

Your Way Home Montgomery County
Continuum of Care

Racial Equity and Homelessness in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania: Initial Findings

February 2019

Authors:

Jeff Olivet

Lunise Joseph

Maya Beit-Arie



WELCOME LETTER

Ten years ago, people and organizations came together from across Montgomery County to design a better system for helping their neighbors end and prevent their experience of homelessness. Leaders from across the public, private and nonprofit sectors agreed that getting help should be easy and quick, that people living outside or in their cars deserved an immediate connection to housing, and that our network of nonprofits, government, philanthropy, and community advocates needed to work together to break down barriers in accessing services. Together, we launched an award-winning public-private partnership called Your Way Home Montgomery County, which has transformed our community's response to homelessness and served as a model for innovation in human services.

Yet despite Your Way Home's innovative and effective programs, partnerships and policies, the tragedy of homelessness persists in Montgomery County. We needed to take a hard look at why. Poverty and a lack of affordable housing were certainly root cause issues, as they are in many affluent suburban communities across the United States. Our analysis of our own YWH data unveiled a disturbing truth—that homelessness is disproportionately experienced by people of color. National, regional and local discussions among policymakers and system leaders are raising awareness that structural racism leads to homelessness and systemic inequities.

With this revelation in mind, we decided to evaluate the racial inequities in our homeless service system and use that information to design a more equitable system moving forward. Through our partnership with the HealthSpark Foundation, we brought in the SPARC team at the Center for Social Innovation, a firm that is leading this work nationally, as well as a local group of equity leaders to advise us on our process. We analyzed data, talked to people of color in our shelters, and talked to our providers about their experiences. We looked at our board and staff diversity and the ways we recruit for positions with decision-making power. We evaluated our structures, cultures and strategies for impact, not intent. And then we paused, so we could share that information with all of you.

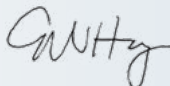
This racial equity evaluation is our first step in understanding what it will mean for Montgomery County to actively work to overcome racial disparities in homeless services.

In this report, we're sharing the first cut of an analysis of our data, policies and procedures, and personnel recruitment through a racial equity lens.

Now that we have an initial analysis, we are taking the 'next step' to conduct a national scan to identify evidence-based and just practices/policies to help inform more in depth strategic conversations with our county leaders, providers, consumers, residents, advocates, funders, and peer communities to determine how exactly we move forward. We welcome you to be partners with us on this journey of reflection, healing, and opportunity.



Russell Johnson
President and CEO,
HealthSpark Foundation



Emma W. Hertz
Administrator,
Montgomery County Office of Housing
and Community Development

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Background	7
Approach	9
Findings	12
1. Policies and Procedures	
2. Program Design	
3. Diversity and Inclusion	
4. External Challenges	
Summary of Recommendations	27
Next Steps	29
Conclusion	30
Resources on Racial Equity and Homelessness.....	31
Glossary of Racial Equity Terms and Concepts	32
Appendices	34



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As with communities across the United States, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania continues to face the impact of historical and contemporary racism in the United States. One result is that people of color are significantly more likely than their White counterparts to experience homelessness. Recent research¹ has shown this to be a national issue and not limited to any one geographical region of the country. As homeless response systems across the nation work to prevent and end homelessness for all people, these systems are becoming increasingly aware of the need to adopt a racial equity focus in their work.

In this context, Your Way Home Montgomery County Continuum of Care (YWH) and the HealthSpark Foundation partnered with the Boston-based Center for Social Innovation (C4) and its SPARC team (Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities). The aim of the partnership was to conduct a preliminary assessment of the intersection of race and homelessness in Montgomery County and begin to shape potential directions forward.

From June through November 2018, the SPARC team worked with YWH to:

- Introduce the topic of “Advancing Equity” to Montgomery County leaders at the YWH Annual Summit in June 2018.
- Establish an Equity Advisory Group comprised of members from the homelessness system, education, housing, philanthropy, and other sectors.
- Analyze local data from Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and other sources to document disproportionality of homelessness among people of color in the county.
- Conduct listening sessions with people of color experiencing homelessness.
- Conduct key informant interviews with staff working in YWH programs.
- Hold discussions with the YWH Operations Team and community partners to understand current practices and potential areas of further exploration.
- Lead community discussions on how YWH can reduce high rates of homelessness among people of color and other marginalized groups. Discussions took place in a community forum in July and in three convenings of the YWH Equity Advisory Team in July, August, and November.

1 Olivet, J., Dones, M., Richards, M., Wilkey, C., Yampolskaya, S., Beit-Arie, M. and Joseph, L. (2018). *Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities: Phase One Findings*. Center for Social Innovation.

This process yielded a number of important findings related to race and homelessness in Montgomery County:

- While people of color comprise only 20% of the general population, they make up 59% of people experiencing homelessness in the county.
- Black children ages 0–17 represent 23% of people experiencing homelessness known to YWH.
- YWH’s Eviction Prevention and Intervention Coalition (EPIC) pilot initiative data indicate that Black individuals pay 15% higher rent and earn 8% less income than their White counterparts, suggesting a potential barrier for Black individuals and families as they strive to avoid or exit homelessness.
- Black households receiving rental assistance are grouped primarily in Norristown and Pottstown, while White households receiving assistance are scattered throughout the county. This geographic dispersal suggests the ongoing impact of housing segregation.
- From 2017 through the first four months of 2018, permanent housing placements for Hispanic clients fell slightly after two previous years of increases. Placements for White clients continued to rise.
- People who are doubled up are prohibited from receiving rental assistance, due in part to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) definition of homelessness, which drives funding for homelessness programs. As a result, many immigrants (documented and undocumented) may not be well served by or even known to the current homeless response system.
- White and Black clients showed little difference in self-reported vulnerability assessment scores as measured by the VI-SPDAT instrument.
- Participants in listening sessions reported perceptions of racial discrimination in intake, assessment, and shelter services.
- Services and supports are needed for people who are homeless and identify as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer). For example, YWH data suggest that few people who identified as transgender accessed services in YWH programs (one in 2016, two in 2017).
- YWH’s prevention services provide a promising road map that can be expanded and developed further to reduce homelessness among people of color.

The SPARC team’s analysis suggests that there may be a correlation among high rates of homelessness for people of color, high rates of eviction in communities of color, and persistent racial segregation in Montgomery County.

Structural racism permeates multiple systems—housing, human services, criminal justice, health, behavioral health, child welfare, education, and others. To address the risk of homelessness for people of color, these systems must come together to address underlying structural racism.

From this review, recommendations emerged around four key areas:

1. Policies and Procedures
2. Program Design
3. Diversity and Inclusion
4. External Challenges

Specific strategies for each of these areas are detailed in this report.

Next steps for advancing this initiative include:

- A national scan of strategies and practices for promoting racial equity in the homelessness sector.
- Ongoing technical assistance as YWH begins to implement strategies to reduce homelessness among people of color and other marginalized groups.
- Additional exploration of the needs of specific subgroups, such as youth and young adults, Hispanic/Latino clients, and people who identify as LGBTQ.

It is important to remember that structural racism permeates multiple systems—housing, human services, criminal justice, health, behavioral health, child welfare, education, and others. Reducing the risk of homelessness for people of color requires intentionally aligning systems to address underlying structural racism. While YWH can draw attention to the issue of race and homelessness and catalyze change, YWH alone cannot solve these complex challenges.



BACKGROUND

About Your Way Home Montgomery County Continuum of Care (YWH)

Since 2008, partners in Montgomery County—including government agencies, funders, service providers, and advocates—have been working to improve the county’s response to homelessness. From these efforts emerged **Your Way Home Montgomery County Continuum of Care (YWH)**, a public-private partnership that engages nonprofits, government, philanthropy, residents, businesses, and other community partners to meet its vision of making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring. The partnership serves as the county’s unified and coordinated housing crisis response system for families and individuals experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness. Since it was established in 2014, YWH has designed and implemented nationally recognized practices in the homelessness sector, including housing first, coordinated entry, and rapid re-housing.²

Through YWH, the community has developed a common agenda, a shared set of metrics, and mutually aligned activities. These shared goals and activities were created through a seven-year process that combined research and evaluation with capacity-building, training, and pilot projects to scale what worked. Your Way Home embraces a “housing first” approach to ending homelessness by first helping people find or maintain permanent housing with stability, then connecting them with the community, health, human, and financial services they need to prevent future experiences of homelessness.

People of color in Montgomery County experience homelessness at **disproportionately high rates** compared to their White counterparts.

2 According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2016), Rapid Re-housing (RRH) is “an intervention designed to help individuals and families quickly exit homelessness and not become homeless again in the near term.” RRH typically moves people out of shelter quickly through the use of short-term housing subsidies (from *Rapid Re-housing Toolkit*: https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NAEH-Rapid-Re-housingToolkit_2017-FINAL.pdf)

As its work continues to evolve, YWH has begun to focus on concerns about the overrepresentation of people of color³ in the homelessness system. YWH data indicate that people of color in Montgomery County experience homelessness at disproportionately high rates compared to their White counterparts.

To understand and respond to these racial inequities, YWH launched a partnership with **SPARC (Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities)**, an initiative of the Boston-based Center for Social Innovation (C4). This project was undertaken with financial support and guidance from HealthSpark Foundation. YWH's decision to center racial equity in its response to homelessness places it among several other communities across the country that are beginning to embark on this important work.

About SPARC

SPARC was founded in 2016 and works in communities across the United States to address racism and homelessness. A national report⁴ from the first phase of SPARC research was released in 2018 and documented high rates of homelessness among people of color—particularly Black and Native Americans. The team analyzed HMIS (homeless management information system) data from 111,563 individuals and collected 148 oral histories from people of color experiencing homelessness. The team also led 21 focus groups comprised of people of color experiencing homelessness, providers of color working in homelessness programs, and other community stakeholders. Through this mixed-methods study, the SPARC team has identified key areas of focus that can guide future research, advocacy, policy, and programming. These areas of focus include: housing, economic development, behavioral health, criminal justice, and family stabilization. SPARC continues to work in communities across the United States to address homelessness through a racial equity lens.

