

SB 2012 (2023 LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY)  
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION  
HONORABLE JON NELSON, CHAIRMAN  
MARCH 20, 2023  
TESTIMONY OF BRUCE MURRY FOR  
FRASER LTD

Good morning Chairman Nelson and members of the Human Resources Division of House Appropriations. I am Bruce Murry, registered lobbyist for Fraser LTD (Fraser) of Fargo, North Dakota.

For fourteen years Fraser LTD has taken the initiative to provide comprehensive, wraparound crisis services for youth and young adults from across North Dakota. Fraser launched the Stepping Stones Resource Center in Fargo to serve youth in critical need of nutrition, shelter, hygiene, mental health stabilization, and assistance with work and childcare. Fraser wanted to move and respond fast, and felt it necessary to do so without the support and burdens of government help.

As you know, recent polling of North Dakota high school students showed 20% have considered suicide in the past year. Some students succeed. Others fail or avoid the attempt, but take other different precipitous actions to change their lives and how they feel. Their experiences highlight the importance of mental health education and services when people face crisis.

I believe the federal government has contributed to some of the issues challenging youth and young adults as they launch their own lives. Political and social divisiveness, exaggerated gloom from all sides, and the inherent lack of perspective of youth have all too often combined to leave them without hope. Because you hear us, and have the power to act consistently with our values, we are asking State Government to help North Dakota's youth at risk survive and have a chance to thrive.

Perhaps because Fargo is our biggest, most cosmopolitan city, youth from across the state tend to end up there at the end of their ropes. With that largest population of youth and young adults at risk, Fraser has found that a physical resource center is needed to meet emergency needs as they vary throughout the year. Devils Lake has used a smaller center-based approach, and Bismarck has followed a model

that avoids a physical center in favor of hotels, etc. However, this request is not about the expenses associated with building or renting the infrastructure to serve youth. Generous donors are creating a new physical space in Fargo. This request is about underwriting part of the explosion in operational costs.

Please listen to the testimony of:

- Erica Markle, Transitional Youth Services Program Administrator, Fraser
- John Campbell, Executive Director, Fargo-Moorhead Coalition to End Homelessness;  
and
- Sandra Leyland, CEO of Fraser

Please also find attached the testimony of twelve participants of Stepping Stones, made part of this document to protect privacy later in life.

Please make at least an additional two million dollars in biennial funding to the Department of Health and Human Services for crisis services to youth and young adults while they wait to access existing programs. The amendment language below represents one of many possible funding mechanisms.

The proposal of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to move toward Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHC) is also an exciting possibility. Respectfully, we support the CCBHC model because it shares evidence based roots with the model SSRC employs for youth at risk. We would welcome the chance to partner with HHS as they explore this exciting idea to serve North Dakotans with mental illness in a wraparound model. Skillfully wrapping the right services at the right time around the individual has a history of success.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and I'd be happy to answer your questions.

## **AMENDMENT TO SB 2012**

There is appropriated out of any moneys in the general fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of two million dollars (\$2,000,000.00), or so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the department of health and human services for provision of certified shelter care for youth and young adults, in a manner analogous to certified shelter care for children under North Dakota administrative code chapter 75-03-14.1. In addition, the department of health and human services may provide for both residential resource center services for youth and young adults at risk.

SB 2012

House Appropriations Committee – Human Resources Section

Jon Nelson, Chair

Testimony of Sandra Leyland

Good morning Chairman Nelson and members of the Human Resources Division of the House Appropriations Committee. My name is Sandra Leyland, Chief Executive Officer for Fraser Ltd., in Fargo. Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of at risk youth in North Dakota as well as Fraser's *Stepping Stones Resource Center (SSRC)* which is a part of our youth services department.

Our services began in 1893 as the Florence Crittenton Home for unwed mothers. Since our inception we continue as a private nonprofit and we meet the needs of children, youth and adults. Services and resources have grown to include independent living supports, residential services and day support services for people with disabilities; childcare services for children who are typically developing and children with special needs; and youth services for those 16 to 26 who are at risk and requiring case management and basic resources for themselves and their children. We serve youth in crisis, experiencing trauma, and can literally report life saving measures by our staff at both physical and mental health levels.

After three years of running the program we recognized the need for our youth to access timelier outpatient mental health supports. We opened Valley Hope Counseling Center serving the community and our youth program.

We support SB 2012 and are asking for an amendment in support of the thousands of youth across our state who are risk of homelessness, human trafficking, suicide and incarceration. Since our Stepping Stones Resource Center began 14 years ago, we see an increase in chemical dependency, mental health issues, youth raising children, and more. Reviewing demographics we show youth utilizing SSRC in Fargo from as far away as Beach, North Dakota. Speaking with other providers we believe there is a need statewide for new money to address this target population.

