

## Tamar's Center: New Directions

The purpose of this report is to identify the needs of the Lower Price Hill (LPH) community within the context of Franciscan Ministries' (FM) mission of addressing the unmet needs of people, with a focus on women/girls, who are underserved, vulnerable, and overlooked.

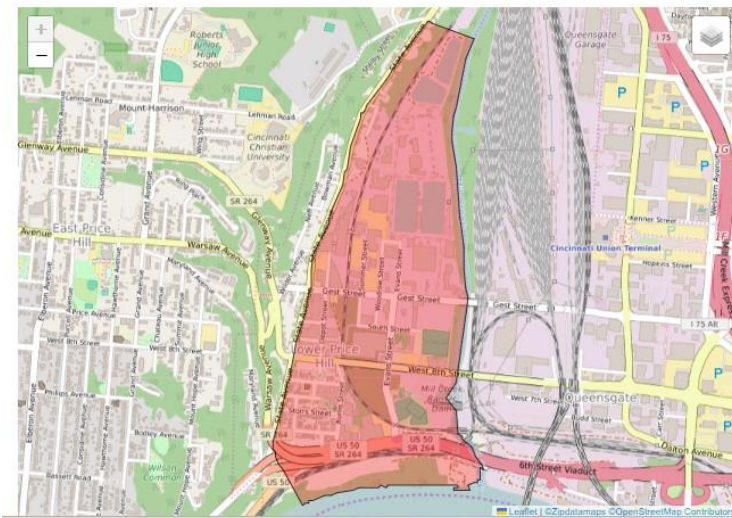
### Methodology

As Franciscan Ministries works to determine the future direction of Tamar's Center at 2142 Hatmaker St., it was necessary to examine the strengths, challenges, needs, and opportunities within the neighborhood of Lower Price Hill. To do this, staff analyzed neighborhood demographics, assets, and crime patterns. Tamar's staff interviewed female residents of the neighborhood to get their opinions and thoughts. The Executive Director conducted face to face interviews with leaders and staff from the main nonprofit organizations with long-standing ties to this community.



### Overview of Lower Price Hill

#### Cincinnati - Lower Price Hill Neighborhood

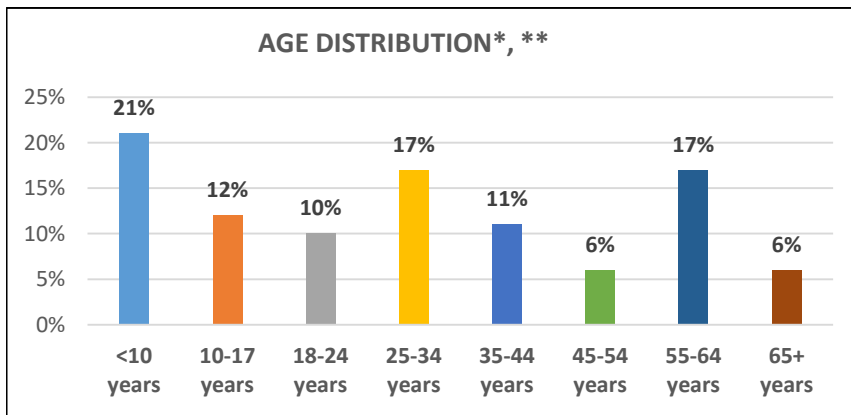
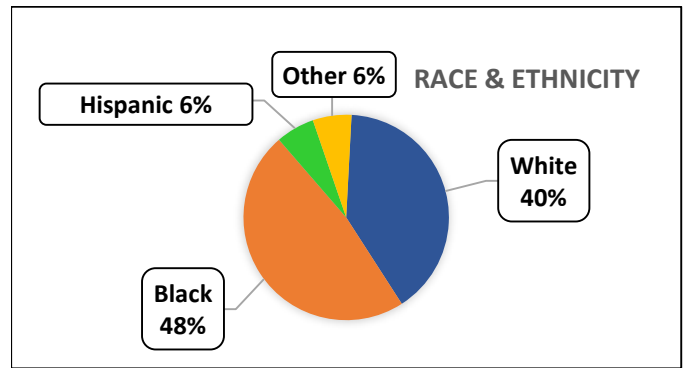
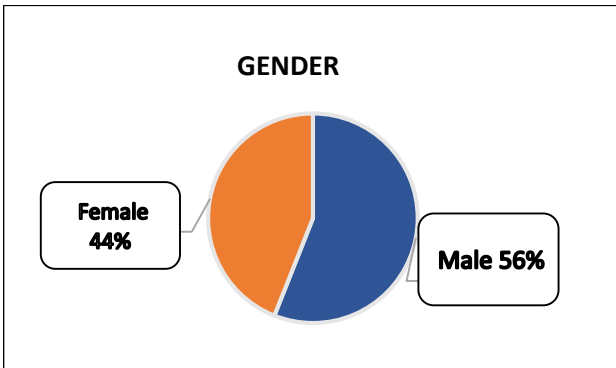