Guided by SPARC's research, HUD's Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for FY2018 to fund homeless programs included explicit guidelines about addressing racial disparities in service provision and outcomes—a sign that the national dialogue around homelessness is changing to include a focus on racial inequity.

It is in this context that Your Way Home's partnership with SPARC was launched, furthering the movement towards equity-based system changes in Montgomery County's homelessness response. This report documents the preliminary stage of the work, which occurred between June and November 2018.

About HealthSpark

HealthSpark Foundation is a private, independent foundation in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Its mission is to invest in systems change opportunities in Montgomery County to promote consumer access to safety net services and leverage public and private resources to improve outcomes. HealthSpark Foundation works with health and human services organizations in Montgomery County to build a more resilient safety net system.

3 The term "People of Color," sometimes abbreviated as POC, refers to all people who are not White. While race is a social construct and terminology regarding race has changed over the centuries, people of color from all non-White groups in the United States have experienced of the very real impact of racism.

4 Olivet, J., Dones, M., Richards, M., Wilkey, C., Yampolskaya, S., Beit-Arie, M. and Joseph, L. (2018). *Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities: Phase One Findings*. Center for Social Innovation.

APPROACH

The purpose of this assessment was threefold: 1) to conduct a preliminary exploration of the intersection of race and homelessness in Montgomery County; 2) to establish a baseline from which future work around racial equity and homelessness can be measured; and 3) to develop recommendations for further exploration and activity. To achieve these aims, the SPARC Team developed a mixed-methods approach to examine the following questions:

- How do the demographics of the homeless population in Montgomery County compare to the demographics of the general population and those living below the poverty line?
- What impact do Your Way Home's access points, screening assessments, eligibility criteria, marketing/communications, and related activities have upon access to homeless services for different racial/ethnic groups?
- How does the racial/ethnic breakdown of people receiving housing placements in Your Way Home programs compare to the demographics of the homeless population in Montgomery County?
- Does the current use of the Vulnerability Index–Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) impact on the racial demographics of people receiving housing placements?
- How can Your Way Home's policies and procedures be improved to promote racial equity?
- To what extent do Your Way Home's Advisory Council, Continuum of Care Governing Board, and Action Team recruitment strategies achieve diverse representation?

To answer these questions, YWH and SPARC conducted the activities described below.

Annual Summit

In June 2018, YWH convened its **Annual Summit** around the theme "Advancing Equity." As part of this gathering of approximately 200 stakeholders from across the county, Jeff Olivet from SPARC presented national findings from the SPARC initiative and participated on a panel with local leaders to discuss racial equity and homelessness. The event galvanized community interest and engagement in examining homelessness through the lens of racial equity.

Equity Advisory Team

Through June and July 2018, SPARC worked with YWH and the HealthSpark Foundation to establish an **Equity Advisory Team** comprised of 15 members (see *Appendix A* [page 34](#)). The team met during SPARC site visits in July, August, and November (see *Appendix B* [page 35](#) for meeting agendas). The role of the Advisory Team was to offer context and input at critical stages of the initial fact-finding work and to review findings and recommendations.

Data Analysis

The SPARC team's analysis included an evaluation of Montgomery County's demographic and Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data and YWH programmatic and system-level outcomes. Specifically, this review included:

- Montgomery County's demographic data
- Demographic data from HMIS
- Disaggregated HMIS data for YWH programs (e.g., Call Center, Street Outreach, Diversion, Emergency Shelter, Rapid Re-Housing, Transitional Housing, and Permanent Supportive Housing)
- Montgomery County Analysis to Fair Housing report (2015)
- Eviction Prevention and Intervention Coalition (EPIC) pilot initiative report

Policy and Procedures Review

To understand elements of YWH's approach, the team reviewed various documents:

- YWH Operations Manual
- YWH Operations Manual Companion Document (forms, templates, examples)
- Call Center scripts

Listening Sessions

In addition to reviewing data, outcomes, and policies and procedures, the SPARC team conducted **two listening sessions** with people of color who had experienced homelessness in Montgomery County. During the July site visit, the first listening session was held at a shelter with seven participants present, including two men and five women. During the August site visit, a second listening session took place at a drop-in center with eight participants—four men and four women. While the sessions occurred at a shelter and drop-in center, participants included people who were currently experiencing homelessness as well as those who had been placed into housing through YWH. Additionally, both listening sessions took place in Norristown, and as a result, may not fully represent the perspectives of people in other parts of the county. During the listening sessions, participants were asked a series of questions pertaining to their own experience of homelessness as people of color and the services they received (see *Appendix C* [page 38](#)). Recruitment was coordinated between SPARC, YWH, and host site staff using recruitment flyers designed for this purpose (see *Appendix D* [page 39](#)).

Provider Interviews

The team conducted **five interviews with service providers** working in YWH programs. The following staff roles were represented in these interviews: drug and alcohol specialist, housing locator, housing resource manager, associate director of housing, and assistant director (see *Appendix E* [page 40](#) for list of participants). The interviews addressed a range of issues related to race and homelessness in YWH programs (see *Appendix F* [page 41](#) for interview protocol).

Conversations with YWH Operations Team and Community Partners

To understand the YWH intake and assessment system and identify potential gaps in services, the SPARC team held conversations with the YWH Operations Team, Core Service Providers, and other community partners, including:

- **Accion Comunal Latinoamericana de Montgomery County (ACLAMO)** Family Centers provides educational programs, social services and access to health and wellness programs targeting Latinos and other community members.
- **Access Services Outreach Team** conducts outreach-based services to people experiencing homelessness in Montgomery County and coordinates with YWH around assessment and referral.
- **United Way Call Center 211 SEPA** serves as a telephone information, intake, and referral line for people experiencing homelessness in Montgomery County.

Limitations

While the assessment process described here brought together multiple perspectives and data points, it is important to keep certain limitations in mind. First, this effort was designed to provide a preliminary understanding of issues of race and homelessness in Montgomery County. It was not designed to be a rigorous, long-term research study. Second, many of the observations are drawn from a small number of people participating in listening sessions and interviews or from small sample sizes in program data. As a result, it is difficult to make conclusive statements about causality or to assume trends. Instead, the findings and recommendations in this report should be understood to be an initial point-in-time analysis and a starting point for discussion, strategy, and ongoing exploration.

FINDINGS

Your way home is taking an important step by examining the impact of structural racism on homelessness in Montgomery County. In doing so, it is joining other communities around the country that are engaged in similar initiatives.⁵ To continue in this work, it is necessary to examine both internal factors (how YWH operates) and external factors (the broader context in which YWH functions). It is not only a question of YWH striving to advance racial equity *OR* working across other systems to address structural racism. It is both. The findings in this report address factors internal to YWH and other systems, such as child welfare, criminal justice, affordable housing, physical health, and behavioral health. Without cross-system collaboration to address structural racism, any solutions YWH attempts to employ will be limited in their impact.

Based on our review, the SPARC team has grouped findings into four broad areas:

-  1. Policies and Procedures
-  2. Program Design
-  3. Diversity and Inclusion
-  4. External Challenges

For each of these areas, we present a summary of findings, followed by recommendations and potential areas for further exploration.

5 Communities currently engaged in the SPARC initiative include: Atlanta, Georgia; Columbus, Ohio; Dallas, Texas; Hennepin County, Minnesota; Portland, Oregon; San Francisco, California; Santa Clara County, California; Syracuse, New York; and Tacoma/Pierce County, Washington.

Findings: 1. Policies and Procedures



Based on the interviews, listening sessions, and conversations with staff from the YWH Operations Team, Core Service Providers and community partners, the SPARC team identified a number of areas for potential improvement in YWH policies and procedures.

Summary of Findings

As evidenced by YWH's Operations Manual, intake and assessment process, and housing placements, race is not considered as a factor in risk of homelessness or barriers to exiting homelessness. As a result, Your Way Home currently operates in a "race-blind"⁶ manner (e.g., an approach that does not explicitly acknowledge or address race). While such an approach can sometimes be a tool to fight discrimination—as in the original intent of the Fair Housing Act—it can also set up systems that perpetuate, rather than diminish, the impact of discrimination.

In the context of Your Way Home, there is little racially explicit language in the manual and few, if any, racially-explicit outcome metrics in measuring program evaluation performance. This may result in an organizational culture and approach to service provision that does not acknowledge or discuss the racial dimensions of homelessness or the specific barriers people of color experience in exiting homelessness.

Additionally, a "race-blind" approach does not acknowledge unconscious racial bias, which may explain the dissonance between workers' intentions and the experiences of those receiving services. This finding was reinforced by the experiences and perspectives shared in the listening sessions and interviews. For example, one service provider we interviewed explained her agency's approach:

We treat them all the same. We have a nice mixed group. They're all going to get the same fair treatment...you don't see color. You're going to do the same thing for them either way.

This stands in contrast with the experiences of some clients in the listening session, including that of one participant who observed:

White families get moved, get helped, get out of shelter quicker. White case managers help their clients faster.

Or, as another participant succinctly stated:

We're not being treated equal.

Whether or not such experiences are supported by outcomes data, there is a perception among some people in shelter that they are being treated differently because of the color of their skin, and that discrimination results in challenges to exiting shelter.

