



## ANNUAL REPORT 2020 - 2021



### Who experiences hunger and homelessness?

It may not be who you expect.

It's certainly not the film version that suggests a homeless or hungry person is a man seemingly without the motivation to improve his life.

There's nothing typical about homelessness or hunger. Both can impact men or women, young or old, working or nonworking. And it strikes many people unexpectedly.



Union County residents who are experiencing homelessness may have a job loss, divorce, rent increase, illness, family dispute or something as minor as vehicle failure. These circumstances can quickly move residents from independence to temporary homelessness.

Our county also has many working households whose income just won't stretch enough to pay all the housing bills and to buy enough food.

At the Community Shelter, we are dedicated to being a low-barrier shelter, providing access and services to all populations. Our services support equitable opportunities because safe, affordable housing and food security are basic human rights.

We address underlying homeless and hunger problems, guiding clients back to self-sufficiency and independent living quickly.

The quicker the return to stability, the less traumatic the episode of homelessness, especially for children.

We focus on three areas – emergency shelter, food and rehousing – and collaborate with organizations with complementary programs.





# EMERGENCY SHELTER

A short stay in the emergency shelter is the best stay. The sooner a homeless person returns to independent living, the better chance he has for long-term self-sufficiency.

The Community Shelter provides short-term emergency shelter to Union County residents who have become homeless for varied reasons. Many clients are homeless due to the combination of low income and rising housing costs.

Prior to the onset of Covid, we sheltered up to 90 people nightly on our campus in separate family, men's and women's dormitory wings on our campus.

Covid, however, prompted a radical change to our sleeping arrangements. In the men's and women's dorms, we moved the beds six feet apart to provide a safer sleeping environment.

We moved medically vulnerable residents to local motel rooms out of concern for their safety and continue to rent rooms to accommodate overflow demand for emergency shelter.



We consistently house 30-plus residents in motels and established an office there to ensure those residents receive the same supportive services as those staying at our onsite facility.

Motel residents are encouraged to eat meals at the Shelter; but many do not have transportation. Staff delivers dinner and other bagged meals to motel residents.

Covid significantly increased the demand for emergency shelter due to restrictions in the service industry, no job availability and limited housing market for affordable rehousing.

## Economic Mobility Program helps Shelter residents find jobs

Homelessness in Union County often is prompted by low income. Many workers earn the minimum hourly wage of \$7.65, which translates into little or no savings and week-to-week subsistence. A major car repair bill and no way to get to work can cause the worker to lose their job. Or an illness can prevent working long-term. Or the need to be home with school-aged children during illness or quarantine can mean the loss of income when working a job without benefits. These are issues that we see regularly at the Shelter.

The key is helping clients see a pathway to obtain a higher income, job security and benefits including health insurance and paid time off. Our Economic Mobility Program does just that.

Through personal sessions with Shelter residents and group computer labs, we provide access to job training in partnership with South Piedmont Community College.

Former program participant Raymond Barrineau says, "I've found that if you really want help, the wonderful God-loving people that work here will bend over backwards to help you get a hand up – not a handout."

Last year, 99 adults were enrolled in the program, with 84 initially unemployed. Through the program, 57 became employed and 43 have sustained employment to date.

# Single mother of three

*'I was blessed to find people there who care'*

"I came in quick and got out quick," says Danielle Gaither of her family's 48-day stay at the Community Shelter earlier this year.

"I knew what I had to do, and I did it," she said.

Danielle, 35, and her three children – ages 15, 11 and 4 – sought emergency shelter when their rent was raised to \$1,500 a month. "I couldn't pay it," she says matter-of-factly. That amount is more than the family's monthly income.

Danielle knew she needed assistance to resume her independence. "It broke my heart with kids in the Shelter," she says, "but I was glad we had a place to live.

"They were so sweet to me and my kids. They loved me and my kids."

While there, her family stayed in a private family room and ate meals in the dining hall at no cost, which allowed her to quickly save money for the move home.

Once her family was safe, Danielle met with her housing case manager, Sandra Clarke, and learned how the rehousing program would help her move back to independent living. She needed to save money for rehousing expenses and to find a new home that would keep her family close to their support system of family, friends and schools.

