

The Current State of Homelessness in Cincinnati



Kevin Finn, President/CEO

Kevin began his career as a Street Outreach worker. Seeing the need for better coordination among our local homeless services he founded **Strategies to End Homelessness** in 2007. A native of Cincinnati, he holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology from St. Louis University and a Masters in Social Work from the University of Kentucky. He is available for all media requests, to share data, or meet with community groups. Email us: **info@end-homelessness.org**.

This report is intended to thank our supporters and partners, to give an update on our programs and services, successes and system improvements in 2019 to end homelessness in Greater Cincinnati. Thank you all for your passion, support, and hard work to end homelessness. It's important and it makes a real difference in the lives of our neighbors.

While we will take a look back at 2019, at the time of writing of this report, the world is squarely in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. And we, as the Continuum of Care for Greater Cincinnati/Hamilton County, need to assist those experiencing homelessness now or who about to become homeless. And we need to look ahead.



How our Shelter Operators Responded to the COVID-19 Crisis

The most immediate need at the outset of the virus was to create social distancing however and wherever possible. Which meant that the number of people residing in our traditional congregate shelters had to be significantly reduced. Some buildings even needed to be vacated. Here's why.

Family Shelters are mainly congregate buildings in which multiple families may be in one room, there are shared bathrooms, shared eating areas, kids playing together. Our partners were rightfully concerned that by the time a resident tested positive, the entire shelter (including the agency staff) would have already be exposed, and at risk. Several congregate family shelter buildings were closed, and each resident family was placed in its own hotel/motel room.

How our Shelter Operators Responded to the COVID-19 Crisis

Likewise, in the shelters for Single Adults, clients were unable to achieve any sort of social distancing, many residents are elderly, and some have underlying medical conditions. The most vulnerable people were moved into hotel/motel rooms, reducing exposure as quickly as possible. Fewer clients under one roof allows those still in the congregate facilities to socially distance. But hotel/motel rooms are not a permanent solution and the funding will run out.

What's happening now?

It's our goal to make sure the agencies have what they need to serve their clients. Our agency partners are still out daily doing street outreach, working with our unsheltered clients. Shelter operators are working non-stop and doing amazing work to keep the shelters open for as many clients as is safe. The biggest system change is utilizing hotel/motel. We're working with the Family Shelters daily to plan for what comes next. And who can predict when is "next" during a pandemic?

Is the traditional homeless shelter no longer a viable option to keep clients safely housed?

That's the question many CoCs across the nation are struggling with now.

While homelessness locally has remained stable the last five years, we can expect to see a big uptick this year and next because of COVID-19 and for multiple reasons. We often say many families are one job loss, one medical emergency away from homelessness. Unfortunately, we're about to see that reality for many local families if we can't intervene and prevent it from happening.

Most people and families who lose their own housing don't immediately become homeless. That is, enter a homeless shelter or sleep unsheltered, on the street or in a car. Instead they "couch surf" "double up" by staying with friends or family as long as possible. It's when they're asked to leave that last couch and they're out of options that they call us for help.

Normally it takes about a year or more for someone – who hasn't otherwise gotten back on their feet and into housing – to find themselves on the street or entering a shelter.

One, because people are afraid of contracting the virus. And two, because school summer break came in March.

Summer Surge Came Early

We normally see an increase in family homelessness each summer. "Summer Surge" as it's known. Often families with unstable housing are able to stay with family or friends when school is in session. Once school ends and kids are home all day and underfoot, they're often asked to leave, with no place to go. (See page x for more about Seasonal Shelter.)

We always see that uptick, but this year Summer Break came early with schools in Ohio closing, moving online in March. (Which created additional stress and problems for the parent. Such as loss of school-served breakfast and lunch for the children, needing to homeschool, accessing online lessons without internet service, and more).

Hamilton County has long been experiencing an affordable housing crisis, a crisis that predates COVID-19. As a community, we are lacking 40,000 affordable units. Now, many residents will not be able to afford their rent because they were laid off and cannot qualify for or are waiting for unemployment compensation.

Evictions on the Rise

While many states put a moratorium on residential evictions at this time, Ohio, for one, did not. Housing court was closed for a period of time, but landlords were still able to file to get the process underway to evict a tenant unable to pay his or her rent.

The Legal Aid Society is also reporting an uptick in "self-help evictions" – landlords changing locks and turning off utilities, forcing people to move. As part of the local COVID-19 response, we are administrating new Eviction Prevention funding from the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) and the Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Ohio (COHHIO).

The program, in partnership with the Legal Aid Society, will provide rental assistance for qualifying households that are facing eviction. Our goal is to help stabilize the housing of participating families by paying 2-3 months' rent.