In addition to potential racial bias at the program level, some concerns have been raised about access to services for people who identify as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer). The client focus groups suggested some negative reactions on the part of residents towards LGBTQ people. Perhaps reflective of a sense of feeling unsafe or unwelcomed, few transgender clients access services in the YWH system: one client in 2016 and two in 2017. These numbers are well below the national average of 0.4% of the homeless population.⁷ While this review was not designed to explore the issue fully or to examine why transgender people might not be coming in for shelter and services, such small numbers raise concern about perceptions of safety and inclusion on the part of the transgender community and the LGBTQ community as a whole. One specific group that merits special focus is youth and young adults who are significantly more likely to identify as LGBTQ and should be considered in future evaluation and program design.

6 Race-blind policies and programs as those that do not use race as a factor in determining access to resources. Such approaches, while often grounded in a stated commitment to equality, can perpetuate racial inequities by assuming that all people have equal opportunities for success, and that race, therefore, should not influence access to resources going forward. If, however, one group (e.g., White people in America) has had decades, or even centuries, of greater opportunity, race-blind approaches can deepen rather than mitigate racial inequity.

7 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2017). Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHAR). Available at <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

Findings: 1. Policies and Procedures



Further complicating access, staff may inadvertently exhibit implicit racial bias or mis-gender⁸ callers due to the potential for linguistic profiling⁹ in telephone intakes.¹⁰ While it is not possible to know with certainty whether this is an issue in Montgomery County, it should be part of future analysis to understand the small number of transgender people seeking services through Your Way Home programs. Additionally, a national scan of equity-based policies for telephone intake (among the next steps for this initiative) may reveal specific approaches that can improve perceptions of safety and accessibility among transgender people.

While further work is needed to understand this issue in more detail, YWH can begin to explore ways to make its services more accessible and more inclusive for LGBTQ people. For example, one section on YWH's Gender Identity Non-Discrimination Policy highlights effective practices for in-person interactions and underscores non-harassment rules. While this is important, it leaves space for individual bias and interpretation and does not explicitly address the need for specific policies. The subject could be addressed with more explicit policy language and staff training.

Conversations with YWH staff, Equity Advisory Team, and community partners also raised concerns that Hispanic/Latino clients—particularly people who speak only Spanish or who are undocumented—have experienced barriers in accessing or receiving services through YWH and if they do attempt to access shelter, that they are treated differently than other clients. For example, case managers at one community organization have reportedly stopped referring clients to YWH because they continue to be turned away as ineligible. In this regard, YWH is in a difficult position. Because it receives HUD funding, YWH is bound by HUD's definition of literal homelessness, which excludes people who are doubled up with family and friends and prohibits programs from using

HUD funds to provide housing subsidies for undocumented people. It is possible, though, to develop additional funding streams and programs that are designed to meet the needs of these individuals and families who are not currently being served.

A final area of focus—and one that cuts across policies/procedures as well as program design—is the use of the VI-SPDAT. As with many communities across the United States, Montgomery County has developed a Coordinated Entry system that administers the VI-SPDAT to determine service prioritization. Analysis of three years of VI-SPDAT scores in Montgomery County showed no significant racial difference (as some communities across the country have reported), indicating a degree of consistency in the administration of the instrument. There was, however, concern among some staff about how and when the assessment was being conducted and confusion among some clients about how it impacted their access to housing and services. As one listening session participant stated:

Sometimes you have to lie in the assessment so you can get what you need. The first three times I called, I didn't get called back. I was told I scored a 4 and didn't need any help. I had to wait until I was almost raped. Then I scored higher and got into [redacted]. Originally, I held back some information. I didn't tell them I was a drug user at first. Then I did and was told I scored a 14.

This experience and others like it raise concerns about the heavy reliance on self-report in the VI-SPDAT methodology. People of color in particular may not feel safe disclosing experiences of mental illness, trauma, substance use, or medical conditions, particularly over the telephone in a conversation with a call center intake person. While the assessment is sometimes administered by the outreach team in person, the vast majority are conducted by telephone. It is possible to

8 Mis-gendering refers to the discriminatory and potentially traumatizing process of referring to a transgender person with incorrect pronouns, or otherwise identifying them as a gender they do not identify with. This practice can have a particularly detrimental impact on the transgender individual when the incorrect gender used is the gender mis-assigned to them at birth.

9 Linguistic profiling is "the auditory equivalent of visual 'racial profiling,'" and involves discrimination based on assumptions of identity (e.g., race or gender) made solely by listening to someone speak [in Baugh, J. (2004) *Linguistic Profiling in A.K., Spears (Ed.) Black Linguistics: Language, Society and Politics in Africa and the Americas*, pp. 155-168. New York: Routledge.]

10 Baugh, J. (2003). Linguistic profiling. *Black linguistics: Language, society, and politics in Africa and the Americas*, 1(1), 155-168.
**Used here to apply to gender profiling, as well as race.

Findings: 1. Policies and Procedures



add additional non-scored questions to the VI-SPDAT to address concerns not addressed by the tool itself, as some communities have done. These non-scored questions may focus on experiences of racism and discrimination.

Interviews with staff in the YWH network and discussions with the YWH Operations Team indicate that the VI-SPDAT is administered early in the intake process (typically at first point of contact with the call center) and may be re-administered multiple times—practices that do not fully align with best practices for using the instrument.¹¹ As YWH considers how and when VI-SPDAT is used for intake, assessment, and prioritization, it is important to understand more fully the disconnect between scores that show little difference across race in perceptions of discrimination among people of color accessing services and potential underreporting of stigmatized issues (e.g., mental illness, substance use, and trauma) among people of color.

It is important to note that YWH data on the role of Street Outreach in Coordinated Entry showed little divergence in demographic categories as far as rate of enrollment into shelter or time spent waiting before enrolling into shelter. African Americans average about two days longer to get into shelter but enroll at a higher rate (38%) than White clients (29%), individuals with multiple races (33%), or those of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity (22%).

Recommendations

1. Incorporate racially explicit language into the YWH Operations Manual.
2. Develop racially explicit outcome metrics for YWH programs.
3. Conduct anti-racism and implicit bias training for all staff across the YWH network in order to minimize potential prejudice in service provision. YWH has received funding to provide training on implicit bias and leadership around equity and inclusion.)
4. Reexamine the prioritization processes, including current policies for use of the VI-SPDAT, to reduce racial disparity in access to services.
5. Explore emerging practices from across the country on Call Centers' equitable use of the VI-SPDAT.
6. Engage in partnerships with agencies that serve Hispanics/Latinx and other community-based organizations serving non-English speaking and immigrant communities to explore how best to meet the needs of immigrants, Spanish speaking clients, and undocumented people.

Areas for Further Exploration

A national scan could examine strategies for racial equity in assessment, intake, and Coordinated Entry. Furthermore, YWH can examine its efforts to create safe, inclusive spaces for LGBTQ people. Another area for additional work is how to actively engage people with lived experience and current service users in providing feedback for system improvement. The voices of individuals with lived experience should be included in decision-making processes, creating meaningful opportunities to shape YWH operations. YWH has already begun to examine how to address the needs of marginalized groups, including LGBTQ people.

.....
11 DeJong, I. (2017). VI-SPDAT: 14 Things That Irk Me. Available at <http://www.orgcode.com/14things>

Findings: 2. Program Design

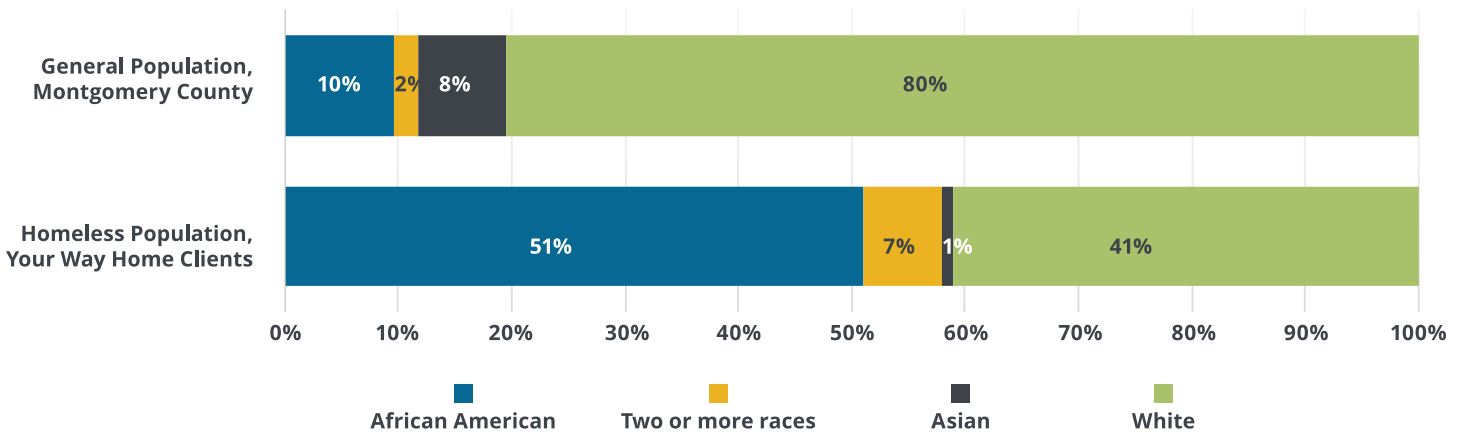


Our listening sessions with clients, interviews with program staff, and review of the data suggest several areas of programmatic focus. In our evaluation of data and outcomes, the SPARC team reviewed data from HMIS, including: project-level demographics, length of stay in shelter, exit from shelter to permanent housing, diversion rates, VI-SPDAT scores, enrollment rate of street outreach to shelter, and data from the EPIC pilot program. We maintained open communication with the Your Way Home administration throughout the data evaluation process and discussed preliminary findings regularly throughout this phase of work.

