

HOUSING FIRST



Building strong financial foundations through stable housing

OPPORTUNITY

Build stability in the financial foundations of families in low-income communities by addressing quality and affordability in housing through locally informed and regional collaboration.

CHALLENGE

Housing is a regional challenge interconnected with economic well-being, yet it looks very different depending on the specific region, neighborhood or family in need. While many innovations and efforts across the region address affordable housing, these efforts are segmented and may not fully consider the unique history or current conditions of the community. There is a need to recognize the importance of differences in approaches while leveraging collective efforts to create systems change.

PORTFOLIO COMPOSITION

Investment of
\$2,425,000
in 15 partners



SYSTEMS CHANGE PARTNERS

- Brighton Center Inc.
- Brighton Properties Inc.
- Caracole Inc.
- Center for Great Neighborhoods of Covington
- Clermont County Community Services Inc.
- Community Matters Cincinnati Inc.
- Cornerstone Renter Equity
- Housing Opportunities Made Equal
- Legal Aid of the Bluegrass
- Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati
- Lincoln Heights Outreach Inc.
- Santa Maria Community Services
- Seven Hills Neighborhood Houses
- Welcome House Inc.
- Working In Neighborhoods

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:

Affordable and stable housing in supportive neighborhoods helps reinforce the financial foundations families need to improve economic mobility and build intergenerational economic well-being.

As shown through research, where families live matters. Neighborhoods play a key role in shaping the trajectory of an individual's life and have an impact on future earnings, likelihood of attending college, lifelong health and criminal justice engagement.ⁱ ⁱⁱ Yet, not all families have access to stable and affordable housing in opportunity-rich communities. Structural discrimination through a range of policies and practices, such as restrictive covenants and redlining, have created inequities within the housing ecosystem inhibiting upward economic mobility for families with low incomes.ⁱⁱⁱ The resulting lack of access to homeownership and other forms of capital has led to significant disparities in wealth in Black communities and other communities of color.^{iv} Economic disinvestment in low-income communities hinders positive conditions that improve mobility – such as good schools, employment opportunities, access to grocery stores and safe places to play and connect with neighbors.

To improve the economic well-being of our region, we must build solutions that provide equitable opportunities for all families to access affordable, stable and quality housing in their community of choice.



UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE:

Housing is a complex issue. It's interconnected with the history and culture of communities, housing policies, public and private investment, economic trends, the quality of public education, physical and environmental conditions, good paying employment opportunities – just to name a few factors. While the overall challenge of limited affordable and quality housing is universal across our region, it looks a little different in each neighborhood and community. Some communities are working to address the housing needs of aging populations and others are welcoming in families that immigrated from other countries. Other communities are tackling family relocation as housing prices increase or public housing units are reduced.

Families with low incomes across our region are disproportionately paying more for housing and are often faced with low-quality, unsafe or crowded housing options. COVID-19's impact on financial security and increased housing competition with limited stock have driven housing prices up, making it even more difficult for families to access affordable and stable housing. For families with school-age children, negative housing conditions can have a ripple effect on educational outcomes such as lower kindergarten readiness, graduation rates and educational attainment at the age of 25.^v ^{vi} Poor-quality housing, encompassing the physical condition of a home as well as the quality of the social and physical environment, can especially lead to negative health outcomes, including chronic disease, shorter lifespan and poor mental health.^{vii} ^{viii}

NATIONALLY

- **Low-income renters making less than 80% of the area median income suffer the most severe affordability challenges** and reside in poor-quality housing at a much higher rate than higher-income groups.^{ix}
- **The number of renters has risen since the financial crisis in 2007** and this growth was particularly drastic for middle-aged households, Black households and higher-income households.^x ^{xii}
- **The homeownership gap between white and Black households grew in 2020.** Although homeownership rates rose to 65.5% nationally, rates for Black Americans increased to only 43.3%, a rate lower

continued

than it was in 2010. Conversely, white Americans (72.1%), Asian Americans (61.7%) and Hispanic Americans (51.1%) all achieved decade-long highs in homeownership.

LOCALLY

- Low-income renters in Greater Cincinnati disproportionately spend more on housing expenses than families that own. **Nearly 60% of all households making less than \$50,000 a year spend more than 30% of their income on housing.**^{xiii}
- Data shows that evictions in Cincinnati aren't spread evenly; **100 buildings are responsible for 26.1% of all evictions in the city of Cincinnati.** Ten of those buildings are responsible for the most filings. This pattern holds true in most municipalities.^{xiv}
- A 2017 study estimated a **shortage of 40,000 affordable and available units** in Hamilton County for extremely low-income households.^{xv}

“ We must address affordable housing – it may look different across the state, but it is still an issue. It's foundational. It's the center block to build upon. ”

– Community volunteer and leader

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

COMMUNITY VOICE AND ASSETS

Families often want to stay in their community of choice, so addressing housing challenges requires us to make sure each community offers opportunities and resources necessary for families to thrive. Child care, transportation, health care, and learning and work opportunities are important resources for families.

To build sustainable housing solutions, community residents must be at the table to share their needs and build shared visions for their community. Using an asset-based approach that recognizes and builds upon the unique human, social and physical capital existing within local communities leads to more opportunity to inform, influence and advance solutions for affordable and stable housing.

How might we engage community voice and leverage existing community assets to inform localized housing solutions so more families build stronger financial foundations?

MENTAL MODELS AND STIGMA

All too often, negative stigmas are associated with families living with low incomes, especially families and individuals in public housing. Reports, articles and conversations with community members document the experiences of families trying to utilize housing vouchers, only to be met with additional fees, excessive rent, refusal or termination.^{xvi} Not only does this present challenges to accessing and maintaining affordable housing, but the negative stigmas and trauma associated with living with limited financial resources are harmful – emotionally, mentally and physically – especially when compounded by other forms of discrimination or racism.^{xvii} Building longer-term solutions to improve housing across our region will require fixes that shift these negative stigmas.

How might we build new narratives about the importance of affordable housing that seek to disrupt harmful and deeply rooted, negative mental models about families living with lower incomes?

DATA FROM INSIGHTS

Income and Housing were considered the top community challenges.

- Housing should be convenient to other needs, such as child care, grocery stores and employment opportunities.
- Many participants were not satisfied with the way most community challenges are being addressed. 58% of participants shared not being satisfied with efforts to address the community challenges of Income and Housing.
- 10% of those surveyed stated the solutions to address housing availability/affordability are not working.
- The majority of those surveyed agreed there is convenient housing, but communities are more challenged on sufficient financial resources and affordable housing.

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