

October 1, 2021

To: UCE Endowment Committee

From: Carol Nielsen and Dale Griffin

Despite the pandemic, the Connections Coordinating Committee was able to make an impact on the services and support provided by Connections for the Homeless. As you know from our previous mid-year report we organized a Coordinating Committee to steer various volunteer activities and to ensure that church members had opportunities for engagement and volunteering. Members of the Connections Coordinating Committee include Dale Griffin, Shirley Adams, Jeanne Kerl, Maggie, Weiss, Les Butler, Judy LeFevour, and Carol Nielsen, with ministerial support from Rev. Susan Frances. Reports for the three four teams are provided below. Also included is an inspirational final report from Connections for the Homeless staff detailing the progress made during this challenging year of the pandemic. We are grateful for the funding that the Endowment Grant provided to Connections for the Homeless to pay the salary for a housing specialist

### **Tenant Training Team Report from Shirley Adams**

The UCE team working on tenancy training defined the topics that need to be covered in the training as well as identifying methods and techniques that could make the training as impactful as possible. Topics to be covered include:

- Tenants' rights & fair housing
- Tenants' responsibilities and how to be a good tenant
- Understanding a lease
- How to communicate with landlords and other tenants
- Financial literacy as it relates to housing
- How an apartment works
- How to address and resolve problems

More detail than this was defined. In addition, the following techniques and methods were identified:

- Keeping the training modular so that not all pieces are covered at once
- Providing a "needs assessment" for tenants to take to determine which modules they will benefit from
- Building in time for learners to talk about their own situations, create their own plans, use tools being provided
- Providing incentives and/or rewards in the form of take-aways for each module (e.g., a toolkit with "How Your Apartment Works," a cleaning kit with "How to Be a Good Tenant," etc.

The team was not able to start developing the training because Connections determined that it was important to assess what pieces of the training needed are already being provided by other social services agencies in the community. It has taken longer than expected to do this assessment. However, once the assessment is complete, the hope is that the work the UCE team has done will help to identify what curricula already exist in the community, what modules are missing, and how

the agencies involved, with support from UCE, can fill the gaps and then collaborate to provide comprehensive “tenancy training and certification”.

### **Talking Circles Team Report from Judy LeFevour and Les Butler**

Plans are continuing to move forward to begin a Women's Talking Circle with a group of Connections residents and 2 group facilitators from UCE, Judy LeFevour and Les Butler. Judy has had several correspondences with Nia Tavoularis from Connections about moving forward. Nia would like to get a couple of her staff on board. I've sent her a list of the 12 topics developed for the Talking Circles at Cook County Jail which we're using in these circles as well. UCE has been generous in offering a space to host the groups at UCE. Several things have come up to delay the start of the program, but all are on board in bringing this to fruition.

### **Lunches and Warm Clothing Drive from Sheila Holder and Maggie Weiss**

The two projects that UCE volunteers did for Connections for the Homeless, Oct. 2020 to June 2021 were making and delivering nutritious sack lunches and a winter clothing drive.

LUNCHES - 29 volunteers; 2,200 lunches. Volunteers signed up to make 24 lunches at a time, to be delivered to one of Connection's three sites. Funds were used to buy non-perishable components (granola bars, juice boxes, sandwich bags, lunch bags, condiments). Volunteers packed non-perishable items for 24 lunches in bags, ready for pickup by lunch makers. Volunteers added sandwiches and fresh fruit at their own expense. Many volunteers made lunches multiple days. Lunches were delivered on 85 days.

WINTER CLOTHING - Donations were solicited through the UCE Newsletter and Facebook Group. They were collected on two Saturdays at UCE, from about 30 donors. Clothes were sorted, packed and delivered to Connections for the Homeless. The donations included large amounts of new underwear and socks, as well as new or very good condition coats, sweaters, hoodies, pants, shirts, backpacks, boots and shoes, hats, scarves, and gloves.