Summary of Findings

People of color in Montgomery County are overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness. While people of color comprise 20% of the general population, they represent 59% of people experiencing homelessness in the county (see *Figure 1*). Specifically, people who identify as Black or African American are overrepresented at a rate of 5:1 compared to the general population (51% vs. 20%), and people of two or more races were 2% of the general population but 7% of the homeless population. People who identified as Hispanic/Latino are slightly overrepresented—5% of general population compared to 7% of the homeless population. People who identify as Asian are underrepresented: 8% of the general population and only 1% of the homeless population.

Figure 1: Homeless population and general population in Montgomery County by race, 2017



Findings: 2. Program Design

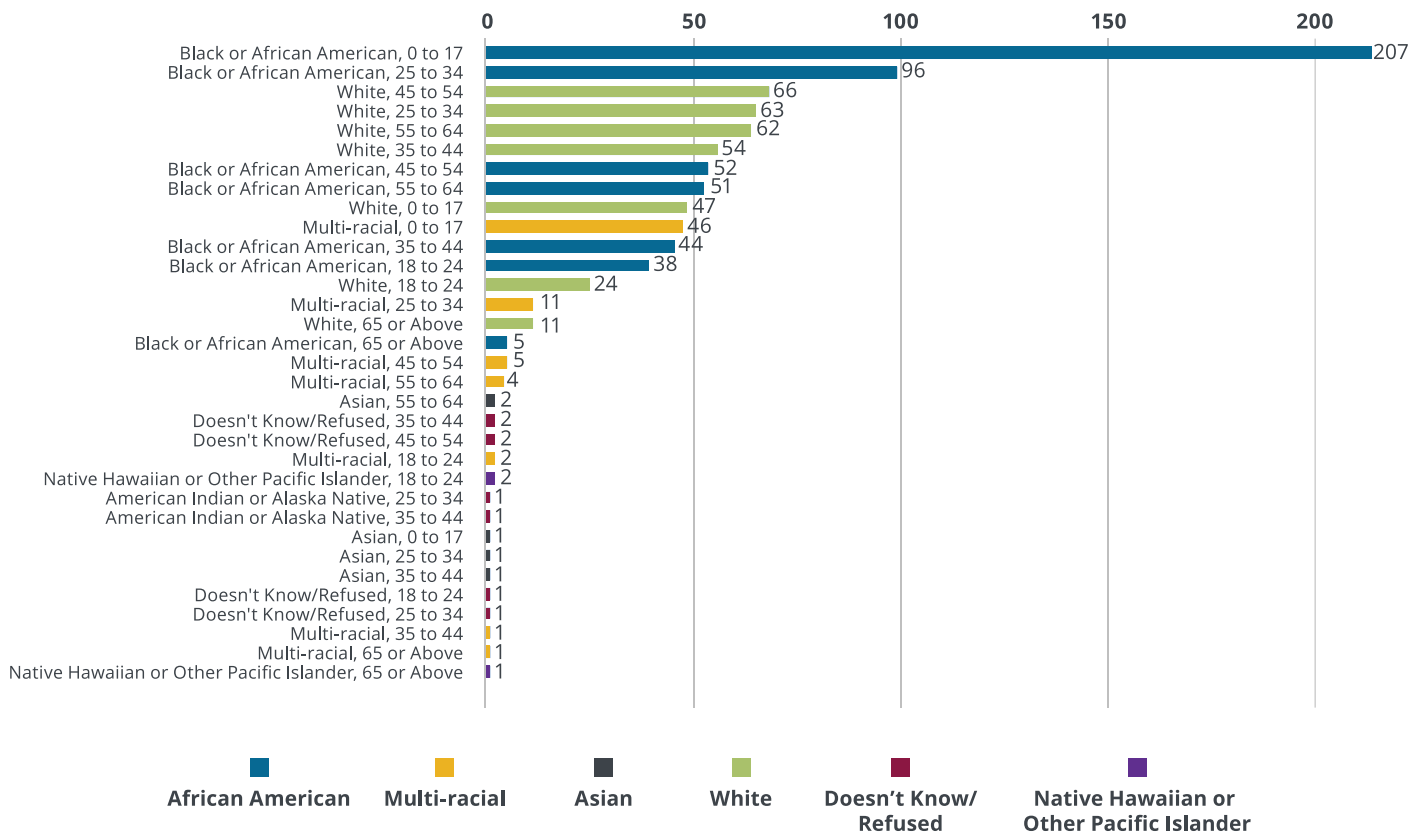


One of the most striking findings is that Black children are by far the highest proportion of the homeless population in Montgomery County (see *Figure 2*). Possibly related to this is the repeated observation by participants in the client listening sessions that young Black mothers and their children may be experiencing decreased access to services and may be at higher risk for return to homelessness after placement in housing. For example, when asked who is at greatest risk for homelessness, multiple participants cited “females,” “women with children,” “women are more vulnerable,” “women who are physically abused,” and “90% of the families here are people of color.” When service providers were asked the same question, one responded, “A lot of single mothers.” Clearly, young black children and the parents who care for them are at increased risk of homelessness in Montgomery County, and programmatic responses should be designed to address this disparity.

This finding is supported by data on the intersection of race and gender in experiences of homelessness in the county. As the graph below demonstrates, for all racial/ethnic groups except Black/African American, male and female clients are represented at approximately equal proportion of the homeless population. Among Black/African American clients, however, Black women represent a larger proportion of the homeless population in Montgomery County (26.9%) than do Black men (22.7%), suggesting higher risk of homelessness for Black women compared to all other groups (see *Figure 3*).

In response to the needs of families of young children, Your Way Home provides immediate homeless crisis response for the following populations: women who are pregnant, families with children aged 5 and under, and people with very severe medical conditions who are already sleeping outside. In particular, families with pre-school aged children who are experiencing homelessness are immediately connected to homeless outreach services, are provided with a hotel voucher, and prioritized for entry into emergency shelter.

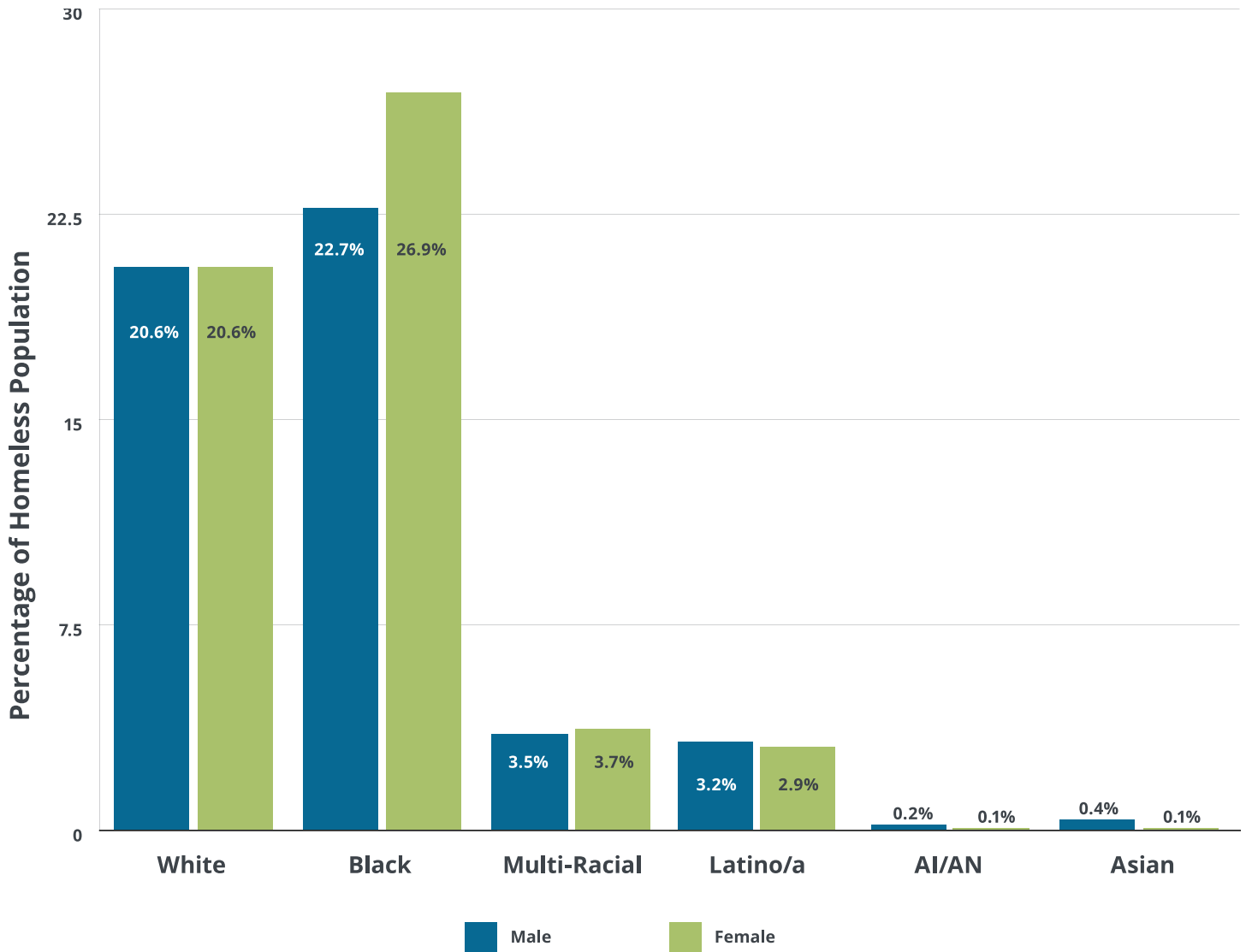
Figure 2: Age and race of homeless population in Montgomery County in 2017



Findings: 2. Program Design



Figure 3: Comparison of race and gender among people experiencing homelessness in Montgomery County, 2017



Findings: 2. Program Design



As these families and individuals strive to exit homelessness, they face barriers. For example, the listening sessions revealed perceptions of bias and discrimination in access to housing. For example, participants in the listening sessions expressed the feeling that White shelter residents had shorter stays and quicker access to housing:

They put them ahead.

