

# **Data Brief**

## **Sheltered Homelessness in the Upstate of South Carolina**

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## **Introduction**

How many people are experiencing homelessness each year in the Upstate of South Carolina? In years past, it has been difficult to use available data to answer this simple, fundamental question. The primary reason for this struggle was the incomplete picture of homelessness provided by the local Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). HMIS is an internet-based, locally-administered database used to record and analyze client, service, and housing data for individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness. As a federally-sponsored database, each agency receiving federal funding for homeless services throughout the Upstate region are required to input their information into this database. Other non-federally funded agencies voluntarily choose to include their client information into the database. However, not all non-federally funded homeless service providers choose to input their client information into HMIS. For years, this missing information made it difficult for HMIS to be a definitive source of information about the number of persons receiving sheltered homeless services 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. This partnership was important because MHM is one of the agencies that does not input their substantial amount of client information into HMIS; instead, MHM utilizes an internal customized database system. Both parties agreed to have their agencies' data made available for compilation, deduplication, and analysis. The “merged” effort, utilizing data from both Miracle Hill and the Upstate CoC's HMIS database, resulted in the most definitive picture to date of persons experiencing sheltered homelessness in the Upstate. Despite this advancement, there are still many data sources missing. In future efforts, similar partnerships can be developed to gain an even deeper understanding of homelessness in the Upstate.

## **Methodology**

Initial meetings between Miracle Hill and Upstate CoC staff identified variables and response options that were shared between the two databases. Next, data was independently extracted from both databases. Projects included in these extracts were Emergency Shelter (ES), Transitional Housing (TH), and Safe Haven (SH; a shelter setting for persons living with mental illness; Safe Haven is not to be confused with a domestic violence shelter). Data was extracted from two specific reporting years. One for calendar year 2017 and the other for calendar year 2018.

Data 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. 12/31/2017 for calendar year 2017 and 12/31/2018 for calendar year 2018). This approach provided unduplicated counts within each reporting year. However, some persons can – and were – counted in both reporting years.

After the four data extracts (Miracle Hill 2017, Miracle Hill 2018, HMIS 2017, and HMIS 2018) were individually deduplicated, the extracts from each database for each corresponding year were merged into new spreadsheets. This resulted in two spreadsheets – one for 2017 and the other for 2018. Within each year-specific spreadsheet, a final step of deduplication was completed. The resulting process produced two deduplicated spreadsheets enumerating an unduplicated count of persons who received shelter services during each calendar year (2017 and 2018). Again, persons could be counted in both reporting years if they received shelter services in both 2017 and 2018.

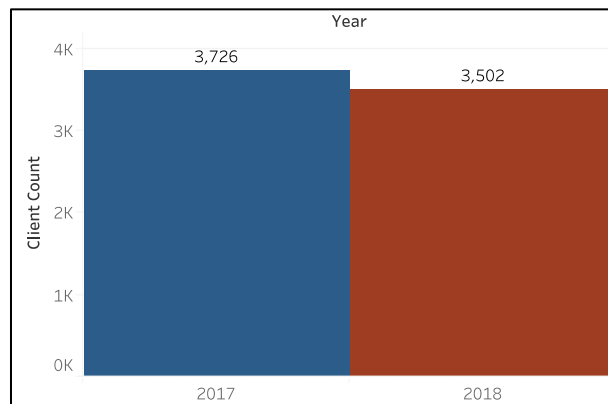
The 2017 and 2018 data was then deidentified to protect client anonymity. These deidentified spreadsheets were then imported into Tableau Desktop for analysis and visualization. Key questions of interest were

answered by visualizations produced in Tableau. These visualizations form the foundation of the Results to follow.

