

**Excerpts from
2009 Housing First Grant
Report to the Henry J. Predolin Foundation, Inc.
From Dane County, Wisconsin**

Performance Progress of the Grant Program

A. Overview of *Housing First* activities taken through June 30, 2009

The start up of the program has been smooth and successful. We have twenty families with forty-two children enrolled in the program.

Developing program policies and procedures. United Way and the partner agencies met weekly, then bi-weekly in the fall of 2008 and beginning of 2009 to develop operating procedures and policies for screening and working with *Housing First* families. There are agreements with each of the agencies to assure smooth program and financial operations. Over these first six months we have created, tested and refined these day-to-day processes to maximize program success. The program team has remained flexible, making program adjustments to meet new needs and opportunities as they have presented themselves. We now hold monthly collaboration meetings and engage in regular email and telephone consultation.

Hiring and training staff. Program case managers were hired in December 2008 and January 2009. Because this is a new program design, the case managers needed considerable training in the *Housing First* model. The critical issue is faithful implementation of the program model and use of best practices in housing case management by the program staff. Integration of the housing management and social work functions is a central feature of this program; this is highly unusual and requires case managers to integrate their work to address family issues that impact housing in new ways; examples of this are provided later in the report.

Landlords and leases. We have worked steadfastly to develop and refine relationships with landlords with good housing stock in decent neighborhoods. As they have come to see the quality of the work of the case managers in negotiating issues with the families, they see these that this tenants are much more promising as stable tenants than their housing records may show. Month-to-month leases are a very promising idea for low-income tenants and their landlords because both have flexibility to end the arrangement if circumstances change.

Goals and outcomes. United Way worked with our partner agencies and the Wisconsin Department of Commerce (the agency that administers Housing and Urban Development grants in the state of Wisconsin) to develop standardized measures for tracking program success, notably in the areas of housing stability and goals for the children. The case worker works with the parents to determine the type and number of goals for each family member. .

The Department of Commerce set up a United Way *Housing First* account on their Service Point data system so that the three agencies can enter all program data in one system and United Way can use the system to evaluate results of the program. Additionally, we are working with the Madison Metropolitan School District and the Madison Community Development Block Grant office to refine processes to collect data on homelessness children and families in Dane County.

Recruitment and retention of families. Shelter case managers make referrals to the program, based on their identification of families that would be suitable candidates. We enrolled our first family in the program in January 2009.

B. Progress toward the *Housing First* goals and outcomes as outlined in the grant agreement, including the number of people served by the program, the characteristics of those served

Section 3 of the grant agreement regarding the Housing First program specifies that: (i) By June 30, 2009, at least twenty (20) families, with a total of at least thirty-six (36) minor children in those families, who are targeted by United Way to participate in the Program, have moved from temporary shelters to Permanent Housing as a result of their participation in the Program; and (ii) Eighty percent (80%) of the families described in Section 3(a)(i) who have moved from temporary shelters to Permanent Housing through their participation in the Program, continue to reside in some form of Permanent Housing as of June 30, 2009.”

We are pleased to report that we have met the six-month goal for the program: as of June 30, 2009, we have enrolled 20 families with 42 minor children in the *Housing First* program and 100% of these families continue to successfully participate in the program.

Below is some background data on these families. It is interesting to note that the demographic data closely mirror the overall profile of homeless families in Dane County.

- The 20 families include 22 adults and 42 children. The 42 children vary in ages: 16 are age five or under, 13 are age six to twelve, and 13 are age thirteen to seventeen. In other words, these families are mostly single parent households with an average of two children. This is not a surprise: single parents have the hardest time meeting their financial obligations.
- At the time of being placed in shelter, thirteen of the twenty families had spent the previous night in a shelter, four with relatives, two in the hospital, and one on the street.
- Eight of the twenty-two (36%) of the adults heading up these households have a disability.
- The majority of the heads of household are African-American (79%), and the rest are White (21%). None are Hispanic.

A major quality in an applicant are motivation and determination to pay the rent and stabilize their family over the long term. All of the families have a multitude of problems; that is why they are homeless. This program is designed to help those who want to help themselves: they get a housing subsidy and a lot of guidance and support for a year or two, but then they are on their own. *Housing First* cannot help parents who do not want to work or find other income, or parents who won't help their kids avoid delinquency and making trouble in their building. Also, the program cannot change a deep underlying condition which can not be addressed with even intense case management, such as a single parent with a profound disability. (Case Family stories presented)

Because the program screens to make sure that we select families that are likely to be successful should by no means suggest that these families are doing well or would make it on their own. These families have serious problems, often in many aspects of their lives. A third of the families have a head of household with a disability. Not surprising, given what they have been through, depression and anxiety are common. Parents have lots of shame about the mistakes that they have made. They expect to fail and believe others expect them to fail. For

many of them, it is instinctive and easier in the short term to run away. They need to learn how to make good decisions; a big part of the case manager's job is to help them make those good decisions. The parents and children often need to learn to connect in new and positive ways – without other parties that may have contributed to their problems or complicated the relationships. These are tough issues to deal with while you are also moving, looking for employment, settling your children in school, finding medical care, and dealing with the many other issues that arise when you become homeless.