White people were put ahead of me to get in. It was never Black people, only White people.

I watched two White families move in and out since I've been in here.

I saw lots of White people come in and leave in the seven months I was there.

HMIS data support these perceptions for individuals while challenging such perceptions for families. Data from 2017 show that White individuals had shorter lengths of stay in shelter prior to exit to permanent housing than Black individuals did—80.4 days for White individuals, compared with 101.4 days for Black/African American individuals. Among families, these findings were reversed. White families stayed an average of 104.2 days in shelter before exiting to permanent housing, compared to a 92-day average for Black families. It is unclear from current data whether White clients are moving more quickly than Black clients into rapid re-housing.

The racial demographics of YWH clients served has been relatively unchanged over the last five years: about 48-51% of clients served have been Black or African American, and 38-42% have been White. This ratio has been consistent across most of YWH's core project types, in that the distribution of clients served in emergency shelter, rapid re-housing, and transitional housing has matched that of the overall percentages served by YWH.

However, this pattern was not the case for permanent supportive housing. From 2014-2017, Black or African American clients were consistently underrepresented (41-46%), while White clients were overrepresented (52-55%). In 2018, the distribution came into closer alignment with other project types, as Black or African American clients accounted for 48.1% of PSH

enrollments while White clients represented 46.8%. Given the consistency of the historical data for this project type, it is worth monitoring closely in the future.

It is important to note that overall exits to permanent housing for Black and White clients have been **nearly identical** for the past five years. Yet the listening session participants seem to be identifying an area of perceived discrimination that should be examined further.

Another area to explore is that permanent housing placements among Hispanic clients dropped slightly from 59% in 2017 to 43% through the first four months of 2018, after three previous years of increases. This is based on a small sample size and should not be construed as a problem unless the trend continues. While the overall numbers are small, and the data itself is based on a very small sample size, further exploration is needed to understand the reasons behind it. One approach would be to conduct interviews or listening sessions with Hispanic clients (both housed and in shelter) to understand this situation more fully. This set of activities could occur in later phases of the initiative.

Last, YWH is engaged in a set of pilot efforts around homelessness prevention, including the Eviction Prevention and Intervention Coalition (EPIC) pilot program. Another YWH prevention effort is The Sprout Initiative, a school-based homelessness prevention program that provides social services and housing stability supports to stabilize families with young children who are at imminent risk of becoming homeless. While these small-scale pilot programs are in their early stages, they represent an important recognition of the role of prevention in solving homelessness.

Further upstream, Your Way Home's Initiative Fund was established in 2014 to provide a flexible pool of funds to support individuals' access to housing and supportive programs. These initiatives show great promise and could be useful tools to reduce the numbers of people of color experiencing homelessness in Montgomery County. YWH's *Unlocking Doors to Homelessness Prevention* report, released in March 2018, found disproportionately high rates of eviction

Findings: 2. Program Design



in the county among people of color and a correlation with high rates of homelessness. This is clearly one of the factors that is driving high numbers of Black individuals and families to experience homelessness in the county, and it speaks to the need for more prevention focused services, such as the expansion of EPIC and the Initiative Fund.

These preliminary prevention focused efforts may offer a road map for beginning to reduce high rates of homelessness among people of color in Montgomery County and across the nation.

Recommendations

1. Partner with other sectors (e.g., health, education, child welfare) to bolster YWH programs that focus specifically on housing, services, and prevention for young Black mothers and their children.
2. Explore opportunities in policy and practice to remove “color-blind” approaches to service delivery.
3. Set measurable targets and timelines for dramatically reducing the number of Black children ages 0–17 who are experiencing homelessness in the county, and share data and goals with partners in the health care sector to support housing as a social determinant of health.
4. Conduct additional analysis to understand the scope of homelessness among LGBTQ people in the county, and explore potential outreach strategies to engage them in housing and services.
5. Conduct interviews and/or listening sessions with Hispanic/Latino clients to understand the reduction in permanent housing placements for this group.
6. Assess the Sprout and EPIC pilot programs for opportunities to include racially explicit outcome metrics and include these metrics in future programs.

Areas for Further Exploration

It is imperative to continue to collect data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, age, and household type. The data must be evaluated through a racial equity lens in order to elucidate disparities and inequities. YWH should continue to gather more information by using ongoing data review, listening sessions with service users, interviews with providers and service users, and other methods in order to gain more insight, specifically into the disproportionate representation of Black children in the homeless population in Montgomery County. Given concerns about specific sub-populations (e.g., Black mothers and children, transgender people, and Hispanic/Latino people), it is important to look at national practices and program models for serving these groups.

Findings: 3. Diversity and Inclusion



Throughout the evaluation process, various quality improvement opportunities emerged that cut across policies and programming, including specific areas for potential quality improvement as outlined below. In particular, there is a need for ongoing efforts to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels of YWH's governance and staffing structures.

Summary of Findings

As with homelessness programs and all systems of care across the country, YWH faces challenges around achieving diversity at all levels of organizational structure and oversight, including the voice of people with lived experience of homelessness. In discussing this issue, it is important to understand YWH's governance and staffing structure:

- The YWH Advisory Council sets the overall strategic direction for the initiative. The 25 members of the Advisory Council are appointed by the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners and represent a broad set of industries and sectors that are invested in ending homelessness in the county. Of the 23 people currently on the Council, 5 are people of color and only 1 has reported lived experience of homelessness.
- The Your Way Home Montgomery County Continuum of Care Governing Board is designed to promote community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness. The thirteen members of the Continuum of Care Governance Team are elected annually. Among current Governing Board members, there is one person of color and no one with lived experience of homelessness.
- The lead public agency of YWH is the Montgomery County Office of Housing and Community Development. This office provides the backbone support to Your Way Home, including policy and program coordination and oversight, data analysis, communications and marketing, grants management, and partnership development. The YWH Operations Team is comprised of seven individuals (including one consultant); five are White and two are people of color.

- The lead private agency and fiscal sponsor of Your Way Home is the Montgomery County Foundation, Inc. The foundation staff includes three full-time staff and two consultants (four White, one person of color).
- Your Way Home's Action Teams provide policy-specific guidance, recommendations, and input on various topics. Action Teams may be *ad-hoc* to address a specific, but time-limited, issue or a recurring one. Any member of the Your Way Home community may participate in an Action Team, including nonprofit partners, government, philanthropy, business, consumers, and residents.

At each level in this governance and staffing structure, it is important to ensure that the perspective of communities of color and people with lived experience of homelessness is represented. A concerted effort to increase diversity of all kinds (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, age, veteran status) will help to improve the focus and quality of programs and will likely result in improved outcomes for specific population subgroups. Such efforts must involve honest, open assessment of what YWH is doing well and what it could be doing better with respect to diversity and inclusion in recruitment, hiring, promotion, and professional development for staff of color. YWH can also analyze its ability to influence recruitment and hiring among its contracted organizations (e.g., requiring those organizations to report regularly on diversity among staff, leadership, and boards).

Throughout this process, our team noted the value of the client listening sessions and staff interviews and suggests that YWH continue to conduct such activities, developing its own internal capacity to do so. Additionally, other avenues could be developed for people with lived experience to contribute their voices to program design and decision-making. These can take the form of working groups, seats on advisory boards and boards of directors, and paid roles as peer specialists, recovery coaches, and outreach workers.

Findings: 3. Diversity and Inclusion



Recommendations

1. Conduct an assessment, including discussions with YWH administrative staff, to understand what YWH can do to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion at each level of its organizational and governance structure.
2. Refine and restart consumer satisfaction surveys and segment these surveys around prevention, shelter, Rapid Re-housing, and Permanent Supportive Housing.
3. Create a plan for increasing diversity at each level of YWH's structure.
4. Write a Statement of Racial Equity Principles that YWH will adopt to guide its work.
5. Create opportunities for including people with lived experience in decision-making processes.
6. Create opportunities for staff of color within the YWH network to develop as leaders and participate fully in decision-making processes.
7. Explore for hiring and integrating people with lived experience in YWH staffing structures.
8. Develop strategies for increasing diversity among YWH's contracted agencies.

Areas for Further Exploration

As YWH moves further into the work of equity and inclusion in its programs, it should continue to develop strategies to embed equity as an overarching way of working, not just a time-limited initiative. YWH should also prioritize inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness in its staffing and governance.

Findings: 4. External Challenges



During this phase of work, the SPARC team identified external challenges beyond the purview of YWH that put people of color at high risk for homelessness and create barriers as they strive to exit homelessness. Any long-term solutions to homelessness, particularly those rooted in racial equity, should address these larger systemic issues.

Summary of Findings

Narratives of inadequate housing options, discrimination in housing and employment, and persistent financial issues were all too frequent. Consider this example from one of the listening sessions:

I have long term domestic abuse, so I've been out many times. When I had the children with me, I had more options. Now that my kids aren't with me, there's nothing. I suffered an injury. I was in my apartment. My daughter wanted to move out and do things for herself. She asked if I could make it on my own. She paid all the bills. I couldn't find a job because of the domestic abuse. I stayed in the apartment for two years after that. Was paying out of my savings. I was having to pay my money to the court. I missed one payment because the court was closed. I paid it late. They took the money, then evicted me on the next month. Then I was at [redacted] then my time ran out. I was there 9 months even though it was a 90-day shelter. I did apply for housing at [redacted]. But there was a freeze on my credit because of the court record. Now I'm around at [redacted], but only for 3 weeks. Then there's nothing else in this area. I love to work, but I'm having trouble finding a job.

