

Dorchester Temporary Shelter

NEWSLETTER

December 2025

"Compassion starts when we see the humanity in everyone, regardless of their circumstances." – Unknown

Drivers of Homelessness in Dorchester by Patti Sanner

Matthew Desmond, a Pulitzer Prize winning sociologist steeped in experience with matters of poverty, wrote, "America is supposed to be a place where you can better yourself, your family, and your community. But this is only possible if you have a stable home." Ask anyone in Dorchester County social services what brings the greatest anxiety in their work and you are likely to hear stories about social and economic conditions that are threatening housing stability. Specifically, Dorchester Temporary Shelter (DTS) staff and



Delmarva Community Services (DCS) case managers can so easily see their faces as they tell their stories -- the father asking for shelter for he and his 13-year-old son, the older person now on a fixed income of disability and Social Security who cannot keep up with expenses including rent, the young man fighting the demons of his social trauma and just trying to make it to work every day, or the young mother of three children looking nightly for safe shelter, and the many who are addicted, whether to legal or illegal substances -- these and many other stories point to deep social needs in Dorchester County and the broader Mid Shore community.

Rising rates of homelessness, especially for seniors and children, are on the radar of Maryland county managers as reported on July 28, 2025, in the Maryland Association of Counties [MACo] Conduit Report.^[i] Strategies for moving vulnerable populations into stable, long-term housing was a focus of a panel of experts at the August 2025 MACo Summer Conference in Ocean City. This *Conduit Report* reiterates a concern highlighted by a Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) report^[ii] that noted an alarming rate of older adults facing homelessness. Even Governor Wes Moore, in his launch on 7/30/2025 of the Longevity Ready Maryland initiative, recognized "Maryland's older population growing faster than the national average" and subsequently noting concern that "reductions or elimination of ... **social care programs will have a cascading effect, placing increased pressure on older, low-income Marylanders' ability to remain healthy, safely housed, and living in the**

community.” Dorchester County is no exception to these rising rates of homelessness among older adults and children. Dorchester Public Schools have noted a three-fold increase in the number of homeless students since 2020, noting 179 homeless students at the beginning of the last school year, as reported by the Maryland State Department of Education. The January 2025 National Point-in-Time (PIT) Count conducted by lead agencies in each county (DCS in Dorchester) and as required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), noted a 187% increase in Dorchester’s homeless: 71 individuals as the most accurate count available on the night when the survey was conducted. Although likely a significant undercount, it demonstrates the increase in homelessness and that Dorchester County has the highest percentage (36%) of the total homeless (179) in the five counties of the Mid-Shore (Kent, Queen Anne’s, Talbot, Caroline, and Dorchester).

Adults and families in Dorchester are under economic strain. Hunger statistics for Dorchester reflect a rising trend in the percentage of students receiving free and reduced meals, reported in 2023-24 at 89%. Based on ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) county level data, roughly 50% of Dorchester County households have been unable to afford survival basics, including housing costs, since the pandemic. Housing market analysis reports find that almost 33% of households in Dorchester County are renters, with that number rising to almost 66% of households as renters when focused on Cambridge alone. Evidence also suggests that the number of low-income seniors in Dorchester, and more specifically Cambridge, is rising concurrently with a rental market where low and or moderately affordable rental units are disappearing.

There are many stories of people who are struggling and homeless in Dorchester County, but these individual stories point to a larger narrative in our county about a stagnant housing and rental market. Even people who would normally be housed become homeless when affordable housing is not available for them. Mid-Shore Regional data in HUD’s Housing Inventory Count reports since 2021 demonstrate instability and insufficiency of limited-income housing options in Dorchester County. A 2025 Dorchester County Data Resource Guide, prepared by Dorchester’s Local Management Board, reports that fair market rents for efficiencies through four-bedroom apartments have risen at least 23% since 2022. Rising rents and reduced housing availability is significantly hampering the ability for Dorchester shelters, including DTS’ temporary shelter, to move individuals and families into more permanent housing. As reported in the LMB Resource Guide, “The decrease in numbers served annually indicates that those in shelter were in shelter for longer periods of time without moving

into permanent housing. Anecdotally, all [*Dorchester County*] shelters indicate growing waiting lists and less mobility within their shelter census.” Growing waiting lists for Dorchester’s three homeless shelters – a men’s shelter in Cambridge, a family shelter in Hurlock, and the DTS overnight shelter -- are evidence of Dorchester’s clogged housing arteries and a sign of insufficient shelter capacity.

