Understanding exit reasons of asylum-seeking families from HELP USA shelters and their implications

By Steven McFeely, Kathryn Cardone & Ashwin Parulkar

In December 2023, 422 asylum seeking persons – including 229 children – lived in 11[1] of HELP USA's 20 transitional housing sites (**figure 1**). This represented a 27 percent decline in the total population and 5 percent increase in the share of children in this population since August 2023. The vast majority of asylum-seeking individuals – 91 percent; a 5 percent increase since August - belonged to families. Such families predominantly lived in two sanctuary sites, Anchor Inn (Queens) and Days Inn (Brooklyn), as well as Morris family shelter in the Bronx. Indeed, 60 percent of all HELP asylum seeking clients lived in the two sanctuary sites.
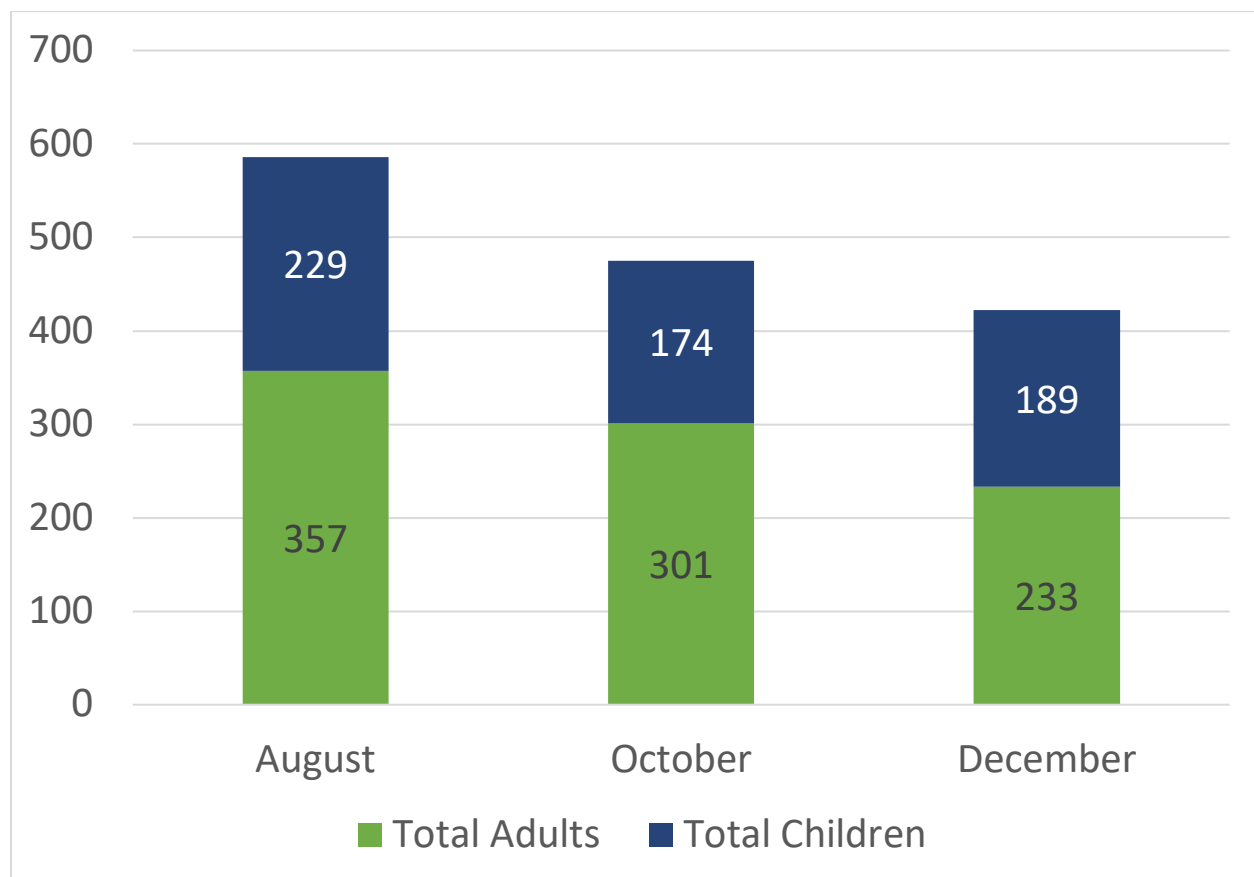

Figure 1: Total Asylum Seekers at HELP Shelters (August, October and December 2023)

A consistent decline in the sanctuary site population (**figure 2**) was due to the decrease in the number of families residing at Anchor Inn, from 52 families in August to 34 families in December. Frontline staff have housed some clients, and reported that others moved in with family members or contacts they had in the country. Some clients also found work opportunities. In late

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[1] Including a Days Inn facility known as Brooklyn Family Sanctuary. This site is currently operated by the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and the National Guard and will be transferred to HELP USA upon pending budget approvals.