The Lower Price Hill neighborhood is a small, tightly-knit community on the west side of Cincinnati. It is one of the 52 neighborhoods of the City of Cincinnati and is located in Hamilton County, Ohio.

Natural boundaries include the Ohio River on the south side, and Mill Creek on the eastern border. The 6<sup>th</sup> Street Viaduct and River Road also run along the south and State Avenue is the major road on the western border.

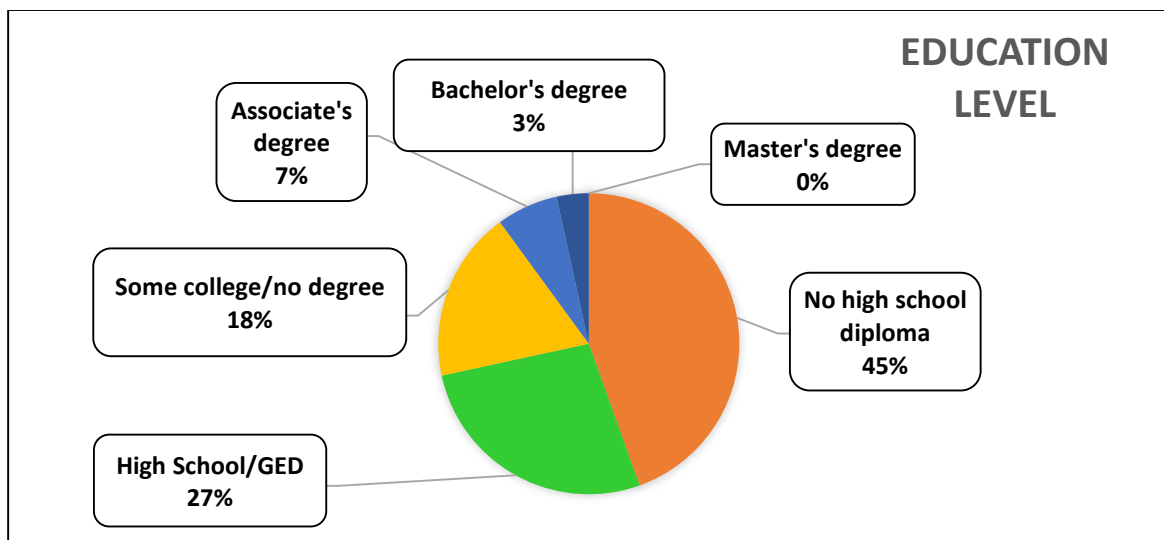
## Demographics

Lower Price Hill has an estimated population of 1,070 people (City of Cincinnati Department of Planning and Engagement, n.d.). The population in the neighborhood has steadily declined since the 1970s. The area has long been considered one of the main urban Appalachian centers in the Cincinnati area, which continues to affect its residents' beliefs and relationships with the rest of the city. Below are the main demographic markers of interest:



