ANNUAL

SNAPSHOT 2015

OF SERVICE AND SHELTER USE

Photo from Heart of Iowa Recovery

IOWANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Institute for Community Alliances

12,918

Iowans were homeless in 2015 and served by emergency shelters, transitional housing, rapid rehousing or street outreach projects.

Photo from Shelter House

Another 8,174 Iowans were at risk of homeless and served in permanent supportive housing, homelessness prevention or other projects.

Each number is an un-duplicated count, although a person may be counted within multiple populations if they were in multiple populations during the year. For example, a person may have been at-risk of homelessness and then become homeless during 2015.

3,791 people overlap the two populations, often in situations where one agency provides shelter and another provides case management. The total un-duplicated population served in 2015 was 17,301.

Iowa's Statewide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is used by most homeless agencies across Iowa. 56% of program beds participate in the HMIS network. The non-participating agencies are primarily comprised of mission shelters. Emergency shelter participation, the primary domain of the missions, is 40% statewide; 2.6% in Siouxland, 82% in Polk County and 38% in the balance of the state. For transitional housing projects participation is 100% in Sioux, 96% in Polk and 74% in the balance of the state.

Point in time counts are conducted on the CoC level. They are summable because the three continua conduct their point in time counts on the same night. Every data point in time is a unique collection of people.

All homeless numbers aside from Point in Time are drawn from the HMIS database, operated by the Institute for Community Alliances. All agencies enter data on behalf of their clients. The advantage of the point in time data is that, for that one night each year, every bed is counted. The advantage of the HMIS data is that for the participating beds, every night is counted.

Both

At Risk

Homeless

SYSTEMS

Systems are all around us, but easy to overlook.

People live in a system that creates homelessness, but they often cannot see the system.

Like a fish in water they are immersed in systems, but blame themselves for their homelessness. Education systems, housing systems, economic systems, health care and mental health care systems, each contributed to outcomes. If the intersection of economics and housing is not aligned, then some people have to be homeless. Failure is not personal. Failure is systemic.

Without systemic thinking each case is an isolated problem that blames victims for their homelessness, that tells people to blame themselves for not finding success when success was not a practical option.

The last Wednesday of January is the
POINT IN TIME

STREET
RAPID RE-HOUSING
EMERGENCY SHELTER
TRANSITIONAL HOUSING
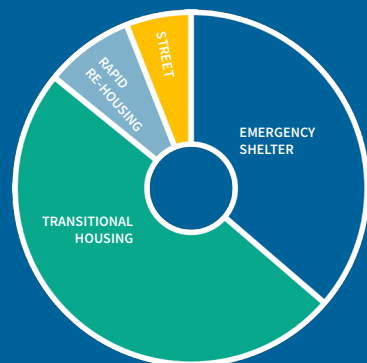
Every day of the year contributes to the
ANNUAL COUNT

RAPID RE-HOUSING
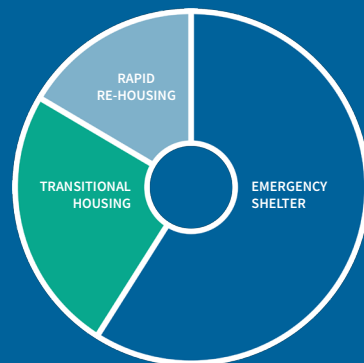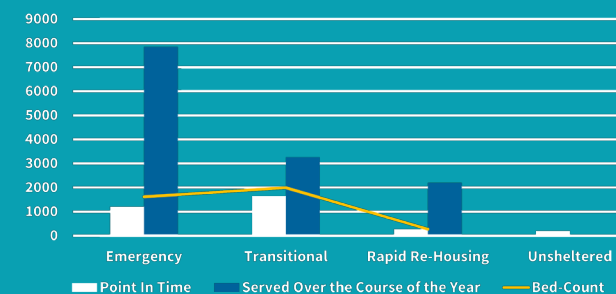TRANSITIONAL HOUSING
EMERGENCY SHELTER

Photo by Isaac Campbell.

The point-in-time count is on the last Wednesday of January every year. It is the only time a thorough count of people living in places not meant for human habitation, and people sheltered in places not participating in the HMIS network occurs. By contrast, the annual count is generated from the HMIS system. While it does not include non-participating agencies, it does account for variations experiences throughout the year.

