



# Mercer County CoC Homeless Assessment Report

2014

## **I. Introduction**

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development released the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Interim rules. These interim regulations require a high level of planning and coordination among all Continuums of Care (CoCs) throughout the Country. As with any planning process, data analysis of the needs and outcomes of the current system is essential to facilitate meaningful planning.

In order to assist the Continuums of Care throughout New Jersey with this data analysis, this report uses information from the New Jersey Homeless Information System (HMIS) to provide a snapshot of the characteristics of homeless households in the Mercer County CoC. This report can serve as the foundation of a more in depth review of the population and its needs. Communities in New Jersey are well positioned to move towards data driven planning with the wealth of information available through HMIS.

## **II. Data Source**

This Homeless Assessment Report for Mercer County CoC analyzed data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) administered by New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA), the HMIS Lead Agency. In New Jersey, NJHMFA utilized software developed by Foothold Technology as the primary HMIS system for the state. The projects included in this report were all Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing and Safe Haven projects (if available in the community) that were classified as “Homeless Only”.

The Homeless Assessment Report is based on information about unduplicated homeless families and individuals who used available emergency shelter, transitional housing and safe haven projects during the yearlong reporting period January 1, 2014 – December 31, 2014, as reported in HMIS.

For purposes of this report, families included any persons that presented together at the HMIS participating project and would choose to be permanently housed together if that was an option. This can include, households with adults and children under the age of 18, households made of all adults, or unaccompanied youth (under age 18) that present together.

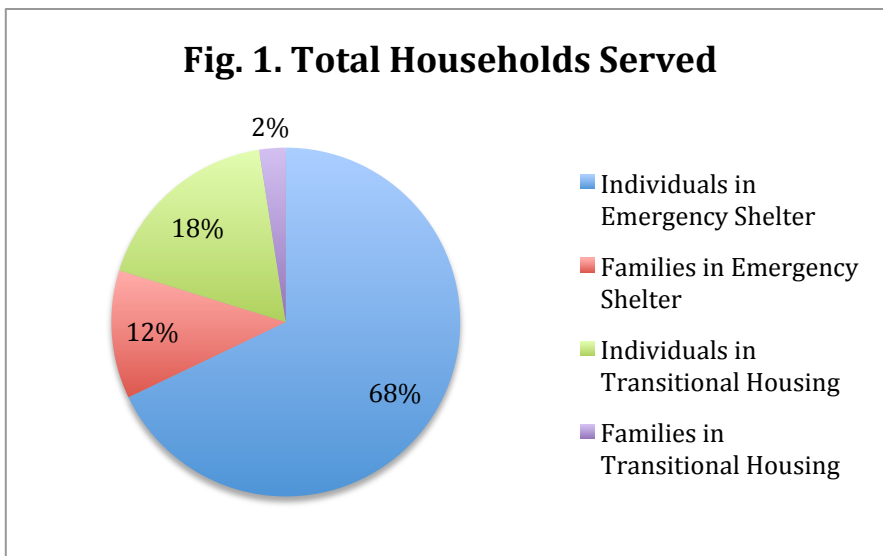
## **III. Findings for Total Population Served**

### **Key Findings:**

- A total of 2,078 households were served in HMIS participating emergency shelters and transitional housing projects during the January 1, 2014 – December 31, 2014 period
- There were 247 households identified as chronically homeless during this reporting period
- 58% of all adults served either as individuals or as part of a family identified having a disabling condition
- 20% of households moved on to permanent destinations after discharge

**Total Homeless**

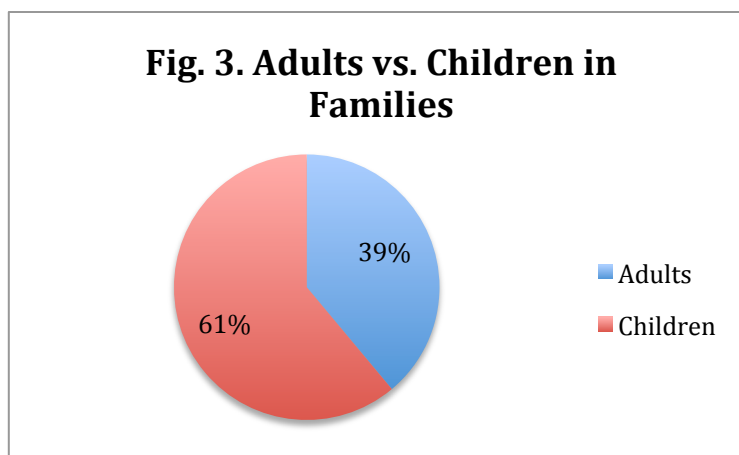
**Population.** A total of 2,078 households composed of 2,604 persons were housed in Mercer County CoC HMIS participating emergency shelters or transitional housing projects during the January 1, 2014 – December 31, 2014 reporting period. This is a 4% decrease in total households and a 2% decrease in total persons served from 2013. Out of the households served in 2014, the majority, 86% (1,780)



