

The Healing Center is a multiservice organization providing resources and support to people who find themselves in need. Since 2008 their goal has been to serve people from a diverse variety of backgrounds. They provide community members with the opportunity to visit a food pantry, clothing warehouse, free walk-in healthcare clinic, as well as attend classes in topics like English, technology, and personal finance. Through the services they offer, the Healing Center is able to address several social determinants of health. Their resources are free of charge to guests and are mostly funded by the Vineyard Community Church and partnerships with various individuals and organizations, including Freestore Foodbank, Costco, Kroger, and Target, as well as volunteers. The Healing Center also has an established relationship with University of Cincinnati medical, nursing, and pharmacy students to provide health screenings and health and nutrition education at the free health clinic onsite.

The Greater Cincinnati Area had a poverty rate of 24.7% in 2019, compared to the national average of 11.6%. A community centered approach, like the one that the Healing Center uses, allows everyone to be healthy and thrive (1). Having served over 13,000 families and 1,700 households in 2022, the Healing Center is just such a community for many living in and around Hamilton County (Figure 1). Everyone benefits when the community works together to overcome barriers.

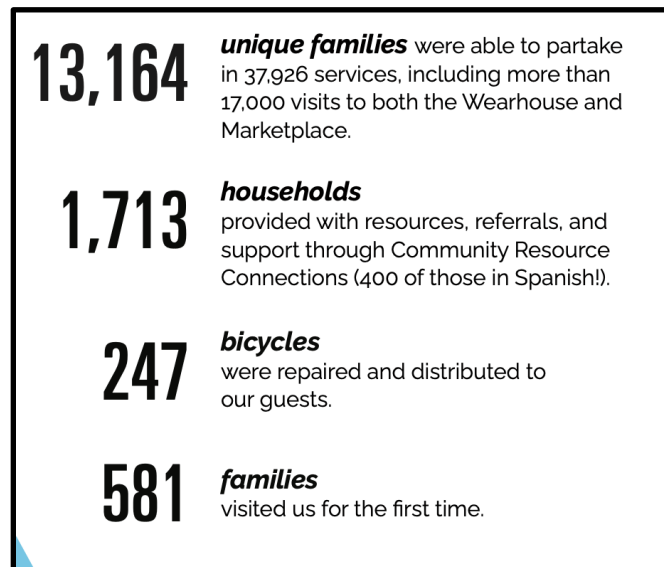


Figure 1. The Healing Center 2022 Impact Report (2)

In addition to providing basic needs like food and clothing, the Healing Center works to address educational disparities and promote employable skills through programs such as career counseling and English as a second language classes. It is estimated that 8.7% of people living in Cincinnati over 5 years of age speak a non-English language at home (3). Additionally, in the Princeton City school district, where the Healing Center is located, the population is 33% Hispanic

(4). The incredible diversity within Cincinnati demonstrates the importance of addressing language as a barrier in providing equal access to basic necessities. By understanding the unique needs of their community and the importance of the various social determinants of health, the Healing Center is actively working to eliminate barriers that drive systemic economic inequities. The Healing Center’s unique holistic approach, makes sure that guests immediate needs are taken care of, in addition to laying the foundations for the development of skill sets that their guests can use to thrive.

Since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, economic disparities have increased making organizations like the Healing Center more critical for community wellness. Researchers conducting a retrospective cohort study on levels of food insecurity in the United States from April 2020-March 2021, found that 35.3% of Americans in the study experienced some form of food insecurity during the first year of

