

# At a Crossroads



Building a foundation for well-being

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# At the Crossroads



Every day we are reminded that we are a ministry that lasts long beyond the days that their individual footsteps cross our threshold. Indeed, we are an institution of social service with a rich history that is designed to serve not just the needs in the moment, but to help create a better road forward for the people we serve.

*“It was like one whole paycheck was just to pay for daycare and we didn’t have any extra money to pay the bills. We both worked horrible hours at very low paying jobs. We weren’t making it.”*

For a time, Mindy\* and her husband Tom\* lived in fear every day. They were madly in love and married very young. After they had three kids, life just kept adding on the bills. And they didn’t have any help. They kept thinking, let’s try this job, let’s move here, let’s stay with them, as a part of their daily lives until they reached crisis. Not long after they moved home to the Sandusky area for work and to live with a relative, they found themselves in an even worse situation than before.



*“My youngest, she’s two, and she was innocently playing. Her uncle came home from work, and was drunk and angry. During one outburst, she was accidentally pushed and hurt. I knew at that moment we couldn’t stay there any longer. My kids needed to be safe and it wasn’t safe there. It was a hard decision, but we were not going to live out of our cars, and we needed shelter...fast.”*

Mindy and her family are among the nearly 400 people each year who seek help from the Volunteers of America of Greater Ohio Crossroads Shelter. The people who come to us are indeed at a crossroads in their lives, and they need help choosing the right path forward. They need to rebuild and move onward . . . and feel safe again.

Recently, Lauren, a 13-year old student in our neighborhood interviewed one of our staff that works directly with our homeless clients. She wants to dispel the awful views people have of the homeless. She asked, “What’s a common stereotype that people give to homeless men and women?”

And our answer was simple: Many times people look at the homeless and think that they are dangerous and “dirty.” Being homeless doesn’t mean you are dangerous. Also, they may look “dirty” but if you don’t have a home and access to shower facilities, you would look “dirty” too.

Homeless people have feelings just like you and me. But something happened in their lives that led them to be homeless. In most cases, homeless people want the same things that everyone else does. They want to be treated with respect, loved, feel safe, and they want to have a place to call home.

They do not want people to be afraid of them or to be mistreated.

*\*Depicts name change for privacy*

## They need our help



At Crossroads in Sandusky, Ohio, help can be found. Since 1999, Crossroads has been open to help the young and old, the family, and the veteran find their right path to a sustainable life. As we progress in this document, you'll read words and phrases like supportive services, transitional housing, evidence-based practice, rapid rehousing, adult care facility, mental health housing, and emergency shelter. These are all types of services we offer individuals and families in the Sandusky area who are at a crossroads in their lives.

### Simply put, they all mean that a person can come to us for shelter, support, and help.



When we purchased the Crossroads building in 1999, we did the work to retrofit the building to become a shelter that helps men, women, families and veterans. But we haven't been able to change it since. And it really needs some changes.

Imagine being Mindy for a moment.

She has been on the road with her family for months, moving from place to place, and, in some instances sleeping out of their car. After the incident at their Uncle's house, and when she was left with no more alternatives, and nowhere to go, she came to Crossroads.

Now imagine the way her family may have looked. They couldn't do their laundry, take showers, eat regular meals, do homework, sleep regularly, and so on. We suspect that Lauren, who is trying to break down the myths of homelessness, would have a tough battle here – because Mindy and her family “looked” homeless.

Mindy moves her family into the shelter for help and relief. At first glance, it doesn't feel better because she knows she is in a “shelter.” The building is fine enough, but once you get inside, the carpets are over-worn and permanently dirty. The showers in the family shelter are just barely working properly, and there is water damage throughout. At the side entrance, when unlocked, the flow of residents is at-will, meaning they can come and go as they please, and it doesn't feel very safe. And the thought of bed bugs makes her cringe . . . makes us cringe too!

This isn't neglect on our part, or even a lack of wanting to make necessary repairs inside the building. Crossroads has been a stepping-stone to thousands of people in the Sandusky area for the past 18 years. It has been over-taxed, over-used and is in desperate need of repair. The individuals, veterans, and families who enter the building need to be surrounded with a supportive environment, not just supportive services in a run-down building. They need to feel safe, comforted, and helped. To help them feel this way, we need to rebuild the environment to demonstrate how much we care about them and how we can help. A shower with soggy drywall, and poorly working plumbing does not demonstrate that.

## Our current needs at Crossroads



Individuals and families who seek shelter at Crossroads, often times come with multiple barriers, including hunger. At Crossroads we provide more than a safe place to sleep, we provide food for our neighbors who are hungry and emergency rental assistance to help families stay in their homes.

The Crossroads facility has allowed us to serve so many in need over the past 18 years, and it shows. There are many areas in need of improvement and renovation at Crossroads, and below are a few:

- Upgrade and repair all restrooms and showers in the facility including family restrooms, and the men's and women's showers and restrooms.
- Replace 16+ year old broken and worn out furniture and fixtures
- Upgrade key appliances to increase energy savings
- Build a secure side entrance to the building that includes security, staffing, handicapped access, search and seizure of contraband, and bed bug prevention.
- Replace all of the carpeted flooring with a floor that will reduce bed bugs and allow for easier cleaning and sanitation.
- Upgrade food / pantry storage area to accommodate 'choice pantry' program



### So why do we need to do this?

At Volunteers of America, we believe that everyone deserves a safe place to live and lay their head each night. We believe in the power of housing as the foundation for life. We believe that every person should have the opportunity to reach their full potential, which helps our community thrive and remain vibrant.



