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September 23, 2015

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**COMMUNITY SHELTER BOARD TO WORK WITH
COMMUNITY LEADERS TO CURB FAMILY HOMELESSNESS**
Report impetus to broaden strategy

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The Community Shelter Board will work closely with Franklin County Commissioner Marilyn Brown as she leads a public/private task force to explore solutions for the growing problem of family homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County. Community Shelter Board will provide data, staffing, and policy support during the six month inquiry period which will culminate in the development of a comprehensive, community-based response for poverty stricken families facing the crisis of their lives.

“Family homelessness has exploded,” says Michelle Heritage, executive director of the Community Shelter Board. “This past year, we have seen as many as 120 families a night without a place to sleep. This is a huge jump from about 50 families four years ago.”

The new Van Buren Center helps with the immediate concern of finding families a place to sleep, sheltering 64 families a night. Families also receive assistance finding a job, applying for benefits and developing a plan so they can move quickly into stabilized housing. Children receive homework help, childcare, warmth and health care.

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A recent report commissioned by The Columbus Foundation and Community Shelter Board found multiple reasons for the increase in families turning to homeless shelters. Those include a loss of \$72 million in state benefits to poor families and adults over the last five years, as well as a robust rental scene that is pricing families with low incomes out of the housing market. The report also noted an overreliance on the Community Shelter Board as the ‘go-to’ system for families in crisis, and the need to develop preventive services for families to keep them from losing their homes.

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“The Shelter Board will help the task force find strategies to stabilize families with the lowest incomes who need more intensive services to succeed.” said Chad Jester, Chair of the Community Shelter Board.

“Our shelter system is like an overcrowded emergency room,” said Heritage. “We can better serve people by keeping them out of the shelters through prevention and diversion efforts, and by keeping them healthy with better support services for vulnerable families. When those are lacking everyone shows up in the ‘emergency room’ and we face a crisis.”

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The report can be viewed here: <http://www.csb.org/?id=publications>

Community Shelter Board is a collective impact organization that creates collaborations, develops innovative solutions, and invests in quality programs to rebuild the lives of people experiencing homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County. Community Shelter Board oversees an annual budget of \$31 million to support homeless programs and services. Last year, these programs served 12,000 people. Community Shelter Board is funded by the City of Columbus, the Franklin County Board of Commissioners, the United Way of Central Ohio, The Columbus Foundation, Nationwide Foundation, American Electric Power Foundation, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the State of Ohio, and many other public and private investors. For more information, visit www.csb.org.