### **Connections for the Homeless Final Report to UCE for Endowment**

We are ending homelessness in our community.

In the last year, Connections for the Homeless supported 444 people in maintaining or moving into a stable home of their own. 95% of the people we served in our housing programs have stayed housed or exited to a permanent housing solution.

Support from the Unitarian Church of Evanston made this work possible. Your incredible investment of \$40,000 in our housing staff is helping us end homelessness, one person at a time. We are thrilled to share an update about the impact of your partnership.

### **The Impact of UCE's Investment**

Jerry was part of the first group of people Connections moved into local hotels in March of 2020. Prior to the hotel-shelter, Jerry was utilizing other emergency shelters. When the pandemic took hold, Jerry couldn't find a shelter that would take her amid shelter-in-place and shut-down orders.

After moving into Connections' 24/7 shelter via hotels, Jerry stabilized and quickly made plans and progress securing employment. She partnered closely with Connections' staff to renew her professional licenses and find employment. While looking for work, she was also looking for a housing solution. Jerry was matched to Connections' rapid-rehousing program, our short-term housing program that pairs rental assistance with case management services to end homelessness.

Our housing staff helped Jerry apply for more than half a dozen apartments until she found a unit. The week she moved into her own apartment she also started a new job. Since that time, Jerry has settled into her apartment, maintained employment, and continues to work closely with Connections' rapid rehousing case manager as she prepares to exit the program.

This is the kind of impact we have with the Unitarian Church of Evanston's support. Your \$40,000 grant helped to cover staffing expenses for our expanded housing case management team (now called rapid rehousing case managers) to help support Jerry and the 200 people we've moved from hotels into their own homes.

### **Homelessness to Housing**

This time last year, our rapid rehousing case managers were in the middle of transitioning more than 100 households from the hotel into homes. Then, the team was five temporary staff. Today, it is four full-time staff.

Through our rapid re-housing program, Connections provides short-term rental subsidies (12 to 24 months) and comprehensive services to support each household in stabilizing, increasing their income, and ultimately, sustaining their housing at program exit. Rapid re-housing case managers partner closely with each person to:

- Locate and move into affordable homes and navigate landlord relationships
- Assess eligibility for public benefits (SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, Medicare, etc.) and help people apply for these benefits if they are not already receiving them
- Develop step-by-step plans following the participants' goals to prepare for a successful exit from the program
- Provide or connect them to services aligned with their goals including, but not limited to, transportation support, counseling services, financial literacy, education support, employment search assistance, resume development, and life skills training.

Our rapid rehousing case managers are providing intensive and holistic support to prepare each household to maintain housing after the rental subsidy and case management support ends. These staff are an essential part of our approach, and it takes a significant number of case management hours to help participants develop their plan to achieve their goals.

The Unitarian Church of Evanston's partnership directly supported this work. Last year, Connections spent more than \$250,000 on rapid rehousing case management staff. UCE's \$40,000 grant was dedicated to these expenses and ensured we had the housing team in place to help people move forward on their journey out of homelessness.

### **Thank You**

Housing ends homelessness.

We know that to permanently end homelessness, we must have a range of housing resources available that meet the unique needs of the person experiencing homelessness. This includes short-term and permanent rental subsidies and short-term and permanent case management to go along with it.

With the Unitarian Church of Evanston's support, we are ending homelessness. Your investment in our rapid rehousing staff was not only the financial resources we needed to do our work, but it was also affirmation of our approach. Since the Unitarian Church of Evanston invested \$40,000 into our staffing expenses, Connections has been able to leverage additional funding to sustain this work. Your partnership inspired and encouraged more partners to join our effort.

We are deeply grateful for all the ways the Church supports our work. Ending homelessness takes all of us, and we're delighted to have UCE as a steadfast partner. Together, we can create a community where everyone has access to the tools and resources they need to live, thrive, and reach their full potential. Thank you for your partnership!