



Charlotte-Mecklenburg Emergency Shelter System

ASSESSMENT OF CAPACITY & UTILIZATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RELEASED APRIL 2019

Each day, emergency shelters in Charlotte-Mecklenburg must turn away people who are facing a housing crisis: single adults, families, youth, veterans and individuals as well as those who have been displaced due to natural disasters.

The reality that local emergency shelters are full is not new; these shelters have always been at the front lines of serving those who need immediate help. The need for shelter is always the end result of a loss of housing. To adequately address the need for shelter, the community must also consider permanent, affordable housing as central to the solution.

In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, there is and has been an indisputable shortage of housing affordable to those earning less than median income levels. While investment in both short- and long-term housing subsidies has increased since 2010, finding units to match with available subsidies in Charlotte-Mecklenburg has been challenging. In addition, the number of naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH) units, where subsidies are not needed, is decreasing due to market pressures.

The need for affordable housing has grown out of proportion to the supply of all housing, as well. Over 75,000 renter households in Charlotte-Mecklenburg face housing instability because they are cost-burdened. Of those households facing a high risk of experiencing homelessness, on average NC 2-1-1 receives 711 calls from households/individuals for housing assistance each month; 318 households receive an in-person assessment through the community's Coordinated Entry system. Over 5,000 individuals entered emergency shelter during FY17. This does not capture the number of people turned away.

The solution for housing instability and homelessness is the *same*: housing that is *affordable* to individuals and families at all income levels.

Readily available, affordable housing, especially for those earning at or below 30% of area median income would help address capacity issues in shelters. However, even when there is enough housing affordable to anyone, communities must have a crisis response system to help individuals and families access shelter when they need it. Therefore, Charlotte-Mecklenburg must consider whether its existing emergency shelters are both effectively providing immediate, safe space for all and efficiently connecting individuals and families with housing available.

The emergency shelters, if functioning as a coherent system in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, are uniquely positioned to play a significant role in the work to end and prevent homelessness, and increase access to affordable housing. Some have begun the difficult work to coordinate and collaborate across individual shelters and explore complementary services to expand capacity without building new facilities.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg is not unique in its challenge to create a fully functional emergency shelter system. Determining the right number of emergency shelter beds is a question faced by communities across the United States. The lack of affordable housing, in combination with other factors, contributes to an increased need for permanent housing solutions.

The emergency shelter system must effectively provide crisis shelter for those who *most need it* and then efficiently *connect those in crisis to housing*.

This report articulates the need to view the emergency shelters as a system, holistically and in its proper context. Analysis of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg emergency shelter system utilization and capacity is provided within the larger context of permanent, affordable housing need and supply. To effectively evaluate the emergency shelters as a system, an objective and comprehensive framework is used to describe the current state and offer recommendations for optimization.

Prior to building new shelters, decision makers must consider the impact of implemented solutions upon overall system performance and optimization. Shelters are necessarily more than options in time of crisis. Only by adopting a coordinated approach, within the broader context of homelessness and housing instability, will Charlotte-Mecklenburg truly impact the need for emergency shelter.

Only by adopting a coordinated approach, within the broader context of homelessness and housing instability, will Charlotte-Mecklenburg truly impact the need for emergency shelter.

Authors

COURTNEY MORTON
MECKLENBURG COUNTY
COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES

SHIRAIN BANNER
UNC CHARLOTTE

Report Reviewers

ADELAIDE BELK, UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL CAROLINAS
KATHY BRAGG, COMMUNITY SHELTER OF UNION COUNTY
LAURA CLARK, UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL CAROLINAS
LIZ CLASEN-KELLY, MEN'S SHELTER OF CHARLOTTE
KATHRYN FIRMIN-SELLERS, UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL CAROLINAS
TRISH HOBSON, THE RELATIVES
STACY LOWRY, MECKLENBURG COUNTY
STEPHEN MCQUEEN, URBAN MINISTRY CENTER
DERONDA METZ, SALVATION ARMY CENTER OF HOPE
CHANDA SCOTT, SAFE ALLIANCE

This report was completed by Mecklenburg County Community Support Services in partnership with United Way of Central Carolinas. Many thanks to the emergency shelter providers in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Union County for supporting this effort.

