

Economic situation

Overall

Regarding homeowners' overall financial and economic situation, a little more than half (53%) of homeowners said they have more money than they did before moving into a Habitat home. Twenty-eight percent of homeowners said there has been no change and 19 percent said they have less money.

The money thing, it's huge, we have much more money left over after paying the mortgage each month. We are able to have less stress and can have our children participate in band, sports and other school and community activities that charge. We planted a tree when we moved in and now this tree has grown and we take pictures by that tree and we can actually say that my kids grew up in this house.

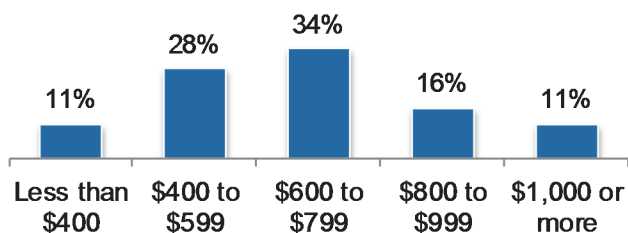
Housing costs

To gain a homeowner's perspective on housing costs, the survey asked respondents to estimate about how much they pay for housing, including mortgage payments, property taxes, and insurance, but not including utilities. While the interviewers explicitly requested only these expenses, it is possible that homeowners included an expense other than those stated, or excluded one of them. For example, housing association fees might be lumped together with housing costs but do not apply to all homeowners. As shown in the Monthly Housing Expenses figure below, the majority of homeowners have monthly housing expenses less than \$800 (73%), with the most commonly reported amount being \$600-\$799 (Figure 12).

The survey asked if homeowners pay more or less in monthly housing costs than they did before moving into their Habitat home. About half said they pay more (52%); 10 percent said there was no change, and 38 percent said they pay less. The percentage of people who said they pay "much more" equals that of people who said they pay "much less" (21%).

It makes living a lot easier, not having to worry about the cost of housing. It is extremely expensive to rent. A Habitat house is much more affordable and it allows me to have a car to take me to work--back and forth. It has allowed us to better ourselves.

12. Monthly housing expenses (N=387)



Employment

The survey asked if anyone in the family had changed jobs since owning their Habitat home, and 47 percent said yes. Seventy-nine percent of those homeowners said their jobs were at least “somewhat better.” An additional 13 percent said there was no change in the quality of job, and 8 percent said their jobs were worse.

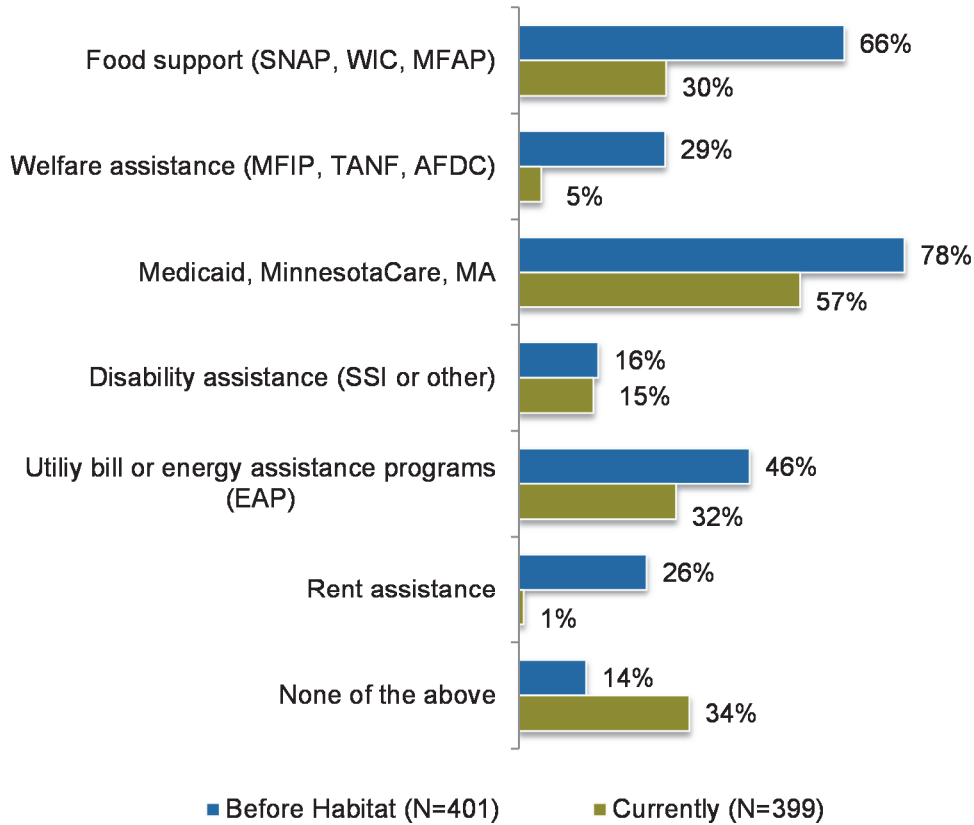
It has given me the opportunity to better provide for my children by going back to school and getting a better job. I couldn't have afforded to do that before getting the Habitat home.

