

SIoux FALLS AND MINNEHaha COUNTY, SOUTH DAKOTA REPORT 50 PERCENT REDUCTION IN PUBLIC COSTS FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS WITH DRAMATIC HEALTH CARE SAVINGS

SIoux FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA. The Sioux Falls *ArgusLeader* editorialized this week under the headline "Helping homeless boosts bottom line: County's use of resources efficient, smart" as it underscored the good news of what's working in Sioux Falls and Minnehaha County's 10 Year Plan, which has reported new cost savings from its pilot Housing First initiative.

Project Safe Home, a permanent supportive housing pilot for 20 individuals, documented a 50% decrease in per person costs for health care, detox, law enforcement, and other county services - costs dropped from \$32,000 per person to \$16,529. The most dramatic decline was in health care costs, which fell from a total of \$109,109 in the first quarter of the initiative to \$12,730 in the last quarter of the pilot program, according to data presented to Minnehaha County commissioners by Human Services Director Hugh Grogan.

"The City and County were early partners in the creation of a 10 Year Plan and now the evidence is in, showing a cost effective investment in solutions," indicated United States Interagency Council on Homelessness Executive Director Philip Mangano, who was present for the launch of the Plan. "Mayor Munson, Director Grogan, and Sioux Falls and Minnehaha County leaders are to be commended for their results in their community and nationally." Director Mangano is pictured above (at right) with Mayor Munson at the Mayor's homelessness forum.

The *ArgusLeader* further noted how jurisdictional leaders developed their results strategy using the Council-encouraged approach of "legitimate larceny" in identifying and adopting what's working in other cities and counties: "Minnehaha County officials deserve credit. This program wasn't some haphazard shot in the dark. The county took time to study other communities across the nation that found effective ways to help homeless people."

The commission approved Safe Home in 2007, and it became operational in January 2008. Minnehaha County voted in December 2008 to acquire property that it hopes to develop as additional housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness, under the 10 Year Plan in implementation for Sioux Falls and the county. In 2005, under the leadership of Mayor Munson, the city became the first jurisdiction in South Dakota to develop and adopt a 10 Year Plan to end homelessness. Mayor Munson was recognized by the U.S. Interagency Council with its "Home for Every American" Award in 2007. The Plan, developed by a Blue Ribbon Task Force appointed by Mayor Munson 10 months earlier, offered a measured and realistic data and research based approach to homelessness in this predominantly rural state. The Blueprint to Eliminate Homelessness called for the creation of 150 new housing units and emphasized strengthening partnerships among all the community stakeholders including 55 city, county, state, and federal entities, non profit service providers, faith based and civic organizations, and the Sioux Falls United Way.

Earlier cost analysis by Minnehaha County focused on the eleven most frequent users of detox and the local jail, using data from the Avera and Sioux Valley Hospitals, county facilities including the jail, Mental Illness Board, Health and Human Services), and local providers. An initial analysis revealed that at least \$338,585 was spent for the eleven individuals. Noted the county report: "We are a community who care . . . We can do better." Added the report: "Why should we care about this group of homeless drunks? What does it matter if they drink themselves to death? When you consider how much is spent under the current system and the fact that shelter is nearly impossible to find and the fact that people continue to be homeless, the response is obvious. There must be a better way."

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