

Affordable And Accessible Housing Needs and Barriers

Community Voices in the Pikes Peak Region



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Introduction and Overview of Findings

The Independence Center (The IC) empowers people who are living with disabilities to achieve independence. Disabilities impact about 1 in 5 Americans; they present themselves in every community circle. There is a spectrum of disabilities and a wide diversity among them. Some may be easily noticeable; others are invisible.

Living with a disability does not have to prevent a person from thriving. However, achieving independence is often a process of overcoming societal barriers, including access to goods and services, transportation, and housing.

Safe and stable housing is a baseline for all well-being. But for many, obtaining affordable and accessible housing is a struggle. These are people who work intensely to overcome cycles of poverty or dependence on others, and their efforts often run into road blocks. This report tells the stories of people who are experiencing barriers to obtain and sustain housing.


What is Affordable and Accessible Housing?

The definition of affordability may shift with income; however, guidelines hold true across the economic spectrum. Most financial experts agree that no more than 30% of a household's income should be devoted to housing, a number that aligns with federal guidelines. No more than 45% of income should be spent on housing and transportation combined.

Accessibility can refer to a person's ability to enter their home and live fully within every room of their home. It also represents the ability to reach common goods, services and activities. For those who do not own or operate automobiles, access may be particularly restricted.

There are immense housing challenges facing our communities in Colorado Springs and El Paso County. Housing costs are increasing rapidly, and incoming jobs are paying below median wages. The fastest growing sectors of the local economy have lower-than-median earnings on average, yet the market is generating more high-end housing units. In this climate, there is a deficit in the amount of available housing stock in the area that is expected to increase over the next five years. This affects households with extremely low, low and moderate income levels. The number of accessible housing units that are affordable is inadequate to meet the need.¹

(Refer to the *Colorado Springs and El Paso County Affordable Housing Needs Assessment 2014* for a comprehensive picture of current housing conditions.)



Homelessness in Colorado Springs is a problem that is perpetuated by inadequate housing stock. In 2015, the annual Point in Time survey found a community count of 2,107 people who were living without permanent housing on the day of the count.² In the absence of enough affordable homes, people experiencing homelessness who work and earn low incomes are still severely limited in their efforts to find a permanent place to live. If affordable and accessible housing is not increased in Colorado Springs and El Paso County, homelessness will continue to impact social and economic issues.

Enduring societies recognize the need for a variety of housing options to meet the needs of all members of the society. In the Pikes Peak Region, affordability of housing that is accessible for people with low incomes is an increasingly pressing issue.

Key Findings

This report offers a qualitative picture of the housing challenges in our communities. One hundred local community members shared their perspectives and experiences with housing needs and barriers, and 20 organizations participated. Information was gathered in focus groups, interviews and community forums. The findings are detailed in this report.

The key findings from this report are summarized below.

- **People who experience homelessness and housing barriers are diverse and complex. In addition to external barriers, many live with challenging or disabling conditions that significantly impact their ability to obtain and sustain housing.** Domestic violence survivors, young people, and others are dealing with the impact of trauma. When a person's access to shelter, food or safety is threatened, their energy becomes occupied with survival, and they have fewer inner resources to cope with the challenges involved in finding permanent housing. People who live with mental illnesses, visual or cognitive impairments, brain injuries or developmental disabilities struggle to navigate housing resources.
- **The number of homeless elderly women in Colorado Springs is increasing significantly.** Most are either unaccompanied or raising grandchildren. There are growing housing needs for elderly women, families and youth that are currently unmet.
- **Single women and mothers between ages 40 and 60 are among populations that fall through the cracks of existing housing resources.** While individual experiences vary, many people are couch-surfing and living in cars. They are circumstantially homeless or poor, and they do not qualify for resources because they do not have addictions, mental illnesses or other disabling conditions.
- **Waiting times can last from 2 to 5 years for people applying for housing vouchers, low-income or subsidized housing.** People who need accessible units usually wait longer than others.

- Among housing stakeholders, **there is not a shared understanding of what accessibility means.** There is a lack of awareness about legal guidelines for accessibility which apply to residential buildings. (Refer to the Fair Housing Act's *7 Accessibility Guidelines*, Appendix D).
- Affordable housing options are extremely limited; the majority of available units are located in areas impacted by crime or other hazardous conditions. As a result, **people who have low or fixed incomes are forced to sacrifice their health and safety in order to live in a home they can afford.** Living in unsafe or unhealthy conditions impacts a person's overall well-being and their ability to participate in society.
- There is a **great need for more affordable housing that is connected to public transportation.** Many people who need affordable housing also rely on the public transportation system to access goods and services and go to work.
- A person's transition from homelessness into permanent housing is a process, not an overnight event. While there are effective resources currently in place, **there is a need for more transitional shelter, financial assistance, affordable childcare, and other supportive services, especially for the first 6 months to 1 year after a person leaves a shelter environment.** While a person is looking for permanent housing and employment, stair-stepping is vital.
- Currently, information about available housing units in the Pikes Peak Region is not completely streamlined. **The process of looking for housing and housing resources is difficult and discouraging,** especially for people who do not have assistance.
- Families and individuals experiencing homelessness have a great need for basic amenities, including drinking water, showers, cooking facilities, and a place to store their belongings. **There is a significant need for more overnight shelter beds, dedicated family shelters, and a Day Center offering space and access to resources.**
- Stigmas and abusive behaviors impact people who experience homelessness and housing barriers. **Many people lack the skills and support needed to advocate for their needs and rights.**



Key Recommendations

The housing challenges facing our communities in the Pikes Peak Region are broad and multifaceted; there is no one solution that will solve them all. Creativity, collaboration and long-term investment are needed from community members, service providers, housing providers, developers and the government.

Participants were asked to offer recommendations for advocacy and other solutions. Their key recommendations are summarized below.

- **Public education and advocacy are important.** There is a need to change societal perspectives about the people impacted by housing barriers and homelessness. There is also a need to elevate the status of affordable and accessible housing issues as priority concerns for Colorado Springs and El Paso County.
- **A sustained effort to build capacity for affordable and accessible housing development is essential.** Housing trust funds, land trusts, and other long-term sources of funding dedicated to supporting affordable and accessible housing are needed investments.
- **Building relationships and trust between service providers and housing providers is vital.** To encourage more collaboration, community conversations could help build a shared language and commitment to resolving housing challenges.
- To promote the health and well-being of all community members, there is a need to **integrate affordable housing units with market-rate housing.**
- In order to protect the health and safety conditions in housing units and neighborhoods, there is a need to **increase staff and availability of Code Enforcement Officers.**
- There is a need for **more personnel to provide education and enforcement regarding Fair Housing laws** in Pikes Peak Region communities.
- Building on existing resources such as the Colorado Housing Search, a **centralized method of tracking available affordable and accessible housing units** would mitigate roadblocks faced by people when navigating housing resources.
- **There is a spectrum of housing needs in the Pikes Peak Region which requires a spectrum of resources.** Every person experiencing housing barriers or homelessness is unique and living with challenges. Supportive services are most effective when they are flexible and informed about the impact of trauma and disabilities.

Purpose

The Community Organizing program at The IC brings together groups of people who are impacted by a common challenge and builds their power so that collectively, communities can address and overcome barriers. Because barriers to obtaining affordable, accessible housing were recognized as a widely and deeply felt challenge among people with disabilities and throughout the community, it was chosen as a primary area of focus for community organizing efforts.

This information gathering process was initiated to develop a better understanding of affordable and accessible housing-related needs and barriers for people with disabilities and others in the Pikes Peak Region. The goal was to learn from community members about wide-reaching housing needs and barriers and to gain insight into opportunities for advocacy and other potential avenues for systems change.

This report seeks to represent and validate the diverse voices of people directly experiencing housing challenges. It can be used as a reference for housing advocates and disability advocates. The findings can also be used as an educational tool and shared with decision makers, housing stakeholders and the general public.



Methods

Working together with two community advocates who helped design the process and procedures, the community organizer from The IC used a qualitative process to gather information. This approach was taken in order to draw from people who are experts in their own stories, contexts and needs. By listening to their feedback, the intent was to gain an understanding of real experiences with affordable and accessible housing needs and barriers. The following sections will describe the processes used to gather, record, and organize information.

Focus Group Participants

A total of one hundred community members participated in the needs assessment. Ten focus groups, five interviews and two community forums were held between December 2014 and May 2015.

Seventy-one participants were part of the **Citizen Group**, or were individuals who are directly experiencing housing related needs or barriers. Participants in this group all were currently or had recently been in the process of looking for housing that they could afford and access in Colorado Springs or El Paso County. During the time that they participated, individuals shared experiences from the contexts of a variety of housing situations, listed below.

Housing Situations

- Living in public or subsidized housing, low income housing, market rate housing, nursing homes, or transitional housing programs
- Staying in a day shelter, warming shelter or safe house
- Couch surfing or living without shelter

Individuals in the citizen group represented a variety of life experiences and population groups, which are outlined below. It is important to note that these population groups can overlap for a single individual. For example, a participant may have been a single mother who lives with a disability.

Population Groups

- People with physical, sensory or other visible disabilities
- People with invisible disabilities, including mental illnesses, developmental disabilities and cognitive disabilities
- Families or single women with children
- Women over age 40 with children or grandchildren
- Domestic violence and sexual assault survivors
- Single women and others who are at risk of “falling through the cracks,” meaning that they may not qualify for existing services or programs or otherwise may not be able to access them
- Adults recovering from addictions

In addition to these population groups, housing-related barriers and needs experienced by youth and veterans were shared by agency representatives.

The remaining twenty-nine participants were part of the **Organization Group**, individuals who represent housing and service providers, property managers, advocacy groups, or City and County departments. Twenty organizations in total participated in the needs assessment; they are listed below.

Participating Organizations:

- The Women’s Resource Agency
- Springs Rescue Mission
- TESSA
- Discover Goodwill
- Partners in Housing
- Urban Peak
- Greccio Housing
- Crawford House
- Mt. Carmel Center
- Housing First Pikes Peak
- El Paso County Economic Development Division
- City of Colorado Springs Housing and Community Initiatives
- Ecumenical Social Ministries
- Tri-Lakes Cares
- Catholic Charities, Marian House
- Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains
- Payne Chapel Housing
- ComCor
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Colorado Springs
- Self-Advocates as Leaders, Colorado Springs



Recruitment and Location of Groups

Reaching a wide level of participation was important in order to represent the spectrum of housing needs and barriers as holistically as possible. Invitations for focus groups were shared with citizens at The Independence Center, Ecumenical Social Ministries, Partners in Housing, Payne Chapel Housing, The Women's Resource Agency, Springs Rescue Mission, and through the Coordinated Housing Assistance and Providers network (CHAP).