**\*Median age:** Males 39.8 years, Females 38.7 years

**\*\*Average Life Expectancy:** 62.9 years of age in LPH vs. 76.1 years for the City of Cincinnati



## Income & Employment

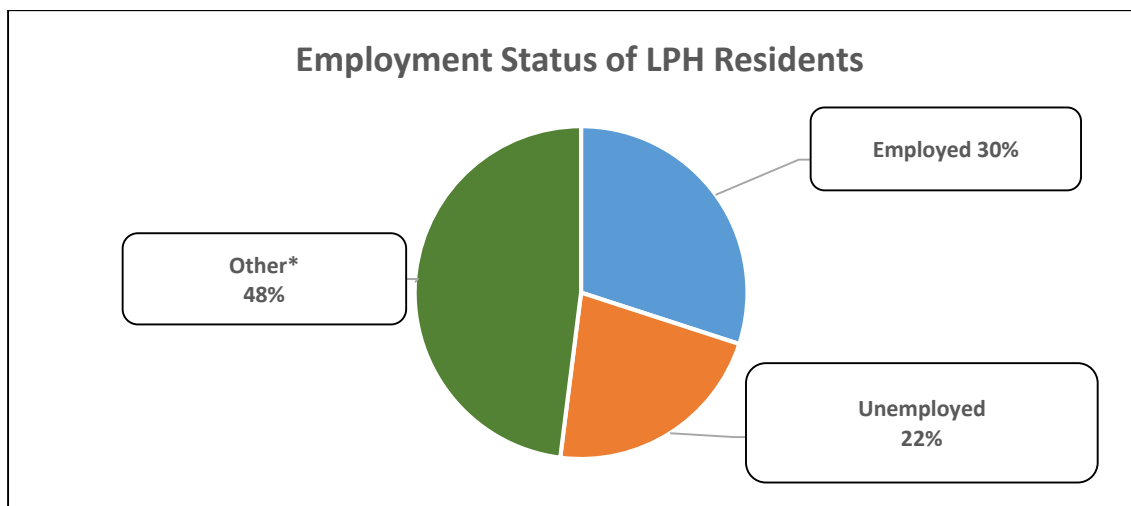
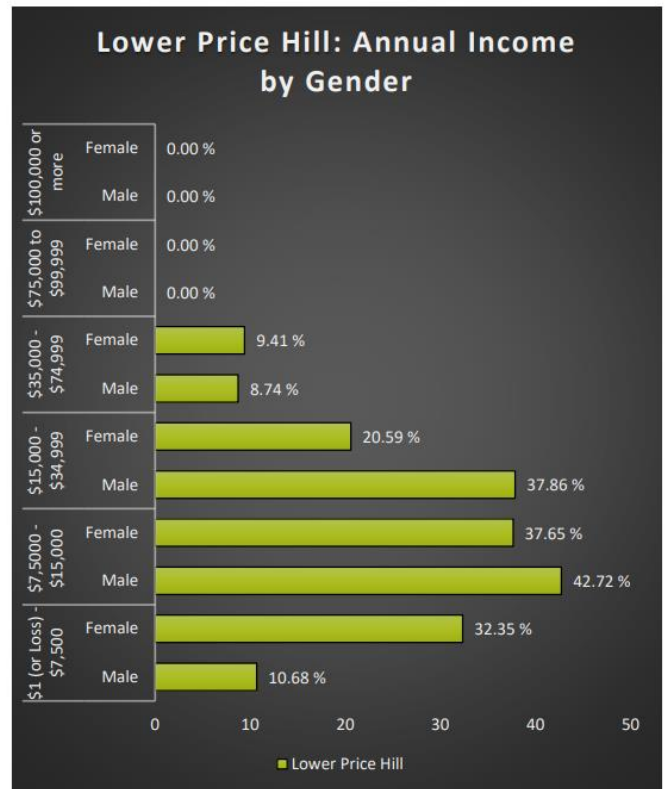
In this neighborhood, 77.2% of residents live below the poverty level. This is 3x the percentage of City of Cincinnati residents who live below the poverty level (26.3%). The median household income for Lower Price Hill is \$15,987 (City of Cincinnati Department of Planning and Engagement, n.d.).