## Results

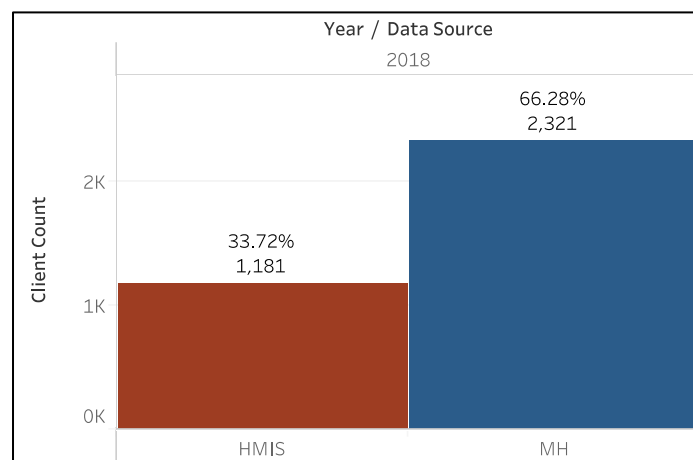
### *Number of Sheltered Persons in 2017 & 2018.*

In 2017, 3,726 persons received sheltered services. In 2018, 3,502 received shelter services (a decrease of 224 or 6%, from 2017 to 2018). However, the figures for both years are four times larger than the Point-in-Time (PIT) sheltered counts recorded in 2017 (932) and 2018 (849). While the PIT count 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 services in our Upstate Region.



### *Source of Information\**

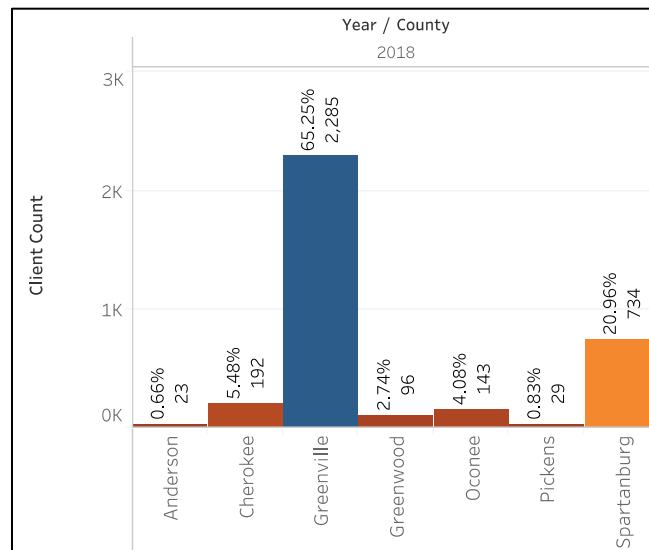
In 2018, two-thirds (2,321) of the total population receiving shelter services were served at a Miracle Hill (MH) shelter or transitional housing project. The remaining third (1,181) were served by an HMIS-affiliated emergency shelter, transitional housing, or safe haven project. This large percentage of clients served by a Miracle Hill project reinforces the importance of pursuing this merged analysis and not simply relying on HMIS data to describe the scope of homelessness in our region.



\*Note: From this point forward, only 2018 data will be analyzed and discussed. This was done to limit the scope of this brief, but also to focus on the most recently available data.

### *County Where Persons Were Served*

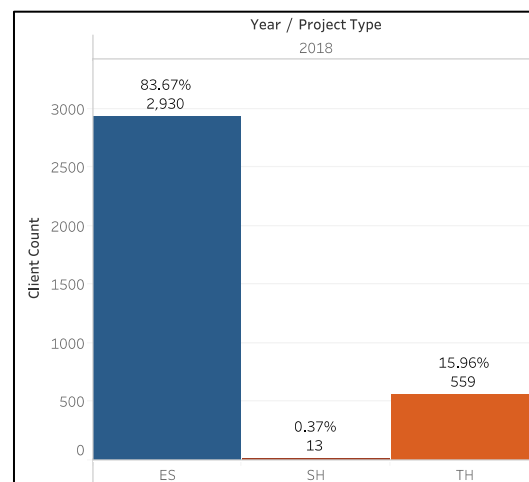
The vast majority of persons received shelter services in Greenville County. In total, 2,285 or 65%, received services in Greenville. Spartanburg County had the second highest percentage of clients (21%, or 734). A much smaller percentage of clients were counted in Cherokee (5%), Oconee (4%), and Greenwood (3%) counties.