With the crisis came a number of new and increased funding sources from the Federal, State, and local governments. And from our generous local Foundation partners. Funding we are thankful to have, but don't know how long it will last or if there will be more of it.

Funding

Unfortunately, due to the direct economic impact of COVID-19 and the loss of revenue for the City of Cincinnati, we've had some of our funding cut by as much as 25%. Funding specifically for our Shelter Diversion Program: the most cost-effective homelessness prevention program with the best outcomes. (See page x for more about the Shelter Diversion Program.)

The National Alliance to End Homelessness calls homelessness a Lagging Indicator. That is, after an economic downturn or national emergency – all of the issues we're facing right now –homelessness will increase.

According to the Federal government, almost 40% of Americans in households making less than \$40,000 a year lost a job in March. In the first six weeks of the pandemic-induced economic shutdown, 30 million people lost jobs.

With confidence, we can say we'll see the number of families and individuals calling our **Central Access Point Helpline** for assistance increase. We will do our best, as we do every day, to ensure we are able to help prevent as many people as possible from experiencing homelessness. And, however possible assist those currently experiencing homelessness.

Thank you for being a partner in the fight to end homelessness.



Kevin Finn, President/CEOStrategies to End Homelessness

P.S. Part of our work is to dispel stereotypes and the myths around homelessness. When you read this report, it may be helpful to have a picture in your mind of our neighbors experiencing homelessness. In Hamilton County 1 of every 4 people experiencing homelessness is a child; under 18. And more than half – 54% – of our homeless population is 35 years old or younger. Very different than the "older man with a substance abuse problem" stereotype we often encounter.



Before we can talk about data regarding people experiencing homelessness, we must first define what homelessness means. For this purpose, we'll be explaining data and trends regarding people who: 1) unsheltered, that are sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (such as on the streets, under a bridge, in a car), 2) residing in an emergency shelter, or 3) are fleeing domestic violence.

We're often asked: "How many people are homeless in Cincinnati? How do you know?"

The Cincinnati/Hamilton County
Continuum of Care was the first in the nation to have all homeless services agencies utilizing a single Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Strategies to End Homelessness is the lead agency for our local HMIS.

All of our partner agencies contribute data into our HMIS system, Clarity HMIS by Bitfocus. From HMIS, we have complete and accurate data on all program participants. And this gives us immediate access to data to track program outcomes in real time and improve underperforming programs. We also have a data analyst on our staff to closely watch performance measures across the system and to identify trends.

Overall, in 2019, 7,028 total unduplicated people were sleeping on the streets or places not meant for human habitation or were a resident at one of our local homeless shelters. Down from 7,036 people in 2018 and 7,197 people in 2017.

Unsheltered Homelessness

- 838 individuals; including 10 children
- 11.9% of the homeless population
- A decrease of 19.8% since 2014 and 47% since 2013
- 6.4% unsheltered only (meaning they did not spend even one night in shelter in 2019)

Comparable statistics from other communities are sometimes difficult to find, but according the National Alliance to End Homelessness, 35% of people experiencing homelessness sleep unsheltered nationwide. Locally that number was 11.9% in 2019 (as many clients move from shelter to street and back again).

In fact, Hamilton County has seen a **7-year** decline in the number of people sleeping on the streets or other places not meant for human habitation.

This is critically important, as we know homeless adults who live and sleep outside are 3x more likely to die than those who live in an

emergency shelter, and 10x more likely to die than the general population.

In order to assist people experiencing homelessness, having fewer people on the streets and more people in shelters is an important first step.

Sheltered Homelessness

- 5.8% increase in people in shelter from 2014-2019
- A corresponding decrease in people on the streets

In 2019, 6,638 people resided in an Emergency Shelter, including 1,740 children. That is 93.7% of the total number people who are on the streets or in shelter. A small uptick from the year prior at 92.5% (6,509 shelter residents in 2018).

The City of Cincinnati, Hamilton County, the Ohio Housing Finance Agency and many others made significant investments in improving local homeless shelters between 2012 and 2015.

During those years, five new facilities opened intended to improve the level of services offered specifically to homeless single individuals, as called for in the Homeless to Homes Plan, which was authored by Strategies to End Homelessness and adopted by the Hamilton County Commission and Cincinnati City Council. The improved facilities are operated by City Gospel Mission, Lighthouse Youth & Family Services, Shelterhouse and Talbert House.

However small, these declines in homelessness are positive. But, our data indicates that there are also areas for concern.