	Emergency	Transitional	Rapid Re-Housing	Unsheltered

■ Point In Time ■ Served Over the Course of the Year — Bed-Count

At any given time, there are more people in transitional housing than in emergency shelter and rational rehousing, but over the course of the year there are two-and-a-half times as many people served in emergency shelter. This is often called churn. People go into shelter, get help, and move on. They just brush against the homeless system but don't become "homeless people". This is part of a much larger problem.
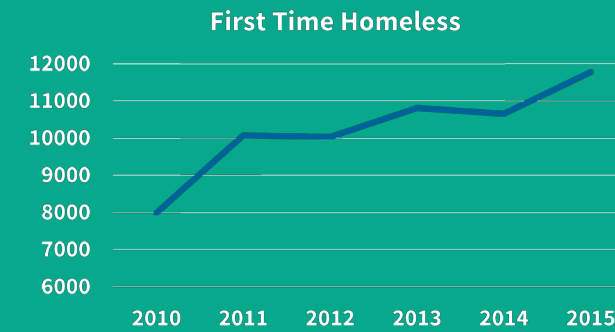

Photo by Linn County PiT team

The Linn county point-in-time team.

Photo from Bridges West

People who were not in HMIS 24 months prior to entry are
FIRST TIME HOMELESS

First Time Homeless

Over the last several years the percent of first time homeless has been steadily increasing. The face of homelessness is changing. As the economy recovers, more and more people experiencing instability are experiencing it for the first time, but more briefly and in a way that seems to be less life-defining. Increasingly, people who are repeatedly homeless also experience severe disabilities.

Photo by Isaac Campbell.

SYSTEMS

Systems aren't something we need to invent. They are something we need to discover. They already exist.

If we neglect them they function poorly. If we engage them with informed coordinated leadership they function well.

Seeing them can be hard. Systems perspectives are not always intuitive. It takes work.

Government and private funders intersect with the lives lived by people in poverty. They constitute a holistic poverty response system. Homeless prevention and housing responses are a part. In turn, agencies and the people they serve are part of a broader economy made from interpersonal social networks of the people living in poverty along with people living in middle and upper classes.

EXISTING HOMELESS

FIRST TIME HOMELESS
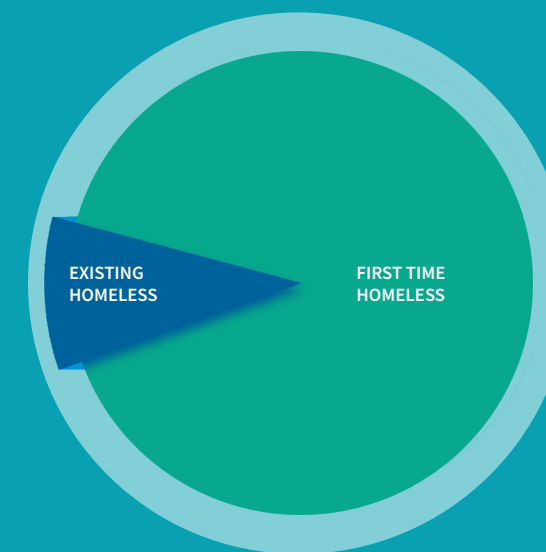
The balance of first time homelessness, exits to a permanent destination, length of time homeless, and people returning from a permanent destination tells the story of our homeless response system. The best situation, aside from no homelessness, is for all homeless be first time homeless, staying for a short time, going to a permanent destination and not returning.

Photo from Shelter House

SYSTEMS

People look for the bootstraps they heard about.

They can't seem to "get over" their addiction, mental health disability, unemployment, familial alienation, history of abuse, criminal history, deficit of life skills, physical disability or abject poverty.

A systems perspective lets us see the relationship among successes and failures. They build on each other and make it possible to see more useful solutions. Not just for one instance of homelessness but for why there is homelessness at all.
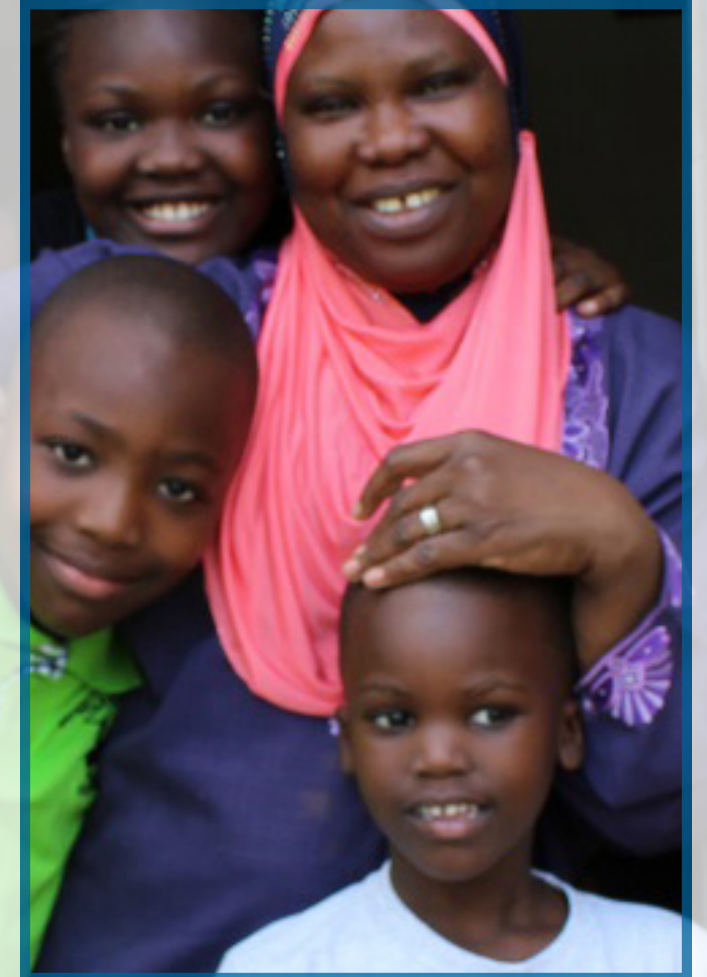
Photo from Shelter House

