

Part II – Narrative for HousingIowa Award Nomination, Unity Place - Multifamily Housing Development

Unity Place is being nominated for the Multifamily Housing Development HousingIowa Award of 2010. Unity Place is a structured multi-family transitional housing program that was placed in service on February 27th, 2010. Located at 100 E McKinley in Des Moines, IA, Unity Place provides housing for 31 households within 15 multi-family furnished living units, as well as accommodations for group meetings, trainings and community events.

Unity Place remains a collaborative venture with Polk County Housing Trust Fund serving as fiscal agent charged with oversight of the program. The Coordinator of the Polk County Housing Continuum functions as program manger; Conlin Properties provides an on-site, live-in manager, and Primary Health Care provides case management. Support services are provided through a variety of community health and service organizations. United Way continues to provide fiscal support for the original residents. Quarterly meetings of collaborative partners are held, with bi-weekly meetings of the program operations team.

Unity Place is the result of a community wide collaborative effort to respond to specific housing need: the displacement of over 30 women and 15 children as the result of the closing of the YWCA residential program. An inspiring aspect of Unity Place is the speed and unity of the community in responding to a perceived crisis that could result in homelessness for many single women and children. Financial support was received from both the State of Iowa through an I-Jobs Affordable Housing Grant, Polk County Board of Supervisors, Polk County Housing Trust Fund, Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino, and widespread public support through designated contributions to Des Moines Radio Group. United Way of Central Iowa provided financial support for rent subsidies and services. Multiple community organizations provided support through loaned staff and assistance in providing client assessment and support services throughout the planning process and preparation of residents for the move. The contractors for the building renovation even left \$100 gift cards for each of the incoming residents to help with their immediate relocation needs.

When the YWCA announced closing of it's residential program for single women and children, the Polk County Housing Continuum, a multi-sector collaboration of organizations, united with the Polk County Housing Trust Fund, Prairie Meadows, and the United Way of Central Iowa to seek immediate remedy and assure safe and affordable transitional housing until long term and permanent housing solutions could be secured. The ultimate goal was to ensure the single women/mothers and children, displaced by the closing of the YWCA, would have safe, secure and affordable housing, with the goal that appropriate services, they would move to more permanent housing within the next year. The cost to renovate the building, operate the building and provide services for the residents was a critical issue regarding the need for affordable housing for these single women and children, most of whom did not earn a living wage. With the support of a group of Polk County Housing Continuum members, alternative housing was located for some residents. 15 women and 9 children were unable to secure other housing and moved into the renovated building on February 27th, 2010. Some of the women have mental health diagnosis; many are victims of domestic violence and others have made bad choices in their lives that pose barriers to mainstream permanent housing. Multiple support services are necessary for Unity Place residents to achieve the highest level of self-sufficiency attainable according to individual life situations. The willingness of community agencies to unite for the common good of the dislocated women and children resulted in a broad-based community effort that included special leasing arrangements with Polk County Health Services, speedy renovation of 15 units through local area contractors, Property Management by Conlin

Properties, Inc., quick orchestration of a qualified case management team from Primary Health Care, and a full speed Morning Drive Radio Fundraiser via the Des Moines Radio Group. All knew that the establishment of a transitional housing safety net could not be accomplished by a "committee of one". Every individual, every organization recognized that it would take a union of caring collaborators to assist these women and families with appropriate housing accommodations and wrap around services like health care, mental health services, Legal Aid, workforce skill development, benefit enrollment, etc.

Unity Place recently began accepting new referrals from the community. Five new residents have been accepted into the program. All have been single homeless women who are either SSI eligible or low-wage employed individuals who need safe affordable housing and support services to strengthen their ability to function self-sufficiently.

While the motivating situation presented by closing of the YWCA may not exist in other communities, the broad-based collaboration formed to meet the housing and service needs is a process that can be replicated. Even now, Unity Place continues to function as a collaborative and engages multiple community partners in the provision of supportive services to residents. Unique aspects of the Unity Place supportive housing program are:

- The program is beginning to serve an emerging underserved population: homeless single women, primarily between the ages of 40-55, who are either SSI qualified or very low wage workers. Many have a stable history of recovery from chemical dependency, are victims of domestic abuse. The 5 new residents accepted to date were previously staying at an emergency shelter or in one situation living in her car. To date, these women have done well in an environment that fosters personal responsibility, and provides the safety and support of an on-site community of residents with common experiences. With stable housing, they have been able to pursue employment and/or benefits.
- The program maintains property management and service delivery as two separate entities. Each resident signs a Rental Agreement and a Residence Policies and Guidelines agreement. Staff from both property management and case management meets with the Unity Place project manager to discuss program and resident issues, and strategies to meet program objectives. Changes have occurred as needed to assure safety of residents, promote a culture of support and community, and motivate residents toward higher levels of self-sufficiency.
- Unity Place links residents with a full range of existing community resources to support their progress in achieving higher levels of self-sufficiency. Each resident has an assigned case manager provided by Primary Health Care. The PHC case manager connects residents to a range of other community service/programs, including Access to Recover, Golden Circle, Broadlawns Medical Center, Iowa Social and Economic Development, Workforce Iowa, Legal Aid as well as the local food pantry and "clothing closet." Primary Health Care also assists with transportation needs.