Homelessness Prevention Programs

- 923 people (of which 567 are children) were provided with Shelter Diversion services
- In 2018, 1,017 people were served; including 634 children
- We've seen a 23% decline in the number of people provided with Shelter Diversion services since 2016
- This decrease took place before the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the City of Cincinnati decreasing the amount of 2020 funding it provides for homelessness prevention programs by 25%
- More people are at risk of homelessness now than at any time since the Great Recession

The biggest problem with adequately funding homelessness prevention services is that the largest funder of services for people who are homeless, the **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development** (HUD), which provides our community millions of dollars a year, largely does not allow its funding to go toward homelessness prevention activities.

Shelter Diversion services provided within the larger homeless services system are a perfect example of how the resources (funding) available to address homelessness do not necessarily align with interventions that can have the greatest impact.

Shelter Diversion is the most cost-effective intervention available for reducing homelessness at \$1,300 per person to keep someone from becoming homeless, compared with about \$4,000 per person to assist after they become homeless.



Permanent Housing Post-Homelessness

- 5,296 people (of which 1,764 are children) served in 2019 vs. 5,507 (1,816 children) served in 2018
- 9.2% decline in the number of people provided Rapid Re-housing & Permanent
 Supportive Housing since 2017, despite HUD funding for Rapid Re-housing & Permanent
 Supportive Housing increasing in recent years

One exit strategy for people experiencing homelessness is to enter a permanent housing program (either Rapid Re-housing or Permanent Supportive Housing) which will assist them into housing, as well as provide a rental subsidy and supportive services for a period of time to help them become self-sufficient.

This decrease can be explained in part by an increased length of stay in such housing programs, which seek to help people return to self-sufficiency. With the increased cost of housing, it takes people in our housing programs longer to get to a point where they can afford to pay for their own housing without assistance.

The longer it takes people in the programs to be able to pay for their own housing, the longer they stay in the program, reducing the total number of households that get into such supportive housing programs.

Family Homelessness

- 496 families in emergency shelter in 2019
- Almost one quarter led by a young parent aged 18 to 24
- 12 families were found on the streets
- 211 families entered Shelter Diversion services

While these number may seem startlingly high, consider this: these numbers only represent the families that received shelter or Shelter Diversion services, not the true need.

When a family is at risk or in need of shelter in Hamilton County, they call the Central Access Point (CAP) helpline, and are screened for placement into an emergency shelter or into Shelter Diversion services. Over half of the families that contact the CAP are turned away without any services due to a lack of capacity. Clearly, there are many more families in need in our community that would have entered services if space had been available for them.



Homeless to Hope in One Call

We believe the key to reducing homelessness is to prevent as many people as possible from becoming homeless in the first place.

What is "CAP"?

The Central Access Point
Helpline (CAP) 381-SAFE was
one of the first helplines of its
kind in the nation, connecting
people in crisis with shelter
diversion, housing, or
emergency shelter placement.

Before **CAP**, families had to make multiple calls to multiple shelters and agencies to get help. Now our clients begin their journey to hope and stability with one call to **CAP**.

Those experiencing homelessness – or about to be – can count on us in a time of crisis, 7 days a week.

How It Works

Our trained **Intake Specialists** determine if a caller is in immediate need of emergency shelter or if a program or service we provide can prevent them from becoming homeless.

CAP can place households into three family shelters, two single men's shelters, a single women's shelter, a youth shelter, a transitional housing program, a Supportive Services for Veterans Families program, four Veteran's Administration Programs and five Shelter Diversion programs.

Who's calling?

3,657 neighbors in need called CAP in 2019 and 1,304 callers were placed into a safe shelter or an appropriate program.

1,675 of the callers were families; 1,982 were single individuals

Data Informs our Work

The **CAP** Team inputs data about callers into the community's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Due to the emergency nature of CAP Helpline calls, only information needed for the risk assessment or to make a placement are collected.

The CAP Team utilizes sophisticated phone software to track call wait times and can view in real time how many callers are waiting in the queue. In order to track target outcomes throughout the year, they review the average weekly call time, and workshop the results weekly.

Improving the Caller Experience

Reducing Call Wait Times

After analyzing different areas of the program, including what causes long wait times, the team decided to add additional staff devoted to answering the CAP Helpline.

In addition, the CAP Helpline developed a new Risk Assessment screening tool, allowing for movement away from a "first come, first served" model to one focused on intentional and strategic placements, ensuring those most at-risk are served first.

Intake specialists provide relevant community service referrals for callers with fewer barriers so that they receive assistance that will help them stay in their housing or acquire housing instead of needing shelter placement.

This new Risk Assessment process allows for callers to contact CAP weekly instead of daily, reducing the number of times callers must contact CAP, decreasing call volume, and reducing wait times, resulting in a better experience for callers.

