

# Housing First Initiative Annual Report

## 2019

### Who We Are

Homeward 2020, now in the final phase of its ten-year plan to make homelessness rare, short-lived and non-recurring in Fort Collins, seeks to produce actionable, community-level data on the issue of homelessness and—equipped with that data—identify and promote solutions that increase housing options, housing placements and housing retention for people experiencing homelessness.

As part of that effort, Homeward 2020 and Homeward Alliance partnered in mid-2017 to create the Housing First Initiative (HFI): a two-year pilot project based at the Murphy Center. HFI collects City-level data on the issue of homelessness, pilots “housing-first” solutions and provides intensive case management to people who are chronically homeless.

This report shares local data and learning experiences, highlight new partnerships and identify trends and gaps.

### Definitions

- This report does not represent everyone who is homeless in Fort Collins. The Murphy Center alone serves about 3,000 people each year, many of whom have been homeless for less than six months.
- Unless otherwise noted, the data in this report pertains only to individuals who have been homeless in Fort Collins for six months or longer. Sample sizes vary between data points.
- HFI’s definition of chronic homelessness (six months or longer in Fort Collins) is broader than the federal government’s definition of chronic homelessness.
- Reports include data from Homeward Alliance, Catholic Charities, Fort Collins Rescue Mission, Outreach Fort Collins, the Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement system group and other agencies in the community and at the Murphy Center.



### Much Accomplished, but Much Still to Do

Since Homeward Alliance and Homeward 2020 launched Housing First Initiative (HFI) in mid-2017, at least 140 HFI participants—people who had been homeless in Fort Collins for at least six months—escaped homelessness. More than 90% remained housed after six months.

Some secured and maintained housing with the assistance of HFI Case Managers; others worked with staff at countless other agencies across northern Colorado; and some resolved on their own.

We are heartened by these outcomes and the recent growth in housing-first programs, both within our agency and across our region.

And yet, just as when we published last year’s HFI Annual Report, we were—in recent weeks—again reminded harshly of the stakes: in July, six current HFI participants (two housed, but four still waiting for housing) lost their lives. The average age at death was 50.

We must do better. We must act faster.

Despite progress, hundreds of *human beings* continue to languish on our streets as systemic conditions—the lack of affordable housing and supportive services, but also dozens of other, intersecting issues—thwart efforts to move the needle on the issue of homelessness.

HFI began as a two-year pilot, but our work is not done. In the pages to follow, we look back on our first two years—but also forward to a future in which homelessness is rare, short-lived and non-recurring.

- Marla Sutherland, HFI Director



# Housing First Initiative A Two-Year Retrospective

## HFI TIMELINE

- June 2017**  
HFI launches
- August 2017**  
First HFI participant secures housing
- October 2017**  
In partnership with Housing Catalyst, HFI is granted five State of Colorado project-based housing vouchers; award marks first dedicated housing units/ vouchers for HFI participants
- January 2018**  
HFI launches contingency fund to help fund housing expenses (e.g. application fees) that other programs cannot fund
- March 2018**  
Homeward 2020 and HFI launch online data dashboard: Addressing Long-Term Homelessness in Fort Collins
- June 2018**  
Homeward Alliance (including HFI) commits to comprehensive data system—Bitfocus's Clarity Human Services—positioning the organization/program to lead local and regional data initiatives
- September 2018**  
HFI hires first Case Manager (beyond Program Director) as HFI and Homeward 2020 release first HFI Annual Report and host event on state of homelessness
- November/December 2018**  
HFI hires second Case Manager as part of City-funded expansion of winter hours at Murphy Center
- January 2019**  
HFI identifies 100th individual who escaped long-term homelessness in Fort Collins (since program inception)
- March 2019**  
Fort Collins selected as FUSE demonstration community; HFI receives state funds to hire Clinical Case Manager in support of project
- June 2019**  
HFI completes two-year pilot, identifying 130-plus individuals who escaped long-term homelessness during trial

## Current State of Long-Term Homelessness

These data points represent the most-current state of long-term homelessness in Fort Collins. All data points are current as of the end of June 2019. Note: We do not have data points for all HFI participants, so the percentages are based on the individuals who responded to the specific questions/ provided the specific data points.

