

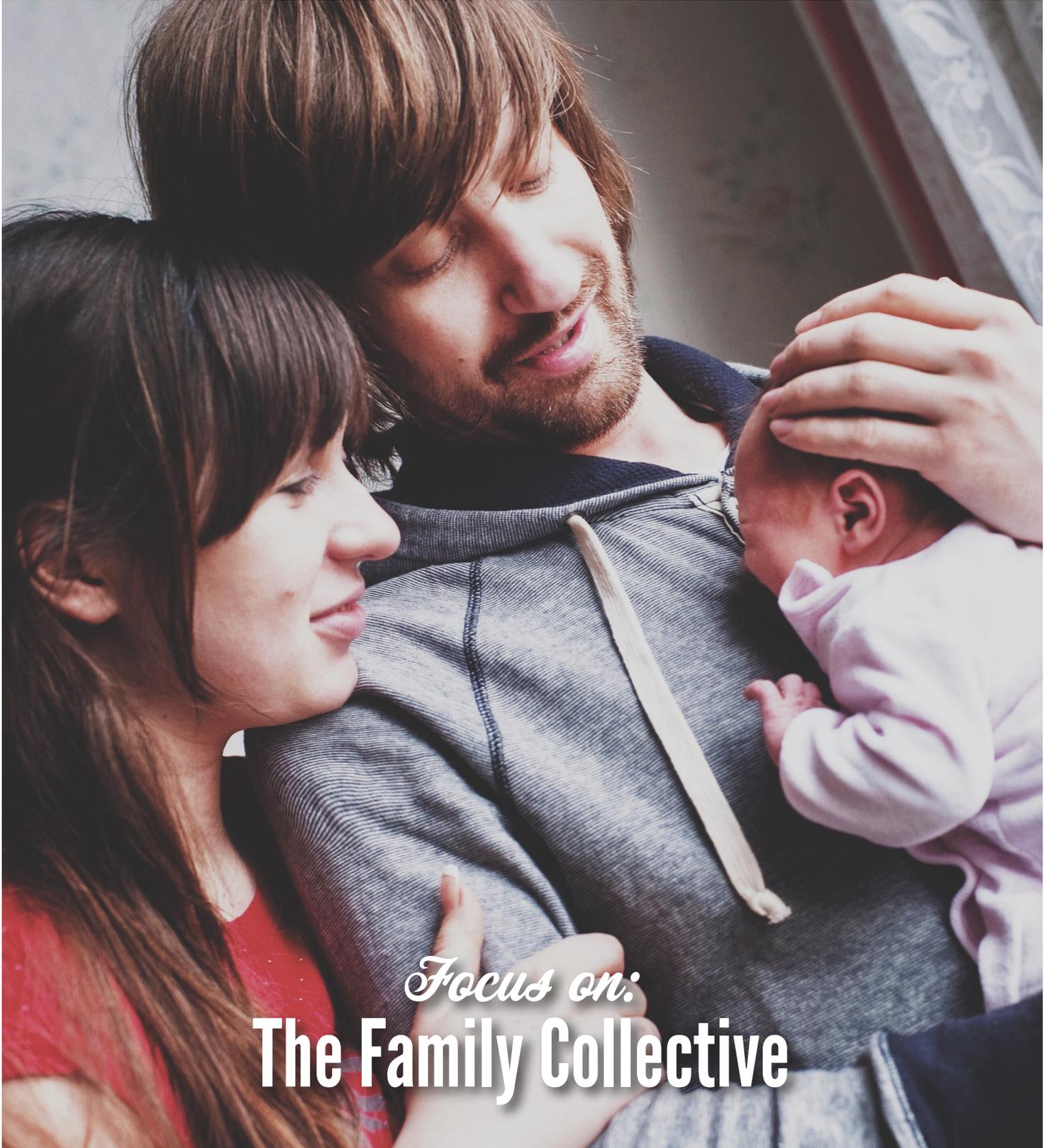


United Way
of Greater Nashville

LEADERS UNITED

Quarterly

FALL
2020



Focus on:
The Family Collective

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Every child deserves a place to call home. But the reality is: In a thriving city like Nashville, more than 3,000 students don't; they live in cars, shelters and on friend's couches.

Among the societal inequities exposed by COVID-19, those who cannot afford adequate, safe or affordable housing are among the most vulnerable.

Home is more than just a place of shelter—where we live influences every aspect of our lives. Where we live influences our identity, the quality and quantity of public services received, social networks, exposure to crime and violence, physical distance and isolation, and other contextual factors that are supportive of physical and emotional well-being.

The impact that homelessness can have on kids and families—our community as a whole—is devastating.

When children are homeless, they experience stress, trauma, academic disruptions and behavioral issues. These challenges are further complicated by the parents' experience of stress, trauma and mental health issues. The impact of family homelessness on community well-being demands that we think about the conditions that are holding this problem in place.

The Family Collective is working to rebuild systems of support in our community to put an end to family homelessness. But how?

We're fostering conversations with our partners and creating infrastructure that will establish an honest and clear view of the present and shape a vision for the future.

