Data Brief

Sheltered Homelessness in the Upstate of South Carolina from 2017 to 2020

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Introduction

In July 2019, Miracle Hill Ministries and the Upstate Continuum of Care published the report entitled: *Data Brief – Sheltered Homelessness in the Upstate of South Carolina*. This report was the first attempt to comprehensively analyze the count and characteristics of people experiencing sheltered homelessness in the Upstate region in 2017 and 2018. The report relied on two primary data sources: Miracle Hill Ministries' Jericho Database and the Upstate Continuum of Care's Homeless Management Information System. Before the 2019 report, it was not feasible to analyze data from these two databases simultaneously, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the scope and extent of sheltered homelessness in the Upstate.

To overcome this limitation, a data-sharing partnership was developed between the Upstate Continuum of Care (Upstate CoC) – a consortium of homeless service providers and curator of the HMIS database – and Miracle Hill Ministries (MHM), the largest homeless service provider in the Upstate region. Both parties agreed to have their agency's data made available for compilation, deduplication, and analysis. The "merged" effort, utilizing data from both Miracle Hill's Jericho and the Upstate CoC's HMIS database, resulted in the most definitive picture to date of persons experiencing sheltered homelessness in the Upstate.

This report builds on the original *Data Brief* by including data from 2019 and 2020. In an effort to identify and describe trends in the data, emphasis is placed on presenting data from all four years of the study period (2017-2020). This report is also timely as it presents some of the first available data on homelessness collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 should be kept in consideration when interpreting the 2020 data included in this report.

Methodology

Building off the 2019 Data Brief, the variables that were shared between both databases were independently extracted from Miracle Hill's Jericho and the Upstate CoC's HMIS. Projects included in these extracts were Emergency Shelter (ES), Transitional Housing (TH), and Safe Haven (SH; a shelter setting for chronically homeless persons living with mental illness; Safe Haven is not to be confused with a domestic violence shelter). Data was extracted for two specific reporting years: one for calendar year 2019 and the other for calendar year 2020.

Data within each independent extract was then deduplicated so that each row of data represented a unique client and their most recent engagement with a shelter service provider. For clients who had open enrollments in a project at the end of the reporting year, an exit date was given for the last day of the reporting year (e.g. 12/31/2019 for calendar year 2019 and 12/31/2020 for calendar year 2020). This approach provided unduplicated counts within each reporting year. However, some persons can be – and were – counted in both reporting years.

After the four data extracts (Miracle Hill 2019, Miracle Hill 2020, HMIS 2019, and HMIS 2020) were individually deduplicated, the extracts from each database for each corresponding year were merged into new spreadsheets. This resulted in two spreadsheets, each including data from Miracle and HMIS – one for 2019 and the other for 2020. Within each year-specific spreadsheet, a final step of deduplication was completed. The resulting process produced two deduplicated spreadsheets containing an unduplicated count of persons who received shelter services during each calendar year (2019 and 2020). Again, persons could be counted in both reporting years if they received shelter services in both 2019 and 2020.

The 2019 and 2020 data were then deidentified to protect client anonymity. These fields were then translated over to the master deidentified spreadsheet that contained the 2017 and 2018 data. The final spreadsheet included unduplicated deidentified client data for persons who received shelter services in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020. This spreadsheet was then imported into Tableau for analysis.
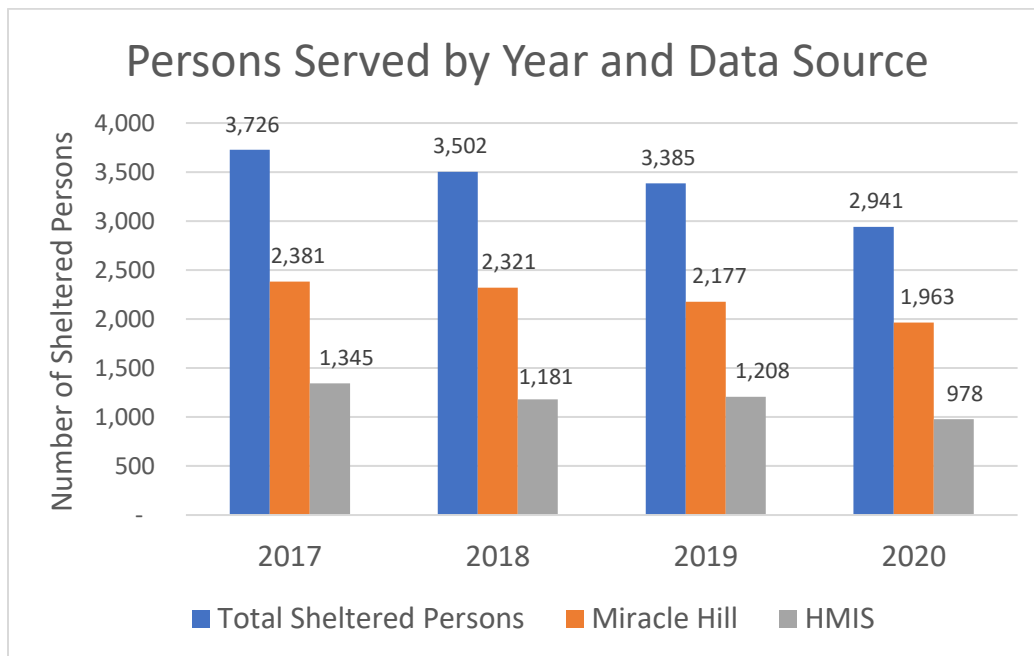
Results

Number of Sheltered Persons from 2017-2020

In 2020, 2,941 persons received sheltered services in the Upstate of South Carolina. This represents a 444 person decrease from 2019 (3,385). However, 2020 was an unprecedented year due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are a number of potential explanations for this decrease:

1. Many HMIS-affiliated shelters reduced their bed availability to allow for more physical distance between residents. Miracle Hill Ministries did not reduce shelter capacity during 2020.
2. A fear of congregate settings and the potential for virus transmission could plausibly have caused people to avoid seeking shelter resources. Results from a SC211 analysis[1] indicated that the number of calls 211 received for emergency shelter dropped in the months after the onset of the pandemic.
3. An additional influx of funding from the federal government helped to stem the flow of persons into sheltered settings. These include multiple stimulus payments directly to lower-income persons currently experiencing homelessness, increased unemployment benefits, and the large sums of money directed towards homelessness prevention programs.
4. On average, residents in 2020 tended to stay longer in shelter than in previous years. This led to lower turnover of available beds in 2020 compared to 2017-2019.

Despite the observed decrease from 2019 to 2020, the total number of persons experiencing sheltered homelessness continues to be between nearly three to four times larger than the Point-in-Time (PIT) sheltered counts recorded in all four years – 2017 (932 one-night sheltered count), 2018 (849), 2019 (895), and 2020 (1,039). While the PIT focuses on a single night in January, the data presented here includes clients served throughout an entire year. Utilizing year-round data from the two largest sources of homeless service information yields a much more realistic representation of the extent of homeless service engagement in the Upstate region.


Persons Served by Year and Data Source

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[1] 2020 South Carolina State of Homelessness Report. Retrieved from:
https://www.schomeless.org/resources/reports/2020-south-carolina-state-of-homelessness-report/

Source of Information

In all four years, two-thirds of the sheltered population received shelter services from a Miracle Hill Ministries shelter or transitional housing project. The remaining third were served at an HMIS-affiliated emergency shelter, transitional housing, or safe haven project (shelter for chronically homeless persons). This large percentage of clients served by a Miracle Hill project reinforces the importance of pursuing this merged analysis and not solely relying on HMIS data to describe the scope of homelessness in our region.

