

## COVID Continues to Pose Challenges for Chicago's Homeless Population

The temperature is dropping on an already cold January morning. Still, Marcus, a client of The Night Ministry's Health Outreach Program, has removed his coat and sweatshirt and pulled his arm out of his shirt sleeve so Stephan Koruba, The Night Ministry's Senior Nurse Practitioner, can give him a COVID-19 vaccination booster.

Marcus had lost his vaccination card a few months prior when the tent he lives in on the edge of downtown Chicago was ransacked. Koruba scrolls on a phone to locate Marcus's electronic vaccination record and then issues him a new card with the date, brand, and vial number of his first vaccination, and now his booster.

Just like any Chicagoan dining in a restaurant this winter, Marcus and other individuals experiencing homelessness have had to show a vaccination card to sit down for a meal and find respite from the cold weather. But, as Katie League, COVID-19 Program Manager at the National Health Care for the Homeless Council points out, the vaccination proof requirement can create barriers for unhoused individuals.

"We know that holding onto a plastic ID is something the population struggles with. A paper card makes it just that more complicated," League said.

Experts say public health measures undertaken to combat COVID-19, while necessary, sometimes have unintended consequences for homeless populations or do not consider their unique circumstances and the challenges they face.

"The federal program to ship at-home tests to residences, which is



*Marcus, a client of the Health Outreach Program, with the COVID vaccination card he received after getting a booster shot from The Night Ministry.*

*"There is an underlying way in which the homeless community has been left out of solutions that have been created during the pandemic."*

*- Katie League, National Health Care for the Homeless Council*

wonderful and very needed, speaks to the inequities faced by the population," said League. "There is an underlying way in which the homeless community has been left out of solutions that have been created during the pandemic."

In Chicago, the emergency shelter system has been under strain since the pandemic began. Many adult shelters have been operating with reduced bed capacity to ensure appropriate physical distance

between shelter guests, a process known as decompression. Temporary shelters were opened early in the pandemic in other

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# New Strategic Plan Emphasizes Flexibility and Innovation to Sustain and Further Mission

The Night Ministry is preparing to launch its next strategic plan, a roadmap that will guide the organization in the years to come as it continues to provide housing, health care, and human connection to individuals and families struggling with homelessness or poverty.

“The changes the world has gone through the last few years underscore our need to prioritize flexibility and nimbleness, in our responses to the evolving challenges faced by those whom we serve and in our internal operations that support those resources,” said Paul W. Hamann, President & CEO of The Night Ministry.

“What excites me about this plan is that it outlines broad priorities for the agency that recognize the complexities, uncertainties, and interconnectedness of the environments in which we serve and work.”

The plan is built around two pillars: strengthening The Night Ministry’s organizational capacity and increasing the quality and reach of its programs. These objectives are anchored in the agency furthering its pursuit of becoming an anti-racist organization and in advancing innovation in services and operations.

The new strategic plan is the result of a months-long intensive process, which involved discussions across the agency, including with the Board of Directors, as well as research and consultation with outside partners to bring fresh perspectives to the table. It will officially launch in July, at the start of The Night Ministry’s 2023 fiscal year.

Among other objectives, the plan calls for The Night Ministry to build upon the innovative housing models it is already developing, such as the scattered-site component of the new Pathways Transitional Living Program, which



*The Night Ministry’s new strategic plan, which will officially begin in July, calls for flexibility and further innovation in how the agency fulfills its mission.*

provides apartment-living coupled with supportive services for unhoused youth. The agency will also explore ways to make clients’ experiences of homelessness as brief as possible (see the article about the recently begun Youth Diversion pilot program on page 6 for an example).

In addition, the new strategic plan calls for The Night Ministry to increase collaboration between its Health Outreach and Youth Housing Programs, to find ways to better meet the needs of clients, regardless of age. The agency will also deepen its connections with partners, community leaders, and residents in the neighborhoods it serves.

