

July 19, 2018

Dear Mayor Soglin:

We write to request additional funding in the 2019 budget for homeless services. The Homeless Services Consortium of Dane County is a partnership of agencies, funders, advocates, and people with lived experience of homelessness who are committed to preventing and ending homelessness. The HSC believes that all households in Dane County should have the opportunity to secure and maintain safe, stable affordable housing.

**Rapid Rehousing**

In the past year, the Homeless Services Consortium has made significant progress in ending homelessness for families. A primary factor in ending family homelessness, is the funding available for Rapid Rehousing programs. In 2018, our community has $1,296,608 in funding for family Rapid Rehousing. In the past year, the family priority list has decreased by 155 families, many of which were housed through Rapid Rehousing funds.

Rapid Rehousing is a solution in ending homelessness. There are three core components involved in a Rapid Rehousing Program 1) housing identification, 2) rent and move-in assistance, 3) housing focused case management and services. Rapid Rehousing can provide assistance for up to 24 months, but most communities find an average of 4-6 months is needed for a household to be stabilized in housing.

Individuals experiencing homelessness are not seeing the same success. This past year has seen a decrease of 95 individuals from the list. Some of this is because people moved into housing, but there have also been some organized efforts to ensure data accuracy on the priority list. People who are housed or no longer in the area were removed from the list and are counted in the 95 individuals. In 2018, our community has $221,943 in funding for Rapid Rehousing for individuals. Because this is a key strategy in ending homelessness and there are currently 290 individuals on the priority list who will qualify for Rapid Rehousing assistance, we need more funding for this program type. In West Virginia, the average cost for an individual to stabilize with Rapid Rehousing is $1,624. With $235,480, our community could house 145 individuals from the list through Rapid Rehousing in 2019.

**Homeless Prevention**

Along with ending homelessness, it is important for our community to ensure prevention of homelessness. Keeping people in their homes makes for healthier individuals and communities. Approximately 2000 households have an eviction filed against them each year in Dane County and some have experienced homelessness in the past which puts them at risk of future homelessness.

Homelessness Prevention services are typically provided in two ways. One is to give direct financial assistance to landlords to cover monies owed by the household. Another is to provide services to avoid eviction. The vast majority of eviction defendants face the eviction process without legal representation. A study in New Haven, CT found that legal services lawyers were three times more likely to help tenants avoid eviction than tenants without lawyers and in cases where the lawyers were unable to help avoid eviction, the evictions were substantially delayed.

Legal Action of Wisconsin has started a small project to provide legal services from volunteer attorneys to eviction defendants on the day they have court. The volunteer attorneys are only able to serve about 6-8 of the approximate 45 defendants facing evictions each week, but they are seeing great success with those served. Under the supervision of a Legal Action attorney, volunteer attorneys provide limited scope legal services. In many cases, evictions are prevented with a settlement agreement negotiated by the volunteer attorney on that day. In five months of program operation, 122 clients were served and 208 volunteer hours were provided by 15 active volunteer attorneys. The annual operating cost for the Dane County eviction defense project is $130,000. Currently, the program receives $25,000 through City ESG funds. We ask the City of Madison to provide funding to continue this important service.

**Housing Navigation**

In our community, there are many households who are self-paying to live in hotels. People who self-pay at a hotel have the resources to afford an apartment, but often have barriers that prevent them from securing housing. With some support and advocacy, these households would likely secure and maintain permanent housing in our community. There is a need for mobile housing navigators who can meet households where they are at and work with them until they secure permanent housing. A housing navigator would help a household identify strengths and barriers to seeking housing, locate available units, complete applications, advocate to the landlord, assist with securing move-in costs and ensure the household understands the lease. With a dedicated housing navigator for households who self-pay to live in hotels, we believe households will move quickly into permanent housing. The HSC suggests that we need $50,000 to provide a housing navigator.

**Support for Homeless Service Providers**

In order for our community to be successful in the prevention and ending of homelessness, the service providers need to have knowledge of best practices used in the field. Many homeless service agencies do not have the funds to provide ongoing training to staff. When providers have access to training and learn about best practices, there is a renewed energy in their work. Currently, agencies send staff to conferences when they are able. Our community could more efficiently train our staff by bringing trainers to Madison. We ask that funds be directed to the Homeless Services Consortium to provide trainings to homeless service providers.

In addition, we request that you direct some funds to the Housing First Coalition. The Housing First Coalition is a statewide coalition that strives to end homelessness by advocating for and supporting effective, sound policies and practices that promote the Housing First philosophy. Their membership includes the Homeless Services Consortium and 3 HSC members sit on the Board of Directors. The Housing First Coalition has provided one free training in our community and future trainings are being planned. In order to support their work, we ask that funds be directed to the Housing First Coalition.

Currently, the City provides funding to the Wisconsin Coalition Against Homelessness. We ask that you, instead, direct these funds to the Homeless Services Consortium and the Housing First Coalition to be used for the above requests.

Thank you so much for your time and attention to these requests. For questions or additional information, please reach out to Jenna Schmitt, Chair of the HSC’s Education and Advocacy Committee at ahelpingheart.jenna@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Education and Advocacy Committee

Homeless Services Consortium of Dane County