Sheltered Homelessness in Greenville County from 2017 to 2020

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Table of Contents

Introduction

In July 2019, Miracle Hill Ministries and the Upstate Continuum of Care published the report entitled: *Data Brief – Sheltered Homelessness in the Upstate of South Carolina*. This report was the first attempt to comprehensively analyze the count and characteristics of people experiencing sheltered homelessness in the Upstate region in 2017 and 2018. The report relied on two primary data sources: Miracle Hill Ministries' Jericho Database and the Upstate Continuum of Care's Homeless Management Information System. Before the 2019 report, it was not feasible to analyze data from these two databases simultaneously, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the scope and extent of sheltered homelessness in the Upstate.

To overcome this limitation, a data-sharing partnership was developed between the Upstate Continuum of Care (Upstate CoC) – a consortium of homeless service providers and curator of the HMIS database – and Miracle Hill Ministries (MHM), the largest homeless service provider in the Upstate region. Both parties agreed to have their agency's data made available for compilation, deduplication, and analysis. The "merged" effort, utilizing data from both MHM's Jericho and the Upstate CoC's HMIS database, resulted in the most definitive picture to date of persons experiencing sheltered homelessness in the Upstate. This specific report details data and trends specific to Greenville County (one of the 13 counties the Upstate CoC has a presence in).

Like the larger, Upstate-wide analysis, this report builds on the original *Data Brief* by including data from 2019 and 2020. In an effort to identify and describe trends in the data, emphasis is placed on presenting data from all four years of the study period (2017-2020). This report is also timely as it presents some of the first available data on homelessness collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 should be kept in consideration when interpreting the 2020 data included in this report.

Methodology

Building off the 2019 *Data Brief*, the variables that were shared between both databases were independently extracted from MHM's Jericho and the Upstate CoC's HMIS. Projects included in these extracts were Emergency Shelter (ES), Transitional Housing (TH), and Safe Haven (SH; a shelter setting for chronically homeless persons living with mental illness; Safe Haven is not to be confused with a domestic violence shelter). Data was pulled for two specific reporting years: one for calendar year 2019 and the other for calendar year 2020.

Data within each independent extract was then deduplicated so that each row of data represented a unique client and their most recent engagement with a shelter service provider. For clients who had open enrollments in a project at the end of the reporting year, an exit date was given for the last day of the reporting year (e.g. 12/31/2019 for calendar year 2019 and 12/31/2020 for calendar year 2020). This approach provided unduplicated counts within each reporting year. However, some persons can be – and were – counted in both reporting years.

After the four data extracts (Miracle Hill 2019, Miracle Hill 2020, HMIS 2019, and HMIS 2020) were individually deduplicated, the extracts from each database for each corresponding year were merged into new spreadsheets. This resulted in two spreadsheets, each including data from MHM and HMIS – one for 2019 and the other for 2020. Within each year-specific spreadsheet, a final step of deduplication was completed. The resulting process produced two deduplicated spreadsheets containing an unduplicated count of persons who received shelter services during each calendar year (2019 and 2020). Again, persons could be counted in both reporting years if they received shelter services in both 2019 and 2020.

The 2019 and 2020 data were then deidentified to protect client anonymity. These fields were then translated over to the master deidentified spreadsheet that contained the 2017 and 2018 data. The final spreadsheet included

unduplicated deidentified client data for persons who received shelter services in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020. This spreadsheet was then imported into Tableau for analysis.
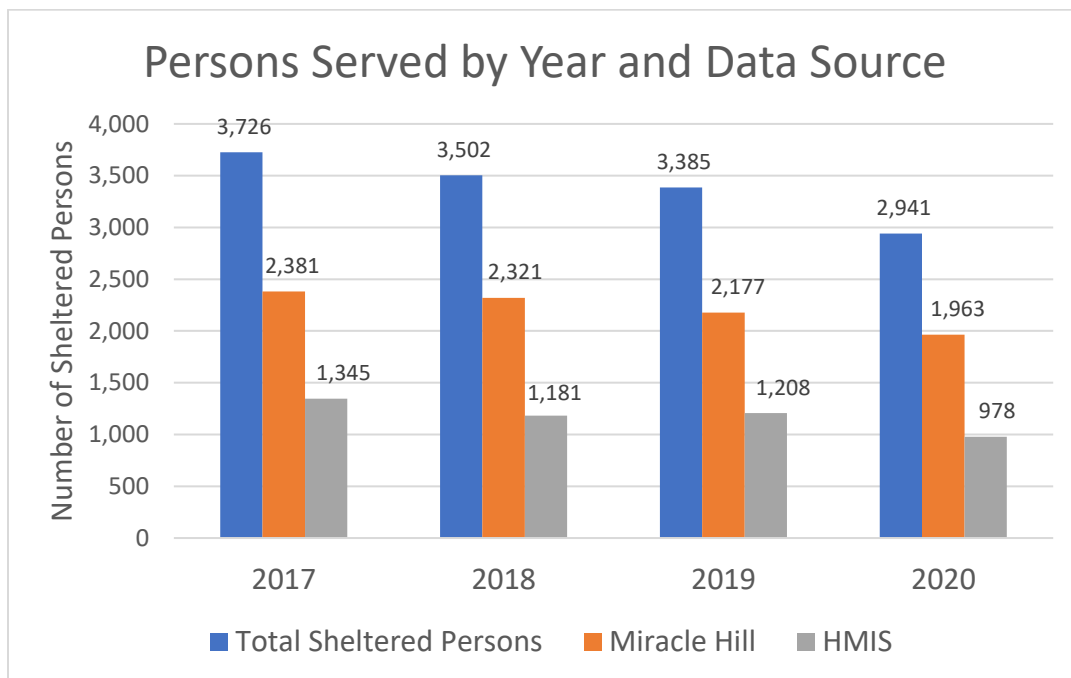
Results

This report will present CoC-wide data regarding overall counts of persons experiencing homelessness. After disaggregating the data by County, the following data presented is specific to Greenville County only.

Number of Sheltered Persons from 2017-2020 Across All Counties of the Upstate CoC

In 2020, 2,941 persons received sheltered services in the Upstate of South Carolina. This represents a 444 person decrease from 2019 (3,385). However, 2020 was an unprecedented year due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are several potential explanations for this decrease:

1. Many HMIS-affiliated shelters reduced their bed availability to allow for more physical distance between residents. MHM did not reduce shelter capacity during 2020.
2. A fear of congregate settings and the potential for virus transmission could plausibly have caused people to avoid seeking shelter resources. Results from a SC211 analysis[1] indicated that the number of calls 211 received for emergency shelter dropped in the months after the onset of the pandemic.
3. An additional influx of funding from the federal government helped to stem the flow of persons into sheltered settings. These include multiple stimulus payments directly to lower-income persons currently experiencing homelessness, increased unemployment benefits, state and federal eviction moratoriums, and the large sums of money directed towards homelessness prevention programs.
4. On average, residents in 2020 tended to stay longer in shelter than in previous years. This led to lower turnover of available beds in 2020 compared to 2017-2019.
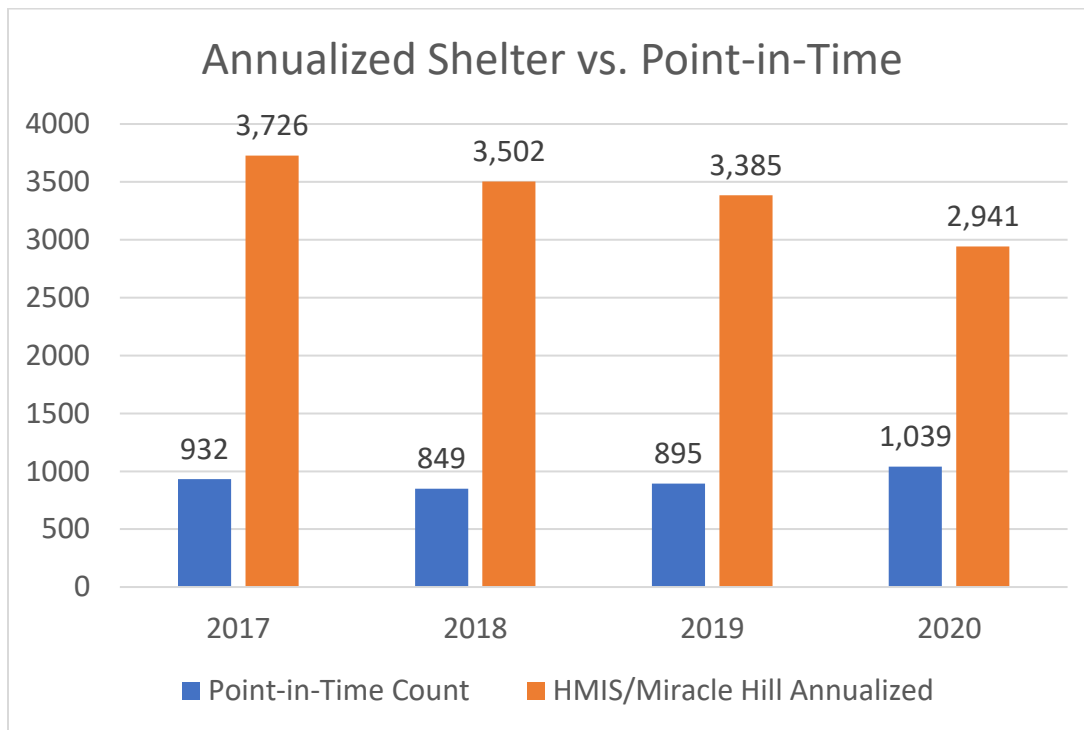

