The CoC's Impact:

2024 Annual Report on Local Homelessness

The Continuum of Care (CoC) was created to help respond to the crisis of homelessness by creating a community-wide commitment to ending homelessness- led locally. There are over 400 CoCs in the country and they are each very different. There are 19 in Illinois alone! The Will County CoC services Will, Kendall and Grundy counties in Illinois- reaching 7% of Illinoisians in 1576 square miles.

The CoC is a coalition that has over 200 members who work together to respond to homelessness by implementing a homeless response system.

The CoC Collaborative is governed through comprehensive input of its members. The official structure of this collaboration is led by the CoC Board and its three primary planning committees: Plan to End Homelessness, Consumer Leadership, and HMIS. The CoC members participate in many ways to help develop strategies to address homelessness by understanding our community need. The commitment of the CoC Board is to be inclusive, transparent and accountable.

The CoC Infrastructure Team supports the collaborative by helping ensure required elements are implemented, coordinating planning efforts, and developing cross system partnerships. The team is housed at the CoC's Lead Agency- The United Way of Will County. The CoC Infrastructure Team's work is focused on three areas: Planning, Performance, and Partnerships, Homeless Management Information System, and Coordinated Entry System. The dedicated staff include the CoC Executive Director, HMIS System Administrator, and Coordinated Entry System Coordinator.

The Homeless Response System (HRS) is an interconnected resource delivery system that focuses on local response to the crisis of homelessness. The HRS is built through three pillars: prevention, crisis response, and housing. Within each pillar, specific interventions are available.

Homelessness is a complex issue. Through this collective, together, we can end homelessness!

Report On Local Homelessness

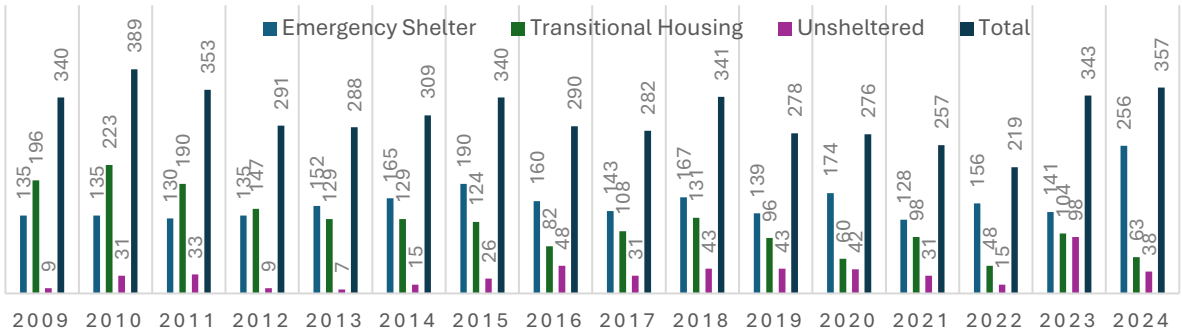
The CoC uses three reports to understand the local experiences of homelessness. The Point in Time (PIT) report shares the needs of people who are experiencing homelessness on any given night. The System Performance Measures (SysPM) provides an understanding of the current Homeless Response System- who it serves, what those it serves experiences, the resources they gain, and how the system is doing at connecting people to permanent housing. The Longitudinal Systems Analysis (LSA) which serves a Homeless Response System Pathway Analysis.

2024 Point In Time Findings:

On any given night, 357 people are experiencing homelessness in Will, Kendall, and Grundy counties. This means they are sleeping in a literal homeless situation- like an emergency shelter, transitional housing, or in an unsheltered situation in a place not meant for human habitation.

