

WINONA COUNTY SCATTERED SITES SUPPORTIVE HOUSING



HOMELESSNESS IN MINNESOTA

On a single night in January 2022 in Minnesota, 7917 people experienced homelessness. Of those, 22% were unsheltered, 78% were in emergency shelters and 22% were in transitional housing; 62% of individuals were single adults; 290 were veterans. These numbers are considered to be low because not all regions conduct unsheltered counts.

Individuals experiencing homelessness often face many challenges and barriers to health care. There is a strong linkage between homelessness and mental health and/or substance use disorders. Barriers such as lack of transportation, stigma or difficulty with communication frequently prevent homeless individuals from accessing appropriate healthcare. The need to focus on basic needs is often prioritized over seeking care. Oftentimes, the result is decreased life expectancy due to infectious diseases, cardiovascular disease, cancer, unintentional injury, substance use, suicide and homicide.

SOLUTIONS

Developing a Scattered Sites Supportive Housing Program will provide supportive housing in scattered community settings for eligible low-income individuals with disabilities. Participants will live in apartments or homes (as opposed to a group setting) and will have their own lease with the landlord.

A key element to this program is that supportive services will be provided to participants for identified needs such as transportation, medical and social services and basic living skills. The supportive services will help the participant remain housed and be a good tenant as well as create pathways out of homelessness.

BENEFITS



Participants will enjoy stable housing without having to worry about where the next months' rent will come from. They will also have supports in place to help them with identified areas of needs, so that they can have the highest quality of life possible.



Landlords will have ready-to-rent tenants, will receive guaranteed rent payments and will have someone to call if issues arise during the tenancy. If funding efforts are successful, there may be funding to help rehabilitate apartments to habitability standards and to mitigate any damage caused by tenants.



Public safety will increase through the reduction of homelessness among disabled and formerly incarcerated individuals will be reduced creating a healthier community. By helping marginalized populations, the program will also increase community efforts at inclusion and diversity.

WHERE ARE WE TODAY?



Hope for Homes is a coalition of community leaders from across systems dedicated to addressing housing needs in Winona County. In 2022, this coalition was successful in obtaining American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding to develop and administer a Scattered Sites Supportive Housing Program in Winona County which will be managed by Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center.



These ARP funds will be used to support necessary staff (including a Housing Resource Specialist and Housing Advocate) to see through the vision of this group. In addition, there are limited funds available for security deposits (placement fees) for prospective tenants, but additional funding will be needed for these fees. Funding is also needed for a landlord mitigation fund, which would compensate landlords for damages caused to their property by a program participant. In early 2023, Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center will post to hire a Housing Resource Specialist to focus on connecting to our community, facilitating the development of a tenant selection process and beginning to identify potential landlords.

WHAT IS NEEDED MOVING FORWARD?

Partnerships are critical to the success of this initiative. Champions for the program are necessary to avoid the NIMBY (not in my backyard) opposition. It will be important to engage community partners in the project so they possess accurate information about the program and can champion the cause.

We must identify and engage with those who have experienced homelessness and the barriers associated with housing instability to best inform the development of the program.

Participants should be willing to rent from the landlord, receive supportive services, and comply with the terms of the lease.

Landlords must sign a standardized housing support agreement with the county; must pass a habitability inspection; must provide a bed and bedding, clothing storage, linen, laundry and housekeeping supplies or services; and must keep up the building and grounds.

Winona County Department of Health and Human Services will determine whether a person qualifies for Housing Support (financial) and supportive services, conduct habitability inspections on housing units and oversee the supportive services provider.

As the vision becomes a reality, a shift to sustainability will become important. By securing additional funding through Community Living Infrastructure grants, the Housing Resource Specialist can be subcontracted on a biennial basis. Identification and engagement with additional funders will be necessary to make the program successful.