

Louisville Metro
Addressing Street Homelessness
2019-20 Initiatives
September – March Outcomes

Background

In the second half of fiscal year 2019, Louisville Metro Council allocated \$500,000 to homeless services in an effort to attend to the increasing numbers of residents seen living without shelter, while simultaneously commissioning a research team to make recommendations for further action. At the conclusion of their work to understand best practices and Louisville's current status, the researchers listed eight recommendations for consideration. Louisville Metro Council then allocated an additional \$1 million to expand services for fiscal year 2020.

The goals of the Street Homeless Initiatives, as identified by Louisville Metro Office of Resilience and Community Services, include:

- Moving homeless residents from unsheltered to sheltered;
- Engaging, educating, and improving collaboration between social-service organizations;
- Invigorating and motivating solutions that would change the outcomes of homelessness; and
- Creating innovative solutions that will fill the gaps, dissipate barriers, and mitigate underlying issues that led to homelessness.

Nine agencies and their services were selected to receive this funding:

- **Healing Place:** Twenty-four beds are designated for men's overnight shelter guests, expanding the agency's capacity to serve this population from December 2019 through March 2020.¹
- **Legal Aid Society:** Legal Aid lawyers engage in outreach in day shelters and care coordination with other providers, including making recommendations on what may qualify as a legal issue as barriers to housing are observed.
- **Phoenix Health Care:** One licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) will accompany the Common Assessment Team, completing on-site assessments to establish diagnoses and engaging clients in counseling, as well as making referrals for ongoing treatment as necessary.
- **Salvation Army:** Storage units are located on Salvation Army's campus, enabling individuals and families experiencing homelessness to leave their belongings in a secure location.
- **St. John Center:** In partnership with Uniting Partners (UP) for Women and Children, a five-person outreach team provides services, including wellness checks; referrals to shelter, health care, and other social services; material goods; and transportation.
- **St. Vincent DePaul:** Ten single-person rooms are designated as sanctuary beds, accommodating overnight shelter guests who feel threatened or in crisis, and who might otherwise sleep outside instead of abiding the requirements to sleep in a congregate space.
- **Volunteers of America:** Funds are dedicated to providing shelter or rapid-rehousing assistance to families who have been identified by an outreach service as staying in unsafe locations.
- **Wayside Christian Mission:** Funds support the operation of a 100-bed low-barrier shelter, which allows individuals experiencing homelessness to stay with their partners and pets with minimal restrictions for entry.
- **Wellspring:** An Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team provides wraparound services to 40 clients with diagnoses of severe and persistent mental illness, by providing intensive case management, quick access to psychiatric care and medication management, and rapid rehousing.

Together, these agencies are using their collective resources and capacity to tighten the network of support for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

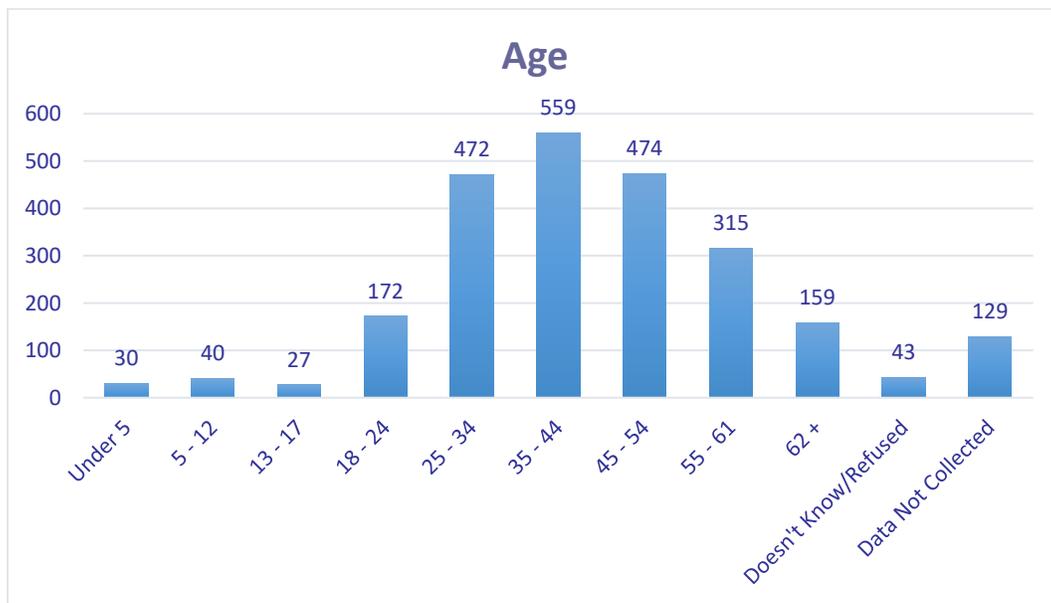
¹ The Healing Place has extended this service through April 2020 in an effort to provide a safe place for the homeless population during the COVID-19 pandemic and orders to shelter in place.

