

New **COMMUNITY TASK FORCE** needed to develop a comprehensive solution for **POVERTY-STRICKEN FAMILIES** facing a devastating housing crisis

Use of homeless shelters by families in Columbus and Franklin County has increased in each of the past five years, more than doubling overall from 756 families in shelter in FY2010 to 1,570 families in shelter in FY2014. System leaders, providers and local officials are understandably alarmed by this trend, which has necessitated the development of a second emergency shelter for families, which opened in September 2015. The Columbus Foundation and the Community Shelter Board secured Abt Associates to undertake analysis of family homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio to uncover patterns or trends that may be useful in addressing the need among families going forward.

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**use of homeless shelters
by families**
DOUBLED
between FY2010 and FY2014
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KEY FINDINGS

Columbus and Franklin County's poorest families were negatively impacted by reductions in public benefits and assistance and had increasingly fewer sources of ongoing income and housing assistance to support them.

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**Franklin County families
lost**
\$72M
in annual benefits since 2001
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Public data on benefits receipt in Ohio from the Department of Job and Family Services shows an annual decline in the number of households receiving Ohio Works First cash assistance by 53%, and the total amount paid to households annually declined by \$28.6M, or 46%. The same data show that while the number of food stamp recipients remained relatively unchanged between 2001 and 2014, the total amount paid to households annually declined by \$43.5M, or 12% in Franklin County. Taken together, Franklin County had the largest decline in the annualized total amount of benefits between 2001 and 2014 at \$72M.

The rental market in Franklin County has tightened considerably in recent years, from 10% vacant rental units to 5% in 2013.

Mainstream, low income housing resources are nearly unattainable. The Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority reports that the Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8 waiting list has been closed since 2007, and that Franklin County has lost approximately 1,000 Housing Choice Vouchers in the last few years due to turnover and budget cuts.

While the number of homeless families increased in recent years, the poverty rate among families has declined by 6.2% between 2010 and 2013.

While public assistance for emergency housing needs decreased, families and providers increasingly turned to the emergency shelter system for assistance. Evidence suggests more families did NOT relocate to central Ohio for the sole purpose of accessing the emergency shelter system.

Mainstream systems are relying on the emergency shelter system for precariously housed families. Public assistance and general population social service systems perceive CSB and its providers to be better resourced and more effective service providers of housing supports for people who are precariously housed and need assistance.

Many families interviewed reported that they understood the family homeless shelter to be the only program in the area that would serve, and keep intact, families experiencing a housing crisis.

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**families shouldn't have
to become
HOMELESS
to get help**
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More families experiencing homelessness are working and earning higher incomes.



Thirty-six percent of families were employed at entry to shelter in FY2014, up from 18% in FY2010. Average monthly household income rose by 44%, though still very low at \$645 average/month.

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**families in shelter earn
an average of
\$645
a month**
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The family emergency shelter system continued to provide shelter accommodation and re-housing assistance, but was unable to mitigate demand due to limited system resources and absence of community resources for prevention.

Rates of return to homelessness are low at approximately 25%.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Community partners (public and private) should convene a six-month inquiry to develop a comprehensive solution for poverty stricken families facing a devastating housing crisis.**
 - a. The inquiry should identify, create and improve services that keep families in their homes, thereby avoiding homelessness and an over reliance on the emergency shelter system.
 - b. The inquiry should examine opportunities for not just linking but integrating services among government agencies, non-profit organizations, emergency shelter providers and affordable housing groups so that resources are more widely known and delivered.
 - c. Community Shelter Board should provide an optimized list of housing-related/social services that are lacking or in short supply that are crucial to mitigating emergency shelter overload.

- 2. Community partners should look closely at families with the lowest incomes who need more intensive services to stabilize their housing, and keep them from returning to homelessness, over utilizing the emergency system and falling through the cracks in our society.**
 - a. Identify families that are precariously housed
 - b. Define what housing related services they have and need
 - c. Provide strong intervention to keep these families in their homes so they can begin to improve their status both financially and socially.

- 3. Community partners should assure that emergency shelter providers, temporary and affordable housing groups and other organizations that deal with families in a housing crisis improve their screening and resource allocation so they can triage families more successfully, improve diversion and focus on those who are truly in an emergency.**
 - a. Community partners should assure that government agencies providing services to housing-fragile families are aware of local resources, committed to local solutions and are working closely with non-profit partners to keep families from a housing emergency crisis.

- 4. Community partners should designate or form an organizing body (not CSB) that will oversee and host ongoing accountability for comprehensive, community-wide solutions to keep at-risk families in their homes.**

