UNITED WAY OF MCLEAN COUNTY HOUSING ASSISTANCE COALITION PERIODIC REPORT: MARCH 2022

The United Way of McLean County Housing Assistance Coalition convened in May 2020 to respond to area housing insecurities exacerbated by job loss and other impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. This report is shared with area stakeholders to highlight Coalition successes and identify takeaways from this ongoing joint effort, in particular recognizing housing needs that will continue in McLean County for years to come.

MEMBERSHIP

The coalition has representatives from the following groups, as well as interested community members:

Area churches

Area property owners

Catholic Charities

Chestnut Health Systems

Children's Home & Aid

City of Bloomington

City of Bloomington Township

Home Sweet Home Ministries

Illinois Prairie Community Foundation

LIFE CIL

McLean County

McLean County Regional Planning Commission

Mid-Central Community Action

Nicor Gas

Normal Township

PATH

Prairie State Legal Services

Project Oz

Regional Office of Education #17

Salvation Army

St. Vincent DePaul

State Farm

Tazwood Community Services

The Immigration Project

Town of Normal

United Way of McLean County

West Bloomington Revitalization Project

YWCA

SUCCESSES

- Resource awareness campaigns (billboards to raise awareness about 2-1-1 service referral line; coordinated social media campaigns about financial assistance; development of housing assistance handouts for legal help, food and shelter, rental assistance, and emergency assistance; communication with area landlords to utilize assistance as alternative to eviction; Spanish language translation of resource info).
- Development and utilization of a coordinated entry application process (one uniform application for emergency financial assistance related to Covid-19 across multiple participating agencies).
- Inter-agency sharing of a continuously updated financial assistance matrix.
- Inter-agency sharing of key data, including eviction cases and shelter capacity.

Since May 2020, these efforts have helped area agencies work together to address increased requests for emergency assistance, respond to an increase of area evictions after the state and federal eviction

moratoriums expired, and ongoing threats to basic needs including utility shut-offs and food insecurity. Coalition partners provided over $5.1 million in direct assistance from May 2020 through February 2022 and assisted community members with additional applications for funds distributed by the State of Illinois.

TAKEAWAYS: CONTINUING BARRIERS TO HOUSING STABILITY

The Coalition has identified the following non-exclusive list of gaps in services and barriers to area housing stability that will require new and sustainable funding sources, legislation, and/or community planning to meet ongoing community needs:

- Low-income households do not earn enough to afford rising area rents and housing prices.
- Renters lack financial and tangible assistance for transportation and moving, storage, temporary housing in between leases, temporary pet shelter solutions, application fees, and related costs.
- Many funding sources (emergency assistance, rental assistance, rapid rehousing) have restrictions making them inaccessible to large groups of community members facing housing instability, including individuals and families who:
    - Have received an eviction notice but are not yet in court;
    - Are proceeding in an eviction process but have not yet been evicted;
    - Are couch-surfing or "doubling-up," but are not literally homeless according to HUD (in shelter, in a vehicle, or on the street);
    - Are undocumented immigrants;
    - Are low income but over income-qualifying guidelines.
- The number and content of applications for services can overwhelm those seeking resources.
- Renters with records of eviction, poor credit, lack of rental history, and/or criminal history face screening barriers in obtaining rental housing.
- Covid-19 rental assistance funds are becoming exhausted and are not long-term safeguards.
- Current housing stock does not appear to meet the community need (affordability, multigenerational supply, location relative to jobs and transportation, etc.)

ONGOING COALITION GOALS

- Ease and end homelessness in McLean County.
- Improve inter-agency coordination of services to meet complex needs of individuals and families.
- Develop relationships with the business community to recognize and address the impact of economic growth on area housing needs.
- Improve and develop relationships with area landlords and promote mutual benefit of participation in programs such as rapid rehousing (financial assistance and case management).
- Improve and develop relationships with area hotels, shelters, and other temporary housing entities, to increase and improve stopgap resources.
- Assess and improve resources available to unhoused persons, including warming/cooling centers, food services and transportation services.
- Improve communication to all stakeholders (website, listserve, text alerts, information clearinghouse).

- Mitigate the need for community members to relocate out of the area due to housing insecurity.
- Facilitate collection of and analyze data on the community cost of area housing instability (social inequity, risks to health and safety, trauma, impact on economic development, cost of emergency services, etc.).
- Promote long-term affordable housing development.
- Facilitate community input through moderated public forums.
- Monitor municipal legislation addressing barriers to housing stability.
- Monitor disparate impacts of area housing instability on certain populations. Develop related metrics including race, religion, sex, gender identity, mental and physical disability, familial status, national origin, immigration status, exposure to domestic violence, and former incarceration.
- Develop long term, funded area resources to bridge identified gaps in services, including:
    - Housing navigation services (identifying client-appropriate housing, application assistance, navigate funding sources, case management);
    - Ongoing coordinated entry services;
    - Centralized physical location(s) for coordinated applications and information (community service center model);
    - Community buy-in through financial and other contributions for more sustainable local emergency assistance.

CONCLUSION

McLean County would benefit from sustainably designed programming to meet community housing needs. The United Way of McLean County Housing Assistance Coalition should continue to meet indefinitely to promote such programming and to continue inter-agency sharing to maximize community benefit of existing resources.

Our community members and neighbors are struggling to recover from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in their relationships, health, employment, and housing. The complex difficulties that have arisen during this historic time have thrust them into a world of services and agencies that many have never sought help from until now. The confusion of navigating these diverse service agencies and processes has amplified the urgent need for a more cohesive system that is easier to access and progress through. The Coalition recommends that a timely and initial intervention step is to establish a Housing Stability Navigator immediately.

PREPARED BY: United Way of McLean County Housing Assistance Coalition, March 2022