



HOUSING



Love in Action

2022 Annual Report



Office of
Homeless Services



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Our Mission

The Office of Homeless Services (OHS) provides leadership, coordination, planning, and mobilization of resources to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring in the city of Philadelphia.

Guided by the housing-first approach, our homeless provider network supports people in their journey to housing security. We strive to be person-centered and trauma-informed in removing barriers and connecting people to vital services.



Dear Friends,

Just three years ago, when state and City leaders ordered us to “stay at home,” our world turned upside down. For the Philadelphians our City agency serves—those experiencing homelessness—there was no home to stay in. In that moment, the rest of the world saw what we at the Office of Homeless Services (OHS) see every day: The people we serve were left out. With our steadfast social services partners, we got to work to protect them. Despite the risks to ourselves and our families, we kept our programs open, making homeless shelters safer and providing lifesaving services. Our mission mattered more than ever: to make homelessness rare, brief, and nonrecurring.

OHS and our network of providers do three things: prevent people from becoming homeless; provide safe, nurturing places to live for those with nowhere else to turn; and offer opportunities to exit homelessness once and for all. Above and beyond managing contracts, invoices, and data, the heart of our work is serving people.

We are always painfully aware of the economic injustice that leaves so many in the U.S. on the streets and in shelters. Most are Black or African American, and COVID exposed the deep and abiding injustice affecting those in this country who suffer most from poverty and homelessness.

Motivated by love, at OHS we are driven to serve others. Every day we admire the resilience of those we serve and feel grateful to provide the basic human need of a safe place to rest one’s head.

The year 2022 was one of recovery, and as we emerged, we asked, *What have we learned? What matters most? Who are we today?* This report offers those answers: our commitment to healing, saving lives, creating opportunity, and rebuilding that fundamental sense of self-worth.

So, as you read the numbers and statistics here, see them as what they really are. They reflect how, together, we persevere against the odds and honor the resilience of the human spirit. The real story is love in action.

