



CATHOLIC COMMUNITY SERVICES
CATHOLIC HOUSING SERVICES
SERVING PEOPLE OF ALL BELIEFS



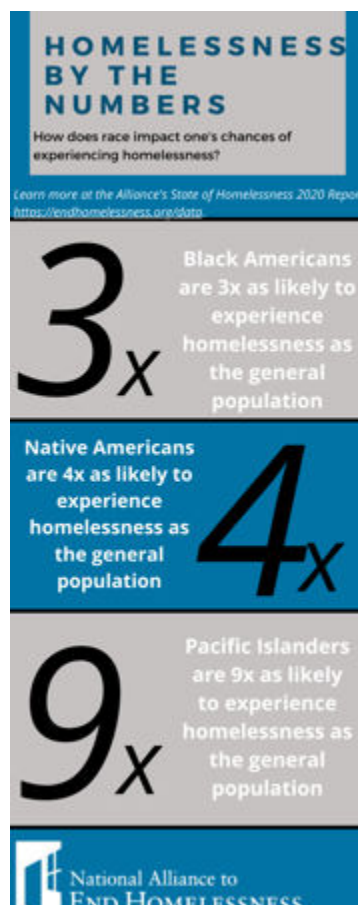
HOUSING & HOPE

A limited email series on housing & homelessness.

Racial Disparities in Housing

CCS/CHS housing programs vary in type of service delivery in order to meet the diverse needs of each individual in our care. The overarching goals of affordability, accessibility, and stability, however, hold true for each of our supportive housing programs across Western Washington. In particular, our case managers aim to eliminate as many barriers to housing as possible for our clients. Common barriers to housing can include poor rental history, unstable employment history, and criminal history, as well as financial obstacles like bad credit, lack of savings, and living on a fixed income. Each of these factors illuminates a deeper history of institutional racism.

In particular, criminal histories as a barrier to housing reveal a larger issue of institutional racism within the United States. As Harvard Law professor, Valerie Schneider [noted](#) in 2018, studies have shown that individuals with criminal records, even minor offenses, are “routinely denied access to housing,” despite these offenses rarely having an effect on whether the applicant would be a successful renter. Due to the [disproportionate](#) number of BIPOC (black, indigenous, and people of color) represented in the criminal justice system, post-incarceration barriers to housing echo this racial disproportion that perpetuates systemic injustice.



For instance, while 7.7% of the Pierce County population who responded to the [2019 Census](#) identified as Black or African American alone, data from the [2020 Point in Time](#) count revealed that 24% of the unhoused population in Pierce County is Black or African American. This disparity holds true on the [national level](#) as well; Black Americans make up 13% of the population, but 40% of people experiencing homelessness. Other issues besides criminal history [contribute](#) to this disproportion, including poverty and less access to quality healthcare and behavioral health services, as well as rental history and housing discrimination. In a national report, [Pew](#) specifically referenced Washington, finding that Black people living in Seattle are more likely to have an eviction listed on their rental history, even if they were not technically evicted. Each of these individual reasons contribute to the larger picture of why BIPOC experience homelessness at disproportionate rates to their White counterparts, and SPARC reminds us that “This is no accident; it is the result of centuries of structural racism that have excluded historically oppressed people—particularly Black and Native Americans—from equal access to housing, community supports, and opportunities for economic mobility.”

Our story this month highlights Mr. Bobby, a new resident at Nativity House Apartments in Tacoma. Mr. Bobby was almost denied housing due a record of minor criminal offenses, but dedicated Nativity House staff strived to ensure Mr. Bobby’s successful transition into the apartments. CCS Nativity House Apartments, a program of the new Nativity House, provides 50 units of permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless single adults. CCS/CHS staff provide case management services to residents to ensure safety, security and supportive connections. The new Nativity House - which also includes a day shelter, an overnight shelter, hot meals, and supportive services - is the largest, most comprehensive facility in Pierce County.



As Brandee Tillman-Banks took on the role of Respite Program Supervisor at Nativity House, she recalls meeting Mr. Bobby. “I met him when I had to wake him up. He was camped right at St. Leo’s parish doors.” Brandee’s usual routine was to move along Nativity House shelter guests by 7 a.m. with a message of encouragement, “Kings and Queens, for this is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. I know that you struggled through the night but thank God you got up in new strength.” Mr. Bobby would say, “That is beautiful!” Brandee lives out the values of Nativity House each day in her work, endeavoring not only to provide for the basic needs of adult individuals experiencing homelessness, but to offer concrete pathways to permanent housing and self-sufficiency for every neighbor in need.

After hearing that Brandee was a supervisor, Mr. Bobby began calling her “Mrs. Supervisor.” He expressed to her that she was “one of few who talked to him like a human being.” As time went on, Mr.

Bobby would make the rounds with Brandee to ensure that no one would bother her. According to Brandee, “he became my personal security guard.” He would also clean up the tents and trash left behind by others. He would demand that others respect the staff and property.

Mr. Bobby grew closer to Brandee, eventually sharing that he has spent almost two decades struggling with homelessness. He said he was blessed that someone like Mrs. Supervisor “saw him as a human being with a story, and one day a story of victory, a testimony.”



In February 2020, Nativity House Apartments received Mr. Bobby’s application for housing. Sadly, his initial application was denied because of his criminal record of minor offenses. Though a beloved friend of Nativity House staff and residents alike, Mr. Bobby simply did not meet the requirements mandated by the federal government and by Pierce County Housing Authority.

However, Mr. Nick, the property manager, fought and fought on Mr. Bobby’s behalf for acceptance into housing. It was with great excitement that Mr. Bobby received the key to his apartment on October 1st. Brandee recalls that staff shed tears of joy when they learned that Mr. Bobby would finally have a warm, secure place to call home. It reminded Brandee in that moment, “This is why I am here, and why we press on...HOPE!” Mr. Bobby’s journey also serves as a reminder for all.

As part of our philosophy of compassion and our respect for the sanctity of each human life, CCS/CHS believes in the right to housing for all. Acknowledging the history of institutional racism in our county, and the resulting [observed](#) racial disparities within Washington’s criminal justice system, CCS/CHS [strives](#) to extend particular support to those individuals, children, families, and communities struggling with poverty and the effects of intolerance and racism. To that end, CCS/CHS supports policies that acknowledge and target systemic inequities which reproduce the racial disproportion still visible across the country.

If you would like to learn more about a particular issue as it relates to the impact of race on experiencing 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](#).