Since most of the families have only been in the program a matter of months, we have limited outcome data regarding its impact on children. However, we can report on the areas in which the families are setting goals to help improve their children's lives.

- Not surprisingly, more than half of the children have goals in the area of education. 52% have goals related to increasing the child's engagement in positive extracurricular activities. This is important because these children have lacked opportunities to learn skills through exposure to new activities and positive social interaction with their peers. 23% have goals to improve their school performance and 21% have a goal to enroll in school or an early childhood program.
- 30% of the children have a health care goal - to gain access to regular health care, address health care problem, or engage in preventive health measures.
- More than 30% have goals relating to improving their social relationships at home, schools or in the community.

Our end of year report will indicate how the children and adults are doing on attaining their goals.

C. Calendar for continued implementation of the *Housing First* program, including the schedule for completing the use of this grant to fulfill the grant goals

Over the next six months we will place twenty five more families with approximately forty children to participate in the *Housing First* program. The case managers will work intensively with the families to resolve the issues that led to their homelessness as well as to address their children's needs in order to assure that the family remains stably housed.

D. Description of the difference this grant has made and what lasting benefits this grant brings to the community, the program, and to United Way.

Establishing the Predolin *Housing First* program in Dane County has already created a significant benefit to Dane County.

On the community level, *Housing First* is no longer a theoretical program that only exists in other places. It is now a program that lives and breathes in Dane County. There is a sense of community ownership, a "buzz" about "our" *Housing First* program. Just last week, two landlords dropped off brochures and asked to meet with us about their interest in the program and a philanthropist in Sun Prairie met with us to consider how we might create a smaller scale *Housing First* program targeted just for Sun Prairie. Child welfare workers at the Dane County Department of Human Services have called to make special appeals for families with children who do not meet the eligibility criteria, demonstrating both the agency's knowledge about and belief in the benefits of the program for poor and at-risk children.

For the partner agencies, the shift from the planning stage to the implementation stage changes fundamentally their relationship with the model. We are working together to refine the model to

have the best outcomes for children and families living in this community, with its particular rental, service, employment and other characteristics. For these agencies, this is a significant shift in focus away from the shelter model and into supported transitional housing. United Way and the partner agencies are establishing new types of partnership agreements with local landlords, schools, child care providers, employers and others who are now aware of the *Housing First* model and excited to be part of making it a success.

As part of our Agenda for Change, United Way of Dane County set an ambitious goal to reduce family homelessness by 50% over ten years. Launch of the *Housing First* model is one of the cornerstones of achieving that goal. With this grant we are further testing our strength as a catalyst for improving the circumstances of our community's most disadvantaged members by fundamentally changing the models of service delivery to align with research based practice and government funding priorities.

E. Have you encountered any problems or any happy surprises in implementing the grant program?

United Way of Dane County described in some detail the challenges facing low income families as a result of the deep economic recession. The poor economy is having a particularly devastating impact on poor families, forcing many into homelessness. People with very low incomes have few if any savings, and often do not qualify for unemployment compensation. Low skilled parents are having the most difficult time finding employment, as over-qualified applicants fill their positions until they can find better jobs. We anticipate that our biggest challenge over the next year will be helping our families find stable employment to replace the housing subsidy they receive through the *Housing First* program,

Our greatest accomplishment has been our ability to build on our relationships with property-owners to find landlords willing to rent to these families and work with the case managers to keep the families stability housed. Deb Zamzow from the Meridian Group said: "I just want to tell you we are very excited [about the *Housing First* program]. We see many benefits for both the resident and owner."

Housing First families by necessity are going to move into low-income housing. The landlords for these properties are accustomed to tenants who are unreliable in terms of rental payments and behavior. Landlords are finding they get faster results on tenant issues when they work with *Housing First* because they can call the case manager to make sure the family follows up.

Conclusion

The Henry J. Predolin Foundation Board can be very proud of the tangible impact it has had in the lives of 42 destitute children and their families. Each night they go to sleep in a bed in a home with enough food. A case manager is working with their parents to help them reach important goals related to their health, education, and welfare. Over the next year, their lives will be transformed as the family achieves stability and supports them as they grow and learn. Over the next six months, at least forty more impoverished children and their families will also have their lives transformed, thanks to you.