

A Year in Review



by **Deb Newman, Executive Director**

It seems like just yesterday that I was joining the team at Partners but a whole year has gone by already!! In my time here, I've had the opportunity to learn a lot about the people we serve and speak to countless service groups, leadership teams, and churches about the services our organization provides within the community. I like to share a few pieces with you...

Working Families

One thing people are most surprised to hear is that a majority of those we serve are working families. People from our community who are holding down one, sometimes two or three jobs but yet struggle to make ends meet. With the greater Mankato area seeing a shortage of affordable rental units, these families often find themselves in a downward spiral started by a simple car breakdown, a cut in job hours, or worse, a health issue that has impacted their family. When thirty-six percent of renters in our area are paying more than 50% of their income on housing (see additional information on Harvard's recent survey found in our spring newsletter) – one or more of the four basic needs is often sacrificed. That could be medical care, clothing, or the ability to provide food for their family as a trade-off for a roof over their heads accompanied with high monthly rent. When misfortune hits an already vulnerable situation, this regularly leads to an eviction outcome for the families we see seeking shelter at the Theresa House and Welcome Inn.

Children

This past year, 40% of our shelter guests were children under the age of 18. Of the families who have sought out shelter – over 47% were children coming from families in need of a warm and safe place to sleep. Over 300 school aged children in our community are currently identified as homeless or are in vulnerable living situations. To put that in perspective, that number is 3x the size of my graduating high school class. Comparatively in our community, that number equates out to the size of an entire senior class of students!

The reality is children, teenagers and families are sleeping in their car, existing in wooded parks, sleeping on the streets or in doorways, living in motels, and/or couch hopping at family, friends or acquaintances' homes in Greater Mankato.

A Night to Remember...

One night last September, I had the honor to drive a group of our shelter guests to the Ted Paul Theater. The group was both excited to see the play and a little worried about whether their attire was acceptable. I told them – they were just fine and jeans were acceptable! The group asked how we got the tickets and I explained how Consolidated Communications is a long-term supporter of the theater program and that they had reached out to us and asked if anyone of our guests or staff were interested in tickets. The group was full of energy as we arrived as none of them had been to a play at the University. Each group went their separate ways to find their seats. Some were front and center; others sat in the middle towards the top.

Continued on the next page



A Year in Review - Continued...

At the end of the show, the groups got in to our van and were completely a buzz with energy. They were so excited about what they were able to take part in. Some of the following comments were shared:

- *"That was the best thing ever!"*
- *"This opened my eyes to a whole new world. I so enjoyed that!"*
- *"That was exactly what I needed."*
- *"This was so good for my soul."*
- *"I would love to go again."*
- *"I want to take my Dad to a play in the future."*
- *"That was so entertaining, from the beginning with the guy talking and making jokes to the ending. What fun!!"*
- *"I can't wait to tell others at the house what they missed."*
- *"I kept my play booklet as a keepsake."*
- *"I don't know who the person was that gave you these tickets, but I'd love to shake their hand and thank them personally!!"*

Every day, we see people in crisis – challenged to make ends meet, desperate to find a permanent roof over their heads; on this particular night by the generosity of others our guests had a mini escape from all of that for just one evening.

The Best Days...

If you were to ask our staff what are our best days at work, the answer would be simple: it's the day our shelter families or individuals get to "go home."

I've long believed that a home is a sanctuary. It is a place to revitalize after a long stressful day. It is a haven from the chaos and hustle and bustle that we all often experience. It is also a quiet place that allows us to center and focus on making plans, living fully and enjoying the beauty each day brings us. I couldn't imagine having to worry about where I was going to sleep or how I was going to have the energy to refocus and make positive, life changing decisions in my life in the absence of a home, a roof over my head or that of my children.