**434** people have been homeless in Fort Collins for six months or longer. Among them:

**2.5 years** median length of homelessness

**50%** self-identify as disabled

**44%** report that they are struggling with substance use disorders and/or mental health issues

**70%** have experienced homelessness at least once before their current episode of homelessness

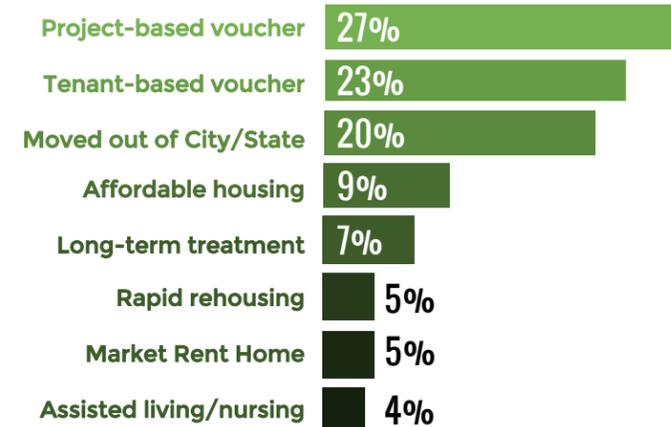
## Housing Snapshot

### Number of People Housed

from July 2017 through June 2019

 **140 HFI participants secured housing\***

Housing Secured by Type (n=75)

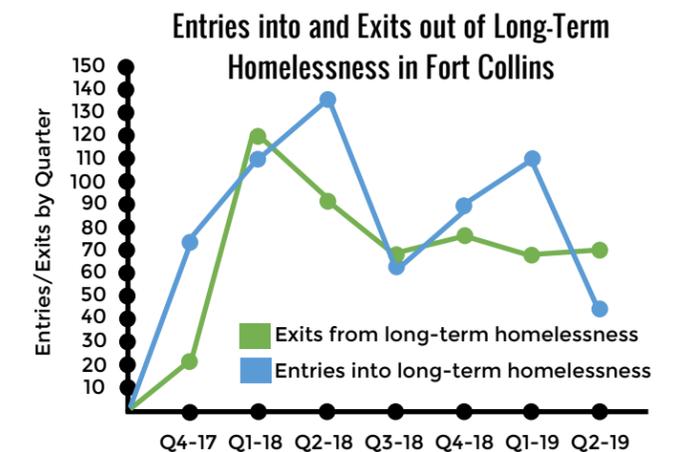


\*At least 81 received services from HFI Case Managers; all received services from Homeward Alliance

## Entries Outpace Exits

Despite significant progress—140 people have escaped long-term homelessness in Fort Collins since HFI was launched in July 2017, and **more than 90% retained housing after six months**—more people continue to enter chronic homelessness than escape it.

The reasons cited for entering homelessness are varied, underscoring the complexity of the problem. They include: unable to pay rent/mortgage, unemployment, family problems, mental illness, substance-use issues, violence in the home, and more.



## The Faces and Stories of HFI Participants



Katana (left) and John (right) were two of the first participants who received housing via HFI's assistance. When we asked John, who is terminally ill, what he was most excited about when it came to his new home, his answer was simple: *not having to go anywhere.*



John is a military veteran who was homeless for three years before he secured housing in 2018.

Now in housing, John says he feels healthier and happier. He plays his music, reads the news every morning and cooks regularly.



Chronic homelessness is not limited to individuals. At least one family with two children escaped

long-term homelessness, with HFI and others' assistance, in late-2018.



Sarah secured housing in mid-2018 after 10 years of homelessness. For years, she struggled with alcohol-use disorder and experienced sexual and physical abuse.

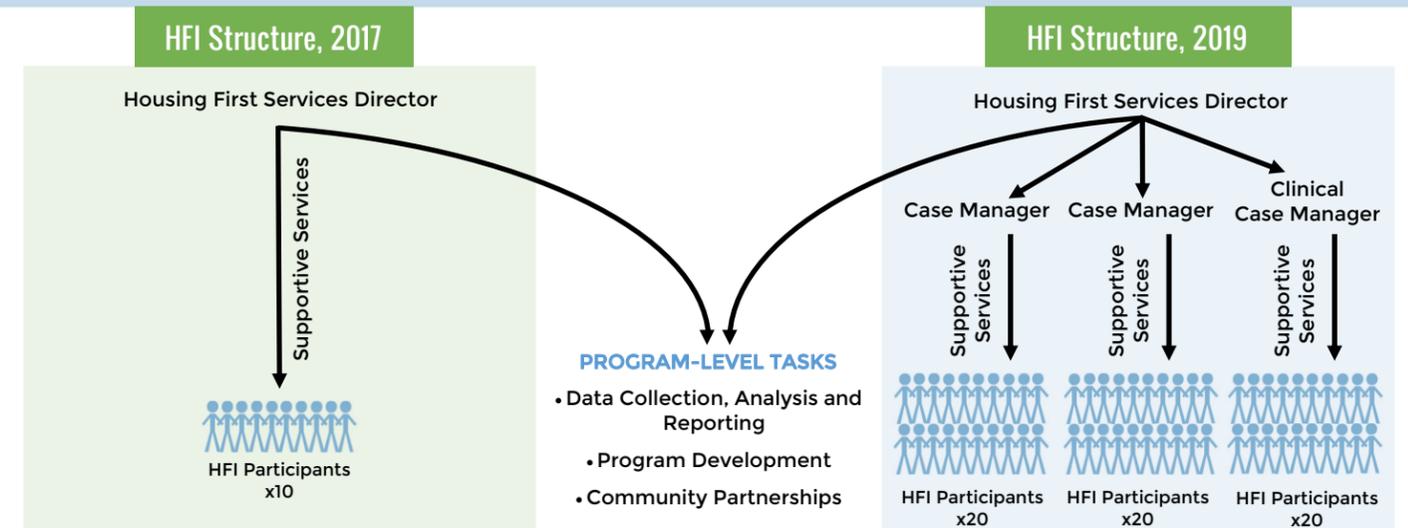
Now housed, Sarah is less-vulnerable, her drinking has reduced and her health has improved.

