MAKING HOMELESSNESS IN COLUMBUS INDIANA RARE, BRIEF, & NON-RECURRING

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING HOMELESS

In every corner of our community, there are individuals facing homelessness and housing instability. Their experiences—of loss, struggle, resilience, and triumph—are as diverse and complex as our community itself.

We hear stories from our elderly neighbors, like the widow who, after her husband's death, could no longer afford the home they shared for decades. At 80 years old, she found herself living in her car. Yet, we also witness stories of renewal, like the elderly woman learning new financial skills, finding hope through coaching, and taking small but meaningful steps toward stability.

We listen to mothers fighting for their families, like the young mom who fled an abusive relationship and scraped together enough to stay in a hotel with her daughter. She knew that living in a car could mean losing her child to the system. Her determination to secure a safer, stable home is a testament to the strength that so many families in our community display in the face of unimaginable challenges.

And then there are those living in encampments—individuals burdened by the weight of stigma and past traumas, some grappling with mental health challenges or substance abuse disorders. But their stories are not just about hardship. We see moments of pride and connection, like the father who, despite his circumstances, lovingly decorated his tent for his child's visit, using a few decorations from the dollar store to create a sense of home for his son.

What ties all these stories together is a deep humanity—a mix of embarrassment and hope, shame and resilience, that could belong to any one of us. The struggles they face are real, but so too are their successes, however small. And as a community, we have the power to be part of these stories—not just as bystanders, but as active participants in their journeys toward a better future.

We can come together to ensure that every person, regardless of their current circumstances, has a chance at a stable and dignified life. Through our support, advocacy, and action, we can create a community where everyone's unique struggles are met with compassion, and where their successes are celebrated by us all.

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The goal of this document is to build community consensus on the facts and narratives surrounding homelessness in Columbus, Indiana. Achieving a shared understanding is essential for evaluating and implementing effective solutions to significantly reduce homelessness in our community.

Homelessness is a complex social issue that affects both those who experience it and the wider community. Diverse perspectives exist on this topic, and the themes discussed in this report have emerged from extensive community input, including public forums, key stakeholder interviews, and data analysis from the Census and local service providers.

Objectives of the Report

This report aims to achieve four key objectives:

1. **Present the Current Situation**: Provide relevant data and context on homelessness in Columbus, Indiana, sourced from local service providers and the Census. Data includes the number of people believed to be homeless or living in an unstable situation, and shortage of affordable housing renting for less than $700 month.

2. **Identify the Key Issues of Homelessness**: Examine the key issues of homelessness in our community that we can address with concrete actions.

3. **Provide an overview of Service Organizations**: Outline the organizations currently working to combat homelessness, including the services they provide.

4. **Identify Next Steps**: Recommend actionable next steps for our community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Columbus, Indiana, has approximately 140 homeless individuals on any given night. Of these, around 80 are in shelters like Brighter Days, Horizon House, or Turning Point, while about 60 are camping or sleeping in their cars. This number is likely an undercount, as it does not include families temporarily staying with relatives or friends.

In recent years, the visibility of homelessness has increased significantly. It is now common to encounter homeless individuals in parks, on People Trails, and downtown, highlighting the impact on the community's quality of life. Nationally, the overall increase in homelessness is being driven by those who are chronically homeless, people who have been homeless for at least a year (National Alliance to End Homelessness). Many of those who are chronically homeless are unsheltered and live in tents. Locally, anecdotal evidence suggests the same trend of an increasing number of people living in tents. This helps explain why the increase in visibility of those who are homeless has increased but the numbers of people staying in emergency shelter has remained relatively stable. Homelessness in our community is likely to get worse if immediate action is not taken.

The issue of homelessness is complex, with many diverse and strongly held opinions. These differing viewpoints can complicate discussions and hinder progress. However, there are shared concerns within our community that can help us move forward. By focusing on these key areas, we can develop effective, community-based solutions:

Common Ground Perspectives to Build Solutions Around

1. There is a significant lack of rental housing available for less than $700 a month, and an even greater shortage of rental housing below $500 a month.

2. People who are homeless face multiple, interconnected challenges that make it difficult to secure stable housing.

3. There is considerable stigma attached to homelessness, which can hinder support and understanding within the community.

4. The current social service system needs better alignment and additional resources to effectively support those in need.

5. Services and supports provided for people who are homeless should encourage self-sufficiency and independence rather than on-going reliance on services.

6. Homelessness in Columbus is becoming more visible. If our community does not take immediate action, the situation will likely worsen.

It is only by addressing these elements collaboratively that we can create meaningful change and improve the lives of those affected by homelessness in our community. Making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring will require our whole community to work together.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement is an important aspect of any community initiative. It is only by listening to the diverse perspectives of community members that we can develop a full understanding of the issue, the impacts, and potential solutions.

Key Stakeholders Consulted Included

- The Mayor's Office
- Members of City Council
- Columbus Department of Code Enforcement
- Columbus Police Department
- Columbus Human Rights Commission
- Bartholomew County Sherrif's Department
- Member of Bartholomew County Commissioners
- Private property owners negatively impacted by the issue of homeless
- Retail businesses negatively impacted by the issue of homelessness
- Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation
- Columbus Township Trustee
- Human Services
- Love Chapel
- Turning Point
- Centerstone
- Salvation Army
- Sans Souci
- Lincoln Central Neighborhood Family Center
- Columbus Regional Health
- Hoosier Action
- First Presbyterian Church
- Private Landlords
- Bartholomew County Public Library
- People who have experienced homelessness