Summary of Activities: September 1, 2019 – March 31, 2020

Organization	Summary
The Healing Place	The Healing Place served 1,973 men in designated Homeless Encampment beds. Their 24 beds have been full or near capacity each night.
Legal Aid	While attending meetings with other service providers, representatives of Legal Aid have continuously provided insight on barriers to housing that may be legal issues. A Legal Aid attorney now accompanies the Street Outreach team, as well. Legal services include applying for disability benefits.
Phoenix Health Care	The addition of an LCSW to the Common Assessment team has been invaluable as he has provided clinical assessments, crisis interventions, clinical referrals, outreach referrals, and wellness checks. Because many individuals living in encampments are resistant to visiting service providers, this approach has increased the accessibility of mental-health services.
Salvation Army	The shipping containers used for storage were moved from the former First Link property to Salvation Army's campus, providing increased access for clients and greater safety for staff. The 76 large containers have remained in use with a waiting list. Because the smaller lockers have limited capacity, they have gone largely unused until recently, when the demand for storage has increased.
St. John Center & UP	During the most recent quarter alone, the Outreach Team provided more than 1,235 services and more than 182 referrals, providing ongoing case management support to many clients who have difficulty building rapport when they are introduced to new agencies. Throughout the fiscal year, the Outreach Team has been essential in linking 33 households with permanent housing.
St. Vincent de Paul	Since opening 10 sanctuary beds in September, the Ozanam Inn at St. Vincent DePaul has served 52 men who have required the extra support and quiet space not typical of an overnight emergency shelter offering congregate sleeping quarters.
Volunteers of America	VOA has served 42 families that would have otherwise stayed on the streets or in their cars by moving them into a hotel, emergency shelter (as it is available), or permanent housing. In addition to shelter, these families receive case management support.
Wayside Christian Mission	The low-barrier shelter provided overnight accommodations to 346 individuals, at least 75% of whom had stayed on the streets at some point in their experience of homelessness. It has maintained an occupancy rate of 98%. Wayside has moved six families from the low-barrier shelter into its family emergency shelter.
Wellspring	The ACT team has a caseload of 45 clients, 20 of whom are currently housed. Nearly all new clients have met with a psychiatrist within 30 days, and the majority of them are addressing their symptoms with medication that the team is able to monitor.

Demographics of Persons Served: September 1, 2019 – March 31, 2020

In total, the eight services² funded through this initiative served 2,420 individuals in seven months according to data entered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Although the agencies met with individuals of all ages, the greatest needs were of the subpopulation aged 25 to 54. It should be noted that because homelessness increases risk for various acute and chronic health conditions; homeless adults aged 50 years and older are considered “older adults.” The identified race of individuals and families served is similar to that of Louisville’s homeless population, and reflects that homelessness disproportionately affects those who identify as Black or African American. Likewise, the identified gender of adults served is similar to Louisville’s overall homeless population. One third of individuals served are categorized as chronically homeless.