- Almost 11% are sleeping unsheltered.
    - Vulnerable health conditions are experienced at much higher proportions among those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. People experiencing unsheltered homelessness are 4 times more likely to be chronically homeless (meaning they are people with living with a disabling condition and experiencing long term homelessness), nearly 3 times more likely to have a serious mental illness, and nearly 5 times more likely to have a substance use disorder.
- Adults without children are the overwhelming majority of people experiencing homelessness, representing 87.5% of households.
- Unaccompanied youth (ages 18-24) and children (under 18 years old) make up 28% of the population served in emergency shelter or transitional housing.
- People who are experiencing homelessness because of domestic violence make up 16% of the entire homeless population.
- Veterans represent 3% of the population experiencing homelessness.
- People with mental health or substance use disorders are a small portion of the entire population experiencing homelessness, representing 12% and 9% of people experiencing homelessness' experience.
- Our black neighbors are overrepresented in this crisis, representing 42% of those in shelters or on the streets.

A History in Snapshots



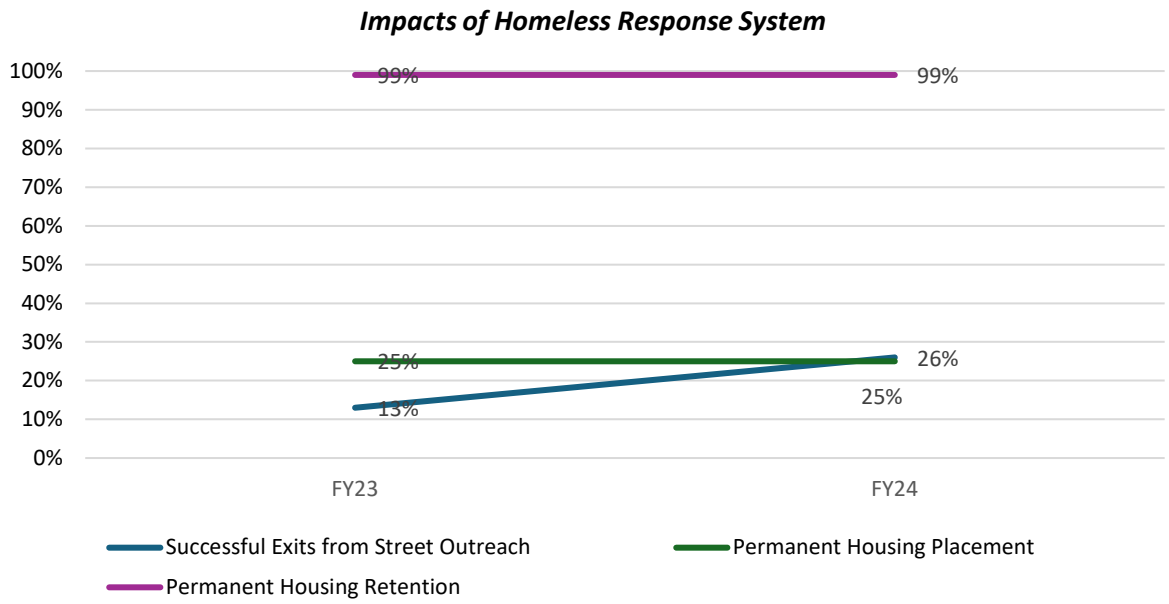
System Performance Measure shares a different perspective- how is the system doing at ending homelessness. A robust Homeless Response System provides interventions for people at risk of homelessness and in the crisis of being without housing. This includes providing emergency shelter, street outreach, and housing interventions. The fundamental goal of a Homeless Response System is to get as many people connected to permanent housing as quickly as possible.

The SysPM report documents the Homeless Response System's impact from 10/01/2023-9/30/2024. The local Homeless Response System served 1030 people during this time in either a crisis intervention or a housing solution.