County Where Persons Were Served

The vast majority of persons who received shelter services were served in Greenville County. Across all four years, between 63% to 67% of all persons counted received shelter services in Greenville County. Spartanburg County had the second highest percentage of clients each year (between 21-24%). A smaller, but still sizable portion of clients were served in Cherokee (5-6%) and Oconee (4-5%) counties. "Other Counties" include counties that do not have many projects entering data into HMIS or Miracle Hill's Jericho database. These include counties such as Anderson, Greenwood, and Pickens. In particular, the largest homeless service provider in Anderson, the Salvation Army of Anderson, is missing from this analysis. Future analyses should include more Anderson-area homeless service providers to more fully understand the scope of homelessness in Anderson County.
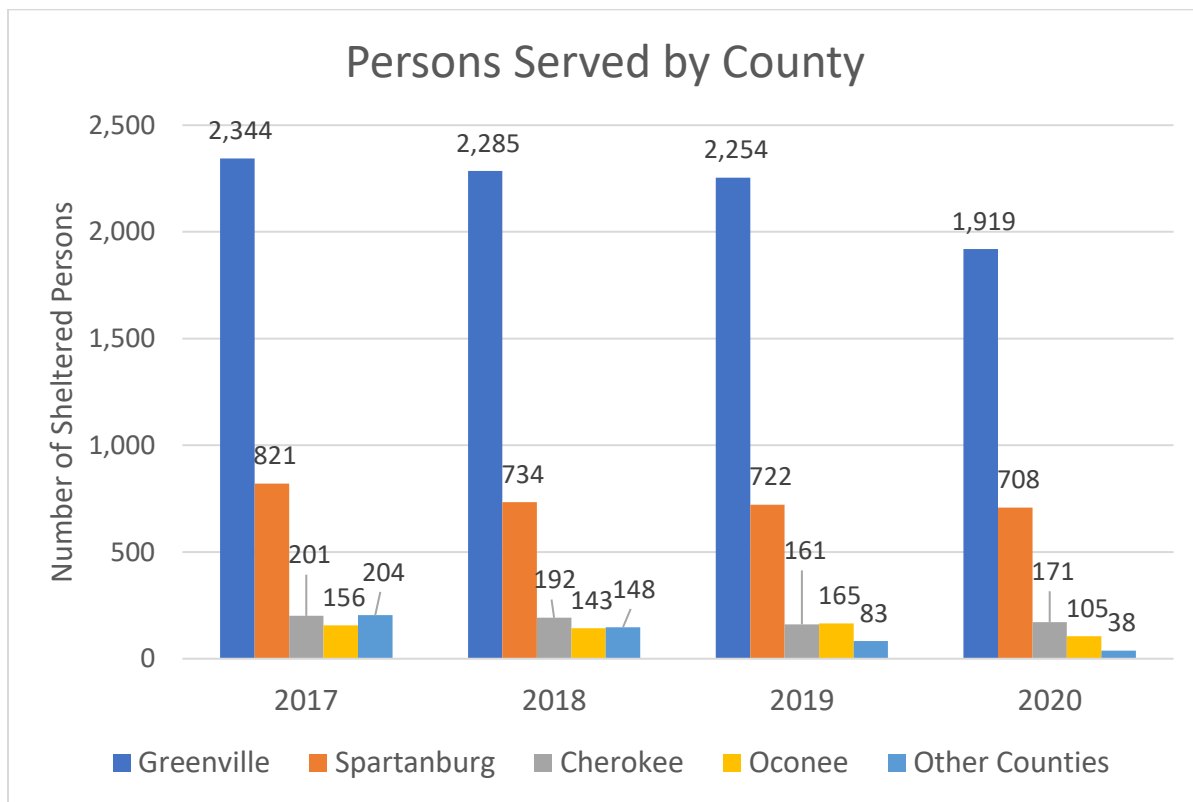
Persons Served by Project Type

Across all four years, the largest percentage of clients received assistance at emergency shelters (81-84% of all persons in each year). The second most frequently utilized project was transitional housing (15-18%). Less than 1% of persons in each year received safe haven assistance. There is only one safe haven project in the Upstate. This project has twelve year-round beds and experience low turn-over.

Persons Served by Project Type
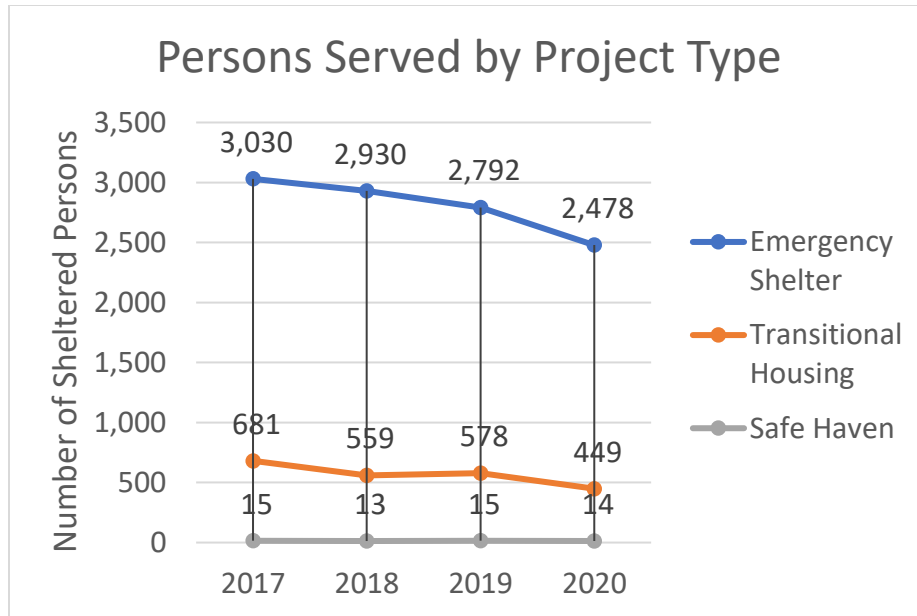
Demographic Profile of Persons Served

Gender

In each of the four years studied, approximately two-thirds of the persons receiving shelter services were Male (61-68%), with nearly all the remaining persons identifying as Female (32-39%). One client in 2017 & 2018 and two clients in 2019 reported being transgender. Five clients had missing data for gender is 2020.

Of note is the percentage decrease of females receiving sheltered services from 2017 to 2020. In 2017, 39% of the population receiving shelter identified as female. This percentage dropped in each of the subsequent years, ultimately resulting in 32% of the sheltered population identifying as female in 2020. Conversely, the percentage of men in sheltered settings has increased every year from 2017, when the percentage was 61%, to 68% in 2020.

Gender
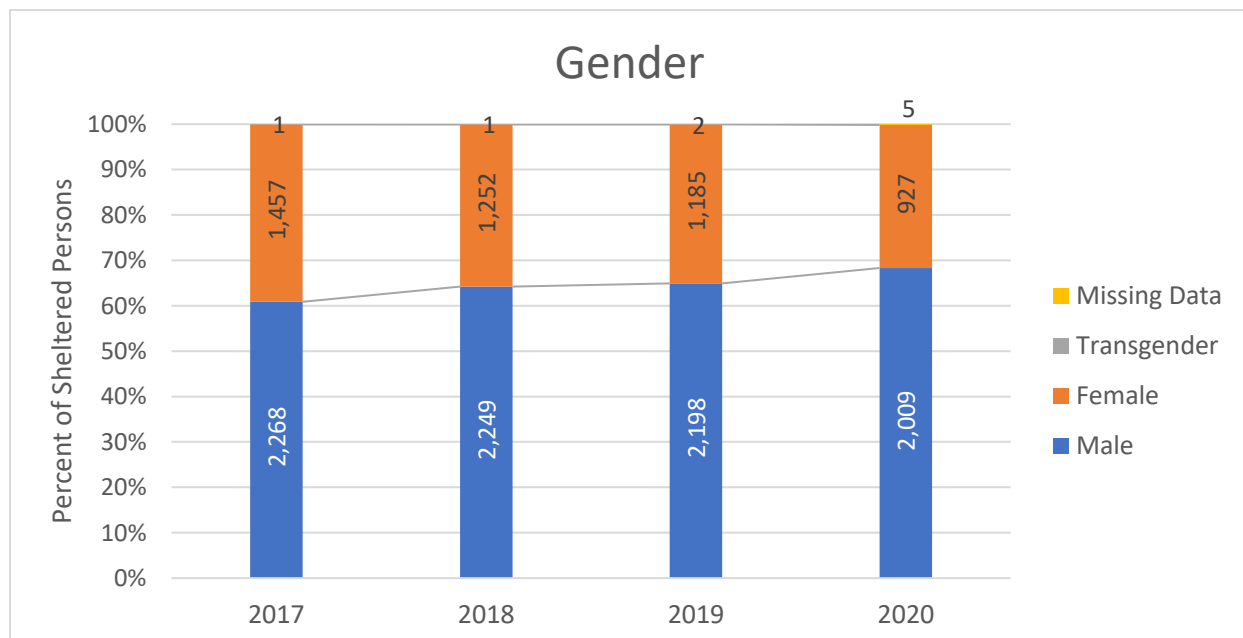
Race

In all four years, the largest percent of persons utilizing sheltered services identified as primarily White (52-56%) with most of the remainder primarily identifying as Black or African American (40-45%). A much smaller percentage of persons identified as Multi-Racial (1-2%). Less than one percent of clients identified as any other primary race categories or refused to answer the question.

