

MARCH 9, 2023

YWCA CASS CLAY SUPPORTS HB 1014

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca
cass clay

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Erin Prochnow, CEO at YWCA Cass Clay.

Our agency offers the largest Emergency Shelter for women and their children escaping domestic violence and homelessness in North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota. We have done so for 45 years. We also operate a sizeable Supportive Housing Program serving 80 households in Fargo and West Fargo, that, after emergency shelter, is the long-term solution for healing, stability, and independence - diminishing the likelihood women will return to abusive partners or homelessness.

YWCA Cass Clay supports the North Dakota Housing Finance Agency (NDHFA) acquiring the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) and North Dakota Homeless Grant (NDHG) from the North Dakota Department of Commerce. Additionally, YWA Cass Clay supports the recommendation of appropriating \$25 million to the Housing Incentive Fund (HIF).

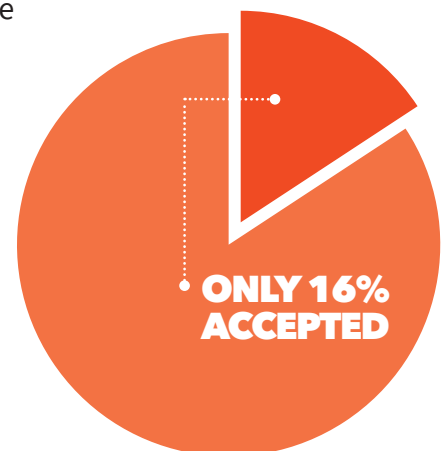
North Dakota Housing Incentive Fund (HIF)

Affordable housing is a critical component of our infrastructure in North Dakota. Approval of HB 1014, inclusive of the provisions of the North Dakota Housing Incentive Fund (HIF) program at the recommended \$25 million, will greatly impact organizations like YWCA in providing affordable supportive housing to citizens of our state. In the case of YWCA, it will provide a pathway for women and children out of harm's way from dangerous abuse and homelessness. It will also deliver the highly effective strategy of affordable housing combined with human support from a housing caseworker.

Supportive Housing stabilizes families and prevents use of other more costly resources.

The solution to homelessness is housing. Investing in affordable rental housing is critical to the ideal of making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring. Despite the effectiveness of supportive housing, only a portion of the people who would benefit most actually receive it. In 2021, 292 women and children applied to gain access to YWCA's Supportive Housing Programs, but **only 46 women and children - 16% - were accepted.**

In 2015, YWCA saw a need for increased supportive housing because too often our caring advocates were witnessing survivors of violence returning to abusive partners because they had no other independent alternative. Often, an abuser's power and control traps domestic violence survivors economically - 99% of domestic violence survivors are victims of economic abuse.



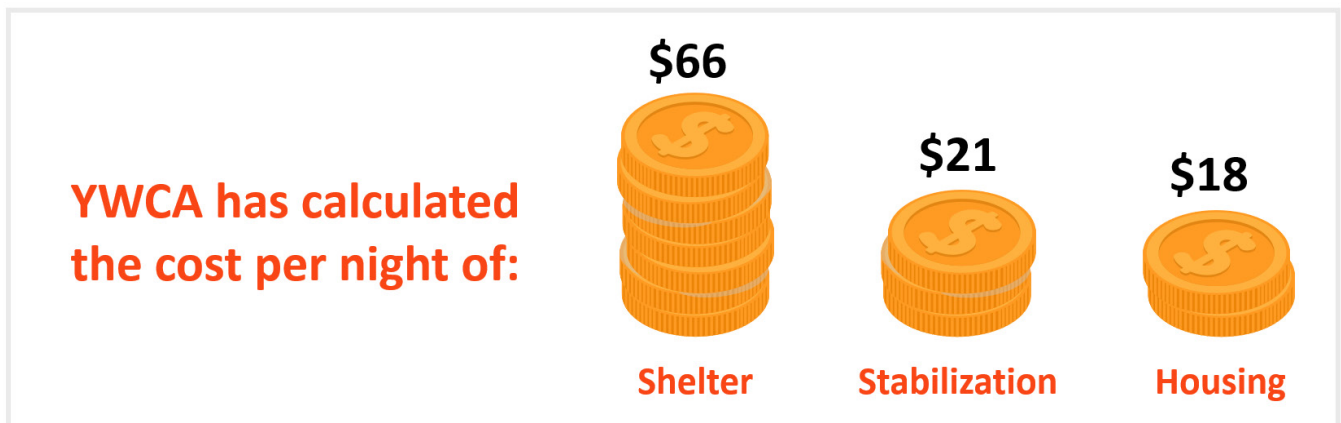
YWCA set a bold goal in 2015 to significantly grow our supportive housing program. At that time, the agency supported 18 units of housing. That number is 80 today.