In addition to key stakeholder input, two public forums were held at Donner Center. Each session was attended by approximately 140 people.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Homelessness is a complex topic. It can only be alleviated by the whole community working together. Below is a diagram that illustrates the stakeholders that must be committed and aligned to make homelessness in our community rare, brief, and non-recurring.
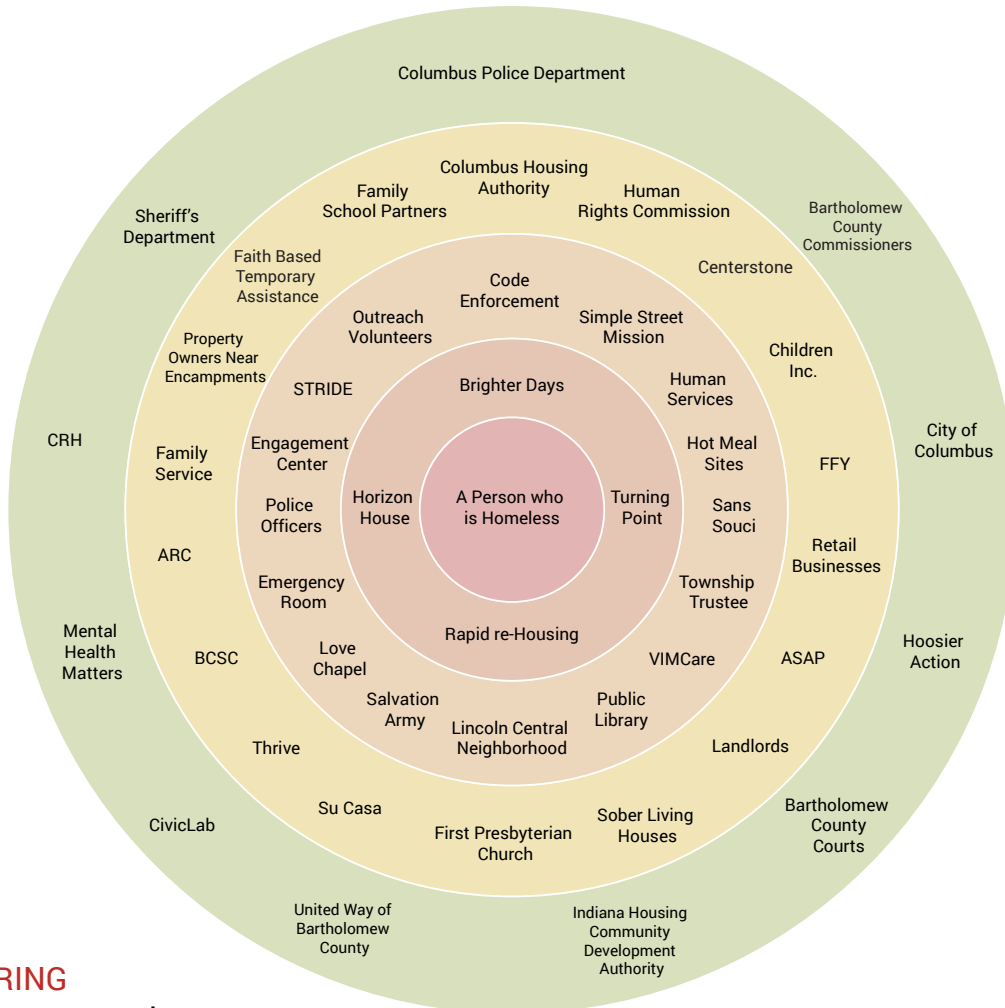
CENTER RING
Participant centered system

SECOND RING
Not-for-profit organizations that directly provide shelter for people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless

THIRD RING
Organizations and volunteers who interact directly with people who are homeless and could provide resources or resource referral.

FOURTH RING
Organizations or people that interact with people who are homeless on a routine basis, but homelessness is not their core mission. These organizations typically refer people who are homeless to other organizations.

OUTER RING
Organizations whose policies, systems, and resources impact people who are homeless.

OVERVIEW

HOW MANY PEOPLE IN COLUMBUS INDIANA ARE HOMELESS?

It is difficult to accurately assess the number of people who are homeless at any given time. For most, homelessness is a fluid, but temporary situation, as people move frequently between couches, motels, shelters, cars, and other locations, rather than staying in one static living arrangement.

Most people who experience homelessness get back on their feet. A 2021 study by the National Alliance to End Homelessness found that for 81% of people who become homeless during the year, it is a temporary situation. Locally, Love Chapel estimates that about 70% of people who experience homelessness get back on their feet within a few months.

Below is a table that shows the estimated number of homeless people sheltered through the social service delivery system.

Name	Description	Max Capacity	Typical Use
Brighter Days	Homeless shelter for individuals	50 beds	20 beds
Horizon House	Homeless shelter for families	4 rooms	Full
Turning Point	Shelter for those experiencing domestic violence	40 beds	Full

The table above does not include those who are unsheltered, sleeping in their car, families doubling-up with another family, or students who are homeless. Through extensive interviews with service providers, law enforcement, code enforcement, and outreach volunteers, it is estimated that on any given night there are approximately 60 people camping. Over the course of a year, it is estimated that between 175 and 225 people temporarily camp in the woods. It is important to remember that this number varies significantly by season.

Nationally, the overall increase in homelessness is being driven by those who are chronically homeless, people who have been homeless for at least a year (National Alliance to End Homelessness). Many of those who are chronically homeless are unsheltered and live in tents. Locally, anecdotal evidence suggests the same trend of an increasing number of people living in tents. This helps explain why the increase in visibility of those who are homeless has increased but the numbers of people staying in emergency shelter has remained relatively stable. Homelessness in our community is likely to get worse if immediate action is not taken.