Beyond this first newsletter, DTS will continue to advocate on matters impacting individuals, seniors and families whose limited income has exposed them to the most detrimental loss of a secure, safe home. DTS will report through the coming winter months how funding received from Dorchester County’s 2025 Community Reinvestment and Recovery Funds will have been used to shelter families in contracted hotel space. DTS will help connect how the same funding ensured the stability and training of shelter staff and how their shelter work links to case management support. And as important, DTS will continue to reach out to link community partners to fill gaps and provide the safety net to those facing homelessness need. The more connected the Dorchester community remains on this matter, the more we can rise to find and fund solutions.

Shelter Capacity and Rehousing Success by Valerie Davis

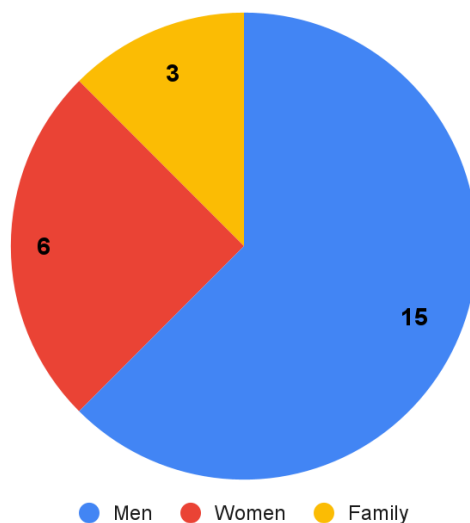


The cooler weather has caused the shelter numbers to increase; we were expecting this in December, not early November. The shelter has reached beyond its capacity over the past month. We have six beds for women and these have been full since October. In terms of the 15 beds for men, we have been at near capacity since October. DTS is actively working with three single adults who cannot be accommodated due to space limitations. They frequently have dinner at the shelter and come for coffee in the morning but, at this point, we cannot physically accommodate them as guests or meet their special needs. A growing concern, as colder weather is arriving, is that almost a third of our adults are seniors. The only family room in the shelter has been occupied by a family consisting of one father and two minor children. We were unable to accommodate four families seeking shelter in November because there was no space. At least now that it is December, funds will be used to shelter up to eight families in overflow motel space. Even with increased capacity, we fear it will not meet demand.

The ultimate goal of the temporary shelter is to find appropriate permanent housing. Over the last three months we've rehoused nine people while over the last seven months we've rehoused a total of 31 people! For instance, in November we rehoused a family who had been homeless since January 2025. Two women and five men are on the list for Permanent Supportive Housing after qualifying for federal housing funds. One of the men is in the process of being housed as of late November. Sometimes housing comes by reuniting individuals and families with extended family. We relocated a mother with her newborn child to Indiana after temporarily sheltering this family. We helped a guest, after discharge from a hospital, return to Arizona. Sometimes success comes when individuals recognize they are ready to enter a rehab facility and we are there to help - and recently we helped two take this step.

Figure 1. Total average November temporary occupancy increased to 25 from an average of 21 in October.

Average Occupancy in November



Community Provides Meals for Shelter by Mary-Angela Martin

Thanks to all of our wonderful donors, the Dorchester Temporary Shelter is able to serve approximately 750 meals a month to our shelter guests. WOW!!! 30 churches, 3 sororities, 1 fraternity, 6 community organizations, and a dozen individuals all make this happen. THANK YOU!!! From your numerous kitchens our guests have enjoyed fried chicken, shepherd's pie, baked ziti, mini meatloaves wrapped in bacon, roast turkey, chicken pot pies, and many more hearty meals. If you are unsure how much food to prepare, it is always best to err on the side of too much. Our guests are VERY hungry after being outdoors for ten hours and dinner is definitely the biggest meal they will get all day. We love leftovers and nothing will ever go to waste. If you bring rolls or bread, there is no need to bring butter or margarine. There is plenty in the refrigerator. Fresh fruit, apples, oranges, and bananas, is always appreciated and can be brought in lieu of dessert. Thanks too to those groups who bring breakfast items for the next day: granola bars, frozen breakfast sandwiches, pastries, and fruit. These are so appreciated as it is a long day from when the shelter closes at 8 am to when it re-opens at 6 pm. As I have shared with most of you, our guests LOVE milk so thanks for making that last-minute trip to pick up those cold gallons!



Many of you receiving this newsletter are on the "motel" calendar and will start providing meals to those families in December. Your willingness to help with this special need is so appreciated. Hopefully having separate teams prepare meals for shelter guests and motel guests will lessen the burden for each group.

May God bless each and every one of you as your food blesses our vulnerable brothers and sisters.

Preparing for Winter Months by Hannah Mayhew BSN, RN, Dorchester County Health Department



To support cold weather preparedness activities associated with a county-wide extreme temperature advisory group, the Dorchester County Health Department CARES Team has partnered with the Dorchester Temporary Shelter to host a Winter Supply Drive for some of the most vulnerable community members. Collected supplies are intended for the guests at the Dorchester Temporary Shelter and our unsheltered community members.