The father had been homeless for seven years; the mother off-and-on over the same period; and the children either homeless or at-risk for most of their lives. Eight months later, the family remains housed.

## HFI Then and Now: Leveraging Outcomes to Increase Impact

When HFI launched in 2017, the program was comprised of one staff member: a Director who oversaw the program and its development AND provided direct services to people experiencing or escaping chronic homelessness.

Since then, we have leveraged outcomes and data to secure new funding and expand the program by three full-time case managers. That has led to a six-fold increase in the number of people to whom we can provide intensive case management; it has also allowed our Housing First Services Director to focus on program- and community-level tasks, such as described below.



# Recommendations and Next Steps

In the 2018 Annual Report, HFI identified numerous strengths and gaps in our local homelessness response system. Those led us to issue numerous system-level recommendations. Below are those recommendations, along with arrows that point to HFI's next steps relative to each.

Develop new affordable units, invest in permanent supportive housing projects and provide funds to programs that make housing affordable for people with zero or extremely-limited incomes.



Develop or fund programs that provide flexible, client-centered services to people who are homeless or formerly-homeless, with an emphasis on programs that provide long-term or permanent support.



Invest time and funding in initiatives that produce actionable, system-level data on the issue of homelessness.



Promote landlord engagement and education and invest in programs that reduce or eliminate barriers to housing access.



When HFI was launched in mid-2017, it was a one-employee program. That employee was responsible for program- and system-level tasks, and also for providing intensive case management to HFI participants. In the two years since, we have secured funding for three new Case Managers and vastly expanded our capacity to provide housing-focused services.

However, gaps remain.

Each of our Case Managers serves approximately 20 individuals, and many require permanent (or long-term) support to maintain housing.

We look forward to providing supportive services in collaboration with numerous community projects—notably, Housing Catalyst's planned, 60-unit "Mason Place" permanent supportive housing development—but we also hope to expand our case management capacity, flexible funding for direct assistance, and help more people secure and maintain housing in existing units across the community.

In July 2019, Homeward Alliance (through HFI) hired a Clinical Case Manager to serve as the backbone of a one-year Frequent Utilizers System Engagement (FUSE) demonstration project in Fort Collins.

FUSE is a model, developed by a national think tank and successfully implemented in more than 30 U.S. cities, through which communities (a) identify individuals who are homeless and frequently engaged with costly community systems (hospitals, jails, etc.) and then (b) provide those individuals with permanent housing and intensive, wraparound support.

Homeward 2020 and the Health District of Northern Larimer County serve as project leads; multiple agencies have signed on to provide supportive services to program participants; Colorado State University's Social Work Research Center is contracted to analyze the results; and the State of Colorado provided 20 permanent housing vouchers (to be administered by Housing Catalyst) and funding for HFI's Clinical Case Manager.

HFI's Clinical Case Manager will provide and coordinate services to/for 20 program participants. We expect to help those individuals escape chronic homelessness and secure permanent housing. We also hope that the program will serve as a model for HFI expansion and/or similar programs at other agencies.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) does not provide funding to individual agencies that serve people experiencing homelessness. Rather, HUD provides funding to Continuums of Care (CoCs): groups of organizations within cities, regions or states that collectively apply for funds and decide internally how to distribute them, based on target outcomes.

The State of Colorado contains three CoCs: Denver, Colorado Springs and the Balance of State (everywhere else). Northern Colorado is part of the Balance of State CoC, but, in 2020, will form its own CoC. Homeward Alliance (and HFI, within it) already serve on the governing board and Landlord Engagement task force for the CoC. When the official transition occurs, Homeward Alliance expects to serve as the HMIS/data lead, for the region.

Most importantly, the shift promises to bring more resources, solutions and local leadership to northern Colorado. It will also further HFI's mission to collect and analyze actionable data on the issue of homelessness, issue system-level recommendations and implement data-driven solutions.