Key findings:

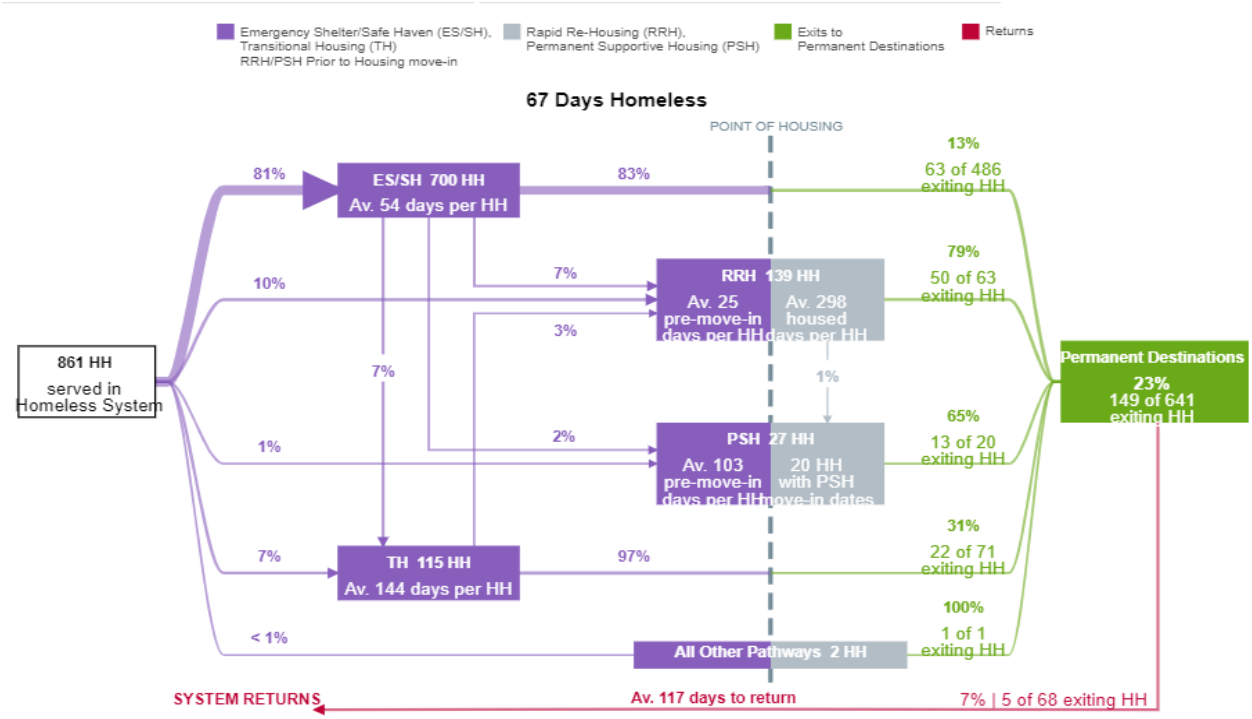
- 89.3% of people utilized an emergency shelter at some point that year and the average stay was 92.61 days.
- 76% reported it was their first-time experiencing homelessness.
- 11% of the people were served by the homeless response system in the last two years or experienced a return to homelessness.
- Most people have income when they experience homelessness. The housing interventions helped 44% of adults who entered their programs increase their income.

When looking at the key performance indicators, the CoC focuses on three important measures: Successful Exits from Street Outreach, Permanent Housing Placement, and Permanent Housing Retention.



An important indication of a Homelessness Response System's success is that people are connected to permanent housing- resolving the crisis of homelessness for those people. The CoC will continue to work on improving the exits to permanent housing measures. Our goal is to create a system that connects 75 households a month to housing. This is 900 households a year. This could effectively end homelessness in our region.

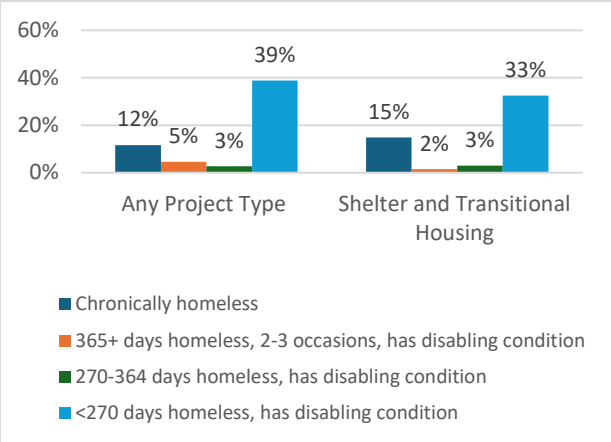
Homeless Response System Pathway Analysis
(FY2023 10/1/2022-09/30/2023)



