

Family homelessness up in summer

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Two new programs have started this year to meet what social service experts say is a summer spike in family homelessness.

One program, linking Bethany House Services and Strategies to End Homelessness, will place families free of charge in motel rooms until space opens in a shelter.

The second expands services of Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cincinnati through a partnership with the group Churches Active in Northside (CAIN). It will accommodate four families in a fixed location in College Hill named Grace Place.

"There is no clear research, but anecdotally we hear all the time homeless families depend on family members and friends to house them," said Stacey Burge, executive director of Interfaith Hospitality Network. "Summer becomes difficult because it's hot – and they might not have air conditioning – and the children are home all day and not in school.

"Other times, when working-poor families are renting, they have stretched their income-tax return as far as it can go and are evicted."

Strategies to End Homelessness, the agency which coordinates local efforts to combat homelessness, collects data from shelters and through the intake service it operates. The Central Access Point is Hamilton County's hotline for people seeking shelter.

» In 2015, an average of 452 families contacted the hotline to seek shelter, according to Strategies to End Homelessness. The average number calling the hotline from June through September was 543 a month.

» Also in 2015, an average of 274 people in families were placed in shelters each month. That number



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Children play in the hallway of the Interfaith Hospitality Network day shelter in Walnut Hills. A new program will allow the network to expand services in College Hill.

increased to an average of 313 from June through September, a 14-percent increase, according to the agency.

Kevin Finn, Strategies president and CEO, said the new programs build "off the strengths of the current system for serving homeless and at-risk families."

Bethany House serves about 2,000 people a year, according to Strategies to End Homelessness. Bethany provides family shelter and transitional housing that includes wrap-around services designed to move families toward permanent affordable housing. Strategies will pay for motel room stays, and Bethany House Services will help with case management.

Interfaith, in its 25th year, has grown to a network of 25 host congregations where homeless families are physically given shelter. Another 80 support congregations provide meals, clothing, toys, books and volunteers to serve food and stay with families overnight. Up to eight families – four families at two sites – receive shelter

each night.

Grace Place is different. Supported by 10 new congregations and faith-based organizations, Grace Place is fixed. It has space for four additional families. Support congregations will prepare meals there and stay with families in a home setting overnight. Families will receive transportation to the Interfaith day center in Walnut Hills, where bathing and laundry facilities are available and where they can receive personal care items, counseling, case-management services. Children's activities are also available.

Overall, Interfaith congregations represent all major faiths – Protestant, Muslim, Catholic, Jewish and Unitarian – and come from across the region.

Churches Active in Northside expanded its hospitality services in 2014, when it took over Grace Place in the Catholic Worker model. It began working earlier this year with Interfaith Hospitality Network to develop the permanent shelter concept,

ABOUT

The Grace Place project in College Hill provides beds for four more families at a set location, unlike the rotating host congregations that accommodate eight families each night. Grace Place also has brought 10 more congregations into the network, on top of the 105 that already serve as hosts or in support with food or overnight volunteers. Churches Active in Northside (CAIN) is a new Interfaith partner, bringing the resources of its 13 congregations into the network, as well. Ten congregations or faith-based organizations directly supporting Grace Place. They include: University of Mount St. Joseph; First United Church of Christ Fishes & Loaves group; The Good New Church of God in Christ; Truth & Destiny; St. Therese Little Flower; North Church; Trinity Lutheran; Westwood United Methodist; Clifton Mosque; St. Ignatius School.

How to help: www.ihcincinnati.org

which is scheduled to operate this year through August.

Eboni Mealing, 31, spent Sunday night at Grace Place with her three children, ages 12, 10 and 4. Her oldest two children, daughters, went to summer camp Monday. Mealing, who has a car, spent Monday with her 4-year-old. She drove to appointments to fill out job applications. She had her children had been staying most recently in the home a man that she described as her "significant other." That relationship ended, leaving her and her children looking for a home.

She called for shelter services and received a referral to Interfaith.

"I had been homeless before, and it was not a good experience with the shelter," Mealing said Monday. "Since I came here, they've been very nice."