

## **MASH 2011: Year in Review**

**July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011**

Homelessness among families in areas of the state like ours, which increased by over one third in 2009, remains high today. Continued high unemployment rates across Connecticut and the persistently high costs of housing in our area continue to create difficult challenges for very low income families in our community.

MASH provides shelter and support only to families with children who are homeless or at risk of losing their housing. Homelessness is one of the most damaging possible experiences for children. The constant barrage of stress and trauma also has profound negative effects on health, development, and ability to learn. Compared to their peers, homeless children have five times more gastrointestinal problems; four times as many respiratory infections; four times the rate of asthma; three times the rate of emotional/behavioral problems; and twice the rate of hunger.

*“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,”* Ben Franklin said. Consistent with those great words of wisdom, national studies show that it is much less costly in dollar terms to prevent a family’s homelessness than it is to shelter and re-house the same family. At the same time, preventing a family’s homelessness means preventing the dislocation, stress, and trauma of homelessness for children and their parents. MASH has continued to innovate with regard to our service model so that we stay on the cutting edge of best practices to end homelessness. This means committing our resources more and more to *preventing* family homelessness whenever we can – rather than just sheltering and re-housing families who fall into homelessness. In 2011, we provided homelessness prevention assistance to nearly three times the number of families that we sheltered.

MASH continues to work in close cooperation with faith communities, town and state social service agencies, and non-profit partners to provide support and to meet the urgent needs of the families we serve. The generous support of our local community continues to make our work possible! Individual donors, businesses, foundations, and faith communities continued in 2011 to serve as MASH’s single largest source of support.

### ***A continued, difficult local economy means the problem of family homelessness in our community persists.***

- Foreclosures in Eastern Connecticut were up over 50%, comparing 2010 to 2008, with some Eastern Connecticut communities experiencing a jump of over 100%.
- Unemployment in Connecticut held steady in 2011 at 9%.
- The cost of housing in Connecticut remains the sixth highest in the nation: a family of four must earn an income equal to the wages of three, 40-hour per week minimum wage jobs to afford rent.\*

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\* The Housing and Urban Development Department defines as “affordable” total housing costs that do not exceed 30% of gross household income.

- Homelessness among families increased in rural and suburban areas of the state like Southeastern Connecticut by 33% in 2009, and the numbers continue to climb: 56 families including 86 children and 59 parents were homeless in the Norwich-New London area on a single night in January 2011– *an increase of 14% over the previous year.*

***MASH continues to serve Southeastern Connecticut as the only emergency shelter for families with children between New London and Westerly.***

- MASH provided emergency shelter services for 24 families, including 77 individual children and parents.
- MASH families spent an average of 50 days homeless in our shelter (16 days fewer than in FY2010, or a decrease of 25%).
  - *One of the most important goals of our shelter program is to reduce each year the average time a family spends homeless in our shelter before re-housing or identifying other long-term housing options. Less time homeless means reduced stress on children and parents, and allows MASH to make better use of our resources.*
- Families we served in our shelter program in 2011 came from the communities of Groton, Ledyard, New London, Niantic, Norwich, and Stonington.
- We continued to engage the service of volunteers to support our shelter program, including a “service day” provided by the Union Baptist Church, in which MASH benefited from the support of over 30 volunteers working in our shelter units on maintenance and upkeep for a day!
- Two different service projects by local scouts provided important maintenance support for our office and free, fresh produce for our client families.

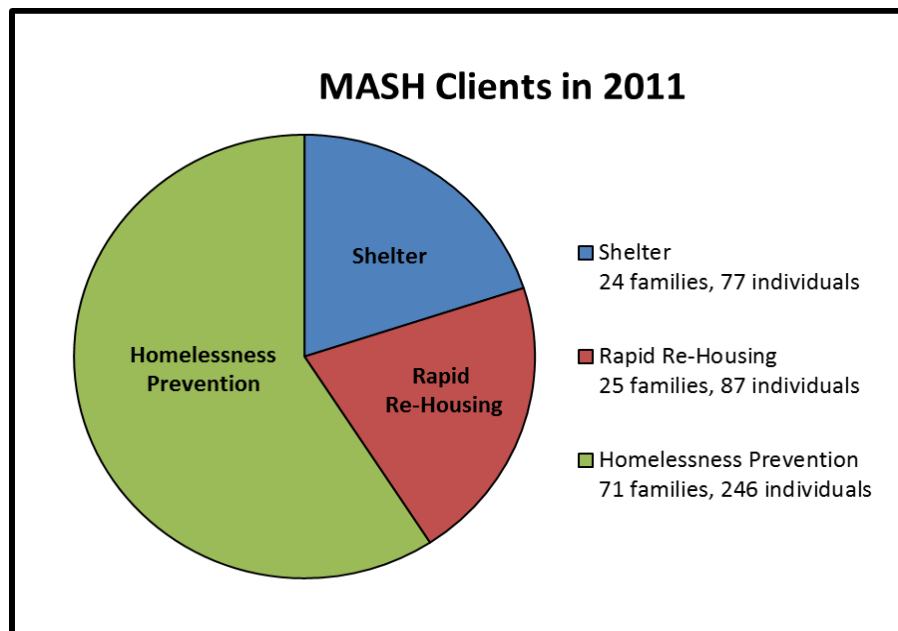
*“Often times, a little bit of financial assistance can make all the difference between finding or keeping a stable home and being forced to live in a shelter or on the streets.”*

