ANNUAL REPORT 2020
Our community faced unprecedented challenges in 2020, from a global pandemic, to bitterly divisive elections locally and nationally, to demonstrations that pushed our city and our country closer to ideals of equity and inclusion we continue to seek. These challenges changed the circumstances and environment in which ECHO and our community partners work, but they did not change the work itself. Through it all, ECHO staff, partners, and community advocates remained committed to connecting our neighbors to permanent housing and supportive services.

In 2020, ECHO saw a host of new teammates join the organization; organized the biggest Point in Time Count turnout our city has seen; began deep and difficult conversations, internally and among community stakeholders, about the inequities present in the homeless response system and how to address them; worked tirelessly to protect our neighbors from a relentless public health crisis; oversaw the largest-ever investment of Continuum of Care funds for our community; distributed millions of additional federal dollars for COVID-19 response; expanded an already-robust data collection and analysis operation; re-committed to engaging people with lived expertise in line with our Philosophy of Service; grew our community of providers assessing and connecting people to permanent housing; and continued to champion the fundamental belief that **HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT.**
As of early 2021, these Protective Lodges (ProLodges) had provided respite for hundreds of medically vulnerable people and served as a permanent housing connection for at least 169 people.

ECHO has helped lead the City of Austin’s response to COVID-19 since the early days of the pandemic, coordinating and implementing citywide strategies to help keep our neighbors experiencing homelessness safe and healthy.

As emergency shelters cut capacity to allow for social distancing among this vulnerable population, staff collected tents and sleeping bags for our unsheltered neighbors to create spaces to self-isolate. The City began leasing hotels to serve as non-congregate temporary housing, and ECHO employees coordinated staffing, referrals, and service provision for people staying there.

Our community partners connected 1,879 people to permanent housing in 2020, an 8% increase from the year before, through Rapid Re-Housing (1,007 people), Permanent Supportive Housing (187 people), and Minimal Housing Assistance (685 people) programs that report to the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

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ECHO saw its revenue - a combination of funding from all levels of government and donations from charitable organizations - grow by 35% in 2019. Expenses, meanwhile, grew by 17%.

The organization undertook an extensive financial audit and budget planning process for the coming year, setting the organization on a course toward financial stability and growth in 2021.

THANK YOU TO OUR $5,000+ DONORS!

Acorn Hill Foundation  
Austin Community Foundation  
Clayton Foundation for Research  
J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation  
John Howard  
MFI Foundation  
Michael Gagarin  
Nimes Real Estate, LLC  
Presidium Group, LLC  
Samsung  
Shield-Ayers Foundation  
St. David’s Foundation  
The Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation  
The Meadows Foundation Grant  
The Tides Foundation

In addition to these generous contributions, ECHO received 86 individual donations, totaling more than $40,000.
As more providers and case managers gain access to HMIS (a person-level database into which partners enter service information and needs), our community is better able to serve people efficiently and effectively.

In addition to growing ECHO’s portfolio of market rate housing units available to people exiting homelessness, the Community Housing Team forged a new partnership with the Austin Justice Coalition in 2020. ECHO and AJC launched the How to House campaign in December 2020 to form new partnerships with property owners and managers and advance antiracist housing policies and practices.

Patience, an unsheltered resident of Austin, earns $15 an hour cleaning up abandoned encampments with The Other Ones Foundation. The organization is also an HMIS licensee and provides case management services.

All three members of ECHO's R&E Team joined the organization in 2020.

Key successes include:
- Analyzing 2020 PIT Count data and releasing the public report in May
- Writing and supporting organizational communications goals through infographics and blog content
- Analyzing and presenting data to stakeholder groups, including Membership Council and the Racial Equity Task Group

RESEARCH & EVALUATION

BY THE NUMBERS

3 team members hired
75 data requests
2 new research collaborations
Mark rebuilt this guitar with parts from another. He’s been playing and working on guitars for 30 years and now borrows electricity from a church near where he lives under I-35.