If all things were equal, and no inequity existed, we would expect the general population and the homeless population to be similar in racial representation. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Over-representation of Black and African Americans in the homeless population is both a national and local problem. Nationwide, Black and African Americans make up 12% of the total US population, but account for 39% of all persons experiencing homelessness in the United States[2]. Locally, the disproportionate representation is comparable. According to the 2019 American Community Survey Five Year Estimates, 19% of all persons in the Upstate of South Carolina identified as Black or African American, but account for 40% of the local population experiencing homelessness in 2020. This means there are nearly two times the amount of Black/African American persons experiencing homelessness than would be expected compared to the general Upstate population.
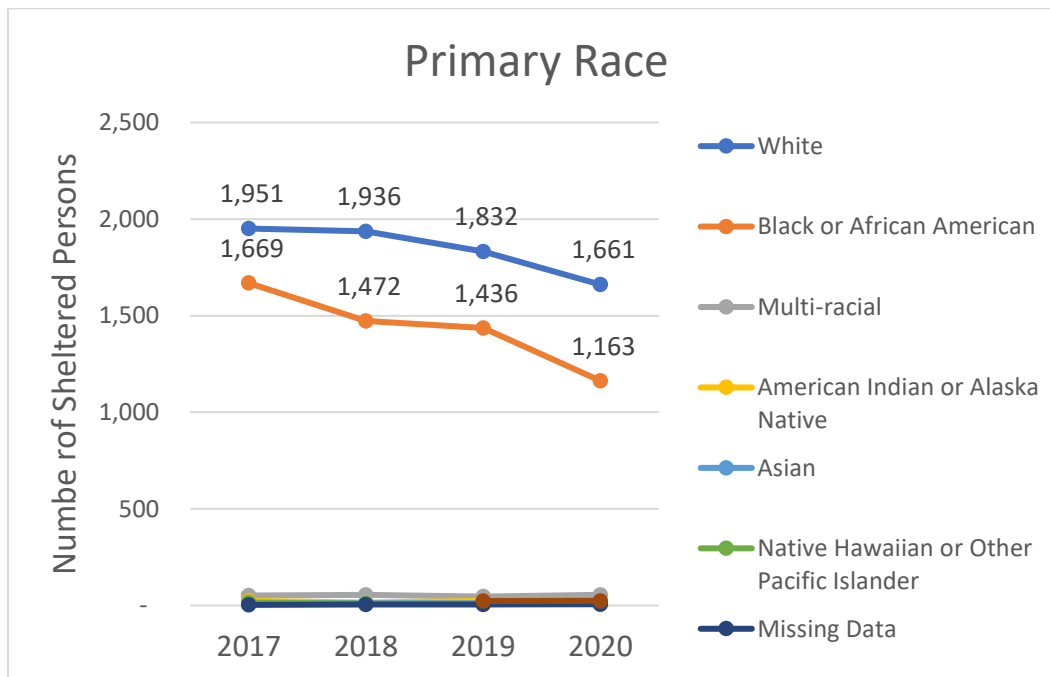

Ethnicity

Across the four-year time period, a small number of persons (between 79-93) and percentage (2-3%) identified as Hispanic/Latino. Nationally, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino persons experiencing homelessness is greater than the percentage of the population overall (23% vs. 16%)[3]. However, in the Upstate, this is not the case; 3% of the population experiencing homelessness identified as Hispanic/Latino, compared to 5% of the overall Upstate population identifying as Hispanic/Latino.

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[2] 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress Part 1 – PIT Estimates of Homelessness in the U.S. Retrieved from: https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/6291/2020-ahar-part-1-pit-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/
[3] Idib.

Hispanic/Latino communities in the Upstate appear to have developed strong support networks (churches, family units, and other community resources) to assist persons experiencing homelessness and housing instability. While homelessness among the Hispanic/Latinos appears to be less prevalent, there remains a need to better engage with the Hispanic/Latino community to break down perceived barriers to shelter participation such as language and fear of law enforcement.
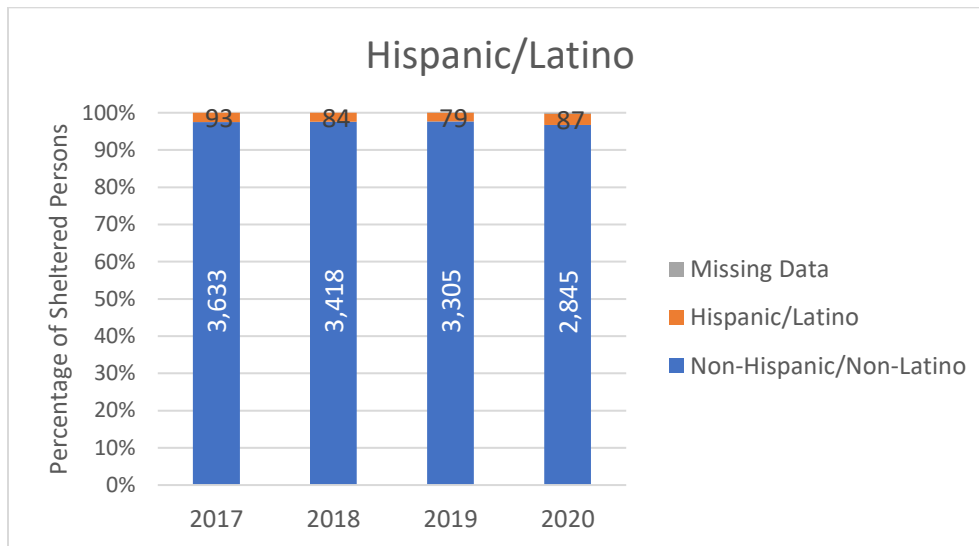
Age