EVICTIONS
Between December 2022 and November 2023, 608 evictions were filed through the Bartholomew County Courts system. This represents approximately 6.8% of renters. While not all people who are evicted become homeless, they are all in a vulnerable housing situation.

CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness stems from a complex interplay of factors, including a shortage of affordable housing, economic challenges such as unemployment and low wages, mental health issues, substance abuse problems, family breakdowns, domestic violence, trauma, systemic poverty, involvement in the criminal justice system, eviction, and the lack of personal support networks.

Local Data from Brighter Days suggests the following causes:

Substance Abuse	30%
Mental Health	30%
Financial Set-back or Family Breakdown	30%
Living on a Fixed Income	10%

Mental health and substance abuse are significant contributors to homelessness, creating a difficult cycle to break. Individuals with mental health disorders, such as depression or schizophrenia, often struggle to maintain stable housing and employment. Substance abuse worsens this by leading to job loss, financial instability, and strained relationships, increasing the risk of homelessness. Many turn to alcohol or drugs to cope with the trauma of homelessness, deepening the cycle.

The overlap of mental health issues and addiction makes accessing support challenging. Limited resources and stigma often prevent recovery. To address homelessness, a combined approach of mental health services, addiction treatment, and housing assistance is essential to help individuals break the cycle and regain stability.

One narrative regarding people who are homeless is that it is a voluntary choice. While this narrative may be true for a few individuals anecdotally – the number of people who do not suffer from addiction or mental illness and choose to be homeless is believed to be small.

Short Supply of Housing Affordable for People Emerging from Homelessness
There is a lack of very affordable housing in the community.

- The "housing wage" in our community is $18.38 an hour for a one-bedroom apartment priced at Fair Market Rent. This means an individual would need to earn $18.38 an hour to afford a one-bedroom apartment priced at Fair Market Rent as defined by HUD. This is signifcantly higher than our minimum wage of $7.25 an hour.

- 2,543 families in our community pay more than 50 percent of their monthly income toward housing (American Community Survey). These families are vulnerable to becoming homeless.

CODE ENFORCEMENTOF CAMPING ON PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROPERTY

The enforcement of camping space in public places and on private property is a rising tension. Code enforcement is generally carried out on a complaint basis. People who set-up campsites are typically given at least 72-hour notice before campsites are removed and disposed. Approximately 128 campsites were removed in 2023. In 2022, there were 93 campsites removed. In 2021, there were 63 campsites removed.

While some campsites are small and well maintained, others are quite large and pose threats to public health and safety due to poor sanitation practices.

THERE IS A SHORTAGE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Finding affordable housing is a significant challenge for families earning less than $50,000 annually, and it becomes more difficult for those earning under $20,000. A high percentage of these families are considered "cost-burdened," meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing. This financial strain increases their risk of housing instability.

Current Housing Shortages (RDG p. 22)

- **Total shortage**: Currently an estimated 87 rental units are needed at prices below $700 per month
    - **Shortage Below $500**: Currently approximately 63 units are lacking
    - **Shortage Between $500 and $700**: Currently about 24 units are lacking
- **Future Demand for Units at this Point are Predicted to Increase**: To meet forecasted demand, around 65 new units priced under $700 per month will need to be developed each year for the next five years - 326 units total.
- **Cost-Burdened Families** (RDG p. 91)
    - **Of families earning under $20,000**: 72% (1,326 families) are cost-burdened
    - **Of families earning between $20,000 and $50,000**: 64% (1,453 families) are cost-burdened
- **Public Housing** (RDG p. 94)
    - **Waitlist**: Over 500 residents are currently on the waitlist for HUD-subsidized housing
    - **Typical Wait Time**: The average wait for subsidized housing is 22 months
    - **Potential Loss of Units**: Approximately 265 federally assisted units may be lost by 2035, such as the recent upcoming closure of the Villas on Waycross Drive, which will eliminate 99 units (National Housing Preservation Data Base)

HOUSING STABILITY SPECTRUM

No Housing	No Housing - Temporarily Sheltered	Soon to Lose Housing	At Risk of Losing Housing	Insecurely Housed	Stably Housed	Housed by Choice
Families/ individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence	Families/ individuals who stay in an emergency shelter or motel	Families at risk of losing their housing through eviction or threat of eviction within 14 days	Families who have identified risks such as late on bills, rent, forced doubling up & family illness and are at risk of losing housing in the next six months	Families whose housing costs exceed 30% of household income and/or are one crisis away from not being able to pay for housing	Families whose housing costs do not exceed 30% of household income & are not living paycheck to paycheck but would move if they could	Families who have affordable, safe, and long-term housing of their choosing
~125 - 175 Individuals	**508 Individuals**	**~1,210 Families***	**2,543 Families (12%)**	**2,075 Families (10%)**	**5,507 Families (26%)**	**11,069 Families (52%)**
Estimated number of individuals camping or staying in cars in 2023 -128 campsites identified in 2023 ~40-50 individuals camping or staying in car on a typical night	Number of unduplicated individuals who stayed in emergency shelter in 2023 (Brighter Days 239), (Turning Point 208), (Horizon House 60) -80 individuals are in emergency center on a typical night	Number of evictions filed in Bartholomew County in 2023 plus threats of eviction or forced moves	Number of families paying more than 50% of their income toward housing costs (rent and own) (ACS)	Percent of Columbus households paying 30%-50% of their income for housing costs (rent & own) (ACS)	Number of Columbus households who rent and pay less than 30% of monthly income on rent (ACS)	Number of Columbus residents who own their own home and pay less than 30% of monthly income on housing costs (ACS)

*Formal evictions through the court system represent approximately 50% of "forced moves" (Desmond & Schollerberger)

ACS = American Community Surveys

Adapted from K-Connect
Grand Rapids, MI

KEY ISSUES FOR COMMON GROUND

ONE OF THE KEY CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS IS A LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

There is limited availability of safe, decent, and affordable housing for those earning less than $50,000 in Columbus.