Research indicates that women are disproportionately affected by poverty. Jobs held by women tend to be in lower-paying sectors and they often bear responsibility for caregiving in their family (National Women's Law Center, 2023).

As seen in the chart at the right, women's annual income in the neighborhood is generally lower than men's, with the exception of the two extremes of \$7,500 and below and the \$35,000-\$74,999 category (City of Cincinnati Department of Planning and Engagement, n.d.).

In the greater Cincinnati area, nearly 18% of women are living in poverty and 69% of the children in poverty reside in a single female-headed household (Women's Fund, 2023).

Regarding employment status, 30% of residents are employed. Of significance, the category of "other" denotes individuals who are neither employed nor seeking employment, makes up 48% of the population (Statistical Atlas, 2024).



## Crime

Officer Jeff Wieczorkowski, Cincinnati Police Department's (CPD) District Three Neighborhood Liaison for Lower Price Hill, was interviewed on Friday, July 5, 2024.

He stated that community has a core of individuals invested in keeping crime rates down. These individuals work through long-established groups, businesses, and nonprofits such as the LPH Business Alliance, LPH Community Council, Santa Maria, Community Matters, Price Hill Will, and others. Oyler Community Learning Center is a pre-K through 12th-grade school that provides wrap-around services to students and their families, including a food pantry, community health center, dental clinic, college/job counseling, and other resources.

He stated that the primary crimes committed in Lower Price Hill are property crimes such as burglary and theft from cars. Domestic violence is a known problem, but is underreported. There have been no violent crimes been reported in the past year. There have been 4 incidences of aggravated assault over the past year (Cincinnati Police Department, 2024). The use of Fentanyl is the main drug issue in the area and the open air sale of drugs on streets and sidewalks is easily observed.

With Tamar's original mission in mind, he discussed prostitution and human trafficking and said it is not an issue in Lower Price Hill. Between 2018-2021, CPD, in response to business and resident complaints about prostitution on street corners in the neighborhood, focused enforcement efforts in the area. As with many crimes like this, concentrating effort in one location pushes those involved to seek out new locations, which is now East Price Hill. Below is a recent summary of crime statistics for LPH compiled by the Cincinnati Police Department (Cincinnati Police Department, 2024)

Lower Price Hill Neighborhood Report



Updated: 6/11/2024

Produced by Crime Analysis and Problem Solving

\*\*Total Part 1 Crime by Week displays the End Date for each week period



## Community Stakeholders

### Residents

To better understand the women living in LPH, staff conducted face-to-face interviews. Information on basic demographics, employment, and income were collected as well as their perspectives on community needs and barriers they faced.

In total, staff surveyed 18 women and 1 transgender resident of LPH. Of those surveyed, 81% were between the ages of 35 and 64 years of age and 73% reported being single for their marital status. Regarding income, 95% of respondents reported making less than \$24,999 annually, with 53% of those making less than \$9,999 annually. No one reported owning a home. Eighty-four percent (84%) stated they rent. One person was unhoused and 2 others did not answer. Most of the respondents (75%) stated that they have multiple children.

A majority of residents hold a high school diploma or GED. One individual had completed “some college” but did not have a degree and two respondents had a grade school-level education. None of those surveyed had earned a college or graduate level degree. Employment status showed 42% of those surveyed were working full or part time. Twenty-one percent were unemployed and not looking for work and 11% were unemployed but report looking for work.

