

**Examination of Family  
Homelessness in  
Columbus/Franklin County, OH  
2010 to 2014**

**Final Report  
July 2015**

*Prepared for:*  
**The Community Shelter Board  
and  
The Columbus Foundation**

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## About this Report

The Community Shelter Board executed a contract with Abt Associates, Inc (Abt) with funding support from The Columbus Foundation to undertake this analysis of family homelessness in Columbus, Ohio. Abt is a consulting firm focused on research, evaluation, and implementing programs in the fields of health, social and environmental policy, and international development. Abt is a national leader in assessing the performance of programs and systems that serve persons experiencing housing instability.

The contents of this report are based on an analysis and interpretation of available data by Abt Associates and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of The Columbus Foundation or the Community Shelter Board.

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## Executive Summary

Family homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County has increased in each of the past five years, more than doubling overall from 756 families in FY2010 staying in emergency shelter to 1,570 families in FY2014. This is the highest number of homeless families using emergency shelter since the Community Shelter Board (CSB) began tracking utilization in the mid 1990's. System leaders, providers, and local officials are understandably alarmed by this trend and, at the same time, concerned that families may be falling back into homelessness at rates higher than previously seen.

For nearly twenty years, the Columbus and Franklin County community has committed to a “shelter all” policy for families in need, meaning any family facing homelessness is offered safe, decent shelter and assistance to quickly secure housing. To maintain this commitment CSB and its partners designed and implemented an innovative crisis response system that has long been viewed as a national model. Key features include a central point of access, or “front door”, provided through the YWCA Family Center, rapid screening of families and diversion to other assistance when possible, and access to comprehensive re-housing assistance based on family need.

As a demand-response system, additional overflow capacity is made available when demand exceeds fixed, year-round capacity. In recent years, the family crisis response system has utilized contingent space within existing facilities, and, as needed, hotels to accommodate unprecedented daily demand for emergency shelter. Last fiscal year, CSB spent \$1.3M on shelter overflow. In July 2014, CSB opened a new facility for homeless families and single adults called the Van Buren Center. This center was created in response to rising demand, in part, and to eliminate the need for overflow accommodations.

In 2014, with support from The Columbus Foundation, CSB and local stakeholders began a deeper investigation of the underlying causes contributing to increases in family homelessness. Abt Associates was engaged to help this effort by examining factors that may be contributing to increases. Our research encompassed factors both external and internal to the family homeless system, including an examination of local economic and housing market indicators, the characteristics and patterns of shelter use among families experiencing homelessness, and homeless system resources for families. We also interviewed system providers, community partners, and families using the YWCA Family Center. Finally, we identify potential actions local system partners could undertake to mitigate contributing factors and reverse recent trends.

### 1.1 Summary Analysis

Our research found no single external factor or proscribed set of external factors alone caused the number of families entering the emergency shelter system to more than double. This was supported, in part, by comparing economic and housing market conditions in Franklin County with those of peer urban counties in Ohio. Our comparative analysis revealed that other counties did not experience similar increases in family homelessness. Interaction across a myriad of *both* external and internal factors created a unique “push-pull” dynamic in Franklin County and an insidious, self-reinforcing cycle.

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### *Income and Housing Factors Negatively Impacted Very Low Income Families*

Data suggest that the poorest families in Franklin County have experienced income erosion and increased financial distress caused in part through significant declines in monthly cash assistance for families through the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services (DJFS). At the same time, rental housing costs continued to climb while rental vacancy rates dropped sharply.

Lower income families in such conditions might require an ongoing housing subsidy to afford housing and remain stably housed. However, the number of housing subsidies available through the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority has declined and the wait list for housing assistance has been closed since 2007. Taken together, these factors caused increased pressure on poor families and very likely caused a significant number of families to turn to family or friends for housing when in need, as indicated by increasing rates of overcrowded housing over the period examined in our study.

**Key Finding:** Columbus' 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.

### *Increasing Reliance on the Family Emergency Shelter System within Franklin County*

As families sought help with critical housing needs a significant traditional source of emergency support to prevent housing loss – the Prevention, Retention, and Contingency (PRC) program operated by the Franklin County Department of Job & Family Services – became less available. The PRC program shrank around 2012 and instituted additional requirements, causing families and service providers alike to turn elsewhere. At the same time, the emergency shelter system for families remained a reliable source of assistance for families on the verge of or falling into homelessness and, from 2009 to 2012, additional federal funding for prevention and re-housing assistance was available and this was widely known among service providers and families alike. Consequently, community social service agencies increasingly referred families to the emergency shelter system to help families secure their own housing. We also found that, contrary to suspicion, the number of families relocating to Franklin County (on their own or via referral) to access emergency shelter did not appear to increase and therefore was not a factor contributing to rising shelter demand.

**Key Finding:** 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.

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### ***Limited Family Shelter System Ability to Mitigate Demand***

As the number of families seeking shelter began to climb in 2010 due to external conditions, the family emergency shelter system responded by continuing to meet shelter demand and ensuring no family in need of emergency shelter was turned away. At the same time, the system was initiating a conversion of its two “tier II” shelter programs (shelter facilities for families with greater barriers) to “direct housing,” otherwise known as “rapid re-housing”. This was done according to the updated Rebuilding Lives Plan issued in 2008 and was intended to help families return to their own housing in less time and with the transitional supports needed to stabilize in their housing. While this reduced the fixed year-round shelter capacity by the end of 2012 from 120 units to 50 units, the rapid re-housing assistance *more than doubled* and the average length of time families remained in shelter *fell from 59 days in 2010 to 24 days in 2014*.

Had shelter demand remained flat from 2010 to 2014, these system changes and improvements in length of stay would have likely resulted in no need for overflow accommodations and the additional, significant resources to provide overflow. Demand did not stay flat, however, and the family shelter system was increasingly forced to rely on overflow capacity.

The significant increase in demand also changed the proportion of families assisted by either a tier II shelter or rapid re-housing provider to find and secure permanent housing (i.e., a program other than the YWCA Family Center and its staff). In 2010, 74 percent of families exited shelter with assistance from either a tier II shelter or rapid re-housing provider, while 26 percent were assisted in some manner by the YWCA Family Center staff. Increasing demand and limited resources changed these proportions. In 2014, 45 percent of families were assisted by a rapid re-housing provider, while responsibility for helping the remainder of families (55 percent) find and secure housing fell to the YWCA Family Center.

Families requesting shelter increased dramatically between 2010 and 2013, rising from 1,305 families requesting shelter to 2,245 families. Ultimately, 33 to 38 percent of these families were successfully diverted from shelter each year; most of the remainder was admitted. Client data show that over this period families entering shelter had greater means than their counterparts in the past – the number of employed adults at entry doubled (from 18 to 36 percent) while the average monthly household income of families entering rose by 44 percent. Families with somewhat more economic means may have a higher likelihood of avoiding shelter with the right support.

While it is not possible to know if increased screening and diversion efforts would have resulted in fewer families being admitted to shelter, it is possible that the operational strains of managing a burgeoning system may have simultaneously diminished the system’s ability to increase attention and resources to diverting families, as some stakeholders indicated. *Even so, it is also likely that any increased efforts would have yielded little reduction in admission rates given the decreased availability of emergency housing assistance in the community during this period.*

In spite of growing demand and the attendant operational pressures, the family system still largely operated and performed as expected – families stayed in shelter for only a short period on average and relatively high rates of successful placement in permanent housing continued. System providers,

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operating under performance-based contracts, met most of their performance goals. Families were provided help with finding and securing housing.

However, success in meeting the central aims of the family system was achieved, in part, by the YWCA Family Center taking on an increasing share of work helping to both manage overflow and assist an increasing proportion of families to quickly exit shelter to housing. Data suggest that existing system resources could be used differently to better target assistance, provide flexible assistance that can progressively increase when needed, and possibly reduce returns to shelter over time (thus also reducing overall demand). For example, while our analysis did not show a substantial change in returns to homelessness over time – overall or among families assisted by any particular service strategy – we did find that about one quarter of all families had no income at entry to shelter and received no assistance to exit shelter. Yet, families who have no income at entry represent roughly three out of four families who returned to shelter, suggesting an opportunity to better target system resources and potentially partner with community-based (non-homeless) supports.

**Key Finding:** 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.

## 1.2 Recommendations

While there appear to be multiple factors contributing to increases in family homelessness, **a concerted effort on the part of the broader Columbus community, not just CSB and homeless system providers, is needed to reduce the number of families requesting and receiving emergency shelter.** The response to this crisis requires a difficult and complicated community conversation about the role of crisis response services for Columbus’ neediest families and the role that CSB-funded programs play in managing the crisis response – both for those experiencing literal homelessness and for those at imminent risk of homelessness.

Specifically, the community should seek to better understand the number and characteristics of families who are precariously housed, define what housing-related services they have and that need to be available, when and for whom more intense interventions may be needed to avoid homelessness and stabilize housing.

Additionally, community partners should initiate a planning effort to develop a community-wide set of supports necessary to increase the resiliency and housing stability of the poorest families in Franklin County and avoid default use of the homeless crisis response system. At the same time, CSB and its partners should define what a high functioning, optimized homeless crisis response system for families looks like when essential partnerships with non-homeless specific providers and a broader set of resources supporting housing stability are in place. CSB should work internally with partners to further improve diversion practices and ensure progressive service strategies are employed

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that better target limited resources to families to help them obtain housing and avoid a return to shelter.

Without a concerted *community-wide* effort to better meet the needs of precariously housed families the homeless crisis response system for families – and the overall homeless system – will continue to bear an inordinate and unnecessary amount of safety net cost. And, this will further negatively impact the community’s ability to provide safe, decent shelter and successful housing outcomes for all individuals and families facing homelessness.

**Key Recommendations:**

- ✓ Community leaders convene relevant stakeholders in a community-wide conversation to define and secure the crisis response services necessary to help poor families remain stably housed and not fall into literal homelessness.
- ✓ CSB and partners define the attributes of a high-functioning, optimized homeless crisis response system.
- ✓ Conduct additional analysis to identify the most effective and efficient service strategies for families experiencing homelessness.
- ✓ Continue to refine and improve services within the homeless system.



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## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Overview

Annual counts of family homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio, have more than doubled from 756 families in FY2010 to 1,570 families in FY2014. This is the highest number of homeless families using emergency shelter since the Community Shelter Board (CSB) began tracking utilization in the mid 1990's. System leaders are also concerned that families may be falling back into homelessness at rates higher than previously seen. CSB and its partners have implemented a variety of measures and improvements designed to stem the increase, including additional efforts to help families return to a host family while they get on their feet. However, these measures alone have not reversed the trend. With funding from The Columbus Foundation, CSB engaged Abt Associates to better understand factors contributing to increases in family homelessness and identify potential opportunities for system improvements.

Historically, the Columbus/Franklin County Continuum of Care (CoC) for people who are homeless has been identified as a national model, providing efficient and effective access to crisis response services. For nearly twenty years, Columbus and Franklin County has committed to serving homeless families by providing safe, decent shelter and assistance to quickly secure housing. To maintain this commitment CSB and its partners designed and implemented an innovative crisis response system, including:

- A central point of access, or “front door,” readily accessible to families in crisis seeking shelter;
- Rapid screening and, when possible, diversion from shelter to avoid inadvertent shelter use, assuring that emergency shelter is reserved only for families with no other viable housing options or resources;
- Comprehensive assessment of housing barriers and creation of a housing plan for every family; and,
- Access to one-time and short/medium-term re-housing and stabilization assistance.

As a demand-response system, additional overflow capacity is made available when demand exceeds fixed, year-round capacity. In recent years, the family crisis response system has utilized contingent space within existing facilities, and hotel overflow when necessary. Last fiscal year, CSB spent \$1.3M on shelter overflow for families. In July 2014, CSB opened a new facility for homeless single adults called the Van Buren Center. This center has been used, in part, to provide overflow accommodations for families until a new family shelter program opens in late August of 2015.

As part of our evaluation, Abt Associates is seeking to answer the following core questions:

- *What external and internal factors correlate or may have contributed to shelter increases?*
- *What differences and similarities exist between families that are becoming homeless now compared with those who experienced homelessness in the past?*
- *Have there been increases in rates of return to homelessness and, if so, what triggered such increases?*

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- *What factors distinguish which families will fall back into homelessness versus those families that do not?*
  - *What differences and similarities exist between families returning to homeless now versus those who experienced repeat episodes in the past?*
  - *Are the causes for increased prevalence and recidivism preventable or can they be mitigated? Are these actions within the control of the system?*
  - *Which interventions or service strategies are most effective at rapidly ending family homelessness and keeping families stably housed after leaving shelter?*
  - *Are other communities experiencing similar trends, and if so, what promising practices are emerging as most effective?*

## **2.2 Evaluation Approach**

Abt Associates examined a variety of data from multiple sources, including:

- Published CSB reports;
- Interviews with families staying at the YWCA Family Center;
- U.S. Census Bureau data on relevant socio-economic factors;
- Key stakeholder interviews; and
- Client data from CSB's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

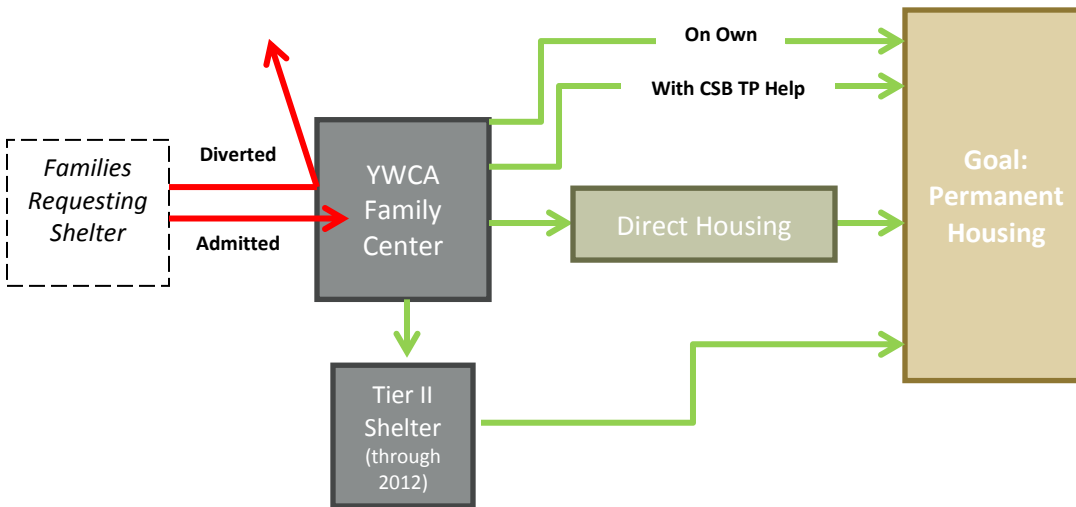
Data from each of the sources were analyzed separately and together in an effort to identify unique factors directly or indirectly related to family homelessness trends, as well as cross-cutting themes. Key stakeholder interviews were conducted with staff responsible for operating programs for persons experiencing homelessness, staff at human service agencies who are most likely to interact with persons experiencing housing crisis, and local government agency staff who administer housing supports and social services. Abt also interviewed 42 families currently staying in the YWCA Family Center to learn about their housing history and pathways to homelessness; family structure; income and benefits; and resources accessed by families at the Family Center. It should be noted that while the information gathered from family interviews provides useful insights, a point-in-time sample is not generalizable to the entire population of families that experience homelessness over the course of a year.