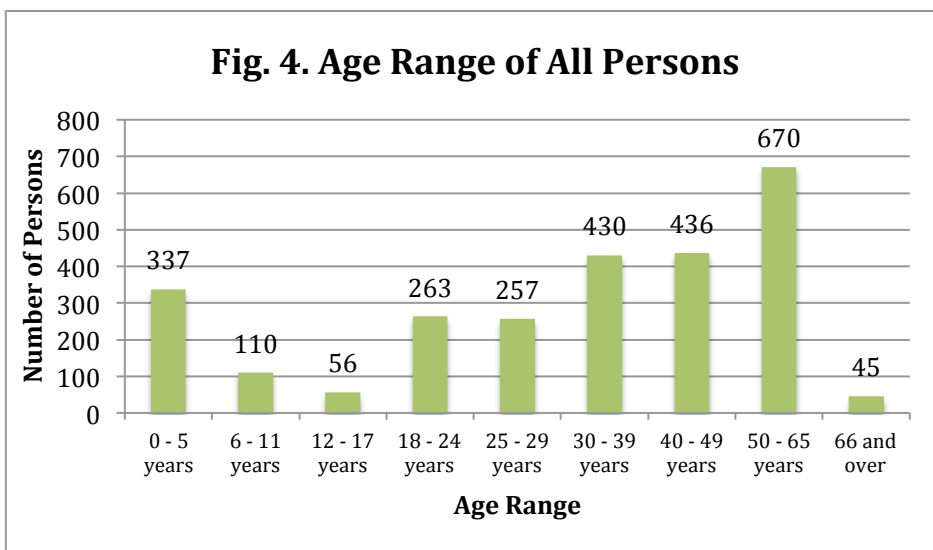
were individuals, while the remaining 14% (298 households) were families. As shown in Figure 1, the most served population was individuals in emergency shelter, which made up 68% of the total population served. The 2,604 persons served throughout Mercer County HMIS projects made up 10% of New Jersey’s total homeless population served in HMIS projects in 2014.

	Mercer County	New Jersey
<b>Total Persons Served</b>	2,604	25,327
<b>Emergency Shelter</b>	2,071	20,800
Individuals	1,411	14,143
Families	660	6,657
<b>Transitional Housing</b>	533	4,343
Individuals	369	2,256
Families	164	2,087

**Family Composition.** Of the 298 family households served throughout Mercer County in 2014, 295 (99%) were households with adults and children under 18, 2 households were adult only households, while the last household was a youth only household. As shown in Figure 3, children represented 61% of the persons included in adult and children families. The average size of a homeless family in 2014 was 3 and the average age of a child served between the two project types was 5 years old.



**Demographics.** Of the total homeless population that was served in the Mercer CoC during 2014, the largest percent, 26%, of persons were between the ages of 50 and 65. As Figure 4 shows, the next highest age range served was persons between 18 and 29 (20%), followed by persons between 40 and 49 (17%).