With the addition later this year of YWCA’s new supportive housing initiative, Lantern Light (described in more detail on page 4), YWCA will provide supportive housing to more than 95 families. Tonight, 250 people will sleep in safe YWCA supported housing, children will be off to school, and survivors of violence will be able to hold steady jobs because of the stability and care provided through supportive housing—of those, **three in five are children.**

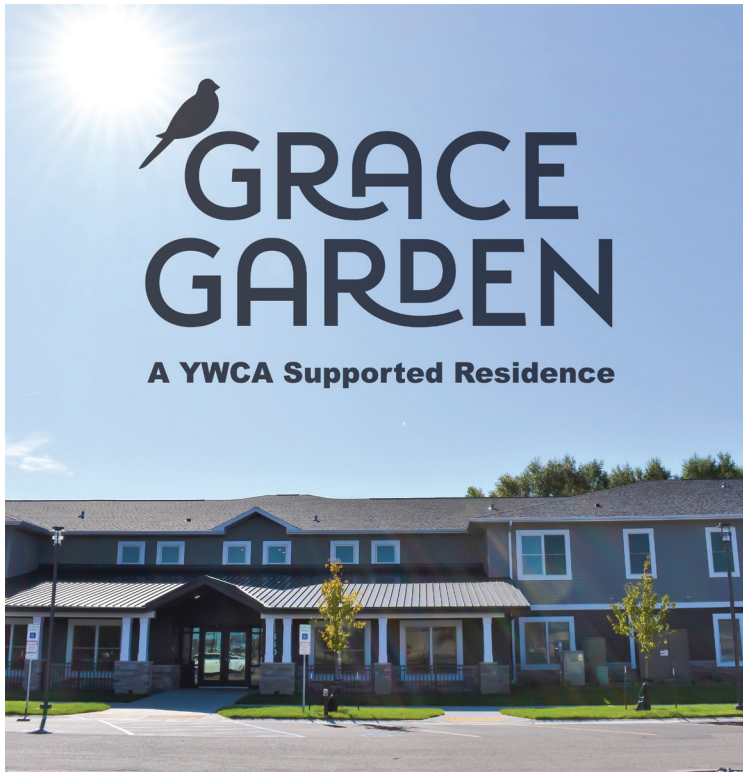


Even with expansion of YWCA’s Grace Garden housing initiative through the help of NDHFA in 2019, **we simply don’t have enough affordable homes to meet community need.** A large body of research shows that most people who live in supportive housing can remain stably housed in the community, making it the most cost-effective prevention to homelessness.

Our own numbers substantiate this fact: at YWCA, the cost of emergency shelter is \$66 per night while supportive housing at YWCA is \$18 per night. **It costs 72% less to provide supportive housing.** This economical resource is a path to safety and financial security for women, at the same time lessening use of emergency, health care and other resources.



YWCA can highlight two recent examples of the Housing Incentive Fund in action at Grace Garden which opened in 2019 and YWCA’s recent purchase of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Sisters) Sacred Heart Convent.



GRACE GARDEN

is a YWCA residence that opened in 2019 and serves individuals and families with its 30 one- to four-bedroom units. Onsite housing advocates readily support residents in their goals.

YWCA was approached by Lutheran Church of the Cross Pastor Joel Baranko in 2017 about vacant unused church property. He solicited the opinion of our agency in the how the land could best serve the community. Our answer was additional affordable supportive housing for those facing homelessness as a result of domestic violence.

YWCA applied for and received support from a variety of public and private partners to bring that 30-unit affordable housing initiative to reality.

