



REPORT ON FORT LYON 2013 – 2023

10 years of progress

Since 2013, the Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community has provided recovery-oriented transitional housing on an expansive campus in Bent County, Colorado. The program combines housing with peer support, and educational, vocational, and employment services to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. The Fort Lyon campus has a long history in Colorado, dating back to 1860 as a military post, veterans hospital, neuropsychiatric facility, and state correctional facility. The current program is made possible through a statewide collaboration between Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), and Bent County.

When the doors opened in the fall of 2013, just 27 residents were onsite. Over the past 10 years, 2218 unique individuals have been supported in their recovery journeys at Fort Lyon. As of 2023, the facility is able to welcome up to 250 individuals at any given time, and employs over 50 staff, creating quality jobs for local community members.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO STAY AT FORT LYON?

Individuals experiencing homelessness with substance use disorders join the Fort Lyon community for up to two years. In addition to housing, supportive services offered include case management, vocational and educational training, on-site support, peer mentoring, and permanent housing integration. An onsite health center, part of the Coalition's Federally Qualified Health Center network, provides physical and mental health services to all residents. In keeping with the origins of the property, veterans who are referred to the program are prioritized.

During their stay, residents fully engage in the operations of the campus including food services, facilities maintenance, grounds maintenance, and housekeeping. They also learn customer service skills as they participate in pre-employment modules in the resident activity locations such as the creativity center, bike shop, library, and game room. In addition, they participate in daily peer support groups. Partnerships with local colleges and nonprofits provide community-based educational opportunities for residents.

Ninety-nine percent (99%) of all residents attend recovery group meetings. At present, each week there are 14 peer-led Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings on campus, eight peer-led Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings on campus, and residents can attend off campus NA/AA meetings four days per week. There are groups to fit everyone's diverse needs including those with multiple diagnoses, those needing services from a chapel, LGBTQ-specific support, and the Red Road to Wellbriety (part of the Native American Program). If a resident is not finding what they are looking for in any of the groups available, they have the opportunity to work to create their own recovery community.



Photo credit TC Valdez

Over the past 10 years,
**nearly 40% of
individuals exited into
permanent housing
destinations** from Fort
Lyon.

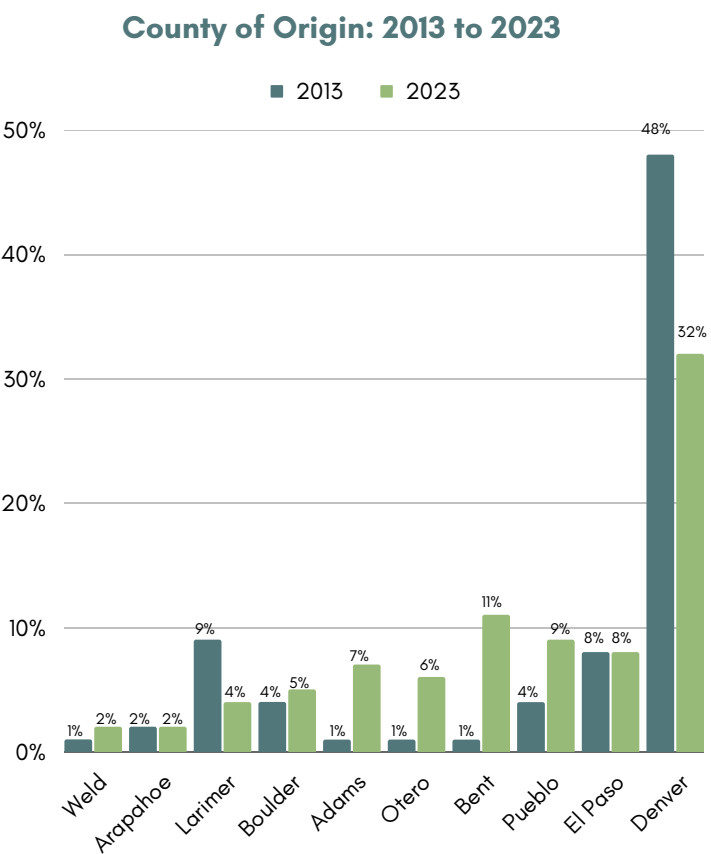


When transitional,
temporary, and long-term
care are included, it
increases to **58%** of all
exits.

WHO IS PART OF THE FORT LYON COMMUNITY?

Over the past 10 years, 2218 unique individuals have been served at Fort Lyon. Each individual's story and experience is different, but data collected over time has shown the following trends:

- The majority of individuals served are between 45 and 54 years of age, as compared to other age groups.
- Approximately 80% of those served identify as male, 18% female, and the remaining 2% are transgender or unknown.
- Residents come to Fort Lyon from across Colorado, but the majority come from the Denver area. However, the number of individuals from non-Denver counties has increased over the time of the program from 52% to 68%
- In 2013, 15% of residents were of Hispanic or Latino decent. In 2023, that number is 23%, representing a 50% increase.
- 13% of all residents over the past 10 years have been veterans.