Analysis of client-level data (HMIS and client family interviews) is used to describe the nature of family homelessness – characteristics of families served, whether rates of return to homelessness have changed over time, and if the characteristics of families returning to shelter are different from those families experiencing homelessness for the first time. Data from the Census Bureau and interviews with local stakeholders are used to frame the increases in family homelessness and help to provide context through identifying external (socio-economic) or internal (system-level) factors that appear related to the increases. Abt staff also examined trends across different housing and economic indicators and compared this with data from other Ohio communities – Cleveland/Cuyahoga County, Cincinnati/Hamilton County, and Dayton/Montgomery County – in an attempt to better understand factors that may be influencing changes in family homelessness.

## 2.3 Additional Context

Throughout the study period for this report, Columbus has operated a centralized entry system for families experiencing a housing crisis. The YWCA Family Center serves as the entry point, providing initial basic screening, diversion to other community resources when possible, and emergency shelter for families with no safe, appropriate alternative. For a portion of the study period, FY10 through FY12, secondary emergency shelter programs, locally referred to as “Tier II shelters”, provided longer term shelter services for families who were not able to exit the YWCA Family Center to permanent housing quickly. The family system in Columbus also includes rapid-rehousing providers, locally referred to as “Direct Housing”. Direct housing providers work with families referred by the YWCA Family Center and provide more intensive housing search and placement assistance, financial assistance for move-in costs, and time-limited rental assistance and case management support for families once housed. Beginning in FY11 the Tier II shelter providers transitioned program models to Direct Housing. A description of this transition and its impacts is discussed in more detail in Section 2 of this Report. Finally, families staying at the YWCA Family Center also have access to financial assistance for move-in costs through the Transition Program administered by CSB. YWCA Family Center staff can request financial assistance from the Transition Program on behalf of families they are helping to place in housing, when a family has a financial need and is not otherwise exiting on their own or being assisted by a Tier II shelter (up through 2012) or a Direct Housing provider to obtain housing.

**Exhibit 1-1: Columbus/Franklin County Family Shelter System, General System Flow**



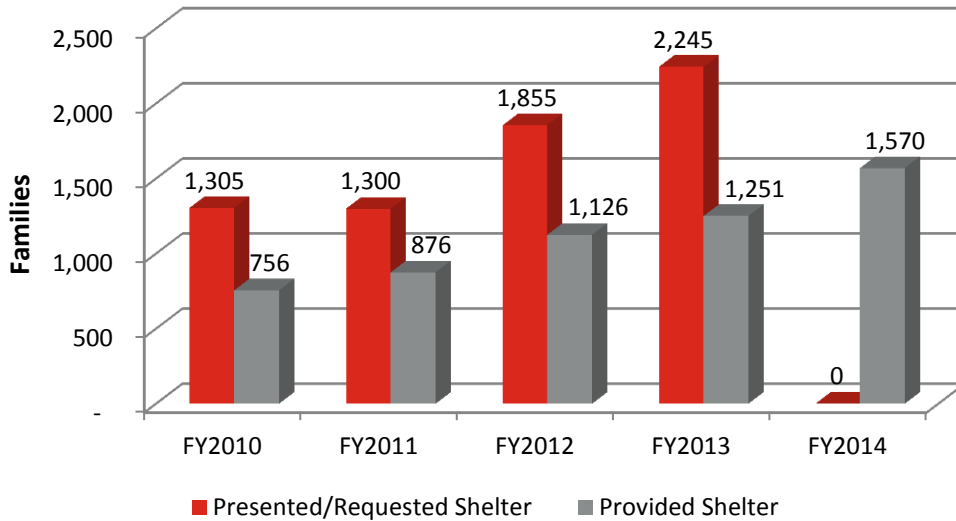
Between 2010<sup>1</sup> and 2013<sup>2</sup> the number of families presenting to the emergency shelter system via the YWCA Family Center increased by 72%. While a significant number of these families were diverted

<sup>1</sup> Annual periods discussed in this report represent July to June fiscal year periods.

<sup>2</sup> Data not available for FY2014.

away from emergency shelter and not admitted, the overall number of families served in shelter grew accordingly, more than doubling between 2010 and 2014. Significantly, the proportion of newly homeless families (those with no prior shelter stay) remained stable over this period.

**Exhibit 1-2: Family Shelter System Utilization FY2010-14**



Source: CSB Annual System and Program Indicator Reports (FY2010 through FY2014)

During this same period, the fixed (non-overflow) capacity to serve families declined by 58 percent due to the closing of 70 “tier II” shelter units operated by the Volunteers of America and the Homeless Families Foundation in 2011-12.

As shown in Exhibit 1-3, because of the shift away from longer-stay Tier II programs, there was also a 59 percent reduction in the average length of stay in family shelter between 2010 and 2014. In 2010, people in families stayed an average of 59 nights compared with 20 nights in 2013 and 24 nights in 2014. It is not clear whether the increase in average length of shelter stay in 2014 is continuing to climb, or whether that year was an anomaly. More likely, families in shelter are beginning to stay for longer periods. This would explain part of the increased demand for overflow beds since shelter beds would be turning over less frequently.

Put another way, even though the family shelter system had less fixed capacity, families stayed less than half as long in shelter in 2014 compared with 2010 – meaning that, had demand remained constant, the shelter system in 2014 likely would not have needed additional overflow capacity. However, demand more than doubled, resulting in an 880 percent rise in average daily overflow in the family system between 2011 and 2014.

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**Exhibit 1-3: Service Use Characteristics of Family Shelter System FY2010-14**

	<b>FY2010</b>	<b>FY2011</b>	<b>FY2012</b>	<b>FY2013</b>	<b>FY2014</b>	<b>% Change FY2010 to FY2014</b>
Total Households Requesting Shelter*	1,305	1,300	1,855	2,245	Not Available	72%
Total Households Provided Shelter	756	876	1,126	1,251	1,570	108%
Percent of Households Provided Shelter who were Newly Homeless†	Not Available	62%	75%	67%	65%	3%
Average Daily Occupancy (households)	105	101	84	64	99	-6%
Inventory of Fixed Capacity Shelter (units)	120	96	73	50	50	-58%
Average Daily Overflow (households) †	-	5	11	14	49	880%
Average Daily Occupancy Relative to Fixed Capacity	88%	105%	115%	128%	198%	110 percentage points
Average Length of Stay (days)	59	46	31	20	24	-59%

\*YWCA Diversion Program. Change represents FY2010 to FY2013.

†Change represents FY2011 to FY2014.

Source: CSB Annual System and Program Indicator Reports (FY2010 through FY2014)

Trends in family homelessness and other related factors are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

### 3. Analysis of Key Data Sources

The following section presents the results from each data collection activity. A deeper discussion of salient factors and cross-cutting themes is provided in Section 3: Analysis of Findings.

#### 3.1 HMIS Data

Abt staff analyzed CSB’s published HMIS data included in their *System and Program Indicator Reports* from fiscal years 2010 through 2014. All HMIS data are generated from the Columbus ServicePoint (CSP) and met CSB’s quality assurance standards which include accuracy vetting and a 95% completion rate for all required CSP data variables. CSB’s *System and Program Indicator Reports* enable annualized analysis of year to year trends. Abt also used a subset of client-level, de-identified CSP data to investigate more refined analysis questions related to the extent of new versus returning families, characteristics of clients accessing different family system services, and outcomes for each of those groups.

##### 3.1.1 Data Analysis from CSB Published System and Program Indicator Reports

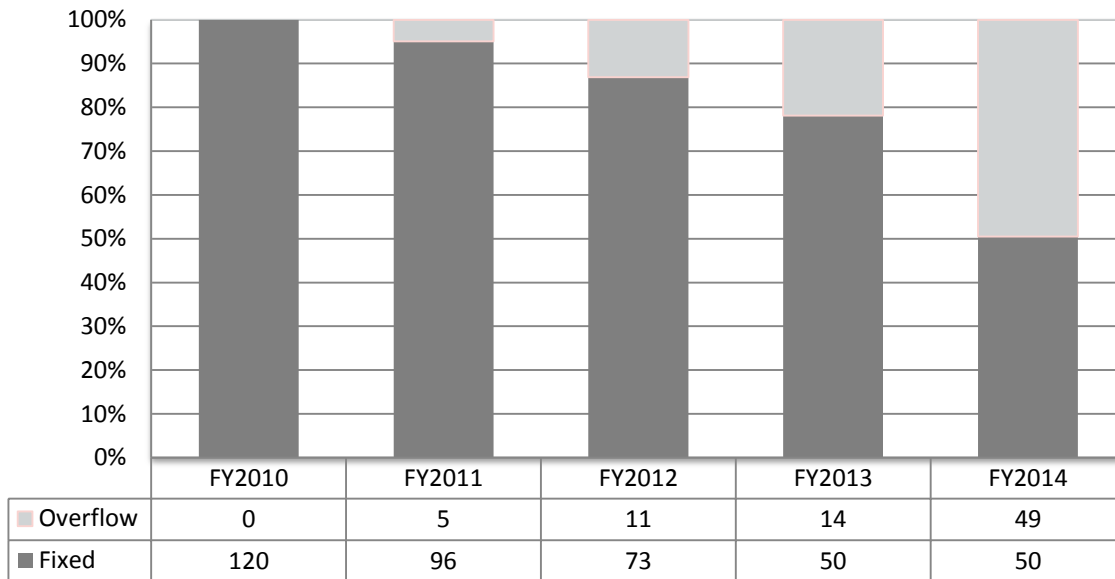
As discussed earlier in this Report, throughout 2011 and 2012 the Columbus emergency response system for families experienced significant transition. Tier II shelters, a secondary shelter option for families not able to resolve their housing crisis at the Family Center, saw unit capacity reduced and ultimately eliminated. During this time Tier II shelter operators transitioned their programs to a Direct Housing (rapid re-housing) model, offering transitional rent and service supports in permanent housing for families in need of additional stabilization assistance. As Exhibit 2-1 shows, the overall system unit capacity did not decrease throughout this period because shelter capacity was able to flexibly expand. This is due to Columbus’ longstanding “shelter all” policy in which sheltering capacity is expanded through use of overflow beds in existing shelter facilities and motel overflow to ensure all families needing emergency shelter are accommodated.

However, Exhibit 2-2 also reveals that system reliance on overflow capacity increased dramatically between 2010 and 2014 and operated above the intended fixed capacity each year starting in 2011.

**Exhibit 2-1: Family System Capacity and Average Nightly Occupancy FY2010-14**

Program Type	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14
Inventory of Fixed Capacity Shelter (units)	120	96	73	50	50
<i>YWCA Family Center Units</i>	50	50	50	50	50
<i>Tier II Shelter Capacity Units</i>	70	46	0	0	0
Average Daily Occupancy of Fixed and Overflow Units	105	101	84	64	99
<i>Average Daily Overflow (households)</i>	-	5	11	14	49
Average Daily Occupancy Relative to Fixed Capacity	88%	105%	115%	128%	198%

**Exhibit 2-2: Distribution of Shelter Utilization by Unit Type FY2010-14**



As system service strategies shifted from a shelter to a housing focus, actual shelter utilization doubled. Families using shelter in Columbus/Franklin County have access to various forms of assistance to facilitate movement back to housing. Some families will exit homelessness with just the standard package of assistance available to all homeless families -- safe shelter and other basic necessities, help with a housing plan, and information and referral to community-based assistance (non-homeless targeted). Others may need financial assistance for move-in costs, including security deposit and first month's rent. Such "one-time" financial assistance is available through CSB's Transition Program, via an application completed by YWCA Family Center staff on a family's behalf. Still other families may require more intensive assistance for a short to medium period of time. In the past, such help was provided by Tier II shelters that could work with a family to address barriers and save money for housing. Similar transitional assistance is provided by direct housing (also known as rapid re-housing), with the distinction being that direct housing assistance involves housing planning assistance and direct placement into permanent housing with time-limited financial assistance and stabilization services. Both Tier II shelter and direct housing assistance are unique in that they each are provided by an agency other than the YWCA Family Center.

As Exhibits 2-3 and 2-4 show, from 2010 to 2014, as the number of families served in shelter grew there was not a concurrent and proportional increase in funding dedicated to rapid re-housing placement assistance. In FY2010, 74 percent of families exited homelessness with assistance from a Tier II shelter or direct housing program, while only 45 percent of families received direct housing assistance in FY2014. Over the same period, 20 to 30 percent of families received no assistance other than shelter. The remaining families needed some amount of assistance to exit and this responsibility fell to the YWCA Family Center staff. From 2010 to 2014 there was a tenfold increase in the number of homeless families assisted by the YWCA to access CSB's Transition Program and quickly move out of shelter and the overall percent of families accessing CSB Transition Assistance increased from 4 percent of families in 2010 to 24 percent in 2014.

Additional investment in housing placement assistance through a partner agency in the family system other than the YWCA Family Center (i.e., through increased rapid re-housing assistance) would have reduced the number of families who had to be assisted by the YWCA Family Center to secure housing. This may have allowed CSB and the YWCA Family Center to focus more attention and resources on mitigating demand. However, CSB was unable to secure adequate funding to both expand shelter capacity through overflow and increase housing placement assistance through a rapid re-housing provider. And, even if it had sufficient resources and greater focus was placed on screening and diversion, it is unlikely this would have resulted in fewer admissions absent available and adequate emergency prevention assistance to divert families to outside of the emergency shelter system.