More details of the new plan will be announced in the coming months. ◊

*“What excites me about this plan is that it outlines broad priorities for the agency that recognize the complexities, uncertainties, and interconnectedness of the environments in which we serve and work.”*

– Paul W. Hamann, President & CEO

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**LIGHTING UP THE NIGHT:**  
**An Evening to Benefit The Night Ministry**  
Monday, June 13, 5:30 pm  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

Please join us for a reception, live auction, and an update on how The Night Ministry has been Learning, Striving, and Thriving over the past two years.

For information on Lighting Up the Night sponsorship opportunities, please contact Heather Nash, Senior Director of Foundation & Corporate Philanthropy, at 773-506-6029 or [heather@thenightministry.org](mailto:heather@thenightministry.org).

*We are monitoring health and safety conditions and will adjust our plans for this event if necessary. We appreciate your support of Lighting Up the Night, which provides critical funding for our mission.*



# Meet Chief of Staff Traci Rivera

Traci Rivera joined The Night Ministry in the newly created role of Chief of Staff in 2020. With an extensive career in both the non-profit and for-profits sectors, she brings her deep knowledge and experience to bare in helping to guide decision making and implementation across the agency. We asked her to share about her background and her role at The Night Ministry.

## Please tell us about your professional background.

My background is in health care, culture, relationships, and making things happen. I was in the for-profit sector for some years and have worked in the not-for-profit sector for over 10 years. I've worked to oversee and direct operations and optimize productivity and break silos across various environments from social services, health care administration, and higher education. I have always been adept at identifying problems, resolving issues moving forward, and attaining goals. My niche has been working primarily with organizations that bring services to children and families in need.

**What led you to join The Night Ministry?** I joined The Night Ministry because of its history in helping our clients. I believe in its mission.

**What about the agency's mission appeals to you?** The Night Ministry accepts people as they are who might be experiencing homelessness. Many places have some specific criteria or limitations, but The Night Ministry aims to be a bridge and provide resources and connections to the clients we serve.

**What does your role as Chief of Staff entail?** My job entails being an internal versatilist, meaning I apply my breadth of experience and knowledge to different areas across the agency, doing a lot of listening and peeling back the onion.

*"I enjoy the variety that comes with the job and thrive on challenges and change."*

– Traci Rivera, Chief of Staff



Chief of Staff Traci Rivera came to The Night Ministry with extensive experience in both non-profit and for-profit settings.

I work behind the scenes to address challenges before they reach the desk of our President & CEO, strategically delegating authority to enable staff to do their jobs well and increasing the lines of communication to help complement the President & CEO. My role is essentially a CEO's right hand, helping to drive strategic initiatives.

## What are some of the challenging aspects of your job?

There is a challenge of balancing not being seen (because I'm good at what I do) and not being recognized for what I am doing. Demonstrating my social and emotional intelligence skills is critical in this role but also challenging as it requires diplomacy and tact when negotiating through

and finding solutions with staff for complex problems across The Night Ministry.

## What are some of the rewarding aspects of your job?

I enjoy the variety that comes with the job and thrive on challenges and change. ◇

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# COVID Continues to Pose Challenges

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facilities, including unused Chicago Public School buildings and the Chicago Park District's Broadway Armory, to provide additional beds. But many of them have since closed.

"Shelter decompression is a necessary measure to ensure people experiencing homelessness are protected from COVID outbreaks," said Sam Carlson, Manager of Research and Outreach at the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. "Chicago is seeing a huge demand in shelter beds, but the solution isn't simple."

"More shelter beds solve the immediate need of keeping people warm, but they don't solve the long-term need of housing," he added. "Increased investment in housing solutions may be the solution to this shelter demand issue."

Meanwhile, by some estimates, vaccination rates among unsheltered Chicago residents have lagged behind the general population. The Night Ministry has relied on the strong relationships it has with its clients to provide them with vaccination education and access over the past year. Still, unhoused individuals continue to face significant barriers to getting vaccinated.

"With all of the uncertainty they face, it's really hard to think about getting any type of health care, especially a vaccine that was known to cause some discomfort and the need to convalesce, and there aren't places to do it," said League.