OUR RESIDENTS, AND THEIR SUCCESSES

The success of the Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community starts from a proven concept: Providing housing and wraparound services is not only the most effective data-driven solution for individuals experiencing homelessness who are also suffering from a substance use disorder, but is also cost-effective for the state and for taxpayers. It costs \$45,993 per person per year for medical and mental health services, substance abuse treatment, incarceration, and temporary shelter costs for those chronically experiencing homelessness. The cost per person at Fort Lyon is \$18,800 per year, a reduction of over 59%.

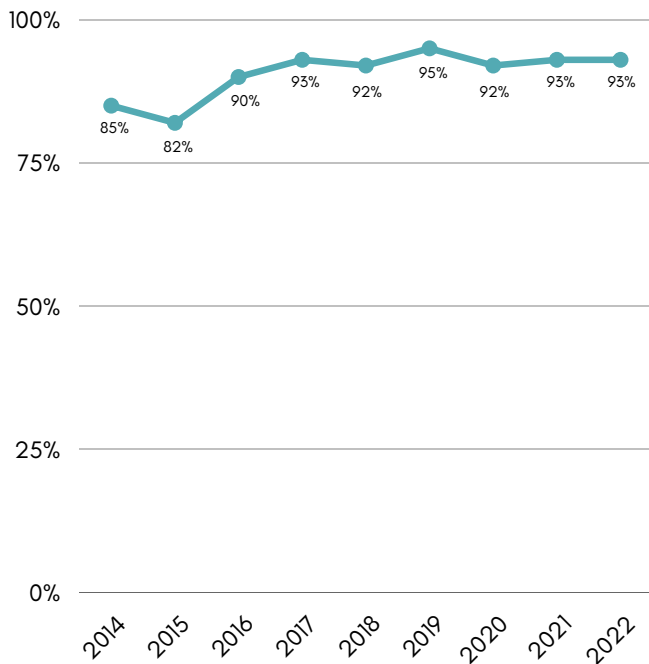
The true success of the program is in the stories and accomplishments of those who have graduated from Fort Lyon. Quantitative and qualitative data analyses show positive outcomes for individuals both while in the program and at 3, 6, and 12-month follow up in the areas of reduced substance use, improved quality of life, reduced anxiety and depression, and longer-term housing access and retention.



The activities, programs, and events are what many residents love about Fort Lyon and are instrumental in recovery. Some of the favorites include gaining skills in the bike shop, wood shop, and pumpkin patch, fishing days, a Memorial Day art show, local partnerships with junior colleges, and the gymnasium, weight room, and bicycle check out—all offered on the 552-acre campus.

Residents also report high satisfaction with the program, which has increased since the program's inception. In 2014, 85% of residents were satisfied with their experience at Fort Lyon. In 2022, that number was 93%.

Percent of Residents Satisfied



"Fort Lyon has so much to offer. I've taken advantage of as much as I could, and tried to give back where I can. I'm grateful for this place, and for all of the people who make it exist. I don't know where I'd be without it, nor do I want to."

—Former Resident Jeff Richardson

GRADUATE STORY

On Marty's 56th birthday, he sat down at a table and with the help of a Coalition outreach worker, filled out paperwork that would change the course of his life. Six weeks later Marty would find himself 200 miles from the Denver streets he once called home and on the historic Fort Lyon campus in rural Bent county. He would become one of the first residents of Fort Lyon.

Marty first became homeless four years prior, after a divorce and addiction left him without any options. The former mining industry worker says, "being homeless wasn't even a remote thought in my mind. I never thought I'd be in that position." Marty had been drinking since he was 13 but managed to keep his disease at bay by throwing himself into his work and providing for his five children.

When asked what made him seek out treatment and move far away from the life he knew, Marty says, "you reach a turning point, and you get tired. I was tired of drinking and things weren't getting better on my own. I needed a change, and lo and behold, Fort Lyon opened up and I ran with it."



As one of the original 13 residents who helped open the doors of the Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community, Marty fondly remembers the days of cleaning, painting, and opening the dorm rooms one by one. With only a skeleton staff, the first days of Fort Lyon were not always easy, but Marty found healing and recovery. He eventually found his way to Otero Junior College where he enrolled in a few basic classes at first and then plunged himself into the Community Health Worker Certificate program.

Marty remained sober and an active participant in his recovery throughout his two years at Fort Lyon. After completing the program last year, he moved into his own apartment in the Arkansas Valley, got his Associates of Applied Science degree, and found full-time employment as a Fort Lyon Peer Mentor.