Projected measureable outcomes for residents are improvements in their self-sufficiency levels according to various elements of HUD's family self-sufficiency matrix, including areas of housing, food, health, income and financial stability. While the project is still in infancy, collaboration of community organizations for the successful growth of the program continues to be a great strength as it works to meet the needs of homeless or near homeless vulnerable women in the community.

1111 9th St., Suite 100
Des Moines, IA 50314-2500
tel 515-246-6500
fax 515-246-6522
www.unitedwaydm.org



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate release

February 9, 2010

Media Contact: Donovan Honnold
Vice President, Marketing and Public Relations
United Way of Central Iowa
515-246-6520 Mobile 515-249-1395
dhonnold@unitedwaydm.org

Housing secured for YWCA residents

The residents of the Greater Des Moines YWCA will soon have a new home.

Thanks to the efforts of a community-wide group of corporate, government and nonprofit organizations, an apartment-style building, to be named **Unity Place**, at 100 E. McKinley Avenue in Des Moines, will be ready for the YWCA's 20 women and seven children by the end of February. The facility owned by Mainstream Living, Inc. will be renovated by the Polk County Housing Trust Fund.

Polk County Housing Trust will complete the \$200,000 in needed renovations in time for the residents to move in at the beginning of March.

To help cover the costs of the new facility, Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino and the Polk County Board of Supervisors have pledged to match funding dollar-for-dollar with the local community.

Des Moines Radio Group is conducting an on-air and on-line fundraiser called **Hearts for Homes**. The endeavor is spearheaded by **93.3 KIOA**. Iowans are able to donate at KIOA.com and the other websites of the Des Moines Radio Group stations. The goal is to raise financial and in-kind support for Unity House. KIOA will also host an all-day telethon Friday, February 12 at Prairie Meadows from 5 a.m.-6 p.m.

In late January, YWCA leaders announced the organization will close in mid February, creating an immediate need for the now approximately 28 women living in the agency's transitional housing units; eight of the residents have already located new housing arrangements.

"With the closing of the YWCA, these women had an immediate need for shelter, treatment and case management services," says Sheila Lumley, Executive Director of the nonprofit Polk County Housing Trust Fund. "We're grateful to the outpouring of community support to find safe and secure housing for these women and children. It's an important step to help them gain some stability in their lives."

Gary Palmer, Prairie Meadows' President and CEO, says, "Prairie Meadows gives back to our community in four core areas—the arts, economic development, education, and human services. We were thrilled to respond to this great need in our community by partnering with Polk County through a dollar-for-dollar match in response to the Des Moines Radio Group's fund raising efforts. The common goal through our commitment

1111 9th St., Suite 100
Des Moines, IA 50314-2500
tel 515-246-6500
fax 515-246-6522
www.unitedwaydm.org



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

August 4, 2010

Media Contact: Donovan Honnold
Vice President, Marketing and Public Relations
United Way of Central Iowa
515-246-6520 Mobile 515-249-1395
dhonnold@unitedwaydm.org

YWCA residents to move to Unity Place

Saturday is move-in day for the residents of the former Greater Des Moines YWCA.

The women and children will move to **Unity Place**, the apartment-style building at 100 E. McKinley Avenue in Des Moines. Mayflower Van Lines has donated a truck and movers.

To make Unity Place ready for its new residents, on Friday February 26 Iowa Prison Industries, Inc., (IPI) will move beds, sofas, end tables, mattress, linen towels, toys for the children and other items necessary to establish suitable living conditions for the relocated families. IPI donated \$20,000 worth of furnishings to Unity Place.

Unity Place was renovated over the past three weeks, thanks to an outpouring of community and corporate support. Prairie Meadows, Polk County, and the "Hearts for Homes" fundraiser conducted by Des Moines Radio Group raised the \$200,000 needed for the project.

Unity Place is owned by Mainstream Living, Inc. and will be managed by Conlin Properties, Inc., who will have a full-time manager on-site.

"With the closing of the YWCA, these women had an immediate need for shelter, treatment and case management services," says Sheila Lumley, Executive Director of the nonprofit Polk County Housing Trust Fund. "We're grateful to the outpouring of community support to find safe and secure housing for these women and children. It's an important step to help them gain some stability in their lives."

Among the partner nonprofit organizations working with Polk County Housing Trust Fund and YWCA staff:

Housing and relocation support:

Anawim Housing
Beacon of Life
City of Des Moines
Conlin Properties
Hawthorn Hill
HOME, Inc.
House of Mercy
Iowa Homeless Youth Centers
Mainstream Living, Inc.
Polk County Housing Trust Fund

Support services:

ISED Ventures