The average age for persons receiving shelter services increased year-over-year from 2017 (36) to 2020 (41). The median age also increased from 38 in 2017 to 42 in 2020.
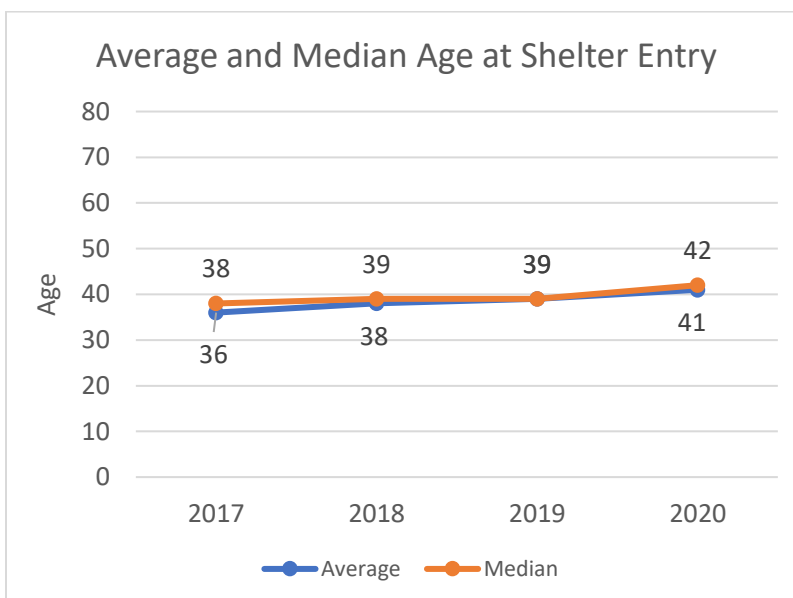
Across all four years, the most common age categories were younger adult to middle-aged persons. Specifically, 25 to 34 (~20%), 35 to 44 (~20%), and 45 to 54 (~21%). A smaller, but still sizable percentage of persons were 55 years and older – between 11-15% were 55 to 61; between 4-8% were 62 and older. Particularly concerning is the doubling of the percentage of sheltered persons 62+ from 2017 (4%) to 2020 (8%).
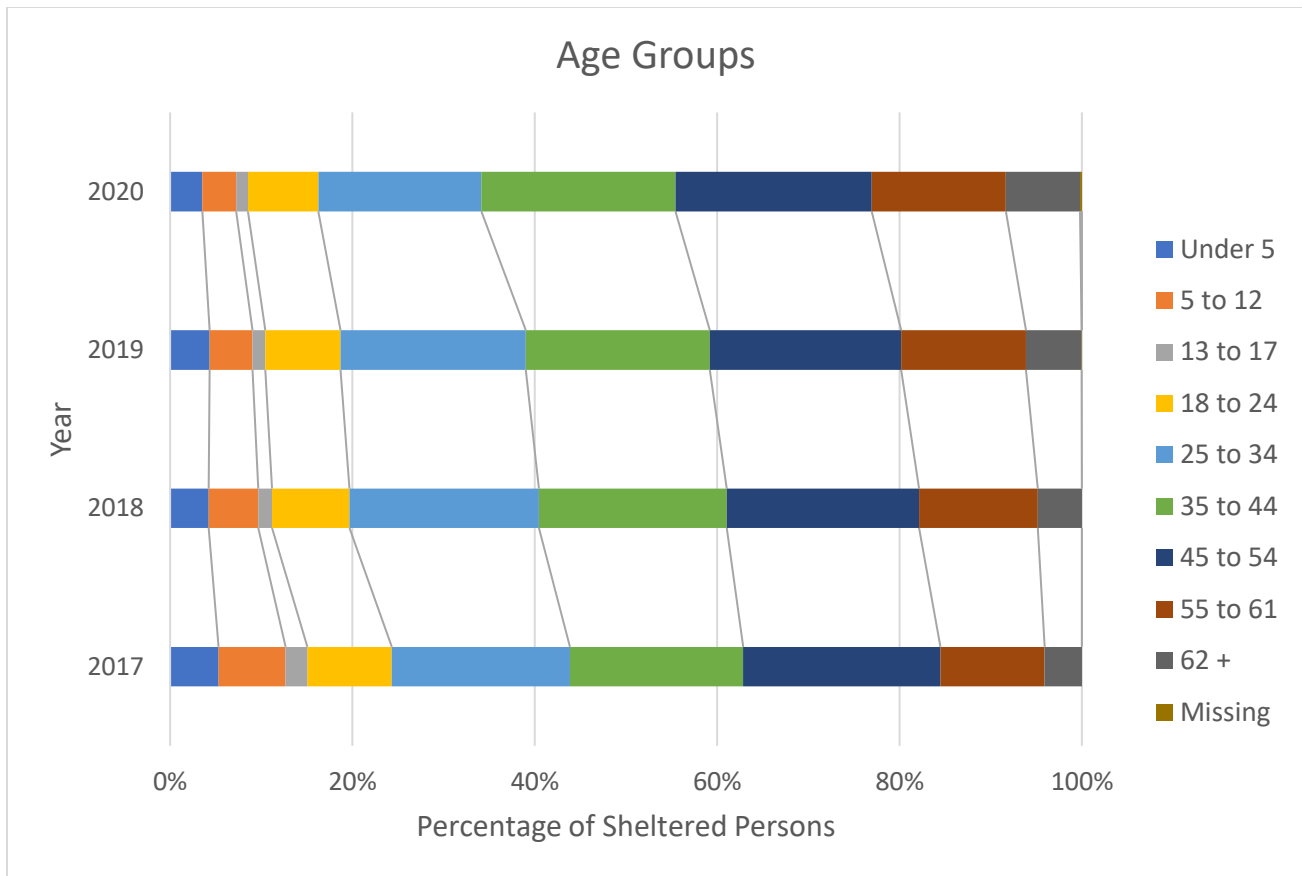
Age Groups

The smallest age groupings were youth 13 to 17 (1-2%) and children under 5 (4-5%). Cumulatively, youth under 18 consistently comprise around 10% of the sheltered population every year. However, according to the broader definition of homelessness used 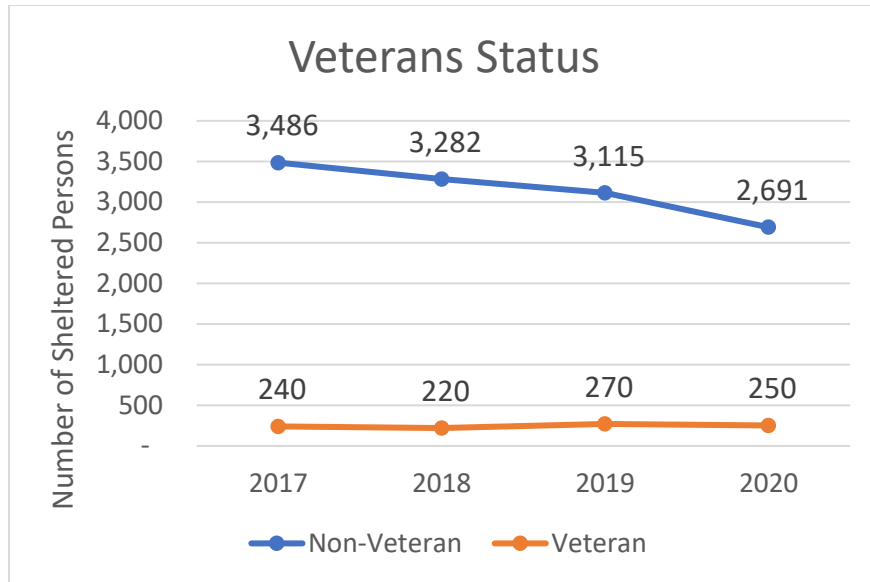by the Department of Education (which includes children residing in hotels/motels or living with family/friends), 6,201 school aged children were experiencing homelessness in the Upstate of South Carolina during the 2018-2019 academic year[4].

Veteran Status

All persons entering shelter are asked if they are a Veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces. The client's answer to this question is self-reported and is not universally required to be verified by shelter staff. With this caveat in mind, in all four years, less than one-in-ten persons experiencing sheltered homelessness self-reported that they are a Veteran. This percentage varied from 6% in 2017 to 9% in 2020. This increase is likely due to the opening of additional transitional housing opportunities for Veterans in 2019 and 2020 coinciding with an overall decrease in number of sheltered persons receiving services.

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[4] 2020 South Carolina State of Homelessness Report. Retrieved from:
https://www.schomeless.org/resources/reports/2020-south-carolina-state-of-homelessness-report/

Veterans Status

Number of Sheltered Persons

Year	Non-Veteran	Veteran
2017	3,486	240
2018	3,282	220
2019	3,115	270
2020	2,691	250

Legend: Non-Veteran, Veteran

Residence Prior to Project Entry

In all four years, the majority of persons who received shelter services were entering from a literal homeless situation – meaning before they entered shelter, they were residing in a place not meant for habitation, another emergency shelter, or interim/transitional housing. The percentage of persons who entered shelter from a literal homeless situation increased year-over-year from 2017 (52%) to 2020 (64%). Conversely, the percentage of persons entering from a non-homeless situation decreased every year from 2017 (38%) to 2020 (26%). These data indicate shelters are increasingly serving those who are, at the time of entry into the shelter, actively experiencing literal homelessness. A smaller, yet consistent percentage of persons (10-12%) were entering shelter from an institutional setting such as a hospital, substance abuse facility, jail, or psychiatric facility.