In gratitude,

Liz Hersh

DIRECTOR HOMELESS SERVICES

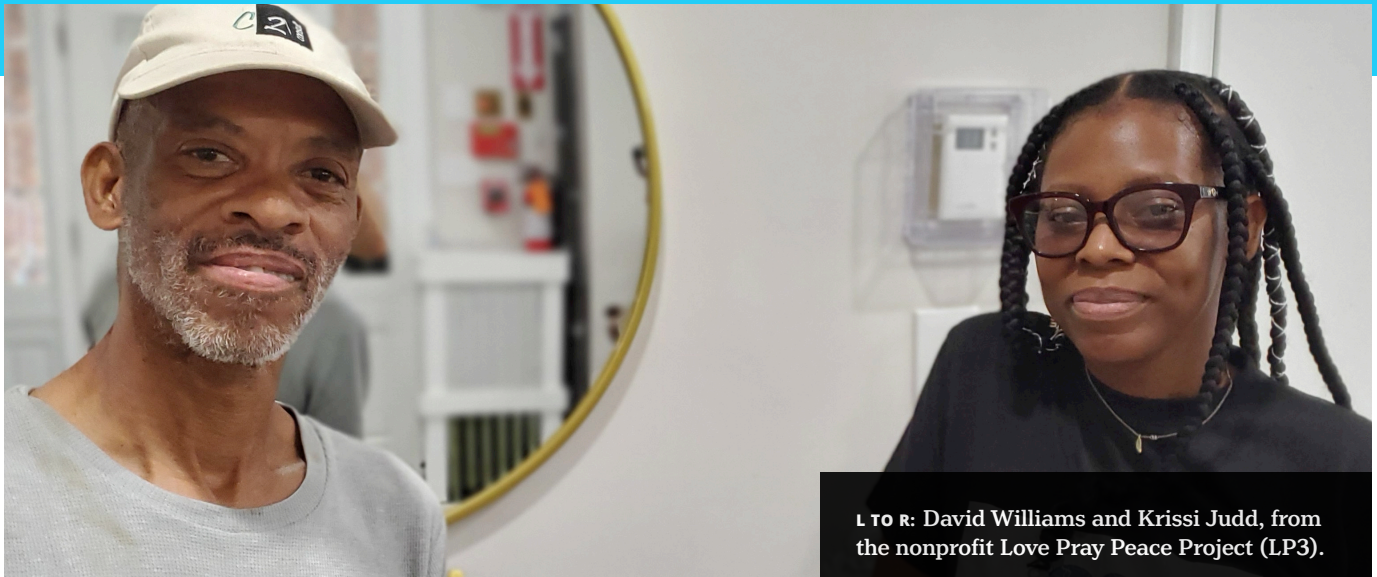
David Holloman

CHIEF OF STAFF



A Solvable Problem: Long-Term Housing

Making Homelessness Non-Recurring



L TO R: David Williams and Krissi Judd, from the nonprofit Love Pray Peace Project (LP3).

FY2022

3,446
people moved into
long-term housing.

Our system counted
5,131
beds in supportive housing.

90+%
of households remained
in or moved to other
long-term housing.

Housing—not shelters—solves homelessness.

Historically, efforts to address homelessness focused on shelters. OHS remains a crisis-response system, but long-term housing is also central to our work.

Coordinating more than 70 partner organizations in our homeless services community, we have helped thousands move from shelter bed—or the street—into a place they can call home. Once they are there, we work hard to prevent individuals, who are our neighbors, **from returning to homelessness.**



Successes and Challenges

A Clear Picture of Our Progress

Required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count is conducted every year on a single night. The PIT identifies how many people are experiencing homelessness now, but also shows trends from year to year, and across the country. The 2022 count in Philadelphia showed:

Unsheltered:

Living in the streets

788

compared to 1,083 in 2018

Sheltered:

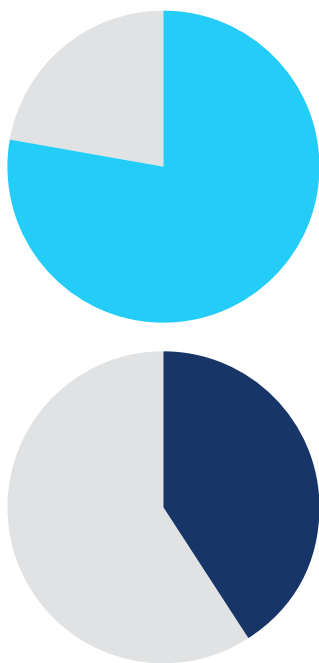
In a homeless shelter or other temporary housing

3,701

compared to 4,705 in 2018

Disparities in Homelessness

For the past three decades, studies have shown that Black or African American people are overrepresented in the U.S. homeless population. This is also evident in Philadelphia.



78% of the persons served by our homeless service programs in FY22 identified as Black or African American, but made up only **41%** of the city's general population.

Increasing deeply affordable, long-term housing is a matter of racial equity, and OHS is committed to this work.



William Bogle and Ed Jones, from the nonprofit Pinnacle Shared Living.

Pushing Forward

Thousands of Philadelphians overcame homelessness in 2022, and we can help to solve it for thousands more.

The scale can make the challenge feel impossible, but there has been substantial progress in Philadelphia over the past five years. Thanks to adequate investments, innovative ideas, and collective determination, around 1,300 fewer people are experiencing homelessness today.

But we shouldn't take those successes for granted, as many factors can easily undermine this progress. As COVID-19 emergency funds and eviction moratoriums subside, we are concerned about a tide of individuals who have or will become newly unhoused.

We are committed to expanding housing as the foundation for family stability, employment, education, and recovery—and to test new ideas to create new opportunities.



Serving Young Adults at St. Joseph's House

St. Joseph's House may look like a typical college dorm, but it's much more. Run by the nonprofit Depaul USA, it's home to 19 young adults, all previously homeless or housing insecure. Today they are each working toward a degree from one of half a dozen local colleges.

"We provide a safe space for these students and the opportunity to balance their housing needs with the rising cost of tuition," says Brendan Sculley, Philadelphia Director of Depaul USA.

“Residents also develop a sense of community, and the tools and knowledge that prepare them for adulthood.”

Depaul USA receives funds through OHS, covering the facility's costs for maintenance, residential aide staff, and more. "We have someone on site at all times, so students know they are safe and supported, should any situation arise," Sculley adds.