# We are the first step for help in Erie County



## Volunteers of America of Greater Ohio is the backbone of Erie County's Continuum of Care.

That means if someone is homeless, in need of housing, in need of food, or is in need of recovery or mental health support, we are the organization they come to. Continuum of Care is a community system that helps an individual or family in crisis from the first moment a problem arises, to a resolution.

In Erie County, when individuals or families are in a housing crisis their first contact is with Continuum of Care. We open the doors, they cross the threshold, they stay, and they work with case managers to end their crisis. It is a process by which we work to resolve and end homelessness for that specific family or individual. Not all resolutions are the same and not every story is a success, but **this supportive system is designed to help all those in need.**

In 2016  
**5,049+**  
Families &  
Individuals were  
helped at  
Crossroads

## It's in our DNA to help people in need.

Through thousands of human services programs, including housing and healthcare, Volunteers of America helps nearly 2 million people across the country annually – more than 23,000 in Greater Ohio alone. Of those 23,000, more than 5,000 people sought help from Volunteers of America in Erie County, seeking shelter, care, emergency food, and assistance.



Our founders Ballington and Maud Booth envisioned a movement dedicated to “reaching and uplifting” the American people. Founding Volunteers of America in 1896, they pledged to “go wherever we are needed, and do whatever comes to hand.”

That declaration has guided Volunteers of America's outreach efforts ever since.

In short, our mission is to reach and uplift all people and bring them to the knowledge and active service of God. We serve people and communities in need and create opportunities for people to experience the joy of serving others. Volunteers of America measures its success in positive change in the lives of individuals and communities we serve. We help the most vulnerable and under-served people achieve their full potential.

# We are the Crossroads between a difficult past and a promising future



For over 80 years we have worked alongside the agencies and citizens of Sandusky and throughout Erie County to end homelessness, provide mental health services, addiction recovery and treatment, food and household items for those in need . . . and to provide a place to call home when someone needs it.

As we look to the future, we know we can't wait to make these changes. The human need demands one set of constructs and the economy determines another. The upgrades at Crossroads are an absolute necessity, because people in our community need shelter.

## Today's needs are urgent.

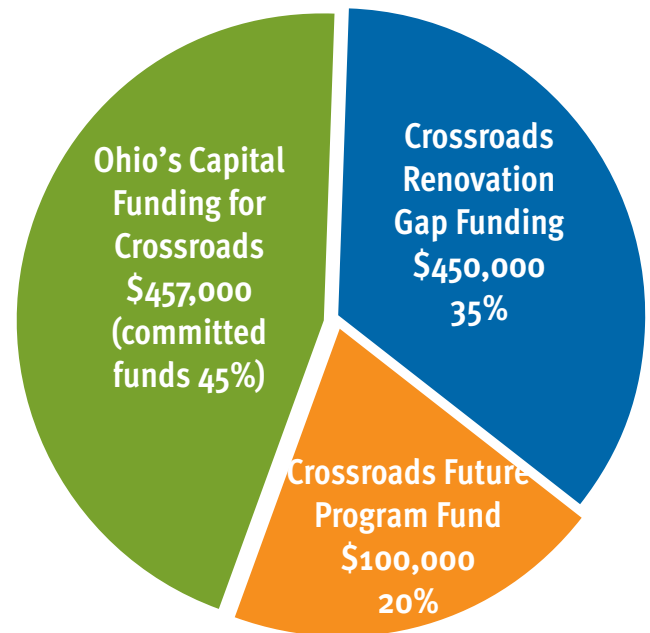
The total cost for all the needed renovations at Crossroads is roughly \$800,000. The good news is Ohio's Capital Funding to End Homelessness approved \$457,700 in funding to support the renovations at our Crossroads facility. But, they did so with the understanding that we would seek out additional and matching funding from our community and stakeholders.

Today we are seeking \$450,000 in gap funding to complete all of the renovations at Crossroads. The most difficult part is that we cannot begin the work until we have secured the matching funds . . . And we need to start working soon!

In addition, over the past 5 years, the cost to operate Crossroads has outpaced available government and philanthropic funding. We are seeking an additional \$100,000 to ensure these programs can continue to thrive and be available to our most vulnerable residents.

## Looking to the future.

In order to fulfill our vision to continue offering needed and critical services to individuals and families in Erie County, we need to raise the remaining \$550,000 to meet the needs of Crossroads . . . And we are only at the beginning.



## Now we need your help



*"Being able to visit the shelter was really an amazing experience. I was able to learn so much about homelessness and the effects that it has on people."*

Lauren, our student exploring the facets of homelessness, completed her assignment for school and she said that she is forever changed.

*"I had no idea about the many ways people become homeless and I learned so much about how they survive and how the world sees them. I think I can talk to more people about this now, and help more people understand them."*

Mindy, our mother of three, and husband are nearly ready to leave the shelter.

*"My daughters are thinking about their future, where they want to go, who they want to be. Staying at Crossroads is just one stop in our lives. We are ready to go forward and help our girls achieve their dreams."*

These are just two stories of the hundreds of stories we hear and see each year. The changes at Crossroads is how we can help hundreds more.

Our mission and values call us to be a ministry of service. We can't be viewed by ourselves or others as just another social service provider. It's simply not who we are.

**Some people can't imagine doing what we do. We can't imagine not doing it.**