Stories such as this one are compounded by broader demographic and economic trends. As described in the Montgomery County Analysis to Fair Housing (2015) report, the population of people of color in the county increased significantly between 1990 and 2010 (see *Figure 4*). This table reflects population data from the last census conducted in 2010. The census will not be updated until 2020, but the estimates from 2018 show a continuation of the trend revealed in the older census data. Populations of color are steadily growing in Montgomery County, with the fastest population acceleration occurring amongst African Americans, who have grown from 8.7% to 10%, and with Asians who have grown from 6.4% to 8% of the general population in the county between 2010 and 2018.

Figure 4: Montgomery County population changes by race and ethnicity, 1990-2010

	1990		2000		2010	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Urban Montgomery County*	518,282	100.0%	518,739	100.0%	626,508	100.0%
White	479,887	92.6%	510,585	87.8%	517,840	82.7%
Non-White	38,395	7.4%	71,154	12.2%	108,668	17.3%
Black	23,197	4.5%	35,441	6.1%	45,826	7.3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	13,003	2.5%	25,146	35.3%	43,956	7.0%
American Indian	565	0.1%	657	0.1%	896	0.1%
Some other race	1,630	0.3%	3,643	14.5%	6,651	1.1%
Two or more races	**	**	6,267	1.1%	11,339	1.8%
Hispanic****	6,194	1.2%	9,898	271.7%	20,438	3.3%
Total Montgomery County	678,111	100.0%	750,097***	100.0%	799,874	100.0%
White	620,310	91.5%	648,510	86.5%	649,021	81.1%
Non-White	57,801	8.5%	101,587	13.5%	150,853	18.9%
Black	38,933	5.7%	55,969	7.5%	69,351	8.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	15,714	2.3%	30,446	4.1%	51,565	6.4%
American Indian	970	0.1%	848	0.1%	1,174	0.1%
Some other race	2,184	0.3%	5,598	0.7%	13,243	1.7%
Two or more races	**	**	8,726	1.2%	15,520	1.9%
Hispanic****	8,027	1.2%	15,300	2.0%	34,233	4.3%

* Excludes Abington, Conshohocken, Limerick, Lower Merion and Norristown municipality

** This category was not recorded in the 1990 Census.

*** The Census Bureau issued a correction report that reduced the county's total number of residents in 2000 from 750,097 to 748,987. However, the Bureau did not indicate racial/ethnic composition of the adjusted total, so the original distribution is included here.

**** Hispanic ethnicity is counted independently of race. Source: U.S. Census 1990 and 2000, 2010 Redistricting Data

Findings: 4. External Challenges



As the numbers and percentage of people of color have increased in the county, it is important to look at household income by race and ethnicity. As data from the Fair Housing report show, the median household income in Montgomery County in 2010 was \$76,380, which represented the second-highest median household income among all counties in Pennsylvania. Across racial and ethnic groups, Asians had the highest median household income at \$80,589. The median household income for White households was \$78,553. Among Black and Hispanic households, median household income was less, at \$59,999 and \$55,000 respectively (see *Figure 5*). As suggested by disparities in median household income, Black and Hispanic residents of Montgomery County experienced poverty at significantly higher rates than White residents.

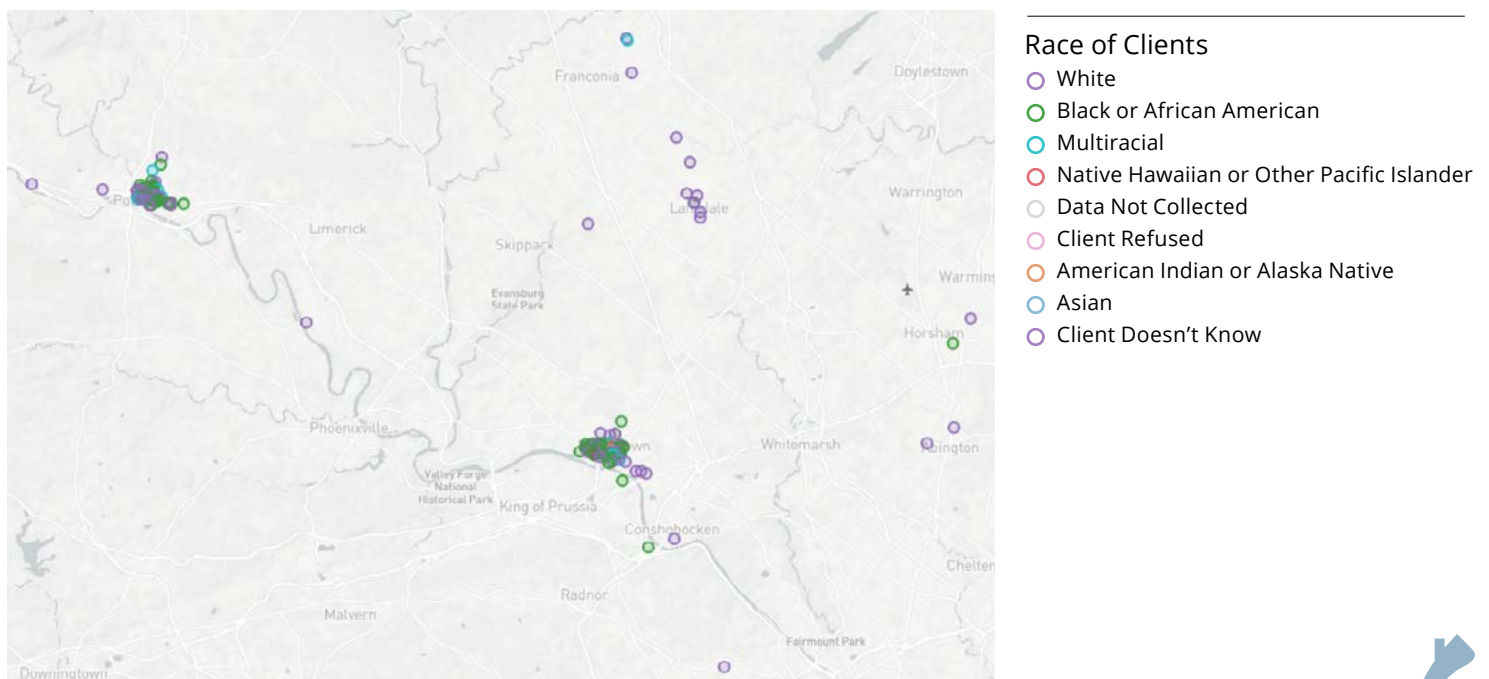
Figure 5: Median household income and poverty rates by race and ethnicity

	Median Household Income	Poverty Rate
Montgomery County	\$76,380	5.6%
Whites	\$78,553	4.4%
Blacks	\$56,999	13.6%
Asians	\$80,589	7.7%
Hispanics	\$55,000	12.0%

Data from this report also indicate that between 2000 and 2009, the number of affordable rental units in Montgomery County declined dramatically. The number of units renting for less than \$500 per month decreased by almost half (49.8%). In that same time frame, the number of units renting for more than \$1,000 per month increased from 11,456 to 26,460, a rise of 131%.

Complicating things further, housing segregation continues to be an issue, as it across the United States. A map of rental assistance for people in YWH rapid re-housing demonstrates the stark reality of racial segregation across the county (see *Figure 6*). The green groupings show a concentration of Black households in Norristown and Pottstown.

Figure 6: Geographic distribution of rapid re-housing rental assistance by race



Findings: 4. External Challenges



While YWH staff can use rental assistance to locate clients in any community across the county, Black households are more frequently located in the Pottstown and Norristown area while White households are accessing housing across the county. Significantly, Norristown and Pottstown comprise the county's largest communities of color overall, suggesting the persistent impact of housing segregation.

A combination of factors—increasing numbers of people of color in the county, housing segregation, a persistent income and poverty gap among racial/ethnic groups, and a dramatic decrease in affordable housing units—creates a perfect storm in which people of color in the county are at a disproportionately high risk of homelessness. This reality is tied together with geographic clustering of people of color in the county along with high rates of eviction in communities of color.

The data are supported by participants who described their own pathways into homelessness during the listening sessions. While a number of the stories included complicated and traumatic experiences leading to homelessness (e.g., domestic violence, poverty, unemployment), they also illustrated the underlying disconnect between limited financial resources and the high cost of housing. As noted in the *Unlocking Doors to Prevention* report, there is no consistent or sufficient source of funding for eviction prevention assistance in the county, and the Housing Authority voucher program has a long waiting list and is currently not accepting new applications.¹²

According to data gathered through the EPIC pilot program, Black or African American participants in EPIC paid 15% higher rent and earned 8% lower income than their White counterparts. The total number of participants in the EPIC pilot is 45, which makes it difficult to generalize from these numbers. Nonetheless, this may suggest underlying reasons for high rates of Black homelessness in Montgomery County. YWH understands this as a Fair Housing issue and is working with its Housing Locators and other partners to address it.

Because increasing housing costs and the persistent racial wealth gap are broader than the homelessness response system, it is important that YWH consider how to strengthen cross-sector collaboration with the public housing authority, landlords, and workforce development boards. Additionally, increased collaboration with health care, behavioral health services, educational institutions, correctional facilities, the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and others can serve as a way to identify risk of homelessness among people of color and respond effectively. YWH is currently participating in the HealthSpark Foundation initiative on Safety Net System Resiliency, which is bringing together stakeholders from these various sectors to define and drive a focus on equity.

12 Poppe, B. (2018). *Unlocking Doors to Homelessness Prevention*. HealthSpark Foundation and Your Way Home. Accessible at <https://yourwayhome.org/unlocking-doors-to-homeless-prevention/>

Findings: 4. External Challenges



Recommendations

1. Increase landlord engagement and education through one-on-one outreach/relationship building and countywide workshops on fair housing.
2. Consider legal strategies in the face of persistent discrimination by landlords toward people of color experiencing homelessness.
3. Conduct zip code by zip code analysis of evictions in the county and compare the results with prior zip codes of Whites and people of color experiencing homelessness.
4. Increase cross-sector collaboration with housing, workforce, health care, corrections, education, and child welfare to develop joint strategies to prevent and end homelessness for people of color. This includes mutual accountability across systems (e.g., the homeless response system, corrections, health care, foster care, and others), as well as a commitment to shared outcomes around preventing and ending homelessness.
5. Conduct training and strategy sessions on racial equity and homelessness to educate and engage partners from other systems.
6. Explore partnerships to focus on development of new affordable housing.