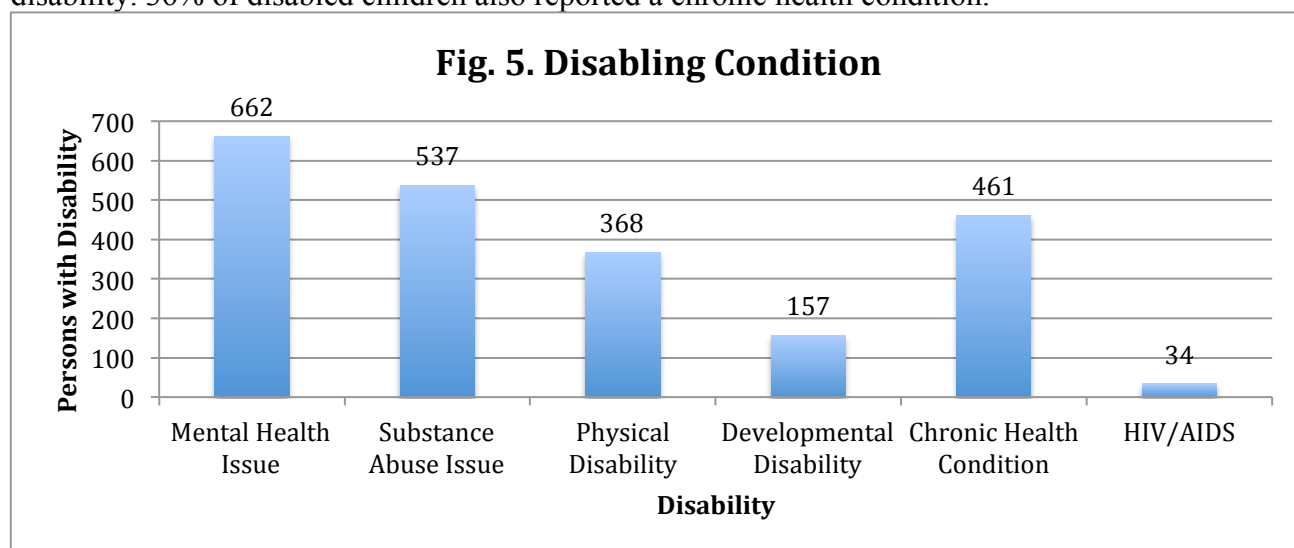


Similar to the 2013 numbers, more than half (64%) of the homeless persons served in Mercer CoC HMIS participating projects were male, with women representing 36% of the population.

In addition, 66% of the homeless persons served during 2014 identified their race as Black or African American, making that the largest racial subgroup. The next largest was White (31%), followed by Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander with 1%. With regards to ethnicity, only 13% identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino.

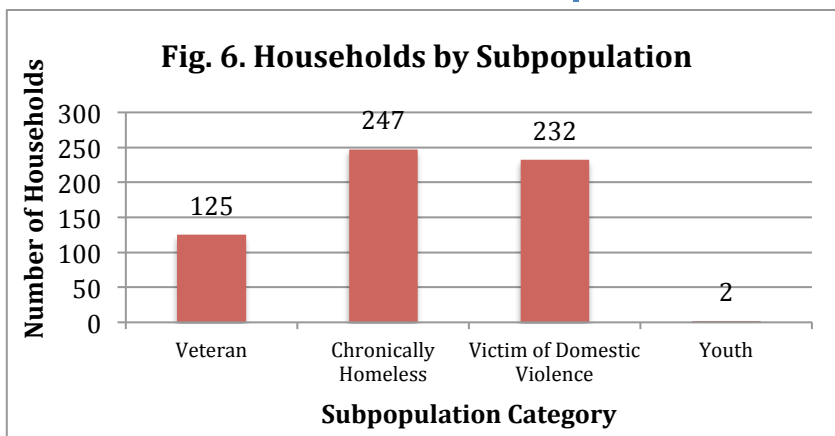
**Disabling Conditions.** Among all persons served throughout Mercer County’s HMIS emergency shelter and transitional housing projects, 49% identified having a disabling condition, this number includes 58% of adults and 14% of children.

Among disabled adults, 53% reported mental health issues making this the most prevalent disability; representing 31% of the total adult homeless population. 44% of disabled adults also reported a substance abuse issue. Among disabled children, 40% reported a developmental disability. 36% of disabled children also reported a chronic health condition.



### Subpopulation

**Characteristics.** In its plan, *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has prioritized ending youth, veteran and chronic homelessness across the Country. In 2014, Mercer CoC served a total of 247 households that

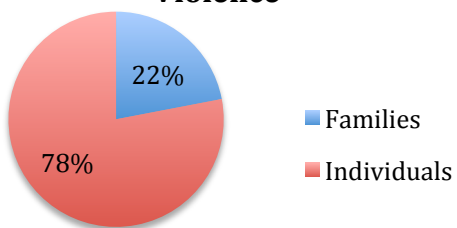


were identified as chronically homeless, a decrease of 14% from the number of chronically homeless in 2013. 85% of the chronic households served were in emergency shelter projects (only 2 were families), while the remaining 15% were individuals in transitional housing projects.

