



Reflection on Service Learning and Housing Availability During the Pandemic

Learning Community 10
In partnership with Our Daily Bread

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Introduction

As medical students, we are privileged to understand and tackle various social determinants of health affecting our communities. This past year, our learning community had the opportunity to work with Our Daily Bread (ODB), a non-profit organization located in Over-the-Rhine (OTR). As the largest soup kitchen in the area, ODB's mission is "to provide stability and hope to guests in need by offering meals, hospitality and services in a safe, respectful environment." There are no requisites or boundaries to entry for patrons to be served, which was made evident by the 400+ warm meals provided to guests on a typical day of operation.

Our Daily Bread's vision of providing access to food, essential social services, and a safe place of belonging remained strong despite challenges the COVID-19 pandemic brought. Our learning community sought to understand the needs of the OTR community, illuminate ways to adapt to those needs, and propose future opportunities for service. As we became familiar with ODB and its patrons, food and housing accessibility rose to the top as key social determinants of health that impact this community. Another focus of our learning community was to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the dynamics of the community and in conjunction with barriers of health.



The Impact of Pandemic on ODB's Patrons

Due to the pandemic, Our Daily Bread had closed its indoor dining services for over a year; However, their dedication to their mission led them to pivot operation logistics and they opened a delivery window to provide guests with warm meals to-go. Our learning community had the opportunity to work with ODB during the time they were only serving take-out meals and after they re-opened their doors. While ODB continued in their mission of addressing food insecurity and providing other vital resources to community members, our learning community aimed to gap health disparities in vaccine access by providing a free vaccine clinic to patrons. After discussion with Georgine Getty, Executive Director at ODB, and evaluating our survey data, we identified a need in the community for better protection against the COVID-19 virus and its variants. We hoped that our community intervention would improve vaccination status, protect ODB staff, patrons and the community, and allow ODB to bolster indoor food services and host social events again.

Our Daily Bread is a keystone institution for the residents of the Over the Rhine (OTR) community. This

is especially true for long-term OTR residents of low socio-economic status, many of whom struggle with food insecurity and housing access. Although ODB does not have trouble with having food in stock, all of which is donated to them, they are still confronted with hurdles when it comes to providing their patrons with additional resources. Since ODB is intimately involved with the community, they have great insight into their needs. A majority of ODB patrons experience homelessness, which has been exacerbated for long-term OTR residents due to the increasingly expensive rent rates in the area and lack of affordable housing options.

Age Groups	Number (77)	Percentage
18-29	9	11.7%
30-39	10	13.0%
40-49	19	24.7%
50-59	21	27.3%
60-69	16	20.8%
70-79	2	2.6%
Gender Identity		
Man	66	85.7%
Woman	11	14.3%
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African American	45	58.4%
Hispanic/Latino	2	2.6%
Mixed Race/Ethnicity	1	1.3%
Native American or Alaskan Native	1	1.3%
White/Caucasian	25	32.5%
Prefer Not to Respond	3	3.9%

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of ODB Patrons, Jan 2022.

The Impact of Lack of Housing for ODB’s Patrons and the Community

Housing in Over the Rhine and surrounding neighborhoods has become a pressing issue as the area has continued to develop in the past twenty years. Reported between 2002-2015, OTR lost 73% of affordable housing units which was a decrease from 3,235 units to 869 units. The lack of affordable housing indicates insufficient resources for low income families, which can lead to crowded living conditions and a lack of income to utilize on nutrition and health. Traditionally, this area has been composed of low-income families that require more affordable housing. Due to the decrease in affordable housing units and the higher cost of living in the area, residents have been displaced, or may experience homelessness or issues securing other essential resources like nutrition and healthcare.

In Cincinnati, affordable housing access is a ubiquitous issue and not limited to those unhoused. It is estimated that about 50,000 households in Cincinnati are using over half their monthly income on rent or a mortgage, with the majority of these people being low income households. There are a few reasons for this, the first is exclusionary zoning. For example, 70% of the land in the city's district is zoned for single family houses only, preventing multi-unit developments from taking hold. Inclusionary zoning is when the city grants incentives for developers to include affordable housing units for low-income families. These efforts have been continually rejected when proposed in city ordinances. This issue has been continually exacerbated in the past several years as well. According to 2021 Ohio county data, 17% of those in Hamilton County, OH, suffer from severe housing problems, which is defined as one of the following: overcrowding, high housing costs, lack of kitchen facilities, or lack of plumbing facilities. These issues are pervasive and have broad-reaching effects on many aspects of daily life and have only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