Anderson County, the third most populace county in the Upstate Region, only had 23 persons counted in this analysis. This was due to the lack of available data on homelessness in Anderson. None of the Miracle Hill projects included in this analysis were located in Anderson County. Also, the largest homeless service provider in Anderson, the Salvation Army of Anderson, has not historically inputted information into HMIS.

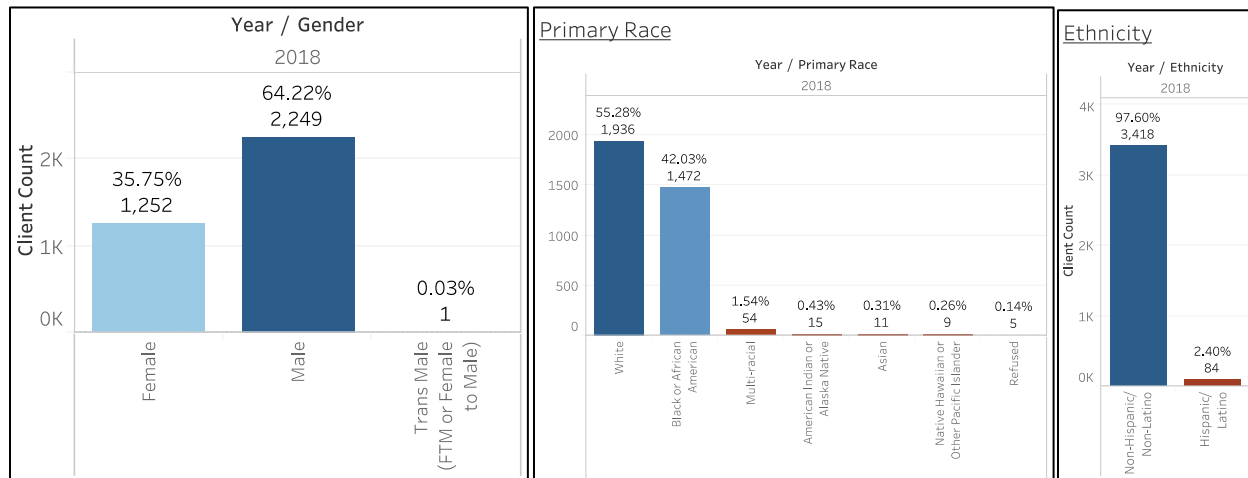
### *Persons Served by Project Type*

Unsurprisingly, the largest percentage of clients received emergency shelter services (84%), followed by transitional housing assistance (16%). Less than 1% of persons received safe haven assistance. Note: there is only one safe haven project in the Upstate region. This project has twelve year-round beds which do not turn-over often.



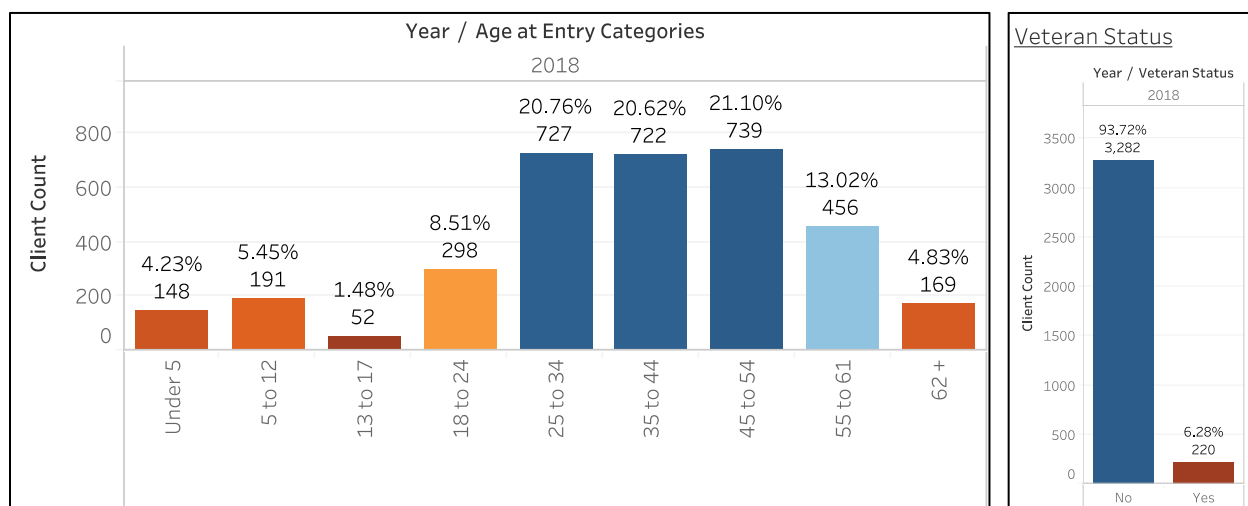
### Demographic Profile of Persons Served