Seven of the focus groups were held at The Independence Center, and the remaining three were hosted by the Women's Resource Agency, the Springs Rescue Mission and TESSA.

Group Procedures

The focus groups were moderated by the community organizer from The IC and either one or two of the community advocates who co-facilitated and recorded notes. Each group lasted two hours, and interviews lasted one hour. Group participants were reminded that their involvement in the needs assessment was voluntary and that they could choose to decline to answer any question or withdraw from the group at any time. The group facilitators assured participants that their comments would be kept anonymous, and consistent questions and guidelines were developed and followed (see Appendix A).

Eight of the ten groups gave permission for their focus group session to be audio-recorded, and every participant gave permission for facilitators to take and use notes. Focus group participants who agreed to be recorded signed a consent form indicating their voluntary participation in the needs assessment and permission to be recorded. (See Appendix B)

Food and drinks were served at every focus group; however, no other incentive was offered to individuals who participated.

The community organizer conducted five one-on-one interviews with four citizens and one agency representative. Each interviewee was asked to describe the process of finding affordable and accessible housing, specific housing needs they or their clients experienced, barriers to obtaining housing that they or their clients experienced, and potential solutions or opportunities for advocacy to address the barriers and needs they mentioned.

Two "Housing for All" community forums were facilitated following the completion of the ten focus groups. All focus group participants were invited to hear about the major themes from the focus group findings and offer input and feedback. A total of 37 community members participated in the two forums; twenty-five participants had attended one of the ten focus groups, and the remaining twelve were participating in Discover Goodwill's We Hire Colorado program.



Organizing the Information

The information was recorded in written notes and by transcribing the audio-recordings into written text. (For groups that did not consent to being recorded, written notes without transcripts were used.) The community organizer worked with two community advocates to review the information, and every quote was coded into a recurring pattern. Once patterns were identified, they were categorized as recurring themes if they emerged from at least two focus groups or appeared to impact participants across more than one housing situation or population group.

The Citizen and Agency Group transcripts were organized separately and then compared. Overlapping themes between the two groups were noted. Descriptive or illustrative quotes were highlighted for use in this report.

Limitations and Scope

Although valuable information was collected during the focus groups, interviews and community forums, there are limits in this report's capacity and scope. Due to limits in time and availability, some population groups that are impacted by affordable and accessible housing needs and barriers were not reached in the needs assessment or were reached indirectly through participants in the Organization Group, most notably veterans, youth and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

Participants were not required to disclose identifying information, and as a result, the housing situations and population groups identified relied on participants' voluntary self-disclosure, and other demographic information for participants (i.e. age, race, marital status, income level, etc.) is not available.

The information gathered from this process is qualitative and based on personal self-disclosures; the findings do not include numerical data and are not intended to be a comprehensive housing needs assessment. This report does not attempt to generalize, formally analyze or interpret participants' responses; rather, the original responses were summarized or directly quoted and organized around themes that recurred in more than one housing situation and population group.

Recurring Themes

The following sections describe the detailed findings from the Citizen Group. Recurring themes were identified because they were shared in at least two focus groups or appear to impact individuals across housing situations and population groups. All of the information either summarizes or directly quotes in italics original responses from participants. Quotes have been kept anonymous to protect participants' confidentiality.

The major recurring themes are organized into three sections, in no particular order:

- Needs
- Personal Factors
- Barriers to Accessing Housing Needs

Needs

Participants shared unmet housing-related needs that they have experienced. Their feedback was not intended to deny the value of existing resources, but they indicated a general need to increase the capacity and coordination of resources described in this section.

Seven recurring needs were identified in no particular order:

1. Affordable housing with access to transportation
2. Physically accessible homes and walkways
3. Accommodations for service animals and emotional support animals
4. Access to a supportive and positive community
5. Safe and healthy living conditions in housing and neighborhoods
6. Flexible and Longer-Term Supportive Services, Programs and Shelters
7. Individual advocacy and assistance with navigating the housing system

Need 1: Affordable Housing with Access to Transportation

“The lack of affordable housing and public transit are the two biggest contributors to poverty in this city.”

Housing

Participants shared that many people in Colorado Springs are cost burdened; the income they are making does not keep up with the rising rent costs in the current housing market.

“Generally if you’re making about \$10, \$12 or \$15 an hour, it takes you two weeks to afford rent.”

“Every year [in the private market], the rent goes up to the point where you have to move. I moved into this place in February 2010. The rent started at \$649 and now it’s at \$850. They changed ownership and now they’re adding more and more.”

“Housing gives you the foundation. You have a mailing address and a safe place to be – that’s a good start. If you don’t have a job, you’re not going to have a place to stay, and if you don’t have a place to stay, you don’t get the job.”

“You have to be able to get to work, and be on time, and leave on time. Public transportation is a major issue.”

“It’s taken me a year and a half to figure out how to get around.”

Transportation

For participants, having an affordable place to live with the means to get to work, grocery stores, medical care, school and appointments is essential.

Many people who need affordable housing also fully rely on the public transportation system in Colorado Springs, limiting their housing choices to areas where bus services are offered.

In the absence of adequate public transportation, participants struggled to meet their basic needs

“If I didn’t live downtown, I would be really stuck because of transit issues. All of my health care is downtown, and I’ve had to build my life around my housing. Once I got to stable housing, I built my life around that.”

“I had no transportation and I had to walk. My knee was in a brace, and I had to worry about my daughter’s safety.”

“It’s difficult when you’re working with a limited budget to find housing in the area where the jobs are. The jobs I’m trying to find...they’re all up north. It can be really difficult to find good housing...That’s been one of my biggest frustrations – finding housing where the jobs are. Especially with the transit system, that proximity is important.”

“I had no way to get my daughter to school other than trying to camp by it.”

“Affordable housing has to be on the bus system. There is no point in having housing if it’s not close to a bus stop.”

Need 2: Physically Accessible Homes and Walkways

“I feel trapped, almost like I’m in prison.”

Participants said that there are very few wheel chair accessible apartments available in the Pikes Peak Region. On a given waiting list for subsidized or low-income housing units, people who need physically accessible homes can expect to wait years longer than others. Because of the shortage in affordable, accessible units, people who use wheelchairs, walkers, canes, and people who simply cannot walk far have been forced to live in homes where they have difficulty moving within and outside of their residence.

It is isolating and extremely limiting to live in a home that is not accessible, participants said. Some shared that they were unable to entertain visitors, access laundry facilities, or use their own kitchen. Others shared that physical barriers add to the difficulty of being without a permanent home.

*“Even if I wanted to couch surf,
I couldn’t in a wheel chair.”*

Elevators in apartment buildings were among the top needs that participants shared. Other accessibility needs that were shared are listed below:

“I feel safer on the second floor, but I have had to live on the first floor because they don’t have an elevator. There is a lot of housing out there that has steps.”

- Deaf and hard of hearing accommodations, examples include: installing visible doorbells, allowing tenants to keep trained service animals, and providing interpreters when requested
- Accessible community rooms
- Sidewalks that are level so there is no accumulation of water, mud, ice or snow
- Laundry rooms on ground levels with waist level change machines Roll-in showers
- Doors that are wide enough to allow wheelchairs, motor chairs and walkers to pass
- Adequate accessible parking
- Accessible walkways with bars and ramps

(See Appendix C for Fair Housing Accessibility Standards)



In cases of emergencies, participants shared that they did not have equal access to a way of escape.

“There are no accessible fire escapes in my building. When the fire alarm goes off, the elevators shut down – I have no way to get out. They don’t have a Plan B.”

There is a great need for landlords, developers and other housing stakeholders to increase their understanding of accessibility for people with disabilities and what legal standards apply to accessibility in housing, participants said.

“You call up an apartment complex and ask if they have any accessible units, and you get, ‘What’s that?’”

“There’s no clear, common understanding of what ‘accessible’ means.”

Need 3: Accommodations for Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals

“There were many times that I was living in the car with my dogs and my cats because I was not going to give them up, and I couldn’t find a place that would take an animal.”

Participants shared the importance of animals to their quality of life; pets are considered close companions or family members to some and essential aids to others who live with disabilities.

“I have a lack of depth perception and a lot of other things, and I need a service dog for walking, depth curbs...and balance.”

“Having an animal keeps people healthier. Many seniors are forced to live alone because people won’t allow pets.”

“If all they have is that companionship with their pet, that’s a lot to lose.”

Some participants shared that their landlords honored their requests for accommodations, allowing them to live with service animals without requiring additional rent or deposit fees. Others said that having one or more animal can severely limit a person’s options when they are looking for housing – even if they are service or emotional support animals. Some landlords and property managers do not honor accommodation requests, they said, and some doctors can be resistant to writing the required documentation for accommodation requests. Participants expressed a need for more consistency within the housing system for animal accommodations and standards.

Need 4: Access to Supportive and Positive Community

“Helping people to step up – that’s community.”


Participants shared that community plays an important role in life, and the quality of community can greatly impact a person’s process of becoming independent.

“When you’re in a good setting, good community happens, and when you’re in a bad setting, bad community happens. That makes it tough.”

Participants who are recovering from alcohol and drug addictions shared that positive, supportive community – whether it comes from family or other relationships -- creates accountability and motivation, and it strengthens healthy habits. On the other side, isolation or negative community can draw people back into destructive cycles.

“You have to surround yourself with people who are doing the same things as you – trying to get better, not staying stagnant.”

“A lot of us are in a very tender place, and it doesn’t take much to end up in a bad place again, and have the environment tear you down. Especially when you’re isolated.”



“If a person is trying to recover, and they are in a bad setting or part of a community where people are trying to drag them down, no one is strong enough to resist that.”

“Generally that isolation...people going dark and we’re not hearing from them...is the first step toward a downward spiral and you see red flags.”

The location of affordable housing plays a role in a person’s access to supportive, positive community. Participants said that for the most part, housing options that are affordable are limited to areas where the communities are already impacted by crime and drug related problems.

“We need housing in a good place where there is good community, or where there is at least a chance for good community that can sustain the process that a person is in to recover.”

“I love the idea of economic diversity, so people don’t feel like they’re all by themselves in the world. I think it would help with neighborhoods – that you would still have choices, and that one neighborhood wouldn’t be a ‘bad’ neighborhood.”

Need 5: Safe and Healthy Living Conditions in Housing and Neighborhoods

“Because I don’t have enough money to live in a safe neighborhood, I have to choose between safety and my cost of living.”

Safety is a primary concern, especially for children and people who have histories of trauma. Participants who are raising children in shelters, transitional housing or affordable housing environments shared that there are not enough safe social opportunities for young kids and teenagers or environments for mothers with infants.

“There is a lack of safe child care or any services for young people near where I live.”

