

# Community Snapshot

## Columbus



May 2006

THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS

### Progress in Ending Homelessness

By redesigning their programs to focus on prevention and housing first, and regularly measuring performance, Columbus has reduced the number of families that become homeless and increased the percentage of families that successfully move into permanent housing. Columbus uses data and performance measures to ensure that homeless families move through the homeless assistance system quickly and receive the services they need to maintain stable housing. The Community Shelter Board, a nonprofit umbrella organization, oversees this system and fosters collaboration between the numerous community based organizations.

The Community Shelter Board used data from an early Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to identify program models and services that demonstrated successful outcomes. These findings led to a reorganization of homeless services, changing the focus from providing emergency shelter to helping families locate and move into permanent housing, and then linking them with services needed to help them remain stable.

These programs are cost-effective, enabling the Community Shelter Board to stretch funding and serve families better. Interventions are targeted to closely match families' needs. Families with fewer service needs move quickly into permanent housing to avoid expensive long term shelter stays. Services are provided to help families gain incomes and stabilize in their housing, thus reducing repeat homelessness episodes. Higher cost interventions, such as permanent supportive housing or transitional housing, are targeted to families with many barriers to moving into housing.

Columbus achieved success using resources and strategies that could be replicated by homelessness providers in most communities. While some cities have reduced homelessness with a special infusion of funding from their state or local government, Columbus has relied on traditional funding sources, including HUD Homeless Assistance funding and the United Way.

Family homelessness decreased 46 percent—from 1,297 families in 1997 to 696 families in 2004.

### Key Initiatives

Responding to the increase in family homelessness in the mid-1990s and data on programmatic outcomes, the Community Shelter Board spearheaded several initiatives to reduce family homelessness:

*Developed Short Term Rental Subsidies.* The Community Shelter Board's Transition Program provides short term rental and utility assistance to help families move into housing, whether it is subsidized or private market. This program is funded in part by the city's Community Development Block Grant and state housing trust fund.

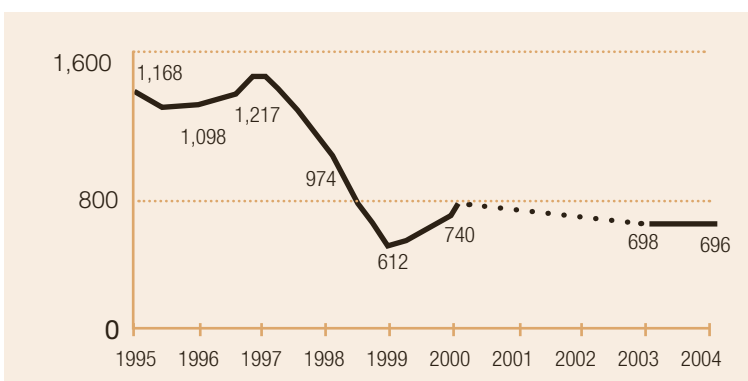
*Single Point of Entry to Homelessness System.* The YWCA Interfaith Hospitality Network was re-designed as a single point of entry into the homelessness system for families. In October 2005, the YWCA opened a new family center which improved upon the Network's congregation-based lodging program. Families entering shelter are quickly assessed and referred to the appropriate services. Many families are referred to an agency that provides prevention assistance, including financial assistance and case management, and are successfully diverted from homelessness. No families needing shelter are turned away, and a recent point in time count found no unsheltered families in the city.

*Housing First.* The Salvation Army and other community partners implemented the Family Housing Collaborative, a program that helps families move directly into permanent housing with transitional services. Families with sufficient incomes to pay for housing without a long term subsidy receive services and financial assistance to help them locate and move into permanent housing within three weeks of referral. The Salvation Army also works with private and public housing providers to connect lower income families to subsidized housing.



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**Exhibit 1:** Families Served by the Emergency Shelter System



**Source:** 2005 Community Report on Homelessness; Community Shelter Board December, 2005. No data were available for 2001 and 2002.

*Data and Planning.* Data and planning are essential components of Columbus's efforts to end homelessness. Underlying these initiatives is a quarterly evaluation process using HMIS data that focuses on a few key measures, including the length of time families are homeless, the success rate for placing families into housing, and lower recidivism back into homelessness. Data from the HMIS system help program managers evaluate programs and properly allocate resources.

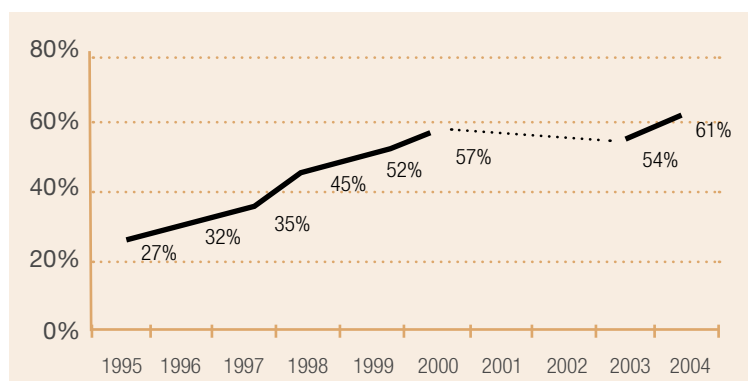
### Outcomes

Targeting services and focusing on prevention and permanent housing is beginning to show results. In 1995, 1,168 families entered Columbus's homeless system. This figure peaked at 1,217 in 1997 before declining to 696 in 2004 (See Exhibit 1). Much of the decline is attributed to prevention efforts.

Successful housing outcomes have risen steadily for families in Columbus's homeless system from 27 percent in 1995 to 61 percent in 2004 (See Exhibit 2).

Repeated episodes of homelessness are also decreasing. Since the adoption of new strategies, families that exit homelessness to permanent housing are unlikely to return to shelter. For example, fewer than 5 percent of families who successfully exit emergency shelter return within 90 days.

**Exhibit 2:** Successful Housing Outcomes



**Source:** 2005 Community Report on Homelessness; Community Shelter Board December, 2005. Successful housing outcomes include families that exit homelessness programs for transitional housing or permanent housing where the family is on the lease. Doubled up families are not included in the count. Moves to transitional housing account for approximately 10 percent of exits. Successful housing outcomes in a few instances also include moves from a emergency shelter to longer term shelter when such a placement is necessary.

Across the country, communities are making progress in ending homelessness. The National Alliance to End Homelessness *Community Snapshot Series* highlights strategies, programs, and innovations in these communities. To learn how to end homelessness in ten years, visit [www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org).

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonprofit organization dedicated to solving the problem of homelessness and preventing its continued growth. Our mission is to mobilize all sectors of society in an alliance to end homelessness.