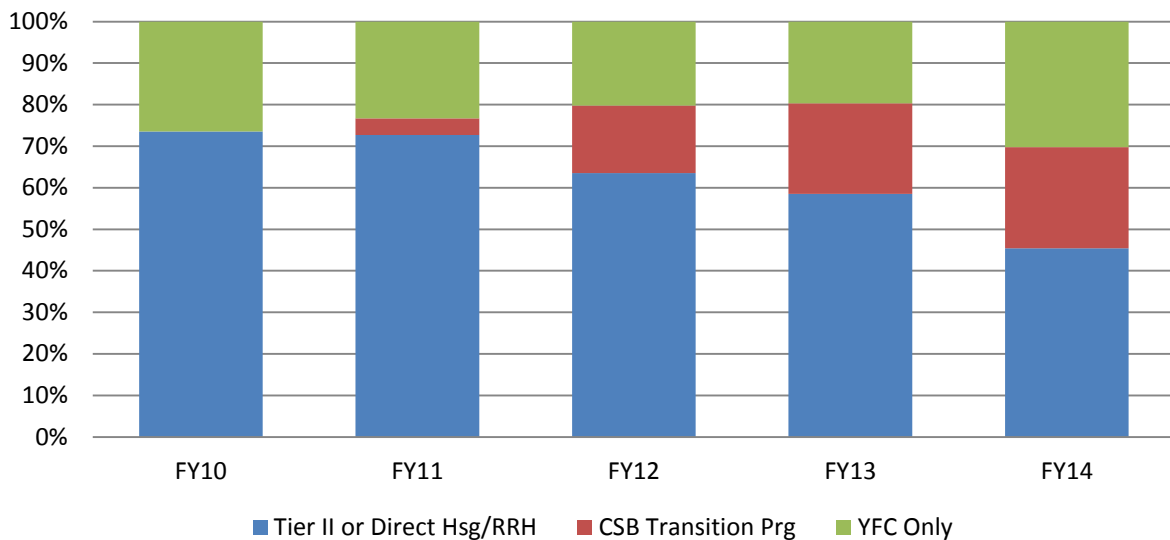
**Exhibit 2-3: Family System Household Utilization by Assistance Type FY2010-14**

	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14
Family Shelter System	756	876	1,126	1,251	1,570
<i>Total Tier II and Direct Housing</i>	556 (74%)	637 (73%)	715 (63%)	732 (59%)	713 (45%)
<i>Tier II</i>	282	198	74	0	0
<i>Direct Housing</i>	274	439	641	732	713
CSB Transition Program †	Not Available	35 (4%)	183 (16%)	273 (22%)	382 (24%)

†Use of CSB Transition Program (one-time financial assistance) was determined through separate analysis of CSP data, not CSB published Program Indicator Reports.

Note: some duplication may exist among programs within the same fiscal year.

**Exhibit 2-4: Distribution of Family System Utilization by Assistance Type FY2010-14**



Abt staff looked at the incidence rates of new households becoming homeless each year published by CSB. This represents an attempt to understand if the increase in annual homelessness numbers over time was attributable in part to an increase in the number of families returning to homelessness or an



increase in the number of new families experiencing homelessness for the first time. Exhibit 2-5 shows the incidence rate (percentage of households served with no previous shelter record) to be generally consistent from 2012 through 2014.

**Exhibit 2-5: Percent Newly Homeless in Family Shelter System FY2010-14**

	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14
Percent Newly Homeless	Not Available	62%	75%	67%	65%

As numbers of households served in emergency shelter programs increase, shelter systems often experience a simultaneous increase in length of stay in shelter as system resources are used to accommodate demand at the expense of facilitating rapid and successful exits. This has a compounding effect on shelter systems, as increasing lengths of stay mean shelter units are not able to turn over as often, creating backlogs and waiting periods to access shelter. Columbus, however, experienced a decrease in average length of shelter stay from 2010 to 2014, attributable mostly to the elimination of Tier II shelter programs that, by design, had longer lengths of stay. Exhibit 2-6 reveals that the Columbus family shelter system operated relatively efficiently over the past five years, reducing length of stay by more than half through the elimination of Tier II shelters.

**Exhibit 2-6: Average Length of Stay in Family Shelter FY2010-14**

	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14
Average Length of Stay	59	46	31	20	24

Although the family system was able to operate more efficiently as demand increased, rates of successful exits to permanent housing from shelter declined to 59 percent in 2014. Exhibit 2-7 shows successful housing placement rates through FY14. Preliminary analysis from 2015 suggests that this effectiveness measure continues to decline.

**Exhibit 2-7: Successful Housing Exits from the Family Center FY2010-14**

	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14*
Successful Housing Outcomes (#)	438	513	765	804	863
Successful Housing Outcomes (%)	67%	67%	73%	68%	59%

Abt staff also looked at household characteristics published by CSB each year to understand changes in family attributes or demographics.

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- The average age of the head of household did not change, remaining constant at 29 from 2011 through 2014.
  - Average monthly household income increased each year from \$449 in 2010 to \$645 in 2014.
  - The percent of heads of household working at entry into the YWCA Family Center increased each year and doubled overall during the five year period, from 18 percent in 2010 to 36 percent in 2014.
  - The mean family size did not appreciably change: the average household size ranges from 3.2 to 3.3 persons each year. The average number of children is consistently about 2 per household.

### 3.1.2 Results from Abt Analysis of CSP Data

In addition to CSB published *Annual System and Program Indicator Reports*, Abt staff analyzed client-level CSP data from the YWCA Family Center and other housing and supportive service programs designed to assist homeless families obtain and maintain permanent housing. Analysis of client-level data enables a richer investigation of the extent and scope of family homelessness over time with particular attention to the characteristics of families participating in different service strategies and the outcomes of those service strategies. To measure success rates and track returns to homelessness, Abt's analysis calculates annual prevalence rates by including all families who exited during the reporting period. CSB employs a slightly different business rule for calculating annual counts. CSB includes all clients who entered during the reporting period. For this reason Abt's annual counts and CSB's annual counts will not match exactly.

Some limitations of the data set available to Abt staff inhibited our ability to exhaustively analyze certain aspects of service use patterns. Specifically, rates of return to homelessness and recidivism into homelessness from FY13 to the present are necessarily an undercount of all households who will eventually experience subsequent episodes of homelessness because not enough time has elapsed for returning households to come back to the YWCA Family Center<sup>3</sup>. In addition, FY15 data includes only the first 9 months of the reporting period (July 2014 through March 2015). Other limitations are noted within the Report when applicable. The following section highlights results from the Abt-analyzed CSP data, organized by key questions identified in our original analysis plan.

#### *Of families served by the total crisis response system, how do prevalence and characteristics differ among families served by different program types and service strategies?*

Exhibit 2-8 shows the percentage distribution of households served by each service strategy cohort from FY11 through FY14. These service strategy cohorts represent all available pathways out of homelessness for families in Columbus as explained in Section 1.3. The distribution demonstrates that the percentage of families served by the YWCA Only and YWCA + Tier II Shelter cohorts each decreased over time (Tier II shelter was phased out by FY13). Families receiving YWCA Only assistance were able to exit the Family Center without other assistance. Though the proportion of

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<sup>3</sup> Our analysis examined returns to shelter that occurred within a two year period following a family's exit from the family shelter system.

such families decreased over time, it appears that generally around half of families (46 to 53 percent) do not require assistance apart from short-term shelter and other basic services provided by the YWCA to all families to exit homelessness. During this same period the percentage of families served by YWCA + Direct Housing remained relatively constant as direct housing capacity also increased. But, the total percentage of families assisted by either a Tier II shelter or direct housing decreased over time (from 42 to 30 percent) while the percentage of families receiving YWCA + DCA increased from 5 percent in FY11 to 24 percent in FY14. As the number of homeless families increased over time, the YWCA + DCA service strategy appears to absorb the largest share of the increase. This is consistent with our analysis of CSB published data.

**Exhibit 2-8: Prevalence Rates by Service Strategy FY2011-14**

Service Strategy Cohort	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14
All Families	759	1,084	1,228	1,628
YWCA Only	402 (53%)	541 (50%)	586 (48%)	750 (46%)
YWCA + DCA	35 (5%)	183 (17%)	273 (22%)	382 (23%)
YWCA + Tier II Shelter	108 (14%)	72 (7%)	NA	NA
YWCA + Direct Housing	213 (28%)	287 (26%)	369 (30%)	496 (30%)

Abt also looked at characteristics within families that could be considered barriers for obtaining and/or maintaining housing. Specifically, rates of families with zero income at system entry and families with a disabled head of household were analyzed. While the prevalence rate of families with zero income appears to decline over time (see Exhibit 2-10), from 56 percent in FY11 to 43 percent in the most recent period, families with a disabled head of household increased each year from 10 percent in FY11 to 23 percent by FY15.

A disproportionate number of families with a disabled head of household are served in either the YWCA Only or YWCA + DCA cohorts, which offer the least intensive services for the shortest amount of time. Some of these families may be appropriate for permanent supportive housing and may have been quickly linked to that intervention, although Abt’s analysis did not investigate this outcome. In FY11, 48 percent of families with a disabled head of household were assisted by the YWCA Only or YWCA + DCA, while 52 percent were assisted by a Tier II shelter or Direct Housing provider. These proportions changed to 71 percent and 29 percent, respectively, in FY15. Exhibit 2-9 shows utilization rates by program type for disabled families. Further analysis is needed to determine if these same families are accessing permanent supportive housing resources or other similarly intensive services after leaving the YWCA Family Center.

**Exhibit 2-9: Disabled Head of Household by Service Strategy FY2011-15**

Service Strategy Cohort	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15*
Families with a disabled head of household (overall rate)	75 (10%)	134 (12%)	187 (15%)	276 (17%)	274 (23%)
YWCA Only	36 (48%)	64 (48%)	95 (51%)	124 (45%)	150 (55%)
YWCA + DCA	- (0%)	22 (16%)	46 (25%)	69 (25%)	44 (16%)
YWCA + Tier II Shelter	13 (17%)	9 (7%)	NA	NA	NA
YWCA + Direct Housing	26 (35%)	39 (29%)	46 (25%)	83 (30%)	80 (29%)

\*FY15 only includes data for the first 9 months of the fiscal period

Exhibits 2-10 and 2-11 show distribution of families served with income and families with zero income. Of families with income, the average monthly amount increased on average 10 percent each year from \$773 in FY11 to \$1,175 in FY15. Increases in household income were experienced by each service strategy and all providers. Families with the lowest monthly income amounts were routinely served by the HFF and VOA Direct Housing programs. Families with relatively higher income amounts were served by the YWCA Family Center Only or the combination of YWCA + DCA. Families with greater financial resources received less intensive service strategies to assist them in resolving their housing crisis, consistent with the general design of the Columbus family homeless system.

**Exhibit 2-10: Families with Zero Income at Entry by Service Strategy FY2011-15**

Service Strategy Cohorts	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
Overall Family System # and % of Households with Zero Income	425 (56%)	601 (55%)	677 (55%)	832 (51%)	504 (43%)
YWCA Family Center Only	222 (52%)	292 (49%)	340 (50%)	414 (50%)	285 (57%)
YWCA + Direct Client Assistance	22 (5%)	108 (18%)	144 (21%)	137 (16%)	48 (10%)
YWCA + Tier II Shelter	99 (23%)	68 (11%)	NA	NA	NA
YWCA + The Salvation Army DH	81 (19%)	132 (22%)	91 (13%)	121 (15%)	85 (17%)
YWCA + Homeless Families Foundation DH	NA	NA	66 (10%)	113 (14%)	56 (11%)
YWCA + Volunteers of America DH	NA	NA	36 (5%)	47 (6%)	30 (6%)

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**Exhibit 2-11: Average Monthly Income at Entry by Service Strategy FY2011-15**

Service Strategy Cohorts	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
Overall Family System # and % of Households with Income	334 (44%)	483 (46%)	551 (45%)	796 (49%)	680 (57%)
Ave Income Amount (of families with income)	\$773	\$816	\$932	\$1,054	\$1,175
YWCA Family Center Only	\$592	\$699	\$999	\$1,149	\$1,199
YWCA + Direct Client Assistance	\$1,181	\$869	\$872	\$1,091	\$1,393
YWCA + Tier II Shelter	\$568	\$325	NA	NA	NA
YWCA + The Salvation Army DH	\$994	\$991	\$991	\$897	\$1,051
YWCA + Homeless Families Foundation DH	NA	NA	\$593	\$771	\$969
YWCA + Volunteers of America DH	NA	NA	\$780	\$1,003	\$851

Exhibit 2-12 demonstrates the peak of housing outcome success in FY13 and the downward trend of exits to more stable or “permanent” housing thereafter<sup>4</sup>. Beginning in FY14 and across all service strategies, families achieved permanent housing at lower rates compared to previous years. The rate of permanent housing exits for YWCA only families declined by half in FY14 and FY15. Lower rates of successful exits coincide with the time period when the family system as a whole experienced the full effects of system capacity constraints demonstrated by routine use of overflow strategies such as Family Center overcrowding and motel use.

**Exhibit 2-12: Exits to Permanent Housing by Service Strategy FY2011-15**

Service Strategy Cohorts	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
Overall Family System Permanent Housing Exit Rate	54%	66%	70%	56%	53%
YWCA Family Center Only	43%	48%	42%	21%	20%
YWCA + Direct Client Assistance	94%	99%	98%	88%	89%
YWCA + The Salvation Army DH	93%	94%	96%	89%	82%
YWCA + Homeless Families Foundation DH	NA	NA	91%	87%	82%
YWCA + Volunteers of America DH	NA	NA	94%	95%	90%

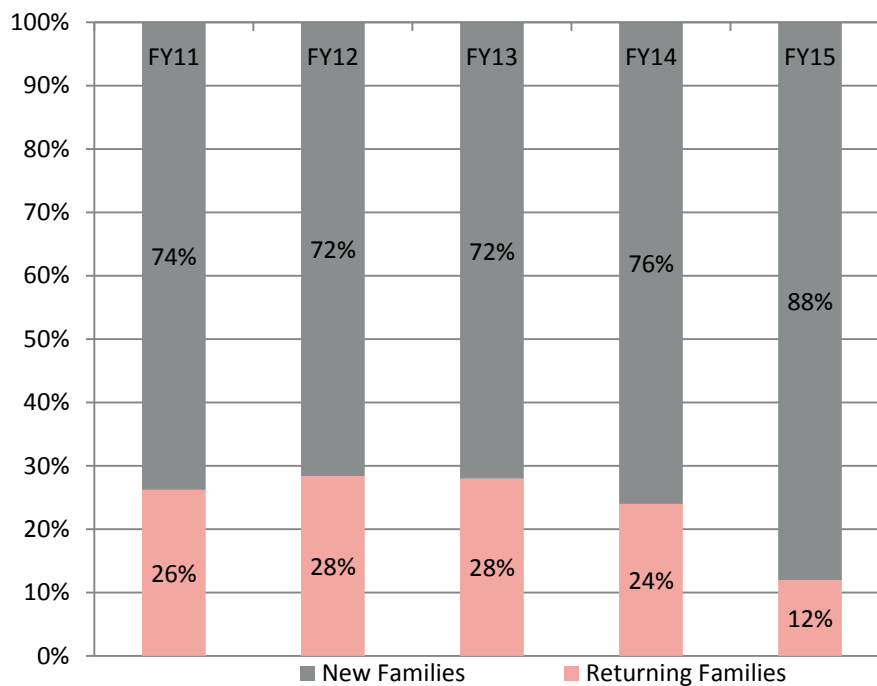
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<sup>4</sup> For this analysis, “permanent housing” includes exits to family or friends that are noted as “permanent” (vs “temporary”).

*How many families are experiencing homelessness for the very first time? How are “new” family characteristics different from all returning families?*

Abt somewhat limited its ability to completely determine the rate of “new” families over time by requesting a dataset from CSB that did not include a complete shelter history for all households. By defining “new” as any household with no previous CoC program stay in the two years preceding a YWCA Family Center stay, Abt would need complete shelter records of all households served from FY09, for example, to determine if households served in FY11 had any shelter history in the two years preceding their YWCA Family Center stay. For that reason “newness” in FY11 and FY12 may be under counted. Rates of new households served at the YWCA Family Center increased from 72 percent in FY13 to 93 percent in the first nine months of FY15. The most recent and complete data available on new families suggest that increasing rates of general family homelessness in the past three years may be driven in part by new families coming into the YWCA Family Center rather than increasing rates of returning families. Exhibit 2-13 demonstrates the increasing rates of new families served in FY15.

