

**An Evaluation of the Emergency Food and Shelter Program at the
Cincinnati Council of St. Vincent de Paul:**



Executive Summary

By:
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February 2009

PREFACE

In the Spring and Summer of 2007, unemployment in Hamilton County averaged 5.5%, and the economy was generally seen as healthy if not thriving – for some but not for everyone! Foreclosures were occurring but were still relatively rare. Against this backdrop we at St. Vincent de Paul for the first time administered Emergency Food & Shelter grant money to help people avoid losing their rented homes. Almost immediately, there was a strong indication that the stream of recommendations being submitted for approval carried data which would ultimately reveal something very important about people, about our vulnerability and strength, and about the wonderful resource the geographic reach of the SVdP conference system provides our area.

“Strength-based” social work fosters the understanding that most often on some level, we know the solutions to our own problems; have some access to the elements of those solutions and the native ability to make corrections to our personal life courses needed to avoid facing the same problem again. The idea that each personal crisis indicates the need for in depth analysis of the “victim” and the introduction of a comprehensive program that can teach the person new (and more “virtuous”) behaviors is accurate far less often than the converse. It is that kind of strict mind set that often causes individuals to “take the rap” for something bigger than all of us – the fact that the social/economic system on which we all rely at its best is just not flexible enough nor universally durable enough to allow individuals to avoid calamities that are out of their control. Bad things do happen to people, seemingly out of the blue. Mercifully, however, they are often correctable with the application of a relatively minor remedy. These study findings support that thesis.

As services were provided during the 2007 project, the data generated continued to accumulate, becoming a richer treasure by the day. There was no denying the potential value this repository of statistics held for learning both about the helping role and the experience of being in need. As time and skill permitted, work was done on identifying common causes of financial hardships faced by clients as well as verifying the existence of hidden pockets of poverty by attaching each case to a census track. And then we waited hopefully with the data but short a plan for mining it.

Matt Flege joined SVdP in April, 2008 with keen analytical skills and the orientation of a social worker. He applied those gifts to this project, to this data reserve, and brought it to life. His findings are compelling. As he cautions, **they are not meant as tools to reject some requests for assistance but to alert us to the special help some people may need to carry forward and maintain their plan for housing stability.** We are grateful to him for this wonderful product. We thank all our professional staff and parish conference members who were so effective in carrying out the program and gathering the data. We are humbled by and grateful to those who trusted SVdP at their time of need. We do not underestimate their courage. Most of all, we celebrate, congratulate and learn from those who used this program to restore and maintain their housing stability and avoided the need to use the homeless services system as a result.

These study results are being released in a far less certain social and economic environment than existed when it was conducted. Recession is now real around the world. But, herein we see reflected the vast reservoir of human ingenuity, the strength of our drive to survive and the success that is possible with common efforts. Ultimately we are encouraged to trust in the strong role the EFSP plays as the community helps individuals address financial crises.

Kevin Lab, LISW
Director of Programs

Introduction:

According to the Cincinnati Coalition for the homeless, some 25,000 people experience homelessness in the Cincinnati area each year. Of these, a startling one-third are children. Perhaps the ultimate form of poverty in a nation of plenty, homelessness has a devastating impact on the families and individuals who face it. Homelessness has an especially severe impact on the development of children, which is well documented. Unfortunately, like so many other cities throughout the United States, Cincinnati's network of social services providers are strained to meet the needs of its large homeless and at-risk populations, and emergency shelters for both individuals and families are badly overwhelmed.