Aimee regularly receives deliveries of shelf-stable food from the Eating Apart Together (EAT) initiative, a program started in response to COVID-19.
COORDINATED ENTRY

ECHO’s Coordinated Entry Team continued to connect households to housing and supportive services through the pandemic, including:

- **64 households diverted**
- **117 SOAR enrollments**
- **9 new community assessors**, bringing the total to **23 assessors at 13 agencies**

The CE Team was instrumental in setting up and running the City of Austin’s Protective Lodges to provide safe places to isolate for people experiencing homelessness. The Team helped prioritize the most medically-vulnerable people for rooms and connected people to housing and social services once in the ProLodges. The City of Austin will convert at least two of the hotels currently used as ProLodges into Permanent Housing to help people end their homelessness. As of early 2021, the City agreed to purchase four hotels total toward this conversion strategy championed by ECHO.

SSI/SSDI OUTREACH, ACCESS, AND RECOVERY (SOAR)

Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), this national program is designed to increase access to disability income benefits for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

In 2020, ECHO’s CE Team **trained 16 direct service providers** at five agencies to enroll people in the SOAR program, **oversaw the enrollment of 117 people** across the CoC, and **served 17 people experiencing homelessness directly**.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND HOMELESSNESS

ECHO’s Housing for Health Team includes a Criminal Justice System Liaison. In 2020, this team developed new HMIS partnerships with the Travis County Sheriff’s Office, Capital Area Private Defender Service, and Mental Health Public Defenders. **These partnerships resulted in 146 people completing Coordinated Assessments in jail.**

When Andrew was arrested, ECHO’s Criminal Justice System Liaison connected with him in jail to ensure he wouldn’t lose his spot in a ProLodge. PBS NewsHour profiled Andrew’s story in December 2020.
ECHO’s Planning & Partnerships Team organized the Point in Time (PIT) Count in January 2020, successfully coordinating 886 volunteers for the one-night survey, the largest number to date.

P&P staff hosted calls to coordinate COVID-19 response, developed a resource guide to support providers with CDC guidelines, and provided Technical Assistance to keep program staff and participants safe.

Planning and Partnerships staff also:
- Developed eight of the 12 new CoC policies Membership Council approved
- Launched a new monitoring page and developed a new online process to submit Performance Scorecards
- Increased inclusion and participation of people with lived expertise of homelessness

The Team took part in the first-ever Joint Funding Competition with the City of Austin, designing the application and evaluation process to award ESG-CV (CARES Act) funding totaling $15,480,572 for five Rapid Re-Housing projects involving 11 partner agencies. These projects will serve at least 533 households most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and support a system-wide response to the crisis.

INTO 2021

Despite uncertainty due to COVID-19, the P&P Team completed the FY20 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) process, resulting in $11,011,967 for 15 permanent housing projects across 10 organizations.
RACIAL EQUITY

RACIAL EQUITY TASK GROUP

A creation of the Continuum of Care Membership Council, the Racial Equity Task Group is comprised of advocates from across the CoC focused on eliminating disparities within our homeless response system. The Task Group analyzed the Coordinated Entry process in parts and as a whole to determine why white people averaged higher vulnerability scores than Black people, leading to higher housing prioritization for white Austinites.

Beginning in Summer 2020, the group added eight new questions to the Coordinated Assessment that seek to counteract bias within the Coordinated Entry process. A formal analysis of these changes from ECHO's Research and Evaluation Team is forthcoming; however, anecdotally, Task Group members report a more equitable distribution of housing opportunities provided to people experiencing homelessness.

HUD RACIAL EQUITY DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) selected Austin/Travis County as one of eight Continuums of Care from across the country to participate in its first-ever Racial Equity Demonstration Project. The goal of this initiative is to identify and correct inequities in our homeless response system.