**Exhibit 2-13 Distribution of New vs. Returning Families FY2011-15**



New families entering the YWCA Family Center did not look very different compared to returning families. Characteristics of families experiencing homelessness for the first time and returning families are distributed across age categories similarly, exhibit similar rates of large family size, and report race and ethnicity status nearly exactly the same. There is a difference in income as new families reported somewhat higher income. Over time 15 to 33 percent of new families reported monthly income in the \$1,001+ category compared to returning families, of whom only 5 to 8 percent reported income in the \$1,001+ category over the study period.

***What is the extent of returns to homelessness for households served in each program type and by each provider?***

Between 20 to 28 percent of all families served by the homeless system returned to the YWCA Family Center within two years of their exit (See Exhibit 2-14). Abt defined returns as any family experiencing a subsequent YWCA Family Center enrollment within 2 years of an enrollment in a Columbus homeless program. Exhibit 2-15 shows the highest proportion of returning families, 47 to 56 percent, was among the YWCA Family Center only cohort. Only 10 percent of families who exited to permanent housing and returned to homelessness (i.e., recidivist) were assisted by the YWCA Family Center only service strategy. The vast majority of YWCA Family Center returners are families who originally exited to an unknown destination. Note that return rates in FY13 and FY14 are incomplete due to the lack of sufficient time elapsing to allow families who experience subsequent homelessness to return to the YWCA Family Center within a two-year period.

**Exhibit 2-14: Prevalence of Returns and Recidivism FY2011–14**

	FY11	FY12	FY13*	FY14*
Count of Family System Households Served	759	1,084	1,228	1,628
<b>Returning</b> Households (count)	198	308	348	388
<b>Returning</b> Households (rate)	26%	28%	28%	24%
<b>Recidivist</b> Households (count)	92	188	223	166
<b>Recidivist</b> Households (rate)	12%	17%	18%	10%
Average Time to Return (days)	416	434	398	256

\*Rates of Return for FY13 and FY14 represent an undercount of probable returns because the 2-year time period for which returns are assessed has not completely elapsed.

**Exhibit 2-15 Distribution of Overall Returns by Service Strategy FY2011–14**

Service Strategy Cohort	FY11	FY12	FY13*	FY14*
All Families who returned to YWCA within 2 years (overall rate)	198 (26%)	308 (28%)	348 (28%)	388 (24%)
YWCA Only	109 (55%)	145 (47%)	183 (53%)	218 (56%)
YWCA + DCA	10 (5%)	59 (19%)	77 (23%)	88 (22%)
YWCA + Tier II Shelter	33 (17%)	29 (10%)	NA	NA
YWCA + The Salvation Army	46 (23%)	75 (24%)	49 (14%)	35 (9%)

YWCA + HFF	NA	NA	25 (7%)	30 (8%)
YWCA + VOA	NA	NA	14 (4%)	17 (5%)

\*Rates of Return for FY13 and FY14 represent an undercount of probable returns because the 2-year time period for which returns are assessed has not completely elapsed.

As Exhibit 2-16 shows, the rate of return among households assisted by each service strategies did not vary significantly from overall rates of return in most years. However, households who received direct housing assistance generally fared better than other households, experiencing the lowest rates of return each year compared with overall rates and other service strategies.

#### Exhibit 2-16 Rate of Returns by Service Strategy FY2011–14

Service Strategy Cohort	FY11	FY12	FY13*	FY14*
All Families who returned to YWCA within 2 years (overall rate)	198 (26%)	308 (28%)	348 (28%)	388 (24%)
YWCA Only	109 (27%)	145 (27%)	183 (31%)	218 (29%)
YWCA + DCA	10 (29%)	59 (32%)	77 (28%)	88 (23%)
YWCA + Tier II Shelter	33 (31%)	29 (40%)	NA	NA
YWCA + Direct Housing	46 (22%)	75 (26%)	49 (24%)	35 (17%)

\*Rates of Return for FY13 and FY14 represent an undercount of probable returns because the 2-year time period for which returns are assessed has not completely elapsed.

#### *How do household income at entry, exit destination type, and time horizon until return impact return rates?*

Abt's analysis of return to shelter rates shows that those families with zero income at entry are much more likely to experience subsequent episodes of homelessness. This is not necessarily surprising; one would expect that families with zero income when entering homeless programs will likely have greater difficulty maintaining stable housing after leaving shelter. Exhibit 2-17, which looks at return rates by household characteristics, shows that lack of income is a strong predictor of families most likely to experience multiple homeless episodes.

#### Exhibit 2-17: Return Rates by Characteristic FY2011-14

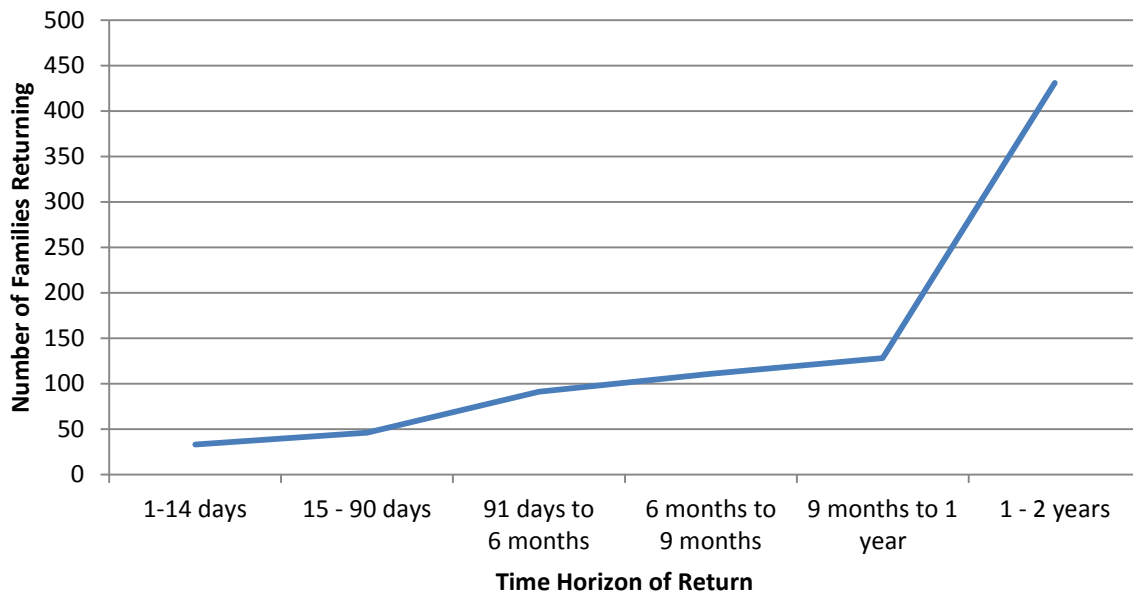
Return Rates by Characteristics	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14
Overall Family System Return Rate	26%	28%	28%	24%
Zero Income for Head of Household	35%	39%	41%	39%



Head of Household Disabled	24%	31%	26%	24%
3+ Children in Household	27%	28%	30%	24%
Head of Household Black or African American	27%	30%	28%	23%

Abt analyzed return rates for all families served at the YWCA Family Center and for each assistance cohort served by the family emergency shelter system. As reported earlier, calculations of return to homelessness rates and recidivism rates will necessarily reflect undercounts in FY14 and FY15 because not enough time has elapsed to capture all families who will eventually return. As noted, 24 to 28 percent of all families served will return to homelessness at some point within a two-year time period following their exit. This rate remained relatively constant throughout the five-year study period. However, of the families that experience subsequent spells of homelessness, the vast majority will return between 1 and 2 years after the initial exit. The spike in returns is potentially driven by new policies governing the distribution of DCA support which prohibit additional financial assistance to a family in the eighteen months preceding provision of initial assistance. Exhibit 2-18 shows the time horizon for return of fiscal year periods when complete data are available.

**Exhibit 2-18: Time Horizon for Returns to Homelessness for All Returning Families Served between 7/1/2010 and 6/30/2013 (FY2011–13)**



Abt analyzed recidivism rates for families served at the YWCA and Direct Housing programs. Recidivist families represent a subset of returning families; recidivists are those families who originally exited to a permanent housing placement but experienced a subsequent episode of homelessness within two years. The characteristics of recidivist families are identified in Exhibit 2-19. Because a two-year time period must elapse in order to assess for recidivism, recidivism characteristics for FY-11 through FY13 are shown. Fiscal Years 14 and 15 are excluded from this analysis. Abt is not able to fully assess for recidivism in those more recent fiscal year periods. Based on available data, younger families and households with zero income are disproportionately

represented among recidivist households when compared with families who did not recidivate and appear to have higher risk of returning to homelessness after being successfully re-housed.

**Exhibit 2-19: Characteristics of Non-Recidivist and Recidivist Families FY2011-13**

Family Characteristics	Non-Recidivist Families	Recidivist Families
Prevalence Rate*	69%	10%
Head of household aged 18-24	32%	43%
Head of household identifying as African-American	72%	72%
Three or more children in the household	23%	26%
Zero monthly income at program entry	45%	76%
Disabled head of household	15%	13%
Households with only 1 adult	69%	66%

\*Note: Exhibit 2-19 does not include families who are returners to the YWCA but whose initial program exit was to an unsuccessful housing placement (Recidivists only include families originally exited to a permanent housing placement).

**3.2 Client Perspectives and Experience**

In March 2015, Abt staff interviewed 42 families currently staying in the YWCA Family Center. We deliberately interviewed roughly even numbers of newly homeless families (no homeless episode within the last five years) and families with two or more shelter stays to understand the characteristics and experiences of both groups. However, this is not representative of the proportions of new and returning families served by the shelter annually. According to HMIS data over the course of the past five years, families new to homelessness range from 72 to 88 percent of all families served. The remainder, ranging from 12 to 28 percent, are returning to homelessness after a previous shelter stay.

Interviews captured information in the following domains: history of homelessness; housing history and pathways to homelessness; family structure; income and benefits; and resources accessed by families at the Family Center prior to and during their shelter stay. The following section summarizes the information gathered from these interviews. As noted above, while the information presented provides information on families at the YWCA Family Center at a given point-in-time, the sample is not generalizable to the entire population served in the family shelter system over time. Families experiencing longer shelter stays, and perhaps more significant barriers to re-housing, tend to be over-represented at any given moment when compared with the characteristics of families over a longitudinal period.

***What were the characteristics of families interviewed?***

A typical household interviewed was a single parent (70 percent) between the ages of 25 and 39 (70 percent), with one or two children present (75 percent). Ten percent were young families, with a head of household under the age of 25. Family separations were common, though a majority of families did not have children living elsewhere. Of the families with separations, about one-third were due to the family’s current housing crisis.

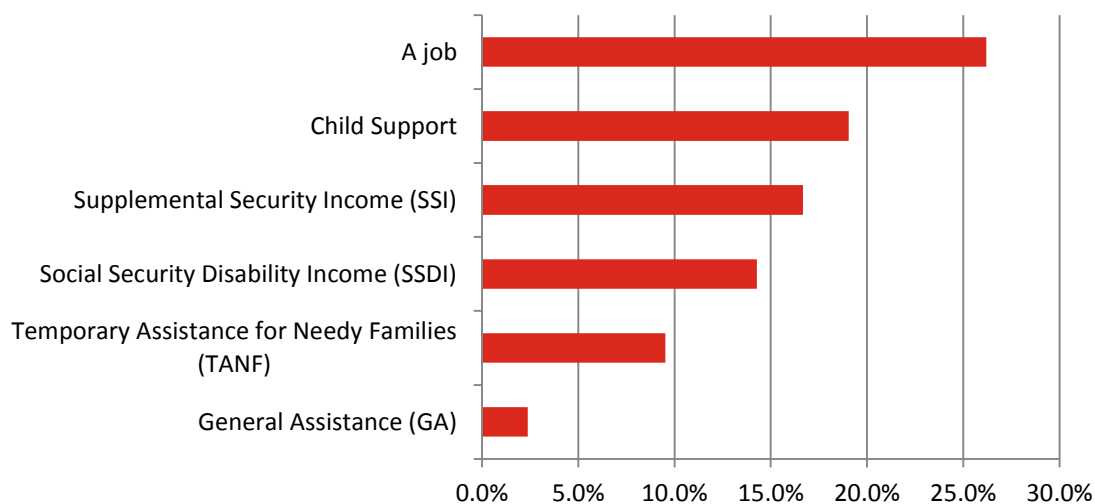
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***Two-thirds of family heads interviewed had been homeless at some other point in their lives.*** More than half of families interviewed (55 percent) had been homeless at some other point between 2010 and 2015. For those families with a history of homelessness, a plurality had only been homeless one other time. However, nearly one-third had chronic patterns of homelessness, with 5 episodes of homelessness or more. Families that were homeless in the past were asked where they were homeless, and 46 percent reported a prior stay at the YWCA Family Center.

Two-thirds of families interviewed were from Columbus/Franklin County. Of the 34 percent not from Franklin County, 22 percent moved to the area more than 3 months ago and 12 percent moved to the area within the last month.

Unemployment was a principal concern for families interviewed. Less than 30 percent of families interviewed were currently employed. Just more than one-quarter of families reported receiving some income from a job in the past 30 days. Exhibit 2-20 below shows sources of income for interviewed families.

**Exhibit 2-20: Percent of Families Receiving Income in the Last 30 Days by Source**



An additional 38 percent of families interviewed reported receiving food stamps in the past month. ***Many families (41 percent) reported losing benefits at some point in the last few years.*** When asked about the types of assistance they received in the past that they no longer received, many reported having received cash assistance (welfare) at some point. Some also indicated that the amount of food stamp support they received was lower now than it had been in the past.

***What were the pathways to families' current homelessness episode?***

We asked families about their prior living situations, cycling back through each situation until reaching the last stable housing situation for each family. Only a few families came to the YWCA Family Center directly from a stable living situation. Most families came to the YWCA Family Center after doubling up with family or friends – 36 percent had been in a short term situation (fewer than 30 days) and 24 percent long term. ***Not surprisingly, families often moved from one doubled up situation to another until they ran out of options.*** For many families, the protracted doubling up

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started with an eviction that affected their ability to secure other housing on their own. Once they ended up staying with others, families often chose to leave a doubled up situation to go to what they believed would be a better doubled up situation. However, the most common reason that families left their last doubled up situation prior to entering shelter was that their family member or friend asked them to leave.

### ***What other resources did families access prior to the YWCA Family Center?***

***Overwhelmingly, families did not contact other service providers during the housing crisis immediately preceding their stay at the Family Center.*** A few families reported that they called HandsOn Central Ohio 2-1-1, faith institutions, or their family services case worker or mental health case worker for assistance prior to coming to the YWCA Family Center. Families indicated that those contacts referred them to the Family Center.