- 64% of renters in Columbus who make less than $50,000 a year are rent-burdened, paying more than 30% of their income toward housing. (RDG p.91)
- There is a large shortage of affordable housing for households earning less than $25,000 a year. (RDG p. 95).
  - There is a waitlist of over 500 residents for HUD-subsidized housing units.
  - The typical wait for a subsidized unit is 22 months
  - Approximately 265 units will potentially leave Federal assistance programs by 2035. An example of this is the Villas with a loss of 99 affordable units. (National Housing Preservation Database)

For people earning less than $35,000 a year ($16.82 an hour), homelessness can happen quickly. Many families are only one paycheck away from becoming homeless and families most vulnerable to losing their stable housing often have multiple factors involved in their eventual loss of housing.

Losing housing is often a snowball effect involving:
- Job loss
- Financial emergency
- Loss of transportation
- Loss of support network

-Each year about 1,210 families in our community experience "forced moves" due to eviction or threat of eviction.

It is difficult to develop housing units targeted to people who can only afford $500 per month in rent.

- From a financial standpoint, it is difficult to develop housing at this price point.
- There may be regulatory and NIMBY (not in my back yard) impediments to developing non-traditional affordable housing such as Permanent Supportive Housing, Shared Housing, or Tiny Homes.
- The definition of "family" may present zoning challenges in shared housing situations.
- Estimated supply needed to meet demand for very affordable housing over the next five years:
  - 236 units with rent below $500/month
  - 90 units with rent below $700/month

PRIVATE LANDLORDS MUST BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

Most units that rent for less than $500 a month are owned by private landlords. A part of any comprehensive community solution must include strategies to work with private landlords to increase the supply of housing renting below $500 a month. However, relationships between landlords and tenants are complex at the lower end of the rent spectrum.

- There are abuses of the system by both tenants and landlords.
- There are many concerns about landlord, tenant, and city relationships. Better communication and associated steps need to address these real, perceived, or unintended consequences of past actions or inactions (RDG p. 7).
- Many landlords do not accept Section 8 vouchers. Some of these reasons include slow payment from HUD, Housing Quality Standards inspections, necessity of providing a W-9, etc.
- There is a sense that private landlords may be less likely to give "second chances" to tenants with a challenged rental history.

THE CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS ARE COMPLEX AND EMERGING FROM HOMELESSNESS CAN BE DIFFICULT FOR SOME PEOPLE

Homelessness stems from a complex interplay of factors. These factors include a shortage of affordable housing, economic challenges such as unemployment and low wages, mental health issues, substance misuse problems, family breakdowns, domestic violence, trauma, systemic poverty, involvement in the criminal justice system, eviction, and a lack of personal support networks.

- Local data from Brighter Days suggests the following major causes:
  Substance Misuse   30%
  Mental Health Challenges   30%
  Financial setback or family breakdown   30%
  Living on a fixed income   10%

- Above data is similar to data on the national level.
- For people who are camping, rather than staying in a shelter, the percentage of people who suffer from poor mental health and substance abuse is believed to be higher.
- Homelessness is rarely caused by just one of these factors. Rather, it is usually an inter-play of causes that exacerbate each other.

Most people who become homeless get back on their feet within a few months.

- For over 80% of people who experience homelessness, it is a one-time, temporary event (National Alliance to End Homelessness).
- Locally, Brighter Days estimates that 70% of people who become homeless get housing within a few months.

The longer a person is homeless, the more likely they will remain homeless for an extended period.

The longer a person is homeless, the more likely they are to develop mental health issues and/or substance misuse which exacerbates the difficulty of obtaining housing.

It is difficult to escape homelessness without a support network of family, friends, or service providers.

- It is especially difficult for people who have substance misuse disorder or poor mental health to escape homelessness.

For people who are homeless, daily life is a struggle. Taking care of basic needs like food, laundry, shelter, hygiene, and transportation can consume an entire day.

THE STIGMA HELD BY SOME COMMUNITY MEMBERS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS PRESENTS A BARRIER TO OUR COMMUNITY MOVING FORWARD

Narrow perceptions and belief in simple solutions regarding people who are homeless are strongly held and hinder progress.

Common misperceptions include:

>People choose to be homeless.
>>Interviews with people who are homeless suggest this is a very limited number of people.

>All people who are homeless are either mentally ill or addicted to drugs.
>>Local data suggests that about 30% of people who are homeless have substance misuse issues. This is similar to national data.

>>Local data suggests about 30% of people who are homeless suffer from a mental illness. This is similar to national data.

>Homelessness is not a problem in Columbus.
>>On any given night it is estimated that about 60 people are staying in tents or cars.

>>It is estimated that over the course of a year between 175-225 people stay in tents or cars.

>>Over 2500 families in Columbus pay more than 50 percent of their income toward housing and are thus at risk of losing their housing (American Community Survey).

Many stakeholders voiced concern with regard to not being heard. The challenges of households in Columbus today are complex and many feel there are no proactive steps to address housing needs in the community.

People who are homeless voiced two specific ways that help reduce the stigma.
- Showing compassion toward people who are homeless
- Using "person first language"

Using "person first language" is important to preserving dignity. For example, better to say a person who is homeless rather than a homeless person.

OUR COMMUNITY HAS VALUABLE RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS. BUT AT TIMES, THEY MAY NOT BE FULLY COORDINATED, ALIGNED, OR WIDELY COMMUNICATED ACROSS THE COMMUNITY

Our community has valuable resources for people experiencing homelessness, but they aren't always well-coordinated or communicated. Many people are unaware of the available services, and several programs operate independently, making it hard for individuals to access the help they need. Additionally, some people avoid services because of strict rules or requirements, while others may feel uncomfortable or disrespected by service providers.