This population of youth is recognized in behavioral health circles as extending to age twenty six. These at risk individuals are often referred to as the invisible population because of the great lengths they go to in order to avoid being detected. This often leads to couch hopping, suicide, sex trafficking, drug use and overdose. They want to avoid foster care as they know it, and models like SSRC meet them where they are at in their young lives. To be clearer, the model we support at our resource center – IS NOT a social club, a drop in center, addiction program – although we do intervene, nor are we a homeless shelter, although we do provide emergency extended hours from November to March to youth and their children when adult shelters are full, or youth are afraid to access adult congregate settings for fear of abuse. We network in the community to meet youth in trauma or in crisis.

In the Senate we presented on a study completed by the University of Mary fourteen years ago which identified not only a successful model we run to date, but a recommendation the program be supported within the community. We have built a comprehensive network spanning all areas impacting this population of youth – coalitions, community providers, law enforcement, and the medical field. This support positively impacts the success of our youth. Services from providers like Fraser Ltd., can be step

down programs, referral sources, or hand in hand partnerships. The capacity of other providers to reach at risk youth through similar methods across the state exists if support is given to them. Indeed, the proposal for Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics by the Department seems to propose a similar model of healthcare for an entire community.

Speaking specifically for the program/service model we follow at Fraser for SSRC, the funding options through 1915i, Community Connect (CC) or Free Through Recovery (FTR) are limited and more suitable to fund our permanent supportive and transitional housing for youth. These state resources are about 22% of the budget. Remaining operational funding for SSRC is at 88% and is derived from donations, foundations, grants, in-kind, fundraisers and social entrepreneurial projects. All of this has been impacted by the pandemic at some level.

SSRC functions as a community center attracting youth from the across the state. We feel statewide funding would assist other regions in keeping their youth in their perspective communities.

Fraser Ltd., is requesting from the House Appropriations Committee what could be considered an obnoxious ask of \$2,000,000, but what we believe could be a cost effective approach to the issues facing our at risk youth. Incarceration and inpatient care for physical and mental health care is far more costly per person than we are requesting. We are willing to collaborate, share information, provide more data, whatever necessary to address the needs and prove good stewardship. We need funding to continue our efforts. Providers across the state identify the same needs.

Please note Fraser's request is not in support of our capital campaign. Money for this project is not available for operations and is privately funded.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share our insight and speak on behalf of our state's youth.

Testimony

Senate Bill #2012

Chairman Nelson

House Appropriations Committee:

Human Resources Division

March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Chairman Nelson and members of the House Appropriations Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on Senate Bill 2012. I am in support of SB 2012 but also to request an amendment to it for crisis services for youth at risk throughout the state of North Dakota. I am Erica Markle, I am the Transitional Youth Services Program Administrator at Fraser, Ltd. in Fargo. I provide program oversight for Stepping Stones Resource Center: our resource center for youth ages 16-26 years of age and their children. We have had the privilege of serving the community through Stepping Stones Resource Center for 14 years. Each year we have been able to grow our outreach and increase the level of support we provide to the community. Our first year of operation we served 338 unique individuals, this past year we served 898 unique individuals; a 166% increase in clients served.

We are at the point now where we have outgrown our current space and are in the process of building a new center in order to accommodate the expansion of our programming, increased number of clients served, and increased need for crisis intervention and wrap around services. 79 percent of the youth we serve at Stepping Stones Resource Center have a mental health diagnosis, 62 percent of the youth have a chemical dependency diagnosis, and 30 percent of the youth we serve are survivors of human trafficking. Having a community space for these individuals to be safe, to get their needs met, and to learn skills is vital to the community.

We have seen a rise in youth coming to us in crisis who are needing immediate services and wrap around support; many of whom we provide lifesaving services for. I can testify to this as several youth have informed me of this after the fact. Our resource center provides crisis intervention in the forms of suicide prevention, responses to overdoses, childcare assistance for overwhelmed caregivers, and assisting individuals in domestic violence situations and human trafficking situations to get away from their abusers and have a safe place to stay and seek services. I have had many youth inform me that they were planning to end their lives before entering into our services. The one that sticks with me the most is an individual showing me their journal, inside was their goodbye note they had made before finding us. They said they created it when they were feeling hopeless. They had called their family and friends all the local shelters but no one had room for them. They had a friend who could not take them in but told them to come to SSRC for our extended hours program. Luckily, they did and are working on their goals and are engaging in mental health assistance and our wrap around case management. Hope and a chance for a better future is what our programming offers.

Stepping Stones Resource Center is structured programmatically using the Transition to Independence Process. This evidence-based model focuses on a strength-based, person-centered approach to assist youth who have emotional and behavioral difficulties. We focus on assisting the youth we serve on their

journey to independence through groups, modeling behaviors, and wrap around case management. Areas of program focus are centered on gaining meaningful employment, continuing education endeavors, finding and securing stable housing, connecting with mental and physical health service providers, and becoming an active member in the community.