For each change in housing circumstance, Abt staff asked if they reached out for assistance. Between the two most recent places families stayed prior to entering the Family Center, only 28 percent of families sought any form of assistance (including assistance from the Family Center). Of these, 36 percent reached out to the YWCA Family Center and were referred elsewhere, 18 percent sought out assistance from churches, 18 percent looked for legal aid to help with their eviction history, and 18 percent tried to access emergency assistance through the Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services Prevention, Retention, and Contingency (PRC) program.

Only four families sought out assistance between the living situations of two and three times ago. Two families reported seeking out help from the Salvation Army, one family contacted the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority, one family called Impact Community Action to help with eviction prevention, and one called the YWCA.

### ***How did families access the YWCA Family Center?***

Overwhelmingly, the families interviewed first heard about the YWCA Family Center from friends or family that had stayed there in the past. ***Many reported that they understood the Family Center to be the only program in the area that would serve, and keep intact, families experiencing a housing crisis.*** When families were asked what assistance they *hoped* the Family Center could help them access, 43 percent reported help with finding housing. A few families reported that they hoped to receive help with money management, employment or child care related services.

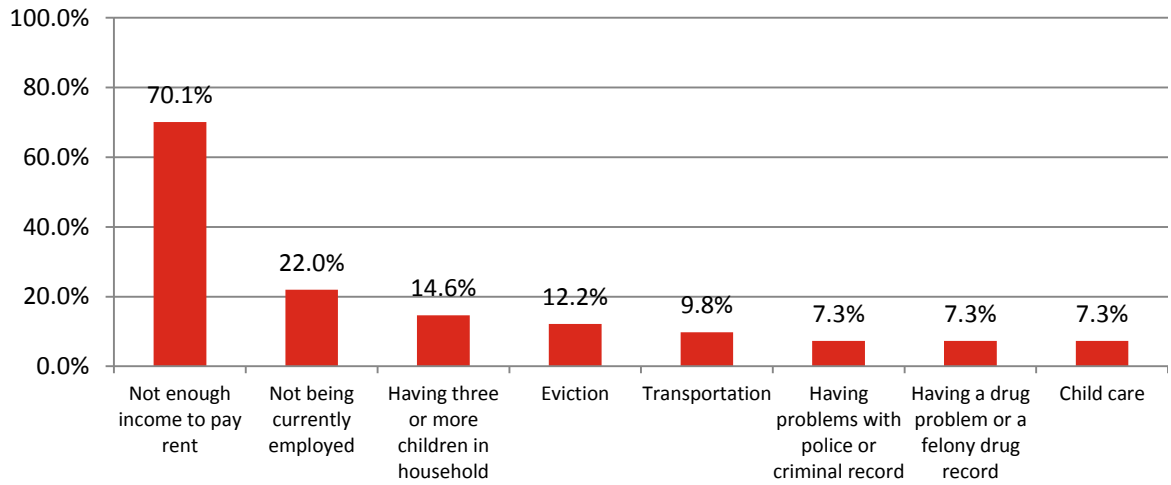
A majority of families interviewed were unsure of what type of housing assistance was available to them, particularly if they had not yet met with their “advocate”, YWCA Family Center case manager. Even after the meeting with their case manager, many were unclear about the parameters of assistance available to them.

### ***What did families identify as their primary barriers to housing?***

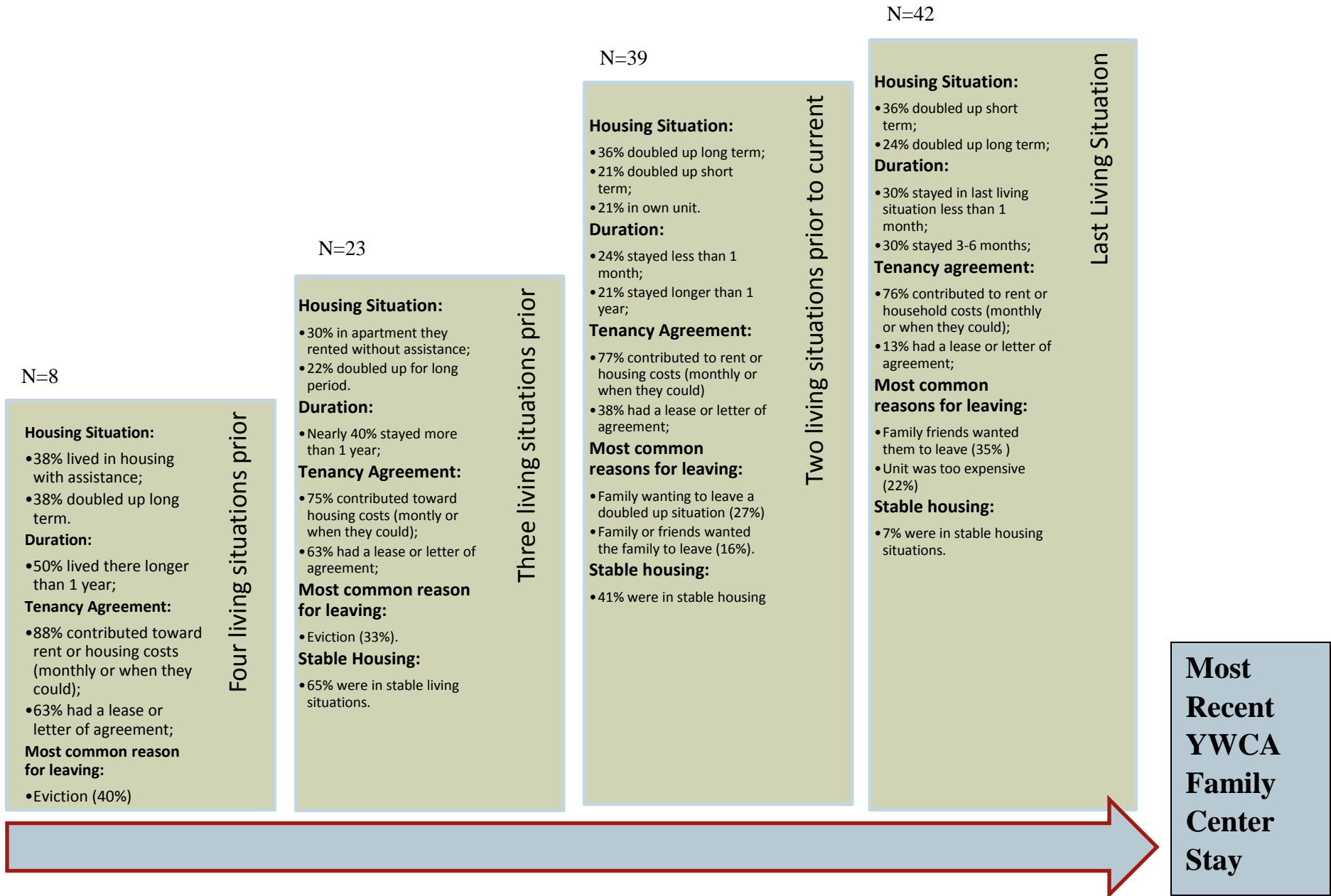
***Families most often identified not having enough income to pay rent as the primary barrier to housing (71 percent).*** An additional 22 percent identified not having a job or source of income as a major barrier. Fifteen percent reported having three or more children in the household as a barrier, while some families reported that a prior eviction or transportation were barriers.

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**Exhibit 2-21: Common Barriers Identified by Clients Interviewed**



**Exhibit 2-22: Housing History of Interviewed Families**



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### 3.3 Key Stakeholder Perspectives

Abt staff conducted individual interviews with key stakeholders responsible for operating programs for families experiencing homelessness, staff at human service agencies who are most likely to interact with families experiencing a housing crisis, and local government agency staff who administer housing supports and social services. A complete list of key stakeholders is included in Appendix A. Stakeholders were questioned about recent increases in family homelessness and asked to consider possible programmatic, systemic, local community, and broader regional factors (internal factors) that might be contributing to trends in homelessness. Responses from stakeholders are summarized below, organized by general themes.

#### *System Management*

Stakeholders suggested that homeless assistance projects are often managed as independent programs rather than components of an integrated system and that mainstream services and programs are often not well coordinated with homeless system programs. ***A programmatic approach rather than systemic approach may contribute to programs that make operational or management decisions in the interest of individual programmatic success rather than the benefit of clients or the homeless system as a whole.*** Examples include agencies that provide enrollment preferences for their own shelter or rapid re-housing clients when they are considered for enrollment in that same agency's permanent supportive housing projects. Further, homeless providers are often not aware of, or are not otherwise able to access mainstream resources or benefits for their clients consistently.

#### *Contract Management*

Many providers report that CSB's use of performance-based contracting contributes to their focus on programmatic success. This may possibly occur at the expense of broader system objectives and outcomes. Individual programs are incentivized to demonstrate programmatic outcomes such as shorter lengths of stay and permanent housing outcomes. ***Additionally, some providers report that administrative demands and perceived CSB restrictions inhibit a progressive, creative, solution-oriented approach to problem solving.*** Provider staff also expressed interest in exercising more programmatic flexibility than that outlined in contract agreements. Providers would like more flexibility in deciding the exact amount of temporary financial assistance, the intensity of the service delivery, and the duration of program enrollment.

#### *Program Design & Management*

The YWCA Family Center has experienced significant staff turnover in the past five years, potentially contributing to inconsistent understanding and application of core functions of the single access point to crisis response services for families. ***As staff and leadership changes occur programmatic aspects such as diversion screening, assessment, case planning, and referral coordination may not have maintained fidelity with the original system design of the YWCA – effective and efficient management of the provision of crisis response services to families experiencing literal homelessness.***

Providers reported that often coordination with other housing providers in the homeless system (i.e., Tier II shelter, direct housing, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing) is not consistently managed to support effective sharing of information or clear direction about who is taking the lead for service delivery. Further, it is not always clear who is responsible for stepping in if a hand off between providers fails or the household's needs change.

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### ***System Design & Resources***

The full complement of affordable housing and/or subsidized housing options do not appear to be universally known to or routinely shared among family system providers who need to access those resources to house their families. Some providers report that some families experiencing housing instability and/or relationship problems may be using emergency shelter as a “break” from the complexity and difficulty of their lives. Families do not see shelter as a “one and done” intervention. After using shelter, families may be more likely to return to the family system when in need, even though they may not be imminently homeless. ***Some providers report that mainstream providers and resources are not collaborative partners in providing housing supports for families and often refer families to the family homeless system when a family has a critical housing need even if they are not immediately in need of emergency shelter.*** Providers report that there is very little, readily accessible emergency financial assistance for families, with Franklin County Children’s Services (FCCS) as perhaps the only readily available source. PRC assistance through FC DJFS was reported to be too time-consuming and having too many constraints to serve as a viable source of emergency financial assistance for rent and utility arrears. DJFS staff confirmed that PRC assistance became more restrictive approximately three to four years ago, including additional requirements around demonstrating proof of financial means to sustain housing following PRC assistance. ADAMH providers, FCCS, Job and Family Services understand the YWCA Family Center and the shelter system as wide safety net for all families experiencing housing instability rather than a limited resource only for families experiencing literal homelessness or who are imminently going to be literally homeless.

### ***Community Issues***

Stakeholder interviews report that underemployment is a potential factor in the rising number of homeless families. ***Some stakeholders report that families are able to find employment quickly, but not the types of jobs that can support a family (greater than 20 hours or higher wages).***

Some stakeholders reported “street knowledge” of the family system’s DCA and Direct Housing resources has contributed to families entering the YWCA Family Center for sole purposes of accessing those resources, though this was not confirmed through client interviews.

## **3.4 External Socio-Economic Factors**

Abt staff examined trends in different social and economic indicators in an attempt to identify external factors that could be related to the increases in family homelessness. The following section describes social, economic and market trends between 2010 and 2013 (U.S. Census data for 2014 is not yet available).

### ***Socio-economic Trends***

While the number of homeless families increased in recent years, the poverty rate among families has declined by 6.2 percent between 2010 and 2013 (20.9 percent in 2010 compared with 19.6 percent in 2013) and median family income increased by 7.6 percent. Based on Census data, the percentage of households receiving cash benefits has increased nearly 14 percent in recent years and the percentage of households receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) has increased by close to 8 percent. The average SSI dollar amount received by households has increased in recent years. However, households receiving cash benefits have experienced a decline in the amount they receive (by 27 percent). Exhibit 2-23 shows relevant socio-economic indicators from 2010 through 2013.



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 (OWF) cash assistance by 53 percent, and the total amount paid to households annually declined by \$28.6 million (46 percent). The same data show that while the number of food stamp recipients remained relatively unchanged between 2011 and 2014, the total amount paid to households annually declined by \$43.5 million (12 percent) in Franklin County. ***Taken together, Franklin County had the largest decline in the annualized total amount of benefits between 2011 and 2014 at \$72 million.***

**Exhibit 2-23: Socio-Economic Indicators for Columbus/Franklin County, 2010-2013**

External Factor	2010	2011	2012	2013	% Change 2010-2013
Total Population	1,165,897	1,178,799	1,195,537	1,212,263	4.0%
Percent of People in Poverty	18.6	18.8	17.9	17.7	-4.8%
Percent of Families with Children in Poverty	20.9	21.3	19.7	19.6	-6.2%
Percent of Households with Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	5.1	5.5	4.8	5.5	7.8%
Mean SSI	8,181	8,635	8,759	8,739	6.8%
Percent of Households with Cash Benefits	2.9	3.3	3.8	3.3	13.8%
Mean Cash Benefits	3,855	4,241	2,789	2,797	-27.4%
Percent of Households with Food Stamps	15.6	15.2	15.5	15.5	-0.6%
Unemployment Rate	7.9	6.4	5.3	4.6	-41.8%
Median Family Income	60,158	62,249	62,323	64,742	7.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey: 2010-2013

***Housing Market Factors***

The research team also looked at housing market characteristics to determine whether there was a clear relationship between market conditions and the increase in family homelessness. ***The rental market in Franklin County has tightened considerably in recent years, from 10 percent vacant rental units to 5 percent in 2013.*** And while both the median rent (overall) and the fair market rent as determined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) increased during this time period, the median rent increased at a higher rate than the fair market rent. ***Overcrowding was more common in 2013 (2.6 percent of households) than it was in 2010 (2.3 percent of households).*** This can indicate an increase in the amount of families doubling up and at-risk of homelessness. Finally, eviction court filings have increased slightly in recent years.