THE ACTIONS OF A FEW PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS NEGATIVELY IMPACT SOME BUSINESS OWNERS AND RESIDENTS. THESE INCIDENTS PRIMARILY OCCUR DOWNTOWN, NEAR THE PEOPLE TRAILS AND WOODED AREAS

Some people who are homeless are engaging in behaviors that negatively affect local business owners and residents, particularly in downtown areas, near trails, and wooded areas.

Business owners have reported that these behaviors make customers uncomfortable and sometimes feel unsafe, which can harm their businesses. Additionally, private property owners face significant costs when cleaning up debris from homeless encampments.

Visitors to the People Trail and public parks have also noted that inappropriate behavior from some individuals who are homeless discourages them from using these spaces.

TAKING IMMEDIATE ACTION CREATES OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION

Taking immediate action creates opportunities to enhance our community's response to homelessness. A key theme from recent public forums was the urgent need to address homelessness before the situation deteriorates further. Concerns about worsening conditions stem from anticipated declines in available resources and rising community tensions.

Fewer Resources on the Horizon
• Loss of Affordable Housing: Columbus is at risk of losing affordable housing units for very low-income residents. The National Housing Preservation Database indicates that 265 HUD-subsidized units may be lost by 2035. A notable example is the Villas Apartment complex on Waycross Drive, set to close in April 2025, resulting in the loss of 99 affordable units, primarily affecting elderly residents and individuals with disabilities.

• Ending of Emergency Assistance: Federal assistance for emergency rental support will conclude on December 31, 2024. This funding has been critical in helping local residents avoid homelessness.

• Reduced Utility Assistance: Starting this fall, federal assistance for utility bills will decrease, placing additional strain on the budgets of economically vulnerable families.

Rising Community Tension
• Distrust Among Stakeholders: There is a level of distrust between individuals experiencing homelessness, the social service sector, and private landlords. Without addressing this issue, tensions are likely to escalate, complicating efforts to find solutions.

• Enforcement of Camping Ordinances: Enforcement of local ordinances regarding camping in public and private areas is creating additional friction within the community.

• Visibility of Homelessness: The presence of homeless individuals and those panhandling has raised quality of life concerns for many residents, contributing to community anxiety.

By recognizing these challenges and acting swiftly, we can work together to improve conditions for everyone in our community.

WHAT SERVICES ARE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE FOR SOMEONE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?

Brighter Days

Brighter Days is the local homeless shelter for men and women experiencing temporary homelessness. It is a dormitory style building that accommodates up to 50 people. It is a partnership between the Columbus township Trustee and Love Chapel. It is operated by Love Chapel. Brighter Days is open from 6:00pm to 9:00am. Showers are available from 8:00am to 9:00am. During the day, people either go to their jobs, the Community Engagement Center, or any other public area where they are welcome, the library for example.

People staying at Brighter Days (except during Winter Contingency) are required to be enrolled in a self-sufficiency program and can stay up to 90 days. Approximately 85% of people staying at Brighter Days are employed - typically at $14 - $18 an hour.

Some of the reasons people come to Brighter Days include: living on a fixed income and need to save money to get into a new apartment, people waiting to hear if they qualify for disability insurance, people who are working to save money to get into an apartment.

Winter Contingency is in effect during the cold weather months. During Winter Contingency, guests are not required to be enrolled in a self-sufficiency program. During Winter Contingency, fewer people are working and more of the residents are chronically homeless. Winter Contingency creates a significant burden on the staff and volunteers as the shelter simply becomes a place to get out of the cold rather than a place to get back on their feet.

Brighter Days receives a few people from out-of-county a month. Their policy is to let people from out-of-county stay one night. They will provide transportation to another shelter or transport them back to where they are from.

Generally, Brighter Days can get individuals housed that are facing situational homelessness. However, the programming offered by Brighter Days is not designed to address people who are chronically homeless. Often people who are chronically homeless have significant mental health or addiction challenges.

Upon leaving Brighter Days, approximately 50 percent of people end up in sleeping rooms. A Sleeping room is a shared kitchen and shared bath with private sleeping quarters. Typically a sleeping room rents for about $125-$140 a month with $390 deposit required.

Most residents do not receive Section 8 during their stay at Brighter Days because the Brighter Day self-sufficiency program is only 90-day program. The waiting list for Section 8 is typically 8-12 months. Veterans are an exception – they can get Section 8 much quicker. Homelessness is not a preference for the Columbus Housing Authority. Rapid Rehousing and Housing First through Human Services Inc. provide some help, but funding is limited.

Brighter Days does not accept people who are on the sex offender registry, have a violent felony, can't prove their identity, are from a different county, or people who have pets.

The most common complaints from guests are: can't sleep with their spouse, no pets, claustrophobia, social anxiety, no privacy, body searches, and limited storage (belongings must fit in a tote that is 24"X 18"X18".

Horizon House
Horizon House is an emergency shelter for families experiencing homelessness. Horizon House can accommodate up to four families. While at the shelter, families receive intensive coaching to empower individuals and families to eliminate barriers while working toward self-sufficiency. Families are required to obtain employment within seven days of entering the shelter and to save 50% of their income each pay period.

Horizon Point
Horizon Point, a program of Human Services, is a three-unit transitional apartment for families that have been in Horizon House Emergency Family Shelter. Much like Horizon House this program provides intensive coaching along with problem solving and goal setting to empower participants.