Marty remarked how much people perk up after being on campus for a few weeks and says, "The transformation is subtle but amazing to watch." Marty may know this better than anyone.

IMPACT ON THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Individuals experiencing homelessness, especially those with substance use disorders, are often those who most incite a “Not in my Backyard” (AKA NIMBY) response from community members. However, in the case of Fort Lyon, strong relationships with local Arkansas Valley entities and the community at large have created lasting reciprocal positive impacts.

Residents take advantage of educational opportunities through Lamar Community College and Otero Junior College—training in computer technology, construction industries, health services, agricultural sciences. In addition to these formal partnerships, residents are encouraged to participate in creative programs that help build support and community while assisting with recovery. For instance, the Fort Lyon residents provide 2,000 to 3,000 free pumpkins during the years the crop is grown to the local children of the Las Animas community and surrounding areas from the onsite pumpkin patch.

CHANGES TO THE PROGRAM OVER TIME

As a one-of-a-kind facility, Fort Lyon has grown and changed over the 10 years through the learnings of the dedicated local staff and the residents themselves, who guide many of the activities onsite.

Housing Outcomes

When the facility first opened, only 16% of individuals exited into housing whereas, in the most recent year, nearly 40% exited into permanent housing. This number jumps to 58% when including other housing opportunities such as transitional, temporary, and long-term care.



Recovery Group Participation

In the first year, around 83% of individuals participated in recovery groups. In 2023, 99% of individuals participated in recovery groups.

Social Connectedness

Housing and recovery are only part of the solution. The connections made at Fort Lyon are lasting and help individuals to maintain their sobriety and strong mental health. Using the Government Performance and Result Act (GPRA) Tool, the Coalition began tracking social connectedness and functioning improvements in 2021. At that time, 21% exited the program with a better social connectedness score than they had at entrance. In 2023, 40% improved their social connectedness score.

Program Changes

In 2023, The Coalition took over the campus maintenance by assuming the contract with the state that was previously held by Bent County. Through the transition, 15 FTE and up to 15 part-time resident work crew positions were added.

During this time, Bent County also abruptly shut down the local transit system that was providing up to nine routes per day to Las Animas, La Junta and Lamar five days per week. The Coalition secured additional funding from the state to create two new driver positions and purchase two used transport vans to back fill the loss of transportation. CCH now provides six routes per day to Las Animas and La Junta. The funding was not sufficient to re-add routes to Lamar.

Facility Upgrades

Not only has this historic property been maintained, but there have also been significant updates. These include upgrades to hot water boilers, replacement of some cast iron sewer lines, remodeling of 10 single resident houses onsite, re-landscaping and installation of a flagpole at the intersection of gate and cemetery roads, and re-planting of the fruit tree orchard at the original 1921 location.

*Completing the program, or achieving their goals in recovery, is the **number 1** reason people leave Fort Lyon*

FORT LYON STAFF

Over 50 individuals serve on the Fort Lyon staff as case managers, nurses, eligibility representatives, cooks, drivers, maintenance technicians, peer specialists, and more. Ninety-nine percent (99%) of the staff are originally from the local Arkansas Valley area or are graduates of the program.

Community Reintegration Specialist Randy Stotts has been with the Coalition for three and a half years, assisting residents in securing housing after they graduate from Fort Lyon. Graduates primarily remain in Colorado with many staying in Las Animas, La Junta, and Lamar in the lower Arkansas Valley. Some have secured CCH housing at North Colorado Station, Civic Center Apartments or other CCH Denver-area properties, and others choose to put down roots across the state. Randy was a resident of Fort Lyon from 2015-2016 and credits CCH outreach team members for their efforts in convincing him to seek treatment at Fort Lyon. "For CCH, I'll always be grateful, because I didn't have a way out."

"I am very blessed to be able to work at Fort Lyon. Being a previous resident, I can come back and work with residents who have the same issues I had and be able to let them know what they can do to move forward. It's possible for anyone if a man like me can do it."



CONCLUSION

Thousands of Coloradans have been helped by the Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community over the past 10 years. The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless looks forward to continuing to refine and expand this program well into the future through an ongoing partnership with the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA). For more information, or to find out how referrals to the program work, please visit <https://www.coloradocoalition.org/fortlyonprogram>

"I feel safe here, I can grow here, this is like school, a school of recovery, a lesson for a journey, it's like skydiving and this place is the parachute. I thank God for this place, my fellow residents who are doing it, the staff who works tooth and nail to help us residents. The state of Colorado for allowing us to be here. I really want to press that there should be more places like this across the United States. I truly believe this is the cure for homelessness, it's help for the mentally ill, it's reintegration into society for people who have been institutionalized, it's a place of learning, a place to build confidence, a place for a comeback, a program of recovery."

-anonymous resident 2023