September, the federal government extended [temporary protected](#) status to Venezuelan nationals, which permitted such persons to work in the United States. Better employment opportunities *potentially* contributed to the *continued* decline in the site's census from October to December, as approximately one-third of Anchor Inn clients in September were young working age adults of Venezuelan origin (**table 1**). Also, 44 percent of these people had applied for asylum and had received a court date. However, we do not know the extent or conditions under which they were granted or not granted asylum to better understand this as a factor for leaving the site.

# Anchor Inn clients from Venezuela > age 18	% Female	Median Age	% seeking asylum	% seeking asylum with court date
48	56.25	27.5	85.4	43.9

Table 1: Anchor Inn clients eligible to work on September 26, 2023
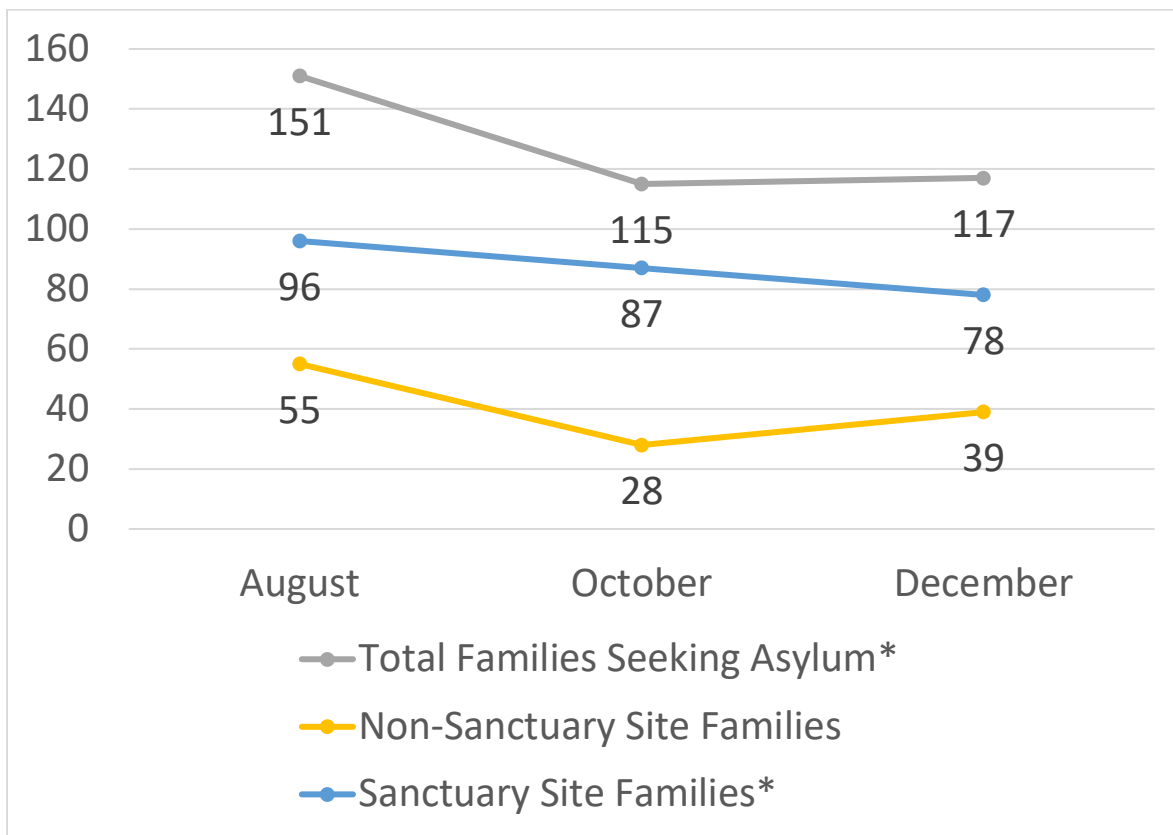

Figure 2: Families Seeking Asylum at HELP USA Shelters (August, October and December 2023)

However, the number of asylum-seeking *families* - not individuals – at non-sanctuary sites declined by nearly 30 percent due to 16 families (51 individuals) at Morris shelter "timing out" of the asylum process. "Timing out" of the asylum process could indicate two conditions.