Participants shared overwhelmingly that it is very challenging to find safe housing that they can afford. Most low and very low income housing are in neighborhoods impacted by crime; the affordable options are slim.

“Toxic environments – that’s where there was cheap rent, and that’s all I could afford. I was just trying to get by.”

“I’m on a waiting list, but right now I live in a really violent neighborhood. There’s a gang living right next door to me, and they haven’t been evicted. In October I was robbed out of my car; that was the first time I had been victimized...I’m always pacing...This is not stuff that is good for children. I have a 12 year old, a 3 year old and a 4 year old.”

“It’s scary because you never know when the guns are going to come out...I’m scared to report because of retaliation.”

“My son couldn’t find a place – everywhere that he went was extremely destructive for kids. The places that housing has for the younger generation are either gang-related or drug related. There is something not right about this housing.”

“I have to look out before I let my dog out. I don’t get much sleep. Your quality of life has gone down the toilet.”

One participant shared that she has lived in her home for almost 30 years, and her neighbors are the only reason she wants to move. Drug activity and other crimes have changed her neighborhood, she said.

“This last 3 years has been the worst. It’s escalating. I’ve called the police when there’s been extreme violence, but unfortunately by the time they get there, they have all disbursed.”

Participants said that they experienced or witnessed health hazards and code violations in affordable units. Issues included pipe leakage, bug infestation and carbon monoxide poisoning.

“My son wants to move because his place is roach infested.”

“There was a leak in my bathroom, and after no one did anything, the whole ceiling caved in.”

“This is more than inadequate; it’s unsafe and unhealthy. My landlord wants to put up surveillance, but I can’t afford surveillance. I’m on a fixed income.”

“A lot of us are choosing between a tent and bed bugs or roaches.”



One participant shared that there were no carbon monoxide detectors in their home, and none were installed even after requests were made.

“My husband ended up dying from carbon monoxide poisoning. There was 86% carbon monoxide in the home when he died. He was 55 years old— it was wrong.”

Participants expressed that there is a general need to increase the capacity and availability of code enforcement in order to maintain healthier living environments in affordable housing.

Need 6: Flexible and Longer-Term Supportive Services, Programs and Shelters

“We need more stair-stepping.”

The transition from crisis to recovery or from homelessness into permanent housing is a process, not an overnight event. Single mothers and other participants who were without permanent housing shared that they needed longer term access to supportive services. Specifically, they recommended a period of 6 months to a year of support after leaving a shelter environment. This support period give them time to find stable housing and a job while building up their resources.

“When you are rebuilding your life, 4 weeks is not long enough when you are starting from scratch, especially if you have kids.”

“The first time I got out of the program, it was like I was supposed to be some sort of transmission being rebuilt, expected to go 100 mph overnight.”

“Once you hit the 6 month mark, you have a nest egg, and your confidence is back. I just need time to build savings and a budget. I need time to establish a safety net. Otherwise, if something were to happen and I have no safety net, where will I go?”

Stair-Stepping

Allowing people to stair-step empowers them to become self-sufficient. Without longer-term supportive services, participants said that there is not enough time between the steps of leaving a shelter or program and finding a job and housing.

“You’re told that in two weeks, your housing will be available or in one month, this will be available, and there is nothing in the mean-time. It’s hard for that month – it’s a gap. There’s no gap village right now; you’re either in or you’re out. Some families that these places are taking in have two or three kids – what are they going to do for two or three months?”


[When starting a new job] *“There is a ninety day period before benefits start, and once you get a job, you often lose your supports and benefits because you no longer qualify.”*

“We need long term assistance – there are so many pitfalls along the way to recovery. When there is nothing, it puts you right back into the cycle.”

When there is a process of progressive empowerment that is tailored to meet individual needs, participants shared that supportive services are effective.

“There is a transition, economically, relationally, physically and emotionally. It starts to come together and people move on.”

“By the end of the program you’re running the show by yourself, but you’ve done it through increments along the way, with different levels of freedom and responsibility.”



Participants with histories of domestic violence and other significant traumas shared that they need flexibility in transitional programs. Programs that are rigid or highly regimented are not always effective for people with histories of trauma; they are often re-traumatizing for survivors because they can mirror patterns of power and control that happened in abusive relationships.

“The inability to make basic choices creates more dependence, which makes it harder to achieve independence.”

Participants in every housing situation shared that even though resources exist for housing case management, living skills training, mental health resources, and deposit assistance, there is a need for more in Colorado Springs and El Paso County. They also expressed a need for more support for youth who are without shelter or at-risk for homelessness.

Single mothers and other participants who are raising children indicated that there is a need to increase affordable licensed childcare and to expand day care programs into evening hours.

“I have to work weeknights until 9pm, and the daycare doesn’t stay open until then. It would really help if they expanded the hours.”

Participants who are without shelter shared a widespread need for basic amenities including drinking water, showers, cooking facilities and laundry facilities. There are two showers in Colorado Springs that people who are on the streets can access, and they are open only during regular office hours.

Shelter and Basic Amenities

“The biggest problem I see with the homeless is water. There’s not enough places for people to get drinking water or to shower. When people come out of the shower at ESM they feel better. They say, ‘I feel human again.’ Same thing with restrooms —you have to sneak into places to use restrooms.”



Homelessness is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

When the two winter warming shelters closed in April, participants said that they had no place to sleep except outside. Completely without shelter, people sleep in the few places outside where they are not legally banned from camping.

There is a desperate need for more year-long overnight shelters, more shelters dedicated to families, and more safe houses for people fleeing abusive partners.

*“We’re not looking for extravagance –
all we’re asking for is shelter and basic needs.”*

Need 7: Individual Advocacy and Assistance with Navigating the Housing System


“Time is of the essence for a lot of women. When someone is on the street or in a bad situation, it’s not helpful to tell them, ‘Here is a referral and we might know something in a week.’”

Finding affordable, accessible housing is not an easy task without any assistance, participants said. When they are looking for the right information and working to access resources, the process is confusing, and they run into roadblocks.

“There are such narrow windows of time to get resources and if you can’t make one appointment, then it’s useless. I might as well sleep in my car. I don’t care about what the resources are if I can’t access them.”

“For me, the buzzword was frustrating and crazy- making. I was having to always wait. There wasn’t anybody who could help me now. I was just having to wait. I was on the waiting list for the Housing Authority for 18 months and came really close to being on the streets.”

*“I was afraid of the
process you have to
go through to find
new housing.”*



Participants said that they would do all the right things and follow through with appointments, but they would still run into dead-ends, including waiting lists, misinformation, or difficulties with documentation. When people have limited access to transportation – for some, only a few bus passes – the wrong lead can severely impact them. It is critical, they said, to have someone who knows the process and can explain it to them, advocating on their behalf when necessary.

“I need a case manager – I was so mixed up, being new to the city.”

“Advocacy is a big thing. We have some services but people don’t know about advocacy services.”

It is equally important for case managers to have a compassionate understanding of their citizens’ life situations and disabilities, participants said. Single mothers and others who are raising children have stretched schedules and resources. People who have visual impairments or cognitive disabilities may struggle to read and comprehend forms.

Participants who live with personal challenges expressed a compelling need for assistance and individual advocacy that tailors to their unique contexts. Personal challenges are described in more detail in the next section.

Personal Factors

Recurring themes emerged about personal factors that significantly impacted the needs or barriers participants were facing related to affordable and accessible housing. Personal factors are often struggles faced internally by a person, and they compound the external housing challenges that are discussed in this report.

Five Personal Factors were identified in no particular order:

1. Invisible disabilities
2. The impact of trauma
3. Survival mode
4. Personal backgrounds
5. Lack of self-advocacy skills

Personal Factor 1: Invisible Disabilities


“It was all happening so fast, and so much faster than I could understand or organize any kind of response to it. That was part of what was really hard for me when I was going through this process to find housing.”

Participants in every housing situation shared that they lived with significant disabilities that are not obvious to others: cognitive impairments, visual impairments, developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and mental illnesses. These invisible disabilities compounded the difficulties people face during the process of finding affordable and accessible housing.

Participants gave the feedback that most forms used for housing and related resources are designed for people who are fully-abled. Citizens who are visually impaired struggle to see the words on standard paperwork. Organizations rarely have alternative formats that are read-able, participants said.

People with traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) struggle to comprehend and complete forms. Processing and remembering a lot of detailed information is difficult and overwhelming for them. When they encounter inconsistent rules and expectations, they lose their grounding.

“When you’re homeless and have a TBI your grounding is gone. Yes, I’m going to be dazed and confused. They didn’t give me any leeway for that. I need consistency to get my grounding back.”



Participants who live with cognitive impairments felt a profound sense of fragility during their processes of looking for affordable housing. It was challenging if not impossible for them to navigate and access housing resources.

“It takes almost nothing to tip me over and I’m suddenly sliding toward the drain... My memory was impaired. So, somebody would tell me to come back on a certain day and time and I wouldn’t remember to go, or I would go on the wrong day or the wrong time. The time thing and being able to respond when I was supposed to was a huge thing for me.”

“There were so many pieces of things happening at the same time. I had food, medications, housing, social security and medical care issues...and I was having to work on all of it at one time, and I was just so confused about stuff.

When my life was falling apart, it was falling apart because of what was happening to my brain. So, trying to figure out how to problem solve stuff, I just couldn’t do it.”

Similarly, participants with developmental disabilities feared the process of finding housing and possibility of losing their current housing. They shared that they struggle with life management skills and are vulnerable to manipulation by others.

“We’re swindled all the time.”

More than other participants, people who live with mental illness shared that because of their condition they experience disdain and rejection by families, friends, agencies, landlords and medical providers. These societal barriers add to their mental health symptoms, make follow-through and decision making difficult when they are looking for housing. Participants shared that more proactive mental health services are needed, and in many cases, people simply need to be listened to.

“It’s a ripple effect, and especially if you’re depressed and you’re trying to get your life together, one blow can be devastating.”

“You can feel like you’re being listened to, but if you’re mentally ill sometimes things are confusing and need to be treated with gloves.”

“You can apply to be reimbursed, but I have so much anxiety, I don’t bother with that.”

Personal Factor 2: The Impact of Trauma

“We have scars and baggage because of what we’ve been through. We’re trying to heal and rebuild our lives at the same time.”

Participants who have experienced traumatic events shared that they deal with the impact of those events every day. They experience extreme anxiety, hypervigilance, and struggle to trust others. Because their personal safety has been threatened, they are instinctively preoccupied with self-protection. As a result, it is difficult for them at times to communicate and consistently follow through, especially when they are overwhelmed. These challenges make the process of finding housing more frightening and difficult.

