

# 2019-2020 Annual Report



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A black and white portrait of Sharon Price, the Executive Director, smiling. She has long dark hair and is wearing a dark top. The background is a wooden wall.

# A LETTER FROM OUR *Executive Director*

SHARON PRICE

Hello everyone,

Remember normal? That is a word we have heard a lot in the past year, in phrases such as "this is the new normal," or "normal operations are suspended," or, most optimistically, "when things get back to normal." Yet our focus on that word, on what is normal and what is not, misses an important point: we have to do our best with what we have, to play the cards as they are dealt, and to press on toward our goals, even in the toughest of circumstances.

What tough circumstances they were: even as the pandemic spread throughout Kentucky, as job losses mounted and more families were displaced from their homes, and as social-distancing guidelines made in-person schooling and training impossible, Community Action Council redoubled its efforts to continue its mission—to find the grit and determination to help as many families in crisis as possible. And there were a lot of them.

Throughout this report you will read stories that highlight some of our agency's extraordinary accomplishments through December 2020.

Throughout the year the Council processed more than 26,000 applications for emergency assistance to households and families, including:

- 13,972 requests for help with utility bills, through the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Programs (LIHEAP)
- 1,342 requests for utility assistance through the Kentucky Community Action Network's Healthy at Home Utility Relief Fund
- 497 requests for help with rent payments, via the Healthy at Home Eviction Relief Fund
- 132 requests for financial assistance through the Team Kentucky Fund
- 137 requests for Housing Stabilization assistance through LFUCG

Meanwhile, the Council also provided temporary housing to more than 600 individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness, using funds provided through the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government. In total, the Council helped central Kentucky households receive \$4.27 million in relief funds, which went a very long way toward making sure "the new normal" didn't involve thousands

more families living without heat, without homes, and without hope.

But the Council's efforts did not begin and end with all that paperwork; what makes for great leadership is human initiative and dedication. For instance, when it became unsafe for people to congregate indoors, in close proximity to one another, Council staff and volunteers moved its God's Pantry Food Bank distribution outdoors, and served families—hundreds more than "normal"—by drive-through, keeping both staff and customers safe.

That drive-through model also worked in the distribution of free infant-care and hygiene products to women and families in the Council's service area. At a time when we all looked to trim our expenses, the provision of the sorts of childcare necessities families sometimes struggle to afford, but simply cannot go without, was a blessing to the community. All told, the Council helped more than 1,100 families.

In the following pages you will also read about how we opened our new recording studio in May, and launched our first-ever podcast, "Lex Talk. More Action." The Council used its first several episodes to talk about the affect of systemic racism and police brutality on our community. Other episodes discuss a variety of local and regional issues, including voting rights, gentrification, COVID resources, food insecurity, early childhood education, and many more.

Of course, finishing our production studio could not have come at a better time, because while in-person Head Start classes, like nearly all schools around the state, had to cease to minimize the spread of the virus, teachers were able to quickly and seamlessly begin recording their lessons for at-home learning. Meanwhile, other staff members created videos to inform the public about the Council's services. Even as the pandemic wanes, the studio will continue to be an invaluable resource for the development of instructional and training materials, as well as the increasingly popular podcast.

Around that same time, we applied for and received several million dollars of COVID-19 pandemic relief funding, aimed mainly at rental and utility assistance or to support at-home learning. Then, in November, we learned we had received a \$5 million grant to address family homelessness from the Bezos Day 1 Families First Fund.

The Council also adapted as the community's needs changed. For instance, the Weatherization Assistance Program helps families with making their homes more energy efficient, by installing or repairing insulation and weather-stripping, upgrading appliances and heating/cooling equipment, and providing smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. But when the pandemic made it unsafe to work in homes, Housing Services Coordinator Mae

Smalley reoriented her focus to making sure the households in that program had access to the Council's other resources for relief, such as utility and rent assistance.

None of these successes would have been possible without the tireless, inspired work of the Council's staff and volunteers. As classrooms and meetings became suddenly virtual, our Information Technology team made sure teachers and staff had the tools and training to make the transition as efficiently and effectively as possible. Later, as health guidelines allowed for a safe, gradual return to the workplace, our Facilities team ensured our buildings stayed spotlessly clean and secured plenty of personal protective equipment for everyone. And as all of these new and expanded services required enough qualified staff to manage the workload, the Human Resources department managed to bring 68 new staff members on board and to provide them with the knowledge and resources they needed to work from home.

No, it was not a "normal" year, and while there is a lot of hope for the future, there is plenty more work to be done. Yes, the vaccines will help us return to where we would all like to be—working together, side-by-side—and there are already signs that an economic recovery is on the horizon. Still, these things take time, but one thing everyone can count on: for the Council, doing better is always normal.