Government assistance

As Habitat applicants, potential homeowners must have an income between 30 and 60 percent of the area median income, or generally between \$19,000 and \$49,000 a year based on location. Habitat homeowners often qualify for government assistance programs at the time of application. At the time of application, 87 percent of homeowners were using at least one government assistance program. At the time of our survey, that number had dropped to 66 percent. Additionally, the average number of programs being used by families decreased from 2.6 programs to 1.4 programs. There was at least a 15 percentage point reduction in every type of government assistance program used except for disability, which was expected to remain the same (Figure 13).

I am not dependent on welfare now and ... I pay my own bills and I save more money now- I pay everything myself such as health insurance, life insurance, medical, etc. I feel good and positive about myself.

13. Government assistance program use (Before, N=401; currently, N=399)



Regional

Overall, changes in the amount of money homeowners feel they have remained relatively consistent across regions.

As a single parent it gave me much more [of] a feel of security and independence. It gave me the confidence and support that I needed to bring my children up. It has given me an opportunity to financially build from where I was at after my divorce. I didn't know what I was going to do as a single mom and renting, and I didn't know which way to turn. I saw the application in the library and I figured what the heck. It was, at the time, an unbelievable dream come true for me. It opened up all kinds of doors for me that I felt confident pursuing as a parent. I was making ends meet, barely, but it lifted a lot of the financial stress off me because it gave me the basis of "this is what it is going to be each month". It gave me a firm foundation to go from. Because of the divorce I had a lot of things to clean up financially, and it helped me to slowly climb out of that deficit to the point that I now feel pretty good about where my credit scores are. I am sure a lot better off than I was back then.

Housing costs

Housing costs varied greatly among regions. Thirty-two percent of homeowners in the North spend less than \$400 a month, in great contrast to the one percent of homeowners in the Twin Cities who spend that amount on housing. While the majority of homeowners in the North and the South spend less than \$600 a month for housing, almost half of Twin Cities homeowners spend between \$600-\$799 for housing (Figure 14).

14. Monthly housing expenses across regions

Estimate of expenses	Overall (n=387)	North (n=91)	South (n=91)	Twin Cities (n=205)
Less than \$400	11%	32%	12%	1%
\$400 to \$599	28%	42%	55%	11%
\$600 to \$799	34%	17%	23%	47%
\$800 to \$999	16%	3%	9%	24%
\$1,000 or more	11%	7%	1%	18%

This difference carried over when asked if the amount they are paying now is more or less than what they were paying previously. Twenty-nine percent of homeowners in the Twin Cities pay less than they paid before moving into a Habitat home, whereas 48 percent of homeowners in greater Minnesota affiliates pay less than before.

I'm very blessed to have found Habitat for Humanity and this program. Where I lived before I was paying twice as much for terrible living conditions. There were empty gun shells in the hallways, and glass in the park. Now we feel so much safer and secure, and are just so happy to have a home we can really call our own.

Habitat for Humanity gave me the opportunity to become a homeowner in an environment where the system isn't always fair as to who can become a homeowner. Homeownership has given me wealth, a financial asset, peace of mind and helped stabilize my housing situation. Plus it's given us a health advantage and allowed us to get away from rental properties which included mold and mildew.

Employment

Homeowners in the North (57%) changed jobs more often than their South and Twin Cities counterparts (46% and 43%, respectively). Of those who changed jobs, over 80 percent of homeowners in the Twin Cities and the South reported their jobs were better, compared to just over 70 percent in the North. In the North, there were more who reported their job quality did not change.

Opportunity to higher education that will lead to higher wages and more confidence as parents. Watching the volunteers work on [the] house open[ed] our eyes to being more aware of other situations, and in turn, now we volunteer.

I really greatly impacted...I used to work full time and my wife worked full time and then we found it hard to find jobs. Now I have a part-time job and my wife has a part-time job. If I did not have a Habitat home I don't know if I could afford to pay for rent, utilities and life essentials like transportation, doctors and that stuff.

Government assistance

The percentages of people using each government assistance program before their Habitat home was relatively consistent between the North and South, with the only noticeable difference being that a higher percentage of people in the North used utility bill or energy assistance programs. Compared to Twin Cities homeowners, greater Minnesota homeowners used all of the government assistance programs at rates nearly 10 to 20 percentage points higher before moving into their Habitat home. Current program use, however, is relatively consistent across regions and most programs. The main exception is current utility bill or energy assistance program use, which is highest in the North (41%) and lowest in the South (24%). Additionally, as disability assistance was being used at higher rates in greater Minnesota, and we don't expect it to change greatly over time, it remains higher in greater Minnesota. In regards to percent change, greater Minnesota had at least a slightly bigger reduction in use of all government assistance programs, which is expected since they had higher use of programs before Habitat. Of noticeable difference were percentage-point reductions of greater Minnesota homeowners' use of food support (43% compared to 30% in Twin Cities), utility bill or energy assistance (26% compared to 5% in Twin Cities), and rent assistance (34% compared to 17% in Twin Cities).