Residents must work full time, engage in coaching, and life skills class. Residents may stay for up to two years. Human Services, Inc. pays for the utilities while the participant pays their determined rent.

The participants rent is based on 30% of the participants gross monthly income. Participants are required to save 10% of their income each pay period.

Engagement Center
The Community Engagement Center is available for individuals who require daytime shelter and may be experiencing or at risk of homelessness. They provide support for accessing housing through various programs. Additionally, they help community members dealing with substance abuse disorders and mental health challenges, facilitating access to treatment. Participation in Centerstone programs is not a requirement, but we encourage individuals to consider it.

Services also include aiding with applications for food stamps and health insurance, as well as connecting individuals with primary care doctors. Weekly job assistance is provided through Drive Staffing for employment opportunities. Washers are available for those needing to launder clothes. Referrals are also provided for showers at the neighboring Stride Center during our operational hours.

Turning Point Shelter
Turning Point offers a 40-Bed Emergency Shelter for adult women, men, and their dependent children who are victims of Domestic Violence and/or Sexual Assault. Shelter services include crisis intervention, danger assessment, individualized safety planning, legal advocacy, and skill building activities in the form of life skills groups, educational support groups focused on recovering from the trauma of abuse, and substance abuse screening and education. In addition, the victim is provided with assistance in accessing community resources.

The average stay at the shelter is about 22 days. Upon leaving the shelter, people typically move into an apartment, move-in with a family member or friend, or evict the abuser and move back into their original home. About 60 percent of people leaving the shelter are moving into a stable housing situation.

Rapid Rehousing – Human Services

Rapid re-housing is a program of Human Services. It provides short-term rental assistance and services. The goals are to help people obtain housing quickly, increase self- sufficiency, and stay housed. Participants must be willing to work toward their self-sufficiency goals. Financial assistance can come in the form of rent and utility deposits, arrears on rent or utilities, and partial rent assistance. Financial assistance is dependent upon participation in the coaching process. Participants may receive assistance anywhere from one month up to one year. Assistance is based on individual need and the need is determined on a month-to-month basis.

Columbus Housing Authority

The largest provider of housing targeted to very-low-income households is the Columbus Housing Authority. The two primary programs are Public Housing and Section 8. Public Housing consists of three apartment complexes (Heritage Woods, Pence Place, and Sycamore Place) and some scattered site units. There are a total of 157 units of Public Housing.

Under the Section 8 Program, eligible families are issued a voucher that can be used on the private rental market for units that are below Fair Market Rent ($1,038). Participants are required to pay 30% of their income toward the housing, the rest is paid by the Section 8 program.

The waiting list for both Public Housing and Section 8 can be up to 22 months long. It is often difficult to utilize the vouchers due to unavailability of rental housing below Fair Market Rent that meets minimum quality standards.

Section 8 – Human Services, Inc.

Under the Section 8 Program, eligible families are issued a voucher that can be used on the private rental market for units that are below Fair Market Rent ($1,038). Participants are required to pay 30% of their income toward the housing, the rest is paid by the Section 8 program.

Section 8 Vouchers issued by Human Services Inc. must be used outside of the Columbus City limits.

Financial Support to Prevent Homelessness from Happening

The following organizations may be able to provide financial assistance to prevent people from becoming homeless:
- Love Chapel
  - Rental assistance
  - Utility assistance
  - First month's rent and security deposit
- Columbus Township Trustee
  - Rental assistance
  - Utility assistance
  - First month's rent and security deposit
- Human Services
  - Utility assistance
  - Rapid rehousing
- United Way of Bartholomew County
  - Flexible funds to prevent eviction or to help with rehousing

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS
AS OF DECEMBER 2, 2024

Homelessness is a complex issue and impacts the quality of life for our community. But by working together, aligning our efforts, and dedicating resources, Columbus can make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring in our city.

United Way of Bartholomew County (UWBC) will continue to circulate this document widely for continuous community input and learning. UWBC will continue to build awareness and community understanding of ways we can work together to address this challenge.

The issue of homelessness in Columbus and across the nation is a significant one. The solutions proposed in this document are long-term and will take time.

INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF HOUSING RENTING FOR LESS THAN $700 A MONTH, MORE PARTICULARLY, BELOW $500 A MONTH.

There is a large shortage of affordable housing units renting for less than $700 a month making it very difficult to find a unit at this price point. The issue of affordable housing will not be alleviated without increasing the supply of available units at this price point.

It is financially difficult to develop new affordable housing at this price point without significant public subsidy. Solutions will require a range of innovative housing alternatives be considered.

Next steps:

Work with community partners to research and evaluate opportunities to increase the supply of housing at this price point for consumers facing a variety of challenges including substance abuse, mental health concerns, and deep poverty. Some of these alternate housing options include:

1. Permanent Supportive Housing
2. Shared Housing models
3. Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units

Timeline

While the research and planning for Permanent Supportive Housing can begin immediately, the actual development of Permanent Supportive Housing put into service is a longer-range initiative which would be envisioned to take 2-3 years.

While the research and evaluation of effective Shared Housing Models can begin immediately, the actual development of Shared Housing Models is envisioned to be 12-18 months away.

While the research and evaluation of effective Single Room Occupancy models can begin immediately, the actual development of SRO is envisioned to be 2-3 years away.

MODIFY THE SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM TO MORE EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY MOVE PEOPLE FROM HOMELESSNESS TO STABLE PERMANENT HOUSING.

The current service delivery system addressing homelessness is sometimes focused on alleviating crisis rather than systemically alleviating homelessness.