Key Findings

- 81% of people who enter the HRS will be served by the Emergency Shelter; 13% of them will connect to permanent housing through non-dedicated CoC housing resources.
    - 7% will exit to Transitional Housing (Crisis Intervention)
    - 7% will exit to Permanent Housing with Rapid Rehousing Assistance
    - 2% will exit to Permanent Housing with Permanent Supportive Housing Assistance
- 19% of people who enter the HRS will not be served by the Emergency Shelter, likely unsheltered experiences.
    - 7% will exit to Transitional Housing (Crisis Intervention)
    - 10% will exit to Permanent Housing with Rapid Rehousing Assistance
    - 1% will exit to Permanent Housing with Permanent Supportive Housing Assistance
- 23% of all people exit homelessness to permanent housing; 7% return to homelessness.

Serving Severe Service Needs: Chronic and Households with Disability (LSA)



Key Findings

-59% of all households have a person with a disabling condition, 12% are experiencing chronic homelessness, 39% are experience homelessness for 9 months or less.

-53% of households in the Crisis Interventions have a member with a disabling condition, 15% are experiencing chronic homelessness prior to entry, and 33% are experiencing homelessness for less than 9 months prior to entry.

The Region's Housing Conditions

It is crucial to understand the housing conditions that exist in the CoC's geographic region. Based on census data, we know a lot about our region. The CoC represents 7% of the constituents of Illinois. The CoC's region lacks housing stock that meets its constituents' needs. Until regional housing stock meets the needs of all its community members, homelessness will persist.

The Homeless Response System is dedicated to helping people regain housing as quickly as possible once they experience homelessness. Local government and jurisdiction can aid in the end of homelessness by adopting strategies to ensure housing stock meets its community members' needs. Without housing, we can't end homelessness permanently.

ILLINOIS **#21***

In Illinois, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment is $1,498. In order to afford this level of rent and utilities — without paying more than 30% of income on housing — a household must earn $4,994 monthly or $59,933 annually. Assuming a 40-hour work week, 52 weeks per year, this level of income translates into an hourly Housing Wage of:

$28.81 PER HOUR STATE HOUSING WAGE

MOST EXPENSIVE AREAS	HOUSING WAGE
Kendall County HMFA	$33.48
Chicago-Joliet-Naperville HMFA	$32.96
Grundy County	$28.65
DeKalb County	$25.52
St. Louis HMFA	$23.25

MSA = Metropolitan Statistical Area; HMFA = HUD Metro FMR Area.
* Ranked from Highest to Lowest 2-Bedroom Housing Wage. Includes District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

- In the tri-county region, less than 20% of the housing stock is available for renters (the state's average is 34.5%). *
- The region's average gross rent exceeds the state's average by $199/month. *
- 2024 Out of Reach Report shows that the tri-county region has the highest hourly wages necessary to afford rent in the state of Illinois.
- Local Housing Solutions' Housing Assessment Data reports that the region has ***13,208*** studio or 1-bedroom units- there are 153,619 One- to Two-Person Households in the area. They recommend, "In areas with a tight housing supply and a larger number of households than units in this comparison, there may be opportunities to improve affordability by developing new studio or one-bedroom units".
- All of our regions, according to Local Housing Solutions' Housing Assessment Data, have lower rental vacancy rates than the state average: Joliet's vacancy rate is 5.8%, Will County's vacancy rate is 5.9%, Grundy County's' vacancy rate is 2.2%, and Kendall County is the most severe at 0.7%.