“Fear is something I deal with every day – I have been walking on eggshells for years. You never know what is going to happen.”

“Well I stay in panic mode most of the time.”

Participants who are survivors of domestic violence shared that they had been victimized by patterns of physical, psychological, and economic abuse and control. Having left abusive relationships, they face the challenge of finding enough resources to regain independence, starting with limited or no support, while recovering from the impact of the trauma they have been through.

“All of my funds have been cut off by my spouse, and he took the vehicle and ruined our credit. Now I’m struggling to find an employer who will work with my hearing disabilities.”


*“We are all
dealing with cycles
of power and
control.”*

For the many survivors who are raising children, single-parenthood adds a layer of complexity to the difficulties they face dealing with trauma while they look for work, housing and other resources.

Personal Factor 3: Survival Mode

“Everything you thought you knew falls out from underneath you.”

When access to basic needs is threatened, participants shared that their mindset changes; it becomes harder and harder to complete tasks, plan ahead, organize and think about the implication of decisions when they are occupied with survival.



“Survival mode...that is one of the things that makes it hard when you’re trying to find housing and they keep saying, well you have to have an eviction notice, you have to have this information and we can’t help you any further than this. There are so many restrictions to that help when you’re in survival mode. We’re trying to have a roof over our heads.”

“Even if you don’t have a mental disability, you second guess yourself. Self-doubt is a real issue, and self-esteem.”

“Work goes out the window when survival mode kicks in...I’m just looking for food.”

Personal Factor 4: Barriers due to Personal Backgrounds

“Give us a chance to tell the whole story. It’s important to look at the why – why we have these records.”

People with negative records have a more difficult time finding housing than others. A person can have poor credit history due to a medical emergency that took place several years ago and still be impacted in their housing applications, participants shared. Participants who had evictions or crimes in their records also experienced barriers to finding housing.

“We’re not bad people – we’re just in bad situations. I’m getting denied housing because of a label.”

“Coming out of incarceration, you have nothing and no one wants to help you. When you don’t have any information or any contacts, it’s very difficult.”

Domestic violence survivors shared that they have criminal records as a result of their attempts to defend themselves against attacks by abusers, and for some, child abuse cases have been opened as a result of domestic violence. Having these records creates additional barriers to accessing housing and resources, especially for programs with a zero tolerance policy.

“Abusers manipulate law enforcement and, and it ends up looking like the victim is the aggressor. I’m the one with the record because I picked up the phone...they are arresting victims because they are not listening to the true story.”

“Even though we are labeled offenders because of charges, we are really the victims. Domestic violence charges do not tell the whole story, but they make it very hard to get a job and find housing.”

They emphasized the importance of being given a chance to explain the full story of their situations when they are applying for housing, programs and assistance.

Personal Factor 5: Lack of Self Advocacy Skills

“I stand up for myself, a lot of people can’t. Many people don’t know what their rights are.”

Knowing about individual housing rights and having the ability to exercise them is crucial. Participants shared that many times, the people who need self-advocacy skills the most do not know how or are unable to use them.

“I was dealing with my loss and not thinking about my rights at the time.”

Participants said that building personal empowerment and self-advocacy skills are vital, especially when dealing with discrimination or other situations where individual rights are denied.

“Many people don’t have assertiveness skills.”

Barriers to Accessing Housing Needs

Recurring themes emerged identifying system and societal barriers that significantly impacted participants’ process of finding and sustaining affordable and accessible housing.

Four Barriers were identified in no particular order:

1. Inadequate affordable and accessible housing stock
2. Fragmentation within the housing system
3. Gaps in housing resources and services
4. Stigmas and abusive behavior

Barrier 1: Inadequate Affordable and Accessible Housing Stock

“Our local economy has not caught up with the housing costs, which is recreating the cycle of dependence that we are trying to get out of.”

Participants shared their experiences being on the multi-year back log for Section 8 and public housing waiting lists. Based on their responses, waiting times can range anywhere from 2 to 8 years. If a person needs a wheel chair accessible unit, they are waiting longer than everyone else.

“If you are in a critical situation like I am right now, there aren’t services that have a level of acceptance; they are all waiting lists.”

“I’m on a waiting list lottery at Hillside Community Center. I’m number 3,063.”

“It’s really hard to find a place unless you have three or four years to find one.”

“The ones that do have accessible units, they have enormous waiting lists.”

Because of the lack of funding and other resources, participants said that there is not enough availability for affordable and accessible housing units, and as a result, housing choices are extremely limited.

“I applied for senior housing over two years ago. I was smart enough to put in an application very early.”

Participants said that the rising cost of rental rates combined with low paying jobs creates a gap in affordable housing.

“Low paying jobs are not enough to get off the streets anytime soon.”

“You need to go to school to get that income to get better housing. A lot of people can’t do that. It takes opportunities and resources to get out of the cycle of poverty.”

Barrier 2: Fragmentation within the Housing System

“I’m staying where I’m at forever, because I don’t have a clue how to go about making a housing change if I wanted one. I don’t have a clue how to do it; I don’t have a clue what else is out there. I don’t know enough to take that risk.”

Participants shared that during the process of looking for housing or housing resources was confusing, especially if they had no assistance and were not connected with a program or provider.

“If you’re not referred or don’t know somebody, or if you’re not in the system, you’re going to wander around and not know.”

“It’s an access problem - where do you find housing; how do you get hooked into the information?”

Using the word “labyrinth,” to describe the housing system, participants said that information is disjointed and sometimes inaccurate, outdated or inconsistent. They had no idea where to start looking for resources.

“Somebody may take the first step and then not get anywhere. It feels like people walk down a lot of dead-ends.”

“Absolute lack of cohesiveness. Too many places to go, too much distance between places, too much wrong information.”

Barrier 3: Gaps in Housing Resources and Services

“I think people slipping through the cracks is a big problem. There are a lot of people who don’t have drug, alcohol, or mental health problems, and they don’t qualify for anything.”

Falling Through the Cracks

Housing and service providers operate within constraints. Their capacity is limited by scarcity in funding and policy restrictions. The problem of people slipping through the cracks of existing resources was emphasized when participants were asked about barriers to accessing their housing needs. They shared that people who don’t exhibit certain risk factors have a harder time qualifying for and accessing housing benefits, programs or services.

“There is a lack of support for people who don’t fit into “trouble” criteria – a lot is lacking for the average person who has had a terrible turn of events.”


“If you don’t have a reason to be in the system, you don’t have access to information.”

“There is criteria for ‘at risk,’ but everyone is at risk. Those criteria are excluding people.”

For example, participants shared that people who are couch surfing struggle to qualify for homeless services, and many times they make too much money to be eligible for aid.

“If you don’t fit all the criteria or if you don’t have any red flags, you’re overlooked or at the bottom of the list.”

A participant who was a homeless, single woman shared that she sought resources through an agency that could only accept clients who had been homeless for a year. Without another choice, she camped with her daughter for a full year to qualify for the assistance that she needed. Participants said that some become so desperate to meet their needs that they lie about their conditions to make themselves qualify for help.



Because most of the focus tends to be on the troubled people, it leads people to lie about how they're doing mentally so that they can get help."

"We are forcing good people to commit crimes... to lie so that they can get housing, which is perjury and a felony."


"You can do everything right and still end up on the streets."

More than one participant group identified single women between ages 40 and 60 as a population that is at risk for falling through the cracks.

"There are programs out there for men, but the programs for women are limited. Women with children okay, women on their own, forget it."

Domestic violence survivors shared that they fall through the cracks when looking for housing resources. Because of their unique need to take precautions to protect their safety when they have fled from an abusive partner, they may not be able to access transportation to public places or disclose identifying information. As a result, they are cut off from resources that others may have access to, and they have more limited information about how to find housing.

"Access to resources is a big problem. A lot of us will end up going back to our abusers because we can't access housing and other resources."



Participants shared that rigid programs and other resources with strict or narrow guidelines create gaps for people trying to find resources to meet their housing needs.

“Some of the rules are so rigid that it doesn’t allow for a case by case evaluation of that person’s needs and where they’re at and where they’re coming from.”

“The system is very rigid – you’ve got to do it this way, this time. I needed so badly to have help that was flexible.”

“Many agencies will send letters or make phone calls to housing providers to help overcome issues with rules, but if someone’s just going by themselves, it’s very difficult to overcome. That’s a serious barrier. These places are trying to protect themselves.”

Barrier 4: Stigmas and Abusive Behaviors

“There is a wider diversity of people who are homeless or need affordable accessible housing than people think.”

Participants across housing situations shared that they experience rejection by families, friends, agencies, landlords and medical providers. Stigmas, particularly about people who are without shelter or who have disabilities, are prevalent.

“We are easy to detect with our semi-disheveled, tattered appearance lugging the ubiquitous backpack or two, maybe accompanied by various forms of luggage...when people see us on the street or in the park there is a wide range of apprehension due to prejudice, mistrust or past confrontations... Sometimes, just sometimes, I wonder if squirrels receive better treatment than the ‘park people.’”

(Quote from *The Homeless Progress*, Appendix D)

“The way we’re handled is really shame-based. We’re treated like children.”

“It’s very difficult to find employment when you’re homeless – employers look at your application, and if there is no home address or if the address is for a shelter, they won’t look at you.”

Participants with disabilities said that they experience stigma and mistreatment during their process of looking for housing or housing resources.

“Even though you’re honest about our disabilities, people will just judge you. It’s almost more hurtful because you would think that they would understand.”

With my disability it’s difficult because I look normal, and people have no tolerance when I have a hard time. There’s differences between visible and invisible disabilities.”

“With my traumatic brain injury I was treated like I was lazy.”

People who need affordable housing are stereotyped, participants said.

“We only talk about the folks who have felonies, drug abuse, or severe mental illness – a large percent of the population we’re talking about are really normal people with spouses and children.”

Landlords

Some participants shared positive experiences with property owners and landlords of low-income housing units; however, others said that landlords (sometimes referred to as “slumlords”) neglected care of their units, refused requests for accommodation, and abused their power.

“Credit check scams happen all the time. They’ll take your application no matter what, knowing that you’re not going to pass. There’s nothing being done about that.”

“Application fees are exploited. They charged me \$40 and I didn’t even make it home before I got the call.”

“They don’t like complaints, but that’s the only way to get things done. You get the run around otherwise.”

“We need landlords that don’t have a predisposition to what they’re willing to accept.”

Participants acknowledged that tenants break rules, but they said that there are unfair standards of accountability for landlords.

“It’s too bad you can’t evict landlords if they don’t follow the rules. They can get away with anything. A tenant, you do something wrong, and you’re out.”

Input from Housing and Service Organizations

Participants in the Organization Group represented housing and service providers, property managers, advocacy groups, or City and County departments. They shared their perspectives about affordable and accessible housing barriers and needs as they related to their individual roles as well as their experiences with citizens.