A LETTER FROM OUR

# Board Chairperson

DENISE BEATTY

## *In Loving Memory*

We honor Board Member Ms. Cynthia Kay, a lifelong advocate and friend of the Community Action Network. Ms. Kay was a member of the Board from 2004 -2021.



Greetings,

My name is Denise Beatty, and I am your newly appointed Chairperson of the Board of Directors for Community Action Council. Before obtaining this role, I served on the Board of Directors for 9 years and have been dedicated to the mission of Community Action Council in serving our community. In working for the State in the Division of Health Information for the Kentucky Health Information Exchange, I am keenly aware of the challenges that people with low income experience daily in the health field, particularly during a pandemic not seen in hundreds of years. I am delighted to join Executive Director Sharon Price in presenting some of the agency's most recent outcomes in this 2019-2020 Annual Report.

Looking back over this past year's many challenges, the world, our nation, our state and this organization have tested a resolve we didn't know we had. I am truly proud of the work that all the staff, leadership and the entire Board of Directors were able to accomplish during these trying times. It has been my honor to serve as your Chairperson alongside our staff—and, through them, to be able to stand in the trenches in serving our communities on the front lines. This report summarizes some of the achievements of this wonderful organization; however, the commitment to the work that was done in our communities and throughout our service area is immeasurable and the effects of the services we provide will affect generations to come.

One of the greatest testaments to the Council is our ability to pivot to address the needs of the people. As new board leadership was initiated in early January 2020, nothing could prepare us for what March of 2020 had in store for us. The board immediately had to become acquainted with virtual meetings that allowed us to continue oversight and guidance as we maneuvered through the many pitfalls that the COVID-19 pandemic presented to us. At a time when many organizations were shutting their doors, we were creating new ways to stay connected and informed about the decisions that affect so many people. The Council's board of directors actually increased their governance during this time to assist more people as so many individuals lost their jobs and needed immediate assistance.

As we look forward to better days ahead, our community should be proud of the work this agency continued to do—and exceeded in doing—during this crisis. I am confident that in the future the Council will continue to answer the call to help the communities we serve thrive. I look forward to continuing serving you, our partners and our communities as the Board Chairperson.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we'd like to thank all of our staff, partners, and our community for the support you have demonstrated during this pandemic and beyond.

## 2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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# *Relentless*

## ABOUT RACIAL JUSTICE

While the pandemic dominated the news headlines throughout 2020, and the November election occupied our attention in the latter part of the year, one of the most important stories concerned the ongoing struggle for racial justice in the United States. The deaths of George Floyd in Minneapolis and, much closer to home, Breonna Taylor in Louisville, along with several other incidents of evident injustice toward people of color, forced all of us to reckon with our country's past struggles to ensure racial equality, and then to think about the way forward, toward a more equitable future. In early summer, as citizens of Lexington took to

the streets by the thousands to peacefully voice their displeasure with what they saw as structural problems with how our society treats minority populations, Lexington Mayor Linda Gorton formed a Commission for Racial Justice and Equality to investigate the issues surrounding access to education and economic opportunities, health care and outcomes for people of color, law enforcement and policing practices, and the gentrification of lower-income neighborhoods. The Commission was then tasked with recommending methods by which Lexington might improve its policies and practices in those spheres.



Community Action Council was delighted when Mayor Gorton appointed our Executive Director Sharon Price to the Commission, and requested that she co-chair the Subcommittee on Education and Economics. The impact of poverty on access to education and economic opportunity is central to the Council's work, and as such Ms. Price was well positioned to offer her substantial expertise and guidance to the Subcommittee's investigation. The Subcommittee's work culminated in an exhaustive report that highlighted the need for Lexington to bolster its efforts to provide high-quality learning opportunities to all local children, especially those in historically under-served populations. On the economic front, the report made specific, actionable recommendations to the Mayor and City Council that would improve workforce training and development in our communities and encourage business investment in low-income neighborhoods, with the aim of reducing the wealth gap.

Even as the Commission began its work, the Community Action Council launched a podcast series, entitled "Lex Talk. More Action," which kicked off with a discussion of how community leaders, educators, and parents might best initiate productive conversations with young people about racial justice, and how to ensure the voices of the youth were heard in the local and national movements for racial equality. Subsequent episodes centered on the relationship

between law enforcement and the communities they protect, the role legislators play in establishing and safeguarding equitable policies and systems in state government, and the historical issues surrounding voting rights and ballot access for people of color. Podcast guests included non-profit leaders such as Timothy Johnson and P.G. Peeples, community activist Devine Carama, Lexington Police Chief Lawrence Weathers, state senator Ralph Alvarado, and state representatives Buddy Wheatley and George Brown, Jr. And while the demonstrations of the summer of 2020 have quieted, and the national media focus has shifted elsewhere, "Lex Talk. More Action" continues to address the struggle for equality with thoughtful, constructive dialog between diverse members of the community.

