

HOMELESSNESS BRIEFING 2021-2022

(Research Chair: Pastor Tim Suttle)

Hearing the Concerns of Our People

Concerns related to homelessness in our community were first identified during a Listening Process organized by the Good Faith Network during the fall of 2021. Community members shared concerns such as:

- “Angered by the lack of services for homeless women outside of domestic abuse situations.”
- “The difference between being able to stay in my apartment and being homeless came down to \$50. I was right on the edge.”
- “Angered by the ‘out of sight, out of mind’ attitude toward homelessness (not-in-my-backyard).”
- “There is nothing for homeless single people with addictions and mental health issues.”
- “I have a friend who can’t get a job because she can’t get a driver’s license/valid ID because she doesn’t have an address. She’s trapped in the cycle of homelessness.”
- “The lack of affordable housing in JoCo is only leading to more homelessness.”

Selecting the Priority of Homelessness

At our annual Community Problems Assembly on November 8th, the Good Faith Network confirmed Homelessness as a priority. That night, Kathy Prim, Jim Schmidt, and Jennifer Schmidt shared testimonies on the problem. Jim shared, “A lot of the homeless in Johnson County are your neighbors. It’s a recurring theme that surprises me every time that this is a friend of a friend or somebody that went to school with our kids.”

Researching the Problem and Viable Solutions

The Homelessness Research Committee held the following research interviews and meetings leading up to the 4/4/22 Solutions Briefing event:

- 12/13/21 - Barb McEver - Project 1020
- 12/15/21 - Tim DeWeese - Johnson County Mental Health Center (JCMHC)
- 01/05/22 - Krysten Olson - Metro Lutheran Ministries
- 01/06/22 - Julie Brewer, Rita Carr, Kristy Baughman - United Community Services
- 01/10/22 - Jessica Murphy - JCMHC Co-Responders, Sgt. Robert McKeirnan - Olathe Police Dept, Sgt. Stewart Brought - Overland Park Police Dept
- 01/11/22 - Vicki Dercher - JoCo IHN
- 01/24/22 - Review of the United Community Services Johnson County Housing Study
- 01/26/22 - Angie Walker - Rockford, IL
- 01/31/22 - Kar Woo - Artists Helping the Homeless
- 02/03/22 - Review of Justice Matters’ 2020 interview with Bergen County, NJ
- 02/09/22 - Tour of Veterans Community Project
- 02/14/22 - Susan Lewis - Mental Health America of the Heartland

- 02/18/22 - David Ward, Jessica Hotaling - Johnson County Housing Services
- 02/24/22 - Doug Brown - Metro Lutheran Ministries
- 03/04/22 - Rita Carr and Kristy Boughman - United Community Services
- 03/07/22 - HOME-ARP presentation - KS Housing Resources Corporation
- 03/09/22 - Andy Brown - KS Dept of Aging and Disability Services
- 03/14/22 - Review of Bergen County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness
- 03/15/22 - Julia Orlando - Bergen County, NJ
- 03/16/22 - Tim DeWeese, Jessica Murphy, Shana Burgess - JCMHC
- 03/22/22 - Rob Santel, Susila Jones - CrossLines
- 03/23/22 - Dr. Sam Tsemberis - Pathways to Housing

The Problem

The stakes are life-and-death for those experiencing homelessness in Johnson County. McKinney-Vento data shows that, in a given year, 1,000 students in our community are precariously housed or homeless. Recent HUD Point in Time counts indicate at least 180 individuals are homeless in Johnson County on any given night.

While Johnson County has numerous programs attempting to manage services to the homeless, we have no coordinated strategy to end homelessness. A lack of accountability for ending homelessness, an over-reliance on temporary, volunteer-operated shelters with limited support services, and a failure to invest in supportive housing for the most vulnerable create cycles that trap and imperil hundreds of lives each year in Johnson County.

Our Current Systems

There are several agencies providing direct services to the homeless population of Johnson County, including but not limited to: Johnson County Mental Health Center, Metro Lutheran Ministries, Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas, the Salvation Army, JoCo IHN, Artists Helping the Homeless, Mental Health America of the Heartland, and Project 1020. Most agencies are stretched thin and struggling to help people navigate the scarce but complicated array of available resources.

People in need of shelter often end up with Project 1020, Johnson County's only shelter option for single adults. Project 1020 is only open during the cold weather months, has been restricted to a 30-bed capacity, and depends almost entirely on volunteers to operate. During the rest of the year, many of its guests will end up cycling through jails and ERs because there is no year round shelter or crisis center for them to go to. Project 1020 has faced one uphill battle after another to keep their doors open - first with opposition from neighborhoods and city officials in Olathe¹ and later with the city of Lenexa, which escalated into a lawsuit.^{2,3}

¹ 'Neighbors voice concerns about Olathe homeless shelter.' KSHB News. February 19, 2019.