Successful Placements from Permanent Supportive Housing

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
84%					
82%					
80%					
78%					
76%					
74%					
72%					
70%					
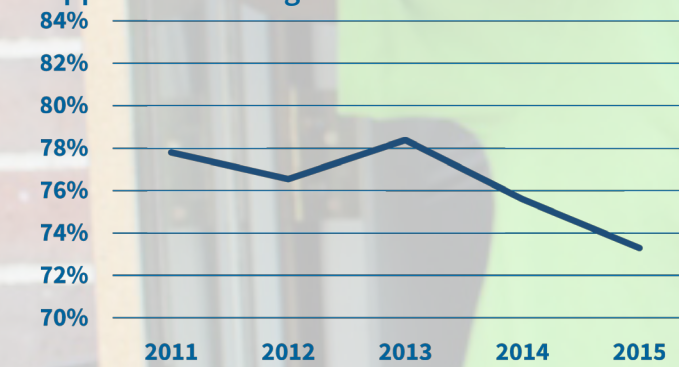
Successful Placements from Emergency Shelter or Transitional Housing

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
44%					
42%					
40%					
38%					
36%					
34%					
32%					
30%					
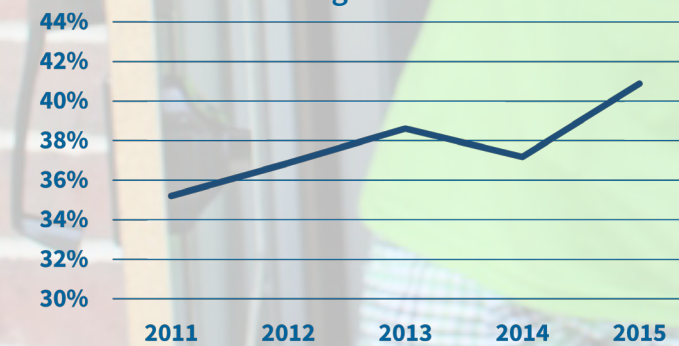
Successful placement depends on the program from which the client exits. For street outreach, moving to a shelter is success. Success from emergency and transitional programs require permanence, places with a reasonable expectation of stability. Permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing carry the expectation of self-sufficient permanence.

Lyon Osceola Dickinson Emmet Winnebago Worth Mitchell Howard Winneshiek Allamakee

Sioux O'Brien Clay Palo Alto Kossuth Hancock Cerro Gordo Floyd Chickasaw

Plymouth Cherokee Buena Vista Pocahontas Humboldt Wright Franklin Butler Bremer Fayette Clayton

Woodbury Ida Sac Calhoun Webster Hamilton Hardin Grundy Black Hawk Buchanan Delaware Dubuque

Monona Crawford Carroll Greene Boone Story Marshall Tama Benton Linn Jones Jackson

Harrison Shelby Audubon Guthrie Dallas Polk Jasper Poweshiek Iowa Johnson Cedar Clinton

Pottawattamie Cass Adair Madison Warren Marion Mahaska Keokuk Washington Muscatine Scott

Mills Montgomery Adams Union Clarke Lucas Monroe Wapello Jefferson Henry Louisa

Fremont Page Taylor Ringgold Decatur Wayne Appanoose Davis Van Buren Des Moines Lee