"I was blessed to find people there who care. I did everything they asked me to do," Danielle says. "We obeyed the rules. Miss Sandra did get on me occasionally and the kids, too, trying to keep us on track. I liked that; both of us were working hard to get us out of the Shelter and into a home of our own."

Danielle says she would recommend the Shelter and its programs to anyone experiencing hunger or homelessness. "We were treated with respect and welcomed. We were in a safe place."

When the family was ready to move to their new home, the Shelter provided financial assistance for upfront moving costs, including the deposit, first-month rent and utility deposit.

Danielle's road to the Shelter is not all that unusual. Life was under control until circumstances beyond her control dramatically changed everything.



A single parent, Danielle is unable to work, a result of a ruptured aorta that prompted emergency heart surgery and a six-month hospitalization.

Once discharged from the hospital, Danielle and her children lived with family. But when those family dynamics deteriorated, they had nowhere else to go.

"Shelter staff saw that I was trying to get out and treated us with kindness. It was nice that they helped us so much." Clarke, her case manager, says that Danielle is the reason the family moved quickly.

"She worked diligently to make her family's Shelter stay short. I'm proud that the partnership between the Shelter program and Danielle worked so well," Clarke says.

Despite having her own apartment, Danielle's life still isn't easy. She cannot drive and must rely on friends for transportation and on a visiting nursing assistant to clean their apartment and run errands.

She is awaiting a decision that could provide disability income for monthly bills, but in the interim, the family relies on her son's disability income.

"I'm on a very tight budget. I struggle but I'm paying every bill," she says, adding that sometimes her mother helps. She receives no child support.

Danielle says she will do everything in her power to not return to the Shelter, "but I'm grateful for it being there when I needed it."





# FOOD

Food is a basic need for all of us, but in Union County, many people living in their own homes simply don't have enough to eat.

They may be forced to choose between paying for prescriptions, for example, and buying nutritious food for their family.

No one should have to make that choice.

We operate multiple food distribution programs to ensure that all county families experiencing hunger can have the food they need.

If you need food, we'll give you food, whether it's a prepared meal in our dining hall, a food box in our drive-thru pantries, a federally subsidized food box for senior citizens or food in collaboration with one of our nonprofit partners, such as Second Harvest of Metrolina, Common Heart and Rice N Beans.

Our prepared meals are served three times a day,

every day, to onsite residents and community neighbors needing a meal. No questions asked; no eligibility requirement – just a need for food.

Due to the pandemic's social distancing guidelines, we have different meal times for onsite residents and community neighbors. We also provide nutritious bagged lunches for our working residents to take to their job site.



With food boxes, we are helping community residents keep

their homes. A twice monthly \$100 food box can make the difference between paying the rent or being evicted for someone earning minimum wage or receiving Social Security benefits.

We depend on food donations from the public to support our drive-thru pantries. Last year, food donations of shelf stable food totalled 197,721 pounds, with a value of more than \$330,000.

## Shelter distributes \$876,193 in eviction relief funds

The Covid pandemic pushed the Community Shelter into eviction relief services. Since Covid began, we have distributed \$876,193 in eviction relief funds to help prevent renters from losing their homes. Financial assistance since March 2020 has supported 262 county households with 687 individuals.

Funding also benefitted their landlords who experienced loss of rental income. The average household payment was \$3,344. Funding came from federal and state disbursements.

A recipient says, "I have not really had to ask for help like this before and you helped me through this experience without me feeling low to do it! God bless you!"

"Many residents in Union County have been out of work for more than a year or have seen their work hours cut to the point that they cannot pay their bills," says Melissa McKeown, Shelter CEO.

"Without financial assistance, their past due rent would continue to accumulate, despite the moratorium. Imagine trying to pay four months of back rent, at \$700 a month for example, when your monthly (minimum wage) income of \$1,255 barely covers your current month's bills."

# 27-year meal provider

## *'I would do this every night if I could'*

It's unusual for a volunteer to provide Shelter meals for 27 years, but Joanne Mucci is an unusual woman.

The 80-year-old woman says of cooking for the Shelter, "I would do this every night if I could."

Her homemade meal providing started with leftovers from a Thanksgiving dinner 27 years ago. "Let's take them to the Shelter," she remembers saying to her family.

Little did she know how that dinner of leftovers would change her life.