St. Joseph's House is just one of 14 transitional housing programs that OHS oversees in Philadelphia—and not even the only one for college students. Working in partnership with the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) and the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP), **OHS helped an additional 16 CCP students who were homeless move into shared apartments in FY2022.**



L TO R: Shayla Whitmore (La Salle University), Brendan Sculley, Asmo Swain (Community College of Philadelphia).



Lifesaving Work: Emergency Shelters

Keeping Homelessness Brief



L TO R: Melvin Jordan and nurse Karen, from the Care Pavilion Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

12,428
people spent at least one
night at a City-funded
emergency shelter.

We served more than
2.04 million
meals inside emergency
shelters.

70%
of those helped in FY 2022
had no previous contact with
our services during a two-
year look back.

Fewer people live on the streets of Philadelphia today than five years ago, but the needs for food and emergency shelter are still enormous. Every day OHS responds to housing crises of different kinds, meeting people where they are and responding to each unique situation. In some cases—as in extreme weather—that helping hand can mean the difference between life and death.

As one of the City's health and human services agencies, OHS is a final backstop for Philadelphia's most vulnerable. We are equipped to respond to emergencies, adapt to unforeseen situations, and make people's experience with homelessness and hunger **as brief as possible**.



Looking Beyond Shelter

People experiencing homelessness have little or no money. Some are entitled to disability benefits and receive around \$850 a month, others earn small wages but not enough to sustain themselves or their family, and many have zero income.

When an individual or family knocks on one of our doors, they've usually been turned out or turned away from somewhere else. In 2022 we worked to make sure they had somewhere to go—day or night, year-round.



We have
4 daytime
access points and
3 overnight
access points.



We support
42
homeless shelters spread
across the city.



We organize and support
a Homeless Management
Information System, to
understand who we serve
and what they need.

OHS invests time and energy to improve people's experience when they enter a shelter, and we try to make their stay as brief as possible. As soon as someone arrives, we collect the most complete information we can, but this process is never a barrier to entry.

Once someone is in our care, we provide meals that meet nutritional standards, while respecting cultural preferences and religious restrictions. We also help individuals apply for government benefits and connect them to workforce development initiatives, recovery programs, and more. These provide sustenance, resources, and tools that help the people we serve envision a life beyond emergency shelter.



The Domestic Violence Collaborative

Last year, OHS piloted a program with the City's Office of Domestic Violence Strategies (ODVS) to offer expert consults to the staff of organizations within our homeless services community. This has been critical during the epidemic of domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV). The problem is not unique to couples and families in shelters, but identifying and helping DM and IPV survivors in this context present exceptional challenges.

During virtual conference calls lasting 30–40 minutes, ODVS, OHS, and shelter staff talk through complex situations. ODVS makes recommendations, helps identify cases of abuse, and—when needed—guides case managers in creating safety plans.

"We help staff determine whether a couple has conflict or it's an abusive relationship," says Azucena Ugarte, the ODVS Director. "It's easy to confuse conflict and abuse, and the intervention must be completely different depending on which it is."

These consults complement regular DV trainings, helping shelter staff improve service and ultimately prevent tragedy. "In some consults it became clear that participants were in a very dangerous situation," Ugarte says.

The pilot began in 2022 for staff in family shelters. DV and IPV consults have now expanded to every type of housing program.



L TO R: Naomi Wildflower and Monique Joosse, from the nonprofit Prevention Point Philadelphia and Azucena Ugarte and Liz Pride, from the City's Office of Domestic Violence Strategies.



USING FUNDS TO INNOVATE



Young adults gather in City Hall to accept a Youth Homeless Demonstration Project award from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) officials.

Much of our funding, from federal and other sources, allows us to simply maintain services from year to year. We support our network of providers however we can, addressing concerns about maintaining their hours of operation and staffing levels. We also regularly apply for special grants and awards, and when we do secure new funding, we invest in innovative approaches to uplift the communities we serve.

In 2022, we began several initiatives:

An Operations Transformation Fund (OTF) from the City allowed OHS to spearhead and launch the **Landlord Gateway program** in collaboration with 15 other public agencies. This cohort is creating a new online presence specifically for Philadelphia landlords, with information on key services, including how to take advantage of rental subsidies that broaden our city's base of affordable housing.