<https://www.kshb.com/news/local-news/neighbors-voice-concerns-about-olathe-homeless-shelter>

² 'After being sued for denying homeless shelter, Lenexa works to develop new city code.' Shawnee Mission Post. January 11, 2021.

<https://shawneemissionpost.com/2021/01/11/lenexa-proposes-regulations-for-homeless-shelters-110551/>

³ 'Kansas church wins court battle to host homeless shelter.' UUWorld. December 20, 2019.

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/lenexa-shelter-victory>

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) administers homelessness services and funding through local Continuums of Care (CoCs). The lead agency for the Johnson County CoC is United Community Services (UCS). UCS is an important local voice for education, data collection/analysis, and advocacy.

HUD requires that every CoC conduct a yearly Point in Time (PIT) count. While the most recent PIT count data shows a drop in the number of homeless in Johnson County, UCS notes this is likely due to the constraints of counting during a pandemic, not an actual decrease in the number of homeless people.⁴ Moreover, PIT count numbers almost certainly underrepresent the true number of homeless people in Johnson County due to its “snapshot” methodology of data collection.

The last PIT count before the pandemic reported 180 persons experiencing homelessness in Johnson County. However, records kept by Project 1020 indicate that they serve upwards of 200 different individuals each year, and then there are still many who remain unsheltered and uncounted.⁵

What do you mean by ‘ending’ homelessness?

This goal of “ending homelessness” sounds impossible, but it’s not. Many communities around the nation have achieved what is called “functional zero” on veteran and chronic homelessness, which means that rates are kept below the system’s capacity to ensure positive exits from homelessness. When homelessness does occur within those communities it is rare and brief.

Functional zero is not a one-and-done accomplishment. Homelessness is a dynamic problem which requires dynamic solutions that can be sustained over time, even when local conditions change. We can conceptualize functional zero like a well-functioning hospital. That hospital will not necessarily prevent people from ever becoming sick, but it will ensure people are triaged, receive prompt and appropriate services, and address the underlying illness.⁶

Chronic Homelessness

The term “chronic homelessness” is a HUD term used to describe people who have:

- experienced homelessness for at least 12 months, or in 4 or more episodes of homelessness in the past 3 years that total 12 months and
- struggle with a disabling condition (serious mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability) as outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act.⁷

⁴ 2021, 2020, and 2019 PIT Count Reports, accessible from:

<https://ucsjoco.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Homelessness-in-Johnson-County-2021.pdf>

<https://ucsjoco.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Homelessness-in-Johnson-County-2020.pdf>

<https://ucsjoco.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Homelessness-in-Johnson-County-2019-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ ‘Houseless in Johnson County will have few options after shelter closes at end of March.’ The Kansas City Star. March 28, 2022. <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article259402304.html>

⁶ Learn more about functional zero at <https://community.solutions/built-for-zero/functional-zero/>

⁷ Defining Chronic Homelessness: A Technical Guide for HUD Programs. Accessible from: <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/DefiningChronicHomeless.pdf>

Nationally, an estimated 19% of homelessness is chronic,⁸ and the number of chronically homeless individuals rose by 15 percent between 2019 and 2020.⁹

Those struggling with chronic homelessness face a tougher climb out of it compared to those who are situationally homeless. If agencies require sobriety, medication compliance, curriculum participation, a clean criminal record, or attendance at a given house of worship before someone can access their services, this presents a “high barrier” for many chronically homeless individuals.

There are very few “low barrier” resources available for this especially vulnerable population. The Good Faith Network made a conscious decision to focus on chronic homelessness for precisely this reason.

Housing First: an Evidence-Based Approach

There are 5 principles to a Housing First model:^{10,11}

1. Immediate access to housing with no pre-conditions
Housing cannot be dependent on any other factor. Evictions happen, but there must be an immediate chance to try again with the help of a support team.
2. Consumer choice and self-determination
Research shows that a majority of participants prefer independent, market housing throughout the city. In order to foster learning and self-determination, the team should support most choices participants make, and avoid over-protecting participants from learning opportunities. When choices have poor outcomes, a supportive learning environment promotes more informed choices in the future, reducing long term harm and increasing self-sustainability.
3. Recovery-oriented service philosophy
People are more likely to do well and achieve personal goals when they have an opportunity to find their own recovery. Housing First supports people as they work at their pace towards self-defined goals, whether it be healthcare/treatment, returning to work, or reconnecting with family or faith.
4. Individualized and person-driven supports
Support is meant to fit the participant, not the other way around. By replacing complicated policies with flexible models and a “can-do” philosophy, the team helps participants reduce barriers and improve self-determination and quality of life.
5. Social and community integration

