

Executive summary

Background

Habitat for Humanity affiliates seek to break the cycle of poverty by working in partnership with low-income families to create simple, decent, and affordable housing. Habitat selects partner families with incomes between 30 and 60 percent of the area median income. Partner families then purchase their Habitat homes with a zero percent interest mortgage and invest between 200 and 500 sweat equity hours to help build their homes.

This study builds on the key themes and areas identified in a 2011 pilot study conducted by Habitat for Humanity of Minnesota. This statewide study investigates the connection between the ownership of simple, decent, and affordable housing and a homeowner's quality of life, including: safety, health, education, social connectedness, family interaction and personal well-being, and economic situation. A representative sample of 402 homeowners from across Minnesota, varying in housing tenure, participated in this study via phone interviews. Their responses were analyzed in total, as well as by geographic region and longevity in their homes.

Summary of results

Since Habitat homeowners moved into their homes, they reported improvement in almost all areas investigated.

Safety

- Over 90 percent of homeowners feel safe in their homes and about 80 percent feel safer than they were in their previous homes. A similar percentage feel that their children are now safer.

Health

- Of homeowners who have a family member with respiratory illnesses, 57 percent said they improved after moving into their Habitat home.
 - Of those with respiratory illnesses, 74 percent of shorter-term homeowners noted an improvement to their condition, whereas 47 percent of longer-term homeowners noted improvement. The improvement with shorter-term homeowners aligns with the implementation of the Healthy Homes program, and more research should be done to explore this connection.

Education

- Habitat appears to have positive influence on children's education. Over half of homeowners with children said their children's grades improved after moving into their Habitat home. Nearly two-thirds said their study habits improved.
- About two-thirds of the homeowners with children feel more confident about their ability to fund their children's college education.
- Overall, 90 percent of homeowners said they feel better about their children's future.
- In 92 percent of the Habitat homes, at least one adult, either the homeowner or another family member, started or completed, or plans to start, higher education or training programs after moving in.

Social connectedness

- More than 80 percent of homeowners reported they feel connected to their community, and over half said they participate more in community activities.
- Two-thirds of families said their children spend more time with their friends and classmates.

Family interaction and personal well-being

- Two-thirds of homeowners said they get along better with their families, and 70 percent spend more time with their families.
- Nearly 90 percent of homeowners said they feel at least "somewhat better" about themselves, and 75 percent of homeowners feel "much better" about themselves, compared to before becoming a Habitat homeowner.

Economic situation

- Over half of homeowners said they have more money since moving into their Habitat home, and almost 40 percent said they pay less in housing costs.
- In nearly half of Habitat households, someone changed jobs since becoming a homeowner. Of those, 80 percent said their jobs are better.
- Overall, 87 percent of homeowners used some form of government assistance at the time of application, and, at the time of the interview, that percentage declined by 20 points.

- Use of every type of government assistance program except for disability declined by at least 15 percentage points.
- Reductions in government assistance were greater with longer-term homeowners than shorter-term homeowners in every category except for disability and rent or housing assistance.
- The cost-benefit analysis indicates that the 2,200 Habitat homeowners in Minnesota could be using between \$6.4 and \$9.3 million less in government assistance programs annually.

Overall

- Overall, 92 percent of homeowners said their lives were better since moving into their home. Of those 92 percent who said their lives were better, 89 percent said they attributed that positive change either “completely” or “a lot” to Habitat.