Residence Prior to Shelter

Percentage of Sheltered Persons

Year	Homeless Situation	Institutional Setting	Non-Homeless Situation
2017	1,833	388	1,338
2018	1,933	415	1,010
2019	1,993	406	913
2020	1,792	284	743

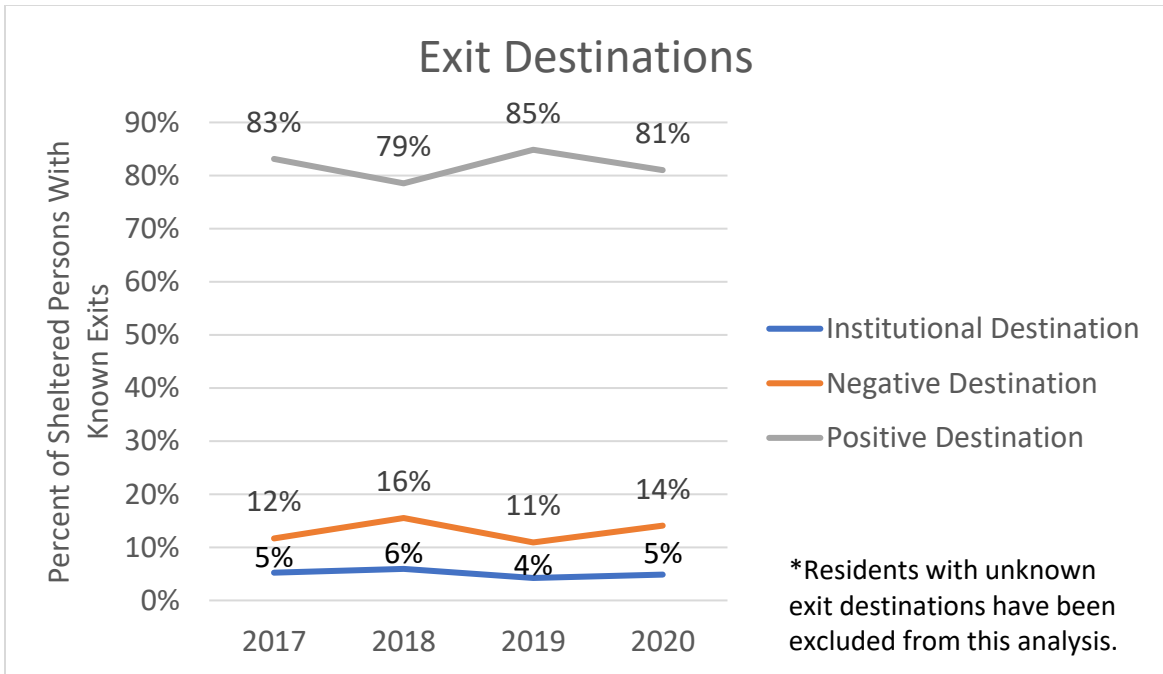Legend: Homeless Situation, Institutional Setting, Non-Homeless Situation
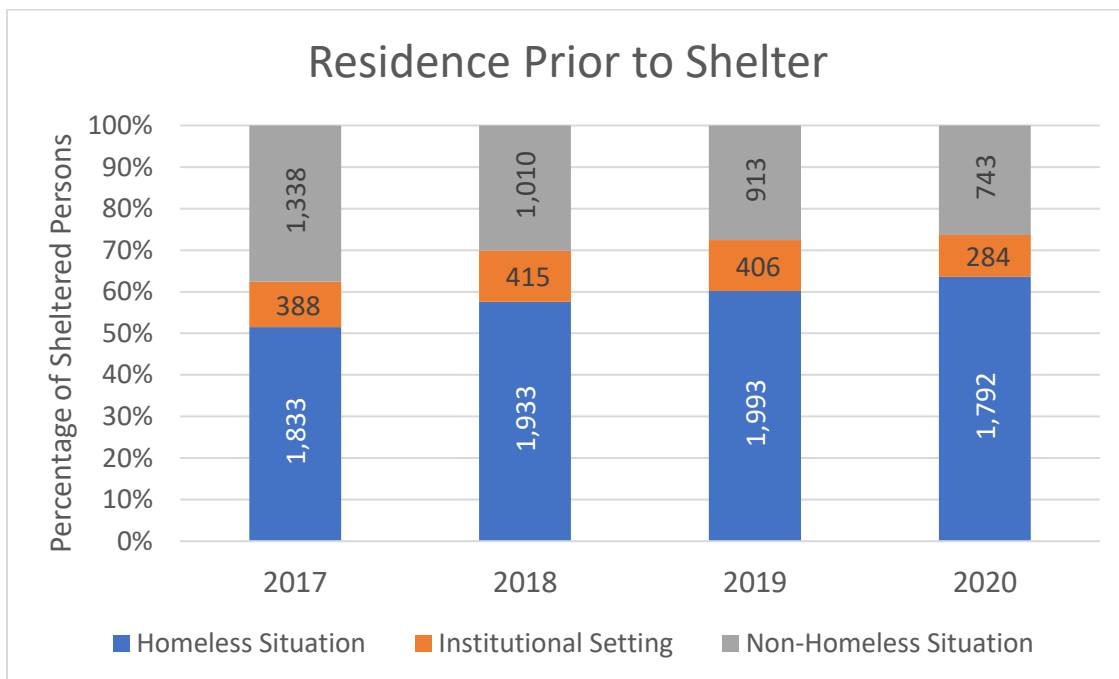
Among those entering shelter from a literal homeless situation, an increasingly larger percentage of persons were entering from a place not meant for habitation (such as living on the streets, in an encampment, in vehicles, in abandoned buildings, or other unsheltered situation). This percentage has increased consecutively across the four years from 53% in 2017 to 67% in 2020. This increase in unsheltered persons entering shelter is mirrored by a corresponding percentage decrease in previously sheltered persons entering sheltered settings from 2017 (41%) to 2020 (31%).
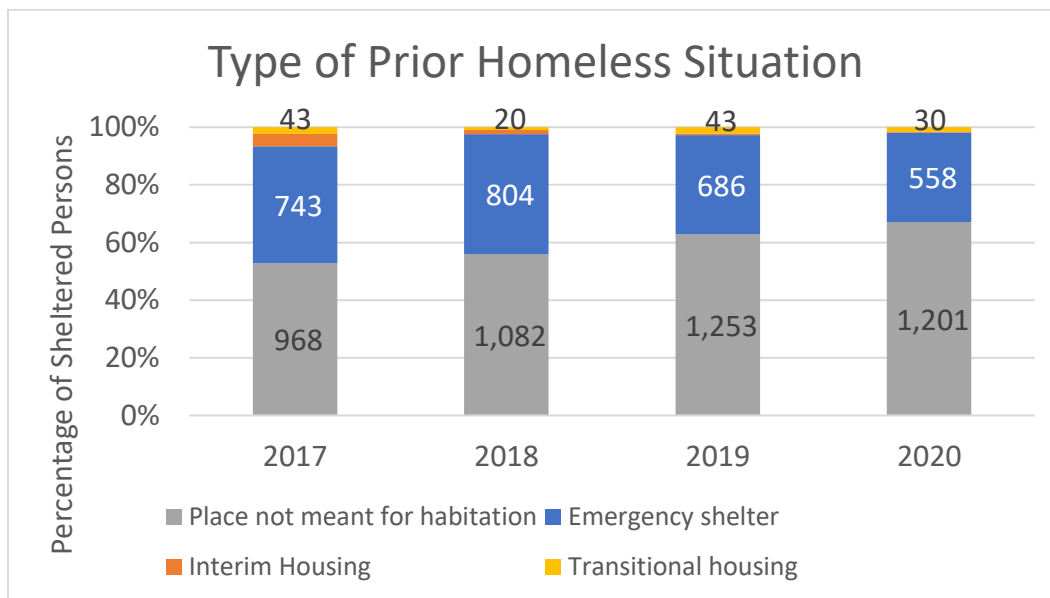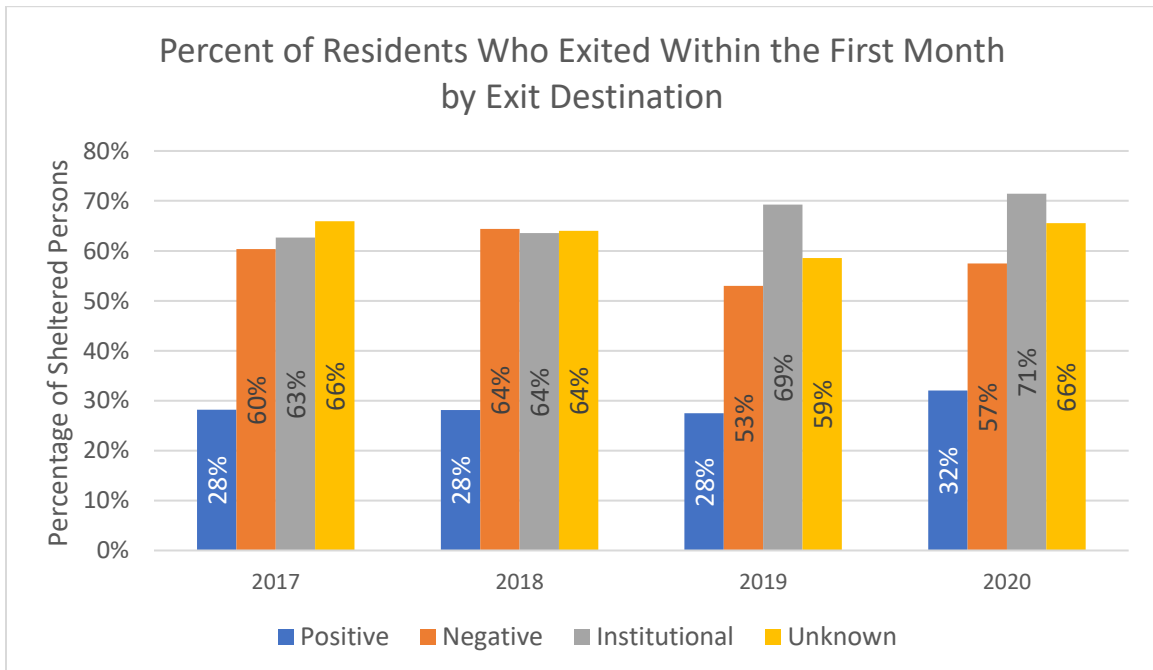