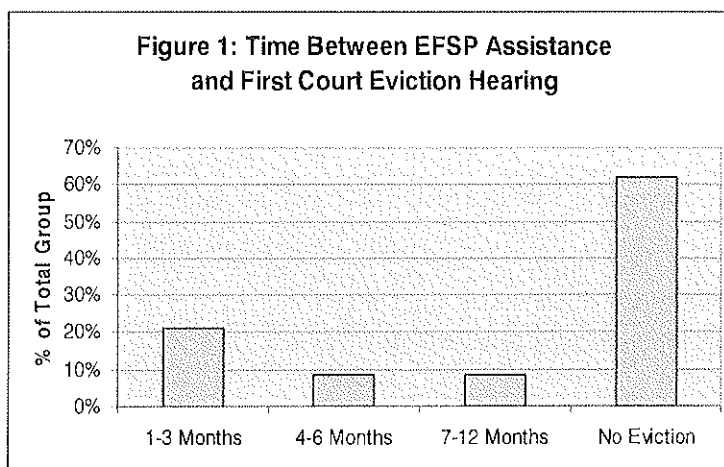
One of the main sources of funding for the prevention of homelessness in the Cincinnati area comes from the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), which is a pool of federal money available to nonprofit organizations used to provide emergency assistance to the homeless and at-risk population. While social service agencies can utilize EFSP funds for a variety of programs, the Cincinnati Council of St. Vincent de Paul (SVDP) uses EFSP funds each year to provide emergency rental assistance to individuals and families who are faced with eviction, and ultimately, homelessness. The program targets households which were going through a short-term crisis, such as a lost job or a sudden illness. These households are assisted with up to one month's rent (or up to \$700) in the hope that enough breathing room will be provided for the household to stabilize its overall financial situation and maintain housing in the long run.

In the spring and summer of 2007, SVDP provided EFSP rental assistance to 128 households who were either about to be evicted or who were currently homeless and were seeking housing. In the summer of 2008, a follow-up study was conducted by SVDP to determine the effectiveness of this program. This executive summary provides key findings and implications of that study. For more information about the entire study, contact mflege@svdpcincinnati.org.

Key Findings:

1. A majority of households assisted avoided facing eviction for at least one year.

For each of the households assisted through the EFSP program, a search was done on the Hamilton County Clerk of Courts website to determine if they had faced a court eviction hearing within 12 months after receiving assistance. Figure 1 outlines the findings of this search. As the figure demonstrates, 62% of households were not faced with an eviction hearing after receiving EFSP assistance during the 12-month period, suggesting that the intervention was successful in stabilizing the household's housing situation. Another 21% of households were faced with a



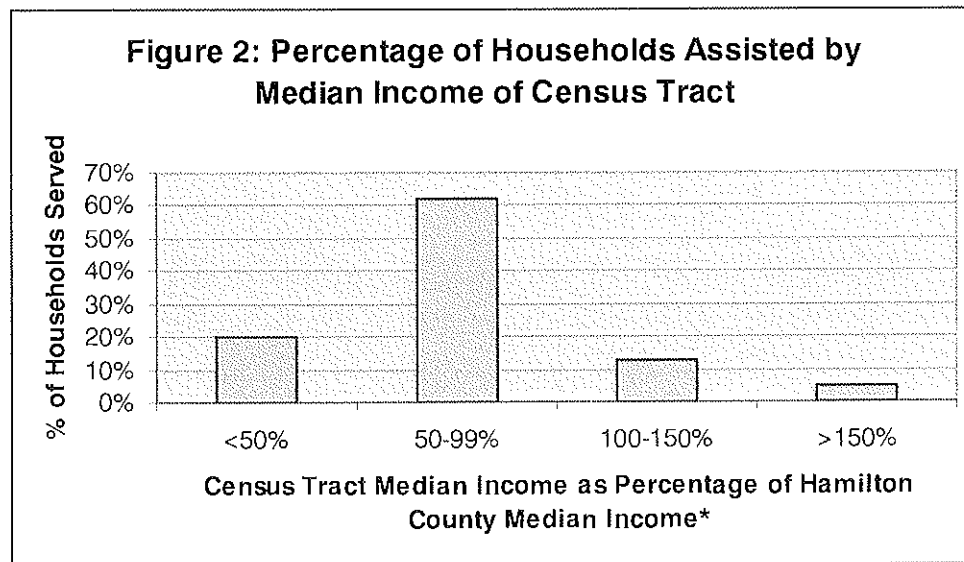
court eviction hearing within 3 months of receiving assistance, suggesting that they continued to struggle to pay the rent. The final 17% of households did face a court eviction hearing, but several months passed between the time of assistance and the eviction, suggesting that their housing situation was stabilized at least temporarily.

2. *Households assisted represented a diverse demographic group.*

Much like the homeless and at-risk population as a whole, the households assisted were a diverse mix of individuals and families. The following are some highlights from the demographic information that was tracked:

- 61% of heads of household assisted were employed.
- 70% of heads of household had a high school diploma or higher, while 30% did not.
- 71% of households contained children, while 29% did not.
- 77% of heads of household were females, while 23% were males.
- 59% of households received some form of public assistance (Food Stamps, SSD, etc.)
- Nearly half of all households' rent was less than 39% of income, while 34% of households' rent was more than 60% of income.

