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## **Partners for Affordable Housing: Homeless support still crucial during pandemic**

Becky Asleson  
Apr 13, 2020

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**A**s Minnesotans continue with the extension of the COVID-19 stay-at-home order, those experiencing homelessness are now faced with greater challenges.

The work done at Partners for Affordable Housing (PAH) is not only essential but critical. Like other members in the community, some of our guests have lost their jobs, while others lack viable transportation to get groceries. Despite the pandemic, assisting those with barriers and setbacks is a priority.

Jen Theneman, PAH executive director adds, "As the rest of the world are retreating to their homes with enough food and supplies to prevent them from needing to leave, those experiencing homelessness don't have a place to call their own, nor enough money to buy what they need."

In the past month, Union Street Place (USP) staff has assisted three families with their move from shelter to more stable housing amid the pandemic and stay-at-home order. Shelter staff routinely reach out to guests to ensure they have adequate food and clothing, while also providing emotional support.

"Our staff is continuing to work hard to provide support to the eight households we're serving currently," said Kelsey Johnson-Rode, shelter manager at USP.

From face masks and gloves to disinfecting wipes and other cleaning supplies, everyone is doing their part to keep guests and staff safe and healthy. Donations of these much-needed items from community members and local organizations have contributed to this effort.

Union Street Place is fortunate to have individual living spaces that allow guests to practice social distancing. However, due to the social distancing restrictions, the shelter's main kitchen and community room have been closed to guests during the

duration of the stay-at-home order. While all rooms include a small microwave and mini fridge, it can be a challenge for guests to cook in their rooms.

Trinity Lutheran Church and The Kitchen recently donated funds to help cover the cost of food for USP guests. This opportunity lends itself to community members who would be willing to provide a homemade meal to guests, who may not otherwise get them. Guests can also use donations of slow cookers for their rooms.

First Congregational United Church of Christ in Mankato has provided a \$2,000 grant to upgrade the kitchen at USP. This gift will provide guests with a more comforting, yet functioning space.

"It is a blessing for us to use our memorial funds during this difficult and trying time to help improve the lives of those who do not have a home in which to shelter," said Linda Hachfeld, one of the church members who presented the gift.

Other opportunities of service include tidying up the grounds or raking the lawn at Union Street Place, which can be done with one or two people at a distance. Looking ahead, USP will soon receive a donation of roof shingles for the property. A new roof will be installed later this spring. The organization is looking for installation solutions, either volunteer labor or funding assistance to hire the labor.

To get involved with any of the mentioned service opportunities, please contact 507-931-3100. Women and families seeking shelter are advised to fill out an application online at [www.partnersforhousing.org](http://www.partnersforhousing.org).

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