AT GRACE GARDEN IN 2022:

27,211

nights of housing were provided

107

adults and children were housed

67%

increased their income level

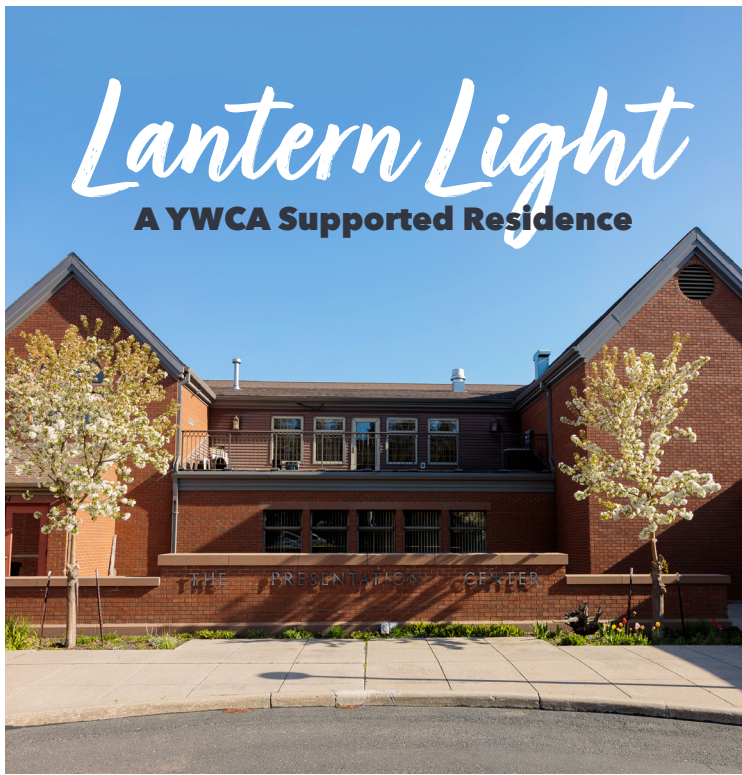
78%

reported a reduction in use of emergency services

Since Grace Garden opened in the fall of 2019 over 86,000 nights of safe housing have been provided to 381 individuals.

This \$7.1 million initiative was aided through the support of \$500,000 award through HIF to leverage over \$6.5 million in federal and state sources in 2017.

Grace Garden has been instrumental in solving a need of domestic violence victims, challenged in the past by lower prioritization for supportive housing because they weren't chronically homeless—instead homeless for the first time after leaving an abuser. Lutheran Church of the Cross and Gate City Bank were instrumental in making Grace Garden possible and generously continue their support.



YWCA CEO Erin Prochnow and Sister Mary Margaret Mooney

LANTERN LIGHT

YWCA Cass Clay's relationship with Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary was born out of proximity and grew through a united mission - serving women and children in need.

YWCA has partnered with the Sisters by leasing 16 units of supportive housing dating back to 2006 in three locations. In June, the Sisters of the Presentation agreed to YWCA purchasing their former Sacred Heart Convent adjacent to the Emergency Shelter.

YWCA is currently renovating the former convent into 23 affordable supportive housing apartments, named Lantern Light. Construction is underway with plans to open in the fall of 2023.

The one- to four-bedroom apartments at Lantern Light will be home for approximately 60 adults and children when the residence opens in the fall of 2023.

A recent Fargo Forum article from December 27, 2022, on this initiative is attached on page 7 of this testimony.

This \$8.3 million building renovation and acquisition was awarded \$1.1 million in HIF to leverage more than \$7 million in federal and state awards.

Funding for renovation was secured through HOME, North Dakota Housing Incentive Fund, National Housing Trust Fund, and the Affordable Housing Program.

YWCA's Supportive Housing Program is a proven solution. Through Lantern Light: A YWCA Supported Residence, the legacy of Sisters of the Presentation and their foundress, Nano Nagle, will live on and be honored with a lasting tribute.

HIF dollars provide a companion tool to federal resources to make affordable housing possible for new construction such as the case of Grace Garden, in remodel projects such as Lantern Light, and also to help make certain that existing affordable supportive housing units are preserved.

On average, a woman stays in the YWCA Supportive Housing Program just 18 months. It's a short time in which families break the cycles of poverty and violence. A woman who participates in the YWCA Supportive Housing Program earns more money, is healthier, and better equipped to live independently and create an environment for her children to thrive.

