

# ANNUAL REPORT 2021

**Center for  
Housing and  
Homelessness  
Research**

**University of  
Denver**



UNIVERSITY *of*  
DENVER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
Center for Housing and Homelessness Research

# CENTER FOR HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS RESEARCH

The Center for Housing and Homelessness Research (CHHR) provides research, evaluation, training, technical assistance and community assessments on issues related to housing security and homelessness. We partner with community stakeholders and contract with city and state governments, local and regional organizations, and nonprofits to improve the health and well-being of people living in poverty and experiencing homelessness.

In 2019, The Burnes Center on Poverty and Homelessness became the Center for Housing and Homelessness Research (CHHR). CHHR continues to provide the same high impact, innovative research, evaluation, and community assessments to those interested in addressing issues of housing insecurity and homelessness.



Photo by Trish Becker-Hafnor, from CHHR's "New and Hopeful Approaches in Housing and Homelessness" event



## A NOTE ABOUT COVID-19

The conditions of COVID-19 impacted all of CHHR's work. Despite the myriad challenges beginning in 2020, CHHR completed various projects with the support of our community partners and participants experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness.

# IN 2021, CHHR...



Art by Emit and Mike Graves  
Photos by Emit

## Initiated a study of guaranteed basic income for people experiencing homelessness with the Denver Basic Income Project



Art by Emit and Mike Graves  
Photos by Emit

The Denver Basic Income Project (DBIP) is delivering unconditional cash transfers to unhoused individuals. CHHR is leading the research, a mixed-methods randomized control trial, in partnership with several organizations. In August 2021, ten individuals were enrolled in the 12-month soft launch program and randomly assigned to one of three groups receiving either:

- \$1000/month
- \$6500 the first month, and \$500 each month after
- \$50/month

CHHR conducted focus groups and analyzed survey data to gather feedback from soft launch participants. CHHR presented preliminary findings to key stakeholders in November 2021. These findings will inform the full launch of the project in 2022. Learn more about this exciting study [here](#).

# Advanced our understanding of the relationship between traumatic brain injury and homelessness

The rates of reported traumatic brain injury (TBI) are significantly higher among individuals experiencing homelessness when compared with the general population, with at least half of individuals experiencing homelessness having a TBI history (Boseley, 2019; Hwang et al., 2008; Russell et al., 2013). TBI is associated with many negative outcomes including lifelong cognitive impairments that harm an individual’s memory processing, attention, communication, and executive functioning (Beijer et al., 2012).

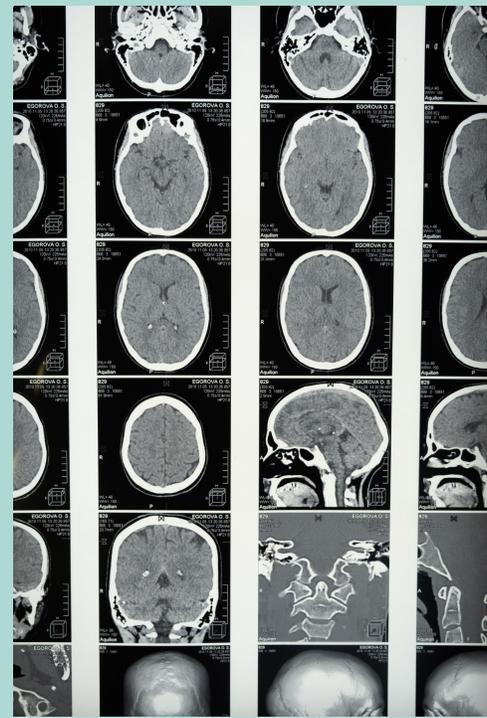
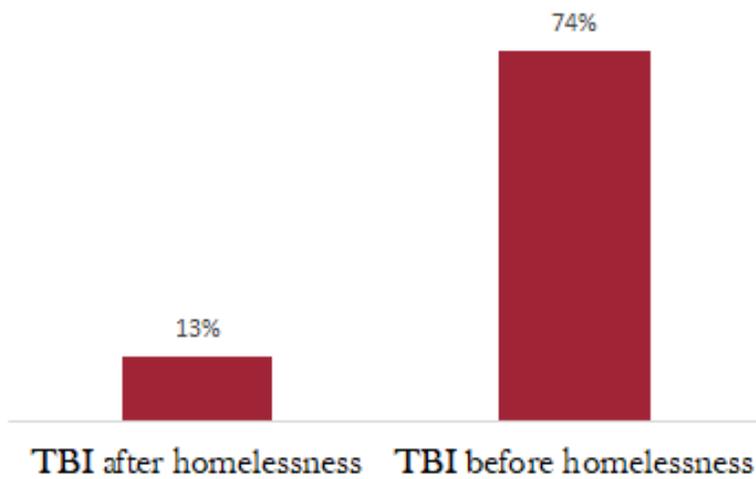