Furthermore, households assisted with EFSP funds lived throughout Hamilton County in areas ranging from very poor to relatively affluent. Clients were assisted in a full 71% (36 out of 51) of zip codes in Hamilton County. The census tract of each household assisted was also recorded, and median income of each census tract was compared to the median income of Hamilton County (\$43,811 per 2004 US Census data). Figure 2 demonstrates the results.



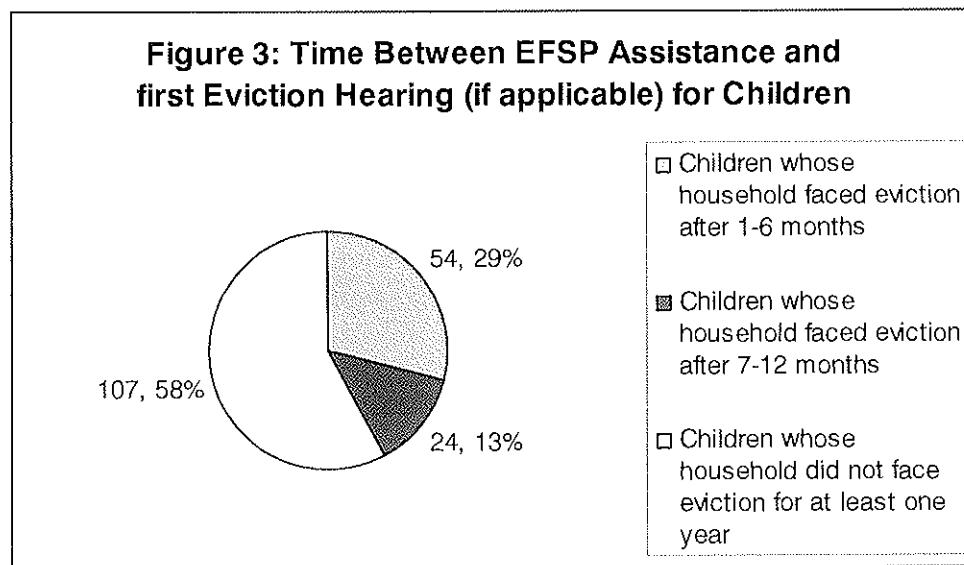
As figure 2 indicates, a majority (62%) of households assisted lived in Census Tracts with a median income of 50-99% of the Hamilton County median. A further 20% of households lived in areas with a median income of less than 50% of the county median. Finally, 23% of households lived in Census Tracts with a median income that was higher than the Hamilton County Median. This indicates that while a majority of households assisted lived in

moderate to low-income areas, a substantial amount of clients lived in neighborhoods of higher than average income.

3. *A majority of individuals assisted were children.*

The ravages of poverty on the mental and emotional development of children are a given in sociological research. The implications of the insecurity that comes with homelessness on the development of a child include failure to learn and inability to regulate emotional responses. Any reduction in instances of homelessness among children then carries its own unique benefits for the child and for the larger society.