More Help Available

The CAP Helpline now has increased placement capacity for specific populations. The community's comprehensive plan to end youth homelessness, KEYS, began operating its youth shelter diversion program in 2019 and placements are now made through CAP.

Healthcare for Homeless Veterans is now integrated into CAP's referral system and provides veteran shelter beds for singles and families.

Community Awareness

The CAP Helpline team also instituted an annual outreach project. This is a concerted effort to identify community agencies, institutions, and locations frequented by those experiencing homelessness and provide CAP Helpline information, with the goal of increasing awareness of CAP's services.

Coordinated Entry

Coordinated Entry is the process by which people experiencing homelessness are given access to housing and assistance based on their level of need and resources available in Greater Cincinnati. By coordinating the needs of the community with available resources, we are able to move people experiencing homelessness quickly and efficiently through the Continuum of Care.

This process reduces the number of people entering into homelessness by offering prevention and diversion resources.

Coordinated Entry ensures that individuals and families experiencing homelessness have an equitable and centralized process for access to appropriate resources, in a person-centered approach that preserves choice and dignity.





Shelter Diversion: A best practice to prevent homelessness

A nationally-recognized best practice, "Shelter Diversion" has the best outcomes and is the most cost-effective way to prevent homelessness.

In essence, Shelter Diversion means keeping individuals and families from entering emergency shelters or sleeping in places not meant for human habitation. Or, by definition, becoming literally homeless.

Shelter Diversion is targeted to those who have already lost their own housing, are doubled up, and are running out of places to stay. The program provides financial assistance, and robust case management.

First, referrals are made through our **Central Access Point Helpline**. When someone calls CAP, an Intake Specialist determines if there is an opportunity to prevent the caller from experiencing homelessness.

The program targets assistance to households that have income below 30% of Area Median Income. Or that lack financial resources and support networks, and have other homelessness risk factors.

If eligible, CAP Intake Specialists refer the caller to a Case Manager at a partner agency. We act as the lead agency of the program with our partners: **Bethany House Services, Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cincinnati, Jewish Family Services, Freestore Foodbank**, and **Santa Maria Community Services**.

From there, our Housing Specialist and Case Manager work closely with the household to assist them in securing affordable housing within 30 days. All with the goal of increased stability.

How much does it cost?

Consider this: the average cost per person in our homeless service system is \$3,800. But, by preventing a person from becoming homeless, the cost is reduced to about \$1,300.

Shelter Diversion the most cost effective intervention available toward the goal of ending homelessness.

How effective is Shelter Diversion?

All of the agencies document information into our community's Homeless Management Information System. So that we have complete and accurate data on all program participants. In 2019, 923 individuals 567 of them children were in the Shelter Diversion program.

Unfortunately, Shelter Diversion is largely ineligible for federal funding. Therefore, we rely on local funding sources to run this critical program. But, due to economic hardships and the lack of affordable housing, Cincinnati's emergency shelter system is almost always operating at full capacity.

Why it matters

For instance, when we can divert someone from going into a shelter, that bed is available for someone else who may otherwise sleep on the street. Above all, it can prevent families and children from having to experience the trauma of homelessness.

The need continues to be evident in our community. Therefore, we will continue to work to raise the money needed to prevent more people from having to experience homelessness.

Our generous donors and foundation partners make this work possible.

WHO WE SERVE

Primarily families who have lost their own housing, are doubled up, and are running out of places to stay.



NEXT

Working with our landlord partners, our team tries to quickly find affordable housing for the client.





A CALL FOR HELP

Our Central Access Point Helpline determines if the caller needs shelter or can be placed into the program when space is available.

HOMECOMING

We pay first month's rent, security deposit and utilities. And often arrange for furniture and beds to be delivered.

5 Easy Ways You Can Help

We're often asked "How can I help people experiencing homelessness?"

Here are a few ideas

1

If you're reading this you're already helping! We work each day to dispel myths and share facts about homelessness here in Cincinnati. We are also happy to speak to groups about our work. Interested? Just send us an email

info@end-homelessness.org.

2

Rent! Do you, a friend or family member own rental property? On any given day, we have more than 200 people with a deposit and first month's rent in hand who just need a unit to rent! If you'd be willing to help a family or single individual, in either a short or longer-term program, please send an email to **info@end-homelessness.org**.

3

Volunteer! Volunteers are needed all yearround - not just during the holiday season! For current opportunities at our partner agencies go to <u>bit.ly/STEHVolunteer</u>.

4

Be our eyes and ears. Download the *Street Reach App* - Android or iPhone - and send real-time information on people in need to our outreach teams.