⁸ National Alliance to End Homelessness. Data accessible via:
<https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-2021/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1648735671345625&usg=AOvVaw1jecB9OTJOVmwLr0oeEHTC>

⁹ National Alliance to End Homelessness. Data accessible via:
<https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/who-experiences-homelessness/chronically-homeless/>

¹⁰ Housing First: Principles into Practice. Video playlist available via:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGx3f1PiutI&list=PLn2dcn1mdW4oAhzNDrCrI0AGx11FJ_ukC

¹¹ 3/23/22 interview with Dr. Sam Tsemberis, founder of Housing First

Moving out of homelessness and into a new place can be isolating and lonely. Support teams help participants build community connections based on their needs and interests. Teams also provide landlords and community members with education on Housing First, inclusion, and myth-busting negative stereotypes.

Affordable Housing and Voucher Programs

Johnson County Housing Services administers the Housing Choice Voucher Program, commonly referred to as Section 8 Housing. HUD allocates 1447 vouchers to Johnson County through this program - a quantity unchanged since 2010.¹² When the waitlist for vouchers was opened on October 20th, 2020 at 9 AM, the waitlist was closed after receiving 1,000 applications at 10:38 AM.¹³ Demand for vouchers far exceeds supply.

However, even for those who are lucky enough to receive a voucher, finding an available rental unit is still a challenge. Johnson County Housing Services does not own or operate any public housing. HUD payment standards (set as a percentage of the “standard market rate”) limit the rental units that vouchers can be applied to.¹⁴ Despite the guaranteed rental payment that a voucher would provide, landlords are hesitant to accept housing vouchers because of the stigma and myths about the tenants who use them.

Several systemic barriers stand in the way of creating affordable housing. Kansas SB 366, which was signed into law in 2016, prohibits municipalities from conditioning the issuance of permits on any requirements that would have the effect of controlling the amount of rent charged or purchase price.¹⁵ This means that neither the county nor any cities have a way of requiring developers to create affordable units.

Johnson County has several Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) facilities that are being sold out of affordability, further chipping away at our affordable housing stock. Over the course of 2021, Johnson County will have lost 24% of its affordable housing units through the use of qualified sales contracts that allow the conversion of housing from affordable to market rate.¹⁶

United Community Services has conducted a Community Housing Study and published an Housing for All Toolkit that can equip Johnson County municipalities with a menu of options to create more affordable housing.^{17,18} While we desperately need more affordable housing, it is only one piece of the solution to ending homelessness.

¹² 2/18/22 interview with David Ward and Jessica Hotaling of Johnson County Housing Services

¹³ 2/18/22 interview with David Ward and Jessica Hotaling of Johnson County Housing Services

¹⁴ Johnson County, KS Fair Market Rent levels can be found via:

https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2022_code/2022summary.odn

¹⁵ Legislation text accessible via: http://www.kslegislature.org/li_2016/b2015_16/measures/SB366/

¹⁶ 2/18/22 interview with David Ward and Jessica Hotaling of Johnson County Housing Services

¹⁷ 1/24/22 Good Faith Network Homelessness Research Committee reviewed the Housing Study

¹⁸ UCS study and toolkit available via: <https://ucsjoco.org/housing-toolkit/>

HOME-ARP Funding¹⁹

In Section 3205 of the American Rescue Plan, the Homelessness Assistance and Supportive Services Program provides \$5 billion of federal supplemental HOME funds to communities across the nation. As a participating jurisdiction, Johnson County has been allocated \$3,977,106 and has until September 30th, 2030 to spend it.

There are five eligible activities that HOME-ARP funds can be used for:

- Production or preservation of affordable housing
- Tenant-based rental assistance
- Supportive services, homeless prevention services, and housing counseling
- Purchase and development of non-congregate shelter
- Nonprofit operating and capacity building

The Solutions

We seek a full commitment to ending chronic homelessness in Johnson County, to be accomplished through:

- A comprehensive, time-bound plan to end chronic homelessness that addresses emergency shelter as well as ongoing housing and support needs.
- Prioritized direction of local, state and federal funds to activities that end chronic homelessness.
- Creation of a single entity with the authority and responsibility to implement strategies that end chronic homelessness.
- Provision of a year-round emergency shelter co-located with support services to function as a navigation center out of homelessness.
- Creation of permanent supportive housing to provide stable living opportunities that combine housing assistance with services for people with serious mental illnesses and other disabilities.

¹⁹ 3/7/22 Kansas Housing Resources Corporation, HOME-ARP Presentation