## Exhibit 2-24: Housing Market Indicators for Columbus/Franklin County, 2010-2013

External Factor	2010	2011	2012	2013	Change 2010-2013
Median Rent	768	783	795	819	6.6%
Pct of renters paying 30% or more Income to Gross Rent	51.8	50.6	47.7	46.1	-11.0%
Pct units with 1.01 or more occupants per room**	2.3	2.2	1.9	2.6	13.0%
Rental Vacancy Rate	10.4	7.8	7.3	5.4	-48.1%
Eviction Court Filings**	19,175	19,531	19,383	19,552	2.0%
Fair Market Rent (2BR)	750	779	790	782	4.3%

Note: \*\* Potential leading indicator

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey: 2010-2013 and Franklin County Clerk of Courts

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

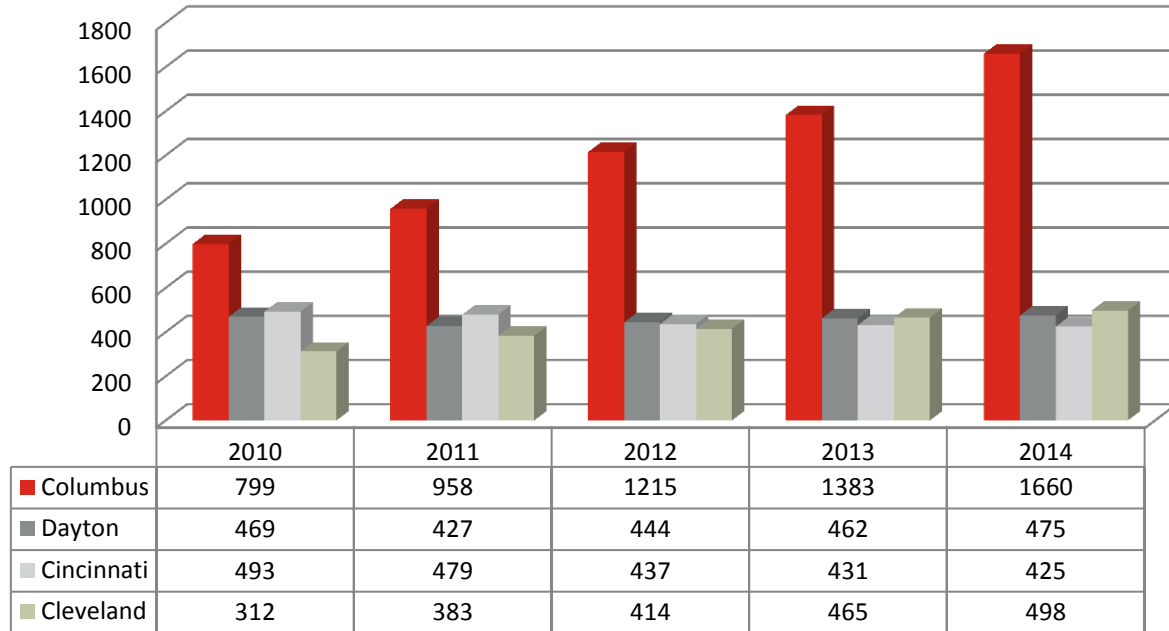
### 3.5 Peer Communities Analysis

To put the Columbus/Franklin County trends into statewide context, Abt staff examined the trends in family homelessness, socio-economic, and market factors in three local peer communities: Dayton/Montgomery County, OH; Cleveland/Cuyahoga County, OH; and Cincinnati/Hamilton County, OH. Columbus has experienced a much steeper increase in family homelessness than its local peers. Comparing 2010 with 2014, Cincinnati experienced declines in the number of homeless families annually, while Cleveland, Dayton, and Columbus experienced increases.

#### *Estimates of Homelessness*

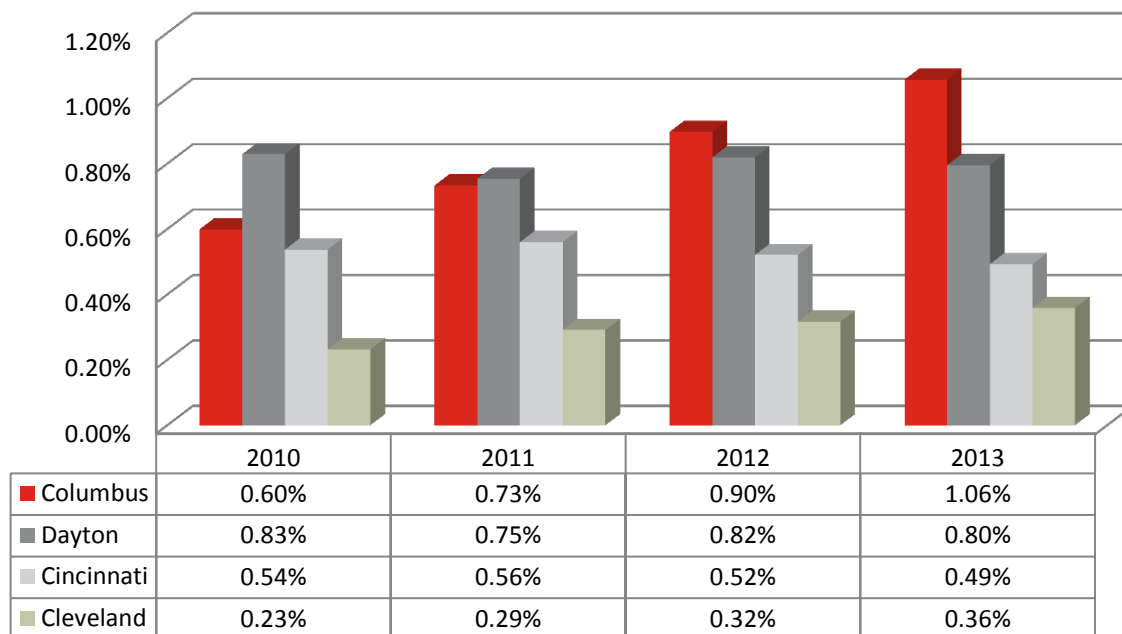
Exhibit 2-25 shows the annual estimates of family homelessness in the four peer CoCs. Columbus' annual increase is dramatic compared to its peers. Between 2010 and 2014, the number of homeless families served annually in Columbus/Franklin County increased by 108 percent. The number of homeless families in Dayton and Cincinnati remained relatively constant. Cleveland, which is most similar to Columbus in terms of their "shelter all" approach for families, experienced an increase each year and an overall increase from 2010 to 2014 of 60 percent. Exhibit 2-26 shows the annual rate of family homelessness among all families in each of the peer communities. The percent of all families in Columbus that are homeless has increased steadily over each of the past five years. In 2010, 0.6 percent of all families were homeless compared to over 1 percent of families in 2013. Only Cleveland experienced an increase in the overall rate between 2010 and 2013 (.23 percent and .36 percent, respectively). Differences in the number and rates of family homelessness in Dayton and Cincinnati may be due in part to the limitations of their shelter systems for families. The Hamilton County/Cincinnati CoC, for example, does not have a mechanism or the resources to accommodate additional homeless families beyond their fixed shelter capacity.

### Exhibit 2-25 Annual Number of Homeless Families 2010-2014



Source: AHAR data provided by CoC lead agencies in all four Ohio CoCs.

### Exhibit 2-26 Percentage of All Families that are Homeless 2010-2013



#### *External Factors*

Columbus and all of the comparison communities showed increases in metrics that indicate dependence on public assistance: percent of households with supplemental security income, percent of households

with cash benefits, and percent of households with food stamps. The mean amount of SSI increased in all four communities, and the mean amount of cash benefits declined everywhere but in Dayton.

As shown in Exhibit 2-27, the rental market has tightened across the state with fewer vacant units at higher median rents. In Columbus, the increase in the fair market rent (FMR) value did not keep pace with rising median rents. In other peer communities, the FMR increased at a higher rate than median rents overall. Overcrowding has increased in all places but Cincinnati.

**Exhibit 2-27: Change in Key Economic and Housing Market Indicators in Columbus and Comparison Cities 2010-2013**

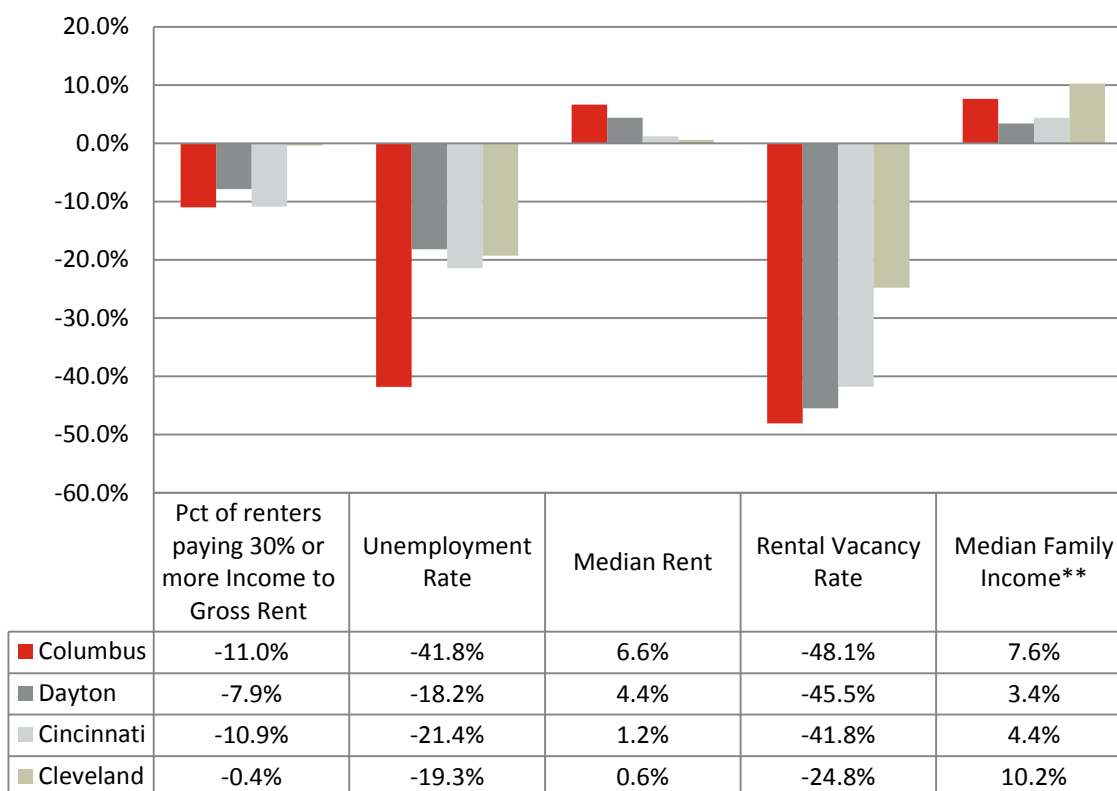
	Columbus	Dayton	Cincinnati	Cleveland
	Pct Change 2010-2013	Pct Change 2010-2013	Pct Change 2010-2013	Pct Change 2010-2013
Total Population	4.0%	0.1%	0.3%	-1.2%
Poverty Rate for Families	-6.2%	12.2%	-3.6%	1.2%
Percent of People in Poverty	-4.8%	5.1%	1.6%	6.1%
Percent of Households with Supplemental Security Income	7.8%	8.9%	38.3%	6.3%
Mean SSI	6.8%	6.0%	8.3%	0.8%
Percent of Households with Cash Benefits	13.8%	-2.4%	-5.7%	-2.3%
Mean Cash Benefits	-27.4%	9.3%	-23.6%	-14.2%
Percent of Households with Food Stamps	-0.6%	16.2%	17.2%	11.4%
Unemployment Rate	-41.8%	-18.2%	-21.4%	-19.3%
Median Family Income	7.6%	3.4%	4.4%	10.2%
Median Rent	6.6%	4.4%	1.2%	0.6%
Pct of renters paying 30% or more Income to Gross Rent **	-11.0%	-7.9%	-10.9%	-0.4%
Pct units with 1.01 or more occupants per room**	13.0%	45.5%	-25.0%	0.0%
Rental Vacancy Rate	-48.1%	-45.5%	-41.8%	-24.8%
Fair Market Rent (2BR)	4.3%	6.0%	2.1%	0.7%

Note: \*\* Potential leading indicator

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey: 2010-2013

Exhibit 2-28 presents key economic and market indicators in all peer CoCs. As shown, Columbus has not experienced any obvious changes that have not also occurred in other cities across the state. Columbus and Cleveland have experienced greater gains in median family income, and Columbus and Dayton saw similar rates of decline in unemployment and similar rental market tightening.

## Exhibit 2-28: Changes in Key Indicators in Columbus and Comparison Cities 2010-2013



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey: 2010-2013

Across the state, OWF payments and recipients declined considerably. Compared to its peers, Columbus experienced the largest drop in both TANF recipients and amount paid to TANF recipients monthly (see Exhibit 2-29). Cincinnati, however, experienced the largest declines in food stamp recipients and payments during the same time period.

## Exhibit 2-29: Change in Food Stamps and OWF Receipt, 2011 to 2014

	Columbus	Dayton	Cincinnati	Cleveland
Change in Number of Food Stamp Recipients	-0.9%	3.9%	-5.3%	-2.6%
Change in Food Stamp payments per month (annualized)	-12.2%	-8.7%	-18.1%	-12.1%
Change in Number of OWF Recipients	-53.2%	-50.9%	-40.0%	-39.5%
Change in OWF payments per month (annualized)	-45.9%	-43.0%	-32.4%	-31.6%

Source: Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services, 2011 to 2014

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## 4. Analysis in Relation to the Research Questions

The following section distills the data collected and described in Chapter 2, and aligns them with the guiding questions identified in Chapter 1. Based on this information, the research team provides initial recommendation in Chapter 4 that could be explored to begin to address some of the contributing factors.

### 4.1 What external and internal factors correlate or may have contributed to shelter increases?

The research team found that no single external factor or proscribed set of external factors alone caused the number of families contacting and entering the emergency shelter system to more than double. Interaction across myriad external and internal factors seems to have created a “push-pull” dynamic, and an insidious, self-reinforcing cycle of increasing rates of emergency shelter use. Described below are the critical external and internal factors that appear to contribute to this dynamic.

#### 4.1.1 Key External Factors

Data suggest that income erosion and decreasing access to income supports and emergency aid put families in the most extreme poverty at greater risk for homelessness. Simultaneously, social service systems often refer families to emergency shelter system as a reliable resource to help precariously housed families access needed assistance to secure their own housing. There exist insufficient resources or capacity across public assistance agencies, non-profit providers, and other mainstream systems to effectively intervene to resolve the increasing housing instability among the poorest families. Related findings:

- ***Continuing economic instability from the Great Recession.*** Homelessness is a lagging economic indicator. Persons negatively impacted by job loss, limited employment, and reductions in benefits who lose their own housing will often make alternative housing arrangements, sometimes for several months or even years. Some exhaust all housing options and seek emergency shelter. A strong indicator of the decreasing economic stability of low-income families is the rate of overcrowding. In Franklin County, overcrowded housing units increased from 2.3 to 2.6 percent in the past three years. Most families we interviewed came to the Family Center after chronically doubling up with family or friends, and exhausting any alternatives.
- ***Reductions in public benefits.*** From 2010 to 2013 Columbus experienced reductions in the number of families receiving food stamps and cash welfare benefits. These reductions were implemented quickly to reduce the welfare rolls and increase public assistance recipients with work assignments. However, such changes likely negatively impacted the economic security and housing stability of the poorest families. Many families interviewed reported losing public assistance, mainly cash benefits, at some point in the last few years.
- ***Competitive rental market.*** Although Columbus is identified as a relatively affordable city in terms of median rent amounts, the vacancy rate has diminished in recent years (from 10 percent in 2010 to 5 percent in 2013), increasing competition for affordable units. In more competitive markets families with any housing barriers such as limited income, no rental history, or past evictions find it increasingly difficult to secure and maintain rental housing.