As a part of a **100-Day Challenge* in Kensington**, OHS, partner City agencies, and local nonprofits set out to connect 350 people with housing or treatment services within this short timeframe. Thanks to gutsy ideas and dedication, the group surpassed the challenge, reaching 423 individuals. The ambitious initiative—one of several in the Kensington neighborhood—helped test the limits of our system so we can improve it and deliver the greatest impact.

At the federal level, HUD awarded Philadelphia one of the few **Youth Homelessness Demonstration Projects** (YHDP) it provides each year. This recognizes that our community has the ability to innovate and to involve youth who are homeless directly in that process. Young adults lead and drive Philadelphia's YHDP, which gives them the tools and resources to test new ideas. Officials in Washington hope to apply Philly's YHDP strategies in other communities across the country.

These are but a few examples of all we do to upend the status quo, harnessing special resources to bring meaningful change to communities that lack adequate housing.

**As designed by, and in cooperation with, the international nonprofit REINSTITUTE.*



EQUITY AT THE CENTER OF OUR WORK



OHS's Racial Equity Core Group holds one of its regular meetings in the Municipal Services Building.

At OHS, equity inspires our considerations on many levels. It's a guidepost for prioritizing resources and funds, a motivation for new partnerships, and a foundation for developing projects. Every year brings new opportunities to incorporate equity, and 2022 was no exception.

- When federal and state governments provided Philadelphia with emergency COVID-19 funding for homelessness, OHS prioritized the safety of high-risk populations: older adults and people with underlying health conditions. Initiatives like the **PEACE Program** and **Street to Home** helped homeless adults move to long-term housing, for vital support with minimal exposure to the virus.

The PEACE Program assists older adults with complex physical or behavioral health needs who are or are at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Street to Home helps unsheltered adults move to their own units, using a light-touch, housing-first approach.

- Data show that Latinx/Hispanic communities underutilize homelessness services in Philadelphia. The language barrier is a challenge, but it's not the only explanation. With a grant from the Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement Fund (**PHARE**), OHS and organizations serving these immigrant communities created a workgroup to delve deeper into this equity issue. The group seeks to improve outreach and communications and to increase the number of multi-lingual and multicultural staff at OHS and among providers.
- In the context of our services, equity means ensuring that we bring those with lived experience of homelessness to the decision-making table. Whether in our **Continuum of Care board**, the **Young Adult Leadership Committee** at OHS, or the **Shared Public Spaces** public-private workgroup, we do more than include individuals experiencing homeless in the conversation. We invite them to help shape policy and make funding decisions.

At OHS we think proactively about equity and equal access in all aspects of our services and programs. Applying an equity lens to every aspect of our work is how we determine the best path forward.



Getting Ahead of Homelessness

Making Homelessness Rare



Lashay Sparrow participated in OHS's Help for the Hurdles project.

We helped

1,558

families avoid homelessness through prevention services.

We accepted referrals for

1,113

people being discharged from hospitals who would otherwise have had nowhere to go.

In partnership with the PHA, we've provided

587

households (2021-present) with Emergency Housing Vouchers that helped them rent a home. About 44% were families with children.

When a housing crisis strikes Philadelphians, OHS takes pride in providing lifesaving support. We do all we can to offer stable, long-term housing to a family eager to move out of emergency shelter. But what we really prefer is to help keep our neighbors from becoming homeless in the first place.

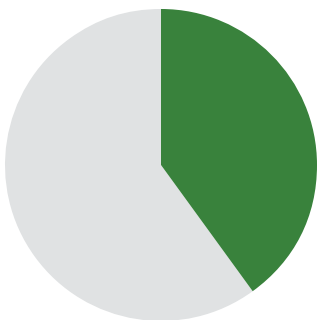
Prevention and diversion—resolving housing issues as quickly as possible—are critical components of our work. They help all individuals, and especially children, avoid the trauma of becoming homeless. We look for solutions “upstream”—that is, work to **make homelessness rare** in Philadelphia.





Security for Children and Families

Many who reach out to us for help with homelessness are parents with children in tow. Sadly, children who grow up experiencing poverty and homelessness are much more likely to experience those hardships as adults.



In 2022, close to **40%** of space in our emergency shelters, safe havens, and transitional housing was dedicated to households with children.

