

2020-21 Cold Shelter and Transitional Home Pilot Program

In the spring and summer of 2020, the staff of the Family Resource Center began to have discussions and research different models of Winter Cold Shelters. These conversations led to the idea of operating a winter cold shelter out of a motel; reserving several rooms for this express purpose and providing case management to help clients with finding long term answers. When asked to apply to the City of Oxford for C.A.R.E.S. act funding, the Family Resource Center believed this program to be a natural fit to meet the needs of this extremely vulnerable population. As funding was approved, the Family Resource Center used C.A.R.E.S. act funding to start the program for the months of November and December. The City of Oxford provided additional funding for the months of January and February as well as the funding of a transitional housing program. The Family Resource Center rented two apartment housing units from Bob Blackburn through Oxford Real Estate to provide families with transitional housing while they were looking for long term solutions to their housing issues. The funding from the City of Oxford for this program in 2021 included:

Four Month Rental of 6 Rooms at the Budget Inn -	\$27,960
Twelve Month Rental of Two Transitional Homes -	\$15,600
Utility Assistance for Transitional Homes -	\$9,600
.6 FTE Staffing -	<u>\$21,000</u>
Total	\$74,160

In February, the Oxford Citizens for Justice and Peace reached out to the Family Resource Center to inquire about the continuation of the shelter program through the month of March. They were able to raise funds (\$9,140) in order to keep the shelter open. These funds were utilized to run the additional month of operations as well as help fund shelter stays that were above capacity during that month. Additional funding raised by the OCJP committee was utilized towards housing needs of clients during months following the closure of the shelter program.

Winter Shelter Operations and Client Demographics

The Winter Shelter provided accommodation to 36 different families (56 people) between November 2020 through March 2021. These clients stayed 962 nights. The average length of stay was 26.7 nights. The median stay was 21 days. The shelter operated at 106% occupancy for the length of the program (see chart A). When the six motel rooms were completely full, the Family Resource Center funded the extra rooms needed through their own operating expenses with support from the Oxford Citizens for Justice and Peace for March 2021. Total extra funding provided by the FRC for additional rooms needed was \$7,868.40. During the length of the program, three different hotels or motels were used. We had an agreement with the Budget Inn for the six continual rooms throughout the length of the program. Additionally the Butler Inn and, for only a few circumstances, the Best Western Inn was also used.

I. Chart A -Program Occupancy

Month	Hotel Rooms Available	Night Stays	Occupancy Rate
November 2020	6 @ 30 Days = 180	113	63%
December 2020	6 @ 31 Days = 186	216	116%
January 2021	6 @ 30 Days = 186	184	99%
February 2021	6 @ 28 Days = 168	231	138%
March 2021	6 @ 31 Days = 186	218	117%
Total	906	962	106%

II. Family, Gender, and Racial Demographics - Charts B, C, and D

According to chart B, the family breakdown outlined a total of 56 people who stayed in the Winter Shelter including 5 single parents, 1 two parent family, 9 couples, and 21 single individuals and 10 children (single parents + couple). The total number of children made up 16 percent of all of the people who stayed in the shelter. Our biggest age group was those between 40 and 59 years old; they represented almost 38% of our shelter. 6 of the shelter residents were over the age of 60.

Chart B – Family Breakdown

Clients	Single	Couples (Adults)	Single parents	Two parent family	Children
56	21	9	5	1	10

Chart C - Gender

Clients	Adult Female	Adult Male	Transgender	Children Male	Children Female
56	26	19	1	5	5

Chart D - Age

Ages of Clients	0-5	6-12	18-25	26-39	40-59	60+
Number of Clients	4	5	4	16	21	6

Chart E - Race

78.5% of the people who stayed in the Winter Shelter were Caucasian. 19.5% were African American and 2% were Hispanic.

	Caucasian	African American	Hispanic	Total
Number of Clients	44	11	1	56
Percentage	78.5%	19.5%	2%	100%

What we learned operating the Winter Shelter program

The Family Resource Center entered into this program with limited knowledge and no experience in running a shelter program. We had done some research of different models of winter shelters and had helpful conversations with the leadership at H.I.T Foundation in Eaton, OH. The agency knew there was a need as we work with the homeless in our community throughout the year. It was the aim of the Family Resource Center to provide emergency shelter as well as help clients with obtaining long term housing solutions. We worked with the Homeless Crisis Response Program (HCRP) and other housing which helped in many situations to help clients achieve permanent housing. Many clients were receptive to this help and were able to move from the winter shelter to more permanent housing.

We learned:

1. Homelessness is the result of extremely complex social and economic issues. It is systemic and not an individual failing.
2. Every client presents unique, new, and different challenges. Some clients may even refuse our assistance.
3. Most clients are not just in need of housing, but employment, documents, income, behavioral health resources, and recovery resources. The need for auxiliary wrap around services and programs such as these are essential to long term success with clients and movements toward sustainability. The following are agencies/organizations we already work with but hope to develop more solid partnerships with:

City of Oxford, Talawanda school district, Oxford church coalition, landlords in our community, The Homeless Crisis Response Program (HCRP), Butler Behavioral/Access Counseling, Senior Center, TOPPS, SELF, Butler County Homeless Coalition, PATHWAYS program and Housing First Initiative, Community Development Initiative

4. We believe housing is the first step to foster long term positive mental health, victory over substance abuse, continued employment, among other areas of healthy living. It is hard to stay mentally healthy, clean, employed, when there is not stable housing. We have begun to deepen our connections to these resources so that in the future we can treat the person holistically.

Case Management and Staffing

One improvement that the agency would like to explore is expanding our case management. We were somewhat limited as the shelter opened and ran during the peak of the COVID season with no vaccine available. We want to increase our case management check-ins to two times a week. Initial intake can be as long as two weeks for each client if needed. Clients can stay longer, but will be reassessed for extended stay at that time.

We fully believe that relationships are key to the success of our clients moving forward. Our experience this past year has proven, when there is trust and positive relationships, clients have much more success in moving forward.

An interdisciplinary/ wrap around team based approach is also needed to assist and sustain families and especially those who have experienced homelessness for any length of time.

The operations of the Cold Shelter Program puts a huge strain on our regular operations at the Family Resource Center. The .6 FTE budgeting was extremely helpful in filling a huge need to run this program, but it really is an “all hands on deck” operation for us including the position of executive director, client services manager, client services, and our interns. It consumed a large portion of all of our time during the months that it was operational. It requires the entire staff’s attention. As we move forward to operate this as efficiently and as well as possible more operational funds would be needed for our staff. We would suggest a 1.2 FTE to provide for the additional workload for our current staff.

Conclusion

We were excited to take on the challenge with support of the city of Oxford to provide a winter emergency shelter for our community. It was a continual learning process and we are excited to put that learning into practice this coming year with the program. The need was certainly there for this program. Our experience since the closing of the winter emergency shelter program at the end of March 2021, is that the need will be there again this coming year. We continue to work with the challenges of homelessness with our clients on a daily basis. We are thankful for the support that we have received from the city of Oxford, the Housing Advisory Commission, Oxford Citizens of Justice and Peace, TOPSS, and other groups to provide this service to our community.