Youth only households, households without someone over age 18, represented less than 1% of the total households served throughout Mercer HMIS projects. One of the youth households was a household of 3; the other was an individual.

As far as veterans served, Mercer CoC served a total of 125 veterans throughout 2014. 98% of veterans served were individuals and only 5% were female. 86% of the veterans served were served in emergency shelter projects. 59% of veterans reported having some kind of disability, with the most common disability reported being a chronic health condition (54%).

**Fig. 7. Household Type Among Victims of Domestic Violence**

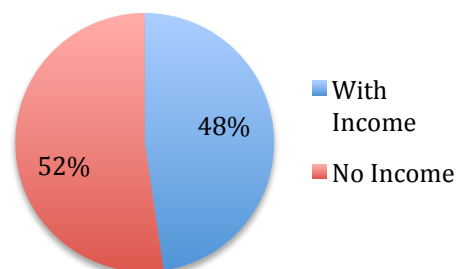


In addition to the chronic, youth and veteran populations, there were 232 homeless households that reported having a victim of domestic violence. 78% of these households were individuals, while the remaining 51 were families. 39% reported that the last episode occurred within the past 3 months, while 38% reported it happening more than a year ago. The large majority of the domestic violence victims (94%) were served in emergency shelters. As a note, while there are victims of domestic violence being served in HMIS

participating agencies, due to federal regulations, Domestic Violence specific projects are not able to enter data into HMIS, so the number of victims served in those projects are not included in this report.

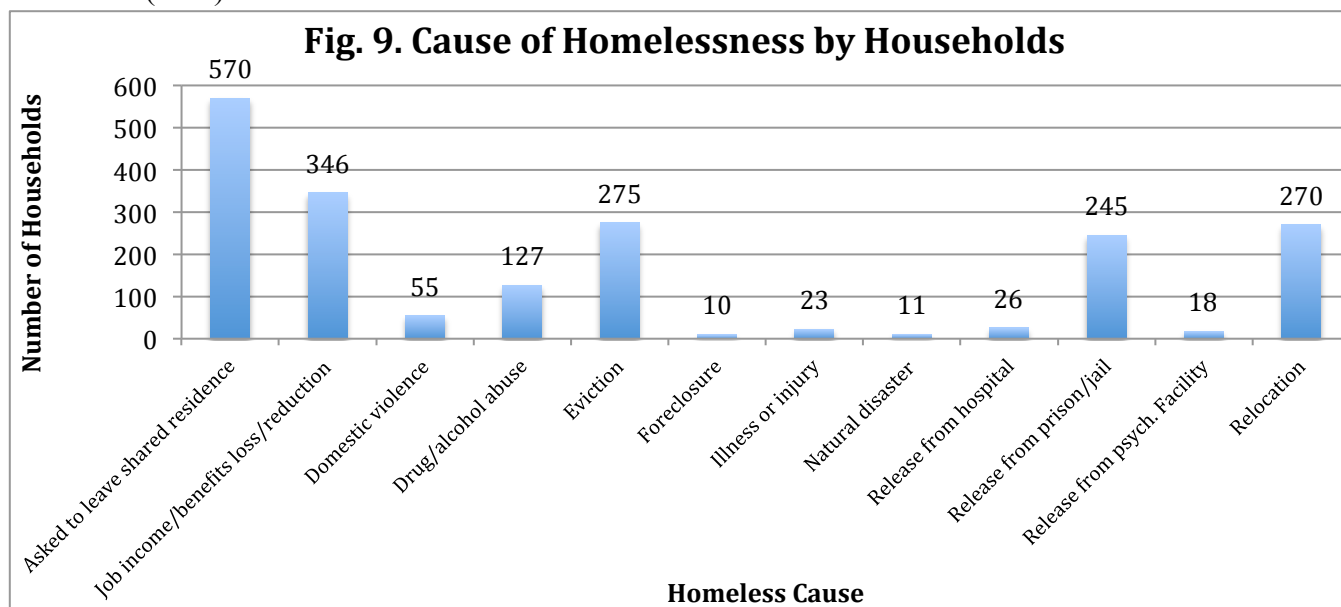
**Income and Benefits.** Among all homeless households served in emergency shelter or transitional housing projects during 2014, 52% had no source of income, while 6% reported receiving some form of earned income. The most common sources of cash income among households were SSI (28%) and General Assistance (16%). The average monthly income for households in emergency shelter was \$219, while it was \$365 for households served in transitional housing projects.