Nearly two-thirds of the persons receiving shelter services were Male, with nearly all the remaining persons identifying as Female. One client reported being transgender (Female to Male). Racially, the largest percent of persons identified as primarily white (55%) with most of the remainder identifying as Black or African American (42%). A much smaller percentage of persons identified as Multi-Racial (2%). Less than one percent of clients identified as any other primary race categories or refused to answer the question. A very small percentage of persons identified as Hispanic/Latino (2%).



The average age for persons receiving shelter services was 38. Across all persons, the most common age categories were 25 to 34 (21%), 35 to 44 (21%), and 45 to 54 (21%). However, a decidedly high percentage of persons were 55 years and older (13% 55 to 61; 5% 62 and older). The smallest age groupings were youth 13 to 17 (1%) and children under 5 (4%).

Nearly 94% of persons (3,282) receiving shelter services did not identify as a Veteran. Conversely, only 6% (220) self-reported their status as a Veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces. Note: self-reported Veterans status is not verified by shelter staff.



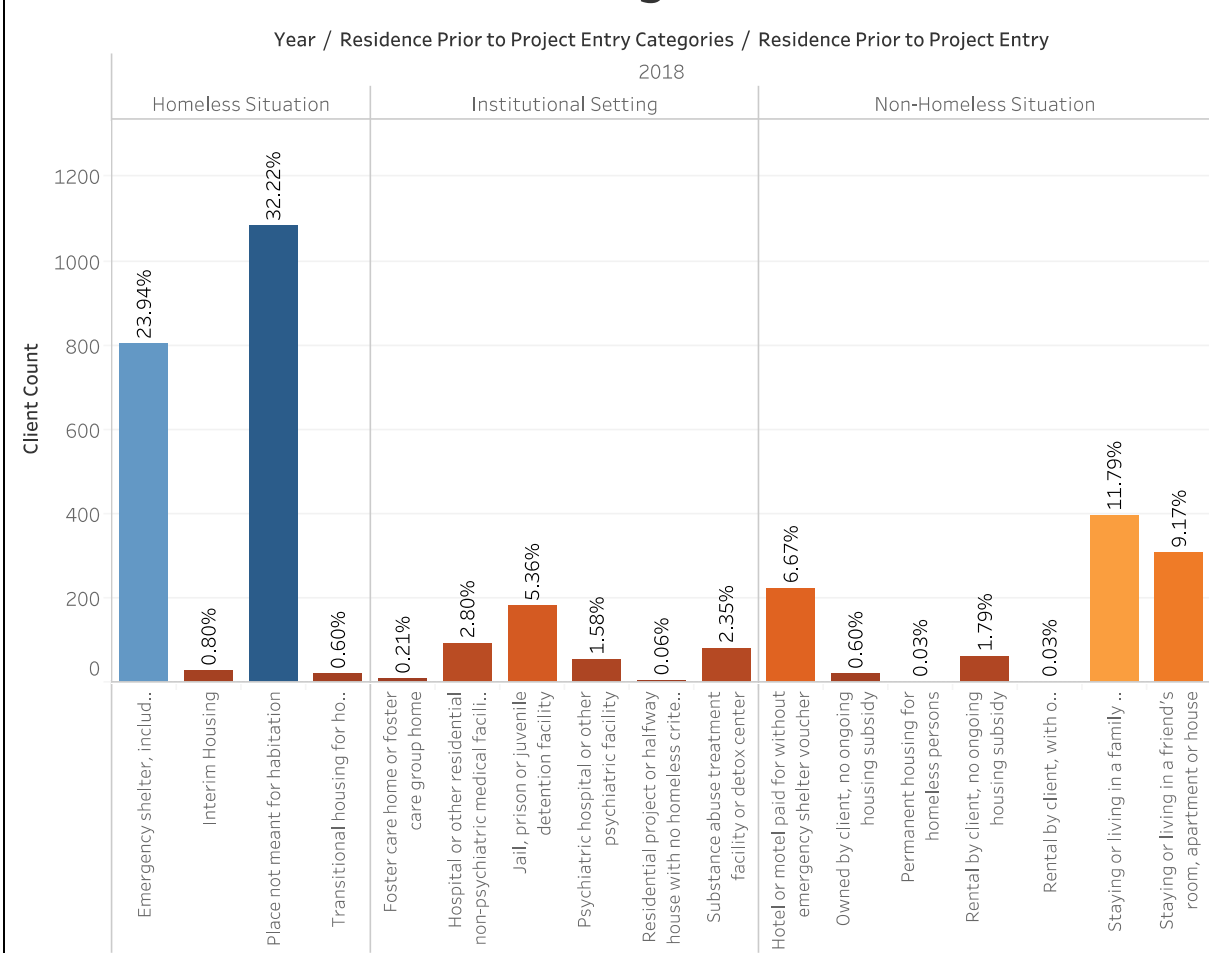
## Residence Prior to Project Entry

By-in-large, the highest proportion of persons who received shelter services were entering from a homeless situation – meaning that before receiving sheltered services, they were residing in a place not meant for habitation, another emergency shelter, or interim/transitional housing. In total, 58% entered from a homeless situation with the highest amount of persons entering from a place not meant for habitation (32% of all persons), or Emergency Shelter (24%).

A smaller, but still important, proportion of persons (30%) were entering shelter from a non-homeless situation. The largest percentage of these persons were residing either with Family (12%) or with Friends (9%). Another 7% of persons were residing in a hotel or motel that they were paying for.