Recurring themes from their responses emerged. Some overlapped with themes identified in the Citizen group, and some supplemented citizens' themes without repeating them. The findings in these sections are organized into Supplementing Themes and Overlapping Themes.

Supplementing Themes

Five supplementing themes were identified that added additional insight regarding needs, personal factors and barriers to accessing housing needs. These themes do not repeat the themes identified by the Citizen Group. They are described below in no particular order.

1. Growing housing and service needs for elderly women, families and youth
2. Additional personal factors
3. Lack of capacity for affordable and accessible housing development and the need for more funding
4. Positive Collaboration with Housing Providers
5. Current local initiatives to address housing needs

Supplementing Theme I: Growing Housing and Service Needs for Elderly Women, Families and Youth

“When we talk about homelessness, we mostly think of men at the Marian house, guys that come to eat at the Mission. We’ve seen mostly 40 and 50 year old grandmothers raising their grandchildren.”

Participants indicated that the demographics are shifting among populations that have the least access to housing resources. Specifically they expressed concern for the vulnerability they observe among elderly women, who are increasingly being found without shelter by service providers. These women are often unaccompanied or are raising grandchildren, participants said. (It was noted from the Citizen Group that single and elderly women are at risk for falling through the cracks when looking for housing services.)

“We’re seeing more and more unaccompanied women that are homeless, specifically elderly women who are on social security and cannot find housing. It’s so sad. We’ve seen an increase in family homelessness.”

“We’ve seen people couch surf and use up the resources they have, and now they’re at the bottom, out of resources and friends who can take them in. Some families are living in their cars and buying a couple of motel nights a month with the money they can scrape just to shower and bathe.”

“I see the need growing. Dynamics are changing a lot, and it’s under the radar.”


“I’ve seen lot of homeless, middle aged women who are very vulnerable.”

“What does it say about our society that we have homeless, elderly women on the street? It sickens me.”

Additionally, affordable housing for families, particularly large families, was also identified as a growing need.

“There is a significant lack of appropriately sized affordable units for families.”

“A challenge is very large families with five, six kids. There’s just not housing...really, really tough.”



“Families are broken up in shelters. We need more shelters dedicated to addressing families. There just aren’t many options for women with children.”

Participants who work with homeless youth to find housing, young people have a difficult time accessing housing that they can afford because there is an increasing number of adults who are using housing services and units that youth used to use. People between ages 15 and 20 who become homeless often do not have rental histories, credit histories, work histories or co-signers for housing leases. According to participants, about 30% of unsheltered youth are members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, and 30% have been through the foster care system -- some have been through between 30 and 40 foster homes. The majority of young people experiencing homelessness have been through significant trauma and, like others with histories of trauma, need tailored services with flexible criteria and trauma-informed care.

“The vulnerability is what gets me.”

Supplementing Theme 2: Additional Personal Factors


“Clients don’t always want to have to ask for help. They want to be able to do it on their own – it’s the one thing they can control – and after so many closed doors they give up.”

In addition to highlighting the impact of trauma and the need for support that is trauma-informed, participants shared about additional personal factors that significantly impact citizens’ abilities to access to their needs.

A large number of homeless and housing service organizations in Colorado Springs are faith-based. While they are valuable for many, participants said that some citizens may experience faith-based settings as exclusive or incompatible. For example, if a person experienced religious abuse or a traumatic religious experience, they might struggle to work through a religious-based transitional program. In this case, the citizen may not have adequate access to alternative resources.

“People who don’t practice religion or who may have experienced religion as abusive don’t have equal access.”

Participants also shared that citizens who come from some cultures and ethnic groups experience unique barriers. Citizens who are non-citizens may struggle more than others to obtain an ID or a social security card, especially if they do not have assistance with finding accurate information and appropriate resources. Because of these barriers, they may have a more difficult time finding housing and employment, participants said.



“Cultures are not respected. Language barriers are huge for people who don’t speak English as their first language.”

Supplementing Theme 3: Lack of Capacity for Affordable and Accessible Housing Development and the Need for more Funding

“It’s important to elevate this issue. We need an additional source of funding that isn’t federal.”

Participants indicated that there is insufficient capacity and resources for affordable and accessible housing development in Colorado Springs and El Paso County.

“There is a 20,000-plus shortage in units in the City and County.”


“We see a high percentage of request for 30% [of income] units. That’s the highest demand – back to the wait lists – it’s the greatest length of time.”

“Aging stock with accessibility pieces – that’s a component of housing costs that we are unable to meet at this time.”

“There is a lack of housing choice because there is not enough funding – even with the low income tax credits, that’s a piece of the funding available at the state level; however, funding allotted to the city doesn’t go very far when the entire state’s competing for them.”

The transient military population impacts the housing market, they said, and another factor is the absence of developers interested in building housing with lower rental rates.

“There’s so little affordable housing in central and northern parts of the city. It would be great for developers to step forward. We’re trying to encourage that from the city side with subsidies and other incentives. Spread it around, it could be a win-win.”



“None of the developers want to build because they don’t want to have a lot of housing available; it lowers the market rate.”

Participants emphasized the importance of government resources and finding creative sources for additional funding.

“That means that you have to publically build and use public resources to build housing for our most vulnerable citizens.”

Supplementing Theme 4: Positive Collaboration with Housing Providers

“Building partnerships with landlords is very important. When issues come up between our clients and their landlords, we step in and say ‘Give us a call and we’ll mitigate.’”

Participants overwhelmingly indicated that building trust with landlords and other housing providers is vital to their effectiveness in working with clients to find affordable and accessible housing. On average, participating agencies who work with clients to obtain housing have 10-20 working relationships with landlords.

“We steer clients toward landlords that we have good relationships with and can help influence credit check issues.”

“I act as the middle person, and I go to the landlord when there is an issue.”

Supplementing Theme 5: Current Local Initiatives to Address Housing Needs

Participants identified current initiatives to address affordable and accessible housing needs and barriers, including Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement, Permanent Supportive Housing developments, and the Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness in 2015.

Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement is an initiative in progress intended to streamline homeless services and housing programs for individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness. It will operate through a network of housing and service agencies and providers who coordinate their resources and match clients with appropriate services based on their level of need and vulnerability. This project is currently being piloted by Rocky Mountain Human Services as part of the initiatives to end veteran homelessness and will be expanded to include other populations.

"It will allow us to effectively evaluate how we serve our community; we will be able to see how services have helped people and what other services they need. It will link to the HMIS program."

Permanent Supportive Housing is a Housing First model that houses people who are chronically homeless and offers services to them without making their housing conditional or based on their progress.

"It's no different from transitional housing, except that it's permanent. There's no time limit."

"The services in the building are not required for residency, but they are required for case managers. It's the case manager's responsibility to develop a relationship with the client and gently guide them to the services that they need."

"We are looking to include accessible units – they're built very specific to the population that you are serving."

"I love the model. It's radical, and it's going to be difficult for our community to wrap it's mind around it. I have had the privilege of visiting other sites where this is practiced, and I've seen it work. I just intuitively know it's the right thing to do."

(Refer to *Initiative to End Homelessness in Colorado Springs: Community Update March 2015*, Appendix F)

Overlapping Themes

Five recurring themes were identified that repeated or overlapped with the themes identified by the citizen groups. They are described below in no particular order.


1. The need for safe, affordable and accessible housing with access to transportation
2. The impact of trauma and the need for flexible and longer-term supportive services and programs
3. Stigmas and abusive behaviors
4. Barriers due to personal backgrounds
5. Fragmentation and gaps within the housing system

Overlapping Theme 1: The Need for Safe, Affordable and Accessible Housing with Access to Transportation

“My clients are on fixed incomes. I’m looking for all-inclusive rent and utility so they can manage and predict what their bills will be.”

Participants expressed that there is widespread need for affordable housing in close proximity to public transportation without segregating low income neighborhoods. They highlighted the importance for a way to transport children to school, especially for single women with children or families who are unsheltered or in transitional housing. The disparity between job locations and transportation creates barriers for people living in affordable housing, they said.

“Even if you can move further outside of town to find affordable housing, all of a sudden your transportation costs have increased – so are you really saving money? Trying to spend less than 30% on housing, hoping that you’re not spending more than 45% on housing and transportation combined. That commute in time and finances is driving up the cost of living, and people are still burdened financially.”



The need for more accessible units in safe neighborhoods was reiterated by housing and service providers.

“The biggest barriers for people with disabilities are the steps and lack of elevators – actually getting into apartments.”

“A lot of affordable housing is in a bad part of town – a lot of drug activity there. People are leery of affordable housing when I present options to residents in nursing homes. I hear a lot about bug infestations in complexes or in certain parts.

They have a lot of history – people know things about that specific development or part of town.”

“Affordable housing doesn’t feel safe.”


Overlapping Theme 2: The Impact of Trauma and the Need for Flexible and Longer-Term Supportive Services and Programs

“Everyone’s situation is different. Some people have more opportunities and support than others. Recovering addicts may need more structure and accountability, while people who have experienced severe trauma may need more flexible environments.”

Participants in the Organization Group echoed the need expressed by citizens for longer-term and more flexible supportive services. Citizens are working to find employment and permanent housing, and in the mean-time they need more transitional housing programs, assistance with security deposits, affordable childcare, health and mental health care.

“They need the chance to build a safety net during that transition period.”

“One month of rent won’t get anyone out of their situation. If we could support them for 6 months or a year, it would make a big difference in helping people get back on their feet.”



The impact of trauma, disabilities and health issues can hinder a person's ability to transition into permanent housing. Participants acknowledged this and expressed a need for more individual advocates and case workers who are well rounded and can understand more than one perspective. Programs and services should be trauma-informed and flexible enough to allow room for every individual's unique needs, they said. The most effective supports meet citizens where they are at.

“Some people are dealing with traumas and disabilities that we can't see.”

“Trauma is paralyzing for people who have been through it.”

“Health issues are a huge barrier to finding housing – they prevent you from working, and things like that.”

“The lack of housing really impacts your health.”

“It's about giving people life skills. I would say that one of the biggest barriers is the human capacity to maintain housing. Some of the people we work with have experienced so much dysfunction and poverty, the cycle of battling everything. It hinders them from moving forward. We have to recognize that it's not just housing – it's also the support to maintain housing.”

“We need to empower residents in low-income housing.”

Overlapping Theme 3: Stigmas and Abusive Behaviors

“Many people are discriminated against or displaced.”

Participants said that stereotypes and discriminating attitudes add to the barriers that citizens are facing when trying to access their housing needs.