"I had no clue that God was going to do what he did," she says. "When I saw the number of people getting a meal at the Shelter, I said 'Well, I can do a little better than once in a while!'"

And she did. Thousands of meals later, Joanne remains committed to her mission.

In the beginning, "I served every night; that was a blessing to my heart. God blessed me in a way that I had enough to do it. I started bringing dinner at night and sandwiches for the next day's lunch," she recalls. She also toted containers of hot chocolate plus grits and oatmeal to neighbors on the streets.

Back then, the Shelter saw 25 to 30 individuals for dinner, a number that has risen to upwards of 100. The number of diners and the amount of food needed weren't daunting then or now to Joanne.

A quiet demeanor belies the depth of Joanne's determination. "All you have to do is be willing.

"People are missing the blessing of being on the giving end."



She urges churches, families and other groups to provide meals, which more than 150 do each year.

The Shelter provides three meals a day, every day, to residents and community neighbors experiencing a food need. Hundreds of those meals are provided by community organizations and caring individuals, like Joanne, who deliver a prepared meal, cook in our kitchen or order restaurant meals for delivery.

Emphasizing that "I get more joy here than in everything else I do," she adds, "I wouldn't give it up for all the money in the world."

## Step It Up provides free bicycles to residents

It's not easy to get around Union County if you don't have a vehicle. More than half our residents have no vehicle, making it difficult to get to work, see family, seek employment or go to doctors' visits.

Our Step It Up bicycle program provides a mode of transportation to temporary residents of the Shelter. We rely on donations of adult bicycles in working condition and are grateful to the many individuals and groups who have helped clients. The Shelter offers a reflective vest, helmet and lock to all bicycle recipients.

Through our 2021 fiscal year, 86 clients have received bicycles, which they keep when transitioning back to independent living.



# REHOUSING

Safe, affordable housing is a basic human right – but it's a right that hundreds of county residents lack.

By encouraging rehousing, we keep homelessness from becoming chronic for many county residents.

Our rehousing programs support and guide the temporarily homeless while encouraging them to resolve the issues that prompted their homelessness.

Clients' unique housing needs are addressed with tailored solutions that might include rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, family reunification or roommate contracts.

Experienced case managers help clients combine community resources to obtain and retain a job, improve job and budgeting skills, address health issues and obtain affordable and sustainable housing.

Shelter services don't end when residents move into their new home. Case managers follow them for a year after they move out, which helps homelessness from recurring.

Last year, 112 households moved to a new home through our Rapid Rehousing program and received rent, utility and move-in subsidies as needed.

## Employed man whose house burned 'This place does wonders for people.'

Ed McManus was driving a commercial load to Tampa when he got a call that changed his life.

"They said my house was on fire. Sure enough, it was burned to the ground. Everything I had was burned," he says.

"I didn't really know what to do. I stayed in my truck and motels until I ran out of money."

He sought help from the Community Shelter and quickly was housed in a motel room because no beds were available in the men's dorm.

"I stayed there and worked," he says.

But he needed help finding a new home, and his housing case manager, Justice McKinney, was there to help.

"She worked with me to find an apartment I could afford, and I've been there for four months now," he explains. "That's the help I needed."

While living in the motel, "I filed for food stamps and



enjoyed the supper the Shelter delivered each evening."

Ed saved "a good bit of money" for his expenses in securing a new home and for paying startup fees and deposits.

Now living in his own apartment, Ed continues to work twice a week with Economic Mobility Manager Meghan

Montemurro in the Shelter's employment lab and is applying at local businesses "for when the seasonal landscaping work ends. I come over here when I can to look, see what's available."

He touts the Shelter's programs, saying, "You can't ask for a better situation for somebody who doesn't have anything.

"If you need to come here, you need to come with an open mind because this place does wonders for people.

"Just follow their directions and do what you need to do. You can't go wrong."