Nebraska Illinois

Days between a person first receiving service and exiting service is

LENGTH OF EPISODE

Emergency Shelter
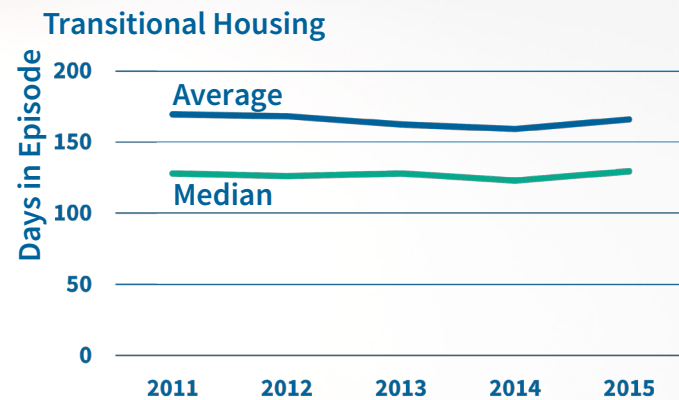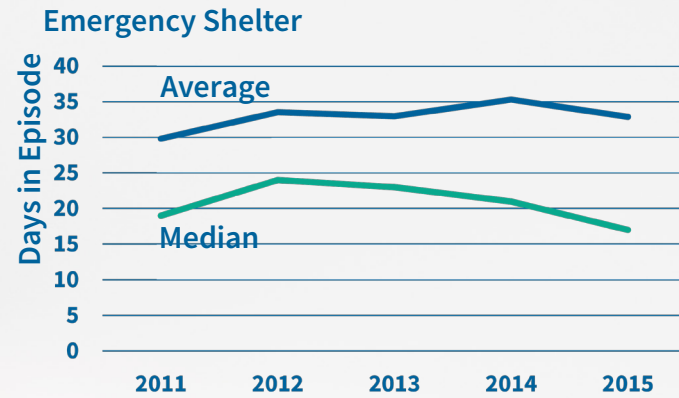

Transitional Housing

Photo by Isaac Campbell.

Photo by Niles George.

The average length of episode is a count of the days people were served, divided by the number of people who were served. The median accounts for outliers, long stayers. If there is a big difference between average and median, then some people have been in service longer than is reasonable and need other interventions.

Emergency shelter is typically capped at 90 days, and often has a goal of 30 days or less. Transitional housing has a limit of 2 years.

SYSTEMS

Systems perspectives reveal a relationship among increasing minimum wages, tax credits and subsidies for building truly affordable housing, public transportation for the lowest income workers, childcare, child transportation solutions and after school programs.

For desperate moments of instability, the solution starts with an emergency home.

Agencies that provide housing solutions are perpetually short of funding to address community need, and often shoulder the blame for the homelessness response system's failure. Solution providers are in need of a systems perspective as much as the people experiencing homelessness.

In a system, blame is not a useful concept. The whole-community is responsible for the problem and the solution. This perspective is increasingly mandated by funders like HUD, who want to see real and lasting solutions.

CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

Self-reported causes of homelessness are aggregable to three basic causes. 52% say economics caused their homelessness. 16% say disability, including mental health and addiction. The disabled can be stably housed if they have money and support. 21% say a breakdown of their support network. But dysfunctional families can be stably housed with money. 11% say Jail or other things. Being discharged from jail without money or a support network leads to homelessness. Money and support networks together prevent homelessness. There is not singe cause, but it's the interaction of poverty, health, and family.

Bad decisions don't cause homelessness. They become bad decisions in retrospect. Other explanations are more comfortable. The illusion of control makes the reality hurt less.

It is hard to understand as it happens. People deal with the problem in front of them, with little power and few options. Those decision may have consequences later.

The decisions seem rational at the time given the circumstances. No decision is a solution and the best strategy is imperfect coping mechanisms. Nobody chooses homelessness, but sometimes that is the story they tell because they can't see where they could have made another choice.

A systems solution to homelessness means building a world where better choices seem viable at the time.

52%	16%	21%	11%
Economics	Disability	Family	Jail and other

Photo from Bridges West
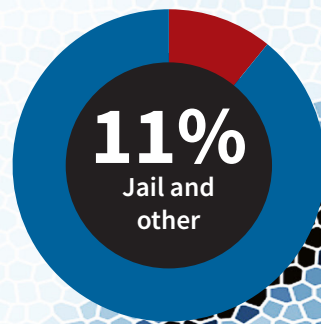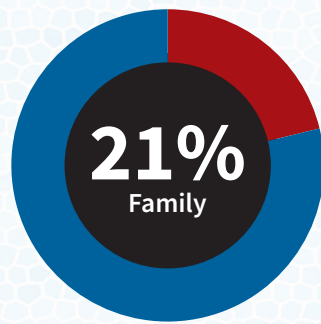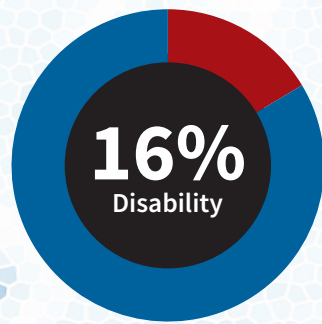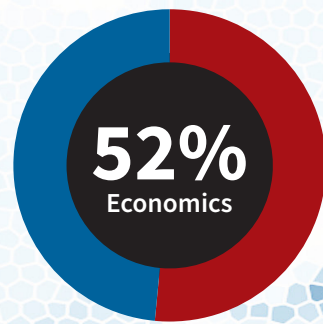
SYSTEMS