Preventing a person from experiencing homelessness for the first time has an immediate impact.

Preventing homelessness has long-lasting effects too. It is an important way to avoid the stubborn cycles of housing insecurity and generational trauma. OHS is one of many stakeholders in Philadelphia responsible for disrupting these cycles.

Making homelessness rare starts with prevention and diversion services. But it also requires partnerships with diverse organizations to increase access. We also help households maintain their current housing, through rental assistance, or identify and create new pathways to housing.

In partnership with other agencies, we bring dedicated housing programs to **runaway youth, returning citizens, and survivors of DV and IPV**. Temporary shelter may be their first stop, but it prevents them from experiencing actual homelessness. In some cases, we help people reunite with families or friends.



Spotlight

Emergency Housing Vouchers

As part of the American Rescue Plan Act, the federal government provided hundreds of Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs) to Philadelphia in 2022. EHV's cover a part of the monthly rent for an apartment or house. Working in partnership with the PHA, we made sure these vouchers reached individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Housing vouchers can change lives. Najee Gibson, a trans woman of color, moved into her apartment in West Philly last year, with the help of a voucher and the support of her case manager at Morris Home. The apartment gives her independence and stability.

This was an exceptional allocation of vouchers dedicated to addressing homelessness. Thanks to this subsidy and the partnerships it created, more than 800 people have had the opportunity to exit homelessness once and for all.



Najee Gibson secured her own apartment with a housing voucher.

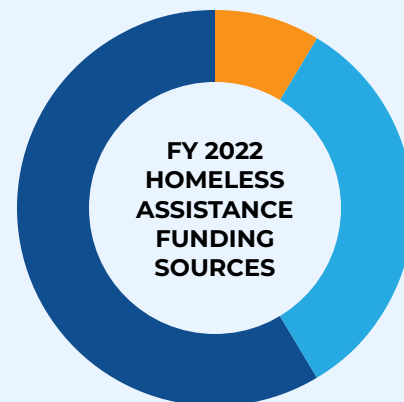


Who We Are



OHS staff gather for a workshop at the nonprofit Community Behavioral Health.

How We Do It



State \$8.3M

Federal \$31.5M

City \$56.3M

THE OFFICE OF HOMELESS SERVICES HAS THREE UNITS:

Housing Services

Prevention and diversion: Working to prevent homelessness in the first place and diverting people away from shelters and into alternatives that are effective and safe.

Emergency and temporary shelter: Providing critically needed shelter to those who would otherwise have no options and be on the street or other places that are unfit for habitation.

Long-term housing: Securing safe and affordable housing options for Philadelphia's most vulnerable residents. This includes programs like rapid rehousing.

Policy, Planning, and Performance (P3)

P3 designs and develops the essential policy, planning, information management, performance standards, funding, and learning systems for OHS, so we can successfully fulfill our mission.

Administrative Services

This group is responsible for budget and finance, contract administration, human resources, facility and asset management, and information technology.

Different Together

At OHS, we care deeply about equity, diversity, and creating an inclusive culture. With 158 employees:

85% of overall agency team members are BIPOC

79% of leadership team members are BIPOC

77% of leadership team members were promoted from within

58% of leadership team members identify as women, gender nonconforming, or non-binary

Time for Action: Housing Ends Homelessness

Can such a simple idea really be true?

Philadelphia's homeless services community proved it can—thousands of times last year.

Our prevention and diversion efforts helped more than **1,500 families remain in their homes** or find other, safe alternatives.

We helped thousands more move into stable, affordable accommodations.

About **90 percent** of people who got supportive housing—rental assistance with other supports and services—**did not return to homelessness**.

These numbers, and dozens like them in this report, show that progress is real. With the right investments, we get results. We *can* solve homelessness. The faces that appear in these pages and across our city inspire and motivate us to persevere.

Of those who accessed homeless services in FY 2022, 70% did so for the first time during a two-year look back. The progress is real, but the need for deeply affordable housing remains dire. We need new investments, stronger partnerships, and a constant recommitment to making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring in Philadelphia.

L TO R: Joseph Aggar and Dominai Taylor worked as OHS vaccine ambassadors while living at the Ife Wellness Center, an emergency shelter site.