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[1] 2020 South Carolina State of Homelessness Report. Retrieved from:
https://www.schomeless.org/resources/reports/2020-south-carolina-state-of-homelessness-report/

Source of Information

In all four years, two-thirds of the sheltered population received shelter services from a MHM shelter or transitional housing project. The remaining third were served at an HMIS-affiliated emergency shelter, transitional housing, or safe haven project (shelter for chronically homeless persons). This large percentage of clients served by a Miracle Hill project reinforces the importance of pursuing this merged analysis and not solely relying on HMIS data to describe the scope of homelessness in our region.
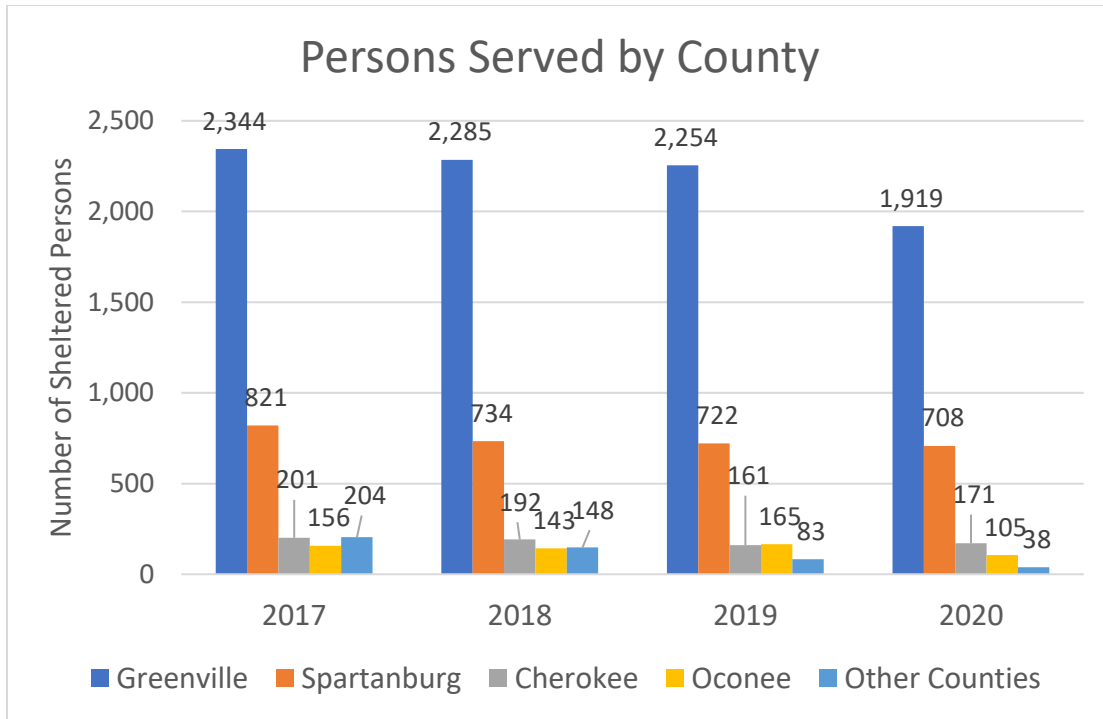
Annualized Homeless Count vs. Point-in-Time Count

Despite the observed decrease from 2019 to 2020, the total number of persons experiencing sheltered homelessness continues to be between nearly three to four times larger than the Point-in-Time (PIT) sheltered counts recorded in all four years – 2017 (932 one-night sheltered count), 2018 (849), 2019 (895), and 2020 (1,039). While the PIT focuses on a single night in January, the data presented here includes clients served throughout an entire year. Utilizing year-round data from the two largest sources of homeless service information yields a much more realistic representation of the extent of homeless service engagement in the Upstate region.

Annualized Shelter vs. Point-in-Time

| Year	Point-in-Time Count	HMIS/Miracle Hill Annualized
2017	932	3,726
2018	849	3,502
2019	895	3,385
2020	1,039	2,941

County Where Persons Were Served

The vast majority of persons who received shelter services were served in Greenville County. Across all four years, between 63% to 67% of all persons counted received shelter services in Greenville County. Spartanburg County had the second highest percentage of clients each year (between 21-24%). A smaller, but still sizable portion of clients were served in Cherokee (5-6%) and Oconee (4-5%) counties. "Other Counties" include counties that do not have many projects entering data into HMIS or MHM's Jericho database. These include counties such as Anderson, Greenwood, and Pickens. In particular, the largest homeless service provider in Anderson, the Salvation Army of Anderson, is missing from this analysis. Future analyses should include more Anderson-area homeless service providers to more fully understand the scope of homelessness in Anderson County.

Persons Served by County

Note: From this point onward, the report will only describe data specific to Greenville County.
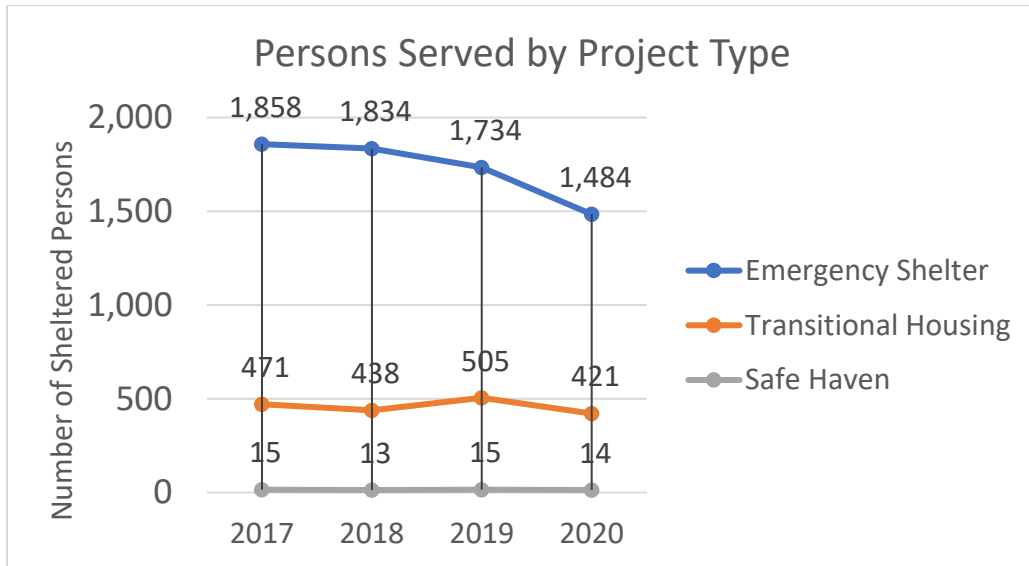
Annualized Homelessness in Greenville vs. Point-in-Time Count

Parsing the data down to just Greenville County, the annualized shelter homelessness count was nearly four times higher than the sheltered Point-in-Time Count (again, which describes homelessness on a single night in January). In 2020, 1,919 unique persons were identified as experiencing sheltered homelessness in Greenville County across the entire year compared to 520 persons identified during the PIT Count. This reinforces the need to describe the scope of homelessness on an annualized instead of a single night basis.
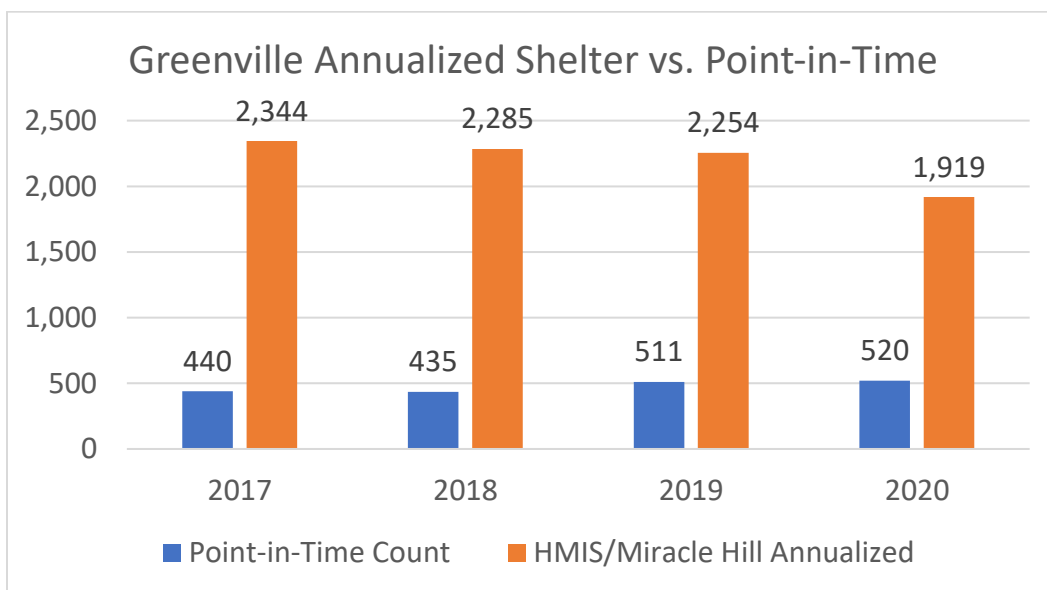
Persons Served by Project Type