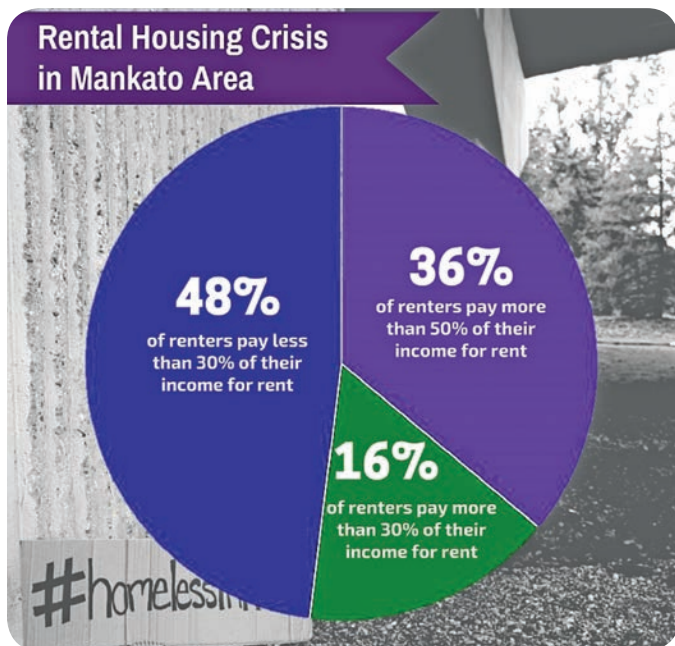
It is truly a beautiful day when our guests find this new home. The joy on their faces, the relief in their voices, and the tears of thankfulness as they begin their journey back to self-sufficiency. Everyone has a story, a reason of how they got where they are at today. Our mission is simple – we believe all human beings, regardless of their economic status, are entitled to safe, decent, affordable housing. Because of this outlook we are committed to providing emergency shelter to homeless families and individuals while helping them secure economically viable long-term housing.



Moving Forward

I look forward to making positive strides and helping those in need in our community as I enter into my second year as Partners' Executive Director. On behalf of those we serve and our Team at Partners, I want to thank all of our generous donors and volunteers. We can't do our job without your help and support!

Lack of Affordable Housing is a Community Issue



As exciting news hits the Mankato airwaves on continued growth in business and commerce in our area, it is important to know that Blue Earth & Nicollet Counties have over 15,000 citizens living in poverty according to the US Census Bureau. Daily, Partners for Affordable Housing are fielding calls from individuals and families in need of immediate assistance.

Housing is considered affordable if it consumes less than 30% of a household's income. At higher levels, families must choose between housing and other basic needs. Over the past 10 years, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of our community's population that pays more than 30% of their income for housing.

A recent study done by the Harvard University Joint Center for Housing Studies determined which counties across the United

States had the most cost burdened renters. To be considered a cost burdened renter, the household would be paying more than 30% of their income towards rent.

This study found that the Mankato-North Mankato metro area had the highest percentage of cost burdened renters in the state of Minnesota. According to this study, 52% of all renters in the Mankato-North Mankato metro area are cost burdened. In addition, 36% of those renters are severely cost burdened and paying more than 50% of their income towards rent.

The Minnesota Housing Partnership reported in their 2015 annual report that Blue Earth County ranks 86 out of the state's 87 counties for the most units affordable/available. The Housing Partnership states that a safe, modest two bedroom apartment costs on average of \$804 per month in Blue Earth County. At the median renter household income of \$23,587, a family could affordably spend \$590 per month on rent. By definition, half of the county's renters earn less than this median and would need less expensive housing.

Since our agency's fiscal year started in July, 52% of the guests staying at the shelters have been unable to locate affordable housing options in our community. The City of Mankato is currently facilitating a housing study to better understand availability and also costs of rent in our area. Early indications of this study are showing affordable housing units in our area have a 0% vacancy rate with market based rental units having almost a 5% vacancy rate. Currently over 600 units are under construction in our area with all units being targeted at market based rent figures of approximately \$1000 a month for rent and utilities. Additionally, the city of North Mankato has also recently commissioned a housing study and waiting for its results. Based on the constraints currently facing our community, the need for more shelter space remains a top priority for our agency.