*US Census Data

Funding Allocations

The CoC is a collaborative dedicated to ending homelessness in Will, Kendall, and Grundy Counties in Illinois. Our geographic region is very diverse consisting of urban, suburban, and rural communities. The Will County Continuum of Care intends on maximizing our funding allocations to end homelessness in our communities. The CoC strategically determines which projects will create the strongest portfolio of housing options, crisis response interventions, and services to meet this goal. The CoC oversees 5 separate funding recommendations, which include a local application process and strategic recommendations of resources to government funders.

Strategies for funding recommendations are based on local data, an assessment of needs, and focused on meeting our collective's mission- ending homelessness. The CoC recognizes that funding opportunities are scarce and do not meet the needs of our communities' homelessness crisis, therefore we strive to improve our alignment of funding so that we impact our local communities the most.

Funding Name	Funder	2022	2023	2024
CoC Program	Federal	$4,930,145	$4,998,416	$5,074,378
Home Illinois	State	$0	$1,178,337	$1,178,337
Special CoC Program	Federal	$0	$796,195	$796,195
Emergency Solutions Grant	State/Federal	$347,604	$408,181	$190,909
Homelessness Prevention	State	$198,000	$198,000	$690,000
	Total	$5,475,749	$7,579,129	$7,929,819

In 2024, the CoC's funding portfolio expanded by $350,000 annually. This came from increases gained in federally competitive funding and increases in resources advocated for by CoC at the state for prevention funding. There was also a decrease in the Emergency Solution Grant (ESG) direct allocation from the state, reducing the emergency shelter and street outreach resources by $130,363 and RRH by $86,909. ESG has also been allocated to Will County, who dedicated to $149,00 to rapid rehousing. Due to the reduction in ESG from the state, this will increase the RRH funding by only $60,000. These shifts will impact the capacity of each intervention. Shelter and Street Outreach are the lowest funding allocation we can make because of regulation limits and they serve the most people. ESG is a federal formula grant that directs funds to the state and local jurisdictions annually. It can change annually. The collaborative hopes to increase their focus on housing and prevention efforts.

Homeless Response System

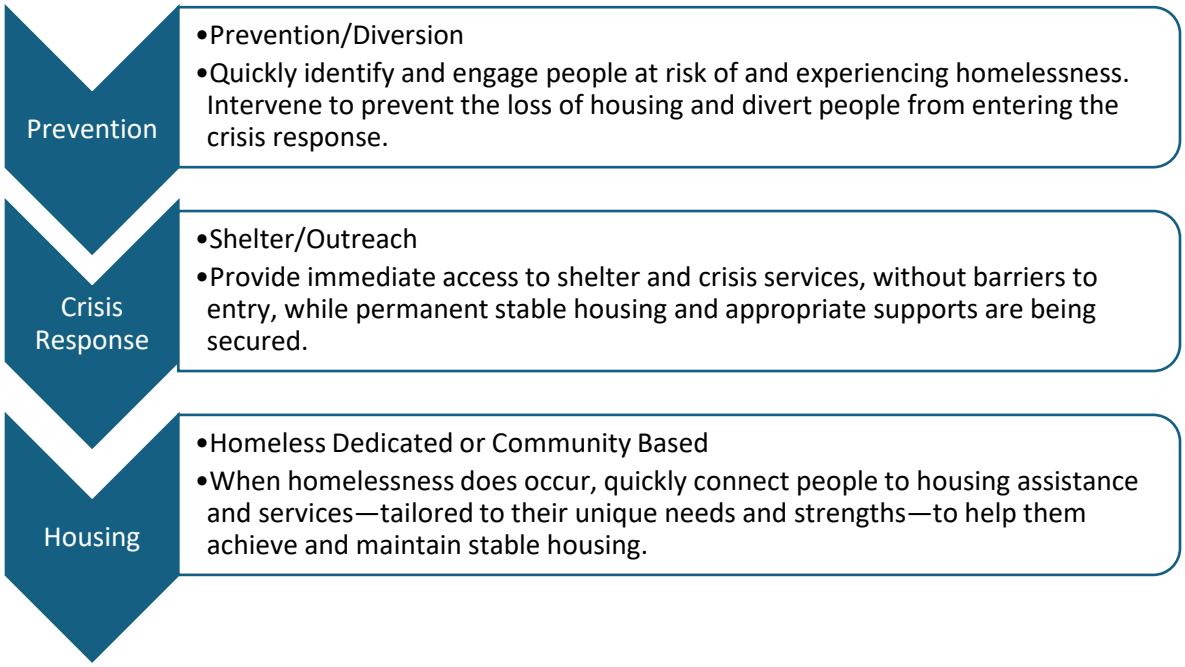
Through coordinating the implementation of a housing and service system within our geographic area, we strive to meet the needs of homeless individuals (including unaccompanied youth) and families. Our system encompasses the following: outreach, engagement and assessment; shelter, housing, and supportive services; and prevention strategies. Coordinating the crisis response begins with this shared philosophy: ***Homelessness is a housing crisis.***