Parts 2 and 3 of the survey provide insight into residents’ perception of community issues, barriers, and needs of the neighborhood. In rating issues faced by their household, on a scale of “not a problem” to a “serious problem”, the cost of living, not having enough food for family/self, and income were rated by multiple respondents as serious or moderate issues.

The section on work barriers showed 42% percent felt they had no problems with employment (both those employed and unemployed), 21% said transportation is a problem and another 21% said that their disabilities are a barrier to employment. Healthcare issues yielded only basic information, mainly focused on respondent’s need for transportation to health appointments and the need for services to manage depression and anxiety.

Part 3 asked a series of open-ended questions on issues and needs of the neighborhood, as well as which nonprofits or churches they sought help if it was needed. When one examines the responses to pressing issues or unmet needs in LPH, the answers fall into three main categories—access to “stores”, traffic safety, and housing. Access to stores covers several ideas, including access to affordable food, convenience stores for alcohol and tobacco, and ATMs for cash.

Regarding groceries, there is one store, Meiser’s, at the corner of Hatmaker and State in LPH. Opened in 2021, Meiser’s is intended to be more than a purveyor of groceries. The store is designed to be a focused neighborhood-level social enterprise, offering fresh produce, basic household items, carryout food, and other programs to support the neighborhood. There are no major chain grocery stores in the area. The nearest Kroger store is located “up the hill” and requires transportation to access.

Also contained in the “stores” category is their interest in being able to buy alcohol and cigarettes conveniently. Most of the respondents mentioned this as a concern. The closest stores to buy these products are located in East Price Hill. This distance requires one to have access to transportation and going into the area is perceived as more dangerous, especially for outsiders.

Roads and traffic safety were the second most mentioned issue. Multiple respondents stated that people drove too fast through the area and that the roads were in poor condition. They felt adding traffic calming devices, such as speed humps, would be good for the neighborhood. Finally, the third topic was focused on housing issues, specifically, being able to access safe affordable places to live. Several noted that it was hard to locate affordable housing options, as the rent is too expensive and the condition of the buildings is poor.

When questioned about nonprofit entities or churches they relied on for assistance as needed, most said they did not need any help. However, the women who did rely on these entities answered Community Matters, St. Michaels, and St. Vincent de Paul. One woman stated, in no uncertain terms, that “we don’t need help. We take care of each other.” Others agreed that the neighborhood was very close-knit and people really did take care of each other. One person stated, “you’re never really homeless because you can stay with friends or family.”

### **Nonprofit Contributions**

The Lower Price Hill neighborhood is saturated with non-profits, city funds, and outside private funders. To gather information on current programs in place and to identify gaps that Tamar’s Center might fill, the Franciscan Ministries’ Executive Director met with the following individuals: Mary Delaney/Community Matters; H.A. Musser, Bri Wilson, Hillary Williams/Santa Maria; Rachel Hastings, Ashley Feist, Clare Rachwalski/Price Hill Will.

The nonprofit leaders shared a broad portfolio of programming currently underway in Lower Price Hill. Community Matters has several pathways to support residents, including GED preparation and testing, family sustainability and support activities, access to basic needs/supplies such as food, youth engagement, a community garden, laundromat, and housing options.

Price Hill Will, in addition to an award winning city youth orchestra, provides residents with leadership opportunities in their community, leverages an extensive portfolio of real estate to develop properties to meet specific needs, facilitates home ownership, and serves as a community hub and gathering space. Santa Maria focuses on direct service to children and families through education opportunities in financial literacy/GED/ESL support, assistance in accessing basic needs, case management services, and safe recreation and learning spaces for children and youth, among many other programs.