But Community Action Council isn't all talk. It is well known that education provides the most reliable pathway out of poverty, and that early childhood is the most important time in a person's educational development. The Council continues to support this pivotal time in a child's life by administering Head Start programs for children from three to five years old, and—recognizing that parental involvement in early education is one of the best predictors of future academic achievement, by providing Early Head Start services to children younger than three and their families.

In late 2020, acting on its own Strategic Planning priorities and

one of the key recommendations by the Subcommittee on Education and Economics, the Council applied for an Early Head Start expansion grant to provide a year of Head Start programs to three-year-old children in the school district served by William Wells Brown Elementary School. By targeting this program expansion at the pre-kindergarten children in the neighborhoods William Wells Brown serves, those kids can arrive better prepared for formal classroom work, helping to elevate the school's performance from the ground up.

But change for the better can also happen from the top down, and one of the ways to do that, in both education and economics, is by identifying instances of implicit bias: those subconscious, unintentional ways in which our behaviors are influenced by the characteristics of other people, particularly their race and gender. In the classroom, implicit bias can show up in interactions between teachers and students or administration and faculty; in the business world, we see it in hiring/promotion practices, loan applications, and transactions of all kinds. In fact, implicit bias can cloud nearly every way in which people interact with one another, and people of color disproportionately suffer from it. The good news, however, is that the negative effects of implicit bias can be countered. By finding strategies to minimize or eliminate bias, we may one day reach that more equitable future we all surely want.



# *Healthy at Home...*

## **BUT WHAT IF YOU DON'T HAVE A HOME?**

In the spring of 2020, and throughout the remainder of the year, thousands of central Kentucky residents learned they would have their working hours reduced, be furloughed, or simply be laid off, as the various stages of COVID-related mandated closures and partial lockdowns meant businesses were forced to reduce customer capacity or close entirely. The sudden, drastic reduction in their earned income forced many locals into making a grim choice: which bills to pay, which to postpone paying, and which to not pay at all, at least not for the indefinite future.

For many people, the largest monthly bill arrives in the form of an invoice for rent. Other large expenses such as water and electricity are necessities, but many utilities allow some leeway with late payments, and in any event they were prevented from disconnecting services during the pandemic by a temporary order from the Kentucky Public Services Commission. As for other common monthly bills, it's easy to go without cable television, or to downgrade a phone plan. However, the basic human need of shelter can't be so easily foregone. Unfortunately, by as early as the end of March, the prospect of receiving an eviction order for non-payment of rent loomed over a huge number of hardworking Kentuckians, who just couldn't manage to pay for their housing, not right then, not at least until they were able to get back to work.

The first sector of labor affected by the business closures of early and mid-2020 were service workers: restaurant servers, line cooks, hotel staff, and the like. Of course, these were also the very people whose comparatively low wages meant their bank accounts were the least able to withstand even a short period of unemployment. While on March 25 Governor Andy Beshear signed an executive order suspending the evictions of residents from rental housing for failure to pay rent, hundreds of workers in our area had already been served orders, and found themselves, over the course of only a few short weeks since the pandemic began, out of work and with no place to live.

Community Action Council was already positioned to assist those workers—the most immediately affected by the economic effects of the fast-spreading pandemic—by providing emergency housing and rent assistance to those who were already displaced from their homes and to those who might shortly be. In a city such as Lexington, which depends heavily on the service sector, these actions were crucial in preventing even more economic harm than would otherwise have occurred. Governor Beshear's eviction moratorium provided a grace period, to be sure, but as it became clear that the pandemic was here for the long term, the Council quickly expanded its reach to serve citizens in all industries, and for a time was assisting people earning 400% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Last May, the Council combined its resources with the Lexington Fair Housing Council and other local non-profit organizations and city programs to begin the Housing Stabilization Program ([covid19renterhelp.org](https://covid19renterhelp.org)). This service has evolved over the last several months, and now is in place to help both households and their landlords, with unpaid rental or utilities to help those most at risk of eviction due to COVID-19 stay in their homes.

Alongside the Housing Stabilization Program, the Council began to operate drive-through centers for the distribution of childcare necessities, such as

diapers, formula, and clothing to Head Start and other families who relied on their recently-closed child care centers to provide those during the week days. For many out-of-work Kentuckians, the help came just in time.