System leaders need indicators of direction, robust turn-by-turn directions to solutions.

Not just indicators of their part of the system, but it's relationship to all the other parts, including parts we don't even know about. Each part seems isolated, but that is just our perspective. The truth is each part is scattered along the lives of the people in the system.

Solutions, then, by necessity are collaborative efforts. Case managers often do this intuitively. A client needs a bank account, a job, SNAPS and transportation, medications and counseling, housing subsidies and intervention with a landlord. Planning across those systems is difficult.

SYSTEMS

It is challenging to come up with measures and objectives for isolated agencies.

Our robust data network helps.

Now the homelessness response system is planning with system-level measures across an entire continuum of care. It is engaging with projects at multiple agencies, including unfunded volunteer driven and community based efforts. The data network is being used coordinate system-entry and intake. Members of the housing system are working with landlords and developers to monitor the housing stock and find non-eviction solutions.

We are interested in all these things, not at the individual level the project level or even the agency level, but at the community system level. Looking forward, our system performance measures from HUD include different definitions of instability. Eventually we will be asked to talk to educators and account for involuntary doubling up of youth in unrelated households. It's coming, but it starts now and it starts by thinking in systems.

In Iowa in 2015, 2,424 families of 5,800 people including 3,392 children under 18 years old were served by shelters, transitional housing or permanent supportive housing.

- Family
- Unaccompanied
- Transitional Housing
- Emergency Shelter
- Permanent Supportive
- Adults
- Children
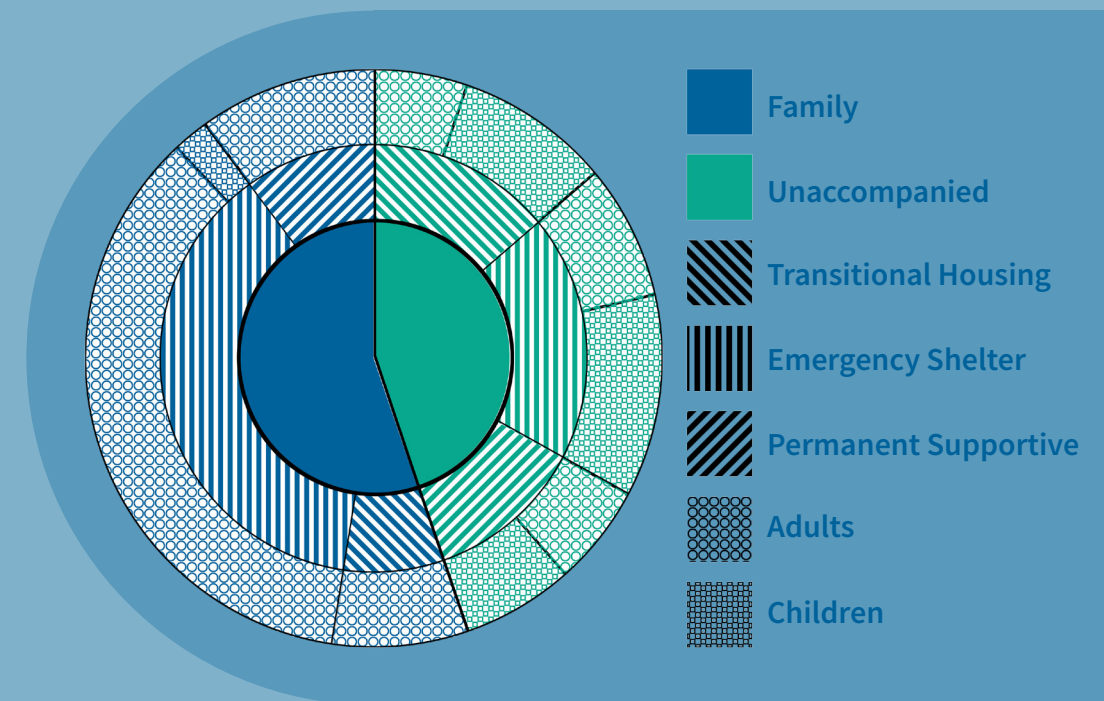
FAMILIES, INDIVIDUALS, AND CHILDREN