Areas for Further Exploration

Based on our findings, SPARC believes that it is important to monitor disparities between race and ethnicity with regard to rental prices and income. Your Way Home should consider ways to better collaborate with landlords to reduce discrimination. While YWH has done this to some extent by having a landlord represented at the July Equity Forum, more representation is needed.

Building on EPIC data about the ratio between average rent and average income, more data should be gathered by expanding EPIC. While the current data is striking, the number of cases evaluated thus far is not a sufficient basis for understanding the extent of the problem.

Further, YWH has the opportunity to use regular meetings and its annual summit to educate the community on racial equity and homelessness, and to create opportunities for involvement in its equity work.

Lastly, Your Way Home's public-private partnership should be utilized to create cross-sector engagement in order to move efforts upstream to counter the potential pattern of recidivism that the data suggest. This cross-sector work can further address disparities in rent and income between Black individuals and their White counterparts.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

For easy reference, recommendations from each section of the *Findings* are presented here.



Policies and Procedures

1. Incorporate racially explicit language into the YWH Operations Manual.
2. Develop racially explicit outcome metrics for YWH programs.
3. Conduct anti-racism and implicit bias training for all staff across the YWH network in order to minimize potential prejudice in service provision. (YWH has received funding to provide training on implicit bias and leadership around equity and inclusion.)
4. Reexamine the prioritization processes, including current policies for use of the VI-SPDAT, to reduce racial disparity in access to services.
5. Explore emerging practices from across the country for use of Call Centers for the administration of the VI-SPDAT.
6. Engage in partnerships with agencies that serve Hispanics/Latinx and other community-based organizations serving non-English speaking and immigrant communities to explore how best to meet the needs of immigrants, Spanish speaking clients, and undocumented people.



Program Design

1. Partner with other sectors (e.g., health, education, child welfare) to bolster YWH programs that focus specifically on housing, services, and prevention for young Black mothers and their children.
2. Explore opportunities in policy and practice to remove “color-blind” approaches to service delivery.
3. Set measurable targets and timelines for dramatically reducing the number of Black children ages 0–17 who are experiencing homelessness in the county, and share data and goals with partners in the health care sector to support housing as a social determinant of health.
4. Conduct additional analysis to understand the scope of homelessness among LGBTQ people in the county, and explore potential outreach strategies to engage them in housing and services.

5. Conduct interviews and/or listening sessions with Hispanic/Latino clients to understand the reduction in permanent housing placements for this group.
6. Assess the Sprout and EPIC pilot programs for opportunities to include racially explicit outcome metrics and include these metrics in future programs.



Diversity and Inclusion

1. Conduct an assessment, including discussions with YWH administrative staff, to understand what YWH can do to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion at each level of its organizational and governance structure.
2. Refine and restart consumer satisfaction surveys and segment these surveys around prevention, shelter, Rapid Re-housing, and Permanent Supportive Housing.
3. Create a plan for increasing diversity at each level of YWH's structure.
4. Write a Statement of Racial Equity Principles that YWH will adopt to guide its work.
5. Create opportunities for including people with lived experience in decision-making processes.
6. Create opportunities for staff of color within the YWH network to develop as leaders and participate fully in decision-making processes.
7. Explore for hiring and integrating people with lived experience in YWH staffing structures.
8. Develop strategies for increasing diversity among YWH's contracted agencies.
9. Conduct community education sessions to help stakeholders build awareness of equity issues and create opportunities for involvement in racial equity work in the county.



External Challenges

1. Increase landlord engagement and education through one-on-one outreach/relationship building and countywide workshops on fair housing.
2. Consider legal strategies in the face of persistent discrimination by landlords toward people of color experiencing homelessness.
3. Conduct zip code by zip code analysis of evictions in the county and compare the results with prior zip codes of Whites and people of color experiencing homelessness.
4. Increase cross-sector collaboration with housing, workforce, health care, corrections, education, and child welfare to develop joint strategies to prevent and end homelessness for people of color. This includes mutual accountability across systems (e.g., the homeless response system, corrections, health care, foster care, and others), as well as a commitment to shared outcomes around preventing and ending homelessness.
5. Conduct training and strategy sessions on racial equity and homelessness to educate and engage partners from other systems.
6. Explore partnerships to focus on development of new affordable housing.

A photograph of two arched doorways in a stone building. The left doorway has a bright yellow door with the number 15. The right doorway has a bright blue door with the number 14. Both doors are set within white classical-style arches with columns. A black metal railing is visible on both sides of the doorways.

NEXT STEPS

To advance racial equity in Your Way Home’s work in Montgomery County, next steps include:

- A **National Scan** of effective strategies to reduce homelessness among people of color and other historically marginalized groups. The SPARC team will examine what other homeless service systems across the country have done to combat inequity and discrimination. This scan will be informed by the themes outlined in this report and will focus on identifying strategies that can be integrated into Your Way Home’s existing framework. The National Scan will be conducted through a racial equity lens and will include interviews with national experts, SPARC’s growing knowledge base about what various communities are doing, and a literature review of equity-based strategies and practices.
- Ongoing support through **technical assistance and presentations** to Your Way Home staff and key stakeholders as they begin to implement the strategies and recommendations.
- Additional exploration of the **needs of specific subgroups**, such as youth and young adults, Hispanic/Latino clients, and people who identify as LGBTQ.

CONCLUSION

Your Way Home Montgomery County Continuum of Care (YWH) has received recognition as a leader in developing solutions to prevent and end homelessness in Montgomery County. YWH must now take important steps to address homelessness through the lens of racial equity. While the analysis in this report represents an early step, this work lays the foundation from which YWH can create a more just and equitable system that will work to end homelessness for all people. Still, a systemic equity focus must be established and nurtured across multiple sectors. YWH cannot achieve an equitable system by itself, only in collaboration with its partners across Montgomery County.

This work lays the foundation for a more just and equitable system that will work to **end homelessness for all people.**

RESOURCES ON RACIAL EQUITY AND HOMELESSNESS

While racial equity leaders have been driving change across multiple sectors for the past few decades, an explicit focus on racial equity in homelessness is in its early stages and a body of information and ideas is emerging to support communities as they take on this work. Selected resources for reading, listening, and ongoing learning include:

The **SPARC initiative website** provides information about the initiative as well as up-to-date links to multiple resources: <http://center4si.com/sparc/>

The **SPARC Phase One Findings Report** documents findings from five communities across the United States on race and homelessness: <http://center4si.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/SPARC-Phase-1-Findings-March-20181.pdf>

The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America by Richard Rothstein (published 2017 by Liveright Publishers) documents the history of housing segregation in America.

A literature review by Marian Moser Jones (2016) entitled “**Does Race Matter in Addressing Homelessness? A Review of the Literature**” provides an academic overview of the state of research on race and homelessness: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/wmh3.189>

The podcast **Changing the Conversation**, hosted by t3: Think. Teach. Transform., explores many issues related to homelessness and multiple episodes on racism and homelessness: <http://us.thinkt3.com/podcast>



SPARC Glossary of Terms

In racial equity work, it is important to understand key terms and concepts. This glossary presents working definitions for common terms and concepts used in the SPARC team's work.

Equity: A condition that will be achieved when all groups have access to the resources and opportunities necessary to eliminate disparities and improve quality of life.¹

Ethnicity: “The social construct that divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as culture, language, history, and ancestral geographical base.”²

Institutional Racism: Discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and practices, and differing opportunities in a specific institution on the basis of race. Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they reinforce racial inequities, even unintentionally.³

Internalized Racism: According to Donna Bivens, “the situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that undergird the dominating group's power.”⁴ It is important to note that internalized racism has a deep impact on White people as well (*see White Privilege and White Supremacy*).

Interpersonal Racism: The expression of racism that occurs when two or more individuals interact and their personal beliefs and prejudices manifest in outward behaviors. This can be deliberate or unintentional, but either way serves to perpetuate and reinforce racism.³

Intersectionality: A term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how the overlap of social identities (i.e., gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, physical ability, immigration status) contributes to specific types of oppression and discrimination.⁵

Network Impoverishment: A phenomenon in which communities exist in a perpetual lack of access to financial and social capital due to historic and ongoing disenfranchisement. This typically refers to communities of color that have been excluded from opportunities for wealth accumulation and economic advancement.⁶

¹ Villarosa, R., Potapchuk, M., Sen, R., Jung, S. (2009). *Catalytic Change: Lessons Learned from the Racial Justice Grantmaking Assessment Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.issuelab.org/resource/catalytic-change-lessons-learned-from-the-racial-justice-grantmaking-assessment.html>

² Adams, M., Lee, A.B., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1997). *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. New York, NY: Routledge.

³ Potapchuk, M., Leiderman, S., Bivens, D., & Major, B. (2005). *Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building*. Retrieved from: <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/potapchuk1.pdf>

⁴ Bivens, D. (1995). *Internalized Racism: A Definition*. Retrieved from: <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/bivens.pdf>

⁵ Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, Volume 1989*, pp. 139 -167.

⁶ Olivet, J., Dones, M., Richard, M., Wilkey, C., Yampolskaya, S., Beit-Arie, M., Joseph, L. (2018). *SPARC Phase I Study Findings*. Retrieved from <http://center4si.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/SPARC-Phase-1-Findings-March-20181.pdf>

Prejudice: A preconceived judgement or opinion based on unsupported generalizations and negative stereotypes.⁷

Race: A social construct created in the 17th century by White Europeans to justify the enslavement of Africans and the spread of colonialism.⁸ As Ta-Nehisi Coates says, “Race is the child of racism, not the father.”⁹ Understanding of race as a concept has changed over time, but the outcomes of discrimination based on race remain entrenched in our systems.