The CoC has adopted evidence-based practices system-wide that enable all the components of our HRS to be housing-focused. These practices are Housing First and Progressive Engagement. These are foundational to our system's success in serving our communities. Increasing housing placements from our crisis interventions and preventing experiences of literal homelessness, including recurring experiences, are also critical to our success.

Housing 1st:
Homelessness is a housing crisis. Housing is the first step to helping a household recover from homelessness. Housing programs prioritize rapid placement and stabilization in permanent housing, their admission does not have preconditions and housing assistance is not conditioned upon participation in services.

The Pillars of the HRS

The HRS is built through three pillars: prevention, crisis response, and housing. Within each pillar, specific interventions are available.

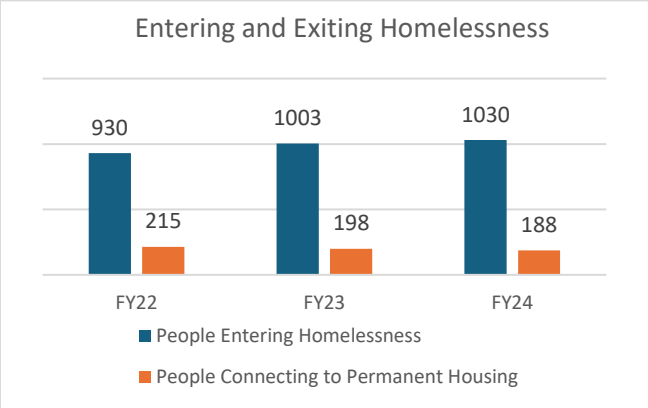


Why Prevention Matters

More people are entering homelessness than can be connected to housing with current resources. Homelessness is a traumatic experience with many impacts on a person's health. Preventing homelessness is key to ending homelessness. In our CoC, an average of 80% of people entering shelter are experiencing homelessness for the first time.

Factors that contribute to homelessness- Unaffordable, inaccessible, and unavailable housing; lack of permanent, stable employment in the community; and health issues and access to health care.

Homelessness Prevention in the Homeless Response System must focus on preventing households from experiencing literal homelessness and/or entering the crisis components of the Homeless Response System (like emergency shelter or street outreach).



Findings from Homelessness Prevention Listening Session Findings (3/22/2024)