15. Government assistance program use across regions

		North	South	Greater MN	Twin Cities
Food support (SNAP, WIC, MFAP)	Before Habitat	76%	75%	76%	57%
	Currently	33%	32%	33%	27%
	Percentage point change	-43%	-43%	-43%	-30%
Welfare assistance (MFIP, TANF, AFDC)	Before Habitat	36%	32%	34%	26%
	Currently	7%	7%	7%	3%
	Percentage point change	-29%	-26%	-28%	-23%
Medicaid, MinnesotaCare, MA	Before Habitat	86%	79%	82%	74%
	Currently	60%	57%	59%	55%
	Percentage point change	-25%	-22%	-24%	-19%

15. Government assistance program use across regions (continued)

		North	South	Greater MN	Twin Cities
Disability assistance (SSI or other)	Before Habitat	27%	23%	25%	8%
	Currently	25%	16%	21%	10%
	Percentage point change	-2%	-7%	-4%	2%
Utility bill or Energy Assistance Programs (EAP)	Before Habitat	64%	52%	58%	37%
	Currently	41%	24%	32%	31%
	Percentage point change	-24%	-28%	-26%	-5%
Rent assistance	Before Habitat	35%	37%	36%	17%
	Currently	1%	2%	2%	1%
	Percentage point change	-34%	-34%	-34%	-17%
None of the above	Before Habitat	9%	13%	11%	16%
	Currently	33%	34%	34%	35%
	Percentage point change	24%	22%	23%	19%

The percentages of people who reported currently using no government assistance programs remained relatively consistent across regions. Overall, the average number of programs used was reduced by 1.57 in the North, 1.59 in the South, and 0.91 in the Twin Cities.

I have everything I want to do. I am comfortable. It's much better, completely. It helps me with my career, and my children's career, too. Moving every single year, we don't have that problem. All of us feel that the house is much better. It's an amazing life. Mentally, physically, it supports us. Financially, it supports us. We are comfortable. I work, I make my payments. Even if you have government help, they only help financially, you are supposed to look every year for another house. You have a lot of kids, I can't rent, you have a lot of problems, you own your own house if you have a big family like me. I really appreciate it.

Length of homeownership

Analysis revealed no differences between longer- and shorter-term homeowners regarding their current financial situation.

Housing costs

Analysis revealed no differences between longer- and shorter-term homeowners regarding housing costs or change in housing costs.

Employment

Fifty-four percent of longer-term homeowners changed jobs since owning their Habitat home compared to 39 percent of shorter-term homeowners, probably due to the greater length of time they had to change jobs. However, reports of job quality remained relatively consistent.

To me personally, it takes you out of poverty. There is something about saying I have a house and a yard that feels nice. I have room for my 9 grandkids to stay overnight. My kids were all able to work at the local fast food which was a block away. It was great. There is pride in knowing that this is mine.

The mortgage that we are paying is less than we were paying for our rent before. It helped support the kids. We help with their tuition and other basic needs that they need: clothing, school materials and other food. We can pay other bills if we have any problems. We were unable to pay other bills because of the high amount we paid when we were renting. It helps us to pay all of these bills without any problems, worries -health insurance, car insurance, telephone, bills we pay every month.

Government assistance

Reductions in government assistance were greater with longer-term homeowners than shorter-term homeowners in every category except for disability, for which almost no change occurred for everyone, and rent or housing assistance, for which change occurred about evenly for both groups (Figure 16). Disability assistance should remain relatively consistent across time, and the data confirmed this. The data on rental or housing assistance suggests that reduction in need occurs soon after a person becomes a homeowner, which is to be expected. The difference between longer-term and shorter-term homeowners use of other assistance programs suggests that reductions occur gradually.

16. Government assistance use over time

	Before Habitat (N=136)		Currently (N=265)		Percentage point change	
	5 yrs or less	More than 5 yrs	5 yrs or less	More than 5 yrs	5 yrs or less	More than 5 yrs
Food support (SNAP, WIC, MFAP)	64%	68%	35%	26%	-29%	-42%
Welfare assistance (MFIP, TANF, AFDC)	24%	34%	6%	4%	-18%	-31%
Medicaid, MinnesotaCare, MA	82%	75%	64%	51%	-18%	-24%
Disability assistance (SSI or other)	13%	19%	11%	19%	-2%	0%
Utility bill or Energy Assistance Programs (EAP)	43%	50%	31%	33%	-12%	-17%
Rent assistance	26%	25%	1%	1%	-25%	-24%
None of the above	13%	14%	27%	40%	14%	26%