Across all four years, the largest percentage of clients received assistance at emergency shelters (77-80% of all persons in each year). The second most frequently utilized project was transitional housing (19-22%). Less than 1% of persons in each year were served at a safe haven. There is only one safe haven project in the Upstate (located in Greenville County). This project has twelve year-round beds and experiences low levels of turn-over.
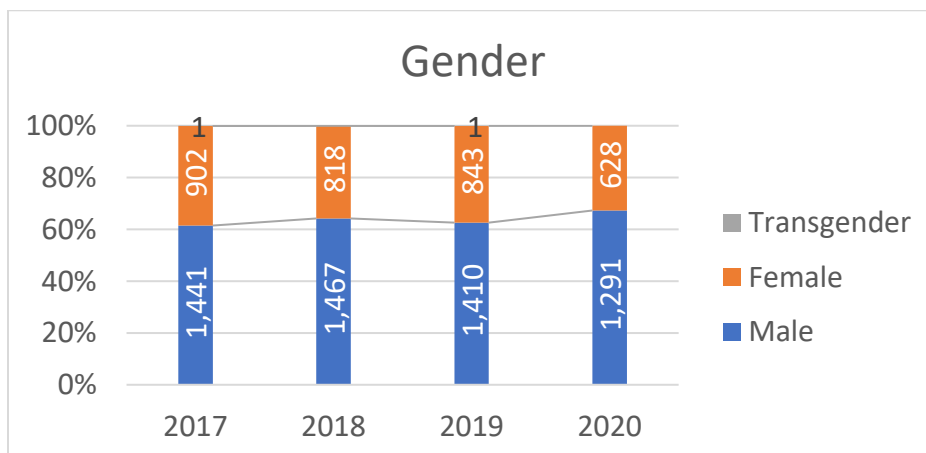
Persons Served by Project Type

Number of Sheltered Persons

Year	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing	Safe Haven
2017	1,858	471	15
2018	1,834	438	13
2019	1,734	505	15
2020	1,484	421	14

Demographic Profile of Persons Served

<u>Gender</u>

In each of the four years studied, approximately two-thirds of the persons receiving shelter services were Male (61-67%), with nearly all the remaining persons identifying as Female (33-38%). One client in 2017 & 2019 reported being transgender.

Of note is the percentage decrease of females receiving sheltered services from 2017 to 2020. In 2017, 38% of the population receiving shelter identified as female. This percentage dropped in subsequent years, ultimately resulting in 33% of the sheltered population identifying as female in 2020. Conversely, the percentage of men in sheltered settings has increased from 2017, when the percentage was 62%, to 67% in 2020.

Gender

| Year	Transgender	Female	Male
2017	1	902	1,441
2018		818	1,467
2019	1	843	1,410
2020		628	1,291

Race

In all four years, the largest percent of persons utilizing sheltered services identified as primarily White (53-55%) with most of the remainder primarily identifying as Black or African American (42-44%). A much smaller percentage of persons identified as Multi-Racial (1-2%). Less than one percent of clients identified as any other primary race categories or refused to answer the question.

If all things were equal, and no inequity existed, we would expect the general population and the homeless population to be similar in racial representation. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Over-representation of Black and African Americans in the homeless population is both a national and local problem. Nationwide, Black and African Americans make up 12% of the total US population, but account for 39% of all persons experiencing homelessness in the United States[2]. Locally, the disproportionate representation is comparable. According to the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) Five Year Estimates, 18% of all persons in Greenville County identified primarily as Black or African American. Contrast that figure with the fact that 42% of the local population experiencing homelessness in 2020 are Black/African American. This means there are over two times the amount of Black/African American persons experiencing homelessness than would be expected compared to the general Greenville County population.

The opposite is found when examining White representation in the homeless population. According to the 2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, 76% of the Greenville County population identified primarily as White. In 2020, 54% of persons experiencing sheltered homelessness identified as White. This discrepancy shows that White persons are underrepresented in the Greenville County homeless population.

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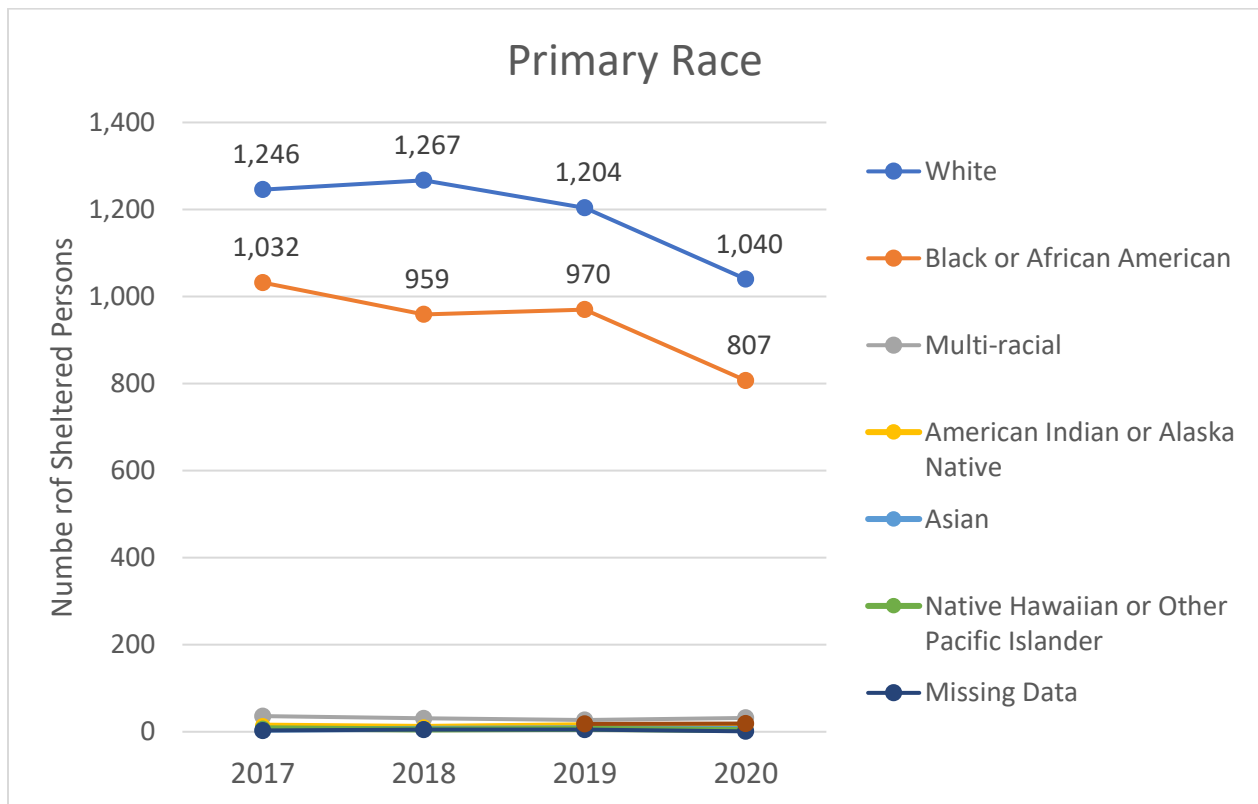
[2] 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress Part 1 – PIT Estimates of Homelessness in the U.S. Retrieved from: https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/6291/2020-ahar-part-1-pit-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/

