

Partners for Housing: Addressing homelessness at Union Street Place

- [By KIRSTEN BECKER Guest Columnist](#)
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Homelessness is significant everywhere, though in Minnesota, it's often a hidden phenomenon. Sometimes it looks like people sleeping in cars, ice houses, storage units or other places unfit or unsafe for human habitation. Sometimes it looks like people doubling up with family members, or “couch-hopping” until their welcome runs out and they need to find other accommodations. It can be a cycle that is very difficult to break.

According to Maslow's hierarchy, physiological needs and safety must be met before people can self-actualize and flourish in their own lives.

Adequate housing is critical for local jobs, strong economy, children's success in school and positive health outcomes.

Statewide, there are not enough affordable housing options for the number of people teetering on poverty. Due to COVID-19, there have been significant economic implications — lower wages or decreased hours

worked, increasing costs for fuel, food, etc. This economic impact leaves vulnerable people faced with decisions about how to spend their income.

According to the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, housing is considered affordable when it consumes 30% or less of a household's wages. Households paying more than 30% of their income are considered cost burdened, while those paying 50% or more of their wages on housing are considered severely cost burdened.

Factors that often precede homelessness can vary person by person or household by household, and may include:

Mental health issues; Loss of relationship (through death, divorce, break-up); Chemical dependency; Loss of home in fire or natural disaster; Recent immigration; Job loss; Loss of reliable transportation; Injury or illness; Lack of reliable or affordable childcare; Criminal charges.

These factors often become barriers to housing stability (USP) guests face. At Union Street Place and its other shelters, Partners for Housing aims to:

Provide guests with a clean place to stay, not just for the night, but for up to 90 days while they acknowledge and overcome barriers.

Connect guests to resources for physical and behavioral health services, job search agencies, monthly budgeting, self-care techniques, food providers – food shelves, EBT, grocery shopping on a budget, transportation resources, childcare options, school enrollment, document-replacement agencies (DMV, SS office, counties of birth), legal services.

Assist guests with housing placement by helping gather information and assisting with completion of rental applications, providing monetary help to cover application fees, advocating on behalf of clients to secure housing, empowering guests to advocate on their own behalf.

Homelessness is very complex, and Partners for Housing is not able to accomplish their work alone. Partnerships with other agencies, state and local funding, and community engagement through volunteerism, donations and other support round out the Union Street Place program in St. Peter – a program that, since October 2019, has helped 100 households reach the next step toward safe and stable housing.

Partners for Housing’s mission is to guide individuals and families toward housing stability. Women and families seeking housing are encouraged to fill out an application at partnersforhousing.org. To become involved with their programs or to donate, contact 507-387-2115 or visit the website.

Kirsten Becker is the communications manager for Partners for Affordable Housing, which works on housing issues in the area, including Nicollet, Le Sueur and Blue Earth counties.

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