Donate. Consider <u>a financial donation to</u> <u>our organization</u> and be assured your generosity will directly impact our neighbors in need. Thank you!



Homelessness Knows No Season

At times of peak demand we raise the money needed for additional temporary shelter capacity. For two critical reasons: so that fewer people are outside during the coldest months of winter and so that families can access shelter in summer when family homelessness spikes. You make it possible!



Winter Shelter

As a community, we need to ensure everyone has a place where they can come in from the cold during the winter.

The **Shelterhouse** team makes the Winter Shelter possible, providing 200 additional shelter beds for men and women during the coldest months of the year.

Thanks to our generous supporters, 872 individuals slept safely 11,412 nights total last winter.

Learn more at: wintershelter.org



Summer Shelter

More families become homeless in summer than any other time of year. Often families with unstable housing stay with family or friends when school is in session. Once school ends they're often asked to leave, with no place to go.

Our goal is to add extra capacity to keep children from having to experience the trauma of unsheltered homelessness. While in shelter, families receive services to assist them into stable housing.

Thanks to **Bethany House Services** and the **Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cincinnati** for providing this vital service.

Learn more about the Family Housing Partnership at: **nofamilyhomeless.org**

Our Partners

Collaboration and partnerships are at the cornerstone of our work. We work with more than 30 different homeless services organizations in Greater Cincinnati. Our job, in part, is to ensure our partner agencies have the tools, training, and funding they need to effectively serve people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

As a Unified Funding Agency appointed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, we apply for, receive, allocate, and monitor the effective use of Federal, State, County, and City funding to end homelessness in Greater Cincinnati.

Our Financials Page 15



Bethany House Services • • • Brighton Center • • Caracole, Inc. . Center for Independent Living Options (CILO) • Center for Respite Care . Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority • Cincinnati Union Bethel • • City Gospel Mission • • Downtown Cincinnati, Inc. - Block by Emergency Shelter of Northern Kentucky • Excel Development Co. • Family Promise of Northern Kentucky . Freestore Foodbank . Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health Interfaith Hospitality Network • • • Jewish Family Services . Joseph House • Lighthouse Youth and Family Services Maslow's Army • Northern Kentucky Independent District Health Department . Nothing into Something Real Estate . Ohio Valley Goodwill Industries • • Over the Rhine Community Housing . Santa Maria Community Services . Shelterhouse • • St. Francis / St. Joseph Catholic Worker Society of St. Vincent de Paul . Talbert House • • Tender Mercies, Inc. . The Salvation Army • • Veterans Administration • • Volunteers of America . Welcome House • • Women's Crisis Center of Northern Kentucky • YWCA Greater Cincinnati • •

Our Foundation Partners

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Difference Maker Legacy Fund Elsa Heisel Sule Foundation Greater Cincinnati Foundation

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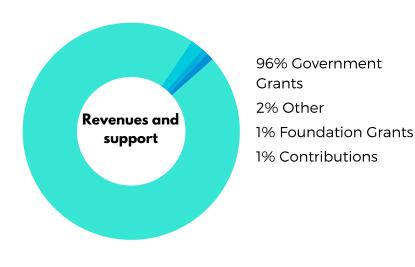
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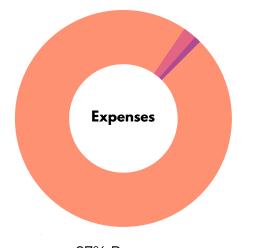
Sabrina Shattles, Shattles Communications

Financials

*Audit Report not yet issued as of publication Audited Financials will be available at strategiestoendhomelessnesss.org

Condensed Balance Sheet	
Assets	
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 1,041,224
Grant & contributions receivable	3,294,135
Other assets	66,771
Total assets	\$ 4,402,130
Liabilities and Net Assets	
Liabilities	
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 2,635,621
Refundable Advances	57,070
Total liabilities	2,692,691
Net Assets	
Unrestricted	775,685
Temporarily restricted	933,754
Total net assets	1,709,439
Total liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 4,402,130
Activities Highlights	
Revenues and Support	
Government grants	\$ 23,374,617
Foundation grants	304,200
Contributions	335,621
Other	356,199
Total revenues	\$ 24,370,637
Expenses	
Program**	\$ 23,771,989
Managment/General	467,318
Fundraising	217,817
Total expenses	\$ 24,457,124





97% Program2% Management/General1% Fundraising















Strategies to End Homelessness is funded in part by The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, The State of Ohio, the City of Cincinnati, Hamilton County, and is a United Way of Greater Cincinnati Agency Partner.



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