<u>Ethnicity</u>

Across the four-year period, a small number of persons (between 54-67) and percentage (2-3%) identified as Hispanic/Latino. Nationally, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino persons experiencing homelessness is greater than the percentage of the population overall (23% vs. 16%)[3]. However, in Greenville County, this is not the case; approximately 3% of the population experiencing homelessness identified as Hispanic/Latino, compared to 10% of the overall Greenville County population identifying as Hispanic/Latino.
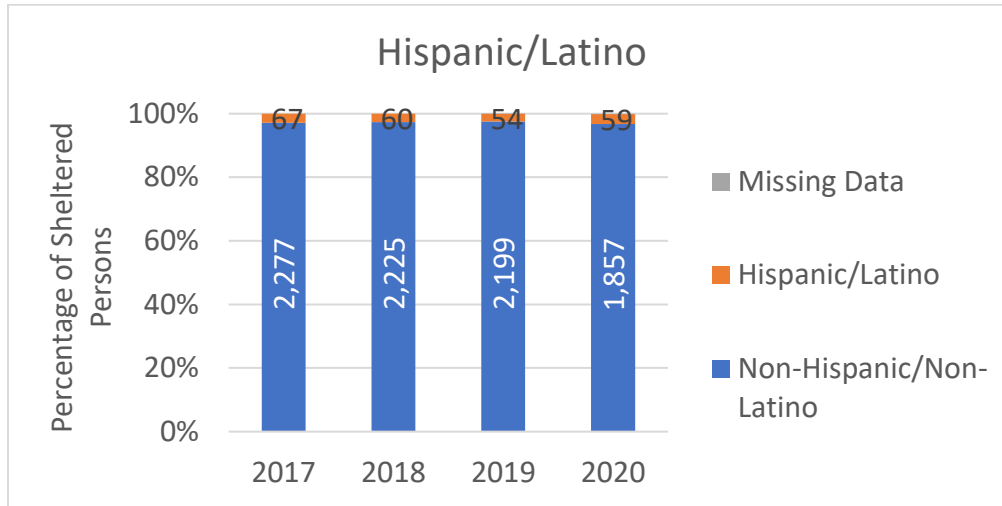

<u>Age</u>

The average age for persons receiving shelter services in Greenville County increased year-over-year from 2017 (38) to 2020 (41). The median age also increased from 39 in 2017 to 42 in 2020.
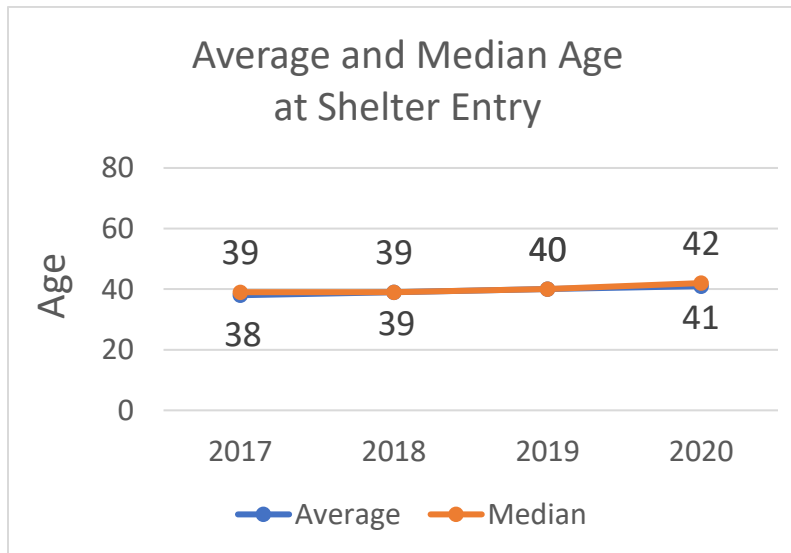
Across all four years, the most common age categories were younger adult to middle-aged persons. Specifically, 25 to 34 (~20%), 35 to 44 (~21%), and 45 to 54 (~22%). A smaller, but still sizable percentage of persons were 55

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[3] Idib.

years and older – between 11-15% were 55 to 61; between 4-9% were 62 and older. Particularly concerning is the doubling of the percentage of sheltered persons 62+ from 2017 (4%) to 2020 (9%).
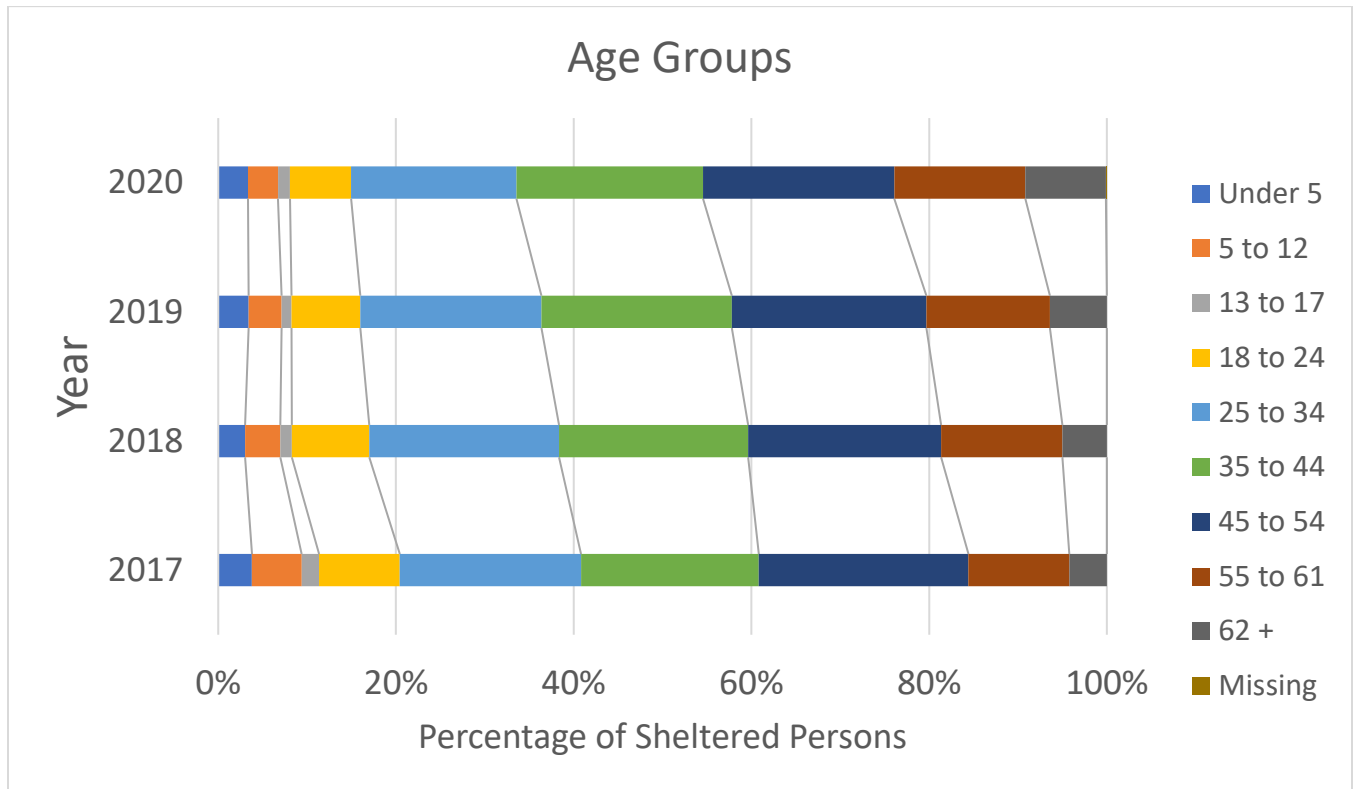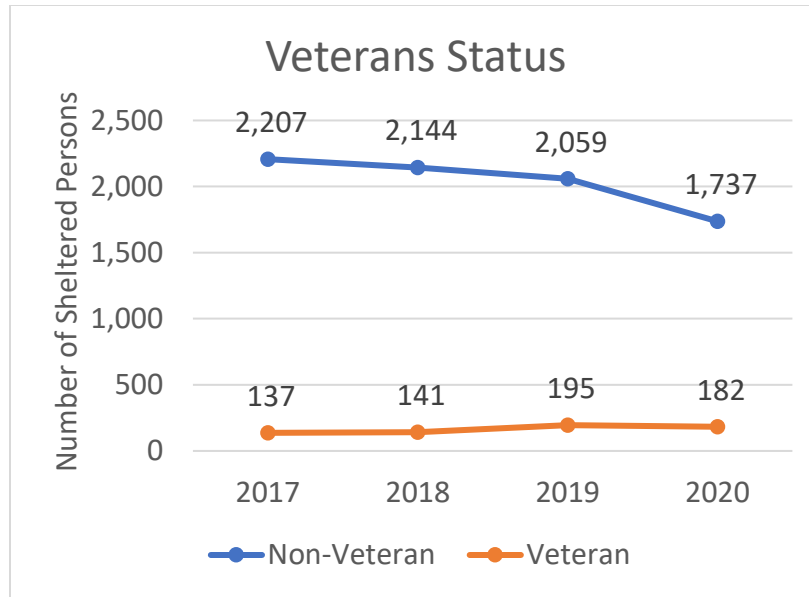
Age Groups