Instable Housing	• Lack of housing availability (extremely low vacancy and limited housing rental), high and rising rents, ease and expediency of eviction process for landlords, doubled up households or hotels being used for housing. • Shelter partner reported that no emergency shelter entries in the last calendar year were from a household who owned their home immediately prior to entry. • Income discrimination, specifically when assistance is available from a nonprofit organization for rent. • No available vouchers or public housing through local housing authorities. • Eviction court partners identified HOA as costs that contribute to the loss of homes.
Household Incomes aren't Enough to Pay Housing Costs.	• Instable employment like multiple 'gig jobs', temporary employment assignments, warehouses employing people for 89 days and releasing employees before they would become permanent employees, and day labor are employment experiences for many people at risk of homelessness. • Employed households cannot acquire benefits, like healthcare or PTO. • Households who are applying for income benefits due to disability cannot access employment income. • VITA partner shared that 'gig jobs' often contribute to households owing taxes they can't pay when preparing their income taxes. • Households will work for cash when they can.
Health Issues	• Households living with chronic health conditions who lack support when their health symptoms exasperate are at risk of homelessness. • Services that are wrapped around households with chronic health conditions to help prevent housing loss is needed. • Healthcare discharge planning is not appropriately considering housing vulnerabilities. • Households are often utilizing emergency rooms in place of accessing primary care providers, sometimes because of lack of education on PCP roles but also because of the lack of access to PCP in the community.
Expanding Affordable Housing	• Land acquisition is unreasonably expensive. • Zoning ordinances impacts new opportunities. • New opportunities are being considered for Veterans.

Homelessness will persist in Illinois until there is housing that meets all of Illinoisians' needs. The Homeless Response System, led by the CoC collective, is critical to helping lessen the impact of the crisis of homelessness while working to re-connect literally homelessness households to permanent housing.

Ensuring Community Safety by Providing Life Saving Basic Human Needs Makes a Difference

In 2023, the region faced an unprecedented crisis of unsheltered homelessness. The CoC was able to respond to this because of the expansion of state resources and equitable regional funding.

Shifting to Low Barrier Crisis Access and Housing Focused Services

- The 2024 Point in Time data showed significant progress, including a 13% decrease in households experiencing homelessness overall.
- People who needed shelter had more access to it in all three counties.
    - People in emergency shelter have increased significantly- serving 2 times more people nightly. This also includes a 130% increase in individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.
    - The shelter can provide both safe spaces for people to sleep and supportive services focused on alleviating homelessness.
- **Most significantly, unsheltered homelessness decreased 59%.**

Street Outreach activities include the outreach and engagement of people experiencing homelessness in unsheltered locations with the goal of connection to HRS. The urgent objective is to connect households to emergency shelters whenever possible. Street Outreach serves as a Coordinated Entry System Access Point for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and must be conducted in the field.

During the last reporting year, 1030 people experienced homelessness that resulted in utilizing the Homeless Response System. This is a conservative number that shares who the Homeless Response System could serve - the need is much higher.

HOUSING IS THE SOLUTION TO HOMELESSNESS.

Through the resources currently dedicated to end homelessness, the CoC's partners were able to house 188 people. This represents only 25% of those experiencing homelessness. *This system is extremely under resourced.*

However, once people are housed the CoC's evidenced-based interventions prove their efficiency with a 99% rate of success. Increased investment in housing will decrease homelessness now and permanently.

'When I was 18, I had my first episode of mental illness. I remember experiencing a time of confusion, hallucinations, and delusions. I remember myself hiding out in odd places like churches and friends' houses. I was scared of everything I encountered. When I decided to go to the shelter, they helped me with a place to stay and got food in my stomach. I stayed there for about 6 months until I had another psychotic episode. I was admitted to the hospital. I went back to the streets when I got out and stayed in a tent. I went back to the shelter. I was staying there for three months when I got a call from a supportive housing program- they said they had a home for me! They helped me find housing and gave me a team of mental health staff to help me. As I look back, I realized I would not be where I am now without the services that were there because of the shelter and the supportive housing programs. I know all these special places have made me the person I am today. More funding for places like these helps the homeless find a light at the end of the tunnel'.- Jason

The Lived Experience

The CoC believes that leaders with lived experience play an important role in our work. It is our goal to listen to them, as they are experts. In 2024, we began developing new ways to help support these leaders and creating an advisory group who received leadership development training from the Supportive Housing Provider's Association. Through outreach and engagement, listening session, and surveys, we strive to understand the experience of the people the CoC is privileged to serve.