To pay for these efforts, which necessarily would require much more funding than what would be needed in a typical year, the Council was able to access more than \$9 million in grant money, distributed through the state government to Kentucky cities and localities, from the COVID-relief package included in the federal government's 2021 appropriations bill. In addition, the Council received funds from the state government's own relief funding, the federal Community Services Block Grant program, and private donor contributions. The importance of all these efforts can't be overstated. The problem of mass evictions and a sudden upsurge in homelessness affect not only the displaced, but cause a negative ripple effect throughout the local economy by placing still more demands on already-stretched publicly funded services, including shelters, food banks, and mental health programs. More broadly, a rising population of unemployed and displaced residents in our area means a general loss of productivity and a marked decrease in the consumer spending on which our economy relies. Of course landlords felt the pinch as well: without steady rental income, they faced the

threats of liens and foreclosures on their mortgaged properties, which would create another drag on the already flagging local economy. With this in mind, the Council worked closely with local landlord associations to help them direct their tenants to sources for rent assistance.

Worst of all is the effect of housing insecurity on children, especially at a time when nearly all area schools were required to adopt a learn-from-home model of instruction, in which students would depend on both stable housing and a reliable internet connection to complete their schoolwork. But how does a child learn from home, with no home from which to learn? Keeping children housed, fed, and ensuring they have access to resources for learning is a must for ensuring the future prosperity of our region.

By acting swiftly to combat the problems of evictions and poverty-related issues caused by the 2020 pandemic, over and above its usual efforts, Community Action Council has provided crucial support to our community as we go through these trying times. While the worst appears to be over, a full economic recovery will take time—perhaps years—and so the Council continues its essential work in striving to ensure adequate shelter and sustenance for residents with low income in central Kentucky.



# *\$5 Million*

## TO HELP END FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

Most people associate the name "Jeff Bezos" with the mighty online retailer Amazon, while newshounds may also recognize him as the current owner of the venerable Washington Post. Perhaps less well known to the general public are his extensive philanthropic endeavors, one of which provided Community Action Council \$5 million in grant funding to continue its work toward ending family homelessness in Lexington-Fayette, Bourbon, Harrison, and Nicholas counties.

Bezos established The Day 1 Families Fund in 2018 with an initial investment of \$2 billion, and later that year the Fund began awarding its first series of grants to non-profit organizations across the country. In total, the Day 1 Families Fund provided more than \$97 million to 16 organizations in its first year of existence. The number of grant recipients doubled in 2019, then increased again by nearly a third to 42 in 2020, when the

Fund distributed almost \$106 million.

As one of the most important bulwarks against the problems of homelessness in central Kentucky, Community Action Council's mission is perfectly in line with the vision statement of the Day 1 Families Fund: "no child sleeps outside." To that end, the Council was thrilled to receive the Fund's \$5 million award, and has definite, well considered plans for how to best allocate it.

To begin, the Council plans to improve, in two ways, its ability to provide temporary, emergency housing to young families in its service area. First, the grant award will be used to expand the Council's existing non-traditional shelter model in Lexington, in which families facing homelessness can access shelter in local hotel rooms or vacant apartments while they work with our staff to find permanent, affordable accommodations. More money in this area means the ability to secure more of these emergency rooms and apartments, thus helping more families.

Second, the Council plans to purchase a multi-unit dwelling to serve still more displaced families and streamline the process of providing emergency housing to them. To do so, the Council is working with and alongside affordable housing experts to identify available properties. It's worth understanding why these family-centered shelters are so beneficial: simply put, they allow families to stay together, whether they be biologically related parents and children, or non-

traditional groups who identify as families.

As a 2018 study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services discovered, families with children who, for various reasons, required a stay in a traditional shelter were much more likely to experience a separation of the children from the parents, both at the time of the stay in the shelter and for years afterward. In some cases, the parents decide that sending their child or children to stay in a safer environment—with friends or relatives, for example—is the best course of action. In others, local child welfare agencies believe the unstable housing situation is too unhealthy or dangerous for the children to remain with their parents, and place them in foster care or other accommodations. And commonly, prior to the establishment of these non-traditional family shelters, the father might be obliged to take residence at a male-only facility, while the mother and children went elsewhere. In the most unfortunate cases, these separations lasted for years. Needless to say, this outcome is far from ideal, and it's one that the Council, with this generous award from the Day 1 Families Fund, will be more able to help families avoid.

Of course, housing isn't the only challenge young families may face: there are also practical expenses, such as past-due utility bills, unpaid rent, and transportation expenses, all of which can combine to make it difficult, if not impossible, to physically move a family from one place to another, to secure a new lease or rental agreement, or to

even find a suitable residence in the first place. Fortunately, the \$5 million grant award allows for considerable flexibility in how the money is allocated, and the Council plans on establishing a Rapid Response Fund to help families with these oft-overlooked expenses.