The smallest age groupings were youth 13 to 17 (1-2%) and children under 5 (3-4%). Cumulatively, youth under 18 consistently comprise around 10% of the sheltered population every year. However, according to the broader definition of homelessness used by the Department of Education (which includes children residing in hotels/motels or living with family/friends), 6,201 school aged children were experiencing homelessness in the Upstate of South Carolina during the 2018-2019 academic year[4].
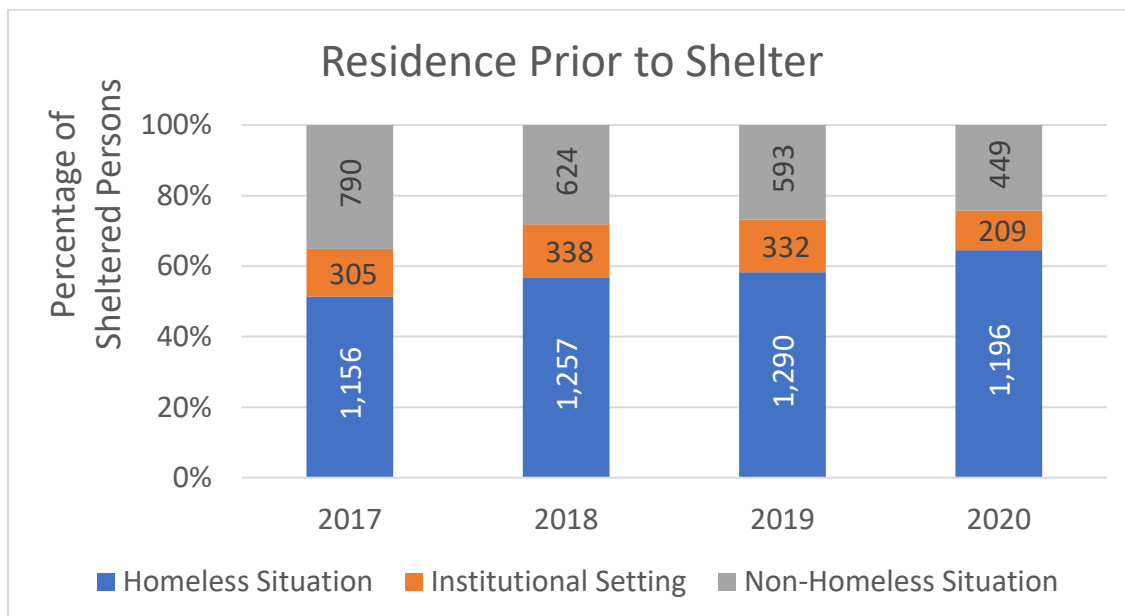
Veteran Status

All persons entering shelter are asked if they are a Veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces. The client's answer to this question is self-reported and is not universally required to be verified by shelter staff. With this caveat in mind, in all four years, less than one-in-ten persons experiencing sheltered homelessness self-reported that they are a Veteran. This percentage varied from 6% in 2017 to 9% in 2020. This percentage increase is likely due to the opening of additional transitional housing opportunities in Greenville for Veterans in 2019 and 2020.

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[4] 2020 South Carolina State of Homelessness Report. Retrieved from:
https://www.schomeless.org/resources/reports/2020-south-carolina-state-of-homelessness-report/

Veterans Status

Number of Sheltered Persons

| Year	Non-Veteran	Veteran
2017	2,207	137
2018	2,144	141
2019	2,059	195
2020	1,737	182

Residence Prior to Project Entry

In all four years, most persons who received shelter services in Greenville were entering from a literal homeless situation – meaning before they entered shelter, they were residing in a place not meant for habitation, another emergency shelter, or interim/transitional housing. The percentage of persons who entered a shelter setting from a literal homeless situation increased year-over-year from 2017 (51%) to 2020 (65%). Conversely, the percentage of persons entering from a non-homeless situation decreased every year from 2017 (35%) to 2020 (24%). These data indicate shelters are increasingly serving those who are, at the time of entry into the shelter, actively experiencing literal homelessness. A smaller, yet consistent percentage of persons (11-15%) were entering shelter from an institutional setting such as a hospital, substance abuse facility, jail, or psychiatric facility.

Residence Prior to Shelter

Percentage of Sheltered Persons

Year	Homeless Situation	Institutional Setting	Non-Homeless Situation
2017	1,156	305	790
2018	1,257	338	624
2019	1,290	332	593
2020	1,196	209	449

Among those entering shelter from a literal homeless situation, an increasingly larger percentage of persons were entering from a place not meant for habitation (such as living on the streets, in an encampment, in vehicles, in

abandoned buildings, or other unsheltered situation). This percentage has increased consecutively across the four years from 57% in 2017 to 70% in 2020. This increase in unsheltered persons entering shelter is mirrored by a corresponding percentage decrease in previously sheltered persons entering another sheltered setting from 2017 (39%) to 2020 (27%).

Type of Prior Homeless Situation
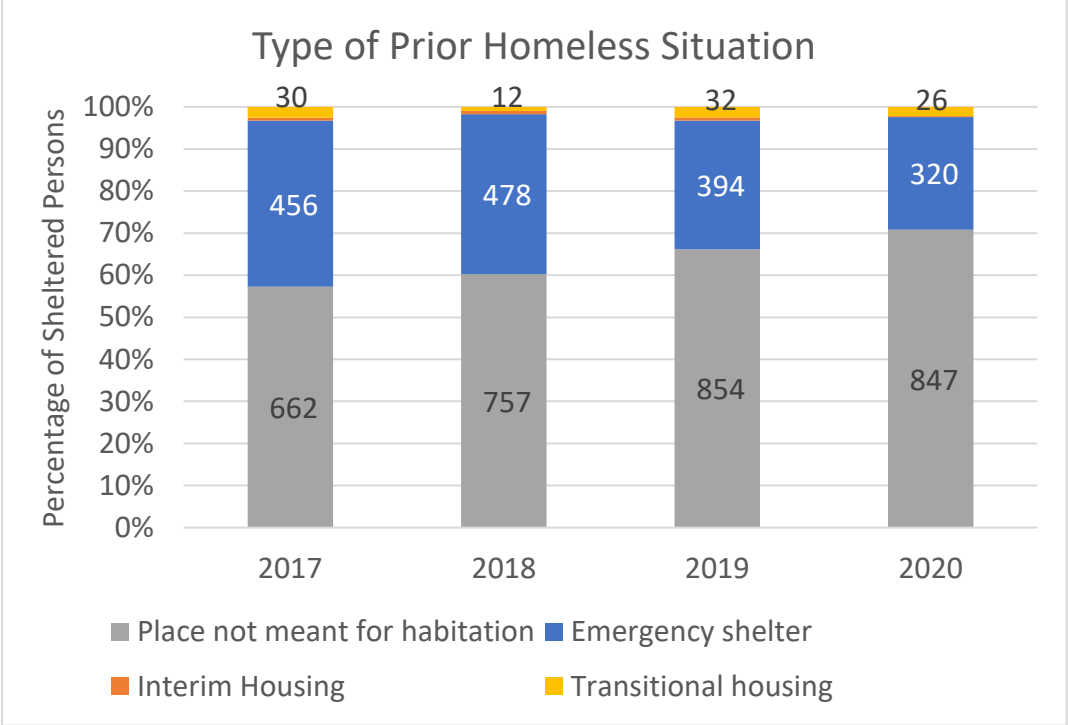

Exit Destinations

Exiting residents to stable housing is a primary goal of shelter providers. Unfortunately, residents often leave shelter without communicating where they are exiting to. This causes shelter staff to not know a definitive exit destination and subsequently record the destination as missing or unknown. This explains why across all four study years one-in-two persons who exited shelter exited to an unknown destination (48% in 2017, 58% in 2018, 56% in 2019, and 59% in 2020).

When those who exited to "Unknown Destinations" are removed from the analysis, the data reveals that a high percentage of remaining shelter residents whose exit destination is known exited to a "Positive Destination" (between 71-84%, depending on the year). For this analysis, a positive destination is defined as a non-homeless situation, not necessarily a long-term permanent housing solution. A smaller percentage of persons exit to literal homeless destinations (12-22%) or institutional settings (4-6%). There are fluctuations in the data throughout the four years that warrant further investigation.