Individuals experiencing homelessness may also be at higher risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 due to underlying health conditions, lack of access to health care, and other factors. Carlson said there are some resources available in

Chicago for those who do become infected with the coronavirus and to protect the most vulnerable.

"The City of Chicago has supported a medical respite center for people testing positive for COVID. For people at high-risk of COVID, the City also helps maintain hotel-based isolation spaces," Carlson said. But, he added, "capacity is very limited at each space."

The Night Ministry has experienced the impact of these limitations at its Youth Housing Programs. During the Omicron surge, the medical respite center stopped taking in people who tested positive for COVID but who were vaccinated and did not have significant risk factors. That meant The Night Ministry had to develop isolation protocols for each of its shelter programs to continue providing housing to vaccinated residents who contracted the virus while keeping other residents and staff as safe as possible. The agency has had to implement those protocols within at least one of its shelter facilities so far.

"Fortunately, we already had quarantine plans in place that we have employed all throughout the pandemic when there had been exposure, so we were able to provide isolation space when needed for those residents," said Betsy Carlson, Director of The Night Ministry's Youth Programs.

League said these kinds of challenges underscore the need to provide adequate and appropriate housing to everyone.

"Why do we have people living in shelters at all?" she said. "If we didn't have to have congregate settings, this wouldn't be something we would have to navigate around." ♦

## STREET MEDICINE COLLABORATIONS



When The Night Ministry began piloting its street medicine approach six years ago, bringing health care services directly to individuals living in encampments, it was the first program of its kind in Chicago. Today, the agency's Street Medicine Team serves as a model and a hub in a burgeoning network of street-based medical outreach programs currently operating and working collaboratively in the city.

Many of these programs are chapters of the nonprofit Chicago Street Medicine, which is comprised of interdisciplinary medical teams from Northwestern University, the University of Illinois Chicago, the University of Chicago, and Loyola University Chicago. Pictured here are members of Loyola Street Medicine providing outreach alongside The Night Ministry at the CTA Blue Line stop in Forest Park.

To learn more about how these programs are working together, visit [www.thenightministry.org/blog/street-med-collaborates](http://www.thenightministry.org/blog/street-med-collaborates).

# Homelessness in the African American Community is Disproportionately High, with Causes Deeply Rooted in the Nation's Past

Homelessness is disproportionately experienced among historically marginalized groups in the United States, but for Black Americans, the disparity is especially stark. In Chicago, for example, despite making up about 30% of the general population, according to the City of Chicago 2021 Homeless Point-in-Time Count & Survey Report, African Americans account for more than 70% of those experiencing homelessness.

“The condition of homelessness is most often connected to the condition of poverty, even when there are other conditions present, and African Americans are far more likely to be poor,” said Dr. Omar McRoberts, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago.

Not only that, but Black Americans are more likely than members of other racial groups to reside in concentrated poverty—areas where a large proportion of residents experience poverty.

“These are places where there are very few economic opportunities, few services, often very poor educational opportunities,” McRoberts continued. “People who become homeless often have lived in these very poor neighborhoods immediately before becoming homeless.”

The causes behind this economic and social imbalance are deeply complex and interwoven, stretching far back into the nation's history. From enslavement, to legalized segregation, to countless other injustices faced including in the present day, Black American communities have experienced far more than their share of systemic disenfranchisement and oppression, and higher rates of homelessness and poverty are just one result of that.



Data Source: US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress

*Black Americans are overrepresented in the population of people experiencing homelessness compared to their share of the overall U.S. population.*

“We’re not talking about African Americans falling from a position of privilege or access or attainment,” said McRoberts.

“It’s the fact that African Americans have never actually had the adequate chance to emerge from the great deprivation of slavery.”

