

NSF Award for Jim Sullivan, LEO

Professor James X. Sullivan, Thomas J. McDonagh, C.S.C., Associate Professor of Economics and co-Director of the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) has received an award from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to support the evaluation of the impact of the Homelessness Prevent Call Center in Chicago. The \$239,464 award will support LEO's efforts to measure the impact of emergency financial assistance on those at risk of homelessness.

Millions of individuals across the United States lack stable housing, including the more than 2 million who become homeless each year. Historically, homeless initiatives have focused on providing housing and services to those who are already homeless through emergency shelters and transitional housing. Recently there has been a nationwide movement toward policies focused on homelessness prevention – ensuring individuals and families avoid having to call a shelter home. In Chicago, the Homelessness Prevention Call Center (HPCC), which is administered by Catholic Charities Chicago, connects those at risk of homelessness with the dozens of local agencies that provide temporary financial assistance to address their needs.

The goal of Dr. Sullivan's study is to determine the impact of providing temporary financial assistance to those at risk of homelessness on several important outcomes: homelessness, housing stability and crime. Currently call centers like the HPCC in Chicago are accessible by more than 90% of the US Population and process more than 15 million calls each year. Thus, the findings of this study will be highly relevant for policymaking and programming in this area, potentially affecting millions of people. This study will allow policymakers to make more informed choices when allocating limited resources to reduce homelessness, putting resources towards the most effective programs. In addition, providers can make more informed choices, targeting emergency funding to those most likely to benefit from them. This will improve the cost effectiveness of homelessness prevention programs.

“It is very common for nonprofit and government agencies to provide financial assistance to prevent homelessness.” said James Sullivan, one of the study authors. “This is the first study that examines the direct impact of financial assistance on homelessness.”

About the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO)

LEO is a research lab housed in the Department of Economics at the University of Notre Dame. LEO matches top researchers with passionate leaders in social service agencies to conduct impact evaluations that identify the innovative, effective and scalable programs and policies that support self-sufficiency. LEO fulfills the University's mission “to cultivate...a disciplined sensibility to the poverty, injustice and oppression that burdens the lives of so many.”

About Catholic Charities Chicago

Helping people in need for more than 98 years, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago is one of the largest private, not-for-profit social service agencies in the Midwest, annually assisting more than 1 million people in Cook and Lake counties without regard to religious, ethnic or economic background. Catholic Charities fulfills the Church's role in the mission of charity by providing compassionate, competent, professional services that strengthen and support individuals, families and communities.