Exit Destinations*

*Residents with unknown exit destinations have been excluded from this analysis.
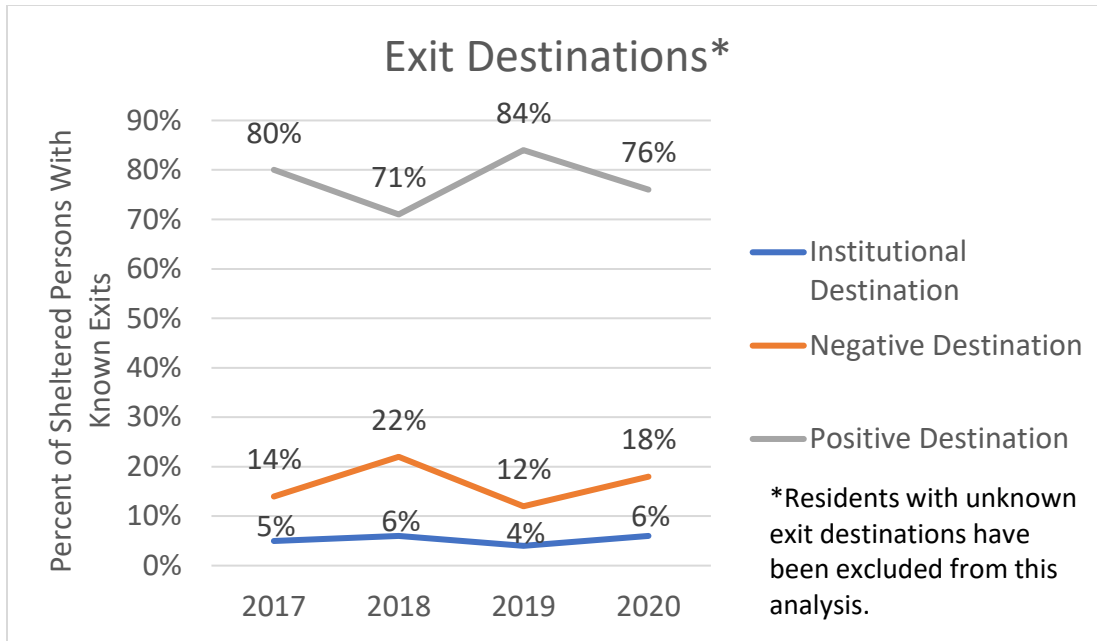
Exit Destination by Length of Enrollment

There appears to be a relationship between the length of time a resident stays in shelter and their eventual exit destination (positive, negative, institutional, or unknown). For example, persons who exited to positive destinations were more likely to remain in shelter for longer timeframes than those who exited to negative, institutional, and unknown destinations. In all four years, only 25-30% of persons exiting to positive destinations exited shelter in the first month. Conversely, between 51% to 65% of those who eventually exited to homelessness exited shelter during the first month (64%-74% for institutional exiters). Unsurprisingly, a similar percentage of persons who exited to unknown destinations exited within the first month of their shelter stay (55%-63%).
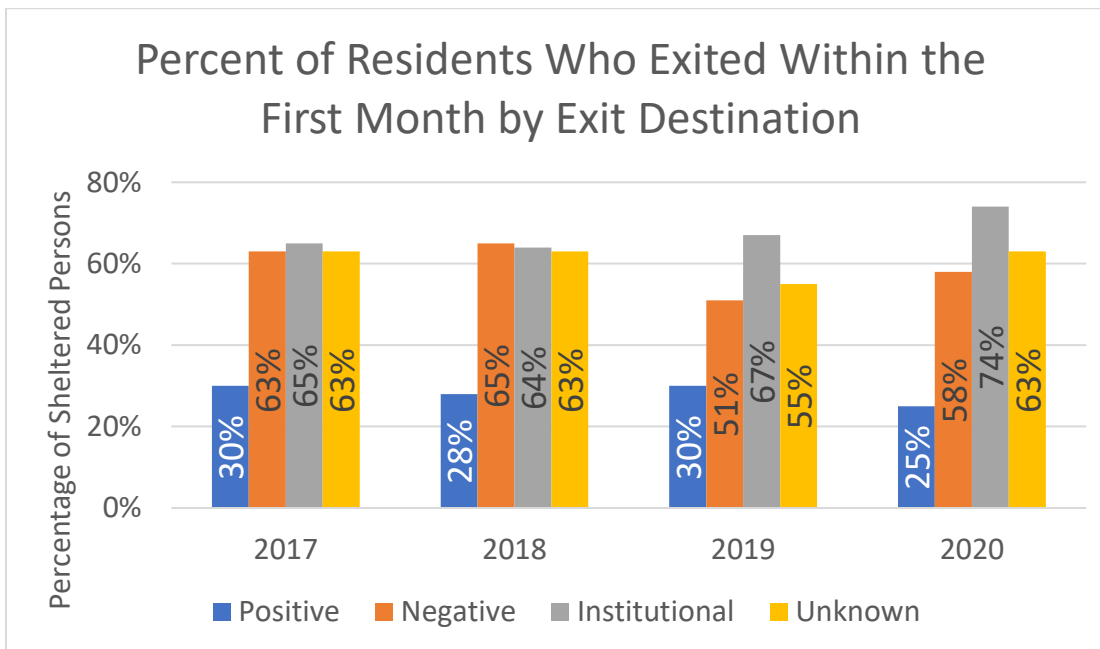
While shorter-term shelter stays are always the goal, having a more extended stay seems to result in more consistently positive outcomes among shelter residents. Most persons experiencing homelessness have experienced poverty and trauma. Both often require extended amounts of time and concerted engagement with case managers/social workers to overcome. During longer shelter stays, persons have more time to work with shelter staff/social workers to overcome these barriers, develop goals, and chart an exit-plan to resolve their experience of homelessness. While shelters are understandably leery of long-term shelter stays, most persons seeking the stabilization shelters provided choose to remain engaged with shelters for longer than a month. These longer stays have been shown to equate to more consistently positive exits from shelter.

One example of this relationship is the differing median length of stay in shelter based on eventual exit destination. The median was utilized to control for outliers, such as very long and very short shelter stays. Persons eventually exiting to positive destinations resided at shelters between 71 to 107 days across all four years. The median length of stay in shelter did not vary widely between residents who exited to negative, institutional, and unknown destinations – persons exiting to these destinations tended to have much shorter stays (<1 month) in shelter than persons who exited to positive destinations. Of note is the increase in days spent in shelter in 2020 by persons who exited to positive destinations. This is likely correlated to the economic and housing-related impacts of COVID-19 that necessitated a longer-term shelter stay.
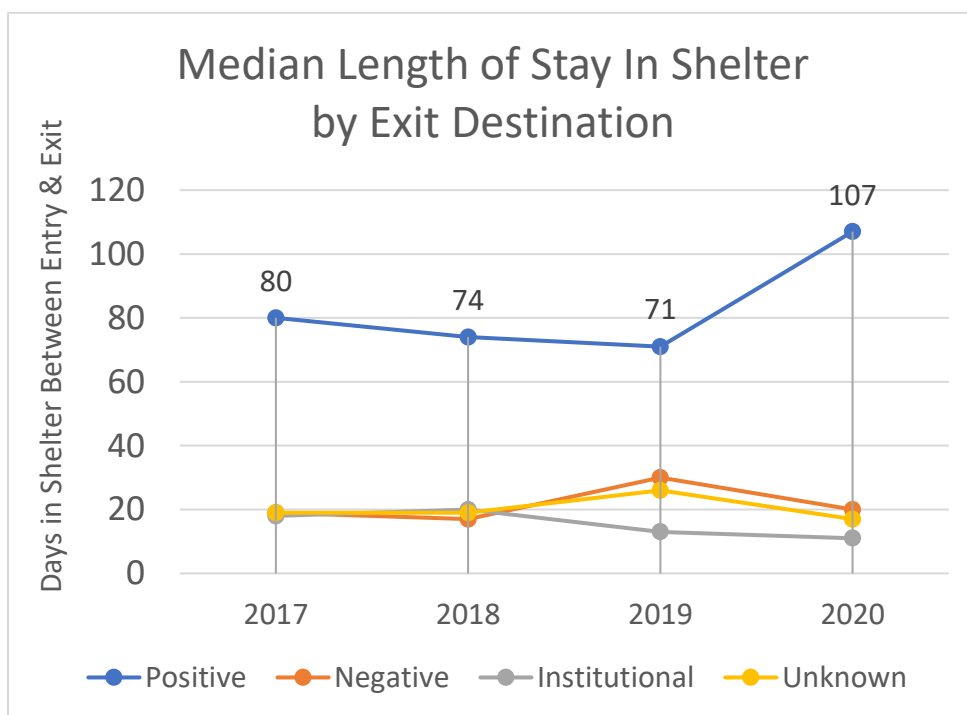
Income

Having access to regular and sufficient income is a primary barrier faced by persons experiencing sheltered homelessness. Across all four reporting years, approximately three-in-four adults (18+) reported no income when they entered the sheltered program. While there were fluctuations between the years, this percentage of persons reporting no income remained relatively stable.
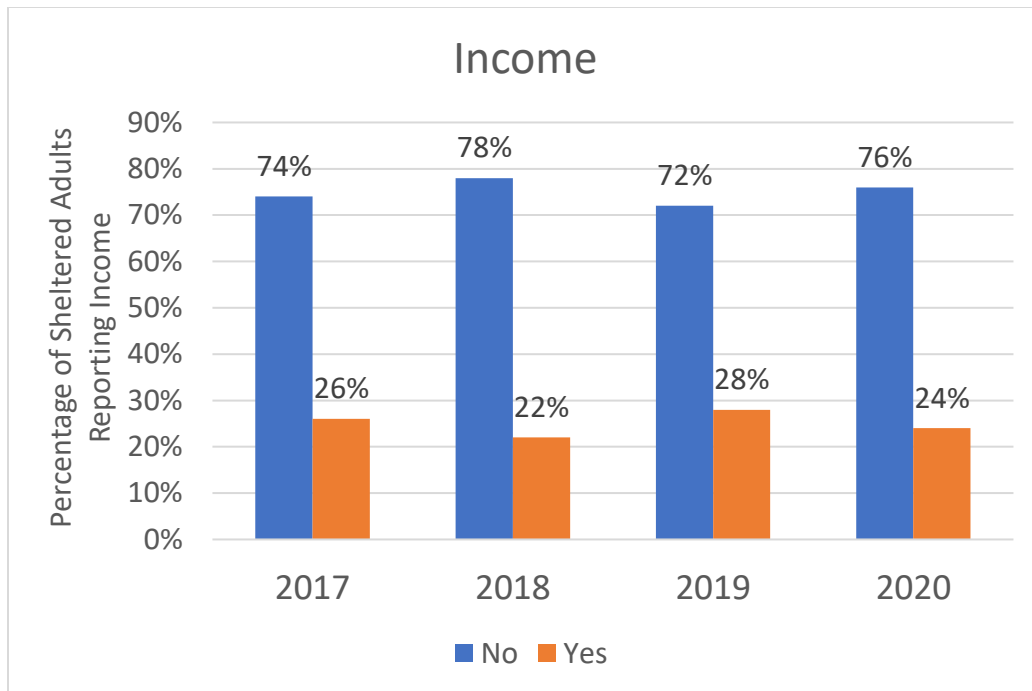
Income