In our community and all of North Dakota that there is a growing need for individuals to have access to resources such as free hygiene products, clothing, school supplies, furniture, and food. We have increased the amount of food given to individuals and families by over 60 percent these past three years. There has been an increase of 35 percent in the amount of food we are getting from Great Plains Food Bank for community distribution. We are seeing the high inflation rate on groceries impacting our neighbors; many individuals that used to be able to provide for all their basic needs are needing supports. Their paychecks are not stretching as far as they used to. We meet their immediate needs and also assist them with getting set up with other local agencies and programs to increase their independence.

SSRC serves youth from all over the state. Many individuals come to Fargo for an increase in job opportunities, for our local shelters, for the services offered within our community, and for continuing education. We get referrals from the state hospital, mental health providers around the state, and juvenile facilities for youth in need of intensive services and supports. We are a resource hub for youth in the community. We assist with transportation to appointments, have other providers come on site to meet with clients, and refer clients to community providers for additional supports. We have staff available 24/7 with an on-call system also in place to meet the needs of the clients.

We see the individuals we serve as more than just a number. We know them by name, know their story, and know their dreams. It is due to this connection that we are successful in assisting them in their goals surrounding independence and becoming an integrated member of society. Currently, 54 percent of our youth we serve are employed. We are striving to only increase our community supports.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in front of you Chairman Nelson and members of the House Appropriations Committee.

SSRC has helped me and my kids in more ways than I ever expected. They let me stay in their shelter with my kids and provided me and them with food, clothing, toys, and hygiene products. They helped me find an apartment and got me furniture. They helped me get out of an abusive relationship. They paid for a hotel for me and my kids while I was fleeing. They helped me file a restraining order and are helping me with the court process.

The staff set me up with a therapist and are helping me get my kids into therapy as well after what happened. They are helping me get all of our birth certificates and helping me find childcare for my kids so I can go to school and start working. They are helping me focus on my goals and helping me get on my own feet. I feel supported from them and know they truly care about me and my kids' wellbeing. They are very supportive of me.

When I first came to SSRC, I was fresh out of jail, had no resources, was in an abusive relationship, and had no direction in my life. I knew I wanted to change but didn't know how. I was cycling in and out of the correctional facilities. This is how my entire life was before SSRC. I was angry and impulsive. I had a rough upbringing and no one to guide me through life. I needed help with learning how to change my life around.

SSRC helped me get on the right path. They sat me down and challenged me to create goals for myself and held me accountable to completing them. They helped me get housing, get a job in construction, get out of an abusive relationship, and get into treatment.

I am now working in a lumber yard with more responsibility added to my job duties. I am out of treatment and in recovery. I just got awarded the title of Group Service Representative at NA. I learned the importance of being a community member through SSRC and give back. I go to church now. I take some people at SSRC to NA meetings. I also take some people from SSRC to church. I am now living my life how I have always wanted to and have a great support network from the avenues SSRC helped guide me through.



Hello my name is Alyssa,

I've been coming and going since 2019, SSRC has provided me with Diampers when i really needed it, Each ~~the~~ Staff has came across seems to be very helpful in getting what i need when it comes to hygiene products, clothing, and provided transportation. i feel this place is like home. my case managurs have always helped me with housing for me & my 3 children, im thankful for the services they provided within the years, i recommend this to others i see @ the bus stop.

Text of handwritten note:

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I've been coming and going since 2019, SSRC has provided me with Diampers when i really needed it, Each Staff has came across seems to be very helpful in getting what i need when it comes to hygiene products, clothing, and provided transportation. i feel this place is like home.

My case managers have always helped me with housing for me & my 3 children. im thankful for the services they provided within the years. i recommend this to others i see @ the bus stop.

SSRC Gives me a place to stay  
feeds me and helps me with my med appointments  
The people here are nice

Text of handwritten note:

SSRC Gives me a place to stay

Feeds me and helps me with my Med appointments.

The people here are nice

SSRC has helped me and are nice enough to give me a place to stay and gave me food when I couldn't even help myself ~~and gave me a place~~  
SSRC also gave me clothes and were here for me when I first moved to Fargo and gave emotional support when I had problems with my relationship with my ex.

Text of handwritten note:

SSRC has helped me and are nice enough to give me a place to stay and gave me food when I couldn't even help myself.

SSRC also gave me clothes and were here for me when I first moved to Fargo and gave emotional support when I had problems with my relationship with my ex.

