

Becker County Homeless Task Force & DL Overnight Emergency Shelter

In October 2020, the staff at First Lutheran Church (FLC) noticed an increase in the number of individuals who were homeless and seeking shelter in the Detroit Lakes area. The shelters in Detroit Lakes, Fargo/Moorhead & White Earth were full so we decided we needed to try to help. The FLC Social Justice Team met and decided to enlist community members to discuss providing safe emergency shelter in Detroit Lakes area until the individuals could get into a homeless shelter or be able to afford their own housing. The "Becker County Homeless Task Force" was formed and included people from various churches and organizations in the Becker County area. Homelessness was not new to the area churches, for years individuals would come to them seeking safe shelter, so when we reached out many of them were eager to help. When the task force first met we discussed locations for overnight emergency sheltering. It was mentioned that the Fargo/Moorhead area used churches as host sites for overflow sheltering during the winter for individuals to sleep on cots overnight. It was decided that FLC would be the host site with volunteers coming from all the community churches. FLC is a central location and the staff's available to do intake during the day. The church also had the space to shelter and it was approved by the Vision Council.

With the help of an FLC member, who's currently a coordinator with West Central MN Continuum of Care Homeless to Housed Task Force, we received a grant. The grant was a MN Covid-19 Fund distributed by Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, on behalf of the Department of Human Services, Office of Economic Opportunity. The first grant awarded on December 8, 2020 was for a total of \$25,577. This grant was approved for spending from April 1, 2020 to December 30, 2020. We received a second grant totaling \$38,244 on March 2, 2021 and this funding was to be spent by June 30, 2021. We received our 3rd and final grant on July 1, 2021 for \$10,100 to be spent by August 31, 2021. The total of all three grants are \$73,921.00. The entire grant was spent and we submitted a report of all Covid-19 Emergency Response Funding to the Office of Economic Opportunity at the Department of Human Services on September 10, 2021.

The grant was divided into 5 categories. Shelter-\$49,601.88, Supplies-\$2,233.87, Food-\$7,846.26, Staffing-\$7,618.70, & Rehab Upgrades for shelter facility-\$6,600. Shelter expenses included hotel stays, first month's rent, damage deposits, shelter cots & bedding. Supply expenses included hygiene items, Covid-19 disinfectants and spray, protective gear, and other supplies for sheltering individuals. Food expenses included meal vouchers & gift cards, groceries, food to prepare meals, food pantry grocery bags, a fridge & microwaves for the shelter. Staffing expenses included hiring a few site leads for the shelter and staffing to help with managing the grant process and budget. Rehab of the shelter facility included expenses to bring both the library, conference room and surrounding areas up to code with the approved exit signage, fire alarms, carbon monoxide system, door security system and security cameras. We have a completely detailed budget spreadsheet with every receipt for all expenses. If anyone would like to see a complete breakdown of each expense category, the binder is in the FLC office.

Within that grant period, we helped 67 households with shelter and food and 6 of these households had children. There was a total of 750 nights paid for stays at a hotel or Airbnb with the total cost of hotel/Airbnb being \$44,014.56. There were 4 households helped with damage deposits or first month's rent, with the total spending amount being \$2,300. There is a detailed spreadsheet of the number of nights each individual stayed. Some stayed 1 night while some were helped for a couple months until they secured housing. All the individuals we helped shelter were referred to Mahube-Otwa housing

intake. Many of these individuals received help from them with their first month's rent/damage deposit depending on their income guidelines at the time. If they did not qualify with Mahube-Otwa, then we helped them with our grant funding. There were 4 households served in the shelter at FLC for a total of 6 days. Over 250 pre-cooked meals were cooked by volunteers, frozen, and handed out to individuals. There were also 215— \$10 meal cards purchased from the grant. Over 100 pre-packaged grocery bags of food were handed out to individuals.

After that grant ended August 30th 2021, we reached out to our own First Lutheran Church Foundation and applied for and received \$5,000 dollars in November 2021. We also applied and was awarded a grant from Essentia Health Community Support for \$10,000 in December 2021. Both these grants helped tremendously with emergency sheltering over the winter months again. In January 2022, we received \$2000 dollars from Walmart's Community Grant. This was another important donation as we feed the individuals who are hungry meals! We have helped 25 people who were homeless from Sept to December 2021 with 74 nights of hotel stays.

Every person who comes here to seek shelter we fill out an intake form and send a referral to Mahube so they can do an intake with their housing intake workers. We try to help them until their intake worker can connect with them. We have had people sleep in the church during the day hours until their bus can take them to a shelter. Numerous individuals come here to warm their food, have coffee and seek assistance. We help individuals find Shelter in the Fargo Moorhead or Surrounding Areas.

- **Volunteers:** I can't say thank you enough to everyone who volunteered in some way. We had 30 volunteers sign up to help with the overnight shelter. They all attended a training prior to being able to volunteer as a shelter supervisor overnight. We had individuals donate clothing and many items that were needed for shelter guests. Volunteers' handmade special faith items that are handed out to individuals to remind them that people are praying for them and they are loved. Many volunteers cooked meals, donated gift cards, organized the supplies, did laundry, and donated day passes to the DLCCC so individuals can shower and enjoy the facility.
- **Ministerial Voucher Program:** This program allows us to issue a voucher with a limited monetary amount for items like gas, clothing, food and an emergency hotel stay. This ministry is funded by donations from area churches. Gas vouchers have been written out to those who need to travel for doctor appointments and those who need extra help getting to work. Thrift store vouchers are issued to those who need help with clothes for themselves or children, bedding, and some various household supplies. Vouchers for food are issued to those who need help with groceries. Hotel vouchers have been issued on a 1 voucher limit to guests who have been stranded in the area, need to escape an unsafe living situation, or for individuals who are living in cars and need to escape the cold. Each church has access to a database which documents who we help. We limit these vouchers as we express to the individual these are for when they are experiencing a crisis. This is a great ministry that will remain, and you should be proud of all the churches who contribute to this and who assist individuals in emergency need with these vouchers. This shows the compassion and collaboration between so many churches.