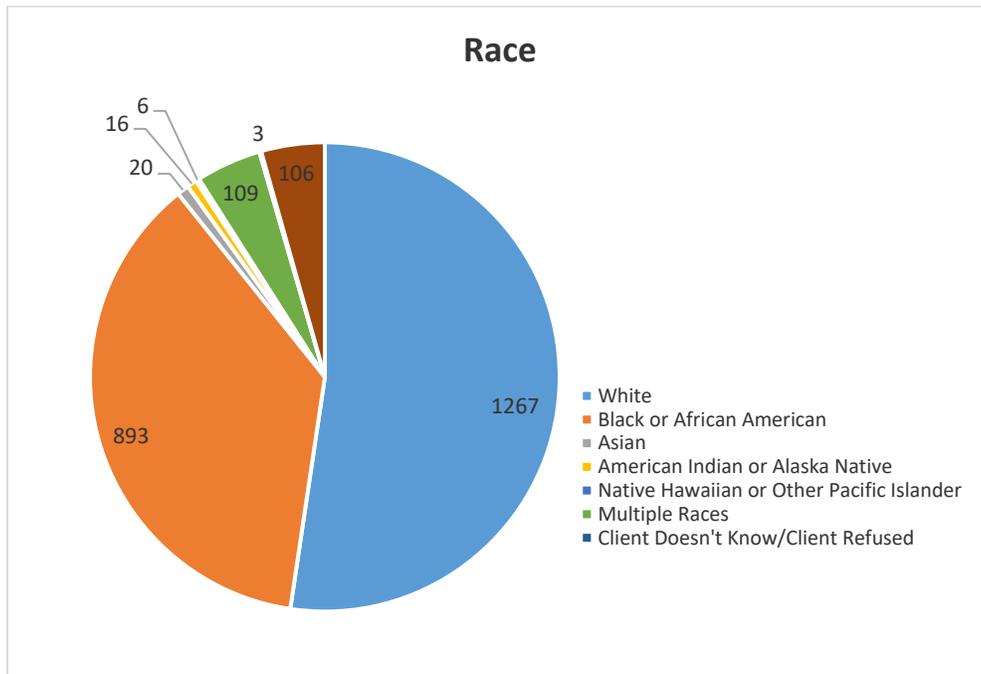
Source: HMIS

² In order to protect the confidentiality associated with attorney-client privilege, Legal Aid does not enter data into HMIS. It is therefore not possible to account for duplication of individuals.