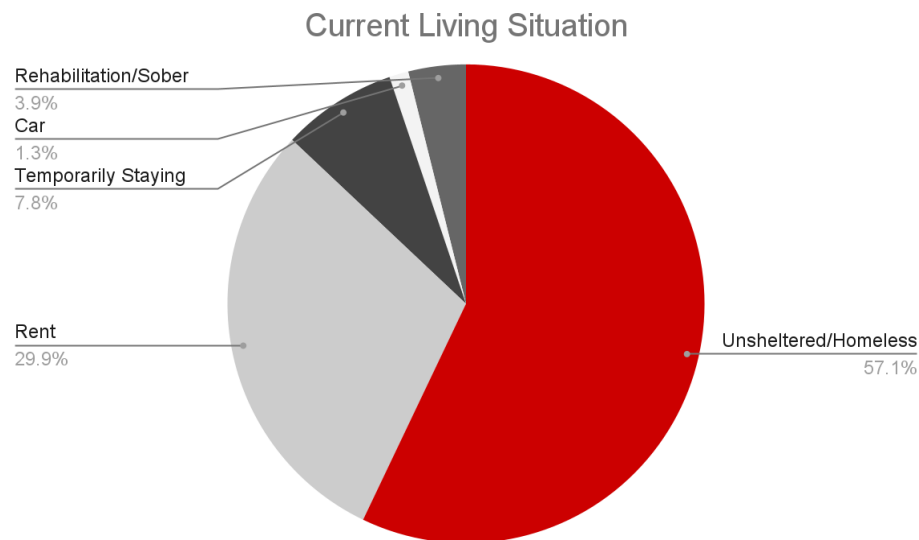


Figure 1. Current Living Situation of ODB Patrons, Jan 2022. Rehabilitation/Sober: Rehabilitation/Sober Living. Temporarily Staying: temporarily staying with friends or family.

Concurrent with the pandemic, housing inaccessibility has translated to an increase in the number of community members that frequent ODB due to new food insecurity in their lives as well as an increase in the number of patrons experiencing homelessness. Per a survey administered by University of Cincinnati College of Medicine students, 57% of ODB guests were unsheltered or experiencing homelessness. This vital information obtained from our survey was presented to Over the Rhine Community Housing to justify the community's need for additional affordable housing and will hopefully be helpful for ODB to apply for future grants for the community's benefit. Our survey results and interaction with ODB highlights the need for more affordable housing options to help the community and to allow individuals the opportunity to sustain and secure resources for themselves.

How We Can Advocate for ODB's Patrons and the Community

In our collaboration with ODB, it became apparent that most of the volunteers that keep it running smoothly are part of a high-risk population during the COVID pandemic, and most patrons are

unhoused, putting them at higher risk of exposure. After these issues were made clear to us, we decided the most immediate impact we could provide was to increase vaccination rates among ODB patrons. While vaccination can protect the population and volunteers at ODB temporarily, the key point for which to advocate to support the community, especially during times of crisis, is increased affordable housing.

Following our survey collection from ODB patrons, the data was used to advocate for more affordable housing. Although there will be some housing opportunities following completion of the Willkommen, a multi-building project that will bring dozens of apartments to downtown Cincinnati, initiatives for tolerant housing or supporting the homeless community within OTR remain pertinent. Because of our work with a large number of non-profits, service organizations, and public health agencies, UCCOM and its students are in a unique position to connect organizations who may have shared goals. We can identify organizations that align in their missions and advocate for potential partnership opportunities. This would be particularly useful in identifying more providers to create shelters and affordable housing for Cincinnatians facing homelessness. Organizations like The Community Builders and People Working Cooperatively are existing UCCOM partners and, given support and funding, may be able to fill some of the housing gaps in Cincinnati.

Various states have implemented legislation that supports the federal low-income housing tax credit program, which allows for federal tax breaks to developers that build affordable housing. This program has shown to be successful in many states, and Ohio currently has a measure on the ballot to allow for state tax breaks to such developers to further incentivize new affordable housing projects. In 2020, this program supported 2.48 million homes. One caveat to this program is that the legislation only requires properties to rent for affordable rates for the first 15-30 years, after which, property managers will be able to increase rent prices. As this program has been active for approximately 35 years, many of the properties that were built when this program began are approaching the time at which they are no longer required to set rent at below market rates. Thus, a large concern with this program currently is that many of the developers utilized this program with the intent to flip these properties into more luxury homes. There likely needs to be additional legislation that addresses these concerns to make these properties affordable, such as continuing subsidies for these properties.