There is no one organization or single solution that will address these systemic barriers alone. We know that the work we pursue is not a single program, but



a myriad of programs, services and strategies built around a model that creates the conditions for a stronger system of support for families. We work with a cross sector group of agencies that are committed to an approach that values the lived experience of families and service providers, invests in a continuous process of learning, and creates 'healthy' systems in which people are able to coordinate and collaborate more effectively.

These commitments will lead us to collectively scale Rapid Re-housing, create permanent supportive housing for families with high barriers, seek to keep families housed, connect families to quality childcare, higher education and career pathways, and build social capital so that families can have a safe space to set goals.

This means collectively acknowledging challenges that have plagued our systems for many years—systemic racism, high-barrier shelters and programs, nonprofit silos and more.

WHAT ARE WE DOING TO HELP?

United Way of Greater Nashville works with partners throughout the community working to move people off the streets and out of homelessness for good.

In 2014, we launched The Family Collective, originally called the Family Empowerment Program, to address homelessness in our city, connect families to sustainable opportunities and disrupt the cycles of poverty. We did this through seed funding from the Siemer Institute, a nationally recognized organization for two-generational success focused on reducing mobility rates for children to reach their education potential.

UWGN funded Catholic Charities of Tennessee and Safe Haven Family Shelter to provide services for families experiencing homelessness or who were at-risk.

This model has become a critical service now

accessed by more than 1,200 families. Since inception, this initiative has housed more than 579 families and prevented 546 families from becoming homeless. Our work is more crucial than ever.

By 2019, the cohort grew significantly to include 11 partner organizations who work together to put an end to homelessness in our city: Catholic Charities of Tennessee, Fannie Battle Day Home, Financial Empowerment Center, Martha O'Bryan Center, McGruder Family Resource Center, McNeilly Center for Children, Mid-Cumberland Human Resource Agency, Preston Taylor Ministries, Safe Haven Family Shelter, The Salvation Army, Saint Mary Villa Child Development Center and Tennessee Department of Human Services.

In the summer of 2020, the Tennessee Department of Human Services granted The Family Collective more than \$30,000,000 to expand its services to Davidson, Cheatham, Robertson, Rutherford and Williamson counties





with additional wrap-around services and engagement opportunities, as part of a four-year term.

So how does it work? An effective system ensures when a family becomes homeless, their experience is rare and brief—no longer than 30 days—and that the negative effects are limited.

Families enter programs within The Family Collective while experiencing a housing crisis or while receiving services at one of our hubs, Early Learning Centers, schools or Family Resource Centers, where they receive at least one core wrap-around service and select the service mix that best meets their needs. To enable care coordination across partner agencies, data is shared in a centralized database.

The Family Collective gives power back to families by providing space to get the help they need while providers work alongside each other to build trust, infrastructure (ex. coordinated entry systems, landlord networks, etc.) and have courageous conversations with stakeholders in each community.

An effective system ensures when a family becomes homeless, their experience is rare and brief—no longer than 30 days—and that the negative effects are limited.

Families work collaboratively with their coaches to:

- Find and maintain permanent, stable housing
- Build social connections
- Receive mental health counseling
- Access financial counseling
- Connect with quality, affordable childcare
- Work to increase income, education and job training opportunities

This work is changing lives.

SLYMS' STORY

Slyms' kidneys were rapidly failing when she and her six-year-old son moved to Nashville.

She was recently divorced, and her kidneys no longer worked without dialysis or a transplant. Treatment meant the difference between life and death.

For years, Slyms has been on hemodialysis, in which a machine and artificial kidney clean her blood and filter waste that is toxic to her body. This type of dialysis requires her to drive to a facility 25 minutes away, three days a week.

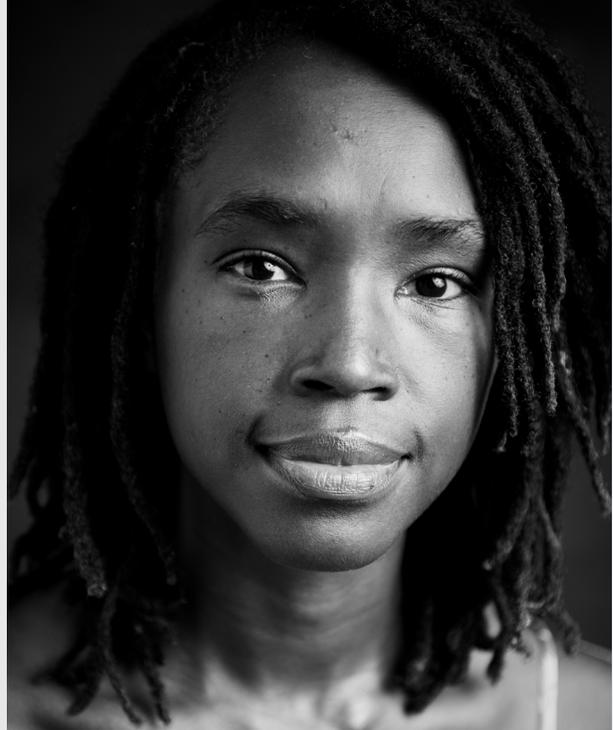
"I have to be there for four hours on a machine, which takes about six and a half to seven hours," she says. "It's very painful and I don't feel well. I get these horrible headaches and my body just isn't doing well. After the dialysis, I don't have the energy for anything else and the next day I'm still recovering, and it just starts all over again."

