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HOMELESSNESS

Racine's homelessness alliance taking steps forward on action plan

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RACINE — Six months after the Homelessness and Housing Alliance, formerly Continuum of Care, announced its strategic plan, the organizers have built out proposals and taken some concrete steps forward.

The strategic plan, which developed over a six-month period last year, has a three-pronged approach: breaking the cycle of evictions; overcoming stereotypes and misconceptions about homelessness; and maximizing the impact of available housing.

Since the announcement of the strategic plan, some of the specific steps have been fleshed out and some initiatives have taken concrete steps forward.



Racine Homelessness alliance to focus on evictions, stereotypes

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The Alliance also is waiting to see how the seven bills addressing homelessness and housing stabilization that passed the state Assembly on Tuesday will fare in the Senate. Though the funding components were removed, thus requiring some extra steps to get funds into organizers' hands, Alliance officials remain optimistic initiatives at the state level could provide some needed resources.

Breaking the cycle of evictions

One of the Alliance's initiatives was to create a Rapid Response Team to connect people on the brink of eviction with resources to mitigate the eviction and stay housed. An ad hoc Rapid Response Team was deployed to the Riverside Inn, 3700 Northwestern Ave., to help tenants who are being removed from the troubled hotel at the end of the month.

Brendan Saunders of the city's Fair Housing Department said that the Rapid Response Team, which was formed to respond to the crisis at Riverside, was a start, but not the one envisioned by the Alliance.



Many Riverside Inn residents 'out of hope'

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"However, we will take everything we learned from that and apply those lessons to coordinating a rapid response team moving forward," Saunders stated in an email. "The biggest lesson we learned is that we need very clear expectations of each group, regular meetings of these service providers to better understand what services are provided, and a plan on how to access those services where the intervention is happening."

Another idea, which Saunders said is in its infancy, is to establish a system where once an eviction is filed, the person being evicted would receive case management services to help them with the eviction proceedings and ensure they are able to relocate to sustainable housing.

Other initiatives

One of the HHA initiatives to maximize available housing was approved by the City Council on Tuesday when it voted in favor of granting the Homeless Assistance Leadership Organization \$15,000 in HOME grant funds from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to create a security deposit fund for those who are income-eligible. HOME grants are issued to local governments to implement local housing programs.

The Alliance also plans to collaborate with private investors and look into best practices for handling the time in between when a grant ends and the next funding cycle begins. Executive Director Gai Lorenzen said HALO has about 90 units with three different funding sources, which can cause gaps in its ability to house someone in a unit.



Homelessness Alliance invites businesses to 'the table'

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The Alliance also plans on looking at overlaps and consolidating some of its partner organizations' housing programs for efficiency.

The Alliance also has developed an action plan for its third initiative: to address false narratives about homelessness and who is homeless. First, they are gathering assumptions and questions from the community which will inform research on homelessness, particularly in Racine.

Michelle Lussmyer of Racine Vocational Ministry announced that with the Alliance's new name, they're also holding a contest open to children ages 12 to 18 to design a new logo. Designs can be done on a computer or drawn. They can be submitted to Lussmyer electronically at hharclogo@gmail.com or dropped off at 806 Wisconsin Ave., Racine.

Possible state support

Seven bills that addressed homelessness and housing issues passed the Assembly on Tuesday.

The bills initially included nearly \$4 million in additional funding statewide for homeless shelters and grant programs to address homelessness, including low-income housing projects and workforce training. Those appropriations were removed from the bills before they passed.

“The passage of the legislation is a positive step, in that it demonstrates an understanding of the issues and a willingness to address those issues we face as homeless providers and a state,” said Lorenzen, who testified before the Assembly on the nine proposed bills. “However, without the appropriations that are attached to those bills, we will not be able to implement the programs or action that needs to take place to effectively address those issues.”



'This place is necessary': Hospitality Center keeps hope alive

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The funds for the bills will have to go through the Joint Finance Committee before they can be allocated to organizations.

