

# Good Works Timothy House: Beyond the Numbers

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

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For the first 33 years that Good Works provided shelter to people without homes, we admitted people based on a 15-minute phone conversation. In most cases, they were able to move into the Timothy House by dinner that evening. That system worked well and, though we were taking reasonable risks, we helped many people and were glad to offer hospitality in that way.

In the 2010s, several factors came to a head which affected our ability to offer hospitality to the people who were calling. Factors that started before the 2010s led to strain on the structure we had developed; Great Recession of 2008 and the opiate crisis led people who might otherwise have had stable lives to fall down the socioeconomic ladder.

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 often exhausted as they attempt to support relatives and friends who go through difficult times.

By 2012, Good Works experienced our peak for total residents and nights of shelter provided in a year. We provided 4,707 nights of shelter to 207 people. Still yet, we had to turn away 248 because of lack of space, which is also the peak number for that statistic. 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 about 5,500 nights of shelter.

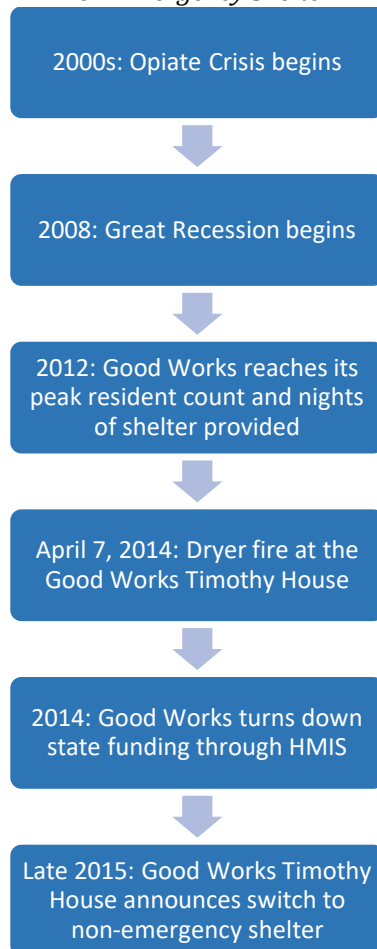
Also in 2012, because of the number of people we had to turn away, Keith and Darlene Wasserman (our founders) moved into the west side neighborhood and renovated their home to welcome people that the Timothy House could not accommodate. This initiative was called Sign of Hope and continued to provide shelter on an as-needed basis to adults and children, screened by the Timothy House staff, until 2019. In 2019, we broke ground for a new facility in the neighborhood of the Timothy House (completed in 2023) which carries on the name Sign of Hope and will accommodate people whom the Timothy House cannot accommodate, nowadays this is mostly due to our bedrooms being upstairs.

So, we were constantly close to capacity. Things felt chaotic and sometimes unsafe. We were discovering that some residents were not telling us the truth about the state of their recovery from substance abuse. We were evicting people at the rate of what felt like once a week because they were coming home high.

## Beyond the Numbers

Then, on April 7, 2014, 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 about two months. This caused a great deal of stress for all of us 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 we were not fully operational until August of 2014.

### *Timeline of Factors Leading to Non-Emergency Shelter*



That displacement was the moment when we were forced to slow down our process for everyone. We moved to a system of having a face-to-face meeting with each person who applied for shelter before we would move them in. This was to determine how safe it would be for a person to move in, given the factors of the people we were already serving.

Also in 2014, we ran into another problem. For some time, Good Works had been receiving about \$60,000 per year from the state of Ohio for the funding of the Timothy House. One requirement of that funding was that Good Works was expected to upload the personal data for the people we served at the Timothy House to the “Homeless Management Information System,” a state-wide database. Until 2014, this had been something that our residents could “opt out” of, but then it became no longer optional, and we were not allowed to tell people we were doing this. Therefore, we chose to stop receiving that funding, and we lost more than a full-time position at the Timothy House going forward. For articles from [The Athens Messenger](#) and [The Athens News](#) about the decision, with comments from Keith Wasserman, to turn down these funds, click the above links.

Between the opiate crisis, fire, and the loss of a staff position, it became apparent that we needed to adjust our process. [In late 2015](#), we stopped receiving people on an emergency basis. Instead, we transitioned permanently to the system we

learned in that period of instability during the fire: we began receiving residents through both the 15-minute phone interview *and* the face-to-face meeting for all who apply. We also began to ask many prospective residents to take drug tests.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic hit us as it did everyone else. We saw a massive dip in our total residents (over a 42% decrease from 2019 to 2020) and how many nights of shelter we provided (a nearly 62% decrease). We suspect that the factors contributing to that were the stimulus checks, the moratorium on evictions, fear of going to a congregate

## Beyond the Numbers

living facility, and even probably families and friends having more generous hearts toward those who were in need of shelter.

Clearly, this change to our structure means that we have been working with fewer people, and that number has been progressively shrinking since 2013 (see chart of Total Residents and Nights of Shelter Provided at right). In 2023, we provided 2030 nights of shelter to 69 individuals and families, and the average length of stay was about one month, though, over the last few years, we have also seen a handful of residents whose stay was longer than six months. Overall, we have fewer residents, but with longer stays—especially for those who end up successfully housed.



Their stays are often longer because it has become more difficult for those we serve to find permanent housing in Athens County. The cost of rentals has increased dramatically nationwide, and Athens (a college town) is no exception. Residents working full time often find it difficult to afford rentals unless they “double-up.” The number of landlords who accept HUD vouchers has diminished primarily because the “market value” of a rental is significantly more than what HUD will pay for. In addition, rentals which are available to our residents are often located outside of the city of Athens, which requires them to have transportation.

All those numbers mean little to us, however. What we cannot express statistically is the life change we are seeing in people. The house is much safer for residents, volunteers, and staff. We almost never have to perform “evictions” where we would ask someone to leave immediately, even though we sometimes do have to give people notice to leave because they are not putting forth effort to find housing or have refused to save money. We are continuing to perform the same mission of providing a safe, clean, and stable place for people to be, and we can *see* people becoming more at ease and feeling more secure. The house feels like a home, and many residents come and find new family.

*This article was created by Keith Wasserman and other Good Works staff in February 2016. It was rewritten and updated by Garrett Mather-Smith in April 2024.*