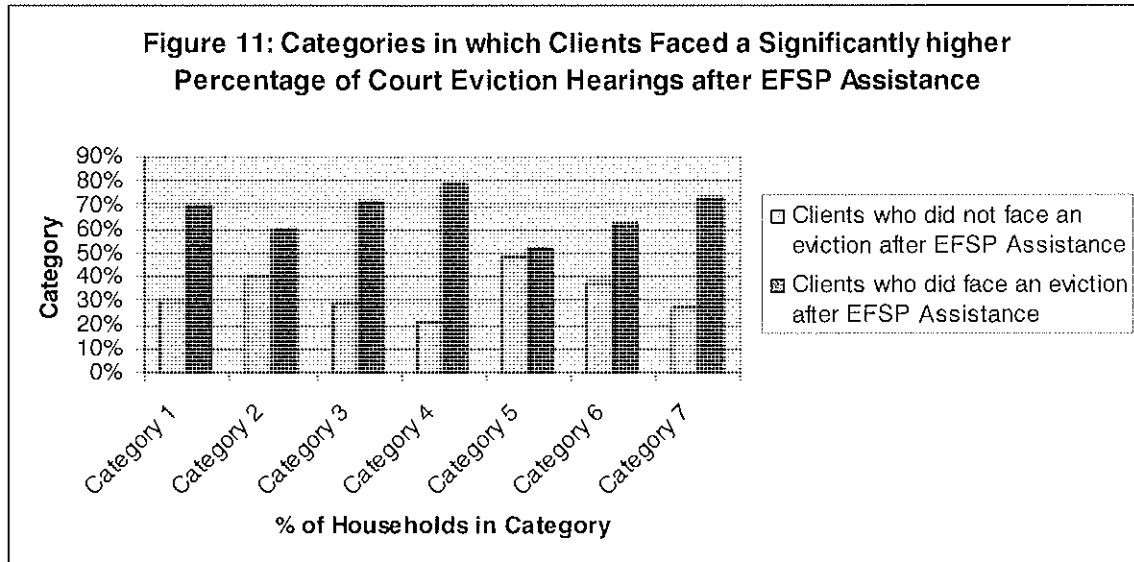
In 2007, 53% of all household members (185 individuals) assisted by SVDP with EFSP rental funds were children. As figure 3 demonstrates, 71% of the children assisted avoided eviction for at least 7 months after the introduction of the program's intervention.



4. *Indicators of increased or decreased likelihood of future eviction hearings were identified.*

For each of the demographic and assistance characteristics examined, a comparison was done between clients who did not face a Court Eviction Hearing after receiving EFSP assistance and those who did. For the overall population served, there was a 62/38 split between those who did not receive an eviction hearing and those who did. Therefore, for each characteristic, a nearly 62/38 split would indicate that clients falling under the category fared the same as the total population after receiving EFSP assistance. A significantly different split, such as 70/30, however, would indicate that clients in the particular category fared better than average after receiving EFSP assistance, while a split such as 40/60 would indicate that clients in the particular category had a much higher risk of facing a court eviction hearing. This comparison revealed several characteristics under which clients faced a significantly higher or lower percentage of court eviction hearings after receiving EFSP assistance.

Figure 11 illustrates the characteristics under which clients faced a significantly higher chance of facing a Court Eviction Hearing after receiving EFSP assistance than the population served as a whole.



Explanation of Categories

Category 1 (10 households): Client assisted with First Month's Rent for a new apartment

Category 2 (43 households): Client's rent is 60-99% of Household Income

Category 3 (35 households): Client receiving financial assistance and not currently employed

Category 4 (32 households): Client faced a Court Eviction Hearing prior to receiving EFSP Assistance

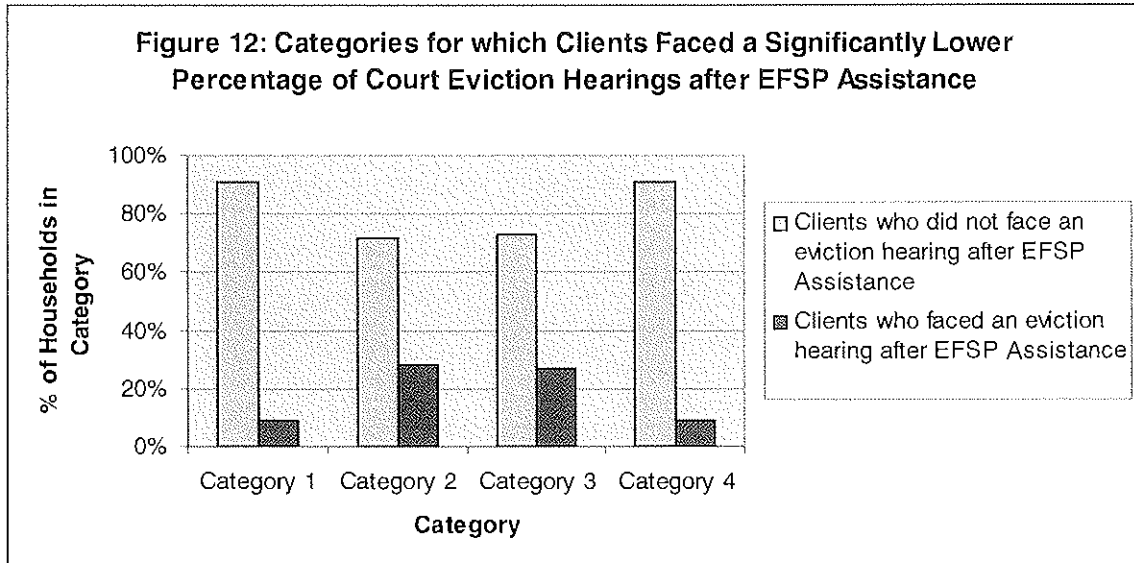
Category 5 (27 households): Client assisted with \$600-\$700