Aside from the funding, Lorenzen said, quite a few of the initiatives would affect the Alliance's efforts to reduce homelessness. One is the creation of a housing navigator who would develop relationships with landlords, create housing opportunities and connect landlords with people who are homeless. Another program would prioritize employment and workforce training for people who are homeless.

Rep. Greta Neubauer, D-Racine, told the alliance that she's hopeful the bills will pass the Senate and that the appropriations will be approved because "homelessness is a nonpartisan issue."

"These bills and others in the package are a beginning, not an end to housing insecurity and homelessness in Racine," Neubauer stated in an email. "We need to continue our work to increase the availability of safe, affordable housing, reduce evictions, and grow family-supporting jobs in our community. I'm hopeful that these bills will help in this critical work, and I am committed to continuing efforts to reduce housing insecurity in our community and at the Capitol."

Serving lunch at the Hospitality Center



Volunteers from Hope City Church serve lunch to guests at the Hospitality Center on Thursday. The Hospitality Center aims to be a one-stop shop for people in need of clothes, food, transportation, health care and any other service it can provide to its patrons who are struggling financially.

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Painting at the Hospitality Center



Ken Michur paints a picture of the what's going on at the Hospitality Center on Thursday.

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Hospitality with family



After her power went out during the night, Desiree McClain, center, took her grandsons — Carl Rogers, right, and William Schafer — to get a warm meal at the Hospitality Center Downtown on Thursday, Jan. 31, 2019.

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Hospitality Center



Wearing a reflective vest, Hospitality Center Program Director Carl Fields speaks with guests waiting on the steps of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 614 Main St. Fields was asking them to move along, restrict their smoking and pick up litter, under a new compromise forged between the center, the city and surrounding businesses.

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Hospitality Center



Visitors to the Hospitality Center, located at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 614 Main St. in Downtown Racine, enjoy a warm cup of coffee on Jan. 22, 2013.

SCOTT ANDERSON, Journal Times file photo

2018 Spring Hiring Event



Carl Fields from the Hospitality Center takes notes as he looks for job opportunities for his clients Wednesday afternoon, April 25, 2018, during the 2018 Spring Hiring Event at Fountain Banquet Hall in Sturtevant. Employers and staffing agencies took part in the job fair that was hosted by Racine County Workforce Solutions and The Journal Times.

Gregory Shaver, for The Journal Times

Laundry Love



Volunteer Kimberly Sam talks with a man doing his laundry inside the Velvet Touch Laundromat, 2027 Lathrop Ave., on Oct. 14, 2014, The Racine Hospitality Center partnered with Velvet Touch Laundromat to provide free washing and drying of clothes for the needy. Laundry Love Racine, as the event was called, is in its first year.

SCOTT ANDERSON, scott.anderson@journaltimes.com

Hospitality Center



Kathee Phillipson (left), Samantha Gerger and Willie Hughes talk on Dec. 13, 2012, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church's Hospitality Center, 614 Main St. The center, which has served as a meal site and temporary homeless shelter, is being called into the city for apparently violating its operating permit.

Journal Times file photo

Hospitality Center



Volunteers assemble sloppy Joe sandwiches for diners in November 2015 during the Hospitality Center's 11:30 a.m. meal.

CARA SPOTO, cara.spoto@journaltimes.com

Hospitality Cente



Volunteers serve guests on Dec. 25, 2014, at the Hospitality Center at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 614 Main St., during a free brunch.

MARK SCHAAF, Journal Times file photo

Contest to design new logo

WHAT: Competition for youth to design the new logo for the Housing and Homelessness Alliance.

OPEN TO: Children ages 12 to 18.

TO SUBMIT: Submissions can either be hand-drawn on 8 1/2- by 11-inch paper or drafted on a computer.

WHERE TO SUBMIT: To Michelle Lussmyer, either electronically at hharclogo@gmail.com or dropped off at 806 Wisconsin Ave., Racine, WI, 53403.

DEADLINE: 4 p.m. on Monday, July 1.

Christina Lieftring

Reporter

Christina Lieftring covers the City of Racine and the City of Burlington and is a not-bad photographer. In her spare time she tries to keep her plants and guinea pigs alive and happy.