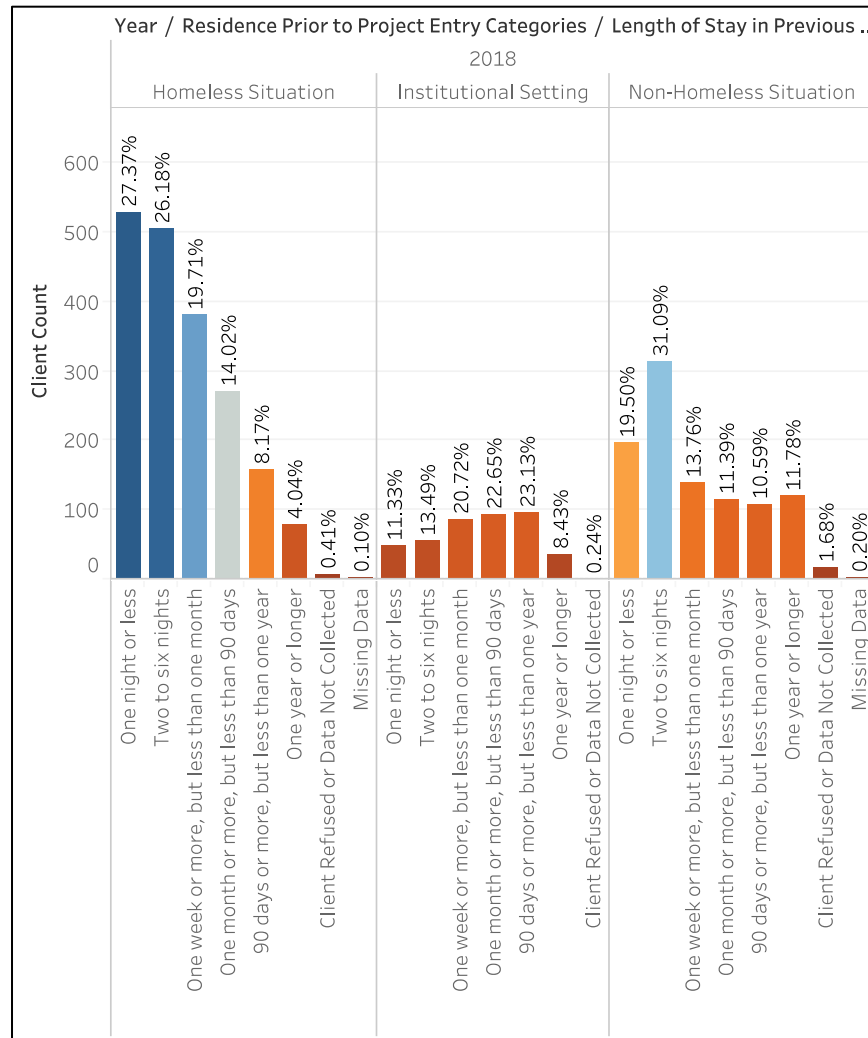
The remaining 12% of persons entered shelter from an institutional setting. The most common institutional settings a person was previously residing at were jail/prison (5%), hospital (3%), and substance abuse facility (2%).

## Where are Clients Entering Shelter From?



### Residence before Shelter by Length of Stay

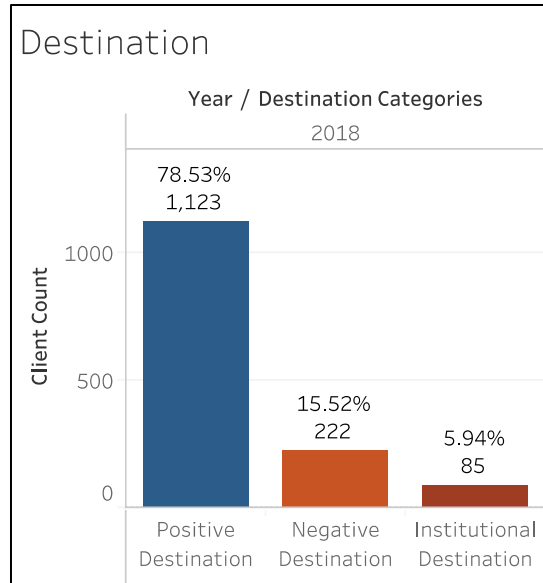
Persons entering shelter from homelessness tended to reside in that situation for shorter periods of time than persons entering from institutional and non-homeless settings. Stated a different way, prior to entering shelter, persons tended to reside in non-homeless and institutional settings for longer periods of time than persons residing in homeless situations.