Photo by cottonbro from Pexels

## Temporal Relationship Between TBI and Homelessness



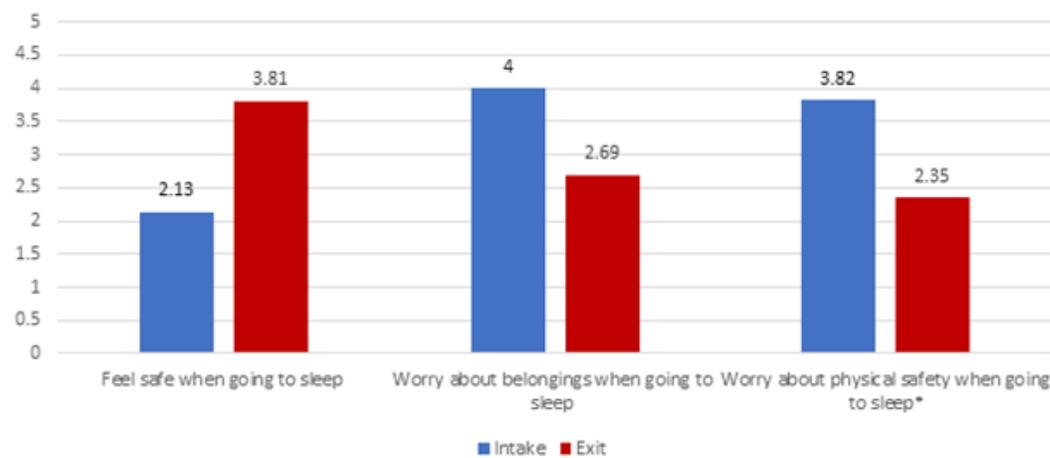
**FIGURE 1.** Temporal relationship (which came first) between TBI and homelessness.

In partnership with students and Co-Principal Investigator, Dr. Kim Gorgens, in the Graduate School of Professional Psychology (GSPP), CHHR students and staff interviewed 59 individuals at the Murphy Center for Hope in Fort Collins and 56 individuals at Catholic Charities’ Marian House in Colorado Springs to assess risk of traumatic brain injury using a validated screening measure (OSU TBI-ID; Corrigan & Bogner, 2007). The results of this study suggest that more than 70% of participants have at least one reported traumatic brain injury. Almost 74% of participants sustained a TBI before experiencing homelessness, underscoring that living with a TBI is a risk factor for homelessness. This study was funded by the University of Denver’s Professional Research Opportunity for Faculty (PROF) Fund. To read more, see the [summary](#) or [presentation](#) of our findings.

## Evaluated a safe parking program for people experiencing homelessness



A growing number of people use their vehicles as temporary, or even permanent, shelter. Organizations providing responsive services, like the Colorado Safe Parking Initiative (CSPI), are identifying new ways to meet the complex needs of people experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. With financial support from the University of Denver's Grand Challenges initiative, CHHR partnered with CSPI to evaluate 5 safe parking programs in the Denver metro area. Participants completed intake, interim, and exit surveys about their experience with a safe parking program.