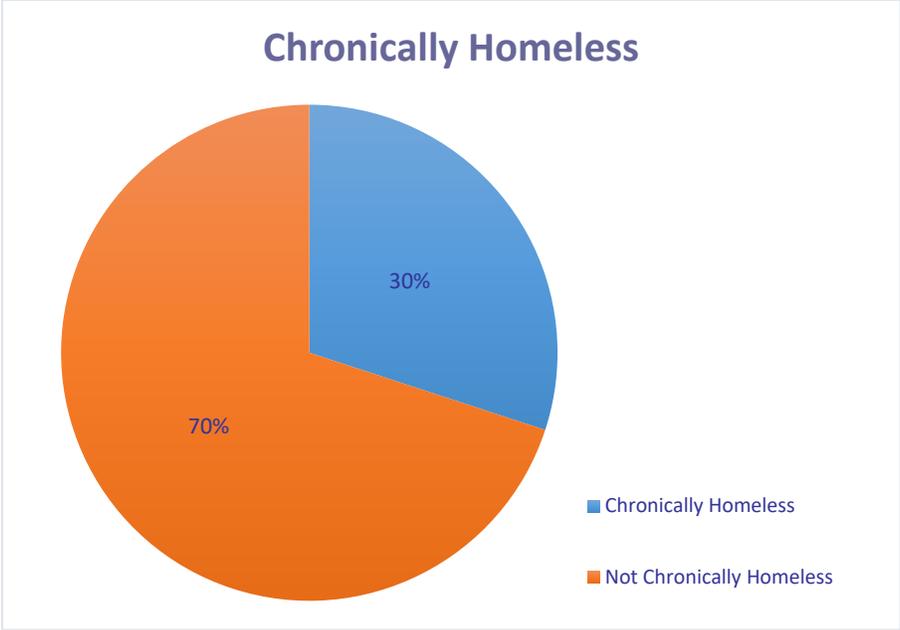
Gender of Adults

Gender	Count
Male	1458 (67.8%)
Female	681 (31.5%)
Trans Female (MTF or Male to Female)	3
Trans Male (FTM or Female to Male)	1
Gender Non-Conforming	2
Data Not Collected/Client Refused	178

Source: HMIS



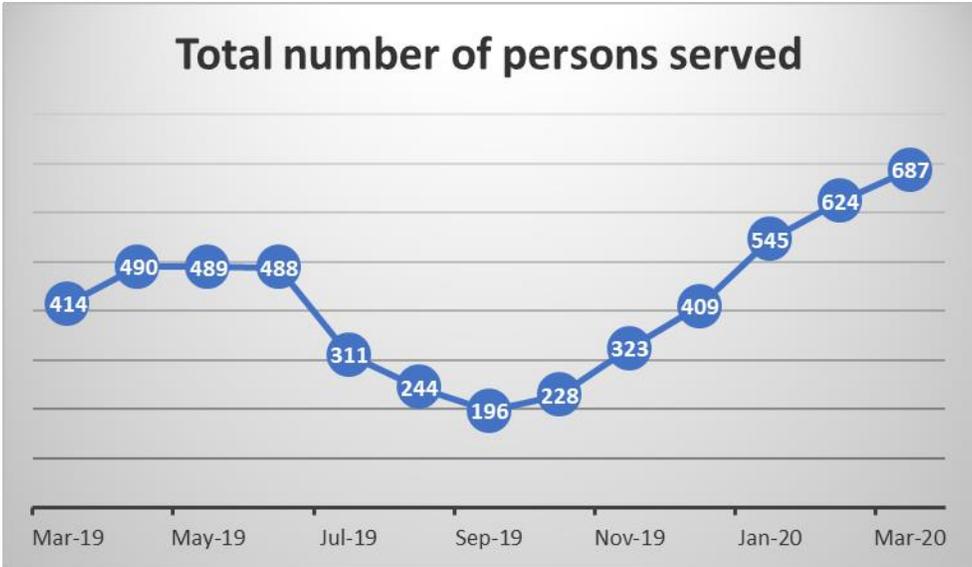
Source: HMIS



Source: HMIS

Street Outreach

Since initiating dedicated street outreach services in February 2019, the St. John Center/UP Outreach Team has served 1,193 unique individuals residing in every ZIP code of Louisville Metro.³ The services provided increase the likelihood that individuals and families experiencing homelessness will learn about and be connected to resources for emergency shelter, basic needs, health care, and ultimately, help acquiring permanent housing.



Source: HMIS

³ The Outreach Team experienced turnover in the fall of 2019, losing one of four full-time positions and limiting its capacity to provide services. As of January 2020, the team is fully staffed with five full-time team members.

Collective Action

Although the \$1 million of funding was allocated to nine distinct agencies for a variety of programs, the overarching goals of the initiative include providing a seamless continuum of care, dissipating barriers to both services and housing, and mitigating underlying issues that lead to homelessness. A city-wide problem cannot be solved without city-wide collaboration, and one recognizable gap in the past has been the lack of coordination between groups who are doing the work. However, this initiative has made substantial progress in closing this gap, with positive results.