Photo by Muscatine Center for Social Action

Family structure is a powerful source of social capital, and the strongest indicator of outcomes and life course. Where families are still intact, it is the greatest resource we can use to encourage long term stability. Particularly for children, preventing instability in childhood results in children who can succeed, learn and grow. Allowing instability to take root leads to negative health outcomes and increased poverty.
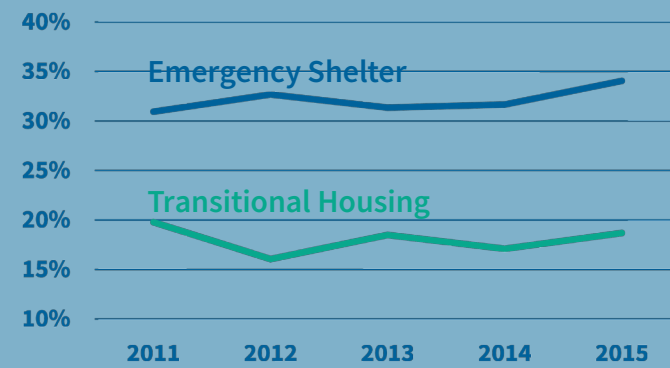
RETURN TO HOMELESSNESS

If a person exits to a permanent destination, then becomes homeless within two years, they had a **RETURN TO HOMELESSNESS**

Photo by Niles George.
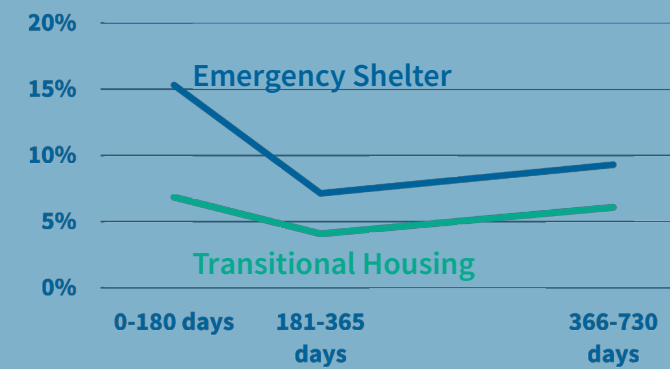
DISABLED

Total Returns to Homeless within 2 years

Emergency Shelter

Transitional Housing

| | 40% 35% 30% 25% 20% 15% 10% |
| 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |

The window for return ends in the year noted. So, the 2015 number represents clients exiting in 2013, and returning within 2 years from their exit date, up to the end of 2015.

Unique Returns to Homeless Over Time

Emergency Shelter

Transitional Housing

20% 15% 10% 5% 0%

0-180 days | 181-365 days | 366-730 days

Every year follows the same pattern. In the first six months, 0-180 days, we see the most returns from permanent destinations. What they had hoped would be a new stability proved unstable. Then the number declines for the next six months. In the second year it goes back up slightly, as people experience new incidents of instability.

If we look at the population returning to homelessness, people with disabilities are significantly more likely to return; quickly for shelter stayers and over a longer time for people exiting transitional programming.