Free Store Update

During a housing crisis, many families lose everything they have. After seeking temporary respite at the Theresa House and Welcome Inn, these families are often faced with the challenge of moving into a home of their own with nothing upon nothing. No beds, no dining table, no couch, no dishes, no silverware, etc.

In just the past couple of years, Partners for Affordable Housing has created a very impressive Free Store thanks to the generous support of the local community and the donations they have provided. Our Free Store is a place where guests can come and "shop" for those basic necessities they might not have when staying in our shelter or when moving into a new home.

Over the past several months, we have been tracking what items are most commonly taken and needed from our Free Store. By far those items are household necessities and furniture. In order to better serve our guests and those in need, we have updated our Free Store Needs List with items that we do and do not accept.

To focus on our guests' needs of household items Partners for Affordable Housing will no longer be accepting clothing or toy donations. We would encourage you to still donate those items to any of the local sister agencies in town, such as Salvation Army, MRCI Thrift Store, Goodwill, etc. The one exception to this is that we will continue to accept new packages of socks and underwear for our shelter guests.

Our Free Store is in need of clean, usable furniture and household necessity items to outfit the many families and individuals we serve each month. When considering what to donate, please remember that our clients are often coming out of hard times. Items should be in a gently used condition that you yourself would feel comfortable giving to a friend or neighbor. The full needs list can be viewed online at www.partnersforhousing.org/get-involved/needs-list/.

Pedal Past Poverty:

PARTNERS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING



It was an unusually warm day for February 27th but the Blue Gym at the Mankato YMCA was packed full of excited bikers!! The Fourth Annual Pedal Past Poverty kicked off with high energy and the atmosphere was buzzing all day as riders pedaled their hardest during the ten heats. Music provided by Radio Mankato kept teams and riders motivated along with numerous prizes awarded throughout the day from various area businesses.

At the end of the event, Deb Newman, Executive Director and Jeff Lang aka Stunt Monkey, a DJ from 96.7, announced to the crowd that not only had we raised more money than ever before, but we also broke \$100,000! In total, the corporate sponsors

and volunteers helped raise over \$103,000 for our 4th annual Pedal Past Poverty event!! An incredible new record!

New this year, added tools for online registration and online fundraising helped raise funds and awareness about Pedal Past Poverty. "The new tool allowed us to streamline our registration and also allowed us a new option of collecting credit card donations via the fundraising online tool. No longer did team members have to go create their own webpage on sites like GoFundMe or Razzle."

Pedal Past Poverty would not have been such an amazing success if it weren't for the hard work of all riders, team captains, sponsors, volunteers and of course - donors! Because of your hard work, Partners for Affordable Housing will be able to continue to serve those in our community experiencing a temporary housing crisis. We will also be continuing our search for a larger shelter to meet the high need we see every day.

Full mileage results, heat winners and pictures can be found online at www.partnersforhousing.org/pedal. You can also like us on Facebook at [Facebook.com/PedalMankato](https://www.facebook.com/PedalMankato). If you have pictures from the event, feel free to tag us on Facebook, use the hashtag #PedalPastPoverty or email them to us at lizzaruba.pah@eventis.net.

Thank You

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- Lake Washington Improvement Association
- Mankato Clinic
- Pier Pleasure
- Pizza Ranch
- Thrivent Financial
- Xcel Energy

Record Amount Raised

Most Team Spirit: Expected Toulouse

Most Creative Team: Thunder Thighs

Most Spirited Individuals: Kate Hengy-Getz (Sliding Fridays) & LaDon Henderson (Friends Friday Crew)

Most Creative Individual: Melissa O Wakhuk (Wellcome Manor)

Most Miles Biked Overall (team): Presbyterian Pedalers: 53.17 miles

Most Miles Biked Overall (individual): Kyle Ahl (Presbyterian Pedalers): 7.55 miles

Grand Prize: Mya Crocker

Most Money Raised (team): The Fast & Furious (Not!) - \$5,201.29



Equipment Partners



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SAVE THE DATE:
 5th Annual Pedal Past Poverty
 Saturday, February 25, 2017
 Blue Gym, Mankato YMCA
 Interested in being a corporate sponsor next year?
 Please contact Deb or Liz for more information!