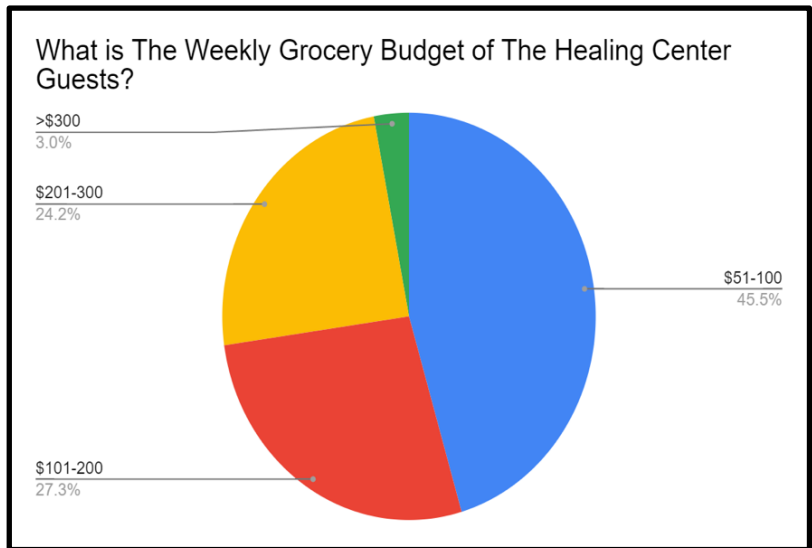


Figure 2: Weekly budget of The Healing Center guests that attended our healthy cooking classes.

the pandemic (5). The demand for the services provided at the Healing Center, most notably the food bank, increased greatly and has unfortunately remained high. As a result of job losses and other factors, social circles are smaller, economic gaps are wider, and food and clothing insecurity have become more prevalent (5). In surveying attendees of a series of University of Cincinnati College of Medicine sponsored cooking classes about their weekly grocery budgets, the majority spent \$51-\$100 per family, compared to the national average of just over \$300 (Figure 2) (6).

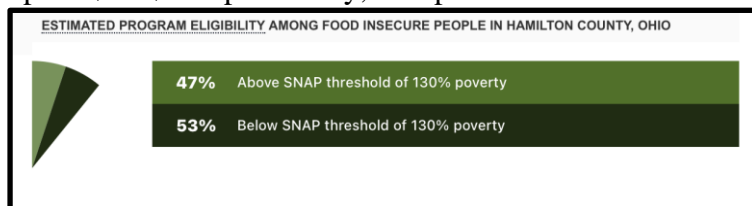


Figure 3: Food Program Eligibility in Hamilton County, Ohio (7)

While many individuals are eligible for SNAP benefits or other social programs, others experiencing food insecurity have to rely on programs like those at the Healing Center to fill the gap (Figure 3).

While the Healing Center is an incredible organization with impressive resources and access to dozens of volunteers who handle their weekly services, physical access and proximity for those who utilize their services is a problem. The terminal bus stop for Metro line 78 has a stop immediately outside of the Center doors, however the ride to the Healing Center is at least twenty-five minutes from the more central areas in Cincinnati. These areas, such as Lower Price Hill, Corryville, and Avondale are where poverty rates are the highest in Cincinnati (8). This means that those who may need services like those offered at the Healing Center the most, are too far away to access them.

One way of expanding access to resources like those at the Healing Center could be to advocate for similar community organizations to model themselves after the holistic approach of the Healing Center. When organizations include more services, like cooking classes for example, they can make a larger impact on the community by providing them with a skillset that they can use to improve their overall wellbeing. Data has shown that educational cooking classes have the potential to boost confidence in the kitchen (9). This one additional program offering could increase interest in cooking at home and lead to guests having a better understanding of how to create nutritious and cost-effective meals, thereby greatly improving a very important aspect of their health (10). In addition to revamping existing organizations, there could also be benefits in expanding the Healing Center's reach by allocating resources to allow them to initiate mobile services. With this change, the Center could sponsor a delivery service that provides free, fresh produce to guests' doorsteps, completely eliminating the barrier of access to the Center. Studies have shown that access to food delivery services can result in young pregnant people eating healthy foods more often (11). This finding could be generalized to potentially make a dramatic difference in communities that struggle with access to healthy food options.

The Healing Center has an excellent framework and has shown their model of helping the community to be successful. By expanding access to programs like theirs, either by remodeling existing organizations or by increasing the reach of the current Center, the Cincinnati community could be better supported, which could be life changing for many of those in need.

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