Emergency Shelter

Not Disabled | Disabled

Transitional Housing

Not Disabled | Disabled

Emergency Shelter

Disabled

Not Disabled

20% 15% 10% 5% 0%

0-180 days | 181-365 days | 366-730 days

Transitional Housing

Disabled

Not Disabled

10% 8% 6% 4% 2% 0%

0-180 days | 181-365 days | 366-730 days
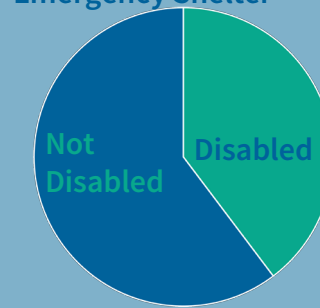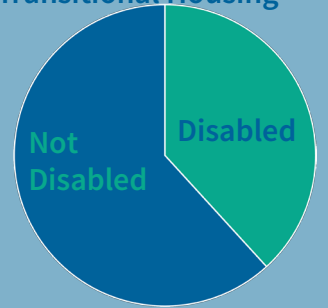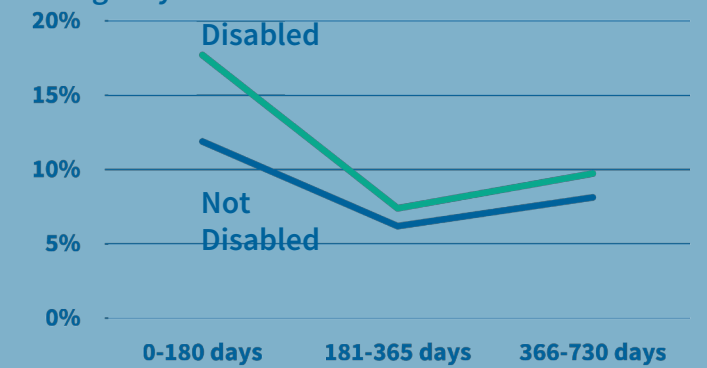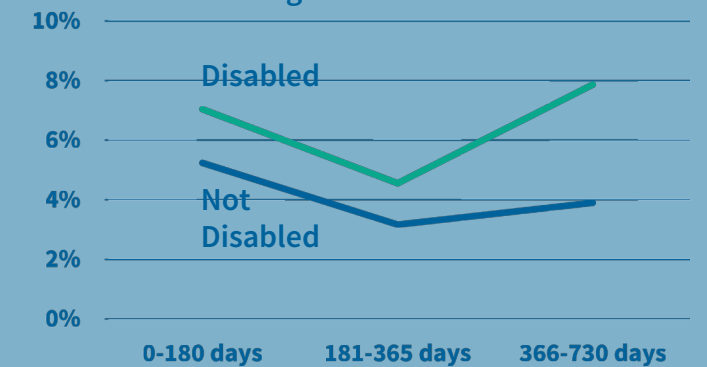
USICH MAYOR'S CHALLENGE TO END VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

USICH and Michelle Obama declared victory in the Des Moines Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness

June 4, 2014, First Lady Michelle Obama announced the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness.

February 25, 2016

The Honorable T.M. Franklin Cownie
Mayor, City of Des Moines
675 Harwood Drive
Des Moines, IA 50312-2313

Dear Mayor Cownie:

Thank you for your commitment to ending Veteran homelessness. Your leadership—and that of your colleagues across the city of Des Moines and Polk County—has been instrumental as we work together to ensure that every Veteran in our county has a home. As one of the first Mayors to sign on to the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, you paved the way for countless other state, city, and local officials to undertake this bold and ambitious mission.

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Department of Veterans Affairs are pleased to confirm that the city of Des Moines and Polk County have effectively ended homelessness among Veterans. We are confident that the infrastructure and systems you have built will ensure that any Veteran experiencing a housing crisis in Des Moines or Polk County will get the support they need to quickly obtain a permanent home.

On behalf of USICH and our Federal partners, thank you for answering the First Lady's call to action through the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness. We recognize and appreciate your extraordinary team, and look forward to continuing our collaboration as we work to end homelessness for all Americans.

Sincerely,

Matthew Doherty
Executive Director

Cc: Ann Marie Oliva, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Special Needs, HUD
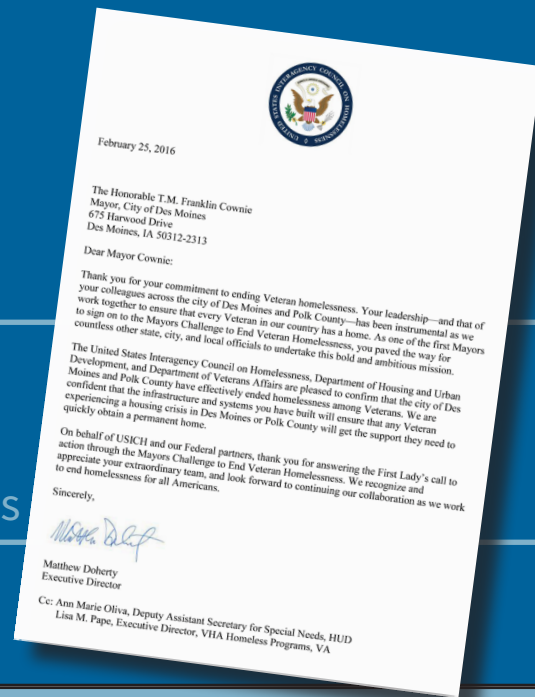Lisa M. Pape, Executive Director, VHA Homeless Programs, VA

Photo by Muscatine Center for Social Action

When the challenge first met on January 14, 2015 there were 70 homeless veterans in Des Moines. By the end of 2015 all 70 were exited and more than 250 additional veterans had been identified. More than 210 had been housed within an average of around 50 days.

The criteria included five qualities and four benchmarks. Together they describe what has come to be known as a *functional zero*. At any time there are still homeless veterans in Des Moines. The functional zero provides that a constant and vigilant effort is made to identify homeless veterans, once identified those veterans are immediately sheltered and quickly provided a practical route to stability involving housing choice. Service intensive transitional housing programs are only used in cases where there is a clear need for them, and not as a stop-gap warehousing solution. The community needs to maintain enough housing stock to accommodate low income veterans.