“It's not acceptable what's happening – and people don't know their rights. We need to be empowering our residents – not just calling code enforcement one time and assuming that it's taken care of. And we need to eradicate slumlords.”

“The way affordable housing is marketed is telling. You hear ‘those people’ or people who are ‘deserving’ of help. That impacts the political dynamic.”

Despite what people might think of the people who experience homelessness and housing needs, participants said that there is diversity in people who experience the cycle of dependence on housing resources.

“Many people don’t understand that there’s a diversity in people impacted by housing.”

“In the Tri-lakes area there is no affordable housing or access to public transportation. If people become homeless here, there is no place to stay here.”

Overlapping Theme 4: Barriers Due to Personal Backgrounds

“Unfortunately, a lot of places that receive federal funding are required to follow those background checks.”

Participants shared that credit issues, unpaid past leases, unpaid utilities, eviction histories, and criminal backgrounds all add to the barriers that citizens experience when applying for housing, and particularly housing with restrictive policies.

“There are so many people in this area that can’t pass a background check.”

Overlapping Theme 5: Fragmentation and Gaps within the Housing System

“We point people in a lot of directions, but it’s hard to get anywhere.”

Participants shared that fragmentation and gaps among housing resources make it difficult to navigate the housing system with their clients.

“We need advocacy for those seeking services, to get them properly connected with resources and life skills training. It’s so essential.”

“It’s just not an organized process; it’s very fragmented. There is a much more systematic process to help people with their utilities... finding housing isn’t the same. You want to help people, but you don’t know where to start.”

“The process is frustrating and hard. As a nonprofit development officer, I’ve seen more collaboration over the last few years.”

“What about people who aren’t homeless? How do they fit in?”

“We need more advocacy for them – they have no idea what to be connected with. People are falling through the cracks.”

Recommendations

Participants from the Citizen and Organization Groups shared their ideas for advocacy directions, education goals and other potential solutions to help address the needs and barriers that had been shared. They indicated a strong need for grassroots advocacy and education campaigns to happen together, feeding into each other.

Opportunities for Education

Overwhelmingly, participants shared that more community education is needed to challenge stereotypes and broaden the general understanding of affordable and accessible housing in the Pikes Peak Region – and the diverse people who are impacted by housing barriers and needs. Participants also emphasized the importance of empowering citizens by educating them about their individual rights and developing their personal self-advocacy skills.

Several education campaigns were recommended to engage local decision makers, housing providers, service providers, advocates, other stakeholders and community members.

Increase awareness about unmet needs and barriers that relate to affordable and accessible housing.	Increase awareness about the important connection between affordable housing and public transportation. Encourage greater coordination between housing planning and public transportation planning.
Offer more training about the Fair Housing Act, especially standards about accessibility and accommodations for service animals (see Appendix D).	Collect and disseminate stories and testimonials that humanize affordable and accessible housing issues and highlight the diversity of experiences with needs and barriers while dispelling stigmas, fears and misinformation.
Offer more training to community members about individual housing rights and self-advocacy skills; disseminate written information to renters and prospective renters about Fair Housing rights and resources.	Promote the cultural acceptance of housing as a basic human need and right, and increase awareness about the economic benefits of preventing and ending homelessness.

Opportunities for Advocacy

In addition to education, there is a need for community advocates and leaders to elevate the status of affordable and accessible housing as a greater priority in our investments as a community, particularly in policymaking and budget allocations. Participants in every focus group recommended specific advocacy goals that are outlined below; they are potential directions for community organizing efforts.

- Advocate for a local inclusionary zoning ordinance, which would require a minimum percent of new housing developments to be affordable and accessible and encourage multiple types of housing in subdivisions.

This could model after the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance passed by the Denver City Council in 2014.

- Establish a local housing trust fund, additional land trusts, or other funding sources dedicated to ongoing financing for affordable and accessible housing developments.

Housing trust funds are distinct funds that are established by legislation, ordinance or resolution to receive on-going revenues from dedicated sources of public funding such as taxes, fees or loan repayments (Center for Community Change). This could connect with or model after the National Housing Trust Fund Campaign, a special initiative of the Center for Community Change.

- Create a licensing process for rental property owners.

This could model after the Rental Housing License community program in Boulder, CO. The licensing process could incorporate Fair Housing training and resources and encourage more collaboration between landlords, property managers and nonprofit agencies who work with renters.

- Develop a Rents Rights Campaign.

This could model after Chicago's Rents Rights Campaign and would include education on rental rights and responsibilities, resources for conflict and problem resolution, and referrals to need programs, services and trainings. The campaign could also promote non-displacement laws and other protections for tenants.

- Advocate for additional local incentives, such as subsidies or tax benefits, that encourage affordable and accessible housing development.
- Increase staff and availability of City Code Enforcement Officers.
- Advocate for funding to increase local Fair Housing resources and personnel, in order to improve access to community education about individual rights and greater enforcement of standards and protections.
- Work with the existing efforts to increase the number of low barrier, year-long overnight emergency shelter beds.
- Advocate for The Right to Rest Act or a repeal of the 2010 ordinance that banned camping on public land.

Recommendations to Expand, Improve or Coordinate Resources

Participants from both the Citizen and Organization groups shared their ideas for new resources or improvements to existing resources. Although outside the scope of community organizing work, they offer potential solutions to help address the affordable and accessible barriers and needs identified in this report.

- Develop a comprehensive database to track available housing units that are affordable and accessible, building off of information systems already in progress, such as Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement and Colorado Housing Search.
- Develop a portal that consolidates an individual's housing resources and available housing units that meet their needs (models could include portals used by Peak Vista, The Department of Human Services and the Veterans Administration)
- Continue to encourage dialogue and collaboration between service providers, housing providers, and the government in order to increase capacity for more affordable and accessible housing development and rehabilitation.

- Develop a Day Center in a central location for individuals who are homeless. This could provide citizens with shelter during the day, a space to store their belongings and basic amenities such as drinking water, showers or cooking facilities. It could also operate as a central “hub” for local housing resources and supportive services.

Models: Star of Hope in Houston and Refugee of Hope in San Antonio

- Disseminate more information to community members about local housing resources and how to navigate them, i.e. a booklet that outlines the steps person could take to access local housing information, benefits and resources.
- Using private or public resources, purchase vacant buildings and foreclosed homes and convert into shelters and/or affordable housing units.
- Continue to build upon existing supportive services for people experiencing homelessness, especially housing programs and services that tailor to individual contexts and address the needs of individuals who may be less able to access resources (i.e. individuals at risk of falling through the cracks).
- Use existing resources (i.e. faith based and police programs) to develop a car donation program for individuals who are in transitional housing programs.
- Coordinate and develop programs to support people with moving.
- Promote opportunities to increase economic diversity and collaborative communities in neighborhoods

Model: The Cohousing Association of the United States

References

¹The Independence Center White Paper: *Affordable and Accessible Housing for Persons with Disabilities in the Pikes Peak Region* 2015

²Colorado Springs/El Paso County Continuum of Care: *Annual Point in Time and Housing Inventory Count* 2015

Appendices

Appendix A

Question Route for Citizens:AAH Focus Groups

Introductory Questions

1. Tell us your name and something unique about you. (3 min)

Transition Question

2. What is the first word that comes to mind when you think about the housing system in Colorado Springs? (5 min)

Questions Relating to Needs, Barriers and Gaps

3. Describe the most recent process you went through to find housing. (15 min)
 - a. What was helpful?
 - b. What was challenging?
4. What are your specific housing needs? (10 min)
5. What do you think are the biggest barriers [for people living with disabilities] to obtain housing in Colorado Springs? (15 min)

Solution Question

6. What are some solutions or changes that could address the problems we've talked about? (15 min)

Bathroom Break: (5-10 minutes)

- Facilitators summarize themes

Ending Questions

7. (Give summary of common themes). Is this an adequate summary of what we have talked about? (5 min)
8. Based on everything we have talked about today, what is one piece of advice that you would give to someone advocating for more affordable and accessible housing in Colorado Springs? (5 min)
9. Is there anything you wanted to mention but didn't get a chance to say so? (5 min)



Appendix B

Question Route: Organization Focus Groups

Introductory Questions

1. Tell us your name, your organization, and summarize the resources your organization provides to your constituents. (3 min)

Transition Question

2. What is the first word that comes to mind when you think about the housing system in Colorado Springs? (5 min)

Questions Relating to Needs, Barriers and Gaps

3. Describe the process a person goes through to find housing. (15 min)
 - a. What are the helpful factors?
 - b. What makes the process challenging?
4. What are some specific housing needs you see within the population you serve? (10 min)
5. What do you think are the biggest barriers to obtain housing in Colorado Springs? (15 min)
 - a. In your opinion, which populations are most vulnerable?

Solution Question

6. What are some solutions or changes that could address the problems we've talked about? (15 min)

Bathroom Break: (5-10 minutes)

- Facilitators summarize themes

Ending Questions

7. (Give summary of common themes). Is this an adequate summary of what we have talked about? (5 min)
8. Who else should we be reaching out to for input? (5 min)
9. Is there anything you wanted to mention but didn't get a chance to say so? (5 min)

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in Focus Group Study

Affordable and Accessible Housing

The purpose of the group discussion and the nature of the questions have been explained to me. I consent to take part in a focus group about my experiences, including the community.

I have been told that the discussion will be audio recorded only if all participants agree. This tape will be kept in a secure, locked location and will only be used for the purposes of transcribing.

I agree to be audio recorded. ____ Yes ____ No

I understand that subjects of a sensitive nature may be discussed and that there is a potential for psychological risk and mental stress. Participants will be provided with community resources to address this risk.

My participation is voluntary. I understand that I am free to leave the group at any time. If I decide not to participate at any time during the discussion, my decision will in no way affect any services I receive through The Independence Center.

None of my experiences or thoughts will be shared outside of The Independence Center unless all identifying information is removed first. I agree to protect the confidentiality of other participants. The information that I provide during the focus group will be grouped with answers from other people so that I cannot be identified. Information shared to outside agencies will be fully confidential and will protect the identities of focus group participants.

Please Print Your Name

Please Sign Your Name

Witness Signature

Date

Appendix D

Accessible Housing Requirements under the Fair Housing Act:

***Note:** These requirements apply to multifamily dwellings designed and constructed for first occupancy after 1991, whether the housing is for rent or sale or is privately or publically funded. Multifamily dwellings include all dwelling units in buildings containing four or more dwelling units if the buildings have one or more elevators, and all ground floor units in other buildings containing four or more units, without an elevator.

1. At least one accessible building entrance on an accessible route.

- **An accessible route** means a continuous, unobstructed path connecting accessible elements and spaces within a building or site that can be negotiated by a person with a disability who uses a wheelchair, and that is also safe for and usable by people with other disabilities.
- **An accessible entrance** is a building entrance connected by an accessible route to public transit stops, accessible parking and passenger loading zones, or public streets and sidewalks.