But the aim is long-term recovery; families need housing, to be sure, but they also need the resources that will prevent them from experiencing housing instability in the future. To help provide these resources, the Council is using another portion of the Day 1 Family Fund's award to create a Diversion Fund, aimed at acquiring computers, tablets, and other technology for the purpose of assisting parents with career-skills training/re-training, job searching, completing online applications and interviews, and sundry other employment-related tasks that require reliable access to computers and the internet. With these tools, the Council can give shelter to families experiencing homelessness and help them become economically stable.

Thus while we know things are unlikely to return to "normal" for some time, and that many central Kentucky families will still struggle even as the unemployment rate creeps downward and employers cautiously begin hiring again, Community Action Council is better positioned than ever to serve our neighbors. Thanks to the Day 1 Families Fund, and the forward-thinking work of Council staff and volunteers, 2021 looks much brighter.



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**This is the year of the Unapologetic Woman—and we're celebrating phenomenal women all across Kentucky who make no apologies for their perspective or the impact that they are making in the community.**

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# THE *Spirit* OF COMMUNITY ACTION

Writing nearly 400 years ago, Francis Bacon remarked that while "the virtue of prosperity is temperance, the virtue of adversity is fortitude." In our own recent times, perhaps no year brought greater adversity upon us all, and required more fortitude to endure it, than 2020. The fear, the isolation, and the emotional toll wrought by so much suffering, so near to us, made the act of simply carrying on, as best we could, a daily challenge.

Yet, Bacon also noted that in those very moments of adversity, we often discover our virtue—our best selves—and so it was with the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council is always ready to assist those in our community who struggle with finding adequate shelter, access to education, and enough to eat, even in the best of times. The year 2020, however, asked the Council to do even better, to help even more, and so it did.

For the past decade, the Council has partnered with God's Pantry Food Bank, a non-profit organization based in Lexington and serving 50 counties in central and eastern Kentucky, to operate a food distribution pantry in the Cardinal Valley area of Lexington. The pantry is led and staffed entirely by the Council's volunteers, and serves as a crucial resource for families on the west side of Lexington who need help supplementing their weekly dietary requirements. In fact the most recent data available puts the number of citizens identifying as food insecure in Fayette County at around 40,000, many of whom earn slightly too much to qualify for federal assistance, but not quite enough to ensure they can afford consistent, healthy meals for themselves and their families.

Normally—prior to the pandemic—the pantry might distribute food to around 100 families during the week. And the volunteers, many of whom are retired and looking for a chance to spend time giving back to their community, were able to serve patrons from within the comfort of the unassuming brick building the Council maintains at the location.

The pandemic changed all that. By early March, as social-distancing measures took effect, it became clear that food distribution, were it to continue at all, would have to be moved outdoors. Nor was it considered safe for many of the older volunteers to continue working closely with the public. To complicate matters, as more and more residents found themselves out of work, or with significantly reduced hours and wages, the demand for nutrition assistance skyrocketed. What to do, then?

For the Council, what was done was to shift operations to the parking lot, with drive-through service. The volunteers whose age made them more vulnerable to the virus were sent back to the safety of their homes, and in their places, more than 30 Head Start teachers and staff stepped in, their regular teaching duties having been put on indefinite hold. Not a moment too soon: within weeks the pantry was serving more than 500 families per week, and doing it safely.

Where some see crisis, others see opportunity. In addition to the drive-through pantry, the Council ramped up home deliveries of hot meals to seniors who could not risk virus exposure. Other staff and volunteers ensured that the rising number of residents in need of food were aware of the pantry's continued operation by distributing relevant information in both English and Spanish. Still others worked on raising awareness about the 2020 Census and the importance of participating for equitable distribution of government resources. And with an election looming, a number of staff and volunteers assisted with making sure that all participants knew about other civic opportunities, such as the state's deadlines for voter registration.

The work continues, even as the pandemic seems to be winding down. Throughout 2020 the Council forged more partnerships to better serve the community, including with FoodChain, a non-profit that operates an aquaponics farm in downtown Lexington and provides cooking and nutrition education to children and adults alike, along with hosting a free community meal each month.

Fortitude through adversity. 2020 asked it of all of us. Yet Community Action Council chose to do more than simply endure. It chose to grow stronger, just as many of us were becoming weaker. In the future, no one will likely look back on the past year with any great affection, but we can certainly look back with pride at how we responded to the crisis, and how much better placed we are to respond to the next challenge our community faces.