New Team Members join Partners



Sandi Miller

Sandi Miller started as the new Shelter Case Manager for Partners for Affordable Housing in late December. Sandi grew up in North Mankato, graduated from Loyola High School, and married Christian. They raised three daughters and have two grandchildren. Sandi's background includes twelve years as an educational assistant with Northfield Public Schools. After attaining a certificate in Coaching for Healing, her extensive focus was within the framework of family systems, concentrating on girls' youth groups, promoting wellness and college readiness.

"It is a privilege to be an ear to hear each person's experience of how they arrived to the place or situation where they are. I am inspired by the resilience and potential of the families and individual that are within our programs," stated Miller, "Growing up in North Mankato I was naïve about the extent of homeless in my back yard. I am honored to be included with this dynamic team that is committed to assisting those in needs of basic human needs, housing."



Sonja Denn

We also want to welcome Sonja Denn as our new Shelter Case Aide. Sonja grew up in Lake Crystal and is currently living in Waseca. She is married with five children. Sonja enjoys working with people and her hobbies include photography, sketching, drawing, fishing and camping. Previously, Sonja has worked as a Parent Aide at Wellcome Manor Family Services in Garden City, as well as a Youth Counselor at Elmore Academy in Elmore, MN.



Jaime Bartles



Lisa Pierret

Jaime Bartles and Lisa Pierret started working for Partners for Affordable Housing as Support Staff at the shelters in January. Jaime is a current student studying psychology who plans to become a mental health counselor. "I enjoy working at PAH because I want to make a difference in the lives of others," Jamie said. Lisa likes working for PAH because she knows the importance of helping those with the issue of homelessness. "I enjoy doing the job and make sure their surroundings are as clean as comfortable as can be!" Welcome Jaime and Lisa!

New Board Members

Brenda Heuss

IT Analyst/Project Manager, Scholarship America

Michelle Johnson

Product Manager, Label Works

Todd Riemann

CEO, MTU Onsite Energy

Donations Needed Wish List

- **Mulch**
- **Shelving for Free Store**
- **Freezer for Welcome Inn**
- **Refrigerator for Theresa House**

Christmas Wishes: Thank You



Our Christmas Wishes: Adopt a Family program had another successful year in 2015. In total, we were able to serve 31 families, for a total of 84 individuals. When presents were picked up or dropped off, the look of awe and appreciation in both the children's and their parents' eyes was an amazing thing to witness.

This of course, could not have happened without the kind support of our community. In total, we had 33 volunteer families and organizations take part and donate for the Christmas Wishes program. In addition, we held wrapping parties at Primrose, Oak Terrace and Old Main Retirement Communities. We also had a group of middle schoolers from Christ the King and some of the School Sisters from SSND come and wrap presents at our offices.

This program was a success because of you in the community. THANK YOU. We can't tell you how much this program means to the families we work with. We look forward to doing it again next Christmas!



2015 Kiwanis Holiday Lights

Another season of Kiwanis Holiday Lights is in the books. Partners for Affordable Housing had 28 volunteers help throughout the event including set up, tear down and various park activities for a total of over 50 volunteer hours. We also collected close to 3,000 pounds of food on the three nights we were the featured non-profit at the park. While our tree did not place in the top three for Favorite Nonprofit Tree, we believe that we continued to get the message across that homelessness does happen in our community. Thank you to our volunteers for all your help and to the community in general for making this such a successful event in Mankato!

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Spring 2016 Newsletter



Partners for Affordable Housing provides shelter for homeless families and individuals, and helps them to secure economically viable long-term housing.

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