Category 6 (13 households): Client unemployed, new job lined up but not yet begun

Category 7 (11 households): Client is disabled

As Figure 11 demonstrates, clients who were assisted with first month's rent (as opposed to rent for a current apartment) faced a much greater chance of being evicted (70%) than the group assisted as a whole. Clients for whom rent was 60-99% of household income also faced a greater percentage of court eviction hearings (60%), as did clients who received financial assistance but were not currently employed (71%). At 78%, clients who faced a court eviction during the year prior to receiving EFSP assistance faced the greatest percentage of court eviction hearings after assistance of any group. Fifty-two percent of clients who received \$600-\$700 of EFSP assistance faced a court eviction hearing, and 62% of clients who had a new job lined up but had not yet begun working faced a court eviction hearing after assistance was provided. Finally, 73% of clients who were disabled went on to receive a court eviction hearing after receiving EFSP assistance.

The comparison also revealed four categories within which clients had a significantly lower than average chance of facing a court eviction hearing. These characteristics are outlined in figure 12 below.



Explanation of Categories

Category 1 (11 households): Clients received less than \$200 in EFSP assistance

Category 2 (96 households): Clients did not receive a court eviction hearing prior to EFSP assistance

Category 3 (33 households): Client is newly employed (< 2 months)

Category 4 (11 households): Client is temporarily off work for health-related reasons

As Figure 12 indicates, a mere 9% of clients who received less than \$200 in EFSP assistance went on to face a court eviction hearing. Also, clients who did not face a court eviction hearing in the year prior to receiving EFSP assistance had a smaller chance (28%) of facing an eviction hearing after assistance was provided. Two employment categories also proved favorable to clients' chances of avoiding eviction after receiving EFSP assistance. Only 27% of clients who recently started a new job went on to face eviction, and an incredibly low 9% of clients who were temporarily off of work due to health reasons faced an eviction after receiving EFSP assistance.

Implications:

1. *EFSP rental assistance is a relatively low-cost, effective method of homeless prevention for households, especially those with children, facing a short-term financial crisis. EFSP funding should be increased to prevent a greater number of households from becoming homeless.*

A full 62% of households assisted with EFSP funds in 2007 were prevented from facing an eviction for at least a year, with an additional 17% of households being prevented from facing eviction for at least several months after receiving EFSP assistance. For these households an expenditure of a few hundred dollars was enough to allow the family to remain independent and maintain housing on their own. The cost of providing shelter and eventually reintegrating these households if they had become homeless would have been many times the cost of preventing the episode of homelessness in the first place with EFSP rental assistance. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the potential savings.

Figure 4: Potential Cost of Housing an Individual

<p>The Potential Cost to agencies of Sheltering and Re-housing a Homeless Individual:</p> <p>32 nights in a shelter at \$29 per night*: \$928 First month's rent for 1 bdrm apartment: \$350 Security deposit: <i>Paid by Client</i> Cost to St. Vincent de Paul to provide basic furniture/household items: \$275 Total: \$1,553</p>	<p>The Cost of Keeping a Potentially Homeless Individual in their Apartment for at least One Month through EFSP Funds:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$350</p>
<p>Difference: \$1,203</p>	

**According to the Partnership Center of Cincinnati, 32 nights is the average stay in a homeless shelter for an individual, and \$29 is the average cost per night. Note: This figure excludes specialty shelters such as Respite Center.*