I had nothing but dirty clothes in my bags when I first came here, to SSRC. My cousin told me about this and how it helped him. I didn't have a home, SSRC provided a roof over my head. I had no money for food, SSRC put food in my belly. I didn't have any clean clothes, SSRC provided me what I needed. This place, the people who are here, its all great. There are people here who take it all for granted. But coming from a guy who started out with nothing, I can gladly say, that I am very thankful for this place and ~~for~~ for everything the people here have done for me.

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I am Antony Jenkins of Fargo, North Dakota and SSRC  
has helped in more than enough to write or explain.  
Everytime I'm in need they help no questions asked.  
making sure I'm alright mentally and physically. warm place to  
sleep, and ~~food~~ food, But to put it lightly changes  
Need to be met and looked at. Staff here does everything  
and more they can do to help along the way but making  
additional ~~services~~ funding would Tremendously help out the shelter  
letting them to continue and help all youth at risk in Fargo  
North Dakota. Thank you for the opportunity to speak  
with you today - Antony Jenkins

Text of handwritten note:

I am Antony [redacted] of Fargo, North Dakota and SSRC has helped in more than enough to write or explain.

Everytime I'm in need they help no questions asked.

Making sure I'm alright mentally and physically warm place to sleep and food. But to put it lightly changes Need to be met and looked at. Staff here does everything and more they can do to help along the way but making additional funding would Tremendously help out the shelter letting them continue and help all youth at risk in Fargo, North Dakota.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

/s/ [redacted]

SSRC has helped in more ways than my own  
Blood family has my life. ~~SSRC~~

Text of handwritten note:

SSRC has helped in more ways than my  
own Blood family has my life.

SSRC ~~taught~~ taught me how to be more responsible and ~~to be~~ this is a good place to go if you ~~don't~~ don't have places to go. SSRC helped me relieve my anger issues and helped me connect my social life and make good friends and good choices and good housing and SSRC helped me stayed out of jail and keep my life on track. This is the longest I've stayed out of jail. I'm grateful for SSRC for staying alive and control my everyday life and make better choices and helping me when nobody else did and I'm a better person because of this place.

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Monday, March 13th / Keesha Miller

Stepping Stones has helped me in many ways but mostly it has helped me learn to be responsible and has been a stress reliever also. I love how they help us with food and a shelter to stay at while getting back on my feet. ♡ If you ever need any food or place to stay during times of crisis I would recommend SS&C. ♡ ♡ Thank you!

Text of handwritten note:

Monday, March 13th/ Keesha [redacted]

Stepping stones has helped me in many ways but mostly it has helped me learn to be responsible and has been a stress reliever also. I love how they help us with food and a shelter to stay at while getting back on my feet. [heart] If you ever need any food or place to stay during times of crisis I would recommend SSRC. [two hearts] Thank you!



Hello, I am a resident or whatever you  
wanna say at SSRC. I've been here consistently  
for about 5-6 days now. Its been pretty cool  
here. The food is good here. I have a place to  
lay my head down at night. I'm a people person  
too so its dope interacting with different  
personalities. Its nice having a place to go to when  
I really need it. Its a dope place to be if you  
want to get away from all the bull. I'm so  
grateful to be here. I havent really asked for too  
much but the things I have asked for, they  
do everything they can to help me out.

Text of handwritten note:

Hello, I am a resident or whatever you wanna say at SSRC. I've been here consistently for about 5-6 days now. Its been pretty cool here. The food is good here. I have a place to lay my head down at night. I'm a people person too so its dope interacting with different personalities. Its nice having a place to go when I really need it. Its a dope place to be if you want to get away from all the bull. I'm so grateful to be here. I haven't really asked for too much but the things I have asked for, they do everything they can to help me out.

Hey How You doing I Am Antoine Mckeown  
And im coming to you today because  
I wanted to talk to y'all on about  
how the SSRC helped me and  
Continuing to help me, So first off they  
gave me a place to stay, they allowed  
me to shower and to be able to make  
me some good ole to eat and they  
also serve food sometime across the  
way but it dont rilly taste good  
cause I aint make it because we  
all know that my cooking is the  
best and ive ~~been~~ been homeless  
for about 4 months so they  
are (as in the caseworkers) putting me  
and pointing me to the resources  
that I need to get all of my  
documents back into my possession.

~~HOME + NEEDED~~

BAMM!!!

Text of handwritten note:

Hey How You doing I am Antoine [redacted] and i'm  
coming to you today because I wanted to talk to y'all  
on about how the SSRC helped me and continuing to  
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they allowed me to shower and to be able to make  
me some good ole to eat and they also serve food  
sometimes across the way but it don't rilly taste good  
cause i aint make it because we all know that my  
cooking is the best and ive been homeless for about  
4 months so they are (as in the caseworkers) putting  
me and pointing me to the resouces that I need to set  
all of my documents back into my possession.

HAVE A NICE DAY! BAMM!!!

[dazzling smile drawing]