In 2022:

- **50% of participants increased their education or income level**
- **83% of participants reduced their use of emergency services**
- **75% of participants obtained stable housing upon exiting the program**

Recently, a woman named Jessica served by YWCA at Grace Garden said, *"I really don't think I could have made it this far without you. I appreciate everything you guys do. Sometimes I still feel like I'm in a dream. I never imagined that I could have made it this far in this little amount of time. I'm very thankful."*

[**Click to listen to Jessica's story >**](#)



When a woman, like Jessica, arrives at YWCA, she often lacks the building blocks to independence: a living wage, adequate credit, childcare, and transportation. Our comprehensive programs and services help women overcome these barriers.

In 2022, the average stay at YWCA Emergency Shelter was 50 days. While women can make significant progress in this time, this is typically not enough time to gain enduring financial security and self-reliance. Women must recover physically and mentally from abuse. She may have a disability, or need to attend school, or be working hard to regain credit history and financial footing.

Supportive Services

The HIF requires 10% of the fund be set aside to provide necessary and life-changing supportive services. YWCA Advocates provide stability and a light hand of support to help women troubleshoot and problem-solve setbacks in life. **Supportive services help vulnerable people** who have histories of trauma, chronic health conditions, poverty, or other struggles come to thrive in the community. In our experience, beyond rental assistance, survivors gain a YWCA housing advocate as their human support.

YWCA Advocates are difference-makers who help women gain jobs and education, overcome obstacles related to childcare, car breakdowns, health setbacks and more. They skillfully use an empowerment approach that helps women summon their own courage and grow in problem-solving and resolve. Women are guided to set concrete goals. They gain caring encouragement that helps them stay focused on convictions they've set.

As women grow in personal autonomy, they avoid the paths of returning to abusers, substance dependency, or interaction with costly social systems like emergency care, law enforcement, the foster system, and more. Tenants grow abilities to stay housed. **They become healthier and reconnect to the community.** In 2022, 83% of supportive housing participants reduced their need for emergency services such as law enforcement and ambulance usage.

They lead lives on paths of their own choosing. **Supportive services are a proven and cost-effective way to reduce shelter occupancy and the homeless population, breaking the cycles of poverty and violence.**

In both initiatives described, YWCA sought or is seeking local private funding to provide life-changing supportive services onsite. These dollars are difficult to raise and are critically important. In the case of Grace Garden, a local bank provided 12 years of supportive service support through a \$1.5 million pledge. At Lantern Light, YWCA is currently in a capital campaign to build an endowment fund to secure supportive services into the future, the goal on this private campaign is over \$6 million.

Wherever a woman may be on her journey, together we must walk alongside her to ensure she has access to the tools and resources necessary to heal, reach her goals and ultimately, build a future free from violence for their family.

LOCAL NEWS

A2 | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2022 | THE FORUM

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Ryan Longnecker / WDAY TV

Erin Prochnow, CEO of YWCA of Cass-Clay, walks through the remodeling of the former Sacred Heart Convent in south Fargo. The site will now become "Lantern Light." It will provide apartment living for those women and children escaping violence in the home.

YWCA making progress on convent remodel for Lantern Light

By Kevin Wallevand
WDAY
Fargo

For years, Fargo's Presentation Sisters used their convent on the city's south side to launch projects for helping the poor and those without housing.

But now, a familiar face is at the convent months after the sisters moved from there.

The YWCA plans to remodel the convent and provide safe, affordable housing for families escaping domestic violence.

"Eventually, on the first floor will be a two-bedroom, handicap-accessible unit," said Erin Prochnow, YWCA

Cass Clay CEO, as she toured the convent now undergoing a huge, multimillion-dollar renovation project.

Prochnow knows housing. As the YWCA's longtime CEO, she knows what survivors of domestic violence need.

"We are going to create, like a hotel, a business center. There will be a business center with laptops so women can apply for jobs and to seek out other opportunities. That is what we have identified as a need, along with classrooms," Prochnow said.

That is why she is so excited about Lantern Light, a YWCA-supported residence now under construction.

"We know the answer to

homelessness is affordable, supportive housing, which the YWCA has worked to grow," she said. "We have expanded from 19 units in 2015 to 95 units by the end of next year throughout the community, in addition to operating the region's largest shelter serving women and children adjacent to here. It will be a campus-like environment for women facing violence."