Figure 5: Potential Cost of Housing a Family of Four

<p>The Potential Cost to Agencies of Sheltering and Re-Housing a Homeless Family of Four:</p> <p>35 nights in a shelter at \$116 per night*: \$4,060 First month's rent for 2 bdrm apartment: \$700 Security deposit: <i>Paid by Client</i> Cost to St. Vincent de Paul to provide basic furniture/household items: \$505 Total: \$5,265</p>	<p>The Cost of Keeping a Potentially Homeless Family of Four in their Apartment for at least One Month through EFSP Funds:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$700</p>
<p>Difference: \$4,565</p>	

**According to the Partnership Center of Cincinnati, 35 nights is the average stay in a homeless shelter for families, and \$29 is the average nightly cost per household member.*

As Figures 4 and 5 demonstrate, using EFSP assistance to allow a household to maintain housing on its own can result in savings of more than \$1,200 for an individual and more than \$4,500 for a family of four. In the case of households for whom such an intervention will stabilize housing and prevent homelessness, EFSP assistance is clearly more cost-effective than entering the continuum of homeless services.

Unfortunately, during the months that EFSP funds were available, St. Vincent de Paul received many times more requests for assistance than it was able to accommodate with its limited EFSP funds. Many households were turned away, and the funds lasted less than four months. This means that many households who could have been assisted were left without help, and some of these households undoubtedly fell into homelessness.

2. *A diverse mix of individuals and families can become faced with homelessness; therefore a variety of programs covering a broad geographical area must exist to prevent homelessness.*

As the demographic data collected in this study indicates, households assisted with EFSP funds in 2007 represented a diverse mix of individuals and families. Certainly different homeless and at-risk individuals and families will have different types of need. A program that is effective for a mentally ill individual will likely not be suitable for a working parent of three, and vice-versa. This research indicates that for households facing a short-term crisis and the threat of homelessness, EFSP rental assistance can be an effective means of homeless prevention. It must be clearly understood, however, that EFSP rental assistance is just one piece of the greater continuum of programs and services needed to prevent and solve homelessness.

Furthermore, as the Census Tract data indicates, individuals living in a broad geographical area with varying income levels are at risk of homelessness. Therefore, EFSP funds must be distributed in a way that covers as wide an area as possible. An example of such effective distribution is the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's wide ranging coverage through its network of church conferences. SVDP's 59 local conferences, together with its main office in the West End, cover the entire Hamilton County area, and each conference is able to access the agency's EFSP funds to assist clients. This organizational framework allowed SVDP to assist client's in 71% of Hamilton County's zip codes in 2007

- 3. *While certain characteristics may indicate a greater or lesser probability of housing stability as a result of EFSP assistance, each household's situation should be evaluated on a case by case basis.***

As Figures 11 and 12 above demonstrate, this research has identified seven characteristics under which a majority of clients went on to face an eviction hearing after receiving EFSP assistance, and four characteristics under which the vast majority of clients did not. While it might be tempting to utilize these factors as a means to automatically eliminate or qualify clients for assistance, this research does not justify such a course of action for two reasons.

1. Under no characteristic with a significant amount of clients was there a 100% eviction or non-eviction rate.
2. Because of the wide range of factors which contribute to a household's overall financial and housing stability, no characteristic should be looked at in isolation.

If a client applying for EFSP assistance demonstrates a characteristic for which clients have proven to be more likely to face to a future eviction, such as the need for \$600-\$700 in assistance, more questions should be asked to determine whether the client exhibits any of the characteristics for which future evictions have proven to be less likely, such as recent employment or a clean past eviction history. Rather than being used to develop a strict formula, the characteristics for which clients faced a significantly higher or lower percentage of future evictions should be viewed as guideposts in a client's overall financial and housing situation.

- 4. *Further evaluation of the success of EFSP assistance should be conducted by local agencies, EFSP boards and the EFSP National Board.***

Finally, this project researcher recommends that a study be undertaken to evaluate the Emergency Food and Shelter Program more comprehensively on a local level, and also on a nationwide scale. While this research has provided information about the outcome of assistance provided by one local agency in one year, a more comprehensive study on the overall effects of the program is needed. Such hard evidence will be necessary in lobbying for the continued and hopefully increased funding of this vital program.

THE SISTER CIRCLE



“A woman is the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture, and transform.” – Diane Mairechild

Come join “The Sister Circle a new women’s support group that meets once a month at the St. Vincent de Paul Winton Hills office. Enjoy a free lunch, special activities, and as well as stimulating discussions. Registration is free and is required. Call 641-0382 for registration information.