# 2020 - 2021 At a glance



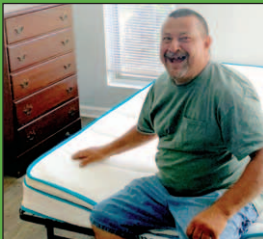
## Emergency Shelter

Total overnight stays in emergency shelter - 23,188  
On-campus stays - 17,159 nights for 483 individuals  
Motel stays - 6,029 nights to 100 individuals



## Food

Meals served in dining hall - 52,221 to 937 individuals  
Meals served with pantry food - 539,204  
Pounds of food distributed in drive-thru pantries - 647,045



## Rehousing

Individuals moved to independent housing - 175  
Households moved to independent housing - 112  
Households receiving Home Again furniture, supplies - 64



## Eviction Relief

Relief funds distributed - \$876,193  
Individuals receiving support - 687 in 262 households  
Average support amount - \$3,344



## Volunteers

Hours contributed by volunteers - 21,050  
Full-time equivalency (FTE) of volunteer support - 10.12 FTE  
Savings from volunteer work - \$600,767 (Independent Sector valuation)



# Where our funding comes from

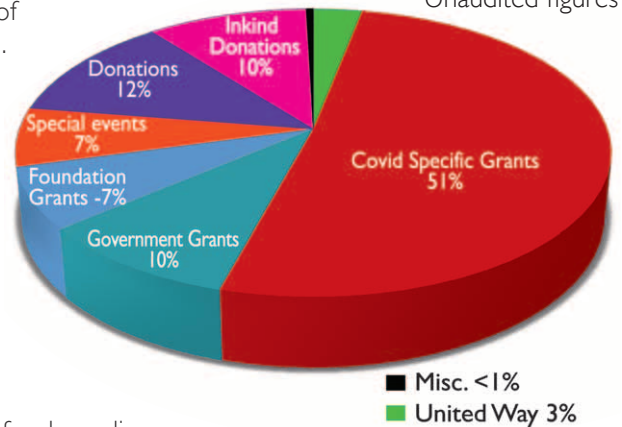
Financials for fiscal year 2020-2021 were significantly impacted by the Covid pandemic. More than half of our operational revenue of \$3,776,580 was Covid-restricted funding – \$1,932,613.

Of that restricted revenue, \$876,193 was direct pass-through grants distributed as eviction relief funding to landlords and county renters whose income was curtailed by Covid. Our previous year operational revenue was \$1,782,340.

Despite Covid, the Community Shelter still depended heavily on financial contributions from individuals, businesses and churches, which were the second highest source of income – \$447,960.

The value of in-kind contributions, such as utilities and food supplies, totaled \$387,171. Combined financial and in-kind donations totaled \$835,131, or 22 percent of the budget.

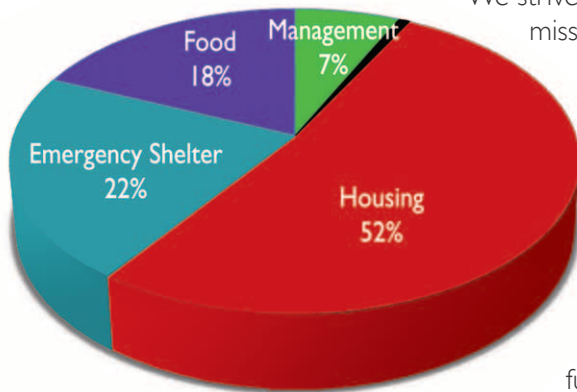
You, the public, continued to support Shelter clients last year in a third way – through special events. Despite virtually all events being online or person-to-person contact, event revenue totaled \$252,337.



**We say it frequently, but it's true – we couldn't do it without you!**

# How we spend that funding

We strive to be good stewards of the donations invested in our mission.



Just as Covid impacted our income, it also impacted our expenses, which totaled \$3,402,354. As comparison, the previous year's operational expenses were \$1,756,384.

Housing expense typically amounts to approximately 30 percent of our annual budget, but last year's housing expense was 52 percent of our budget – due to eviction relief pass-through funding.

*The Union County Community Shelter, dba Community Shelter of Union County, is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, Federal Tax ID# 58-2121860.*

**COMMUNITY SHELTER**  
Of Union County  
EMERGENCY SHELTER ■ FOOD ■ REHOUSING

*The Community Shelter of Union County provides emergency shelter, food and rehousing. Our low-barrier services support equitable opportunities because safe, affordable housing and food security are basic human rights.*

For volunteer or donor opportunities, visit [UnionShelter.org/GetInvolved](http://UnionShelter.org/GetInvolved).  
160 Meadow St., Monroe, NC 28110 ♦ [www.UnionShelter.org](http://www.UnionShelter.org) ♦ 704.289.5300