What for so many years was the Presentation Sisters' convent will now be the safe home for 23 families who are survivors of domestic violence and often homeless.

The irony of this new project: the name Lantern Light. A way to honor the

years of ministry of the Presentation Sisters in Fargo. Through their founder Nano Nagle who, although rich, was known to carry a lantern through the streets of Cork, Ireland, helping impoverished women and children.

"We have partnered with the Presentation Sisters for so long. It is repurposing something and honoring their legacy, and something we care so strongly about," Prochnow said.

The bottom line: The YWCA's shelter is full.

"Seventy-three today, 37 of whom are children," Prochnow said, referring to the number of people at the shelter nightly this week in

Fargo. This new building will not be a shelter, but housing. More efficient, cheaper.

"When they walk into this apartment when it is done, they will have a place to call home, they will be safe and have an environment for their children to thrive and not live in fear. That is absolutely what it is about," Prochnow said.

Millions of dollars have been secured for the project, but the YWCA is now raising nearly \$4 million to get the project done. An endowment is also in the works.

To support the mission, go to the YWCA's website at www.ywcacassclay.org.

Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) and North Dakota Homeless Grant (NDHG)

In our judgement and experience in working with the NDHFA team, they have demonstrated repeatedly that they maintain the knowledge, understanding, and administrative expertise to manage both ESG and NDHG.

These two programs are primarily utilized to supplement direct service programs such as those provided at YWCA. Additionally, the NDHFA administers the three critical federal programs many homeless service providers access to provide shelter and supportive housing programs including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Continuum of Care (CoC), HOME, and Housing Trust Fund programs; the NDHFA team understands the existing nuances and compliance regulations required by HUD.

To my understanding, there is limited full time staff equivalent implications in this transition. The shift from North Dakota Department of Commerce to the NDHFA will help maintain the funding at the federal ESG because the NDHFA team understands the regulatory mandates and can streamline communication channels with service providers.

In the 2021-2023 biennium, YWCA was awarded approximately \$100,000 through the competitive NDHG process to help purchase food in the emergency shelter and provide homeless prevention and rapid rehousing support in the form of limited rental assistance to those facing eviction.

The ESG competitive award to YWCA in the 2021-2023 biennium was \$65,000, primarily supporting basic services such as electricity costs to maintain the emergency shelter.

The state appropriates funding to leverage federal ESG funding, and YWCA is supportive of the state leverage as it helps provide safety and security to more than 1,250 people facing violence and homelessness at YWCA annually, or 2,500 people over the biennium. **Of those, 1,100 were children under the age of 18.**

Specifically, NDHG supported two major programs at YWCA: Rapid Rehousing & Stabilization Services and Emergency Shelter, both of which are outlined in more detail on the next page.



RAPID REHOUSING & STABILIZATION SERVICES

Where possible, individuals are diverted from homelessness or rapidly rehoused after experiencing homelessness. YWCA Rapid Rehousing and Stabilization Program provides deposit assistance, rental arrears, short-term rental assistance, or utility payments to help prevent families from becoming unhoused or quickly regain housing after experiencing homelessness.

Oftentimes a one-time payment through this diversion program can be a bridge to solid ground. This support means a single parent or distressed family can get by while awaiting a first paycheck or rebounding from a large medical bill. Funding for this work comes from the NDHG. By assisting with these needs, we can make homelessness brief and one-time, or prevent it before it happens.

**Over the 2021-2023 biennium,
NDHG will help YWCA provide:**

74

adults and children an average of

\$1,239

over two months for rental support

EMERGENCY SHELTER

For 45 years, YWCA Cass Clay has offered the largest Emergency Shelter for women and their children escaping domestic violence and homelessness in North Dakota. Last year 86% of those served were fleeing violence and 74% were arriving from North Dakota.

YWCA provides a nightly meal for 65 individuals in shelter on average. By doing so, YWCA plays an important role in ending hunger.

In 2022, NDHG funding was critical in helping with increased food costs. Last year, it cost more than double what was projected - an overrun of more than \$25,000.

**Over the 2021-2023 biennium,
NDHG will help YWCA provide:**

2,448

women and children with safe emergency shelter and nourishing meals

