

Dane County Housing Initiative

2016 Dane County Housing Summit

Working Together to Expand Housing Opportunities



Supporting Children to Thrive: The Critical Role of Stable Housing

Are there Homeless Youth in Dane County Outside the City of Madison?

In the 2014-15 school year, Dane County School Districts identified 2,119 students experiencing homelessness. 805 of those students were identified in communities outside of Madison. ¹

Students are identified as homeless under the federal law, McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Homelessness, under this law, is defined as lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. It can include living situations like staying in a shelter, living in your car, a park, abandoned building, or place not ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings. Also, living in a motel; or sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, fleeing violence, or similar reasons. ²

In Wisconsin, between the 2006-2007 academic year, and the 2012-2013 academic years, the conservative estimate of the number of homeless students counted through the course of those years grew 183% from 6,246 to 17,716. ³ Families make up 40 percent of the country's homeless population. ⁴

Why are Children Homeless?

Homelessness can result from a variety of combined circumstances including a parents inability to work due to mental or physical health conditions, low wages and the lack of affordable housing, decreasing supportive resources and services; or, challenges associated with raising children alone, domestic violence, and fractured social supports. Interpersonal difficulties, and child-related problems such as illness, also contribute to family homelessness. ⁴

What are the Impacts to Children and Families from Homelessness?

School change during childhood is associated with nearly a half year loss in educational attainment (4-6 months). Children who moved three times in a six-year span fell one full school year behind. ⁵ In addition:

- Highly mobile students frequently have attendance issues due to a lack of consistent, stable housing.
- The experience of homelessness results in a loss of neighbors and community, daily routine, personal possessions, privacy, and security.
- Moving three or more times as a child lowers later earnings by nearly 52 percent. ⁵
- Homeless children are sick at twice the rate of other children. They suffer twice as many ear infections, have four times the rate of asthma, and have five times more diarrhea and stomach problems.
- More than one-fifth of homeless preschoolers have emotional problems serious enough to require professional care, but less than one-third receive any treatment.
- Chronic stress from homelessness or living in extreme poverty impacts brain development.

Homelessness also makes families more vulnerable to other forms of trauma such as physical and sexual assault, witnessing violence, or abrupt separation. The stress related to these risks comes in addition to the

¹The Dane County Housing Initiative (DCHI) is a public-private partnership of residents, elected officials, financial institutions, housing developers and non-profit housing agencies. DCHI works to bring people, information and resources together, facilitate communication and learning, and help build strategies to expand housing options in Dane County.

stress resulting from homelessness itself and can impede recovery due to ongoing traumatic reminders and challenges. ⁴

Impacts to Communities and Schools from Homelessness?

- High student-mobility rates (students who transfer in and out of school) can also disrupt the learning environment in the classroom and throughout the school. ⁴
- Maintaining current school placements results in transportation costs for both the resident and non-resident district. Finding available modes of transportation, particularly for students in 4K through 1st grade is particularly challenging. Transportation from remote areas is not only challenging but extremely expensive.
- Some families do not access county or community resources. Schools seek to wrap around students experiencing homelessness, but there are limits to available resources such as safe, stable housing, daycare outside of school sessions, and medical needs of students and families.

How to Solve the Problem of Child Homelessness?

There are a lot of solutions, but no one person or agency can solve child homelessness on their own. The demand for help and obtaining and maintaining safe, stable, affordable housing is far greater than the supply.

Dane County needs to produce somewhere between 16,000 and 31,000 affordable units in the next 26 years to meet existing and future affordable housing needs. Expressed in terms of units per year, the county needs somewhere between 648 and 1209 affordable units each year to reach these goals. ⁶

In addition to building more below market rate housing, there are other types of housing and housing programs that can help including:

Transitional Housing - Programs that provide extended shelter and supportive services for homeless individuals and/or families with the goal of helping them live independently and transition into permanent housing. For example, Sun Prairie built Shelter from the Storm in 2015 to support their school children and families.

Housing First - is an approach that offers permanent, affordable housing as quickly as possible for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and then provides the supportive services and connections to the community-based supports people need to keep their housing and avoid returning to homelessness. To find out more visit United Way, or contact Martha Cranley at mcranley@uwdc.org.

Homeless Services Consortium - For further information on homelessness in Dane County, please contact the Homeless Services Consortium (danecountyhomeless.org). The Consortium is a partnership of agencies, funders, advocates, and formerly homeless persons committed to preventing and ending homelessness. There are many programs working with families and individuals in helping secure and maintain safe, stable, affordable housing.

Community Conversations - As individuals, we can't raise the minimum wage or lower housing costs, but we can share the information we learn with our fellow community members, or even start a community conversation? We can also encourage community leaders and elected officials to make this issue a priority. By working together, we can make more housing available and provide greater support for the existing programs to help end homelessness.

¹ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2016

² McKinney Vento at a Glance, NCHE, NAEHCY, & NLCHP 2008

³ UW Institute on Research and Poverty, No Place to Call Home: Child & Youth Homelessness in the United States, 2015

⁴ Facts on Trauma and Homeless Children, National Child Traumatic Stress Network 2005

⁵ Frequent Moves in Childhood Can Affect Later Earnings, Work, and Education, Ziol-Guest & Kalil 2014

⁶ Affordable Housing Needs Assessment, Dane County and Municipalities, Paulson 2015