One condition could be that an asylum seeker has not submitted an asylum application by the required federal deadline . As discussed in [July](#) – and widely reported [elsewhere](#) - migrants in the United States that wish to apply for asylum have one year to file applications. It could also mean that a migrant had applied for asylum at some point in the journey from the southern border to

New York City and had acquired but missed a court date – potentially because one did not have the appropriate information or legal assistance.

In this context, half (27 of 54) of Morris shelter clients that completed a HELP's Asylum and Refugee-seeking Survey last spring had applied for asylum. We therefore tested several survey questions on the outcome of *having applied for asylum*. Time is a critical factor in the asylum application and processing stages. We conducted this analysis because wanted to understand the particular conditions that increase the probability of being recognized by the formal asylum process.

Understanding this context may help frontline staff decide how to allocate the time and resources that are necessary to coordinate with authorities to ensure that eligible new migrants can apply for asylum and asylum applicants can continue the asylum process.

We found that four variables – derived from the survey – were correlated, at statistically significant levels, with the outcome of having applied for asylum:

- Having been provided free legal assistance by volunteer attorneys since arriving in New York City
- Having received services at an Asylum Seeker Navigation Center[2]
- Having been detained by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)
- Having experienced hunger (gone to bed hungry) from the time one left one's country of origin until entering the New York City shelter system

We employed two statistical models to analyze the data. In the first model, survey response questions were entered into a logistic regression model to identify if any variables predicted the occurrence of having applied for asylum.

However, predictive models are generally not viable for small samples. The second model therefore ascertained the effect that *individual* responses had on having applied for asylum. In this context, we created two effect size models to isolate the statistically significant variables[3].

The two effect size models are as follows:

I. $Y_{Applied\ for\ asylum} = 0.57536 - 3.01771 X_{Went\ to\ sleep\ hungry} + 1.86698 X_{Detained\ by\ ICE/CBP}$

II. $Y_{Applied\ for\ asylum} = -0.60029 + 1.91244 X_{Free\ legal\ assistance} - 2.47232 X_{Accessed\ service\ at\ ASNC} + 2.15277 X_{Detained\ by\ ICE/CBP}$

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[2] Healthcare, Medicaid enrollment, vaccinations, school enrollment, immigration legal orientation, *or* identification services

[3] This additional check was also necessary to avoid overfitting the data. Overfitting is the act of having too many variables for the amount of data, causing a model to fit the data instead too closely in context of the overall trend.

In model I, migrants were 6.47 times more likely to have applied for asylum if they were detained by ICE/CBP than those that were not detained when adjusting[4] for going to bed hungry[5].

In model II, migrants were 6.77 times more likely to apply for asylum if they received free legal assistance than those that did not, when adjusting for both detention by ICE/CBP as well as having accessed services at the Asylum Seeker Navigation Center (ASNC). Migrants were 8.61 times more likely to apply for asylum if they were detained by ICE/CBP, when adjusting for free legal assistance and having accessed services at the ASNC.

Based on the analysis of our sample we can determine that Morris's respondents were more likely to have applied for asylum under two conditions: if they had been detained by ICE/CBP (model I). They were also more likely to have applied for asylum if they had received free legal assistance upon arriving in NYC (model II). Our sample size is small. However, these findings indicate the need for city officials to work with providers, like HELP USA, to identify the extent to which migrants entering the city were detained by ICE to expedite asylum cases particular to that condition and, secondly, coordinate processes of shelter entry and asylum process mandates with the city's volunteer attorneys.

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[4] Controlling for the response "going to bed hungry"

[5] Migrants that went to bed hungry sometimes, usually or always were only 0.05 times as likely to have applied for asylum than those who rarely went to bed hungry, while adjusting for detention by ICE/CBP.
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