2. Accessible public and common use areas.

Public and common-use areas cover all parts of the housing outside individual units. They include -- for example -- building-wide fire alarms, parking lots, storage areas, indoor and outdoor recreational areas, lobbies, mailrooms and mailboxes, and laundry areas.

3. Usable doors (usable by a person in a wheelchair).

All doors that allow passage into and within all premises must be wide enough to allow passage by persons using wheelchairs.

4. Accessible route into and through the dwelling unit.

There must be an accessible route into and through each covered unit.

5. Light switches, electrical outlets, thermostats and other environmental controls in accessible locations.

Light switches, electrical outlets, thermostats and other environmental controls must be in accessible locations.

6. Reinforced walls in bathrooms for later installation of grab bars.

Reinforcements in bathroom walls must be installed, so that grab bars can be added when needed. The law does not require installation of grab bars in bathrooms.

7. Usable kitchens and bathrooms.

Kitchens and bathrooms must be usable - that is, designed and constructed so an individual in a wheelchair can maneuver in the space provided.

Appendix E

***The Homeless Progress* is a first-hand account of homeless experiences, written from the perspective of a person who has experienced homelessness in Springfield, MA and Colorado Springs, CO off and on for approximately 18 months.**

Word Count: 1,942

Characters: 9,579

The Homeless Progress by M.T. Hazard

Number of homeless people in Tokyo for every 10,000 residents: 1;

Number of homeless people in NYC for every 10,000 residents: 67


Number of homeless people in Colorado Springs for every 10,000: 3-4¹

I have discovered that being homeless is a primitive, dystopian existence like some plagued population from a T.V. show only surrounded by modernity, luxury and just enough charity. A culture of gatherers in a digital world who rely on the resources available such as the public library, soup kitchens, Sally wagons², chicken in the park, dumpsters, and someone else's donations. It's a mass migration of individuals, couples and small groups from location to location to line up with hopes of gaining any offering available like seagulls hovering above fishing boats. We however, stand and wait. We wait for everything: showers, haircuts, bathrooms, phones, job offerings, clothing, and food. Time is what we have-time- time to wait-waiting time for a specific time to obtain what we think we need. While we wait, we tell tales of life's experiences, crack jokes, usually on each other, we meet friends and lovers and make new acquaintances, and snarl at enemies. Unlike the joyful Baloo from the Disney Movie *Jungle Book* we find bare necessities with weathered faces, competition, and patience. The days roll into hours of another day filled with the same casual routine and reflexive actions: some days pass faster than others. Regardless, it has been said on the streets of the Springs that if a person is hungry here he or she must be an idiot.

A commodity that is as near as important as a bathroom is the electrical outlet: cell phones, speakers, laptops and pods of all sorts, all require power. With the luggage stacked and all those wires stretching and infusing juices of electronic life, I have often pictured any departure gate at any airport with travelers prior to boarding gathering in any space near an outlet. We head to the library or some cof-

1 "Harper's Index" February 2015 issue of *Harpers'* magazine citing Ministry of Health, Labour (sic) and Welfare (Tokyo) and NYC Department of Homeless Service. As to Colorado Springs, it is my best estimate based on "Point in Time" surveys and the population of the Springs. Of course, the Springs is a much smaller city.

2 The Salvation Army has a catering truck that comes around for a hot dinners Monday through Friday.



fee shop. I have been to McDonald's where free (with purchase) Wi-Fi is available however; they have blocked all access to the electrical outlets.

The vagaries of the culture, just as in another, cover a wide spectrum of individuals. The uncaring (often rude loud, or just lacks empathy, litters), the braggart ("Maybe the less you have the more you're required to boast"³), the selfish (the smoker in the non-smoking area, cuts in line), the polite (beyond please and thank you, excuse me sir or ma'am), the quiet (doesn't say much, loner), the user ('can't get enough of them *Sugar Crisps*'), the dealer (late, expensive, demanding and then there is the generous few), the camper (Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) in pursuit, trashy but not all trashy) the young (it is not 1966 anymore, some suburbia dwellers slumming), the old, (range of age, gray, and teeth, usually bearded and sore), the student (must carry books, secure financial aid, and use the library for real) and the list goes on to boredom. Approximately a quarter of the homeless population is receiving some sort mental health treatment.⁴ (Some readers may claim we are all sick in the head for living this way but...) These mentally challenged individuals vary in demonstration as in appearance. There is shouting at perceived or real indiscretions of others, self-communication whether in rambling fashion or in what appears to be an intelligent dissertation to an unseen professional group yet functional in some primordial routine to eat and sleep. The yelling at the air often involves obscenities and unintelligibles and scares people and keeps us all on the alert. Some belong to the quiet set who are lost in his or her remote and deserted regions of thought and process.


We come from all over the country: Alaska, Georgia, Tennessee, Florida, New Mexico, California, Colorado, New England and who knows where else. Randy, the Ghost, Pop, Fox, Wolf man, Cave man, the Professor, Cowboy, Tex, Bojangles, Tennessee, too many Mikes and Michaels, and every other nickname that one might adopt mingle with the Cathys, Cindys, Susans, and Dakota's. Some of these characters resemble cartoon or theatre performers in reality hanging out on cement street corners smoking and joking, dressed in a vast array of costumes for warmth and style, requesting assistance, alms for the poor or sign-handling (known as "Flying a sign") complete with God Bless. Like Mister Kurtz⁵ arriving from a foreign land, I have joined the flock.

We are easy to detect with our semi-disheveled, tattered appearance lugging the ubiquitous backpack or two, maybe accompanied by various forms of luggage: Samsonite -plastic-tote -duffle all holding our sole possessions. And then there is the occasional stolen shopping cart burdened to bent wheel or two. Walking about is conducted in layered levels of clean and out right filthy. When people see us on the street or in the park there is a wide range of apprehension due to prejudice, mistrust or past confrontations suffered at the hands of a few street dwellers. Requesting assistance from the general public adds to the annoyance and disgust. Sometimes, just sometimes, I wonder if the squirrels receive better treatment than the "park people". More of our population is reserved and anonymous but we resemble the stereotype. We are a transient segment of our population: strange is rarely welcome. History has taught that lesson ad nauseam.

3 John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*

4 "Point in Time" 2013 Survey Colorado Springs, Colorado


5 Mister Kurtz went into the deepest, darkest parts of Africa and deteriorated as a civilized man to put it mildly in the novella *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad.



I must admit that there is an amount of freedom in this lifestyle. Some view this with a sense of disgust but there is a cost for that freedom: freezing his or her ass off because of snow storms, single digit temperatures, and facilities closing. Any corner won't do. I suppose that's what I deserve. However, on a late winter Sunday I awoke to a sun rise full of 'vim and vigor' with the streaking tangerine chill and 'I love Pink' across a canopy of remarkably blue, not a deep rich hue but a joyously baby blue cast over the city. I admired the view until it passed with stretched out dungareed legs under a grandfather cottonwood sprouting fresh hints of budding leaves. There were no internal desires, wishes to be elsewhere, I was content and free from harm and discomfort. I was far from the bored Alice prior to her discovery of the March Hare: no one was late and there was no place I'd rather be. That was until the wind picked up and a chill began to set in. That same wonderful sky rained on my picnic later.

Shelter is a relative term: to some underneath a cottonwood is paradise and that chill I felt was "nothin'"; others need mattresses, blankets and indoor facilities. The warming shelter has been a necessary and enjoyed respite. Men and women queue up nightly for the opportunity to lie upon a thin yoga type mat and curl up under a gray woolen blanket within a cavernous stark white bare store show room. Some appreciate, some complain, and most keep coming back. Wonderful, caring staff maintain order and safety even at the risk of his or her personal safety mingled with the scents of feet and bad gas with hints of stale tobacco and alcohol: all under the echo of raucous snoring. Unfortunately, it closes at 7:00 a.m., two hours before the library and ESM opens and several hours before the Marion House Soup Kitchen begins serving lunch. During the winter, warmth is an immediate concern at 20 degrees give or take. Hence, there is the flocking of homeless folk to businesses that cater to the early morning coffee and bakery patron. Among those of us who live on the services available many want more than the park or doorway or special cubby holes. Making it happen is a major challenge.

Jobs are not as easily obtained as some "Get a Job" challengers must assume they are. (Mostly men use the pejorative.) There are job seekers. Time is spent going through ESM or Goodwill or Craig's List or just showing up at Labor Ready. The hindrances often outweigh the applicants' positives. No permanent address, (even giving blood requires 'living address'), no car, other transportation difficulties, job history, cleanliness, drug testing, proper clothes, criminal record, storage for bags or showing up to work with baggage, literally and figuratively are all obstacles to gaining employment. Low paying jobs are not enough to get off the streets any time soon. Unfortunately, there are those who take advantage of our position and take on common labor with promises of payday and then tell us to scram. (Actually said more colorfully.) Without resources filing a complaint in court is difficult and confusing for most people out on the street. Even if one is working, saving money is not simple or safe. Banking is not one of our strong connections or supporters. Identification issues, child support, debt and affordability are all barriers to the banking system.



There are many residents who want to move the homeless out of downtown, move them out of the parks, move them out of sight. A day center will not accomplish that desire. The day center would need to have hot food, a computer center with Wi-Fi, showers, clothing, and various other services to attract visitors. Even then with warmer weather arriving people will enjoy being outside and close to downtown activities, services, and places to go. Use the money for more, clean, safe beds, maybe.

Springfield, Massachusetts has a day center⁶ complete with three computers, food, caseworkers, two televisions one in English, the other in Spanish, plastic seats with matching tables and walls of plaques. People come and go even in the hardest of winter weather. They continue to visit the local library, go to soup kitchens, sit in parks and hang out at his or her favorite spot to obtain ‘necessities’.

On April 16, 2015 the Warming Shelter closed and one hundred plus homeless will be without a place to sleep except outside. The 2010 Colorado Springs City Council’s passage of the ‘No Camping on Public Land’ ordinance will not stop people from finding some spot that is hopefully safe from HOT as well as muggers and thieves, who may or may not be homeless.

I have not heard a viable solution to homelessness in the Springs that would appease all sides. I certainly do not have the answer. The course of action must identify as many current issues first, and then proceed from there. Passage of the “The Right to Rest Act” known as the “Homeless Bill of Rights” by the Colorado Legislature would be a beginning. Meanwhile, view us “park people” merely as alternative lifestyle visitors to the store or the sidewalk or the park, we just have more visible baggage.

⁶ Friends of the Homeless, 755 Worthington Street, Springfield, MA also includes a shelter with beds available for men and women. The food shown on its website fohspringfield.org is not a fair representation of the food served.