# LAUNCHING A

# Podcast


## DURING A PANDEMIC

In the last decade, with the proliferation of online streaming services and connected, portable devices with which to listen to them, the medium of the podcast has become one of the most effective and convenient ways for organizations to communicate with the public. The format allows for deep dives into complex issues while still retaining a personal feel, as though the listener were sitting in on a conversation with the podcast's host and guests. Best of all, the amount of information a podcast can deliver might run to dozens or hundreds of pages of printed text, but in audio form, becomes nothing more demanding to the listener than an engaging way to spend the morning commute.

With that in mind, in 2020 Community Action Council began its own podcast series, "Lex Talk. More Action." The series released its first episode in June, with the stated purpose of exploring a wide range of issues with individuals from a broad range of backgrounds. With more than 30 episodes under its belt now, all of them produced by Communications Manager Cameron Minter and many of them hosted by Executive Director Sharon Price, the podcast has done just that. Elsewhere in this report you will read about the discussions about racial justice that filled several of the earliest episodes, coinciding with the public demonstrations after the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. But there is much more to the podcast, and to the Council's mission, than only that topic.

One of the most important ways the Council uses the podcast is to publicize the impact of its Head Start programs: to make the public aware of how Head Start is improving the academic readiness of young children as they prepare to embark on their formal schooling. In 2020, since the pandemic prevented the Council's Prep Academies from conducting in-person classes, Head Start Director Jessica Coffie used the podcast to keep parents up-to-date with the Head Start at Home program, tentative plans to safely reopen the Academies, and practical matters such as the expansion of service hours and the scheduling of virtual parent-teacher conferences.

In other episodes, the podcast has tackled some of the more difficult challenges facing our community. In September, for example, Councilmember James Brown and Urban League of Lexington President P.G. Peebles discussed the ongoing problem of the gentrification of low-income neighborhoods in Lexington and how the displacement of the working class from previously affordable areas of the city causes negative follow-on effects on their healthcare, transportation options, school quality, and access to healthy food sources. Not long after, a series of episodes addressed historical and current attempts at minority-voter suppression, the restoration of voting rights for individuals with a felony conviction, and the struggle to engage young adults in the election process. In another edition,

A black and white photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing large headphones, looking down. The image is partially obscured by a horizontal bar with yellow, blue, and red segments. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some studio equipment.

well-known community activist and hip-hop artist Devine Carama and state representative George Brown, Jr. took on the causes of—and the possible solutions to—youth violence.

But it is not all about the problems of our times on Lex Talk. More Action. In fact, there has been plenty of success to chat about as well. With the God's Pantry Food Bank distribution program helping hundreds of families every week, and a new partnership with nonprofit organization FoodChain, several episodes focused on our progress in ensuring central Kentucky families have enough to eat. Others spotlighted the Council's essential work in keeping families housed, with electricity and running water, even as the pandemic made that job tougher. And a recent conversation with state representative and rising star of Kentucky politics Charles Booker, centered on his perseverance through difficult circumstances as a child and his progressive plans for the state's future, and inspired everyone who listened.

All these stories were made possible by the construction of a new audio and video recording studio at the Prep Academy at South Lexington. The studio provides a clean, comfortable space for hosts and guests, with professional-quality audiovisual technology at the ready. Of course, the studio is not just used for podcasts: with the pandemic requiring the suspension of in-person Head Start

classes, teachers used the facility to record virtual lessons, allowing students and their families to continue their education from the safety of their own homes. The studio's recording capabilities also meant volunteers in the Foster Grandparent Program could stay in touch with their students—not quite as good as being there in person, to be sure, but the short messages and videos offered kids a world of reassurance throughout 2020.

But the studio is not all microphones and cameras. The Council also constructed a general-purpose meeting space and conference room adjacent to the studio, which, once it is safe to do so, will be open for use by community organizations and institutions of all kinds, who may otherwise lack their own gathering spaces. In the meantime, the staff and volunteers of the Council itself have been thrilled to take advantage of the extra room.

So, when you get the chance, take a listen to Lex Talk. More Action. New episodes arrive every Wednesday, and they are always timely and in touch with the most pressing issues confronting our community. You can find them on the free streaming service Soundcloud: just search for the podcast name, or Community Action Council, and click the orange "play" arrow on whichever episode strikes your fancy. Then spread the word!

THE NEW  
*Prep Academy*  
AT MADISON COUNTY



The Council has served its core area, of Fayette, Nicholas, Harrison, and Bourbon Counties for a half-century, and provides Head Start education programs in each of those, and to Scott County as well. In 2018, however, the federal Office of Head Start provided the Council with an opportunity to expand its program area to the eight-county area immediately south and east of Lexington, from Clark and Madison all the way down to Laurel County. The Council began offering its South Central Head Start (SCHS) in 2019.