**FIGURE 2.** Changes in feelings of safety from intake to interim

Lot administrators completed surveys about site logistics, challenges, and successes, and 5 participants shared stories through semi-structured interviews with a peer interviewer. Findings showed that most participants began sheltering in their vehicles due to unaffordable housing and loss of employment, and they view staying in their vehicles as a temporary housing solution. Although participants reported little change in employment while at a safe lot, findings suggest that participants were able to connect to resources such as Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and 45% were able to secure temporary or permanent housing during their safe lot stay. Lot participants reported improved feelings of safety while staying at a safe lot, which is particularly important because participants identified safety as the most common challenge to sheltering in a vehicle as well as a frequently reported challenge to staying in emergency shelters. Learn more about CSPI's work [here](#).

*“Well, it gives me a place to eat in the evenings and also breakfast in the morning, shower when I need it. It kinda like gets me off the streets so you don’t have the police knocking on your door trying to get you to move again.” (Participant)*

## Conducted a longitudinal study of a tiny home village

Tiny homes have become an increasingly popular response to the issue of homelessness. Construction of Beloved Community Village (BCV), Denver's first tiny home community, was completed in July 2017 as a 180-day pilot project for individuals experiencing homelessness. It was launched as an experiment in providing a partial solution to the housing crisis facing the Denver metropolitan area with the specific intent of serving those individuals experiencing homelessness whose needs were not being met by the traditional shelter system. BCV resulted from a joint effort, funded by the Barton Institute for Social Enterprise and carried out by the Colorado Village Collaborative (CVC) along with several other nonprofit and for-profit groups and independent community members. CHHR began evaluating BCV in 2017.

An initial evaluation report was delivered in 2018 after collecting data on BCV's first program year. The second evaluation was commissioned in 2019 and included two new data collection strategies, including 1) a comparison of BCV residents with a group of people experiencing homelessness and on the waitlist for BCV and 2) a longitudinal follow-up with current BCV residents as well as former residents who left BCV. See our key findings [here](#) and a presentation of our report [here](#). To request a copy of the full report, please contact The Barton Institute. Evaluation findings show that BCV residents report improvements in a number of areas. Upon move-in, all BCV residents interviewed reported sleeping outside at some point over the last six months. However, at the six-month follow-up, no BCV residents interviewed reported sleeping outside. In fact, four former BCV residents were interviewed and all reported graduating from BCV to stable housing (one of whom is staying in an RV that they own). Finding from the neighborhood evaluation reveal that most neighborhood residents' perceptions of BCV were neutral to positive:



Photo from Colorado Village Collaborative

*"Honestly, I feel fine about it now. But in the beginning, I did not feel as good because I didn't know what kind of people were moving in. I was worried about the kids' safety, but there's been no impact."  
(Globeville resident participant)*

Consistent with the first BCV evaluation, results of this study continue to show that the Village has a positive impact on individuals who had formerly experienced homelessness. Results also continue to demonstrate that NIMBY (*Not In My Backyard*) sentiments are a minority opinion in the neighborhoods where BCV has resided. BCV continues to be a promising example of an alternative sheltering solution for people who are experiencing homelessness. One resident described the sense of community:

*"Feel like I finally have a family again."  
(BCV resident participant)*

## Researched the emerging concept of trauma-informed design

To better understand how residents experience spaces designed with a trauma-informed approach, CHHR worked with Shopworks Architecture and Group14 Engineering to gather exploratory data from staff and residents of three recently completed affordable housing communities in Colorado: Housing Catalyst’s Redtail Ponds (Fort Collins supportive housing designed by Studio Completiva), the St. Francis Center’s St. Francis Apartments at Cathedral Square (Denver supportive housing designed by Humphries Poli Architects), and The Delores Project and Delores Apartments at Arroyo Village (Denver shelter and supportive housing designed by Shopworks Architecture).

Through this research, the team identified three core concepts of trauma-informed design—

- **Choice**
- **Community**
- **Comfort.**

These 3 C’s proved foundational to the group’s development of a trauma-informed design framework.

Learn more about trauma-informed design [here](#).