Recipients of Louisville Metro funding have been required to meet monthly with the Office of Resilience and Community Services (RCS) and the Coalition for the Homeless. These monthly meetings have established an unprecedented level of communication between city government and homeless services providers, and have presented opportunities to both recognize and resolve systemic barriers to quickly moving individuals and families from homelessness to permanent housing. Furthermore, service providers meet monthly for additional outreach coordination to address concerns regarding specific individuals and families who have presented as most vulnerable and require the most support from many providers. Although the system of service providers has a longstanding history of collegiality, these monthly meetings have established explicit mechanisms for communication and partnership. These meetings have enhanced the relationships and allowed greater coordination: Service providers have learned more about what resources are available for their clients through other agencies, and have expanded their ability to make referrals and jointly provide wraparound efforts to move individuals and families from homelessness to housing.

On the streets of Louisville, the St. John Center Outreach Team, the Common Assessment Team, Louisville Metro Police Department, and Wellspring's ACT team coordinate efforts among themselves and with volunteer outreach groups. They are in frequent contact with each other so as not to duplicate services and address the immediate needs of clients about whom they are concerned. The Outreach Team also now receives referrals from the Metro 311 line regarding people experiencing homelessness and living in places not meant for human habitation.

Increased collaboration has highlighted systemic issues, as well, which has given Louisville Metro the opportunity to address some of these concerns. RCS has kept a log of observations, and has begun to investigate root causes of the named issues. For example, providers have reported that their clients have been known to have housing vouchers, but have had extended waits for housing inspections and approval from the Louisville Metro Housing Authority. This insight prompted meetings between RCS and Codes and Regulations, and with the Housing Authority, to understand opportunities for improvement as the process moves between offices. This interagency conversation will continue, so that the process might be streamlined.

Housing

As noted, the funding provided by Louisville Metro to nine new or expanded programs has provided additional opportunities for assistance to those experiencing homelessness and has improved the collaboration and communication among providers. One specified purpose of the funded projects has been to increase the number of individuals who move from unsheltered to shelter; it is evident that the services have met this objective. The work of these programs have enhanced Louisville's system of service, ultimately promoting the ability of individuals and families to move out of encampments and places not meant for human habitation, and into emergency shelter or permanent housing. Because many of the funded services are designed to reduce the barriers to housing rather than provide housing

counseling, it is difficult to offer evidence of direct links from use of a specific service to a move into housing. However, it is clear in provider activity reports that the services have aided clients to achieve greater stability.

According to data entered into HMIS, in the seven months from September 1, 2019, to March 31, 2020, 372 individuals who had previously used Louisville's system of services moved into housing, some of whom could do so with the assistance of a subsidy (i.e., Housing Choice Voucher Program). An additional 245 individuals were accepted into permanent supportive housing programs, and have continued to receive case management services while in their new homes, while 169 individuals moved into permanent living situations with family or friends. Although transitional housing programs are temporary and not an end goal, it should be recognized that the 20 individuals who moved from emergency shelter to transitional housing have achieved greater stability, while the 21 individuals who moved from encampments into transitional housing are now in shelter.

Response to COVID-19

Both RCS and homeless service providers, in partnership with Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness, have diligently worked to meet the needs of the homeless population during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was declared a national emergency on March 13, 2020. Service providers have been dedicated to providing the utmost care while maintaining safe service environments and observing social distancing recommendations, despite limitations in congregate settings. However, this has also meant that service-delivery mechanisms have been altered substantially.

- In addition to overnight accommodations, the Healing Place now operates with shelter in place guidelines, and has made adjustments to allow guests to remain on property 24 hours a day. They have adjusted daily schedules to allow for social distancing precautions, and deployed additional staff to ensure that guests are safe at all times.
- With limited face-to-face contact, Legal Aid has worked to remain in contact with clients to the extent possible via phone, acknowledging that most of them have limited access to virtual means of communication. They have coordinated with other service providers as they continue to provide legal assistance, and have published a series of articles about receipt of stimulus funds. They have also been monitoring evictions.
- The Common Assessment Team, of which the Phoenix Health Care LSCW is a member, has been providing routine wellness checks and has coordinated outreach medical services to people at encampments as needed.
- Despite the concerns about COVID-19, the storage operation continued to meet the needs of the Louisville homeless population for safe and secure storage of their belongings. Evening hours were eliminated because of the increased congestion in the area near the storage containers, which has been transitioned into a space for meal service that can observe social distancing protocols. In addition, the number of clients seen at any one time was reduced to two at a time, again to promote social distancing. However, this has not reduced the number of clients served, and has, in fact, increased the demand for storage options.
- The St. John Center and UP Outreach Team have adjusted their daily routines to support the operations of the two-day shelters, both of which have waived the crucial onsite support of volunteers. Additionally, outreach workers have respected social distancing efforts, which has meant limiting their physical presence in the spaces provided by other agencies, such as the storage facility at Salvation Army and the Low Barrier Shelter at Wayside.