In 2020, among all adults (18+), including those who reported no income, the average monthly income was $277.40. When those reporting no income were removed from the calculation, the average monthly amount of income for adults (18+) was $1,141.66. While this amount is greater than what was identified in previous years, it is not enough to afford fair market rent (FMR) while not becoming severely rent-burdened (defined as paying >50% of income towards rent). For reference, the 2020 FMR for a one-bedroom apartment in Greenville is $740.
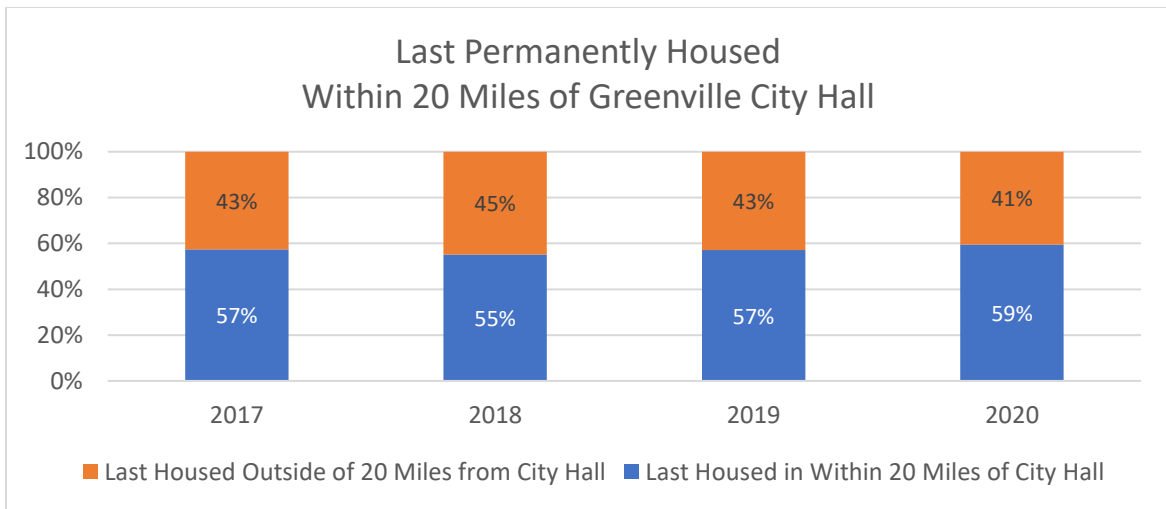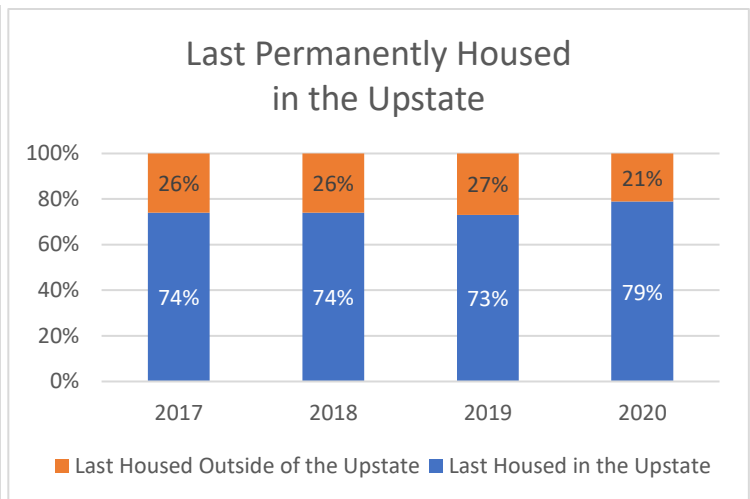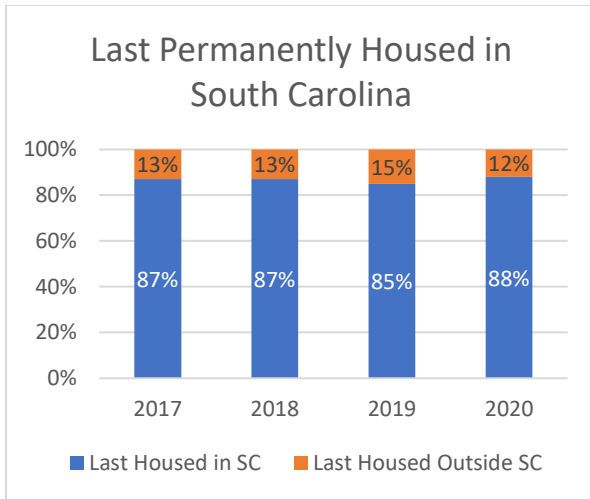
Even for the fortunate 25% of adults who reported income, these individuals would have to dedicate 65% of their income towards a rental property, leaving only 35% to cover all other essential expenses such as food, clothing, transportation, childcare, and medication.

This barrier to exiting homelessness is particularly challenging for single adults living on fixed income (SSI and SSDI). This underscores the importance of developing more very-low income and subsidized housing near core amenities such as public transportation, employment opportunities, social services, and healthcare. Other solutions include exploring additional shared-housing options, and the expansion of job training programs to increase the earning potential of persons experiencing homelessness.

Map of Last Permanent Address

Virtually all persons currently experiencing homelessness were at one time in their lives permanently housed. To explore where persons receiving shelter services were last housed, upon shelter entry residents were asked for the zip code of where they were last permanently housed.

In all four years, between 85-88% of persons who received sheltered services in Greenville County were last permanently housed in South Carolina. Furthermore, 73-79% of Greenville shelter residents reported last being housed in the Upstate Region. Lastly, between 55%-59% were last housed within 20 miles of Greenville City Hall (206 South Main Street) in downtown Greenville.

Last Permanently Housed in South Carolina

Year	Last Housed in SC	Last Housed Outside SC
2017	87%	13%
2018	87%	13%
2019	85%	15%
2020	88%	12%

Last Permanently Housed in the Upstate

Year	Last Housed in the Upstate	Last Housed Outside of the Upstate
2017	74%	26%
2018	74%	26%
2019	73%	27%
2020	79%	21%

Last Permanently Housed Within 20 Miles of Greenville City Hall

| Year	Last Housed in Within 20 Miles of City Hall	Last Housed Outside of 20 Miles from City Hall
2017	57%	43%
2018	55%	45%
2019	57%	43%
2020	59%	41%

The location of last permanent address is also depicted in the two maps on the following page. These maps were generated using the zip codes of last permanent housing for 2020 Greenville County sheltered clients to examine where they were last housed before their current experience of homelessness.

The maps demonstrate visually what is already known analytically: the vast majority of persons were last permanently housed in not only South Carolina, but specifically within the Upstate. The darker the region of the maps, the higher the density of persons who were last permanently housed in that specific zip code. In the South Carolina map, the highest density of persons was last permanently housed in the zip codes surrounding Greenville County (29605, 29611, 29609, 29601, etc…).