### Trauma-Informed Design Framework



FIGURE 3. Trauma-informed design framework

*“As we’ve observed, a trauma-informed approach to housing design can improve the design decision-making process—and ultimately resident outcomes—without increasing the cost or complexity of a building.”*

## Delivered a program to strengthen bonds between children, their families, schools, and neighborhoods

Your Family, Your Neighborhood (YFYN) is a dual generation intervention that works with families living in low-income and subsidized housing communities across Denver and Phoenix. YFYN supports whole families in building relationships: 1) within their family; 2) among neighbors; and 3) with local schools, which lead to stronger families and communities as well as improved health and well-being. After delivering and testing the YFYN intervention for several years, the University of Denver has evidence that the program has a positive impact for families living in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CHHR tailored the manualized curriculum and piloted virtual cohorts at the Quigg Newton and Clare Gardens housing communities from January to March of 2021. The commitment and engagement from participant families during this unique and challenging time was exceptional. Programming consisted of identifying and working toward family hopes/goals, engagement in education, learning and improving communication skills, building community relationships, and strengthening the parent/child bond. In October, 2021, CHHR returned to safely delivering YFYN to families in person at Decatur Place in the Sun Valley neighborhood.

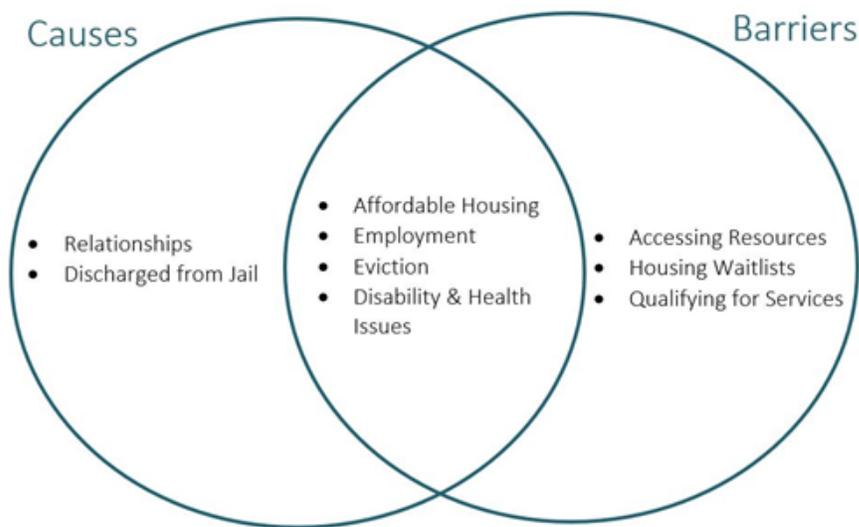


FIGURE 4. Photo of housing community by YFYN participant for Photovoice project

Parents and youth reported that they learned and practiced leadership skills in the program and identified themselves as leaders in their communities, felt a stronger family bond and increased the time they spent together as a family, felt more connected to their community, and consistently identify YFYN as a factor in helping create new social support systems. Read more about this ongoing intervention [here](#).

## Assessed the nature of family and individual homelessness in South Metro Denver

The cities of Englewood, Littleton and Sheridan (referred to as the Tri-Cities) are located in Arapahoe County, Colorado and are part of the Denver metropolitan area. The Tri-Cities region share physical borders and often collaborate on municipal and regional issues. To better understand the nature of local homelessness in the Tri-Cities, the Tri-Cities Homelessness Policy Group commissioned CHHR to conduct assessments of family homelessness and individual chronic homelessness.



**FIGURE 5.** Causes and barriers of families experiencing homelessness in the Tri-Cities area.

CHHR, a consultant from Rocky Mountain Center for Positive Change, Kara Schmitt, LCSW, a peer interviewer, a community-based interviewer, and Mike Sandgren, Mission Pastor at Wellspring Church, worked collaboratively with non-profit agencies, school districts, faith congregations, service clubs, community members, and Tri-Cities government to interview 49 families and 121 individuals experiencing homelessness. This work was funded by Arapahoe County and the City of Sheridan. Explore the findings from the family assessment [here](#) and for the chronic individual assessment [here](#).