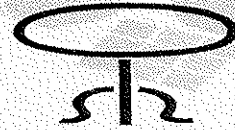
CINCINNATI COUNCIL OF THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

FURNITURE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

PURPOSE: This program was established to provide help to people in accessing basic household furniture. This responsibility is shared with many parish conferences to make service available throughout the county.

THE NEED:

Approximately 125 requests for furniture are received weekly at our Council office.



MEETING THE NEED:

While this program is of longer standing, since April of 2007 service has been provided through home visits. A strong corps of 14 volunteers recruited from throughout our area join with several staff members to visit homes in pairs every Wednesday morning.

From 8 to 12 homes are visited each week. Building on the interpersonal connections made during the visits, spiritual support will be offered and vouchers will be issued to meet needs identified in the assessment. Requests for beds present a major problem in this area due to the frequent infestation of bed bugs. A special fund has been established to assist with the purchase of beds. That fund is a shared resource for the conferences and Council programs. The resources presented by this fund are tragically inadequate compared to the need.

THE RESULTS

During 2008, furniture assistance coupled with spiritual support and personal connection, was provided to 286 households in Hamilton County through the Council office.



CINCINNATI COUNCIL OF THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

GENERAL NEEDS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

PURPOSE: To help provide items and services most necessary to sustaining human dignity and hope.

THE NEED:

Clothing, cooking and eating utensils, bedding, personal care and hygiene items are needed to preserve the wholeness of body and soul. Having official personal documents of identification is essential to our safety and to conducting personal business. A cool spot in the summer and a warm coat in the winter are truly the relief and protection we all need.

OUR APPROACH

Twice each week, people in need are welcomed without appointment to the Council office. The basic struggle to maintain life is so difficult and telling in the faces of those who come. The issues faced by those in need vary but the fire of hope they present by their very presence and kindness offers the most eloquent of sermons for all those able and willing to listen. For several precious minutes the strangers sit with a client advocate and reveal a glimpse of the same longings that are common to us all. It is their struggle under the most extreme conditions that set them apart. Often more than 100 come and ask and receive. It is always in this context though - an atmosphere of comfort where strangers connect and reveal and hope and pray and go on to hope more.



THE RESULTS

During 2008, nearly 7,000 people experienced caring and shared their strength with another in this environment that is our tradition. In very practical and concrete ways we have been able to help each of them address their most basic needs.

CINCINNATI COUNCIL OF THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

RENT AND UTILITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

PURPOSE: The sole goal of this program is to prevent homelessness.

OUR APPROACH: In order to help the greatest number of people with limited funds, we usually provide seed money on which people facing eviction due to delinquent rent or utility payments can build to maintain housing and avoid homelessness. With assurance that SVdP funds will be granted if the client acquires the balance needed to prevent utility shut off or eviction, so many people are able to gather the additional funds from other sources.

Our assistance is often less than 20% of the total needed. At times, other assistance programs in the area contribute. Most often, however, clients use their earnings, benefits, contributions of family and friends as well as their negotiating skills to develop and carry out a workable plan.

OUR RATIONALE:

The staggering material and psychological costs of homelessness last for generations and dwarf our financial contribution toward individual solutions.



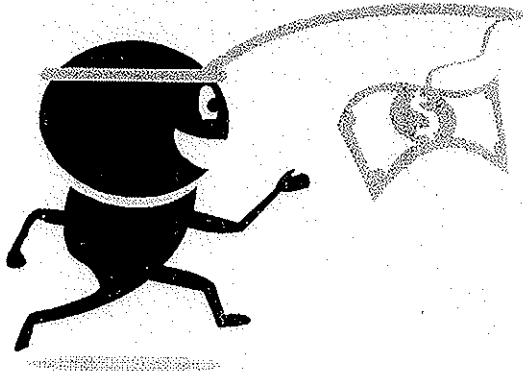
THE NEED: We receive nearly 100 calls every day from people requesting help with rent or utilities.

OVER

THE PROCESS:

We respond to as many requests as possible and gather information about the total financial situation of the household. This is used to determine whether we will provide assistance. All requests are reviewed by a team of staff with the following goals in mind:

- Maximizing future impact of assistance
- Alleviating the most severe suffering
- Help people avoid the most devastating consequences of homelessness.