**Fig. 8. Percentage of Households with Income**



While 52% of households had no source of income, 50% of households were not receiving some kind of non-cash benefit. Food Stamps was the top reported non-cash benefit, which was reported by 42% of the households. Another 23% of households were connected to Medicaid benefits.

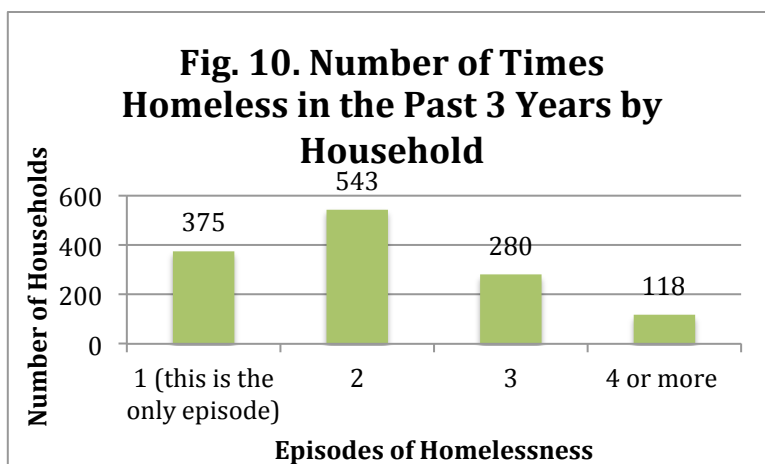
**Cause of Homelessness and Residence Prior to Project Entry.** When asked what the primary factor was that contributed to, or caused, their homelessness, more households attributed their homelessness to being asked to leave a shared residence (27%) than any other cause. As Figure 9 shows, the next most common factors were job income or benefits loss/reduction (17%) and eviction (13%).



These causes of homelessness coincide with the common response for residence prior to project entry with 41% of households staying or living with family or friends prior to project entry. The next most common response was emergency shelter (18%) followed by place not meant for habitation (11%).

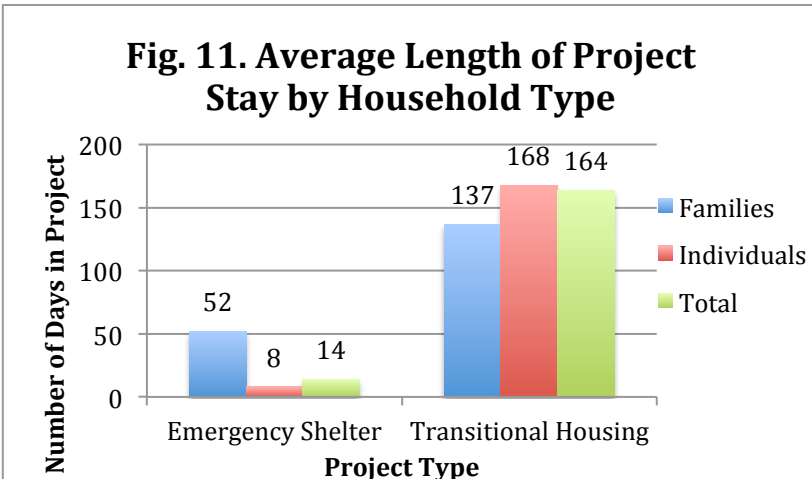
**Length of Stay at Prior Residence and Episodes of Homelessness.**

36% of households served during 2014 had resided in their last residence for one year or longer before entering the emergency shelter or transitional housing project. Another 21% were in their prior residence for more than 3 months but less than one year, while only 10% were there one week or less. Similarly, only 6% of households experienced 4 or more episodes of homelessness in the last 3 years, while 44% of households were experiencing their first or second episode of homelessness prior to project entry, as seen in Figure 10.