Next Steps

United Way of Bartholomew County will convene community partners to:

1. Develop a robust process for Coordinated Entry (see APPENDIX) for people who are experiencing homelessness. The purpose of Coordinated Entry is to get people into stable housing as quickly as possible. United Way of Bartholomew County would work closely with key stakeholders to design and implement a "no wrong door" approach for people who are experiencing homelessness – regardless of where they enter the system. Common examples of current entry points include contacts with service providers, code enforcement officials, police officers, the Public Library, the Emergency Room, and the Stride Center. By establishing a Coordinated Entry approach, our community would ensure that people who are homeless get connected to services as quickly as possible. Coordinated Entry should be designed to meet people where they are and ensure that available services are aligned, effective, and efficient. A key component of this element will be launching a mobile app that could be used by anyone in the community who encounters a homeless person and would like to help connect them to services.

2. Identify and develop a system of clear pathways for people out of homelessness and into stable permanent housing. Multiple pathways need to be developed depending on the characteristics of the person experiencing homelessness. Characteristics to be considered include mental illness, substance misuse, living on a fixed income like Social Security, past rental history, past legal record, etc.

3. Implement a Street Outreach Worker program to proactively meet people where they are. People who are homeless often express frustration over how to connect to the system and what resources are available. This program would create trust-based relationships in trying to get people into stable permanent housing. The program would be based on housing-focused case management.

4. Research and develop ways to help connect people who are homeless to our community. Being homeless can be very isolating and detrimental to a person's mental health. A common theme that emerged from talking with people who are homeless is the importance of feeling compassion and love. Several people have stated that the turning point in their homelessness experience was being connected to people who cared and demonstrated compassion.

Timeline

Redesigning of social service system can begin immediately and is anticipated to take approximately 12 months.

Designing Pathways out of homelessness is anticipated to take approximately 4 months.

The Street Outreach Worker will be implemented by the end of the year.

Designing strategies to connect people who are homeless to our community is anticipated to take 6 – 9 months.

RESEARCH, EVALUATE, AND IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES TO PREVENT EVICTIONS AND IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LANDLORDS AND TENANTS

Each year over 600 families face eviction. While an eviction does not necessarily result in homelessness, it does put a family in a vulnerable position regarding their housing stability.

Next Steps

Convene a working group of landlords, tenants, and service providers to research and evaluate successful models in other communities of programs designed to reduce evictions and improve relationships between landlords and tenants. Potential strategies to explore include landlord and tenant education, eviction prevention strategies, and understanding the rental process and lease requirements.

Timeline

United Way will convene a workgroup immediately. Research, evaluation, and program guidelines is anticipated to take about 6 months.

ESTABLISH A FUND TO HELP PEOPLE WHO ARE EMERGING FROM HOMELESSNESS OR TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS FROM OCCURRING.

For most people, homelessness is a one-time event. For many, it could be prevented with short-term rental assistance. Preventing homelessness before it occurs is a cost-effective strategy to keep someone in their home and to minimize the substantial disruption that homelessness causes.

For others, who are currently homeless, coming up with the money required to move into a new home can be a significant barrier. Most landlords require at least the first month's rent and security deposit to move in.

Next Steps

United Way will convene a working group to develop a strategy and program parameters to provide short term assistance:

-To prevent people from becoming homeless.

-To assist with the costs associated with moving into a new home.

Timeline

Research, evaluation, program design, and development of program guidelines is anticipated to take about 6 months.

RESEARCH AND EVALUATE THE FEASIBILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF DEVELOPING A TINY HOME VILLAGE AS TEMPORARY HOUSING FOR THOSE WHO ARE UNSHELTERED.

Several "Tiny Home Villages" have been developed across the nation for the purpose of providing a temporary solution to help people become sheltered. Tiny homes for alleviating homelessness are typically less than 300 square feet and provide a level of support for the residents living there. One of the most successful models is in Eugene Oregon, Emerald Village. It has 22 Tiny Homes on 1.1 acres and has been operational since 2018.

Next Steps

United Way will convene a working group to research and evaluate the cost, feasibility, and effectiveness of establishing a Tiny Home Village.

Timeline

It is estimated to take approximately 6 months to research the cost, feasibility, and effectiveness of developing a Tiny Home Village in Columbus.

BLUEPRINT TO MAKE HOMELESSNESS RARE, BRIEF, AND NON-RECURRING
FEBRUARY 2, 2025

Our community strategy for providing resources and opportunity to those who choose to move toward self-sufficiency

This Blueprint outlines an ambitious community effort to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring. The challenge of addressing homelessness in our community is a daunting one. It is a complex issue that will take time and will require the whole community working together. A critical key to improving the situation is to increase the supply of units renting for less than $700 a month, which is a longer-term strategy.

This document represents the transition from shared community understanding to shared community problem solving. The strategies in this Blueprint have emerged from extensively studying the issue of homelessness in Columbus, Indiana. This includes analyzing local data, key informant interviews, public forums, and broad community input across all sectors of our community, including service providers, elected officials, and those with the lived experience of being homeless.

The next step in making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring in Columbus, Indiana is to establish a Guiding Team and 3 Strategy Teams. The purpose of the Guiding Team is to shape the relationships among people, programs, and organizations and to serve and support the Strategy Teams.   The purpose of the Strategy Teams is to bring together experts (including lived experience), service providers, and stakeholders to co-create recommendations.

The Strategy Teams are:

- Prevent homelessness before it happens – Strategy #1.
- Optimize our homeless response system – Strategy #2
- Increase the supply of affordable housing options - Strategy #3

The Guiding Team members are:

- Mark Stewart, President, United Way of Bartholomew County
- Cathy King, Impact Director, United Way of Bartholomew County
- Eric Frey, City of Columbus
- Kelly Daughtery, Executive Director of Love Chapel
- Donna Taylor, Human Services
- Brian Meyer, Centerstone

Strategy #1 – Prevent homelessness before it happens. Decrease the number of evictions and the impact on families when evictions do occur.