Importantly, the process always includes the development with the client of both a written budget and plan for maintaining housing in the near future.

THE RESULTS:

In 2008, 898 households including 2167 people were provided assistance with rent or utilities, thereby avoiding loss of their housing. Our most recent review shows that 78% of households assisted avoided eviction for at least 6 months.

Please take a copy of the Executive Summary of "An Evaluation of the Emergency Food and Shelter Program at the Cincinnati Council of St. Vincent de Paul".

CINCINNATI COUNCIL OF THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

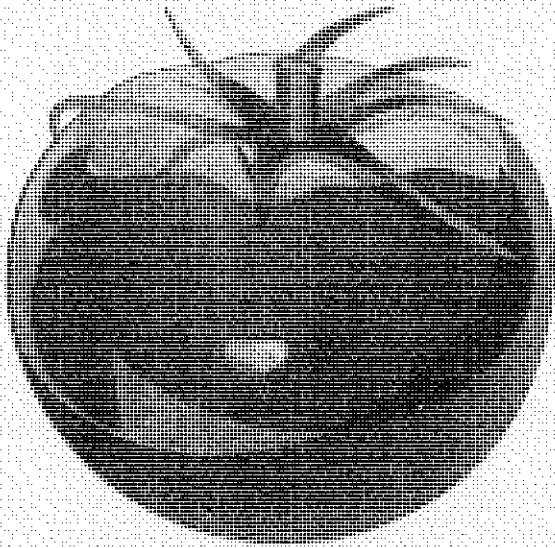
CHOICE PANTRY PROGRAM

PURPOSE: To make basic food products available to meet all emergency requests and to provide a regular monthly source of supplemental food for low income households not located in areas served by SVDP conferences

PHILOSOPHY: The service of the choice pantry and the design of its operation are based on our belief in the importance of relationships in everyone's life. A common prayer is offered shortly before the pantry opens. In addition, volunteers are available in the lobby for friendly exchange and if desired individual prayer before the patron is called to select their food. The selection process itself is individually guided by another volunteer who explains the choices and quantities available. Most importantly however, this contact is valued as an additional opportunity to personalize the care of our community to the person seeking service.

THE "CHOICE" IN CHOICE PANTRY

While our space is limited, it was our desire to give patrons the opportunity to select the food they wanted to eat. Being able to manage the flow of patrons was key. Pairing one volunteer with each patron to walk through the process allowed us to ensure the flow needed to serve all who come in the time available.

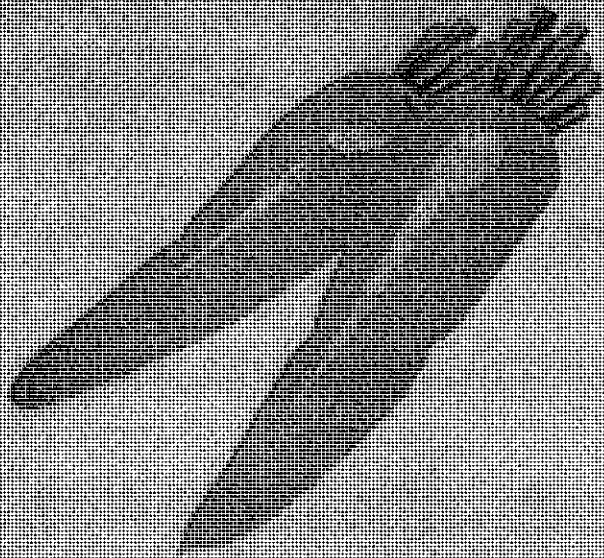


OVER

THE SERVICE:

- Emergency food provided to everyone in need regardless of residence
- People not eligible for ongoing services are provided appropriate referrals
- People in our service areas are able to access food for approximately five days every month

STAFFING AND RESULTS: 25 volunteers sustain the pantry with the support of Council staff. Together they served 14,571 people in 2006.



GOALS FOR GROWTH:

- Assess financial situations of all food pantry partners to determine their status regarding local stamps and other main stream benefits that could increase food purchasing power and security
- Coordinate operation of Food Street Charities Pantry with that of 7 other pantries operated by SMDP member agencies in Hamilton County. The coordination may include coordinating, transporting, storage, volunteers and access by patrons.
- Move from manual record keeping to database.