While poverty is an ongoing challenge throughout Kentucky, the problem is magnified in the more rural areas of the state, particularly in the south and east. To complicate matters, the distance from major population centers can correspond to a lack of access to adequate educational resources. Given that low educational attainment is often associated with lower income levels, rural families in Kentucky are often stuck in a cycle of generational poverty, in which children and families lack opportunities to escape their difficult economic circumstances.

South Central Head Start aims to change that. Like all Head Start and Early Head Start programs,

SCHS provides early childhood education to approximately 800 families with low income residing in the corridor south of Fayette County, and gives children a much better chance of achieving an education that can elevate them out of the poverty cycle. To advance that aim, in 2019 the Council used a portion of the Office of Head Start's grant funding to purchase an expansive building in Richmond, Kentucky, the seat of Madison County, and has begun extensive renovations of the property.

The building, conveniently located on Richmond's Eastern Bypass, was in its previous incarnation an auto-repair shop. An odd candidate for conversion into a school and child development center, you might think, until you consider the building's large footprint, open floor plan, and ample parking. In fact, the building was nearly ideal for the needs of SCHS: plenty of room for conversion of classroom space and play areas, and enough room left over to house offices for SCHS administrative staff. When completed, the new Prep Academy at Madison will boast seven state-of-the-art classrooms of around 900 square feet each, which means instructional space for 40 Head Start and 24 Early

Head Start students. The spacious classrooms are also designed to be easy to reconfigure for other age groups, as the needs of the community change over time.

The Prep Academy at Madison will also function as the headquarters for the entire SCHS program; in addition to the comfortable, modern offices for faculty and staff, the renovation includes a storage facility of around 2,500 square feet. That kind of capacity allows the Council to centralize its facility maintenance operations, among other program needs.

Why Richmond? First, it is the sixth-most-populous city in Kentucky, and the largest in the SCHS service area, which means the Prep Academy at Madison is located squarely where its staff can reach the most children and families. Second, Richmond's placement along Interstate 75 makes it easily accessible to families in the southern reaches of the service area.

While the Council will always maintain its unwavering focus on ending poverty in the heart of the Bluegrass region, the establishment of South Central Head Start and the opening of the Prep Academy at Madison means the Council can reach even more Kentucky families, and give even more children a better start in life.




COMING  
*Together*  
TO PROVIDE TEMPORARY SHELTER

Most of us spent a lot more time at home in 2020, not because we wanted to, but because it was the safe thing to do. We worked from home if we were able, we used curbside pickup and delivery services more than ever before, and we spent a lot of time in our pajamas. And even though we ought to have been doing it all along, we all paid much more attention to washing our hands.

Some of our neighbors, however, couldn't take the availability of hot water and hand soap for granted. Nor could they lock themselves away in their homes, protected from transmission of the virus. For people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, the risks of the pandemic were not so easily mitigated. Most obviously, the close congregation of people experiencing homelessness in local emergency shelters made social distancing nearly impossible in those settings, but individuals who for their own safety chose to avoid such shelters might also find themselves cut off from access to meals, sanitation facilities, and referrals to health and recovery services. To compound the problem, while sleeping outdoors, out of close contact with other people, may reduce the risk of viral transmission, the lack of protection from Kentucky's freezing winters and scorching summers can cause a range of other health problems.

By the most recent count, in January 2020, nearly 700 people were experiencing long-term homelessness in Lexington; of that number, about 30 routinely slept outdoors, around 50 stayed in transitional housing, and more than 600 relied on emergency shelters for protection from the elements. Emergency shelters are an invaluable community resource, but the pandemic complicated matters: while local shelters each adapted their facilities and services to cope with the virus, those modifications took time, and for much of the year, Kentuckians experiencing homelessness faced a stark choice between the possibility of catching the virus through close contact with others or accepting the risks of going without shelter in life-threatening weather.

However, Community Action Council, with funding from Lexington's Office of Homelessness Prevention and Intervention, was able to provide a third option for the population of people experiencing unsheltered homeless. Prior to the pandemic, the Council had embarked on a "street outreach" program, through which Council staff connected with individuals and provided them with information about and referrals to the various means of help available to them, both from the Council's own range of programs and the city's network of public and



non-profit services.

Yet with the onset of the virus, and in response to the difficulties the established emergency shelters had in quickly adapting their facilities to provide safe temporary housing, the Council adapted the street outreach program to fill the void. Working with local motels and catering services, Council staff were able to assist more than 100 individuals access unused motel rooms and provide them with three meals a day.

