



CATHOLIC COMMUNITY SERVICES
CATHOLIC HOUSING SERVICES
SERVING PEOPLE OF ALL BELIEFS



HOUSING & HOPE

A monthly email series on housing & homelessness.

A Family's Journey to Housing Stability

As we move into the New Year, we are offered a chance for contemplation and reflection on the year passed. This year has presented new challenges for us all, and particularly for the caregivers who prioritize the wellbeing of their children. Parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about new stressors, concerns, and fears. Common parental worries over the psychological and physical wellbeing of their children are now exacerbated as children are tested psychologically due to the rapid routine changes and uncharted isolation from friends, as well as being at physical risk of contracting the virus. Parents are now faced with novel challenges, including supervising at-home education, accessing safe childcare, or keeping their children entertained without extensive levels of screen time. How do we impart on our children the importance of face masks without inflicting too much general fear about the pandemic? How can we create time to prioritize our own mental health? Children's [hospitals](#), [psychologists](#), [doctors](#) and [magazines](#) have been brimming with tips to manage these unprecedented tribulations.

Parenting includes added stressors for those experiencing homelessness, and these, too are intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finding nutritious food, a safe place to sleep, and clothes to protect from the cold are central concerns, on top of the general anxieties about their children's health and wellbeing. Further, for parents with substance abuse disorders, new challenges have arisen during the pandemic, including accessing the [already limited](#) addiction and mental health services that are now increasingly restricted due to shutdowns across the sector.



Source: FamilyPromise, 2020

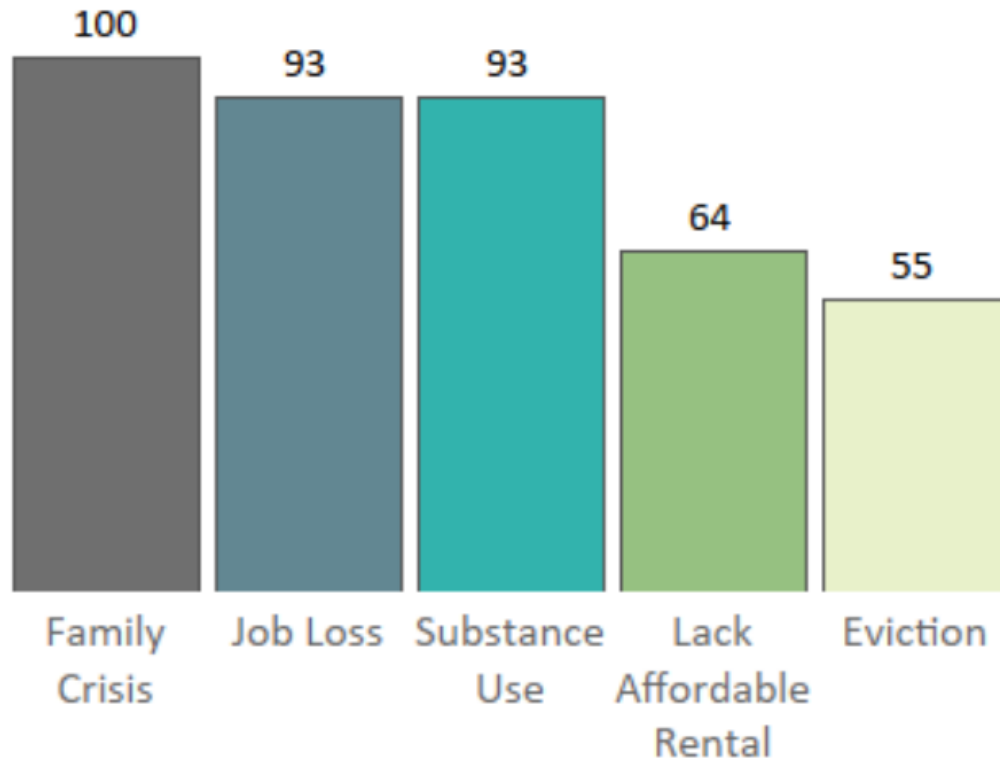
CCS/CHS housing programs across Western Washington offer individualized care for the differing experiences of chronic homelessness. In Snohomish County, housing programs are concentrated around services that overcome specific barriers that make the experience of homelessness challenging - therefore targeting veterans, those living with HIV and AIDS, and other specialized populations, including parents with histories of substance abuse. The Pregnant/Parenting Housing Program (PPH) is a permanent supportive housing program for pregnant and parenting adults in Snohomish County.

PPH was established with an understanding of the relationship between chronic homelessness, substance abuse disorders, and parenting and family support. The Point in Time count in Snohomish County in 2017 and 2018 revealed that the top three reasons for homelessness in both years included family crisis, job loss, and substance use.

Sarah Jayne Barrett, Housing Services Director for CCS/CHS' northwestern programs, notes that many clients who work with the PPH program have experienced a recent family crisis, and that the COVID-19 pandemic has also increased the number of individuals who are seeking shelter due to recent job loss. The relationship between substance abuse and experiencing homelessness is two-fold: reports [indicate](#) that substance abuse can be a cause as well as a result of homelessness. Further, the Point in Time Count states that 12.5% of adults were diagnosed as having co-occurring disorders (having both mental health and substance abuse issues), and 12% were tri-morbid (having a combination of mental health, substance abuse, and physical health issues), underscoring the augmented effects of health conditions on

the experience of homelessness, particularly when accessing treatment is a barrier to recovery.