– Secretary Shaun Donovan  
Housing and Urban Development Department

***MASH helped more families than ever before through our Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing programs!***

- MASH was the only agency in New London County awarded a substantial funding boost through a Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Federal Stimulus grant to increase substantially our Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing services to low income families in FY2011.

- MASH was awarded a state sub-contract to fund our Housing Coordinator who identifies housing options for homeless families, mediates with potential landlords, helps clients understand and budget appropriately for their housing costs, and provides counseling on good tenancy.
- We provided Homelessness Prevention services to 71 families (150% more families than in 2010), including 246 family members, with an average of less than \$1,400 in financial assistance per family to keep these families housed – *out of the shelter system*.
- We helped to re-house 25 homeless families (more families than in any previous year), including 87 individual family members, through our Rapid Re-Housing Program, providing less than \$2,500 on average in targeted financial assistance to help each homeless family secure new, permanent housing.



***MASH continued to reach out to inform the community about the issue of family homelessness and our work to help families in need.***

- MASH Executive Director gave numerous public presentations to community groups, churches, and schools and made appearances on local radio and local access television shows.
- We participated in the New London County “Project Homelessness Connect” effort in October, 2010 at St. Bernard’s school to reach homeless families in need.

***MASH increased our work with partners in the community and the state to enhance our presence in the community, educate staff on new approaches, broaden our client base, and improve services to clients.***

- We continued to work closely with other social service providers by encouraging referrals and working jointly to meet urgent client needs. Many clients re-housed by our housing coordinator came from other family shelters in our region.

- MASH Staff participated in the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness Spring Training Institute to stay well informed about best practices research regarding approaches that work to end homelessness.
- We continued to work closely with local employment service providers to help our clients secure or improve their employment situations.
- MASH launched a new Financial Literacy program, emphasizing careful budgeting and attention to expenses, for our client families in partnership with the United Church of Stonington, a small cadre of financially savvy volunteers, and the support of seven area churches.
- The MASH cooperative program with the Westerly Innovations Network (WIN) 7<sup>th</sup> grade student volunteer leaders to solicit donations of used cooking oil for conversion to usable heating fuel earned MASH over \$2,000 in bio-heat fuel credits for our clients or shelter units.

***Generous support from local individuals, foundations, and institutional donors, and increased success in our fundraising efforts continues to provide strong financial support for our work.***

- MASH enjoyed continued, strong support in 2011 from foundation supporters including:

<i>Allyn Foundation</i>	<i>Community Foundation of</i>	<i>Mystic Women's Club</i>
<i>Bodenwein Foundation</i>	<i>Eastern Connecticut</i>	<i>Newport Federal</i>
<i>Brownington Foundation</i>	<i>Dime Bank</i>	<i>Pfizer</i>
<i>Chamber of Commerce</i>	<i>Dominion Resources</i>	<i>Rotary of the Stoningtons</i>
<i>Eastern Connecticut</i>	<i>Frank Loomis Palmer Foundation</i>	<i>Savings Institute Foundation</i>
<i>Charter Oak Credit Union</i>	<i>Liberty Bank</i>	<i>SUNL Baptist</i>
<i>ChelseaGroton Bank</i>	<i>Mystic Rotary</i>	<i>Washington Trust</i>

- We raised over \$86,000 and collected a multitude of useful in-kind donations through fundraising events throughout the year, including our annual “Iron Chef Competition/Auction for Action,” the MASH Swing Dance at Foxwoods, and the Coogan Gildersleeve Brunch and Auction for MASH!
- Over 430 donations from individuals, small businesses, and corporate matching programs contributed nearly \$90,000 to support our work, and 19 foundations granted over \$85,000 to support our work!

***MASH Executive Director was honored by St. Edmund’s Retreat.***

- St. Edmund’s Retreat at Enders Island awarded MASH Executive Director, Lisa Tepper Bates, the St. Edmund’s Medal of Honor for leading the work of MASH to help families facing homelessness.