### Exit Destinations

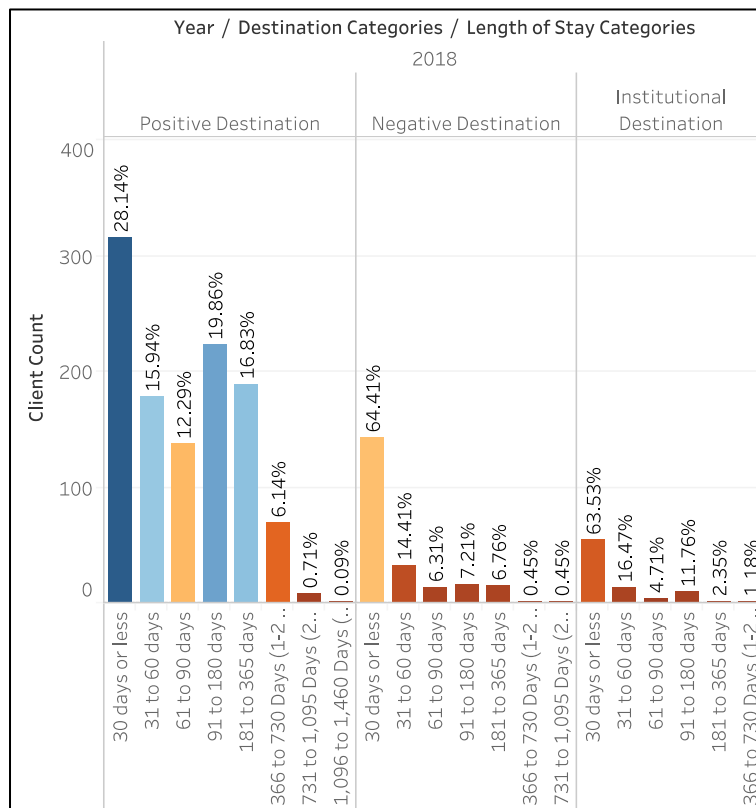
It is common for persons to leave shelter without communicating to shelter staff/social workers where they are relocating to. Even with this knowledge, a surprisingly high percentage (57%) exited to an unknown place.

When those who exited to “Unknown Destinations” are removed from the analysis, the data reveals that a high percentage of remaining persons (79%) exited to a “Positive Destination.” A positive destination is defined as a non-homeless situation, not necessarily a long-term permanently housing solution. Regardless, the data presented here indicates that when a person’s exit destination is known, persons tend to exit to non-homeless situations. Only a small percentage of persons exit to homeless destinations (15%) or institutional settings (6%).



### *Exit Destination by Length of Enrollment*

Persons who exited to positive destinations were more likely to remain in shelter for longer timeframes than those who exited to negative and institutional destinations. Those exiting to homelessness and to institutional settings most commonly exited shelter during the first month (64% for both destination types). Comparatively, only 28% of persons exiting to positive destinations exited shelter in the first month. During longer shelter-stays, persons have more time to work with shelter staff/social workers to develop goals and an exit-plan to resolve their homelessness.





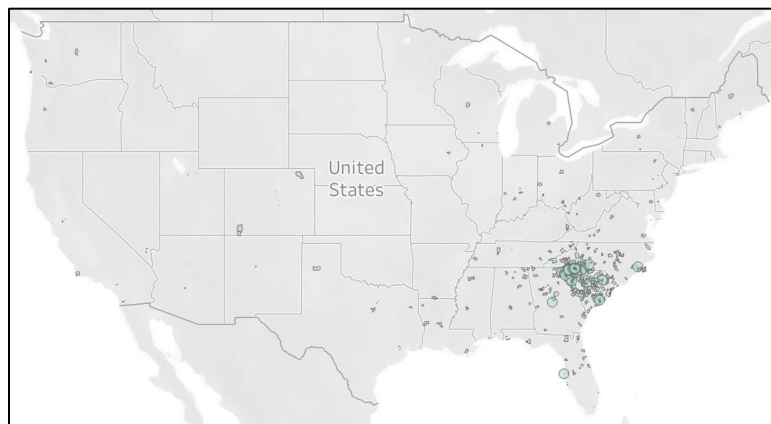
### *Income*

Three-quarters of adults 18+ reported they did not have income at the time they entered shelter. Among all adults (18+), the average monthly income was \$211.14. When those reporting no income were removed from the calculation, the average amount of income for adults (18+) was \$694.37. This amount, while better than no income at all, is not nearly enough income to afford fair market rent. This underscores the importance of developing more very-low income and subsidized housing.

