

# The Good Works Timothy House: Beyond the Numbers

February 2016

The purpose of the Timothy House is to provide a safe, clean, stable, temporary but homelike place for people to be while they work on the issues in their lives that led them to experience homelessness.

For the first 33 years that Good Works provided shelter to people without homes, we admitted people on the basis of a 15-minute phone conversation. In most cases, they were able to move into the Timothy House by dinner that evening.

From 1981 until about 2010 this system served us pretty well. We helped many people and took reasonable risks. We were glad to offer hospitality to people in this way.

2006 was a relatively normal year, with an average of 10 residents per night, for a total of 3,708 nights of shelter provided.

For some perspective, the Timothy House has a maximum capacity of 15 people per night. If the house were completely full every night for an entire year, we would provide 5,500 nights of shelter.

In the early 2000s, two external factors began to press against us severely: drug abuse and economics.

Prescription drug and opiate abuse exploded in Southeast Ohio in the early 2000s, to the point that in 2007, accidental overdose became the leading cause of accidental death in Ohio (surpassing auto accidents) and has stayed the leading cause of accidental death.

The next year, in 2008, the Great Recession began.

Homelessness is generally regarded as a lagging indicator of economic problems. As people slip down rungs on the economic ladder, into lower and lower incomes, it takes a while for people at the bottom—people in poverty—to experience the impact. Initially, entire families move in with other family members, straining both economic and interpersonal stability. People's generosity and patience are exhausted as they attempt to support relatives and friends who go through difficult times.

In 2007, we had formally approached the city of Athens Board of Zoning Appeals to request permission to expand the capacity of Good Works to serve more people. Given approval, we had a contract to purchase the house next door to the Timothy

House and use it specifically to provide more room for families with children, thereby creating more space for single adults in the Timothy House. This request was denied by the city.

At Good Works the impact of these issues came to a head in 2010—2012.

In 2008, we provided 4,407 nights of food and shelter to 168 people. We had to turn away 80 because of lack of space.

In 2009, we provided 3,985 nights of shelter to 164 people. We turned away 36. In 2010, we provided 4,046 nights of shelter to 171 people. We turned away 86. In 2011, we provided 4,576 nights of shelter to 156 people. We turned away 142. In 2012, we provided 4,707 nights of shelter to 207 people. We turned away 248. In 2013 we provided 4,603 nights of shelter to 169 people. We turned away 177.

At this point, a family intentionally moved into the neighborhood of the Timothy House and began opening up sleeping space in their own home for people we did not have room for at the Timothy House. We call this act of hospitality “Sign of Hope.”

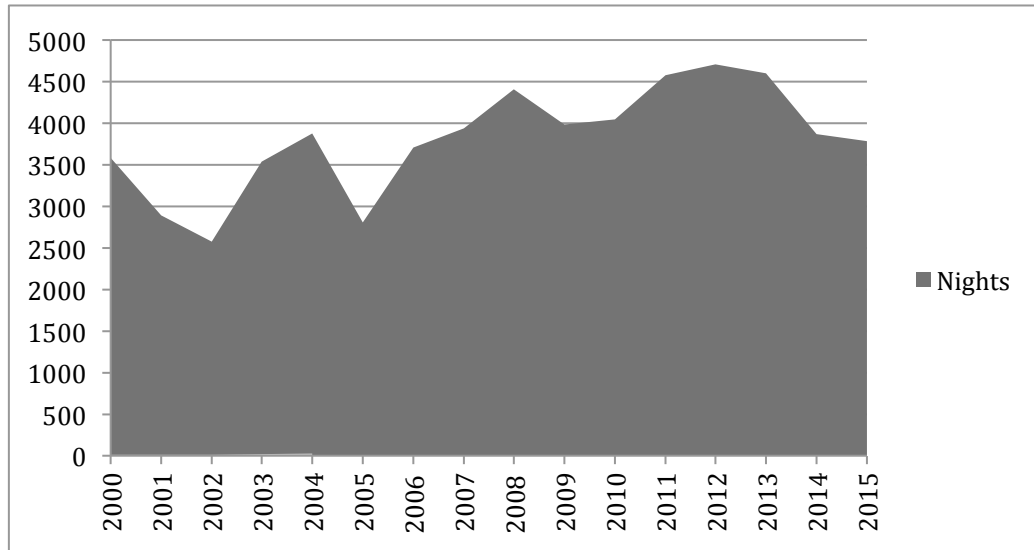
Meanwhile, inside the Timothy House we were close to capacity constantly. And things felt chaotic and sometimes unsafe. We were discovering that some people were not telling us the truth about the state of their recovery from substance abuse. We were evicting people what felt like once a week because they were coming home high. For several years in a row, over 40% of the people we were housing had substance abuse problems in their past or present.

On April 7, 2014, the unthinkable happened—the clothes dryer at the Timothy House caught fire and burned up, causing severe smoke damage throughout the entire house. We decided that rather than shut down, we would move our operations into our hospitality house on our Luhrig Road Property—the Hannah House. We provided shelter there for what ended up being two months. This caused a great deal of stress and took a lot of adjustment throughout the entire organization. When we moved operations back into the Timothy House, we had only partial access to the building for an additional two months, so that we were not fully operational until August of 2014.

During that season of being displaced, we felt the need to move to a system of having a face-to-face meeting with everyone who applied for shelter. We use these meetings to better determine how safe a person would be for the rest of the people already living at the house, and to discern whether they are dealing with an active substance abuse problem. The Timothy House has never been intended to serve as an addiction rehab facility. Our expectation is that anyone entering the house who has dealt with addiction would have some reasonable “clean time” and a commitment to a recovery plan.

This new structure meant that in 2015, we worked with less people (90), who have stayed longer (an average of 45 nights). We provided a total of 3,782 nights of shelter in 2015.

**Here is a chart of our Total Nights of Shelter provided per year from 2000 to 2015:**



What is harder to put into numbers is the change in the experience of people who live at the Timothy House. The house is safer—people who we work with worry much less about their roommates and are able to think about their own future more. We are evicting fewer people, and we are having less of the problems that come with active substance abuse. We are working with families more. And the house feels more like a home.

Andrea Horsch  
Keith Wasserman  
February 2016