Racial Equity Lens: A way of viewing the world in an integrated and holistic manner, taking into account past and present racial injustices and seeking to address them through more equitable practices and structures.

Structural Racism: The cumulative effects of history, culture, and ideology. It systematically privileges White people and disadvantages people of color. The Aspen Institute defines structural racism as “a system by which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work to perpetuate racial inequality.”¹⁰

White Privilege: Unearned assets, immunities, permissions, advantages, benefits, and choices available to people based on their belonging to a dominant group (in this case, White people). Those who experience such privilege are often unaware of it.⁷

White Supremacy: A set of unnamed, often invisible structures in which the assumed superiority of people assigned the signifier of Whiteness is centralized in social, cultural, political, legal, and economic systems. This results in a system of power that privileges and elevates White people at the expense of people of color.¹¹

⁷ Maguire, J., Leiderman, S., Egerton, J. (2013) *A Community Builder's Tool Kit: A Primer for Revitalizing Democracy from The Ground Up*. Retrieved from <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/idr.pdf>

⁸ Charles Hirschman, 2004. The Origins and Demise of the Concept of Race. *Population and Development Review*, Volume 30 (3), pp. 385-415.

⁹ Coates, T. (2015). *Between the World and Me*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House, LLC.

¹⁰ Lawrence, K., Sutton, S., Kubisch, A., Susi, G., Fulbright-Anderson, K. (2004). *Structural Racism and Community Building*. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/structural-racism-community-building/>

¹¹ Mills, C.W. (1997). *The Racial Contract*. Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press.

APPENDIX A

Equity Advisory Team Members

Name	Title	Organization
Jason Alexander	YWH Senior Policy Advisor	Capacity for Change, LLC
Greg Barchuk	Data Manager	MC Housing and Community Development
Andrea Bretting	Senior Program Officer	Claneil Foundation
Blair Dawson	Community Relations Manager	MC Housing and Community Development
Jess Fenchel	Vice President for Adult Behavioral Health and Crisis Services	Access Services
Ever Hanna	Life Skills Counselor	Valley Youth House
Emma Hertz	Administrator	MC Housing and Community Development
Charmaine Ijeoma	Veterans Homeless Outreach Officer	MC Office of Veterans Affairs
Joel Johnson	Executive Director	Montgomery County Housing Authority
Russell Johnson	President and CEO	HealthSpark Foundation
Carolyn Mayinja	Senior Manager, Housing and Homeless Programs	MC Housing and Community Development
Natasha Patterson	Interim Dean of Health Sciences	Montgomery County Community College
Kayleigh Silver	Program Manager	MC Housing and Community Development
Viviann Schorle	Community Engagement Director	Family Service Association of Montgomery County
Beth Sturman	Executive Director	Laurel House
Emma Ward-Williams	Program Coordinator	MC Housing and Community Development
Barbara Wilhelmy	Executive Director	Pottstown Cluster of Religious Communities



Your Way Home/ Center for Social Innovation Equity Evaluation Site Visit

Community Partners Center for Health and Human Services
Walton Room: 2506 North Broad Street, Colmar, PA 18915
Tuesday, July 10, 2018

AGENDA

10:00-11:00 AM: Your Way Home Equity Forum

Attendees: Equity Advisory Team members, Your Way Home Advisory Council, invited members of the Your Way Home community

- Overview of the intersection of race and homelessness
- National perspectives
- Explanation of Your Way Home Equity Evaluation
- Questions and discussion

Break

11:15-12:30 PM: Equity Advisory Team Meeting

Attendees: Equity Advisory Team members

Group discussion focused on the following key questions:

- What trends are members seeing in their own organization's work, processes, and data related to equity and homelessness?
- What questions should we make sure we're paying attention to as we undertake this work?
- As this work unfolds over the next few months, how will we apply the findings?



Your Way Home Equity Advisory Team
Community Partners Center for Health and Human Services
2506 North Broad Street, Colmar, PA 18915

Tuesday, August 14, 2018

AGENDA

- 3:00 Welcome & Updates from the Group: What have you been seeing/hearing since our last time together?**
Emma Hertz, Administrator, Montgomery County Office of Housing and Community Development
- 3:15 Initial Impressions from Interviews and Listening Sessions**
Jeffrey Olivet, jo consulting
Lunise Joseph, Center for Social Innovation
- 3:30 Quantitative data: What are the numbers telling us?**
Gregory Barchuk, Data Manager, Your Way Home
- 3:45 Strategies: A large group brainstorm**
- What are some potential strategies to address racial disparities in the homelessness system here?
 - How might we work towards better cross-system approaches?
 - What is the role of the homelessness system to address prevention? How would that work?
 - What can we do internally (within individual orgs and in YWH) to “get our house in order”?
- 4:25 Next Steps**
- 4:30 Adjourn**



Your Way Home/ C4 Social Innovation Equity Advisory Team Meeting

November 14, 2018
10:00 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

- I. Welcome and Introductions (10 min)
- II. Presentation of Major Themes, Findings and Recommendations (20 min)
- III. Discussion (60 min)
- IV. Next Steps (10 min)
- V. Other (5 min)

www.montcopa.org | www.yourwayhome.org | @YWHMontCo |
facebook.com/yourwayhomemontgomerycounty
Call 1-877-646-6306 if you are a resident of Montgomery County and need housing

Client Listening Session Questions

Participants are all people of color who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness. They may be recruited through posted flyers, street outreach, word-of-mouth, or through service providers. They should be as representative as possible of communities of color in each geographic area.

1. Given your knowledge of homelessness and homeless programs, who is at greatest risk for homelessness?
2. What is your current housing situation? Family?
3. Drawing on your experience, how does homelessness differ across racial/ethnic groups?
4. Data indicate that people of color are much more likely to become homeless. Why do you think that is? Why do you think White people are less likely to become homeless?
5. In your opinion, what are the main causes of homelessness? How do racism and discrimination contribute?
6. To the extent that you feel comfortable discussing this, has racial discrimination played a role in your experience of homelessness?
7. Our research project defines racism in two ways. First, we're referring to interactions where people make assumptions about others based on their race or treat them differently because of it. Second, sometimes rules and policies can impact people of color and benefit White people. [Provide example if appropriate]. We can refer to these two forms as interpersonal racism and institutional racism. Does racism exist in homeless programs? What does it look like?
8. When you think of other disenfranchised groups, for example, people who identify as LGBTQ or have a disability, what barriers do they face related to homelessness?
9. Do you feel like you have a voice in shaping how programs are run?
10. Do you think it is possible to end homelessness? What would it take?
11. What advice do you have for Your Way Home as it tries to address racism and other social injustices?



Join us for a small group discussion on the role race and ethnicity play in homelessness

Tuesday, August 14th | 9:00–10:30am

SPARC (Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities) is a group of people working with members of your community to learn more about the intersection of race and homelessness.

We are interested in talking to people with current or past experiences of homelessness. Our goal is to learn more about what peoples' lives have been like, from *their* point of view. By listening to stories and sharing what we learn, we hope to improve services.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?	WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?
<p>We are looking to talk with people who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify racially/ethnically as a person of color and/or identify as LGBTQ, have a disability, or come from families with children.• Have experience with homelessness.• Are at least 18 years of age.• Can use English in conversation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with 6-8 people and a facilitator from the SPARC team.• Sharing 90 minutes of your time.• You will be thanked for your participation with a \$25 gift card that can be used in most stores.• We will record audio of the conversation so that we can listen and learn from it later.

HOW CAN I TAKE PART? If you want to take part in an interview, please contact Lunise Joseph at ljoseph@center4si.com or at 781-247-1717 to make arrangements to participate.

APPENDIX E

Service Provider Interviews: List of Participants

The SPARC Team conducted formal interviews with five staff from programs in the YWH network. Interviewees included:

Title	Organization
Drug and Alcohol Specialist	CHOC
Housing Locator	Carson Valley
Housing Resource Manager	Salvation Army
Associate Director of Housing, Bucks and Montgomery County	Valley Youth House
Assistant Director, Homeless Street Outreach	Access Services

Additionally, the team held conversations with staff from other organizations in the YWH network and across the wider community to understand the system more fully. Participants in these conversations included:

Name	Title	Organization
Debra Curtin	Director of Street Outreach	Access Services
Jessica Fenchel	Vice President, Behavioral Health and Crisis Services	Access Services
Nelly Jimenez-Arevalo	Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer	ACLAMO Family Centers
Mark Boorse	Director of Program Development	Access Services
Cinda Watkins	Call Center Manager	United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania

APPENDIX F

Service Provider Interview Questions

Participants are people of color who are currently working in homeless service organizations. The groups should include people from all levels of provider organizations.

1. What were your pathways into this field? How did you come to work in the homelessness field?
2. Given your knowledge of homelessness and homeless programs, who is at greatest risk for homelessness?
3. Data indicate that people of color are much more likely to become homeless. Why do you think that is? Why do you think White people are less likely to become homeless?
4. Our research project defines racism in two ways. First, we're referring to interactions where people make assumptions about others based on their race or treat them differently because of it. Second, sometimes rules and policies can impact people of color and benefit White people. [Provide example if appropriate]. We can refer to these two forms as interpersonal racism and institutional racism. Does racism exist in homeless programs? What does it look like?
5. In your opinion, what are the main causes of homelessness? Do you think that racism and discrimination contribute?
6. Do you see racial differences in the pathways into and out of homelessness for clients at your organization?
7. How can individual service providers combat racism?
8. Do you think it is possible to end homelessness? What would it take?
9. How can our country move towards ending racism and ending homelessness?