Appendix F

Initiative to End Homelessness in Colorado Springs



On January 29, 2014, the City of Colorado Springs launched the Initiative to End Homelessness in Colorado Springs - a two-year plan to raise awareness about the problem of homelessness in our community, build a collaborative framework for service delivery, and invest in urgent needs quickly.

Notable accomplishments

- The Continuum of Care (CoC) has a new charter and fresh enthusiasm, and is backed by the strength and vision of the Pikes Peak United Way. The CoC adopted the Initiative as its interim strategic plan.
- With leadership from The Salvation Army and Springs Rescue Mission, the community added 158 winter shelter beds over the last year.
- State and local government partnered to bring a housing “toolkit” to Colorado Springs to help with the development of new housing with supportive services aimed at preventing and ending homelessness.
- Collaborated with the Downtown Partnership to improve safety downtown by enhancing lighting, developing a social services resource card, and adding a downtown police substation.
- Joined the national Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, bringing additional resources to meet local and federal goals to house all Veterans by the end of 2015.
- Completed a contract to resolve outstanding floodplain issues along Fountain Creek, which paves the way for expansion of Springs Rescue Mission.

One year later, ending homelessness is now a more tangible community priority. The needs of the most vulnerable are being prioritized in community plans, relationships among local governments and service providers are stronger, and more people are being served. This update highlights some of those stories.

A number of goals in the Initiative will take more time to achieve, but plans are in the works. Funds have been allocated to support expanded day resources and the community is working through land use and operational challenges to develop a permanent day center and additional permanent shelter beds. Also, there is still a significant need for more affordable housing across the community.

Despite these challenges, we believe this community can end homelessness. **Colorado Springs can be a community where no one goes without shelter and homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.** The Initiative grew out of this spirit, and as our community prepares to elect a new mayor and new city councilmembers, we must not lose our momentum. We must continue to work hand in hand with the people experiencing homeless and the churches, volunteers and professionals helping these neighbors find hope and a home.

It has been an honor to serve alongside you and to help celebrate and enhance the good work being done in this community. Thank you for making Colorado Springs a great place to live for all of our residents.

Auzi Bach

Community Update
March 2015

Vision

All citizens of Colorado Springs will have access to safe shelter and a strong safety net of services to help them avoid and end homelessness.

Goals

1. Increase access to emergency shelter, especially during winter months
2. Facilitate development of a day center offering comprehensive services and amenities
3. Expand outreach programs to reduce street homelessness
4. Increase access to stable and affordable housing
5. Strengthen the community's Continuum of Care
6. Develop a ten year plan to end homelessness with strong community buy in



Continuum of Care

CITY OF COLORADO SPRINGS/ EL PASO COUNTY

The City supports a Continuum of Care (CoC) approach to addressing homelessness - a collaborative community-based system of housing and services for those who are at risk or are currently experiencing homelessness. As its key guiding principle, the City of Colorado Springs/El Paso County CoC believes that the issues that contribute to homelessness can best be addressed once people are housed. The CoC brings

We are dedicated to ensuring our community is healthy and vibrant so that all families and individuals have access to housing and services that allow them to optimize their self-sufficiency

- Continuum of Care

together service providers, consumers, businesses, public officials, and citizens to reach out and connect to those in need and move them toward permanent housing.

In 2014, with funding from the City, Third Sector Group facilitated the development of a governance charter and the selection of a governing board to oversee the CoC. The Pikes

Peak United Way was selected as the Board's administrator and the City, County and local housing authorities serve as non-voting members. The CoC adopted the Initiative to End Homelessness in Colorado Springs as its interim strategic plan and will launch a comprehensive planning process in 2015 to build long-term strategies for preventing and ending homelessness.

Street Outreach

URBAN PEAK COLORADO SPRINGS

In summer 2014, Urban Peak Colorado Springs expanded its street outreach program with financial support from the City of Colorado Springs. There was a 79% increase (from 117 to 210) in the unduplicated number of youth and young adults the team connected with through street outreach. In addition, 20 more youth and young adults were brought into emergency shelter, an increase of 74% (from 27 to 47) over the previous year.

In addition to the 183 youth who entered emergency shelter, Urban Peak's outreach program helped 15 youth from the street reunite with family or find an alternative form of safe housing.

The vast majority of youth do not become homeless by choice. Homelessness has cumulative causes and we need systemic solutions.

- Shawna Kemppainen,
Executive Director

Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness

ROCKY MOUNTAIN HUMAN SERVICES

The *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* set a bold goal to end Veteran homelessness in the United States by the end of 2015. In 2014, the White House announced the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness - a call to action to mayors across the country. On October 16, 2014 in conjunction with the annual Homeless Veteran Stand Down, Mayor Bach joined this effort on behalf of the people working to end homelessness in Colorado Springs. The following goals were set for 2015:

- House 100 Veterans
- Reduce the number of unsheltered Veterans to 30 in the 2016 Point in Time Count
- Build capacity to rapidly house every homeless Veteran who wants housing

During 2014, Colorado Springs saw a significant increase in the resources targeted at ending Veteran homelessness. The number of Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers increased by 41, to a total of 176, and Colorado Springs was selected as one of 56 cities to receive "surge funding" as part of the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. With this funding, Rocky Mountain Human Services' (RMHS) Homes for All Veterans program will establish a Veteran Housing Resource Center for local Veterans seeking housing and employment services. The City is supporting RMHS with funding for outreach and rental assistance for homeless veterans.

Ending veteran homelessness means reaching the point where there are no veterans sleeping on our streets and every veteran has access to permanent housing. Should veterans become homeless or be at-risk of becoming homeless, communities will have the capacity to quickly connect them to the help they need to achieve housing stability. When those things are accomplished, our nation will achieve its goal.

- Mayors Challenge to
End Veteran Homelessness



Permanent Supportive Housing

PATHWAYS HOME COLORADO PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING TOOLKIT

The issues that may contribute to homelessness can best be addressed once people are housed.

The City of Colorado Springs and El Paso County Housing Authority, in partnership with Governor Hickenlooper's Office, are bringing the Pathways Home Colorado Supportive Housing Toolkit to the Pikes Peak region. A five-month series of technical assistance and peer learning sessions, the toolkit brings together local, state, and federal housing experts and resources to reduce the number of individuals experiencing homelessness. It expands community dialogue around housing stability and works to increase permanent supportive housing units - affordable rental housing combined with wraparound supportive services. Supportive housing is a nationally recognized best practice for successfully reintegrating highly vulnerable homeless families and individuals back into their community.

Created by the State of Colorado, the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA) and LeBeau Development, the toolkit provides service providers with logistical support and best practices in project development including funding, property management and service provision. Bringing these projects to fruition can be a challenging process. The toolkit aims to make this process easier by giving teams the expertise they need to build, operate, and maintain effective supportive housing.

First launched in January of 2014, the toolkit has expanded Colorado's development pipeline to include a dozen projects on the Western Slope and Front Range with the expectation of more than 200 new units in the next three years.

Homeless Outreach Team

COLORADO SPRINGS POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Colorado Springs Police Department Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) works throughout the city to reduce the number of complaints made about the activities of people experiencing homelessness. HOT builds relationships with homeless individuals and coordinates assistance with service providers. In 2014, these officers responded to 1,100 calls for service and made 2,055 contacts with homeless individuals in our community. The officers made 759 referrals to local service providers, established appointments or immediate visits as necessary, and coordinated mental health and medical transportation.

HOT also assists with removing trash and debris from public and private land as a result of illegal camping activities. These clean ups take place on a monthly basis in partnership with Keep Colorado Springs Beautiful.



Community Challenges and Opportunities



2,564

students in El Paso County experiencing homelessness during the 2012-2013 school year



100

homeless veterans the community aims to house by the end of 2015



4,695

deficit in available affordable housing units for extremely low income renters (<\$17,259) in El Paso County

1,147

unduplicated clients served by winter shelters between November 1, 2014 and March 25, 2015



291

year round emergency shelter beds including domestic violence shelter (32)

158

new winter shelter beds

82,708

households spending more than 30% of their income on housing and utility costs

75,363

persons living below the poverty line in El Paso County

\$23,850

federal poverty line for a household of four



2,055

contacts the Homeless Outreach Team made with persons experiencing homelessness in our community



Investments

By re-evaluating its grantmaking process and targeting highest priorities first, the City was able to invest \$1,027,156 in homeless programs in 2014 – an increase of 75% over 2013 (\$587,161). Support was maintained for essential shelter and meal programs, while also expanding respite care and street outreach and increasing the number of winter shelter beds. In addition, the City supported development of 54 units of affordable housing and funded critical repairs to transitional housing units with \$960,500 in grants and loans to Greccio Housing and Colorado House, LLC.

\$1,766,966 **HOUSING AND SHELTER**

Ascending to Health Respite Care
Colorado House, LLC
Colorado Springs Housing Authority
Ecumenical Social Ministries
Greccio Housing
Homeward Pikes Peak
Interfaith Hospitality Network
Partners in Housing
The Salvation Army
Springs Rescue Mission
UrbanPeak

\$120,260 **SUPPORT SERVICES AND OUTREACH**

Catholic Charities
The Salvation Army
Urban Peak

\$100,400 **PLANNING**

Colorado Springs/El Paso County
Affordable Housing Needs Assessment
Colorado Springs/El Paso County
Continuum of Care
Pikes Peak United Way

Thank You

Though not a service provider, the City engaged with service providers, business leaders, policymakers and the general public to champion and invest in strategies that prevent and end homelessness. A community based Trustee Committee was formed to consult on and allocate funding to the strategic initiatives. Many thanks to these people and organizations and the many others who work daily to serve our homeless neighbors.

Trustee Committee
Suzi Bach
Carol Bruce-Fritz
Mike DeGrant
Nechie Hall
Deborah Hendrix
Kathy Hybl
Jan Martin
Chris Riley
Andre Spencer, Ph.D.
Jason Wood

Mayor Steve Bach
Colorado Springs City Council
City of Colorado Springs
Housing and Community
Initiatives
Homeless Outreach Team
(CSPD)
Planning
Public Works
Fire Department
Colorado Springs Utilities

Office of Governor
John W. Hickenlooper
El Paso County
Board of County
Commissioners
El Paso County
Housing Authority Board

Continuum of Care Governing Board
Pikes Peak United Way
El Pomar Foundation
First Mortgage Company
Downtown Partnership
The O'Neil Group Company
Third Sector Group
Keep Colorado Springs Beautiful
Coats4Canines

For more information, please contact City of Colorado Springs Housing and Community Initiatives at housing@springsgov.com or visit www.coloradosprings.gov/housing.