Unsheltered Experiences

Unsheltered homelessness experiences are dangerous, leaving people without a safe space to sleep and disconnected from the homeless response system. The CoC's Homeless Response System was devastated by the pandemic, significantly reducing emergency shelter in our three-county region. Our communities have documented unprecedented numbers of neighbors experiencing unsheltered homelessness. People experiencing unsheltered homelessness should have access to crisis interventions, including street outreach, emergency shelter, and housing and resource referral systems, without barriers.

The Coordinated Entry System reports that 90% of all people in our homeless response system have experienced unsheltered homelessness.

Project HELP, Homelessness Ends Lifting Peers, is an initiative led by people who have experienced homelessness. Their goal is to help end homelessness in the Will County Continuum of Care.

Project HELP coordinates outreach efforts to connect with our most vulnerable community members- those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. These efforts have helped people that are experiencing unsheltered homelessness obtain basic necessities- often critical to their survival.

During Project HELP's September 2024 outreach event, people who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness share the following with the CoC:

- 77% are sleeping in locations of 4 or more people
- 38% have been attached physical since experiencing homelessness
- 1.76 incidents of violence experienced per person
- 77% do not get enough sleep- the average is 5 hours. People reported going days without sleeping.
- 62% are experiencing homelessness for the 1st time, and their average time in this first episode is 2.5 years.
- 85% have you ever tried to access an emergency shelter in Will, Kendall or Grundy County. 38% stayed in the shelter but most reported they could not access shelter because there was no space.
- 77% have been engaged by the street outreach team.
- **85% want help with housing.**

"It is so difficult to make any first step out. It's difficult to be clean and be clean clothed to go to job interviews. Not able to work on resume or cover letter."

"It's hard, rough, cold at night, and I don't got nothing. They need to put a porter potty in. An area for being able to have electricity."

In response to are you safe: "sometimes, I pray a lot"

Our Black Neighbors

The racial disparity of Black or African Americans within the Will County Continuum of Care's Homeless Response System is drastic. While this demographic represents only 12% of our community's population, within homelessness they represent 46% of those we serve. The CoC recognized that populations who are overrepresented or their experiences represent a significant portion of our homeless neighbors as households with severe service needs. Our black neighbors were identified because they are 3.5 times more likely to experience homelessness than any other race/ethnic group.

The CoC has hosted a listening session of people who are black males and experiencing homelessness to identify further the specific challenges of this population. The members of this listening session established a monthly advisory meeting to provide input on the CoC's strategies.

Input Expressed in Initial Listening Session of the Homelessness Experiences of Black American Males

- They work a lot but their income is instable because they are employed by staffing agencies.
- They do not anticipate receiving help from systems, like the Homeless Response System, and they figure out solutions on their own. This means they enter HRS only long enough to save the money they need to exit, they exit, and return. The CoC prioritizes resources to the longest stayers. This strategy prevents these experiences from receiving support in exiting homelessness.
- Law enforcement, criminal justice, and court systems impact them significantly and create insurmountable barriers to housing stability. Examples include convictions, unmanageable child support, and legal fees that result in loss of driver's license removing transportation autonomy. Because of convictions, their educational attainment and employment skills are not utilized.
- In response to the question of 'what would it take to help you with housing?', a responded shared a voucher would help because then a landlord would see him as having stable income. Attendees at the listening session reported working a lot. In the staffing agencies, they went from job assignment to job assignment- never without work. They also said they needed to earn $22/hour to pay for housing needs. This is much less than projected by the "2024: Out of Reach Report" which identified $31.69/hour as the wage needed for housing stability for our region.
- Attendees expressed homelessness was traumatic. No one reported a disabling condition because of physical or mental health, however, an attendee profoundly expressed, 'Being a black man is a disabling condition in America'.

The CoC's Plan for Preventing and Eliminating Racial Disparities.

- Evaluating All Homeless Response Projects for Racial Disparities
- Review Coordinated Entry System Data for Racial Disparities
- Receive Input on Processes, Policies, and Procedures from Impacted People
- Develop Strategies to Better Serve the Severe Service Need for Housing and Services

For More Information, please connect with the CoC Infrastructure Team!

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