All interviewees were familiar with Tamar’s Center and reiterated the advice given in prior meetings with FM staff and board members, specifically:

1. Prostitution is a problem in East Price Hill not Lower Price Hill
2. Tamar’s purpose and what they do is not clear to residents
3. Because the purpose is not clear, residents are hesitant to rely on its services

When asked about how Tamar’s Center might improve its reputation with residents and better serve them, they had several suggestions. They shared that it is crucial to be present in the neighborhood and seen as participating in the many outreach activities, such as health fairs or kids’ festivals. Oyler School is a key community gathering place and can provide perspective on needs of children, teens, and families. It is important to cultivate them. Partnering with other nonprofits, as opposed to operating independently, is more efficient and increases program reach. Redundancy in services confuses people seeking help, is inefficient, and creates barriers instead of serving.

There are two additional nonprofits operating relevant programs in the area, Weightless Anchor (BLOC Ministries) and Women of Alabaster. Both programs serve women involved in prostitution in East Price Hill. They are faith based with religious proselytization a major part of the program. They were not interviewed for this research, but noted by other nonprofits in the area.

### **Tamar's Center: Comparing Old and New**

Tamar's Center opened its doors in Lower Price Hill in early 2022. A comparison between program data collected in 2019 and that of 2023 shows a catastrophic drop in services provided in all categories. The number of client visits between 2019 and 2023 dropped by 80% and unduplicated client visits by 60%. Level 1 services provided, such as signing up for government benefits, drug treatment, keeping appointments dropped by 93%. Level 2 services, completing medical treatment, entering treatment or establishing case management, dropped by 91%.

To stem the decline and establish roots in this new community, Julie Mulcahey (Shelter Manager) and Erin Zinicola (Social Worker) implemented a wide variety of outreach activities to draw in participants. Tamar's Center attempted to fulfill the current mission at this location in many ways:

- Conducted weekly outreach in Lower Price Hill, Over the Rhine, East Price Hill, and Liberty Street area locations.
- Launched weekly addiction groups in 3 different modalities- AA/NA, peer recovery, and a group led by Addiction Services Council.
- Established weekly partnership with FreeStore Foodbank, Caracole, and The Salvation Army. These agencies were available weekly to clients, and offered them things such as food stamp sign up, Medicaid sign up, harm reduction services, housing, and ID assistance.
- Worked with BLOC Ministries' program, Weightless Anchor, in East Price Hill to try and coordinate a mutual partnership.
- Hired a peer support specialist to build relationships with clients, who conducted outreach drives 3 times per week.
- Worked with Meiser's grocery to hand out hot meals to community.
- Worked with the Community Matters' "Washing Well" laundry mat to host laundry outreach days.
- Invited St. Michael's agency to host a women's fun event.
- Provided monthly free haircuts for women through FM sister program, Haircuts from the Heart.
- Offered regular pickups and drops offs from all Cincinnati areas, including downtown, East Price Hill, Avondale, Winton Hills.
- For an entire year, hosted weekly "Tuesday at Tamar's" events. Provided attendees with a hot meal, free clothes, food to go, and showers as well as an educational event, such as self-care, art therapy, yoga, gardening, cooking skills, depression management, and mental health therapeutic groups.
- Held special events, such as holiday meals, and supported family reunification dinners.

Despite this extensive variety of offerings, Tamar's Center has been unable to garner sustained interest from women residents in the community.

Tamar's Center is at a crossroads.





## What's Next for Tamar's: Options

The Congregation has made a tremendous investment in Tamar's Center. The purchase and renovation of this property is demonstrated commitment to continue this work. But, how can Tamar's Center meet its mission and properly leverage its resources?

Below is a wide spectrum of options based on staff brainstorming sessions, Tamar's history and resources, and staff experience with local nonprofits and client base. Some of the ideas are a stretch and others more practical, as seen below:

- Sell the property and re-establish Tamar's in a community experiencing high levels of prostitution/human trafficking
- Keep the property and continue working to establish a client base for whom these same services can be provided
- Keep the Tamar's offices in current location and identify another site for direct service work with women in prostitution, via partnership or as sole entity.
- Develop the property into a 24 hour women's shelter
- Pivot to a new service orientation and client base: prevention programming for young women (12-18 years of age).