Summary Situational Analysis
Each year in Bartholomew County an estimated 1200 families* face a "forced move". A forced move includes both court-filed evictions and threats of evictions from landlords whereby a family moves of their own accord rather than contest the eviction. While a forced move does not necessarily result in homelessness, it does put a family in a vulnerable position regarding housing stability. Forced moves can be particularly negative impact on children as it disrupts their lives, causes uncertainty, and may entail switching schools.

Leadership Team

- Mark Stewart – President, United Way of Bartholomew County
- Joe Meek, Attorney – Senior Counsel at Landman Beatty
- Aida Ramirez, Director, Human Rights Commission Landlord

Scope

- Research and evaluate model programs and best practices from other communities.

  - Dallas Poverty Action Lab
  - Indianapolis
  - Housing Navigators Program – Bloomington, IN

- Make detailed recommendations to the Guiding Team regarding implementation, success metrics, timeline, and sustainability model.

- Coordinate closely with the other Strategy Teams.

- Potential topics to address:

  - Tenant Education
  - Renter stabilization
  - Rental assistance
  - Diversion
  - Legal support
  - Mediation
  - Increase tenant knowledge of their rights and responsibilities as a renter
  - Provide proactive assistance as soon as evictions are filed

*In 2023, 605 eviction cases were filed in Bartholomew County.

Strategy #2 – Optimize our homeless response system

Summary Situational Analysis
The current service delivery system addressing homelessness is sometimes focused on alleviating crisis rather than systemically alleviating homelessness. Additionally, several components of the existing system are under-resourced in money, staffing, and experienced personnel. Several parts of the current system operate in siloes and are not aligned.

Leadership Team

- United Way of Bartholomew County – Cathy King
- Love Chapel
- Human Services Inc.
- Centerstone
- Columbus Township Trustee

Scope

- Implement the Homeless Response Team

  - Service providers meet weekly to remove barriers and provide support to house people who are currently homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in the next 14 days.
- Conduct street outreach to re-house people who are currently homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.
- Evaluate the current Homeless Response System
- Using national best practices, make detailed recommendations to the Guiding Team regarding implementation, success metrics, timeline, and sustainability model.
- Coordinate closely with the other Strategy Teams.
- Potential actions include:

  - Map the current Homeless Response System
  - Design the ideal Homeless Response System
  - Perform a Gap Analysis on each part of the System
  - Implement Coordinated Entry and Street Outreach
  - Develop pathways out of homelessness for different characteristics
    - I have a substance use issue
    - I have poor mental health
    - I am exiting jail
    - I can/cannot work
    - I have a history of eviction
    - I have a criminal record
    - Etc.

  - Support expansion of Engagement Center
  - Increase awareness of current services available
  - Create a sense of belonging that people who are homeless are part of our community
  - Response to public nuisances – retail businesses/panhandling
  - Establish strategies to help with frontline staff burnout and turnover

Strategy #3 – Increase the supply of affordable housing options below $700/month

Summary Situational Analysis
According to RDG Columbus Housing Study 2024, there is a significant shortage of affordable housing for people earning less than $50,000 a year. 64% of families earning between $20,000 and $50,000 a year are cost burdened, paying more than 30% of their income for their housing. As a result, a large percentage of families in Columbus are housing unstable.

Leadership Team

- Mark Stewart – President, United Way of Bartholomew County
- Developers
- Landlords
- City of Columbus Planning Department
- City of Columbus Community Development Department

Scope

- Attend the permanent supportive housing development through the Supportive Housing Institute. Advocate and support the development of permanent supportive housing.

- Summarize and quantify current affordable housing options and identify and quantify pipeline of projects (Thrive Alliance Haw creek, TGW Pallet, Dove House, Sober Living Houses).

- Evaluate the possibility of increasing the number of vouchers available through the Columbus Housing Authority.

- Complete a gap analysis of needed housing types and price points.

- Make recommendations to the Guiding Team on potential development projects or programs

- Potential projects/programs to evaluate and consider
  - Second chance housing program
  - Tiny home village as interim solution
  - Work with private landlords with existing units
  - Sleeping rooms
  - Work with emerging developers who want to increase density within current code requirements
  - Improve awareness and access to Sober Living Houses/Recovery Housing
  - Shared housing models
  - Single Room Occupancy developments
  - Strategies to overcome NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard)

APPENDIX

Community Alignment for Coordinated Entry

Centralized Intake Access, Prevention and Diversion	Shelter and Rehousing	Stabilization

Coordinated Entry

-Human Service-Based Not-for-Profits

-Code Enforcement

-Law Enforcement

-Public Library

-Hot Meal Sites

-Faith-Based Organizations

-Outreach volunteers

Street Outreach

Coordinated Intake

-Human services Inc

-Brighter Days

-Columbus Township Trustee

-UWBC

-Emergency Room

Prevention and Diversion

Does not need shelter tonight

Safe, temporary shelter is needed/wanted

Pathway to housing is defined

Housing-Focused Case Management & Navigation

Temporary Shelter

Brighter Days
Horizon House
Turning Point

Unable to secure housing on own within short period

Treatment and long-term care

Rapid Re-housing

-Transitional Housing
-Sober Living Houses
-Turning Point
-Human Services
-Love Chapel

Able to retain housing or gain new housing, or bypass shelter

Highest needs, unable to maintain housing without ongoing services, subsidy

Housing-Focused Case Management, Resource Coordination, & Diversion Support

Community-Based Services and Supports. Includes employment, day care, behavioral health, etc.

Reunification & Relocation

Community-Based Permanent Housing

HUD Subsidized Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing