

Solutions for Family Homelessness

Taking Action...

to make family homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring

FAQ

What is family homelessness?

Every year, hundreds of thousands of American families become homeless, including more than 1.6 million children. These families are hidden from our view. Many are doubled-up in overcrowded apartments with relatives or friends, moving frequently. Others sleep in cars or send their children to stay with relatives while parents enter shelter. When a family enters shelter, despite the efforts of dedicated staff, life can be noisy and chaotic, and accessing needed services can be difficult and confusing. Homelessness increases the likelihood that families will separate or dissolve.

How many families are homeless in the Cincinnati/Hamilton County community?

In 2014, 661 families found themselves living in emergency shelters in Hamilton County; however, there were hundreds more families who did not receive services or found themselves within a system that lacked coordination and resources to more effectively assist each individual family. And for all of the families turning to the homeless system, earlier interventions could have helped to prevent their plight.

What is the profile of a homeless family in our community?

80% single female head of household
Average family has two children under the age of 6

What causes family homelessness?

Family homelessness is caused by the combined effects of lack of affordable housing, unemployment, limited access to resources and supports, health and mental health challenges, the challenges of raising children as a single parent, and experiences of violence. As the gap between housing costs and income continues to widen, more and more families are at risk of homelessness. Even a seemingly minor event can set in motion a chain of events that catapults a family toward homelessness.

How does the economy affect homelessness?

In relation to the economy, homelessness is a "lagging indicator", meaning that it is not until some time after a recession begins that an increase in homelessness occurs. Similarly, when the economy improves, it is some time before homeless families and families at risk of homelessness begin to see an improvement, and homelessness begins to decline.

How can family homelessness be prevented?

A variety of community-based organizations provide **Emergency Assistance** services, financial assistance and stabilization services, to families who still have housing but are behind on their rent and/or utilities and are facing eviction. St. Vincent de Paul, the largest provider of Emergency Assistance, provides one-time intervention to nearly half of those who seek SVDP assistance; the other half do not receive assistance. For those who receive emergency assistance, data shows that an investment of \$200 to \$600 per family helps 89% of assisted families avoid eviction for at least 6 months.

Households that have already lost their own housing, and are relying on others for a place to stay, may access **Shelter Diversion** services, which are administered by Strategies to End Homelessness. Shelter Diversion services pair direct financial assistance with case management services to reestablish families in their own housing, and then support them for 3-6 months while they work to become self-sufficient. Such Shelter Diversion services have a 90% success rate in preventing families from finding themselves on the streets or in shelter at a cost of \$1,126 per person, compared to an average cost of \$3,032 per person who becomes homeless.

What are the stressors unique to families experiencing homelessness?

The prevalence of traumatic stress in the lives of families experiencing homelessness is extraordinarily high. Often these families have experienced on-going trauma in the form of childhood abuse and neglect, family disruption, domestic violence, community violence, involvement with the foster care system, and the trauma associated with the loss of home, safety and sense of security. Ongoing exposure to traumatic stress, particularly exposure from a younger age, can impact all aspects of people's lives, including physiological, emotional, and cognitive functioning; social interactions/relationships; and identity formation.

What happens when shelter is needed?

When families have lost their own housing, are living in doubled-up situations, and are in imminent need of entering a shelter, they can call the Central Access Point (CAP) community-wide shelter and shelter diversion hotline. In 2013, 2,185 unduplicated families called CAP. Of those, 9% were enrolled in the shelter diversion program, which provides financial assistance and case management designed to keep a family out of shelter; 22% were placed in a family shelter within the Family Housing Partnership; and 69% were not assisted at all.

What is being done locally?

To address the hardship faced by homeless families and those at-risk of becoming homeless, Strategies to End Homelessness joined the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Family Housing Partnership (Bethany House, Interfaith Hospitality Network, The Salvation Army, and YWCA of Greater Cincinnati) to assess inadequacies of the current system. Their recommendations to address our families' needs and streamline the system of care are outlined in the **Solutions for Family Homelessness** plan released in 2015.

Sources: National Center on Family Homelessness, Cincinnati Family Homelessness Services Study, and Strategies to End Homelessness (October 2015)



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