Reasons for Homelessness



Source: Snohomish County Point in Time Count, 2018

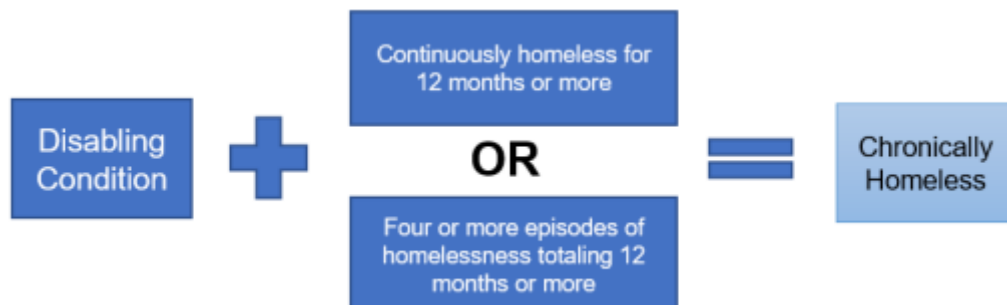
The Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless [notes](#) that “even when homeless individuals were motivated to address substance abuse problems, access to the variety of services needed were lacking.” Barriers include the accessibility and availability of treatment, including cost, location, and mental health constraints like high levels of depression and anxiety. Additionally, “notably lacking has been successful integration of substance abuse treatment, permanent stable housing, and related services such as mental health.”

Further, a 2017 [study](#) of the effect of homelessness on parenting found that the experience of homelessness severely impacts parenting behaviors, in particular parental mental health, authority, and the availability and use of material resources and social support. Positive self-concept is of extreme importance as a parent, and parental stress and inability to provide consistent shelter, stimulation, and environmental and material resources can have a negative effect on a parent’s belief in their caregiving skills. Such added stress increasingly impacts mental health and may further drive some individuals to abuse substances as an escape.

The PPH program aims to eliminate the added barriers to accessing stable housing for parents suffering from SUDs. Reports [indicate](#) that programs most effective at encouraging sustained sobriety include stable housing during and post-treatment,

along with other supportive services including assistance with employment, education, mental health, and child-rearing. Case managers help PPH clients with the child reunification process, parenting and substance abuse support as well as with other personal goals, which often include gaining employment and income. Danielle Gentry, PPH program manager, reveals that in her experience, “most people don’t want to be on voucher assistance forever!”

Adults eligible for PPH are pregnant or parenting (with 51% or more legal custody, or imminent reunification through the courts) with a documented disability, have completed or are currently engaged in a substance abuse program, and are experiencing chronic homelessness. PPH offers two types of housing vouchers for clients. Through a partnership with Everett Housing Authority (EHA), project-based vouchers are available for ten units in an Everett building. These vouchers are offered to clients who have been screened by EHA, and therefore clients with drug related or violent felonies, as well as those with past evictions, are often not approved (please see the Housing & Hope series [homepage](#) to learn more about criminal records as a barrier to housing). Other PPH clients receive Shelter Plus Care vouchers through the YWCA and live-in market-rate units around the county. When a parent has 51% or more custody or will be reunited with their child within three months, the child is also eligible to live there. However, PPH clients usually stay in the program for two or three years. Danielle notes that it can take over a year for clients to reach personal stability, and months to reform a solid relationship with one’s children.



Source: Snohomish County Point in Time Count, 2018

Corrie, a 39-year-old mother, struggled with addiction and experiencing chronic homelessness for five years. Despite her goal of self-sufficiency and dreams of a stable life for herself and her young son, Corrie reveals that experiencing homelessness and the accompanying uncertainty of day-to-day life kept her “*in a cycle of addiction for many years.*” In a letter of thanks to the PPH staff, Corrie writes, “*I lived from place to place and in my car, when I had one, and also in my storage unit. I was addicted to drugs and alcohol and didn’t have my son with me because I had no place for him.*” She describes this point as rock bottom, and it was then that Corrie decided to make a change.

Corrie came to PPH in 2018, pregnant for the second time and ready to battle her addictions, reunite with her son, and to welcome her second son into the world. Danielle Gentry, program manager of PPH, remembers Corrie’s first meeting with CCS, “*When I met her at her intake, you could tell she was really trying to make*

positive change and make life better for her kids." After receiving an EHA project-based voucher, Corrie moved into her new apartment. There, she worked hard to increase opportunities for herself, often confiding in her case manager that she did not want to be on public support. In fact, with the support and stability provided by PPH, Corrie was able to prioritize her sobriety and her children, and now lives with them full-time. After identifying career paths that she was passionate about, Corrie also began to work with the Seattle Pipe Fitters Union.

Now three years clean, Corrie lives with her children and writes that, *"I have a full-time job and am able to pay my rent on time every month, which feels really good."* She also added that showers, laundry machines, and having a place for her children to put up a Christmas tree are some of the experiences she now cherishes the most.

Corrie concluded her letter with a powerful message. She writes, ***"I was given a hand up when I needed it and eventually, I will be fully self-sufficient and able to pass my spot to someone else who really needs it. My life is better than I could have imagined it could ever be three years ago. Thank you for helping me find my worth and for helping me become the woman and mother that I am today!"***

CCS/CHS is proud to offer services that specifically address the diverse barriers to housing and housing stability that our clients face. As we continue to fight for a place to call home for all our Western Washington neighbors, we hope that stories like Corrie's can serve as a reminder of the trials and hardships that so many among us experience, and that everyone deserves a helping hand.

If you would like to learn more about a particular issue as it relates to the experience of homelessness, please contact Sienna at SiennaH@ccsww.org. If you received this email from an outside source, please [sign up](#) if you would like to receive our monthly Housing & Hope emails directly. For an archive of each month's story, please visit the [series homepage](#).

