

The Hope for Families Center Summary

The Hope for Families Center began over 30 years ago with one goal in mind and that is to help families with resources so they could become sustainable and raise healthy children that break the cycle of homelessness. HFC was incorporated in 1992 as a food pantry to provide emergency services to homeless individuals in Indian River County. In 1995, HFC became a direct service provider opening a 16-bed facility for single adults. Finally, in 1999, HFC was awarded a Temporary Financial Assistance for Homeless Families Grant through the State of Florida. This grant changed the trajectory of the mission to helping homeless families. Over the years the organization has evolved to become the largest family shelter in Vero Beach and Treasure Coast area. Homeless is an evident problem in the Vero Beach area and it is becoming increasingly acute due to the current housing situation. On January 26, 2023 there were a total of 925 individuals (736 adults and 189 children) who were counted as homeless on the Treasure Coast. These numbers show a 9% increase from the 2022 PIT count. According to the Treasure Coast Homeless Service Council, additional individuals temporarily staying with family or friends because of economic reasons are not considered homeless in this count. An additional 2,720 households were reported as doubled up by participating agencies during the Point in Time count. This is up from 1,986 during 2022, which is a 37% increase over last year's numbers.

On a typical day, The Hope for Families Center receives calls for assistance from 15-20 families a day who find themselves in need of assistance. Currently, at this time HFC can only service 21 families in the shelter and 2 families in the Hope House. This creates a waiting list that averages daily between 80 to 100 families needing placement at the shelter. While families are on the waitlist, our Intake Case Manager works with the families to assist with other services that may keep them afloat as they wait for a room. Last fiscal year HFC serviced 197 residents (115 being children). HFC uses a unique service approach by meeting people where they are and guiding them toward a future that is very different from their needs in the past. This is done by moving families from crisis to a stable, self-sustaining life. The emotional motivation to pursue this work is because we have compassion for families who are suffering. Families that receive support through our program become independent, thriving families that drive prosperity in our own community.

HFC provides a temporary roof for the families, but also wrap around social services as they restore their sustainability. Each family receives a personal case management strategic plan to address the needs of the family unit. We use 5 keys to drive this success which are highlighted below.

- Job Placement Support
- Financial Literacy
- Health/Mental Health Support
- Equity in Education for children/adults
- Housing Placement (if affordable housing is available)

Upon acceptance into the program, families are assigned a case manager who interviews the family and assesses their needs. The case manager assists in the creation of an action plan for the parents and family. The family sets measurable goals so they can leave the program with confidence in their ability to be self-sustaining. Also, case management aligns the family with other collaborative supportive agencies for an extra layer of services from when they leave HFC. In order to receive services families

must be drug and alcohol free, working or willing to find employment, and not have a conviction of sexual offender or felony charge that includes violence or guns.

The Hope for Families Center has a waitlist for over a year, and some the affordable housing isn't changing at the moment in Indian River County. The Board of Directors and leadership knew that something must be done to help ease the burden of these families that have been camping, living out of their car or couch surfing. Due to a generous donation, we were able to purchase the surrounding land around our existing building and plans were put into motion for the expansion process. Our program currently is outlined in the three bullet points below.

- In the back wing which consists of 5 rooms is our Intake Wing. These are residents that have just entered the shelter. This is a quieter part of the shelter and residents who have been experiencing crisis can decompress. In this wing we try and keep one room open for emergency walk ups just in case someone is seeking immediate shelter. These residents stay in this wing for two to four weeks while case managers create their strategic case management outline. These residents are visited by case management daily to address immediate crisis. Some residents are not ready to make the commitment to the work it takes to become sustainable and leave within a few days. Discipline problems happen frequently for those residents who don't want to participate, and case managers know within a week if the family is a good fit for the program.
- Next phase is the Emergency Wing which consists of 5 rooms. These are residents that have committed to intake and have set obtainable goals in finances, healthcare/mental healthcare, education goals for children and adults, adults are employed, and have started a housing plan. Families are now meeting with case managers weekly and working on sustainability. These residents are still being observed closely for behavior, and are meeting with case managers once a week. They are in this space from 90 to 120 days.
- Next phase is the T- Wing or Transitional/Transformational Wing which consists of 11 rooms. These families are pretty much ready for housing. They meet with their case managers 2 to 4 times a month depending on their level of need. They have reached goals to become sustainable but next layer goals are defined such as; continuing education, growing their saving account, working on mental health, and establishing family values (just to name a few). If housing was available these families could obtain housing immediately. The length of stay is 6 months to a year in this wing, or until they find housing.