Through facilitated discussions and data-driven analysis, a diverse group of people from across Austin identified elements of the Coordinated Entry process that led to disproportionately more white people being housed than Black people, despite the fact that our population of people experiencing homelessness is disproportionately Black. Building on the work by the Racial Equity Task Group, the Coordinated Entry team revised and expanded the resource prioritization criteria to include new areas of vulnerability that are symptoms of other types of inequity.

The Team also created an internal data analysis feedback loop to test all aspects of the response system for inequities and flag potential problems for further action. This ensures consistent, data-driven improvements across our homeless response system.

"I have to remember I'm not doing this for HUD, I'm not doing this for any funders. I'm really doing this for my family, for people that look like me, for my community. Because what I've learned in the last eight years is if the homeless response system works for those of us that are systematically oppressed, then it works better for everyone."

Quiana Fisher, THN
HUD Equity Demo
Core Team Member
ADVOCACY

The unprecedented public health crisis the world faced in 2020 spurred a national response that positioned our community to make unprecedented commitments to and investments in lasting solutions to homelessness into 2021 and beyond.

CARES ACT

The City of Austin received **$17 million** from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and committed the funds toward new Rapid Re-Housing programs. That’s about 17 times our community’s annual RRH budget.

HOTEL/MOTEL STRATEGY

ECHO proposed and supports the City of Austin’s plan to purchase hotels and motels to convert into housing. By early 2021, the City had purchased or agreed to purchase four properties toward this end, with more to come.

ECHOBORDBAMEMBERS2020

ECHO thanks the members of the Board of Directors who served during 2020:

Active Members:
- **ALBERTA PHILLIPS**, Chair
- **COSSY HOUGH, LCSW**, Vice Chair
- **PEGGY DAVIS BRAUN**, Treasurer
- **SHANNON SEDWICK**, Secretary
- **BETTY STAEHR**
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- **GREG HARTMAN**
- **JOY RUCKER**
- **STEVEN BROWN**
- **MARK S. HERNANDEZ**

Ex-officio Members
- **A.J. JOHNSON**
- **TIM LEAGUE**
- **PERRY LORENZ**

ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

ECHO’s internal Advocacy Committee launched in late 2020 and began meeting monthly in January 2021 to advance equitable, evidence-based policies and practices that prevent and end homelessness in Austin and Travis County through active engagement in local, regional, and national priorities and legislative initiatives.
COMMUNITY PARTNERS

As the Continuum of Care lead agency for Austin/Travis County, ECHO works to build partnerships with organizations in our community to provide housing and services to people experiencing homelessness. These partners are vital to ensuring homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

MEMBERSHIP COUNCIL

Membership Council, the CoC’s governing body, is comprised of local service providers, government agencies, and community advocates and is responsible for setting policies and procedures for the governance, operations, and written standards for assistance and coordination of the Homelessness Response System and Continuum of Care funds.

Helmed by Dr. Virginia Brown (UT Austin) and Christy Moffett (Travis County), Membership Council conducted 10 meetings in 2020, sharing agendas and minutes publicly on ECHO’s website for the community to view, and approved 12 new policies for the CoC.

CoC PARTNERS

The following organizations were funded through the HUD CoC competition in 2020:

- HATC
- SAFE
- Caritas of Austin
- Front Steps
- Integral Care
- LifeWorks
- Green Doors

FIERCELY FOCUSED: PARTNER SPOTLIGHT VIDEO SERIES

ECHO profiled six community partners in 2020 to kick off a new continuing video series entitled “Fiercely Focused.” The videos are available on ECHO’s YouTube page, blog, and Facebook page.

The first six featured were Family Eldercare, Community Health Paramedics, Sunrise Homeless Navigation Center, the Other Ones Foundation, the EAT Initiative, and the Austin Youth Collective.
"Austin is at an inflection point, and there is a clear path forward to a healthier, more equitable community. It's up to all of us to meet this opportunity and to fight for access to quality, affordable housing as a human right."

- Matt Mollica