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- ***Mainstream systems reliance on emergency shelter system for precariously housed families.*** Public assistance and general population social service systems perceive CSB and its contracted agencies to be better resourced and more effective service providers of housing supports for people who are precariously housed and need assistance. Overwhelmingly, families we interviewed did not contact other service providers during their most recent housing crisis. A few families reported that they called HandsOn Central Ohio 2-1-1, faith institutions, or a case worker they were engaged with for assistance. Those contacts referred families to the YWCA Family Center.
  - ***Available crisis response resources are limited and generally not targeted to or easily accessed by homeless or imminently homeless families.*** There appears to be an insufficient supply of emergency financial assistance for homeless or imminently homeless families, as well as housing search and placement and other material assistance from entities other than the family emergency shelter system. Emergency assistance for critical housing needs available through the Department of Job and Family Services was once the largest source of emergency aid for rent, mortgage and utility needs. This source has declined in recent years according to DJFS staff and is has become more restrictive, requiring a family to produce evidence of their ability to sustain housing and imposing limits on the amount, frequency, duration and type of assistance available.

#### **4.1.2 Key Internal System Factors**

While the above conditions increasingly led precariously housed families to turn to the family homeless system, at the same time the family system was and continues to be viewed as a highly efficient housing crisis response system for families. In the absence of viable alternatives, the inclination to turn to this system for intervention is not surprising. However, just as numbers coming through the front door started to sharply increase, the family system was undergoing planned changes to reduce fixed, year-round emergency shelter capacity, and refocus resources on rapid re-housing assistance – a flexible response to assisting homeless families with rapid connection to permanent housing and time-limited financial assistance.

Unprecedented demand for family shelter caused the system to unexpectedly direct resources to provide overflow capacity. Changes in system service strategies – shifting focus to rapid re-housing instead of emergency shelter -- and exploding demand, in turn, created significant strain on system operations and resources. Related findings:

- ***Increasing numbers of families presenting for shelter without commensurate investment strategies to mitigate those numbers.*** As demand for shelter increased, the YWCA concurrently had to increase shelter diversion responsibilities – screening designed to explore alternative housing options and resources for those families that may be able to resolve their immediate housing crisis without emergency shelter. Families served in the YWCA’s diversion initiative increased dramatically between 2010 and 2013, rising from 1,305 families requesting shelter to 2,245 families. Ultimately, 33 percent to 38 percent of these families were successfully diverted from shelter each year; the remainder did not enter shelter yet possibly remained in crisis or were admitted to the YWCA Family Center.

However, staff operating the Family Center at the time reported that the YWCA struggled to keep pace with the need for additional, trained staff to support screening and diversion functions. At times, diversion screening became rote as staff had less time to exhaustively explore alternative options.

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Staff also reported that emergency resources previously available throughout the community were no longer an option. As noted, staff overseeing the Department of Job & Family Services PRC program confirmed that PRC funding diminished significantly approximately 3 to 5 years ago while eligibility requirements tightened.

Client data also show that families entering shelter had greater means than their counterparts in the past; adult family members employed at entry doubled between FY2010 and FY2014, from 18 percent to 36 percent, while average monthly household income rose by 44 percent (though still very low at \$645 average/month). Families with somewhat more economic means may have a higher likelihood of avoiding shelter with the right community supports versus getting that support from the homeless system.

Findings are inconclusive at this stage, but it's possible that a greater focus on diversion by trained and dedicated staff *coupled with* sufficient and accessible community emergency resources could have yielded higher shelter diversion rates. Without intentional diversion and available mainstream supports, however, families will strategically seek support and assistance wherever available. System leaders and providers were necessarily focusing their attention and limited resources on meeting immediate crisis needs of the unprecedented number of families coming into shelter.

- ***Significant changes in capacity and system design occurred just as multi-year increases in family homelessness were beginning.*** Starting in 2011, “Tier II” shelters operated by the Homeless Families Foundation and Volunteers of America began transitioning as each agency converted their programs to direct housing. This resulted in a reduction in the number of fixed, year-round emergency shelter units from 120 to just the 50 units offered at the YWCA Family Center, although flexible overflow remained available to accommodate shelter demand in excess of the 50 fixed units.

While this conversion was planned as part of the Rebuilding Lives Plan-the community’s plan to end homelessness-and resulted in a doubling of direct housing (rapid re-housing) capacity, overall there was not a proportionate increase (relative to overall shelter demand) in the capacity of housing placement offered by providers other than the YWCA Family Center. Previously, tier II shelter programs and rapid re-housing programs assumed responsibility for helping families find and secure housing. In FY 2010, 74 percent of families at the Family Center moved to a tier II shelter or were assisted by the Salvation Army’s rapid re-housing program, while in FY 2014 only 45% of families were assisted by a rapid re-housing provider. An increasing number had to be assisted by the Family Center over this period to find housing and, when needed, access to one-time financial assistance for move-in costs.

As the number of families contacting and being admitted to the YWCA Family Center increased, the system placed families in overflow, using common areas at the Family Center as well as hotel overflow. The shelter system incurred significant additional costs and operational strains as it accommodated this demand, limiting the system’s ability to effectively manage and resource housing referral and placement. This strain was compounded by the loss of resources from public assistance mainstream systems available to at-risk families or families seeking to exit shelter and was borne disproportionately by the YWCA. Though the YWCA Family Center continued to perform at a high level – families stayed in shelter for around three weeks and the majority exited to permanent housing – an increasing percent of families with zero income (those at greatest risk of returning to



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homelessness) was exiting with no financial assistance or with only one-time financial help for move-in costs.

#### **4.2 What differences and similarities exist between families that are becoming homeless now compared with those who experienced homelessness in the past?**

Analysis of Columbus' CSP data suggest that characteristics and attributes of families experiencing homeless in the most recent two-year period (FY14 and FY15) are not significantly different from those families served several years ago, with two notable differences. The analysis did not reveal significant differences in the age of heads of household, race and ethnicity characteristics, household size, and prevalence of one-parent households from the beginning of the analysis period to the end. However, families served in more recent periods tend to have higher monthly income amounts. Twelve percent of families with income reported income greater than \$1,000 per month in FY11. That rate steadily increased each year to a rate of 30 percent in the most recently available data. In addition, more heads of households were identified as disabled. In FY11, ten percent of household heads reported a disability in FY11. That rate steadily increased each year to a rate of 23 percent in FY15.

#### **4.3 Are Columbus' trends being experienced in other comparable communities?**

The team compared the level and rate of family homelessness in Columbus with Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Dayton. Two out of three of Columbus' local peer communities have experienced increases in family homelessness, though not at the same rate and only Cleveland experienced an increase in the prevalence of homelessness among all families. In contrast, Columbus has experienced a much more dramatic rise in both the number of homeless families and prevalence. When examining potential contributing socio-economic characteristics, no single external factor was consistently correlated with either increasing or decreasing homeless numbers across the four Ohio communities analyzed. Each community has a unique set of characteristics and attributes that do not contribute to a standard set of socio-economic factors impacting homelessness consistently across the state. However, in all communities, the number of families receiving critical benefits (Ohio Works First, Food Stamps) has declined in recent years, and *in Columbus the declines in Ohio Works First have been the most dramatic*. In addition, in all four communities the housing market has tightened considerably, while median rents have increased to varying degrees.

#### **4.4 Have rates of return to homelessness increased?**

Rates of return to homelessness have remained relatively constant throughout the study period, although a slight decline is noted in the most recently available data. The actual rate fluctuates annually but has remained in the 24 to 28 percent range from FY11 through FY14. Return rates are highest for households with zero monthly income at original program entry. Younger households tend to return to homelessness at slightly higher rates than other families with older heads of household.

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#### **4.5 Which interventions or service strategies are most effective at rapidly ending family homelessness and keeping families stably housed after leaving shelter?**

While overall rates of successful housing outcomes have suffered for all family programs since FY13, families participating in Direct Client Assistance and Direct Housing programs consistently achieved permanent housing placement at least 80 percent of the time. These two programs tend to be reliable service strategies for the vast majority of participants. Direct Housing is also successful in preventing families from returning to homelessness. Return rates are lowest for Direct Housing compared to all other service strategies and those return rates have shown some improvement over the past two fiscal years.

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## 5. Conclusion

The number of families experiencing homelessness in Columbus, Ohio has more than doubled from 756 in 2010 to 1,570 in 2014, a 108 percent increase over the five year period. This dramatic increase is alarming to homeless system planners, providers of services and housing to persons experiencing homeless, and city leaders. The City of Columbus/Franklin County Continuum of Care for individuals and families experiencing homelessness has been identified nationally as an efficient and effective model for centralizing access to crisis response services, comprehensively assessing the needs of clients, and quickly moving individuals and families back to permanent housing. As prevalence rates began increasing in 2012, system leaders and planners implemented a variety of measures and improvements designed to stem the increase. Unfortunately these measures did not reverse the trend and family homelessness continues to increase to this day, confounding the Columbus community. This Report finds the contributing factors to be perplexing but explainable. The recommended solutions to the problem will be equally challenging to implement. However, with concerted effort on the part of the broader Columbus community, not just the YWCA, Salvation Army, Homeless Families Foundation, Volunteers of America, Gladden Community House and Community Shelter Board, Abt believes a reduction in family homelessness and recidivism rates are possible.

Based on multiple visits to the YWCA Family Center to observe operations, one-on-one interviews with homeless families, analysis of administrative data, discussions with key stakeholders, and analysis of peer communities throughout Ohio, the team determined that myriad factors, both external and internal to the system of care for homeless families, converged to create dysfunction and fractures within the previously effective system. (These factors are summarized in Chapter 3.) Erosion of economic stability and increased competition in the housing market for those at the lowest levels of poverty contributed to an increase in families experiencing housing difficulty and, ultimately, exploring homeless system resources as way to find and secure safe, decent, affordable housing. Simultaneously, mainstream assistance contracted and resources for the poorest families became more restrictive. The family emergency shelter system expanded to fill the gap.

The system of care for homeless families – the YWCA Family Center, Direct Housing providers such as the Salvation Army, Homeless Families Foundation, and Volunteers of America of Greater Ohio, and temporary financial assistance through CSB – responded by effectively doubling temporary crisis response capacity, creating an increasingly larger emergency safety net for families (perhaps beyond those experiencing literal homelessness and in need of emergency shelter). Very quickly efforts to manage the larger daily census of homeless families through overflow became a focus of the system, which was not designed, staffed, or resourced to accommodate twice the daily planned capacity.

### 5.1 Recommendations for System Improvements

While there appear to be multiple factors contributing to increases in family homelessness, ***a concerted effort on the part of the broader Columbus community, not just CSB and homeless system providers, is needed to reduce the number of families requesting and receiving emergency shelter.*** The response to this crisis requires a difficult and complicated community conversation about the role of crisis response services for Columbus' neediest families and the role that CSB-funded programs play in managing the crisis response – both for those experiencing literal homelessness and for those at imminent risk of homelessness. Specifically, the community should seek to better understand the number and characteristics of families who are precariously housed, define what housing-related services they have

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and that need to be available, when and for whom more intense interventions may be needed to avoid homelessness and stabilize housing. Maintaining the status quo will continue to cost homeless crisis response system for families – and the overall homeless system – an inordinate and unnecessary amount of resources and will further negatively impact the community’s ability to provide safe, decent shelter and successful housing outcomes for all individuals and families facing homelessness.

Further research and planning are needed to determine specific recommendations. However, we offer the following general recommendations for consideration related to next steps.

- ***Define the broader community’s role and the role of the homeless crisis response system in addressing general population housing instability.*** Community stakeholders should work to define the specific limitations and boundaries of the Columbus emergency shelter system for families relative to addressing housing sustainability for all persons experiencing housing distress beyond those who are literally homeless. This should involve:
  - A broader conversation among stakeholders and system leaders to develop a community-wide set of supports necessary to increase the resiliency and housing stability of families with the most significant housing retention barriers and avoid default use of the homeless crisis response system for those families who may be successfully stabilized using other available community supports.
  - A homeless system planning initiative to define what a high functioning, optimized homeless crisis response system for families looks like in terms of physical capacity, key services, and resources to support capacity and services. This should consider what such a system looks like when essential partnerships with non-homeless specific providers and systems and a broader set of resources supporting housing stability are in place, per the recommendation above.
- ***Continue to improve screening and triage operations to successfully divert families whenever possible.*** Implement a targeted training and capacity building initiative for staff completing shelter diversion screening, triage assessment, and ultimate intake/enrollment determinations. The skill sets and knowledge required for highly effective diversion are quite different from those of housing search, housing placement, and general case management. If Columbus intends to retain a “shelter all” policy for families, highly effective eligibility screening, diversion protocols, and service partnerships need to be in place and reinforced.
- ***Improve homeless system collaboration, integration, and implementation of progressive assistance model to ensure efficient resource utilization.*** Homeless providers need to work together in a more collaborative, progressive, and solution-oriented manner to ensure that system management goals are used to focus client enrollment, service intensity, and service duration decisions. Targeted training and capacity related to system-wide implementation of progressive engagement and assistance strategies should be undertaken to ensure limited resources are used as needed to re-house, stabilize and link families to other community-based supports. System goals such as targeting crisis response services to the most needy and providing a progressive engagement approach will ensure limited resources are allocated more effectively.

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Based on analysis of CSP data, families with zero income at program entry are more likely to experience subsequent returns to homelessness. CSB and homeless providers in all service strategies (i.e. YWCA + DCA and Direct Housing) need to consider a more flexible approach to service intensity and duration for the poorest homeless families. Reductions in homeless prevalence and return rates might best be achieved in the short term by providing longer-term services with deeper housing subsidies to families with no income.

- ***Improve collaboration between family homeless assistance providers and State, County, and City human service agencies.*** In the long term, partnerships with other community partners should be pursued to ensure there are additional, ongoing supports to link families to that support increased stability overtime. Shelter system managers should seek to actively engage mainstream systems more intensively and dynamically to ensure that housing resources and supports are targeted and accessible to families experiencing housing instability with limited or no income. These resources include income supports through TANF/Ohio Works First and emergency assistance through PRC, federal Emergency Food and Shelter Program assistance, and other public and private sources.
  
- ***Undertake deeper analysis of program success and return rates in relation to specific service strategies.*** Ongoing and more intensive investigation of CSP data could potentially yield helpful insights about more effective service targeting and program design. Abt encourages CSB to consider the following questions:
  - Are families with the greatest needs appropriately identified and linked to more intensive services? What amount and duration of service intensity for highest need families best predicts long term housing stability?
  - What is the relationship between head of household disability and family income? Are disabled families quickly identified and assessed for permanent supportive housing resources?
  - Are families who are diverted from shelter able to connect to other family supports and system resources such that subsequent shelter stays are avoided?
  - How can pre-shelter screening, intake, and diversion activities be refined to identify more quickly and successfully those families for whom crisis response services are absolutely necessary to shelter families who have no other options?

