

2024 - 2025



ANNUAL REPORT



MISSION STATEMENT

The Community Shelter provides emergency shelter, food, and rehousing. Our low-barrier services support equitable opportunities because safe, affordable housing and access to food are basic human rights.



Letter from Our Leadership

This past year, the Community Shelter faced rising needs, strained resources, and the ongoing affordable housing crisis. Thanks to the grit of our team, the generosity of our supporters, and the resilience of our participants, FY25 became a year of meaningful impact.

While our shelter numbers held steady, the demand for food services reached record highs, and we rehoused more people than we have in several years. From the mother who finally secured a safe home for her children after years of instability to a longtime neighbor who slept in a tent for years before unlocking the door to his own apartment, these are not just statistics, they are lives transformed. One participant, Chris, came to the Shelter after losing housing with a relative. Through our Economic Mobility Program, he landed a stable job, saved diligently, and this summer moved to Charlotte to attend culinary school. His journey is just one of many reminders that stability opens the door to new dreams.

We strengthened shelter operations, redesigned special events to ensure financial sustainability, and raised our voices against policies that criminalize poverty. We stayed true to our belief that success is not just helping people exit homelessness, it is helping them build lasting stability.

The year brought challenges. Inflation strained our budget, and the housing market continued to push more families to the edge. We met these challenges with creativity, partnership, and an unshakable commitment to our mission. As we move into FY26, we will continue to stretch our resources to end hunger and homelessness for our neighbors, deepen our impact across all programs, and advocate fiercely for affordable housing solutions in Union County.

With gratitude,
Melissa McKeown



Chief Executive Officer



Our Mission

The Community Shelter of Union County provides emergency shelter, food, and rehousing. Our low-barrier services support equitable opportunities because safe, affordable housing and access to food are basic human rights.

Our Vision

To end hunger and homelessness in our community.

What We Do

Since 1993, the Community Shelter has been Union County's leading organization dedicated to providing crisis response, long-term housing stability, and pathways to economic mobility. Through innovative programs, compassionate care, and strategic partnerships, we help individuals and families move from crisis to stability and build a foundation for lasting success.

How We Do It



Emergency Shelter

Short-term, emergency shelter is provided in while we stabilize participants and help them move to stability.



Economic Mobility Program

The Employment Lab helps participants secure or improve income to move out of economic and housing crisis quickly.



Food Services

The Soup Kitchen provides three meals a day, seven days a week. The Drive-thru pantry distributes twice monthly.



Step It Up Bicycle Program

We bridge transportation gaps by distributing gently used bicycles to those in need.



Rehousing

Rehousing quickly ends episodes of homelessness by helping find and move into independent rental units.



Home Again

Provides essential supports to households transitioning into independent living by furnishing rental units with donated furniture and household items.

By addressing both urgent needs and long-term stability, we create a holistic support system that empowers people to rebuild their lives and thrive.



FY25 By the Numbers – Stories of Hope

Emergency Shelter

506 individuals sheltered
30,431 overnight stays provided

After years of instability, a mother arrived with her two children. Within 60 days, they secured a permanent home where the children are now thriving in school.

Economic Mobility Program

138 referred, **100%** participation,
65% gained employment,
80% sustained income for
6+ months

Chris came to the Shelter after losing housing with a relative. Through the program, he secured stable employment, saved diligently, and moved to attend culinary school.

Rehousing

163 individuals moved into
permanent housing

After years in a tent, one participant secured an apartment. On his first night inside, he said it was the first time in years he had felt truly safe.

Food Services

84,462 dining hall meals
162,031 pantry meals

A longtime neighbor relied on our dining hall for daily meals after losing his job. Even after securing housing, he continued visiting the pantry to stretch his budget while rebuilding his career.

Step It Up Bicycle Program

30 bicycles distributed last year
186 since inception

One participant walked over an hour each way to work. A donated bike cut his commute in half, giving him the energy to attend GED classes in the evening.

Home Again

66 households furnished

A single father moving into a rental with his children received a fully furnished apartment. The children picked out their own bedding, and the father said it made them feel “like we belonged here from day one.”

Volunteers

15,072 hours, **2,344** unique
volunteers, equivalent to **7.25**
full-time staff

One volunteer group has served a hot meal every month for over fifteen years, becoming a steady and welcoming presence for staff and participants.



This Year's Milestones

FY25 was a year of innovation and progress across every area of our work. In addition to meeting increasing demand for services, we took bold steps to strengthen operations, expand opportunities, and advocate for change.