She's not able to work because dialysis takes up most of her time.

"It's like a part-time job just to stay alive."

Slyms went to the Vanderbilt Transplant Program in hopes of getting a transplant. Instead, they recommended she transfer to a different type of dialysis, peritoneal dialysis, which can be done at home while sleeping. She'll be able to eat more, use fewer medications and do more daily activities, making it easier to work or travel. However, a requirement for at-home dialysis is—a home.

A case worker referred her to Catholic Charities and the Family Empowerment Program, which helps those at-risk of homelessness find and secure stable housing.



Many families don't always have a large sum of money such as first and last month's rent saved to sign a lease. The Family Empowerment Program worked with landlords to determine who accepted housing vouchers and helped with rent assistance while Slyms transitioned to her own home.

"It's definitely a juggle. Sometimes the balls fall down—which they did, and that's where the Family Empowerment Program came in and helped me get the balls juggling again. They have been very supportive in a time where I really needed that support."

For Slyms, her own home is more than a roof over her head. It means not being hooked up to machines in a facility three days a week. It means regaining her health and picking her son up from school.

"Having my children and health issues and having dealt with a recent divorce, it's definitely taken a toll—but it's taught me some very valuable lessons that I would not have learned otherwise."

BUT WE COULDN'T DO IT ALONE

Because of your generous commitment, we are working to prevent and end family homelessness—for good. Your gifts laid the foundation for this expansion and are vital to programs like The Family Collective.

Because of you...



620

Families have been housed since program inception



26

Adults currently enrolled in higher education programs



602

Families were prevented from becoming homeless



1,552

Adults and 2,025 children have been served through The Family Collective's wrap-around services



A Q&A WITH BARBARA SIEMER

We heard from Barbara Siemer, co-founder of the Siemer Institute alongside her husband Al, on leading the charge to prevent and end family homelessness.

What gave you the idea to start the Siemer Institute?

“Let’s go back to 2003 when my husband transported me to Florida from Ohio. I had no idea what I was going to do down there. I didn’t know anyone. In Ohio, I had been working in a church family support group for many years, mostly doing eviction prevention but with very small dollars to help people stay in their homes. I thought, ‘If I could only do this differently. If there could be more counseling, if there could be more stabilization on a long-term scale and not just a stop gap.’ I wanted to try to stabilize families with the goal—and this is really important—of stabilizing the children. I knew that moving in and out of schools was one of the biggest hurdles children faced in staying on task and getting to third grade reading proficiency.”

What did your work with United Way first look like?

“We joined the Tocqueville Society at United Way of Sarasota, and I went to United Way and said, ‘I want to try an experiment. Will you help me?’ I told them I wanted to find an agency that will immediately intervene when someone comes to them with an eviction notice. But I wanted the agency to work with families for up to a year to prevent this from happening again. I didn’t want a band-aid. I wanted a cure for family instability. So, with our \$50,000 investment we chose Jewish Family and Children’s Services of the Suncoast. By 2008, the program had grown to a \$450,000 program.”

How did you continue to grow your ideas?

“Al and I decided to take the program to Ohio.



After a year, the state did a study and found that during the recession not only did we not increase homelessness during that terrible period, we actually reduced it by 8 percent. We knew we had something really special. We decided that in the next four years, we wanted to be in 50 of the largest cities in the country because that is where mobility is the most damaging to children. When a family moves all over the city, children are going into different schools and they’re adjusting to different reading and math programs. When a family moves, the average time that a child is missing in school is three months and missing three months of school means they missed the entire year. When kids move in high school, 50 percent of them will not graduate.”

Why was this issue so important to you?

“I’m an English teacher and I know what not being able to read does to a child. And when families have nowhere to turn—when their back is to the wall and they’re about to lose their house—there has to be some place where people can go; there has to be somewhere that they can turn and get help. And we determined that we would be that place and that the help would be immediate.”

Read the full interview at unitedwaygreaternashville.org.

About Leaders United

Leaders United donors provide the foundation for a better community with a generous annual gift of \$500 or more. Your gifts allow us to continue to fight for the health, education and financial stability of every person in our community.

Eagle Level
\$500 - \$999

McGavock Level
\$2,500 - \$4,999

**Tocqueville Society
Alpha Chapter Level**
\$10,000+

Robertson Level
\$1,000 - \$2,499

Cockrill Level
\$5,000 - \$9,999

Looking for more ways to get involved?

- Find a volunteer opportunity
- Host a poverty simulation
- Build Comradery with a Cause by recruiting friends or colleagues to create kits for our neighbors in need
- Share this newsletter with friends and families

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