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Letter in Support of Heading Home Ramsey's (HHR's) Request HF 1686 and SF 2033

March 1, 2023

Project Home at the Provincial House:

Shelter and Economic Mobility for Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness in Ramsey County



March 1, 2023

To: Human Services Finance Committee Chair: Representative Mohamud Noor

Health and Human Services Committee Chair: Senator Melissa Wiklund

Dear Representative Noor and Senator Wiklund,

Interfaith Action of Greater Saint Paul mobilizes faith communities to support the stability and economic mobility of our neighbors. Project Home is a program of Interfaith Action. With capacity for up to 30 families or 100 individuals, Project Home is the largest shelter in Ramsey County for families with minor children experiencing homelessness.

Overview

For 23 years, Interfaith Action provided this shelter at minimal cost to the government.



We had no facility of our own; instead, we relied on area churches and synagogues to host us for a month at a time and largely relied on their volunteer labor. The families packed up their belongings and relocated to a different house of worship each month. Every day the families moved from the host congregation to the Day Center at 6:30 am; then the children boarded school buses from the Day Center to their schools; then the school buses took them back to the Day Center at the end of the school day; and

then, at 5:30 pm, the families moved back to the host congregations to sleep on cots, with cardboard dividers between families, in basements and classrooms of churches and synagogues.



The COVID public health crisis forced us to rebuild the Project Home operating model because houses of worship could no longer welcome us given significant concerns about the health of volunteers and the families.

During COVID, ***we developed a unique public/private/faith partnership that*** allowed the shelter to relocate to a former convent at 1880 Randolph Avenue (near the St. Catherine University campus; see "partnership" below). The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet said at Christmas time in 2020, "***There is room at the inn.***"

Our guest families are teaching us that ***having private bedrooms, real beds, and minimal disruption is very stabilizing, and allows the families to focus on the work they need to do to build family success.*** This move also allowed us to increase the number of people we

serve by a factor of 2.5 (moving **from 40 beds to 100 beds**). The increased capacity helped reduce the number of families on the Ramsey County shelter waitlist. However, there are **still not enough family beds** in Ramsey County to meet the needs of all families with minor children experiencing homelessness.

Without governmental funding, this shelter would not be possible. Project Home would have to revert to its former model, or close. Because of continuing COVID concerns, we do not think our former model of church and synagogue hosting will work in the foreseeable future. Indeed, many houses of worship are not even fully open to their own members. And even **if we could go back fully to the old model, our capacity would be reduced from 100 beds to 40 beds at best.**

Request



We support HHR's request for your offices' help to find sufficient funding to stabilize Project Home at its current capacity (100 beds / 30 families). This model is cost-effective for the long-term success of Ramsey County's families who are working so hard to gain an economic foothold and provide stable living and learning environments for their young children.

Interfaith Action requests funding to provide some measure of security for the work of Project Home at the Provincial House. This request is designed to **replace the ESG-CV funds** that made it possible for Project Home to move to the Provincial House during COVID, and to fund county administrative costs that are necessitated by contracts with Interfaith Action.

Key Facts About Project Home

⇒ **Impact: move from shelter to enduring family success.** We provide **emergency**

shelter when the family comes to us. We provide intensive supports to **boost the family's stability and economic mobility** during their stay and ongoing support to maximize ongoing family success once the family relocates to their positive housing destination.