- **Launched a triage intake system** to connect shelter waitlist households with resources earlier, building rapport and relationships to create a stronger foundation before shelter entry.
- **Expanded education access** with Hi-Set prep labs in partnership with educational institutions, removing transportation barriers and increasing flexibility for participants.
- **Served more meals than ever** in our dining hall and strengthened partnerships with local food suppliers to meet record demand.
- **Improved volunteer onboarding and training** to make it easier for community members to connect their time and talents to the greatest needs.
- Worked alongside community partners to **push for affordable housing policy changes** and **opposed measures that criminalize poverty**.
- **Redesigned key fundraising events** to secure long-term financial health without losing community connection.
- **Increased wages, expanded professional development, and provided training opportunities** to support staff retention and growth.

These milestones reflect our commitment to doing more than meeting today's needs. They show how we are building the systems and capacity to create lasting stability for our neighbors.

Volunteers and Community Partners

2,344
volunteers



15,072
hours of
their time



equivalent of
7.25
staff members



Their dedication filled our dining hall with hot meals, sorted thousands of donated goods, staffed our drive-thru pantries, and brought hope and encouragement to every corner of our programs.

One volunteer group has provided and served a hot meal every month for more than five years. They know many of our participants by name, offer a friendly smile with every plate, and show that consistency is its own form of compassion.

Our community partners were equally essential to our success. From local businesses and faith congregations to civic groups, educational institutions, and nonprofit collaborators, each played a vital role in helping us meet record demand. Whether hosting supply drives, preparing and serving meals, offering professional expertise, or lending their space for community events, these partnerships multiplied our impact far beyond what we could accomplish alone.

Together, our volunteers and partners expanded our reach, strengthened our programs, and reminded us that change happens fastest when a community works side by side toward a shared goal.

Advancing Our Strategic Plan

Our 2024–2027 Strategic Plan continues to guide our priorities, even though the political and financial climate in FY25 required us to adapt. Several major initiatives were intentionally placed on hold to ensure we move forward with stability and sustainability.

While some work was paused, we maintained progress in key areas. We strengthened shelter operations through the triage intake system, which connects people on the shelter waitlist with resources sooner and builds relationships that can support long-term stability.

We expanded access to education and employment opportunities through our Economic Mobility Program and continued to meet record demand for food services.

We also remained active in community advocacy, speaking out against policies that criminalize poverty and working alongside partners to keep affordable housing at the forefront of local conversations.



Our commitment to the plan's long-term vision has not wavered.

By prioritizing financial sustainability, maintaining essential services, and protecting the capacity of our team, we are positioning the Community Shelter to move forward with confidence as conditions allow. As we enter FY26, we will be ready to accelerate paused initiatives when the climate is right, keeping our focus on lasting solutions to end hunger and homelessness in Union County.

Our Financials

REVENUE

Government Grants	37.8%
Foundation Grants	17.7%
Special Events	15.4%
Donations	14.4%
Inkind	11.4%
Misc.	3.3%
TOTAL	100%

EXPENSES

Management	10%
Fundraising	3%
Housing	42%
Emergency Shelter	23%
Food	22%
TOTAL	100%

In FY25, the Community Shelter maintained strong fiscal stewardship while meeting record demand for services. Our funding came from a balanced mix of public and private sources, individual donations, corporate sponsorships, and special events.

Careful budgeting and diversified revenue streams ensured we could sustain essential programs despite rising costs and economic uncertainty.



LOOKING AHEAD

As we move into FY26, our vision remains clear: a Union County where everyone has a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home, and where hunger and homelessness are effectively addressed.

We will continue meeting the growing demand for our services while advocating for affordable housing policies and fair wages that support long-term stability.

Our expanded triage intake system will connect people on the shelter waitlist with critical resources sooner, and we hope over time to divert more households from needing shelter at all. We will continue building strong partnerships with local employers to open doors to higher-paying jobs. In our dining hall, we will increase capacity to meet record demand for meals while addressing food insecurity through expanded collaborations.

We will deepen volunteer engagement by creating new leadership roles, sustain financial growth by evolving events and diversifying funding, and invest in staff development so our team can lead with skill and compassion.

Through collaboration, advocacy, and innovation, we are stronger, more connected, and more determined than ever to create a community where every individual and family has the resources and support they need to thrive.



Contact Us

For further information, please reach out to us at info@unionshelter.org.

COMMUNITY SHELTER OF UNION COUNTY

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