Cold weather supplies most needed by the shelter guests and our larger unhoused community includes gloves, winter coats, overboots, warm socks, and warm winter hats for both adults and children. For the drive, we are looking to collect new or gently used items. We kindly request gently used items be cleaned prior to donation. Additional warming supplies such as hand warmers, cold weather sleeping bags, and outdoor blankets will also be graciously accepted.

For those of you who may be interested in donating supplies, there are tall white donation boxes at the following locations: Front lobby of the Dorchester County Health Department (627 Race Street in Cambridge), Dorchester Chamber of Commerce (306 High St, Cambridge), Cambridge City Hall (307 Gay St, Cambridge), St Andrew's Episcopal Church (303 S Main St, Hurlock), the Garden Church (900 Peachblossom Ave, Cambridge) as well as several local fraternal organizations. Boxes will be emptied and items distributed to those who need it the most as they are received. DCHD will be collecting supplies from November 2025 through February 2026.

Spearheaded by Barbara Coleman, local textile artists (quilters, knitting circles, those who crochet) have started to create handmade hats and blankets to give our community members a little extra love and warmth this season.

Please note during the frigid days where the Dorchester County Extreme Cold Plan is activated, a Dorchester County Health Dept Extreme Cold Outreach Team will work to distribute warming supplies to unsheltered folks. If you are interested in joining those outreach efforts, please contact Hannah Mayhew at hannah.mayhew@maryland.gov. Warming supplies (blankets, hand warmers, and gloves) have also been pre-positioned at Dorchester Public Library branches in Hurlock and Cambridge for this same priority population.

Shelter Needs

Like most of us, the shelter is gearing up for the cold and flu season. Are you able to help us re-stock our medicine cabinet? Donations of any of the following would be greatly appreciated:

cough medicine	ibuprofen	Preparation H
cold medicine	Tylenol	hydrocortisone cream
sore throat lozenges/cough drops	Immodium/Pepto-Bismol/Kaopectate	triple antibiotic ointment
tissues	Miralax/Dulcolax	Athlete's foot cream
Gauze pads and tape	Tums	

A Word from DTS President, Eric Sanner

Now is a perfect opportunity for us to recognize and thank the community and partner service organizations who have graciously stepped forward to meet the needs of our most vulnerable unhoused neighbors this past year. Only a year ago, it was clear there was going to be no emergency homeless shelter in Cambridge. A coalition of Dorchester citizens rose to fill the void and engaged partner social service organizations to build a truly community-based initiative to shelter some of the homeless in our

community. Between December 2024 and March 2025, we sheltered approximately 50-60 individuals and families at the shelter on Washington Street and in local motel rooms. With each following month, we remained open sheltering individuals and families to the full capacity of the shelter – 15 men, 7 women and one family. We sincerely appreciated the confidence the Dorchester County Council had in selecting DTS as one recipient of the 2025 Community Reinvestment and Recovery Funds. Those funds ensured shelter staff, our frontline individuals working from dusk to dawn, became employees instead of contract workers. Those funds will also pay for hotel rooms this Winter to shelter families. We wish we could say that we met the needs of all the homeless in our community, but we know that is far from the truth. We regularly turn away people including women, seniors and families because of the limited capacity of the shelter building. Moreover, there are still many more who are without safe housing in our community. Yet, much has been accomplished, and lives have been saved because of caring people in our community.



Helping our unhoused neighbors has been made possible by a community of individuals, faith communities, fraternal and community organizations, City of Cambridge, County of Dorchester, Delmarva Community Services, Salvation Army and Mid Shore Behavioral Health.

Nearly every night for the last year individuals or groups have brought a hot meal and a friendly smile to our shelter guests. That generosity means so much to the wellbeing and dignity of our guests while allowing us to use our limited funds to pay our caring staff and fund motel rooms for overflow shelter.

Delmarva Community Services (DCS) has provided DTS needed fiscal services. DCS also provides critical case management services for each of our guests to ensure they get the support they need for rehousing, substance abuse, mental health or other unique needs.

Salvation Army has donated the use of their building as well as monthly utilities for the last year.

Mid Shore Behavioral Health serves as the lead agency for the five-county Continuum

of Care (CoC) known as the Mid Shore Roundtable on Homelessness. The Roundtable applies yearly for funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide permanent supportive housing for individuals and families who are homeless. This assistance and the efforts of DCS have led to the successful rehousing of 31 individuals and families.

Thanks to our community, the Dorchester Temporary Shelter has successfully provided critical food and shelter for the last 12 months and we intend to carry on through the coming winter months.

We give thanks to all of you.



Partners in Giving Volunteers (L-R): Katie Day, Cathy Keller, Karen Tecce, Mary-Angela Martin, and Vicki Harris