### Staff recommendation: Pivot to Prevention

The Lower Price Hill community offers a plethora of resources to women already experiencing hardships, such as hunger, lack of education, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence. But could there be a way to prevent the problem in the first place, affecting not one young woman in the Lower Price Hill Community, but many from across the Tri-State as well?

It is proposed that Tamar's Center pivots from treating issues that have already occurred to preventing the problem in the first place. In conversations with nonprofits in the area, when asked specifically about prevention programming for young women ages 12-18, leaders cited very few options for this specific group. There are a variety of activity based programs, such as jewelry making or crafting, as well as educational programs focused on self-esteem or wellness topics. These programs do function as a protective factor that can reduce the negative impact of risk factors or increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. However, the positive effect is limited.

By implementing sustained prevention programming with a long term focus, Tamar's has the opportunity to ensure that the protective factors in these young women's lives outweigh and outpace the risk factors they face in their community. Offering this type of programming has both short and long term potential, changing individual lives as well as the community as a whole.

### Tamar's Reimagined

Below are more details about this proposed program:

#### *Who Can Participate?*

Tamar's would offer programming to girls from Lower Price Hill as well as those from outside the area.

#### *What is the program?*

The programming would utilize established evidence based curricula on topics relevant to 12-18-year-old girls focused on boosting protective factors in their lives. Topics might include healthy

relationships, self-reliance, communication skills, media safety, or character building. Further research is necessary on what would be most relevant to the participants.

The programming would be offered to two distinct groups:

- Girls living in Lower Price Hill neighborhood. Programs would occur in non-school hours on a set schedule with the expectation that participants attend a majority of weekly sessions. In addition to the curriculum, girls also have a chance to socialize in a safe space and it may be relevant to offer a creative activity as well. There would be no cost to participate in the programs for local girls.
- Girls from outside the community who spend a day or several (potentially including overnight) at Tamar's. Participants groups would participate in a service project in Lower Price Hill or with one of FM's other partners, as well as in custom learning sessions created based on input from group leaders. There are numerous options for education, from the topics listed in the first point or broader topics focused on poverty, hunger, or women's issues. There would be a moderate fee for groups to participate in this program.

#### *When Could This Begin?*

Staff propose closing Tamar's beginning in September 2024 to prepare the house for its new purpose as well as to establish a comprehensive project plan, conduct curriculum planning, develop branding, begin participant recruiting and marketing, and other tasks necessary for a January 2025 launch.

#### *Why do this? Who Benefits?*

There are a number of benefits to this model. The individual girls benefit by gaining life skills that serve to bolster them against adverse experiences. The girls from the neighborhood also have a safe space with positive adult women role models. The girls from outside the community benefit from the experience of leaving their safe space to gain new perspectives on lives potentially very different from theirs. And, finally, Franciscan Ministries can offer more volunteer hours to its service partners year round, strengthening those ties.

Finally, longer term, this program has the potential to also affect the wider community. Girls will carry learnings from the programming home to siblings, friends, and others. They have the potential to be a model for positive choices to whole communities, and as they are often primary caregivers, to pass this knowledge to their children.

#### *How much will this cost?*

A review of needs indicate this program could be conducted within the current budget, following modest investment in furniture to accommodate groups who are overnighing. And, as noted above, the fees from groups from outside Lower Price Hill would contribute to any incurred costs related to that program.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, Tamar's Center is at a decision point in its existence. The neighborhood data indicates plenty of need for direct service work, which is already served by other well-established neighborhood nonprofits.

Tamar's has not been able to gain a foothold in this neighborhood. Women involved in prostitution is not a problem in the community and residents do not yet trust Tamar's as a reliable provider. It is critical that Tamar's clarify its purpose in Lower Price Hill to ensure proper stewardship of the assets invested to date.

This document provides several options for discussion and one recommendation from staff. It is hoped that this provides the information and support needed to move forward.

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