

Social Mobility Committee

Initiative: Create community conversations around the impact of housing insecurity on women’s and girls’ health and education.

Who it Impacts

Approximately 44,500 households¹¹ in Hamilton County struggle to afford housing. They are “cost-burdened,” “severely cost-burdened,” or homeless. Their situations may range from living in cars or shelters or doubled up with other families, or, if they are paying rent, paying much more than they can afford, leaving them unable to pay for medicine, food, childcare, transportation, clothing or other family needs. The high cost of housing means that they have no savings, no assets and no cushion for illness, job loss, car trouble or other life events, and no extras for education or investment in the future.

Housing affordability, homelessness and eviction disproportionately affect women of color, women who are single parents, and young women emerging into adulthood. These renters are often working, but, at minimum wage or slightly higher, their wages have not kept pace with the increases in housing costs.

While a few families receive supports such as housing subsidies or public housing to help with rental costs, the majority of families do not receive this help because the amount of assistance is much smaller than the number of eligible families; for example, Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority has vouchers for approximately 11,600 families in Hamilton County with three to five year waitlists for eligible families. Even families who have access to housing vouchers or other assistance struggle to find landlords who accept assistance or who offer clean, accessible, affordable housing in safe neighborhoods near transit and jobs. Each year, about 12,000 evictions are filed, plunging unstable families further into crisis; many of these evicted households are single mothers.



While those who work in fields that serve struggling families – teachers, healthcare professionals, social workers and so on – may witness these realities and their subsequent impacts, the majority of the public remains unaware of the depth and complexity of the problem and its long-term effects on our community.



¹¹ Community Building Institute of Xavier University. (2017.) *Affordable Housing in Hamilton County: An analysis of households, housing affordability, and housing subsidy in Hamilton County and Cincinnati, Ohio.*

Why the Initiative

The Hamilton County Commission on Women & Girls exists to “improve the economic position of all women in Hamilton County”. Income instability, housing insecurity, homelessness and evictions deepen poverty for families and for individual women and children. Homelessness and housing insecurity adversely impact the health, education, opportunities, hope, and community and economic participation of women and girls in our community. While there are a number of proposed policy initiatives that can help, they lack community support because of misunderstandings, myths and stereotypes about homelessness. In addition many people feel hopeless or helpless in the face of this large-scale structural problem, so they avoid discussing it.

Some areas in the county outside the City of Cincinnati have similar levels of poverty and homelessness but less awareness and fewer public policy initiatives. As a Commission, we need to educate ourselves and the people we know, to see beyond the stereotypes, move out of passivity, and learn ways to engage our community at a deeper level through conversation and compassion.

In keeping with our directive to develop public information and/or education campaigns, this initiative attempts to use a community conversation model to help people understand our County’s housing problem and to empower county residents and their legislators to act toward solutions.

Research/Justification

The committee outlined the following components for social mobility in our region:

- a) Basic needs: food, clothing & shelter
- b) Economic capital: sustainability, living wage, etc.
- c) Skills & knowledge: for jobs, about other aspects of life
- d) Overcoming prejudice: intersectionality of gender with race, ethnicity, immigrant status, etc.
- e) Social capital: privilege, empowerment

Members of the committee engaged in research to learn more about the problems of housing and homelessness. This included attending workshops on housing and eviction offered by Affordable Housing Advocates; reviewing articles by Matt Desmond (“Evicted”); reviewing Xavier University and LISC studies on Hamilton County housing issues, participating in City Council’s Quality of Life Subcommittee, interviewing subject matter experts, and reviewing apps and online educational games about homelessness.



Recommendations

- We believe that community conversations, storytelling and art can be used to open dialog about solutions to housing insecurity and homelessness. This year, we developed and piloted a community conversation about homelessness and its effects on health and education for women and girls in a format that can encourage thoughtful discussion rather than passive listening. This pilot conversation should be the model for future house parties and discussions throughout the community. A template for community discussions is developed based on learnings from the pilot program.
- Engage arts programs to develop storytelling, spoken word, games or short videos to communicate this subject matter in nontraditional ways.
- Schedule a time early next year for commission members to participate in the St. Vincent de Paul poverty simulation activity to help commission members understand some of the complexities and unseen costs involved in surviving in poverty.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Bess Lindeman

Megan Rich

Rina Saperstein

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A Community Conversation on

The impact of Housing Insecurity on the Health & Education of Women & Girls

Thursday, November 14, 2019 | 6:30-8:00PM
Finneytown School District Media Center
8916 Fontainebleau Terrace, Cincinnati, 45231

Pizza, drinks, and babysitting will be available

The Hamilton County Commission on Women and Girls is hosting this conversation to create greater awareness about housing insecurity and public will to address the issue.

This event is organized as a set of “table talks” in which small groups, each led by a facilitator, share experiences and perspectives. People experiencing housing insecurity, those in a position to witness its impact on women and girls, and all members of our Hamilton County community are invited to participate.

Results will inform recommendations made by the Social Mobility Committee to the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners.

RSVP Requested: <https://hccwg-housing.eventbrite.com>

More Info: Eileen Trauth (emtrauth@gmail.com), Rina Saperstein (rlsaperstein@yahoo.com), Commission on Women & Girls

INTRODUCTION: Denise Driehaus, President, Board of Hamilton County Commissioners

FACILITATORS:

- Kathy Schwab, Executive Director, Local Initiatives Support Corporation; Commission on Women & Girls
- Megan Rich, MD, UC Health, Family & Community Medicine; Commission on Women & Girls
- Rebeka Beach, Manager, Project Connect, Cincinnati Public Schools
- Cathy McNair, LISW-S, Finneytown District School Social Worker