*“There are a million factors for each person's story. My whole life I've had psychological and emotional abuse that has led me to question my self-worth. I think that is a really big factor to homelessness, and also the financial aspect. If you're coming out of homelessness long-term, you need support to evolve to be a 'normal functioning person,' and it takes a lot of work, grit, and positive reinforcement. For those that are homeless and have mental health issues, they may not be able to get a job because they have a hard time even having a conversation, and then they're on long wait lists. It's just a broken system. More recently, I tore my ACL and had to pay medical bills instead of rent.” (Participant)*

# Senior Program Associate, Jennifer Wilson, PhD, developed a new way to rapidly study emergent social innovations-

With her dissertation research, Jennifer Wilson developed a more nimble and responsive way to study social innovations, such as tiny home villages for people experiencing homelessness, identifying priority specifications to successfully replicate and scale the intervention. Tapping directly into the expertise of those operating the nation’s tiny home communities, Wilson defined the priority specifications for tiny home villages addressing homelessness — the most important elements to consider when replicating and scaling the intervention — and developed a new method along the way called “Field Identified Priority Specifications for Social Innovations” (FIPSSI).

*"The FIPSSI method is able to fill gaps created by slow-moving research processes, providing a means for knowledge synthesis and dissemination while other more rigorous research efforts are underway."*

## FIPSSI PROCESS (Field-Identified Priority Specifications for Social Innovations)

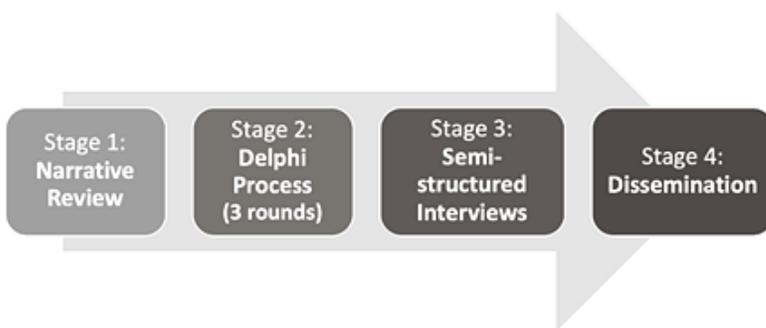


FIGURE 6. Field-Identified Priority Specifications for Social Innovations (FIPSSI) process.

From a review of 100 sources, Wilson started with a list of 99 village characteristics. Using a modified Delphi process, experts in the field then narrowed that list down to the 21 most essential qualities of an operational tiny home village. Finally, Wilson used semi-structured interviews with field experts to explore the accuracy of the resulting set of specifications, which described day-to-day village operations, physical village characteristics, and engagement with the primary stakeholders. The method relies on the practice knowledge of those who are developing innovations in real time. It’s a process that helps to rapidly gather and share vital knowledge with others, who can’t wait years for a traditional research process to play out. Click [here](#) to learn more about Wilson’s social innovation research.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you!

CHHR would like to thank all the families and individuals experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity who contributed their time and effort to these studies.

CHHR also extends our thanks to our many project partners:

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Arapahoe County Libraries  
Barton Institute for Community Action  
Beloved Community Village  
Bloom Foundation  
Brain Injury Alliance of Colorado  
Café 180  
Catholic Charities' Marian House  
Colorado Division of Criminal Justice (Justice Assistance Grant)  
Colorado Housing Finance Authority  
Colorado Office of Children, Youth & Families –  
Tony Grampsas Youth Services Program  
Colorado Safe Parking Initiative  
Colorado Village Collaborative  
Cooperating Ministries  
Dean Amanda Moore McBride  
Denver Basic Income Project  
Denver Homeless Out Loud  
Denver Human Services  
Denver Housing Authority (Quigg Newton)  
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Englewood Libraries  
Englewood, Littleton, Sheridan No. 2 School Districts  
Family Tree Inc. & House of Hope  
Gary Community Investments  
Gary Sanford, MPA  
Giving Heart

Globeville residents, businesses, and organizations

Gracefull Café  
Grand Valley Catholic Outreach  
Group14 Engineering  
Holiday Motel  
Housing Catalyst's Redtail Ponds  
Impact Charitable  
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University of Denver Graduate School of Professional Psychology  
University of Denver's Grand Challenges initiative  
University of Denver's Professional Research Opportunity for Faculty (PROF) Fund  
Volunteers of America Family Motel  
YFYN Facilitators  
**And last but not least,  
our volunteers and field staff!**