These maps provide evidence against a prevailing belief that the people receiving homeless services are not originally from the local area. Instead, the opposite conclusion was reached; the overwhelming majority of persons receiving shelter services in Greenville County were last permanently housed in the local area. Homelessness in Greenville County appears to be home-grown. Local solutions are needed to combat this local problem.
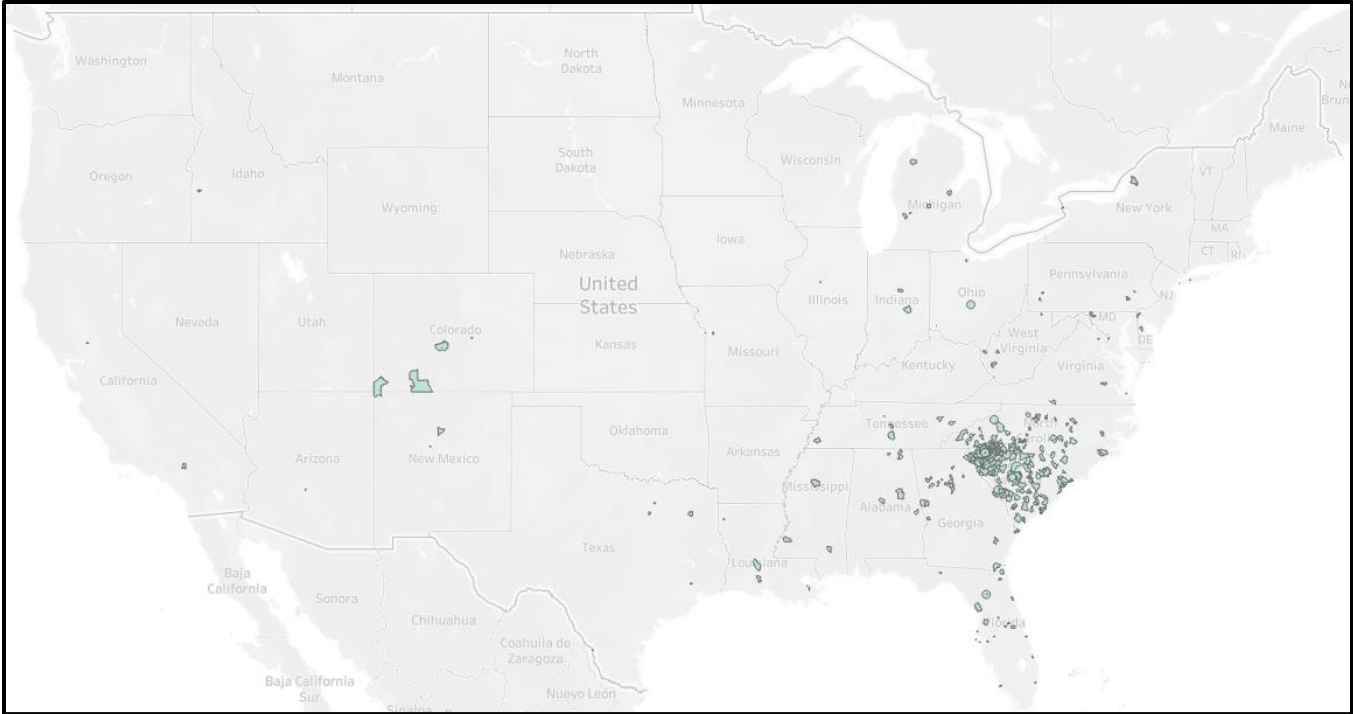
2020 Greenville County Client Data for Zip Code of Last Permanent Address – United States
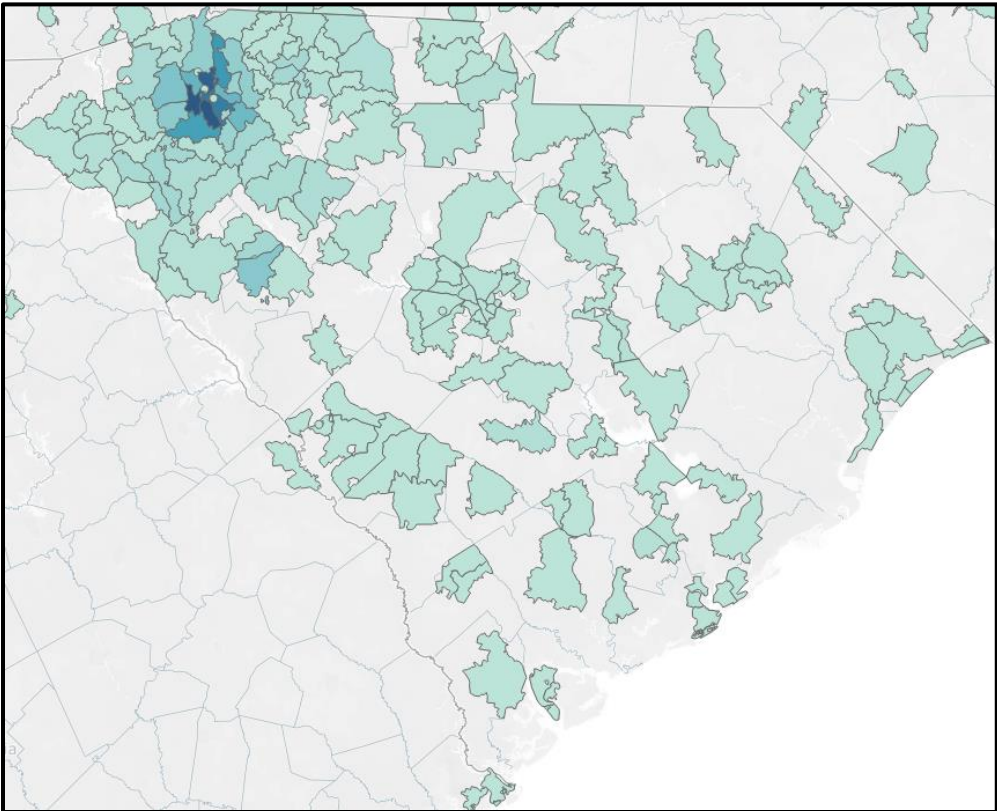
2020 Greenville County Client Data for Zip Code of Last Permanent Address – South Carolina

Conclusions

This report builds upon the previously published *Data Brief – Sheltered Homelessness in the Upstate of South Carolina from 2017 to 2020* produced by the Upstate Continuum of Care. The key difference between the two reports is the original *Data Brief* covers findings from throughout the 13 counties of the Upstate Continuum of Care, whereas the majority of this report hones the data down specifically to Greenville County. There is a great deal of similarity between the CoC-wide and Greenville-centric reports. This is because in all four years two-thirds of clients who received shelter assistance throughout the CoC received shelter services in Greenville County, yielding an overall sample heavily influence by data from clients who were served in Greenville County.

While much has changed over the past four years, many of the original findings remain as true today as they were in 2017. Local shelters continue to provide valued stabilization services for thousands of persons every year. While there was a decline in persons experiencing sheltered homeless from 2019 to 2020, the total count of persons experiencing sheltered homelessness in Greenville County continues to be in excess of 1,900 people annually. This figure, while lower due to a variety of COVID-related reasons, remains a much more holistic picture of sheltered homelessness in Greenville County than can be provided by any other stand-alone data source or existing report.

Across all four years, the majority of people receiving shelter services are male and trending older. Black and African Americans continue to be over-represented in the homeless population compared to what would be expected in the general population, highlighting societal inequities that appear to be driving a higher percentage of Black and African Americans towards an experience of homelessness compared to Whites.

Case management and client-staff interaction again appear to be related to successful exits from shelter. Data across all four years indicate persons exiting to positive destinations tended to stay longer in shelter compared to those exiting to non-homeless, institutional, or unknown settings. Ideally, shelter stays would be short and result in quick placement into a non-homeless exit destination. However, barriers to shelter exits (such as the lack of very-low-income housing inventory, high cost of rents, and lack of options for single adults on fixed income) often cause shelter stays to become extended. These barriers are particularly prohibitive for persons in Greenville County where the Fair Market Rent for housing is out-of-reach for most persons experiencing homelessness. Regardless of these reasons for longer shelter stays, data indicate that persons who remained engaged with shelter for longer than a month were much more likely to exit to a non-homeless situation than persons who exited shelter before the first month elapsed.

Another important finding is that shelters continue to struggle documenting the exit destination of over half of persons exiting. Among the persons whose exit destination is known (removing "Unknown Destination" from the analysis), nearly three out of four persons exited to a positive (non-homeless) situation. This high level of positive exits from shelter indicates shelters are largely successful in helping persons who remain engaged with their services to resolve their homelessness.

This report highlighted the continued financial barrier many sheltered persons face to securing stable, independent housing. Across all three years, seven out of ten of adults (18+) at shelter entry did not report income. Even among adults who reported any income (>$0), the total monthly income was only $1,142. Considering the cost of Fair Market Rent ($740 for a one-bedroom apartment) even having the average amount of income would make it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain stable housing, particularly among single adults living on fixed income.

Finally, data presented here combats the conception that persons experiencing homelessness are from "somewhere else." In every year, nearly 90% of the sheltered population reported last being permanently housed in South Carolina. Moreover, three quarters reported last being stably housed in the Upstate and six-in-ten were last housed within 20 miles of Greenville City Hall. These data, and the maps provided, indicate that homelessness in Greenville

County in a home-grown problem; Greenville-area shelters are providing local solutions for local people in need of assistance.

Shelter services, while widespread and clearly effective, are just one solution to ending homelessness. Other critical solutions include: growing the inventory of very low-income subsidized housing, increasing housing-focused case-management/outreach, and preventing the onset of homelessness among at-risk populations through targeted prevention programs.

For more information about the effort to end homelessness in the Upstate of South Carolina, please visit the Upstate Continuum of Care website: www.upstatecoc.org. For more information about the comprehensive shelter and transitional housing programs offered by Miracle Hill Ministries, please visit: www.miraclehill.org.

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