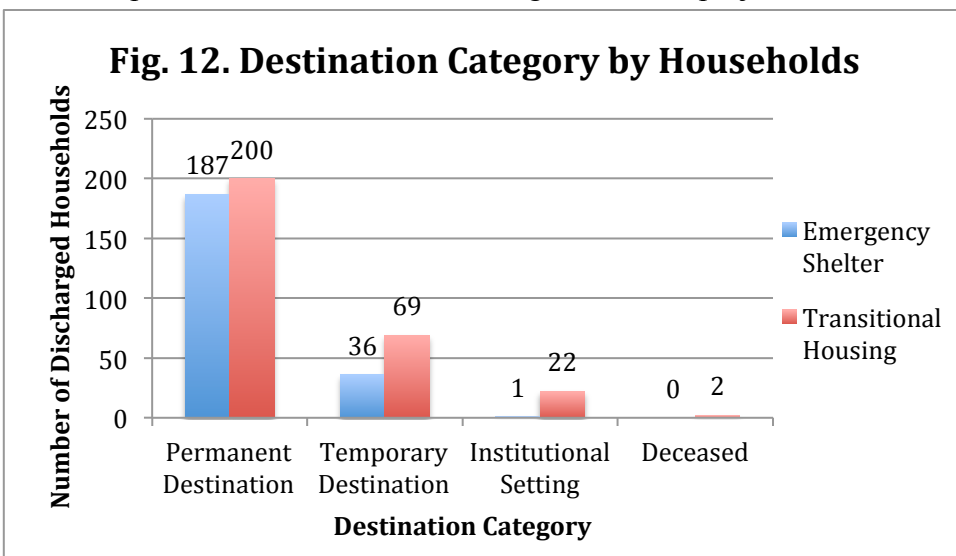
**Average Length of Project Stay.**

When looking at total length of project stay, families seemed to have longer staying in emergency shelter, while individuals seemed to have longer stays in transitional housing projects. During their project stay, it was found that families stayed on average 44 days or about 1½ months, longer than individuals in emergency shelter, while individuals were found to stay 31 days longer than families in transitional housing project. When comparing the 2014 average lengths of stay to those found in 2013, the average length of stay for emergency shelter decreased by 3 days, while the average length of stay for transitional housing projects decreased by 19% in 2014.



**Reason and Destination at Discharge.**

A total of 1,933 households were discharged from emergency shelter and transitional housing projects during the 2014 reporting period. 20% of these households were discharged after project completion or left for a housing opportunity before completion, while 3% were discharged from the project due to non-compliance.



Unfortunately, due to the nature of nightly emergency shelter projects, information about where the household left to was not able to be collected by staff for a large number of households in the Mercer CoC.

Based on the data that was collected, 20% of households discharged in 2014 moved on to permanent destinations upon discharge from the project.

A permanent destination includes a unit owned or rented by a client, permanent housing project, or living with a family member or friend permanently. The most common permanent destination was rental by client with 16% of total households moving into a rental upon discharge. This rental could be with or without a subsidy. 5% of households moved on to a temporary destination at discharge, which could include an emergency shelter, hotel or motel, place not meant for habitation, staying with a family member or friend temporarily, safe haven, or transitional housing for homeless persons. An institutional destination, which was the destination of 1% of households, includes hospitals (psychiatric or non-psychiatric), a halfway house, jail or prison, foster care, long-term care facility or a substance abuse treatment facility.

## Appendix A: HMIS Projects Included in Report

### I. Emergency Shelter Projects

Agency	Project Name
Home Front	HF Family Preservation Center
	HF Gateway
	HF-FreshStart/Emergency Placement A
Rescue Mission	RMOT-Nightly Emergency Shelter

### II. Transitional Housing Projects

Agency	Project Name
Anchor House	Anchor House Anchor Line
	Anchor House Anchorage
Catholic Charities ECS	CC ECS Housing Now
Community Innovations	Community Response – Bowen House Women in Transition
	Community Response LLC – Chest House I – Men in Transition
Helping Arms	Helping Arms Housing Program
Home Front	HF Huchet House
	HF TLC
Rescue Mission	RMOT – Transitional Housing
United Progress Inc.	UPI – Housing Program
VOADV	VOADV-Amani House Transitional Living