⇒ **Number of Families Served.** The existing conditional use permit (CUP) allows us to

accommodate up to 30 families or 100 people. We are on track to serve 175 families (more than 600 people) in calendar year 2022. **If the CUP were to be revised, we could accommodate even more as many rooms stand open.**

- ⇒ **Average Length of Stay.** Pre-COVID, Project Home’s average length of stay was 71 days; during COVID, the average has been 83 days.¹ Our length of stay is now just 66 days.
- ⇒ **Placement in Positive Housing Destinations.** We assisted 62% of our families last year to “Positive Housing Destinations” as defined by HUD. About one-third of those families found housing through Ramsey County’s Coordinated Entry System. The other *two-thirds of those families found housing with support from Project Home’s Rapid Exit team.*²
- ⇒ **Persistence in Positive Housing Destinations.** Data show that six months after the families move to their positive housing destinations, *91% of the families are still in that housing.*
- ⇒ **Savings.** Our families participate in budgeting, savings, and general financial education while at Project Home. Last year our families entered Project Home with an average of \$37 and left with an average of \$1,003 in savings. This means that once they settle in housing, their *new lives are not derailed by the first expensive problem* that they may face.
- ⇒ **Ramsey County Family Shelter Waitlist.** When we count numbers on a waitlist, we need to remember to count each family as three to four people (on average). Before COVID, there were on average about 56 families on the shelter waitlist (about 196 people based on multiplying the number of families times 3.5). [Real-time data are here.](#) The waitlist is smaller now, likely because of the eviction moratorium. As the eviction “off-ramp” takes effect, we expect the number of families to increase past pre-COVID levels. Even with the Project Home expansion, there are still not enough emergency shelter beds to serve all the families in need. Any reduction in shelter bed count would worsen this.
- ⇒ **Meaningful Supports.**
 - **Supports for Adults.** Our Rapid Exit Social Work team sets us apart from other shelter settings. This team helps families ladder-up in education and employment; find jobs that are right for them; find positive housing destinations that work given those jobs; solve problems including child care, transportation, legal issues, accessing documents, and more.
 - **Supports for Children.** Our staff provide onsite parenting support, give tips and tricks to manage challenging childhood behaviors, provide school, Head Start, Early Start and day care enrollment support and outside referrals for family therapy, chemical dependency recovery support, etc.
- ⇒ **Partnership.** The Project Home shelter is possible because of a unique partnership forged during COVID between Ramsey County, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, and Interfaith Action.

¹ The actual *nights of stay* is a lower number because families can get weekend passes to stay with family overnight. The *length of stay* is calculated based on the date of entering the program and the date of leaving the program.

² About one third of the families (37.5%) received housing referrals from Ramsey County’s Coordinated Entry System; the other nearly two-thirds of the families (62.5%) found housing by working with Project Home’s Rapid Exit Social Work Team. In 2018, before we adding our Rapid Exit team, only about one-third of Project Home families were successful in transitioning from shelter to housing. Our Rapid Exit team has nearly doubled the percentage of families who achieve positive housing destinations upon leaving shelter (from approximately 33% to 62%).

⇒ **Welcoming Building and Welcoming Neighborhood.** The Provincial House is a clean, beautiful, cheerful place that allows families to release the stress of homelessness and focus on what they need for family success. Moving shelter into Provincial House allowed our partnership to repurpose an underutilized, partly vacant building to provide safe, stable shelter in an area of opportunity.

Project Home includes a large dining room; multiple sunrooms where children can do homework; a fourth-floor playroom for kids to be kids; a computer lab for adults; a playground, a basketball court; and more. In Ramsey County town hall meetings with residents and businesses in the Highland Park neighborhood, nearly 500 people (250 at each of two meetings) said, ["YIMBY" – Yes In My Back Yard!](#)

⇒ **Families Present Needs Different from Singles' Needs.** It's easy to forget how different families' and singles' needs are from each other: ***54% of our guests are under the age of 13.*** In designing the shelter and economic mobility programs, our focus is supporting the children's well-being and learning, and supporting the adults' ability to build a life pathway that will be nurturing for their children.

We have perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build stability and economic mobility for families with children who are facing homelessness in Ramsey County. ***We applaud the efforts of Ramsey County, the City of Saint Paul, and the State of Minnesota to dramatically increase the amount of deeply affordable housing in the next 3-5 years. We need your support to care for children and families in need while this dream is being realized.***

Warmly,



Randi Ilyse Roth
Executive Director