Exit Destinations

Exiting residents to stable housing is a primary goal of shelter providers. Unfortunately, residents often leave shelter without communicating where they are exiting to. This causes shelter staff to not have a definitive exit destination and record the destination as missing or unknown. This explains why consistently across all four study years one-in-two persons who exited shelter, exited to an unknown destination (48% in 2017, 57% in 2018, 54% in 2019, and 58% in 2020).

When those who exited to "Unknown Destinations" are removed from the analysis, the data reveals that a consistently high percentage of remaining shelter residents whose exit destination is known exited to a "Positive Destination" (79-85% depending on the year). For this analysis, a positive destination is defined as a non-homeless situation, not necessarily a long-term permanent housing solution. Only a small percentage of persons exit to literal homeless destinations (11-16%) or institutional settings (4-6%).

Exit Destinations

Percent of Sheltered Persons With Known Exits

- Institutional Destination
- Negative Destination
- Positive Destination

Positive Destination: 83% (2017), 79% (2018), 85% (2019), 81% (2020)

Negative Destination: 12% (2017), 16% (2018), 11% (2019), 14% (2020)

Institutional Destination: 5% (2017), 6% (2018), 4% (2019), 5% (2020)

*Residents with unknown exit destinations have been excluded from this analysis.

Exit Destination by Length of Enrollment

There appears to be a relationship between the length of time a resident stays in shelter and their eventual exit destination (positive, negative, institutional, or unknown). For example, persons who exited to positive destinations were more likely to remain in shelter for longer timeframes than those who exited to negative, institutional, and unknown destinations. In all four years, only 28-32% of persons exiting to positive destinations exited shelter in the first month. Conversely, between 53 to 64% of those who eventually exited to homelessness exited shelter during the first month (63-71% for institutional exiters). Unsurprisingly, a similar percentage of persons who exited to unknown destinations exited within the first month of their shelter stay (59-66%).

Percent of Residents Who Exited Within the First Month by Exit Destination

Percentage of Sheltered Persons

| Year	Positive	Negative	Institutional	Unknown
2017	28%	60%	63%	66%
2018	28%	64%	64%	64%
2019	28%	53%	69%	59%
2020	32%	57%	71%	66%

While shorter-term shelter stays are always the goal, having a more extended stay seems to result in more consistently positive outcomes among shelter residents. Most persons experiencing homelessness have experienced poverty and trauma. Both often require extended amounts of time and concerted engagement with case managers/social workers to overcome. During longer shelter stays, persons have more time to work with shelter staff/social workers to overcome these barriers, develop goals, and chart an exit-plan to resolve their experience of homelessness. While shelters are understandably leery of long-term shelter stays, most persons seeking the stabilization shelters provide choose to remain engaged with shelters for longer than a month. These longer stays have been shown to equate to more positive exits from shelter.

One final example is the differing median length of stay in shelter based on eventual exit destination. The median was utilized to control for outliers, such as very long and very short shelter stays. Persons eventually exiting to positive destinations resided at shelters between 70 to 78 days across all four years. Interestingly, the median length of stay in shelter did not vary much between residents who exited to negative, institutional, and unknown destinations. Reinforcing data presented above, residents who exited to these three types of destinations exited shelter before one month had elapsed.
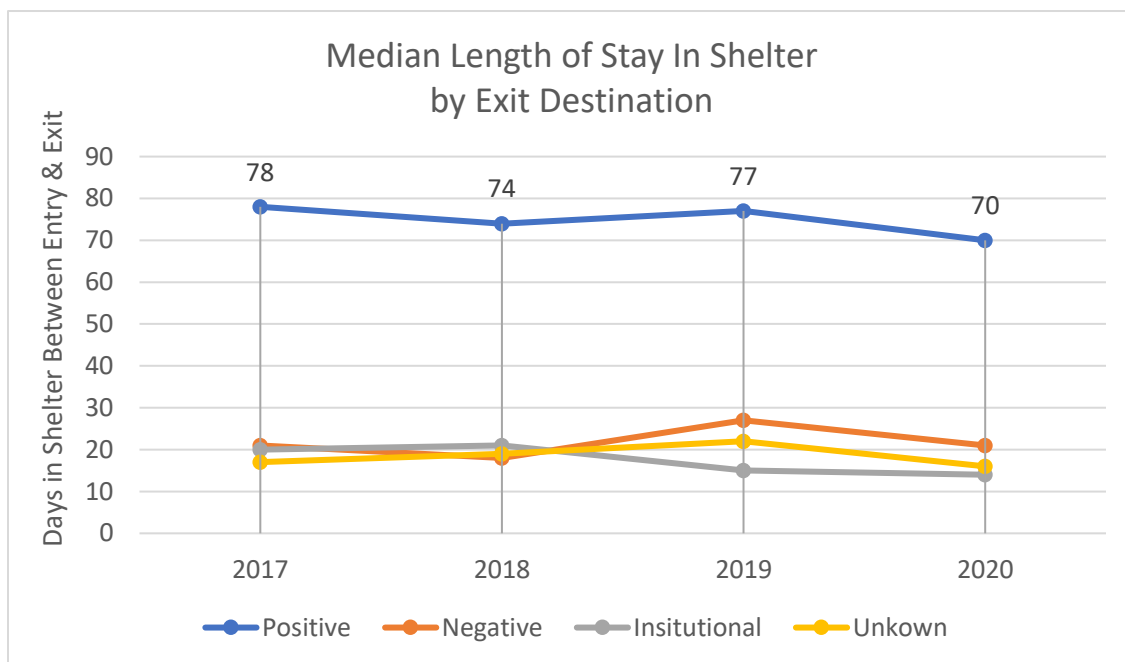
Income