The benchmarks required that there be no chronically homeless veterans experiencing homelessness, unless those veterans had been offered housing and actively refused it, and even then the offer has to be repeated every two weeks. They required that there be no more than 90 days between identification of a homeless veteran and placement in permanent stable housing. Des Moines was considerably lower, typically between 50 and 55 days. The last two benchmarks were questions of ratios; newly identified to permanently housed and permanently housed to placed in transitional housing. Both ratios were safely in positive territory.
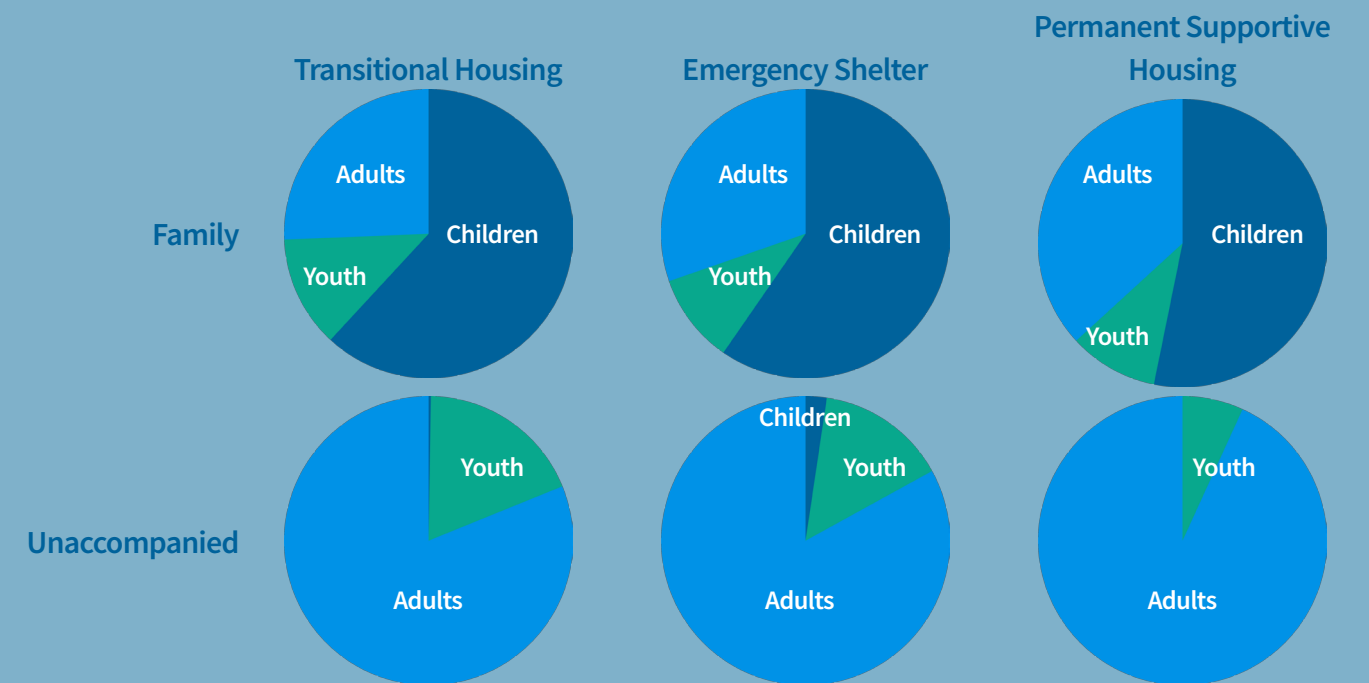
The goal was accomplished with meetings every two weeks, where social workers got together in a room with a list of homeless veterans. Every name on the list was discussed and a plan was formed or revised about how to place that veteran in permanent stable housing.

It can not be overstated how well this worked, and how important the process was. It is also vital that the Veteran's Administration put money in place to fund housing vouchers. They made ending veteran homelessness a priority and it was accomplished.

Special programs exist to address homeless youth through age 25.

HOMELESS YOUTH

By preventing homelessness during youth, we improve adult stability.

Transitional Housing

Family: Adults, Children, Youth

Unaccompanied: Youth, Adults

Emergency Shelter

Family: Adults, Children, Youth

Unaccompanied: Children, Youth, Adults

Permanent Supportive Housing

Family: Adults, Children, Youth

Unaccompanied: Youth, Adults

Photo from Bridges West

Everyone Deserves a Home

Institute for Community Alliances

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Des Moines, Iowa 50314

www.icalliances.org