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## Appendix A: Key Stakeholders Interviewed

Roberta Garber, Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority

Christine Kade, Franklin County Children Services

Laura LaRoche, Franklin County Children Services

Tina Rutherford, Franklin County Children Services

Dawn Carson, Franklin County Department of Job & Family Services

Michelle Lindeboom, Franklin County Department of Job & Family Services

Mardi Ciriaco, Gladden Community House

Cheryl Brewer, Homeless Families Foundation

Adrienne Corbett, Homeless Families Foundation

Beth Fetzer-Rice, The Salvation Army

Laura Black, The Salvation Army

Kim Eberst, Volunteers of America of Greater Ohio


Laura Brenner, Volunteers of America of Greater Ohio

Angela Stoller-Zervas, YWCA


## Appendix B: Characteristics of Clients Interview

The following tables provide the characteristics of the 42 families interviewed in March 2015. Families were homeless at the time of the interviews, staying at the YWCA Family Center shelter. Characteristics include: homelessness history, household composition, income and employment, and housing barriers.


### *Type of Homeless Situation*

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Newly Homeless		42.9%	18
Returning to Homelessness		57.1%	24
		Total Responses	42

### *Did you grow up around Columbus, OH?*

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		64.3%	27
No		35.7%	15
		Total Responses	42


### *When did you move to Columbus (if not from here):*

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
0 to less than 1 month		0.0%	0
1 month to less than 3 months		33.3%	5
3 months or more		66.7%	10
		Total Responses	15


### *How many children under the age of 18 are staying with you right now? (Cross-tabbed by Presence of another Adult in Household)*

Another Adult in Household:	Yes	No	Total Responses
1	5 (29.4%)	12 (70.6%)	17
2	5 (35.7%)	9 (64.3%)	14
3	1 (20.0%)	4 (80.0%)	5
4	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2
5 or more	0 (0.0%)	4 (100.0%)	4


*Are you currently pregnant or expecting to become a parent in the next 9 months?*

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		19.0%	8
No		81.0%	34
		Total Responses	42

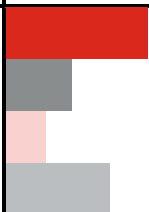
*Do you have children under the age of 18 that are not living with you right now?*

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		45.2%	19
No		54.8%	23
		Total Responses	42

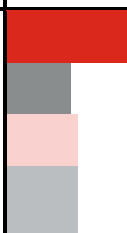
*Is this your first time experiencing homelessness?*

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		35.7%	15
No		64.3%	27
		Total Responses	42

*How many times have you been homeless (including this time)?*

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
2		40.7%	11
3		18.5%	5
4		11.1%	3
5 or more		29.6%	8
		Total Responses	27














*When you experienced homelessness in the past, did you stay...[select all that apply]*

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
At the YWCA Family Center		57.1%	16
At another homeless shelter in the Columbus area		25.0%	7
At another homeless shelter in a different area		28.6%	8
In an unsheltered location (for example, staying outside, on the street, in a car, bus terminal or		28.6%	8



abandoned building)			
In a transitional housing program		21.4%	6
In another program for homeless people or homeless families		28.6%	8
With friends or family for a short period of time (		67.9%	19
With friends or family for a long period of time		46.4%	13
Other, please specify...		10.7%	3
		Total Responses	28

*Where did you stay the night before entering the Y?*

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Homeless in another shelter (e.g., emergency shelter or hotel with voucher assistance from public or private charitable source)		14.3%	6
Homeless in an unsheltered location (for example, staying outside, on the street, in a car, bus terminal or abandoned building)	 	2.4%	1
Homeless in a transitional housing program for homeless people that provides a time-limited place to stay and services		4.8%	2
Another residential program for homeless people that provides a long-term place to stay and services		0.0%	0
An apartment or house that you rented with rental assistance		0.0%	0
An apartment or house that you rented without assistance		11.9%	5
An apartment or house that you owned		0.0%	0
Staying with friends or family for short period of time (		23.8%	10
Staying with friends of family for a long period of time		35.7%	15
Institution (for example, hospital, mental health facility, drug or alcohol treatment facility, prison, jail, detention center)		0.0%	0
Hotel/Motel:		7.1%	3
at YWCA		0.0%	0
		Total Responses	42

**How did you first hear about the YWCA Family Center?**

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Through friends or family		71.4%	30
2-1-1 (or other triage/screening tool)		4.8%	2
Other homeless service providers		4.8%	2
DHS, DSS, or other local govt program		0.0%	0
Other people experiencing homelessness		2.4%	1
Other		19.0%	8
		<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>42</b>

Other:

1. tried to get eviction prevention, but it didn't work
2. Internet
3. Internet search
4. Google
5. Knew as a nurse that families could come to shelter at Y (personal knowledge)
6. Internet search
7. knew from prior stay
8. Personal experiencing having stayed at Y 2 years ago

**Income and Employment**

**Are you currently employed?**
















Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		28.6%	12
No		71.4%	30
		<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>42</b>

**Have you received any income from a source that was not a job in the past 30 days? Sources like TANF, Social Security Income, General Assistance?**

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
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Yes		52.4%	22
No		47.6%	20
		Total Responses	42

*Have you received income from any of the following sources in the past 30 days.*

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
A job		26.2%	11
Unemployment Insurance		0.0%	0
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)		16.7%	7
Social Security Disability Income (SSDI)		14.3%	6
Veteran's disability payment		0.0%	0
Private disability insurance		0.0%	0
Worker's compensation		0.0%	0
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)		9.5%	4
General Assistance (GA)		2.4%	1
Retirement income from Social Security		0.0%	0
Veteran's pension		0.0%	0
Pension from a former job		0.0%	0
Child support		19.0%	8
Alimony or other spousal support		0.0%	0
Any other source (Specify)		31.0%	13
		Total Responses	42

## Housing Barriers

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Not having enough income to pay rent		70.7%	29
Not being currently employed		22.0%	9
Family violence		2.4%	1
Your having problems with police or a criminal record or background		7.3%	3
Another family member having problems with police or a criminal record or background		4.9%	2
Your having a drug problem or a felony drug record		7.3%	3
Another family member with a drug problem or a felony drug record		4.9%	2
Having three or more children in the household		14.6%	6
Having teenagers in the household		2.4%	1
Having a person in the household whose behavior or mental health condition is a concern for prospective landlords		4.9%	2
Having a person in the household who requires physical accommodations that are difficult to find in housing		2.4%	1
Other (please specify)		41.5%	17
Total Responses			41

## Appendix C: External Factors for Columbus and Peer Communities

The following table provide data on socio-economic and housing market indicators for Columbus/Franklin County, and its peer communities: Dayton/Montgomery County, Cincinnati/Hamilton County, and Cleveland/Cuyahoga County. In addition, the numbers of homeless family households and number of people in those households for 2010 to 2014 are included below.

### *Annual Estimates of Family Homelessness, 2010-2014*

City	Columbus/Franklin County		Dayton/Montgomery County		Cincinnati/Hamilton County		Cleveland/Cuyahoga County	
	Number of Family HH	Number of Persons in Families	Number of Family HH	Number of Persons in Families	Number of Family HH	Number of Persons in Families	Number of Family HH	Number of Persons in Families
2010	799	2663	469	1,479	493	1602	312	977
2011	958	3116	427	1,352	479	1569	383	1157
2012	1215	3758	444	1,381	437	1450	414	1280
2013	1383	4472	462	1,452	431	1471	465	1473
2014	1660	5506	475	1,480	425	1458	498	1631

*Source: Community-level homelessness data were provided by each Continuum of Care lead agency.*

## Socio-Economic and Market Characteristics

### *Columbus/Franklin County*

Title	2010	2011	2012	2013	Change 2010 to 2013
Total Population	1,165,897	1,178,799	1,195,537	1,212,263	4.0%
Percent of People in Poverty	18.6%	18.8%	17.9%	17.7%	-4.8%
Poverty Rate for Families	20.9%	21.3%	19.7%	19.6%	-6.2%
Percent of Households with Supplemental Security Income	5.1%	5.5%	4.8%	5.5%	7.8%
Mean SSI	8,181	8,635	8,759	8,739	6.8%
Percent of Households with Cash Benefits	2.9%	3.3%	3.8%	3.3%	13.8%
Mean Cash Benefits	3,855	4,241	2,789	2,797	-27.4%
Percent of Households with Food Stamps	15.6%	15.2%	15.5%	15.5%	-0.6%
Unemployment Rate	7.9%	6.4%	5.3%	4.6%	-41.8%
Median Family Income	60,158	62,249	62,323	64,742	7.6%
Median Rent	768	783	795	819	6.6%
Pct of renters paying 30% or more Income to Gross Rent	51.8%	50.6%	47.7%	46.1%	-11.0%
Pct units with 1.01 or more occupants per room	2.3%	2.2%	1.9%	2.6%	13.0%
Rental Vacancy Rate	10.4%	7.8%	7.3%	5.4%	-48.1%
Eviction Court Filings	19,175	19,531	19,383	19,552	2.0%
Fair Market Rent (2BR)	750	779	790	782	4.3%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010-2013*

*Dayton/Montgomery County*

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Change 2010- 2013</b>
Total Population	535,059	537,602	534,325	535,846	0.1%
Percent of People in Poverty	17.8%	18.5%	18.7%	18.7%	5.1%
Poverty Rate for Families	22.9%	24.7%	24.1%	25.7%	12.2%
Percent of Households with Supplemental Security Income	5.6%	6.4%	6.8%	6.1%	8.9%
Mean SSI	8,331	8,630	9,478	8,829	6.0%
Percent of Households with Cash Benefits	4.1%	3.7%	4.4%	4%	-2.4%
Mean Cash Benefits	3,597	3,008	2,675	3,932	9.3%
Percent of Households with Food Stamps	14.8%	15.5%	17.8%	17.2%	16.2%
Unemployment Rate	7.7%	6.6%	6.6%	6.3%	-18.2%
Median Family Income	51,921	54,245	54,378	53,694	3.4%
Median Rent	689	694	700	719	4.4%
Pct of renters paying 30% or more Income to Gross Rent	53.3%	57.3%	51.6%	49.1%	-7.9%
Pct units with 1.01 or more occupants per room	1.1%	1.2%	1.3%	1.6%	45.5%
Rental Vacancy Rate	8.8%	6.7%	6.9%	4.8%	-45.5%
Fair Market Rent (2BR)	696	714	685	738	6.0%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010-2013*

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*Cincinnati/Hamilton County*

<b>Title</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Change 2010- 2013</b>
Total Population	802,252	800,362	802,038	804,520	0.3%
Percent of People in Poverty	18.4%	18.3%	19.8%	18.7%	1.6%
Poverty Rate for Families	22.5%	24.7%	26.7%	21.7%	-3.6%
Percent of Households with Cash Benefits	3.5%	3.2%	3.5%	3.3%	-5.7%
Mean Cash Benefits	3,961	3,992	3,663	3,027	-23.6%
Percent of Households with Supplemental Security Income	4.7%	5.1%	5.3%	6.5%	38.3%
Mean SSI	8,082	8,506	8,459	8,755	8.3%
Percent of Households with Food Stamps	13.4%	16.2%	16.7%	15.7%	17.2%
Median Family Income	60,095	62,386	63,133	62,740	4.4%
Unemployment Rate	7%	7.8%	6.2%	5.5%	-21.4%
Pct of renters paying 30% or more Income to Gross Rent	54.2%	55.5%	54.2%	48.3%	-10.9%
Pct units with 1.01 or more occupants per room	2%	1.4%	1.4%	1.5%	-25.0%
Median Rent	676	671	683	684	1.2%
Rental Vacancy Rate	11%	14.3%	8%	6.4%	-41.8%
Fair Market Rent (2BR)	726	752	723	741	2.1%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010-2013*



*Cleveland/Cuyahoga County*

<b>Title</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Change 2010-2013</b>
Total Population	1,278,208	1,270,294	1,265,111	1,263,154	-1.2%
Percent of People in Poverty	17.9%	18.6%	18.6%	19%	6.1%
Poverty Rate for Families	24.2%	23.7%	23.4%	24.5%	1.2%
Percent of Households with Cash Benefits	4.3%	4.6%	4.2%	4.2%	-2.3%
Mean Cash Benefits	3,021	3,116	2,944	2,591	-14.2%
Percent of Households with Supplemental Security Income	6.3%	6.7%	7.1%	6.7%	6.3%
Mean SSI	8,575	8,860	8,551	8,645	0.8%
Percent of Households with Food Stamps	16.7%	17.5%	19%	18.6%	11.4%
Median Family Income	54,047	56,472	57,514	59,578	10.2%
Unemployment Rate	8.3%	7.6%	7.1%	6.7%	-19.3%
Pct of renters paying 30% or more Income to Gross Rent	53.1%	52.9	52.1%	52.9%	-0.4%
Pct units with 1.01 or more occupants per room	0.9%	1.1%	1%	0.9%	0.0%
Fair Market Rent (2BR)	735	720	727	740	0.7%
Rental Vacancy Rate	10.5%	8.4%	9.4%	7.9%	-24.8%
Median Rent	708	701	712	712	0.6%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010-2013*

Changes Over Time For Key Family Homeless Indicators				
	Columbus	Dayton	Cincinnati	Cleveland
Percent Change 2010-2013				
Number of Family Households	73.1%	-1.5%	-12.6%	49.0%
Number of Persons in Families*	67.9%	-1.8%	-8.2%	50.8%
Percent Change 2010-2013				
Total Population	4.0%	0.1%	0.3%	-1.2%
Population 16 and Over*	4.1%	0.5%	0.6%	-0.4%
Percent of People in Poverty	-4.8%	5.1%	1.6%	6.1%
Poverty Rate for Families	-6.2%	12.2%	-3.6%	1.2%
Percent of Households with Supplemental Security Income	7.8%	8.9%	38.3%	6.3%
Mean SSI	6.8%	6.0%	8.3%	0.8%
Percent of Households with Cash Benefits	13.8%	-2.4%	-5.7%	-2.3%
Mean Cash Benefits	-27.4%	9.3%	-23.6%	-14.2%
Percent of Households with Food Stamps	-0.6%	16.2%	17.2%	11.4%
Unemployment Rate	-41.8%	-18.2%	-21.4%	-19.3%
Median Family Income**	7.6%	3.4%	4.4%	10.2%
Median Rent	6.6%	4.4%	1.2%	0.6%
Pct of renters paying 30% or more Income to Gross Rent	-11.0%	-7.9%	-10.9%	-0.4%
Pct units with 1.01 or more occupants per room**	13.0%	45.5%	-25.0%	0.0%
Rental Vacancy Rate	-48.1%	-45.5%	-41.8%	-24.8%
Eviction Court Filings**	2.0%	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
Fair Market Rent (2BR)	4.3%	6.0%	2.1%	0.7%
<i>Notes:</i>				
*Change is based on 2010 to 2013.				
**Potential leading indicator				
Indicates an increase       Indicates a change for the better Indicates a decrease       Indicates a change for the worse				

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010-2013