The stability of this arrangement also allowed the Council to help individuals find permanent housing and employment. For example, Council staff located birth certificates and connected individuals with public assistance and social security benefits, thereby ensuring proof of residency and eligibility to work. Of course, most individuals experiencing homelessness also lack regular access to healthcare services, which meant that as COVID vaccines started to become available, many of Lexington's unsheltered neighbors did not have the means to access them. To remedy this problem, Council staff, as part of the broader network working to deliver vaccinations, ensured that individuals temporarily residing in motels could receive a vaccine. This work is ongoing; as Kentucky's vaccination

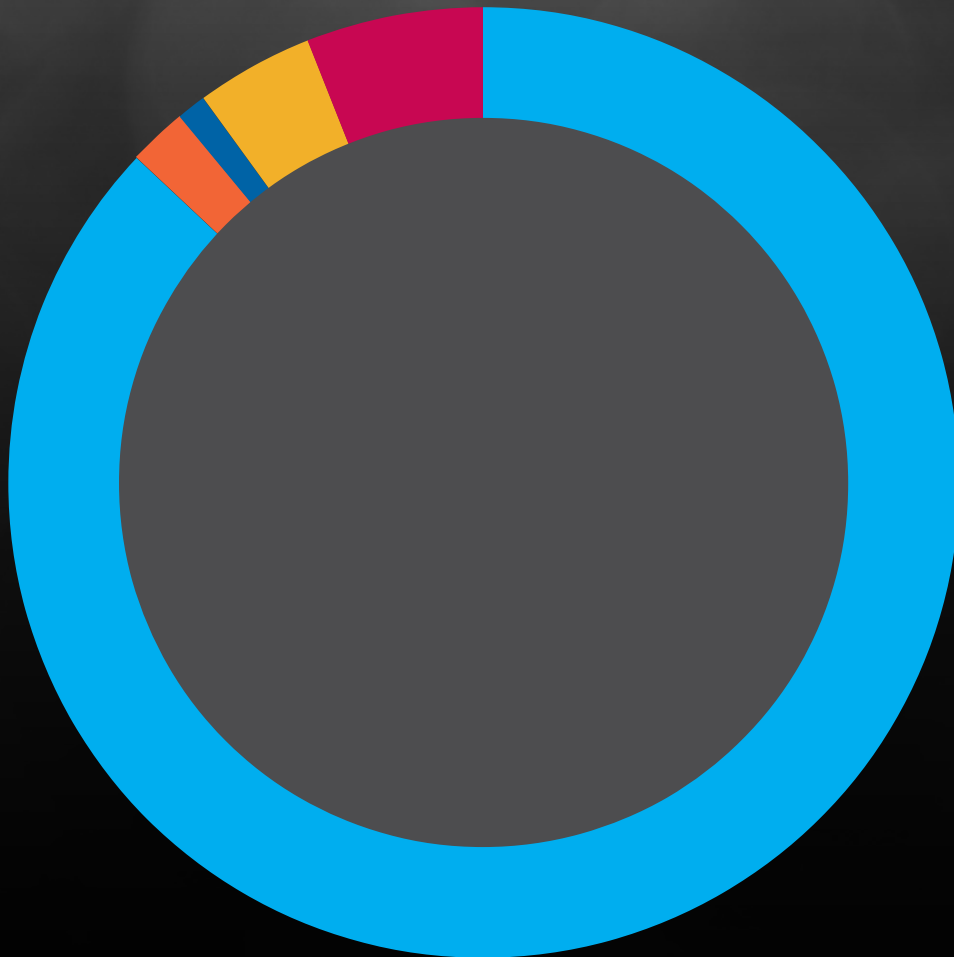
efforts continue, the Council continues to make sure individuals experiencing homelessness are protected from infection as soon as possible.

In 2021, with the end of the pandemic in sight, and as Lexington's network of homeless shelters and service providers has largely adapted its infrastructure and modified its protocols to be able to once again operate safely, the street outreach program will return to its core mission of connecting people experiencing unsheltered homelessness with the resources they need to get back on their feet. But by remaining responsive to the community's immediate needs, the Council bridged the gap the virus created and prevented the most serious public-health emergency of our time from becoming much worse.

Thanks to the collaboration between Council staff, local government, businesses and landlords, our community will keep working to end homelessness until we can one day say that no one need go without a roof and a hot meal, even for one night.

# Fiscal REVIEW

## REVENUE



Federal	\$39,164,838
State	\$886,779
Local	\$611,778
Private	\$1,702,163
In-Kind	\$2,863,373
Total	\$45,228,931

## EXPENSES



Salaries	\$13,721,355
Fringe Benefits	\$6,639,195
Partnership/Contractual	\$5,695,091
Supplies	\$3,911,520
Space	\$2,542,574
Travel	\$507,278
Communications & IT	\$659,680
In-Kind Expense (GAAP)	\$168,373
Other	\$1,293,194
Subtotal	\$39,283,461

Change in Net Assets	\$5,945,470
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<b>Total</b>	<b>\$45,228,931</b>
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