

The Way Home Apartments

Please accept this nomination for a HousingIowa Award for the category Special Needs Housing Development. The nominee is, "*The Way Home Apartments.*" The Way Home is a 24-unit transitional apartment complex in Cedar Rapids. The target population is families who are in recovery from a substance abuse addiction. This special housing program was developed in response to a need for affordable, safe and sober housing among graduates of the Area Substance Abuse Council's Heart of Iowa Mother and Child treatment program.

The 24-unit apartment complex includes sixteen two-bedroom and eight three-bedroom units. The apartments are completely furnished; including a microwave, television, and a washer and dryer. The two bedroom apartments rent for \$535. The rental cost for a three bedroom unit is \$635. These rental amounts include all utilities except for telephone and cable TV. Financing for the construction of this project was through federal low income housing tax credits and a state-funded Transitional Housing Revolving Loan Fund.

Families can reside in transitional housing for up to 24 months, and have access to a variety of services including ongoing drug treatment support, mental health services, parenting classes, job training, child care, and transportation assistance. The women are not the only ones that need services. The children are also in recovery. They have a host of emotional, physical and mental health needs. They have been affected directly or indirectly by their mother's substance abuse.

The Heart of Iowa Mother and Child Recovery Center is a comprehensive substance abuse treatment program that provides outpatient, residential and halfway house services. The women in Heart of Iowa are chronic substance abusers that need 24-hour care to overcome their substance abuse problem. Most of the families in Heart of Iowa are very low income with an average monthly income of \$328.60.

Background

When a parent comes out of an inpatient substance abuse treatment program, she/he faces many challenges beyond maintaining sobriety. The struggles include reunification with children, maintaining custody of her/his children, accessing a stable living environment that she/he can afford, and accessing ongoing support to obtain employment, education and continued treatment. There are few options beyond 21 to 30 days for women or men and even fewer for those with children. Halfway houses and single room occupancy apartments can provide a place to live immediately, but only a handful of apartments are conducive as a family setting or provide a stable place to live for a transition period (6 months to 2 years). Transitional housing helps those who need primary treatment beyond 21 days.

In addition, because of the parent's extremely low income, the housing that is available is likely substandard and increased risks for health and safety are present. If this person or another household member has been involved in criminal activity related to drugs or if a

pattern of substance abuse exists that could interfere with other tenants, she/he is denied admission to federally subsidized apartments, such as HUD or USDA-RD properties.

A substance abuse program spends \$10,000 on treatment on these families and the community spends thousands more on health care and welfare support. A conservative estimate of the total cost to the community is over \$25,000 per year. If the parent gets in a pattern of returning to old behaviors, this cost to the community can go on for several years. For each family that can be transitioned through treatment, stable living arrangements, job training and education, the state not only saves treatment, health care and welfare costs, but also picks up another tax payer whose tax payments help support future state needs.

Results

The first five tenants moved into The Way Home in Cedar Rapids on January 26, 2007. By the end of March, the program was at full capacity. Of the current tenants, fourteen have been living at The Way Home for over one year and 4 of the initial 5 tenants still reside there. From March 2007 through July 2008, The Way Home has been at month-end full capacity 13 out of the 17 months. Currently all of our tenants are single, head-of-household mothers, and together they have 40 children living with them at The Way Home.

In addition to The Way Home, this housing model has been replicated in two additional communities in Iowa. In Clinton, Area Substance Abuse Council has constructed New Directions Housing, 10 transitional apartments using tax credits, and in Sioux City, Jackson Recovery Center has constructed Sanctuary Housing, 24 transitional apartments using tax credits and the Transitional Housing Revolving Loan Fund.

In the words of Kathy Brogla, Way Home Counselor, "Success here is not measured in absolutes not is it seen on grandeur scales. Success for Way Home clients is measured on a very personal level and sometimes only seen as very small steps. Ultimate success for the women at Way Home involves their taking back control of a future they lost during the course of their addiction."

Nichole Cooper, a resident of The Way Home, says, "At The Way Home we have built a community where we are able to work towards self sufficiency and expand our recourses for recovery. We are able to learn from our mistakes with judgments and work towards a life of serenity with grave, independence, hope and dignity."

And finally, Michelle Martin, another resident states, "I started smoking methamphetamine at nineteen. Within weeks I was smoking meth daily and the Department of Human Services took my children. I started treatment at Heart of Iowa where I learned the skills necessary to live a life of recovery. After treatment there, I moved to The Way Home for aftercare treatment. The Way Home is a place where I am learning to live life on life's terms. With encouragement and guidance from my counselor I am now in my third semester at Kirkwood College. I am raising two beautiful daughters with a positive outlook for the future and most importantly, I remain drug free."