- VOA has increased their family referrals to hotel rooms, and has reduced the number of families staying in their shelter to allow for more space. They have dedicated four units to quarantine.
- The low-barrier shelter at Wayside Christian Mission has remained at capacity. Staff are required to wear masks, and clients are highly encouraged to do so.
- All service providers have reported they have limited or eliminated volunteer participation within their organizations, which has meant shifting operations and limiting services or programs.
- Service providers who serve meals have adjusted their dining room protocols to accommodate social distancing. Some providers have transitioned to serving meals outside their buildings or handing out sack lunches. Others, who previously served community members in addition to their shelter guests, no longer invite non-shelter guests to eat inside. This practice changes the routine for people who stay in encampments and may rely on those agencies for meals.
- The Coalition for the Homeless has been successful in securing some donations of needed items and hygiene supplies for agencies.
- All providers have stressed that they have been distributing educational information and hygiene supplies to assist their clients in protecting themselves from the virus.
- Overall, service providers reported a small number of clients known to have been diagnosed with COVID-19, although testing has still been very limited.

Remaining Gaps and Barriers

Despite the ongoing work to move individuals and families into permanent housing from the street and in encampments, systemic gaps and barriers persist, resulting in an ongoing challenge to reduce the number of Louisvillians experiencing homelessness. Recent housing assessments have established that Louisville Metro has a severe shortage in affordable housing; it is anticipated that the demand for affordable housing will likely increase in the upcoming months amid the severe economic downturn.

The Wellspring ACT team has found it takes on average 80 days to find housing for their clients—nearly three additional months that someone with chronic and persistent mental illness lives on the street and in shelters. During COVID-19 restrictions, including a freeze in issuing vouchers and difficulty searching for apartments, the process has slowed. Other providers have reported that landlords who had been expecting tenants to have moved out, are now limited in their ability to process referrals while tenants must remain in place.

Over the past few years, the Louisville Continuum of Care has made targeted efforts to reduce homelessness among a few subpopulations: veterans, chronically homeless, and youth. As many clients have accessed resources and permanent housing through these efforts, the demographics of those who remain on the streets and in shelters have shifted. Providers have observed that the most-often-reported needs have included mental health assessment and treatment and physical health care or accommodations, including support for chronic disease management and limited mobility. Shelters are neither equipped with the facilities nor the personnel to meet accessibility standards or provide intense care. More recently, as health care providers have shifted to telecommunication services, homeless service providers have also observed their clients experiencing more difficulty securing their medications.

Governor Beshear has temporarily halted evictions for the duration of the statewide COVID-19 emergency, the court system has suspended eviction filings, and the Public Service Commission has stopped shut-offs for non-payments or late payments. However, currently, these orders will expire in the coming months, leaving thousands of residents extremely vulnerable and potentially on the brink of

being unsheltered. While enacting these moratoriums was critical, Kentucky residents can still be served with eviction notices, and rent and mortgage payments are still due. In short, without swift and aggressive action like cancelling rent and mortgage payments, massive evictions and foreclosures are on the horizon in Louisville, which are certain to increase the number of persons without shelter.

Finally, as all agencies have seen an increased demand for services, their operations have reached or exceeded capacity. From emergency shelter to storage, homeless service providers have reported their human and material resources have been stretched.

Submitted April 30, 2020