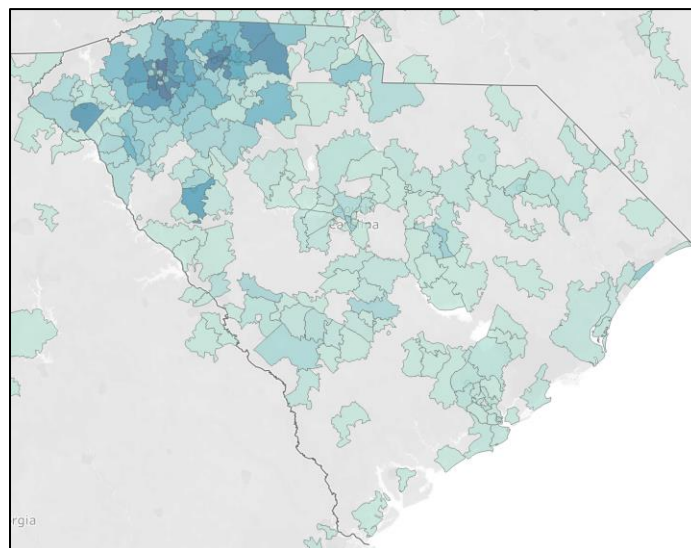
### *Map of Last Permanent Address*

Two maps were generated using the zip code of where persons receiving services reported they were last permanently housed. The maps demonstrated how the vast majority of persons were last permanently housed in not only South Carolina, but specifically within the Upstate region. 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 were last permanently housed in the Upstate region.

These maps provide evidence against a widespread belief that the people receiving homeless services are not 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.



Zip Code of Last Permanent Address – United States



Zip Code of Last Permanent Address – South Carolina

## Conclusions

This study addressed long-standing questions about the extent of sheltered homelessness in the Upstate of South Carolina. To address these questions, this study combined data from the region's two primary homeless service databases – the Upstate Continuum of Care's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and Miracle Hill Ministries' database. Through partnership and a rigorous methodology, this study produced insights into the Upstate's sheltered homelessness population that were previously unavailable.

Most importantly, the study produced counts of the number of persons experiencing sheltered homelessness across two separate years. 3,726 and 3,502 unique persons were found to be experiencing homelessness in the Upstate region during 2017 and 2018, respectively. This figure is much larger than the number of persons experiencing homelessness commonly reported via the annual single-night Point-in-Time Count.

Over half of the persons entering shelter entered from a previous homeless situation – indicating shelter programs are predominantly serving those who are actively experiencing homelessness and in need of crisis services and stabilization. Case management and client-staff interaction are likely related to successful exits from shelter. Data indicates persons exiting to positive destinations tended to stay longer in shelter compared to those exiting to non-homeless or institutional settings. While shelter stays would ideally be as brief as possible, data indicates that persons who stayed for longer than a month were less likely to exit to a negative or institutional setting.

Another important finding from this study is that shelters do not know the exit destination of over half of those persons exiting. Among the persons whose exit destination is known (sans "Unknown Destination"), 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 when they remain engaged with case management.

Financial stability is a fundamental stepping-stone for long-term housing stability. Unfortunately, this study revealed sheltered persons are at a severe disadvantage in securing financial and housing security. Three-quarters of adults (18+) at shelter entry did not report income. Further, the average income among all adults was slightly over \$200 per month. Even among adults who reported any income (>\$0), their total monthly income was only \$694 – not enough to sustain housing without additional financial support.

Finally, data presented here combats the misconception that persons experiencing homelessness are from "somewhere else." Instead, those receiving services are largely "locals" – they are neighbors, co-workers, friends, and fellow community members. Shelters are providing local solutions for local people in need of crisis housing support to make their experiencing of homelessness brief, rare, and non-recurring.

Shelter services, while widespread and clearly effective, are just one solution to ending homelessness. Other 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, please visit the Upstate Continuum of Care website: [www.upstatecoc.org](http://www.upstatecoc.org) For more information about the comprehensive shelter and transitional housing programs offered by Miracle Hill Ministries, please visit: [www.miraclehill.org](http://www.miraclehill.org)

## Contact

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