In the months to come, The Night Ministry will delve deeper into the intersection of race and homelessness through newsletter

articles focused on contributing factors such as the inequitable enforcement of criminal justice, housing discrimination, and health disparities affecting Black Americans, as well as the prevalence of homelessness within the Latinx community. ◊

*“The condition of homelessness is most often connected to the condition of poverty. . . and African Americans are far more likely to be poor;”*

– Dr. Omar McRoberts, University of Chicago

## NEW YOUTH HOUSING PROGRAM UPDATE

Two young people from our new Pathways Transitional Living Program kicked off 2022 as roommates in a fully furnished two-bedroom apartment! And two more Pathways participants will soon be moving into another apartment provided by The Night Ministry.



Pathways is a hybrid housing model for young adults experiencing homelessness, offering residents the opportunity to live more independently in community-based apartments—while still receiving services like case management—or in a congregate living environment with program staff present. By providing both options, Pathways is better able to serve the needs of each individual resident along their journey to greater independence.





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## The Night Ministry Pilots Program to Quickly End Youth Experiences of Homelessness

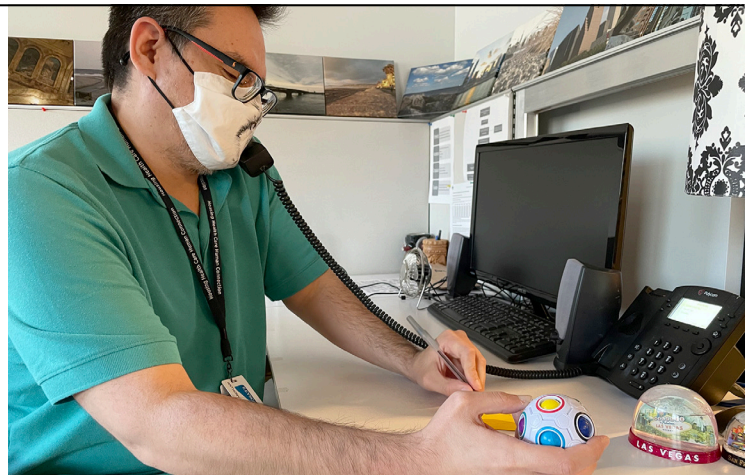
From The Crib emergency overnight shelter to its transitional living programs that offer up to two years of supportive housing, The Night Ministry's Youth Housing Programs provide a continuum of care for young people who are struggling with homelessness. Now, a new diversion program piloted by the agency aims to quickly end the amount of time that some young adults spend in a shelter.

"We help young people explore the resources they may already have in their lives that could lead to a stable living situation," said Anthony Monterroso, Youth Diversion Specialist at The Night Ministry. "And we offer the support that can help them get there."

The diversion approach is not appropriate for every unhoused youth. Some may not have the resources that could lead to quick rehousing. For others, the intensive supportive services The Night Ministry's shelters offer may also be a better fit for where they are at on their journey to greater stability.

But for those for whom it is appropriate, the goal is to identify a safe and available housing situation and move the client there within 14 days. What that housing looks like varies from client to client, Monterroso said. "It could be an apartment of their own, if they have a job or income, for example. Or it may mean they return to family or move back to a prior living situation."

Conflict in the home is often a factor in a young person entering into homelessness. In such cases, Monterroso may engage clients



*Youth Diversion Specialist Anthony Monterroso helps his clients identify the resources they already have which could help them quickly end their experiences of homelessness.*

and their families or housemates in conflict resolution.

"Recently, I worked with a young person who was pregnant and her partner's mother to draw up a contract with clear terms for them residing together, as the relationship between the client, her partner, and her partner's mother was very tumultuous," he said. "I just spoke to the mother today, and they are all still living together. So, we diverted two young people and a baby from the shelter system." ◇

**Thank you to those who generously gave at the \$500 level or higher between November 1, 2021, and January 31, 2022. Thank you as well to everyone who donated during this time period through alternate giving portals, such as Facebook, Amazon Smile, Workplace Giving, and more.**



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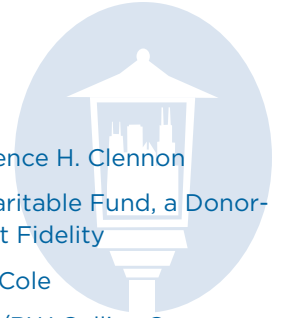
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