



## ABOUT US

### WHAT WE ARE

Through an innovative partnership approach, Heart Room provides families with three years of support, which includes rental assistance (funded by community partners and congregations), housing case management (led by The Road Home), supportive services (provided by Early Childhood Initiative and Joining Forces for Families) and additional family-driven support from volunteers so families can reach their goals and address barriers.



### WHO WE SERVE

Families who were experiencing homelessness, at substantial risk of homelessness, or in unsafe living situations but who were ineligible for other Dane County housing programs are referred by Early Childhood Initiative and Joining Forces for Families.

We have served 15 families and 60 children in two South/Southwest Madison neighborhoods. 7 families have graduated from Heart Room, 3 enrolled in 2021 and 5 more enrolled in 2022. 8 families have mixed immigration status.

Families entering Heart Room have faced multiple barriers to maintaining housing stability.

Data from the first 10 families revealed the following barriers:

- Lack of access to reliable transportation (30%)
- Mental health concerns for caregiver and/or kids (100%)
- Low financial literacy and credit (80%)
- Limited English proficiency (70%)
- Low-wage (<\$15/hr) work or temporary work (60%)
- Low school engagement/school difficulties for children (50%)
- Domestic abuse concerns (50%)
- History of juvenile or adult justice system involvement (40%)
- Caregiver does not have high school degree or GED (30%)
- Lack of stable childcare (30%)
- Caregiver has a long-term physical disability (30%)

## LEARN MORE

### THE HEART ROOM

The Heart Room pilot project was designed to demonstrate a better way to help families keep stable housing and achieve their own goals for thriving. Stable housing is key for children to grow up safe and healthy, learn in school, and succeed over their life course.

### HOW HEART ROOM STARTED

Started in 2018 as a faith-in-action commitment of Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ (ORUCC), Heart Room was developed and implemented in active collaboration with three professional partners: **The Road Home, Joining Forces for Families, and the Early Childhood Initiative (RISE).**

## KEY OUTCOMES

The 7 families who graduated from the program left with stable housing, increased income, and made significant progress towards important goals for their families.

These 7 families set their own goals with high achievement rates:

- Transportation goals = 100% achievement
- Increased kids' engagement in school (working with school staff, changing schools, enrolling in enrichment opportunities) = 100% achievement
- Increased financial literacy (getting bank accounts, improving credit, budgeting) = 80% achievement
- Improved mental health and increased social support = 80% achievement
- Completed an education or training program = 40% achievement
- 1 family purchased a home in the Meadowood neighborhood shortly after program end



Families value Heart Room for the opportunity to identify and work towards long-term goals versus a crisis-only intervention approach:

- "It's not just the rent money. It's that you guys show you care about my family. You check in with me... I can go to you when there's a problem. The money helps, but I can't thank you enough for the work you put in to help my family."
- "I hope the program stays where you [the family] get to choose how much of your Heart Room funds you want to use for rent each month."
- "I would tell other families to trust this program and be patient because it works. I've accomplished a lot this year."

Direct service staff identified key components of this program's effectiveness, including:

- The focus on family-driven goals and flexibility, allowing the family to decide what is best for them and allow them to adapt to their circumstances.
- The collaborative program permits coordination of services across agencies, allowing families to work on multiple systems with professionals with the appropriate expertise.
- The extended duration of the program (3 years) allows families to move from survival mode to planning mode for long-term stability.

## FUTURE PLANS

- We envision expanding beyond the current geographic neighborhoods as other funding partners join. We will ask other community partners to support rental assistance for four added families in 2023 (to total 12 enrolled families).
- We have updated our cost figures for 2023-2025, estimating an average of approximately \$21,000 in rental assistance per family. (Amount per family will be based on number of people in the family.) Community partners could join together in supporting one or more families if providing the full assistance is beyond their capability.
- The proposed 2023 Dane County budget includes funding for a full-time position at The Road Home needed for housing case management and program coordination.

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