Having access to regular and sufficient income is a primary barrier faced by persons experiencing sheltered homelessness. Across all four reporting years, approximately 70% of sheltered adults (18+) report no income when they entered the program. However, the percentage of adults reporting income is slightly higher in 2019 and 2020 than in 2017 and 2018.
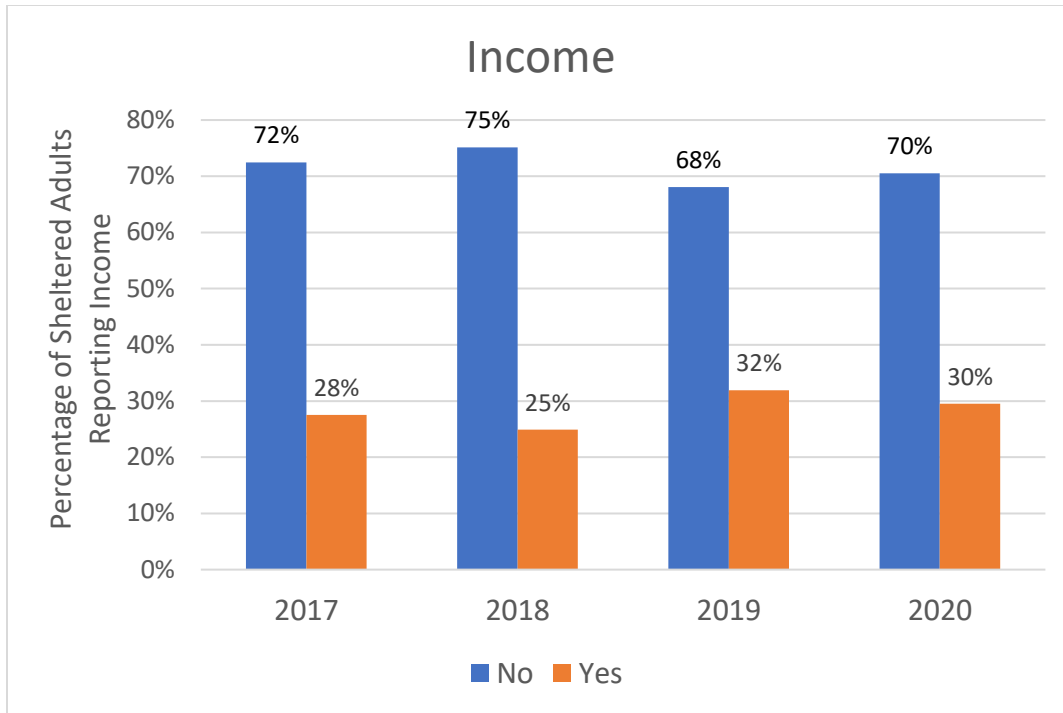
Income

In 2020, among all adults (18+), including those who reported no income, the average monthly income amount was $313.34. When those reporting no income were removed from the calculation, the average amount of income for adults (18+) was $1,052.77. While this amount is greater than what was identified in previous years, it is not enough to afford fair market rent (FMR) while not becoming rent-burdened. For reference, the 2020 FMR for a one-bedroom apartment in Greenville is $740 and $679 in Spartanburg.
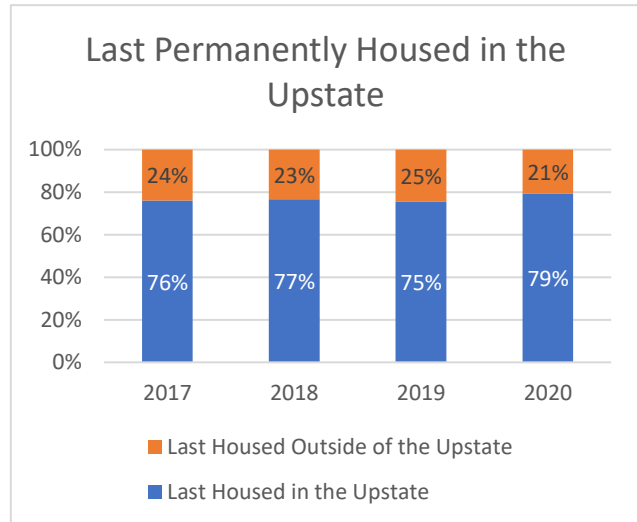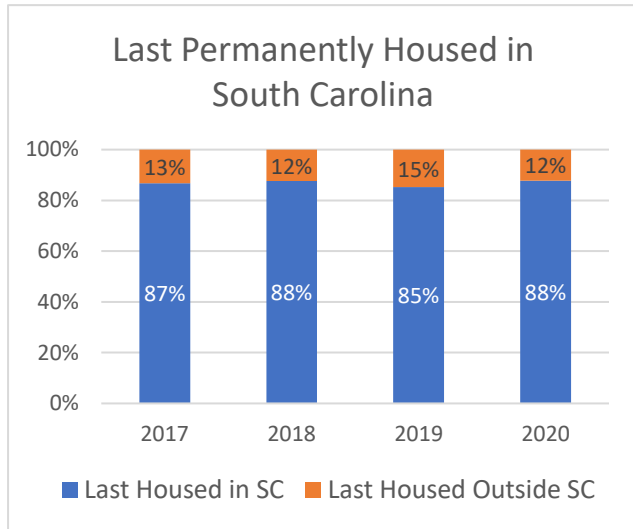
Even for the fortunate 30% reporting income, this means the average homeless adult reporting income would have to dedicate nearly 70% of their income towards a rental property, leaving only 30% to cover all other essential expenses such as food, clothing, transportation, childcare, and medication.

The barrier to exiting homelessness is particularly challenging for single adults living on fixed income (SSI and SSDI). This underscores the importance of developing more very-low income and subsidized housing near core amenities such as public transportation, employment opportunities, social services, and healthcare. Other solutions include exploring additional shared-housing options, and the expansion of job training programs to increase the earning potential of persons experiencing homelessness.

Map of Last Permanent Address

Virtually all persons currently experiencing homelessness were at one time in their lives permanently housed. To explore where persons receiving shelter services were last housed, upon shelter entry residents were asked for the zip code of where they were last permanently housed.

In all four years, between 85-88% of persons who received sheltered services were last permanently housed in South Carolina. Furthermore, a staggering 75-79% of Upstate shelter residents reported last being housed in the Upstate Region.

Last Permanently Housed in South Carolina

Year	Last Housed Outside SC	Last Housed in SC
2017	13%	87%
2018	12%	88%
2019	15%	85%
2020	12%	88%

Last Permanently Housed in the Upstate

| Year	Last Housed Outside of the Upstate	Last Housed in the Upstate
2017	24%	76%
2018	23%	77%
2019	25%	75%
2020	21%	79%

The two maps below were generated using the zip codes of last permanent housing for 2020 sheltered clients to examine where they were last housed before they came to their current experience of homelessness.

The maps demonstrate visually what is already known analytically: the vast majority of persons were last permanently housed in not only South Carolina, but specifically within the Upstate. The darker the region of the maps, the higher the density of persons who were last permanently housed. In the South Carolina map, the highest density of persons was last permanently housed in the Upstate.

These maps provide evidence against a prevailing belief that the people receiving homeless services are not originally from the local area. Instead, the opposite conclusion was reached; the overwhelming majority of persons receiving shelter services were last permanently housed in the local area.
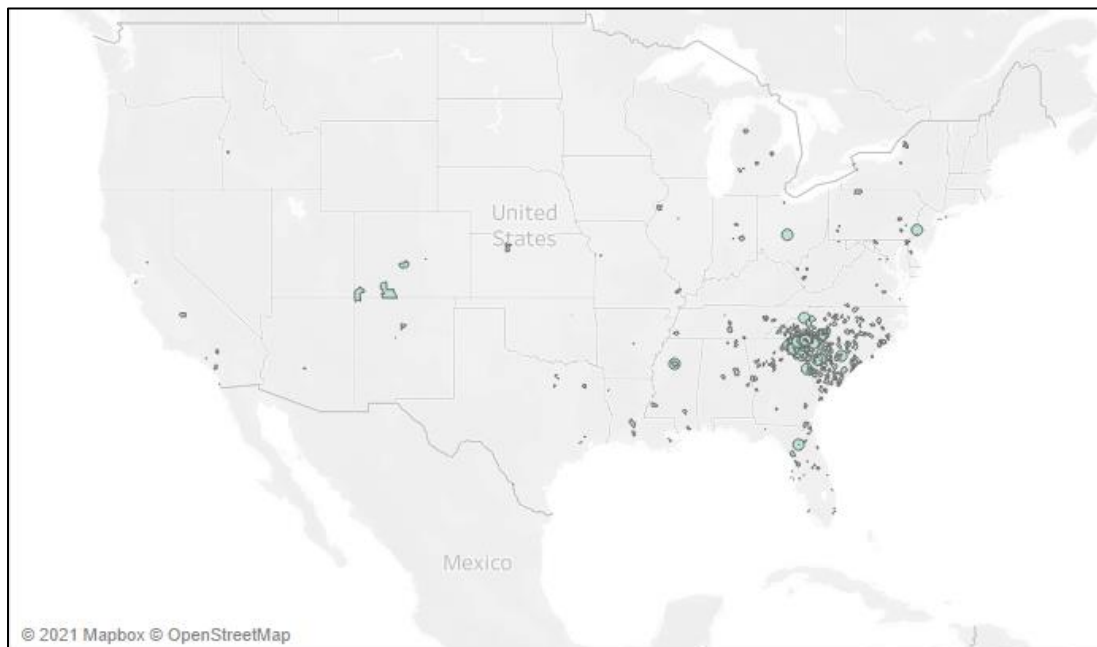
2020 Data for Zip Code of Last Permanent Address – United States
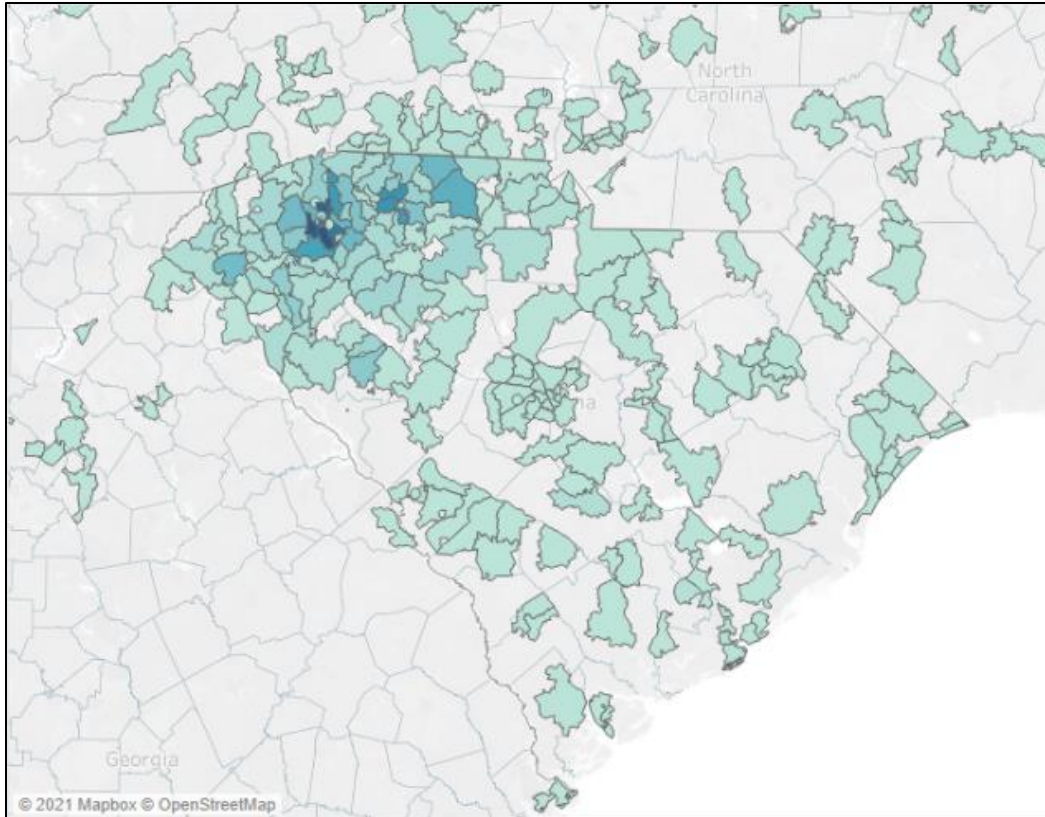
2020 Data for Zip Code of Last Permanent Address – South Carolina

These maps and data indicate the people seeking shelter services were previously the neighbors we said hello to across the apartment hallway, the community members we shared the aisle with at the grocery store, or the people we cheered alongside at a rec league soccer game. Homelessness in the Upstate appears to be home-grown. Local solutions are needed to combat this local problem.

Conclusions

Building upon the original *Data Brief*, this report extended the analysis to include data from 2019 and 2020. While much has changed, many of the original findings remain as true today as they were in 2017 and 2018. Local shelters continue to provide valued stabilization services for thousands of persons every year. While there was a decline in persons experiencing sheltered homeless from 2019 to 2020, the total count of persons experiencing sheltered homelessness continues to be in excess of 2,900 people. This figure, while lower due to a variety of COVID-related reasons, remains a much more holistic picture of sheltered homelessness in the Upstate than can be provided by any other stand-alone data source or existing report.

Across all four years, the majority of people receiving shelter services continue to be male and has begun to trend older. Black and African Americans continue to be over-represented in the homeless population compared to what would be expected in the general population, highlighting societal inequities that appear to be driving a higher percentage of Black and African Americans towards an experience of homelessness compared to Whites.

Case management and client-staff interaction again appear to be related to successful exits from shelter. Data across all four years indicate persons exiting to positive destinations tended to stay longer in shelter compared to those exiting to non-homeless, institutional, or unknown settings. Ideally, shelter stays would be short and result in quick placement into a non-homeless exit destination. However, barriers to shelter exits (such as the lack of very-low-

income housing inventory, high cost of fair market rents, and lack of options for single adults on fixed income) often cause shelter stays to become extended. Regardless of these reasons for longer shelter stays, data indicate that persons who remained engaged with shelter for longer than a month were much more likely to exit to a non-homeless situation than persons who exited shelter before the first month elapsed.

Another important finding from this study is that shelters continue to struggle documenting the exit destination of over half of those persons exiting. Among the persons whose exit destination is known (removing "Unknown Destination" from the analysis), nearly 8 in 10 exited to a positive (non-homeless) situation. This high level of positive exits from shelter indicates yet again shelters are largely successful in helping persons resolve their homelessness even if it takes longer than desired to help an individual achieve stabilization.

This report highlighted the continued financial barrier many sheltered persons face to securing stable, independent housing. Across all three years, seven out of ten of adults (18+) at shelter entry did not report income. Even among adults who reported any income (>$0), the total monthly income was only $1,053. Considering the cost of Fair Market Rent throughout our region, even having the average amount of income would make it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain stable housing and not be heavily rent-burdened, particularly among single adults living on fixed income.

Finally, data presented here combats the misconception that persons experiencing homelessness are from "somewhere else." In every year, nearly 90% of the sheltered population reported last being permanently housed in South Carolina. Moreover, in excess of three quarters reported last being stably housed in the Upstate. Homelessness in a home-grown problem; shelters are providing local solutions for local people in need of assistance.

Shelter services, while widespread and clearly effective, are just one solution to ending homelessness. As referenced in the original *Data Brief*, additional solutions are needed to make homelessness brief and rare. Some of these solutions include: growing the inventory of very low-income subsidized housing, increasing housing-focused case-management/outreach, and preventing the onset of homelessness among at-risk populations.

For more information about the effort to end homelessness in the Upstate of South Carolina, please visit the Upstate Continuum of Care website: www.upstatecoc.org. For more information about the comprehensive shelter and transitional housing programs offered by Miracle Hill Ministries, please visit: www.miraclehill.org.

Contact & Acknowledgements

For more information about this study, please contact Austin Barrett, Ph.D. – Data Analyst/HMIS System Administrator for the Upstate Continuum of Care. You can reach Austin at: abarrett @ uhcsc.org

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