

Testimony from Erin Prochnow, CEO, YWCA Cass Clay
North Dakota House Government Operations Subcommittee on Appropriations
March 20, 2025
SB 2014

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. Founded in 1906, YWCA has provided emergency shelter for more than 45 years. We also operate a sizeable Supportive Housing Program serving 97 households in Fargo and West Fargo.

YWCA Cass Clay supports the appropriation to \$10 million to the North Dakota Homeless Grant (NDHG) and \$25 million to the Housing Incentive Fund (HIF). YWCA has utilized both programs to offer emergency shelter and supportive affordable housing services in our work to provide safety to 350 women and children every day who face homelessness a result of violence.

North Dakota Homeless Grant (NDHG)

Previous NDHG awards to YWCA primarily support basic services such as electricity costs to maintain the emergency shelter. The annual operating budget of our shelter program is approximately \$1.8 million. Safety and security for about 1,250 women and children facing violence and homelessness are served at YWCA Emergency Shelter annually.

The Fargo Moorhead shelter community participates in a triage system providing those with the greatest need to access shelter first. YWCA and other service providers participate in this shelter prioritization collaboration and still receive direct phone calls, referrals and walk ins. In the last three months of 2024, at YWCA Emergency Shelter, there were 707 direct calls for service where 383 diversion screenings took place, and 99 households were able to be sheltered. YWCA had the capacity to shelter approximately 35% of those seeking shelter.

YWCA is an agency who applied only for what we knew was available in funding from NDHG previously. The numbers requested in aggregate applications at NDHFA, in my judgement, are understated.

YWCA has focused on building a robust supportive housing program to help meet this demand. YWCA has strategically focused on the expansion of our supportive housing programming for a decade.

North Dakota Housing Incentive Fund (HIF)

Affordable housing is a critical component of our infrastructure in North Dakota. Approval of SB 2014, inclusive of the provisions of the HIF program at the recommended \$25 million, will greatly impact organizations like YWCA who utilize funding to provide affordable supportive housing. In the case of YWCA, affordable and supportive housing provides a pathway for women and children out of harm's way from dangerous abuse and homelessness.

A study by NDHFA earlier this year indicated that in all, 11,401 new housing units are needed in Cass County alone by 2027. According to the National Women's Law Center two in three low-wage workers are women. Specific statistical pages regarding housing facts and forecasts and how gender and poverty intersect can be found at the back of this testimony.

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 a decade ago to significantly grow our supportive housing program. At that time, the agency supported 18 units of housing. That number is 97 today.

HIF has been utilized by YWCA on two occasions times over the past six years to achieve this goal, in the subsequent pages you can see the initiatives supported including Grace Garden a new build in 2019 on vacant church property in West Fargo, and Lantern Light, a renovation of former convent, in Fargo. Both initiatives were born out of partnership and collaboration with faith-based organizations including Lutheran Church of the Cross and an order of catholic nuns: the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. These efforts assure that tonight, more than 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.

As others have eloquently stated, we simply do not have enough affordable homes to meet community need. YWCA has offered supportive housing for nearly four decades and remains focused on building capacity in supportive housing because first, we know it works and is the solution to homelessness and second, it is far more cost-effective and a path to safety and financial security for women, at the same time lessening use of emergency, health care, and other resources.

Our numbers at YWCA substantiate this fact: at YWCA, the cost of emergency shelter is three times that of a night of supportive housing, \$75 per night of shelter versus \$25 per night of supportive housing.

Many ask the direct result on families impacted. On average, a woman stays in YWCA's Supportive Housing Program just 14 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.

Statistics regarding each program can be found on the detail pages. Highlights include:

- 84% of participants reduced their use of emergency services
- 88% of Cove Lane participants obtained stable housing upon exiting the program
- 53% of participants increased their education or income level

YWCA Cass Clay encourages a do-pass of NDHG and HIF provisions within SB 2014 to support those most vulnerable in our state from facing the devastating impact of homelessness, not only through emergency services of the NDHG program for temporary short-term solutions, but for longstanding supports of affordable and supportive housing through the HIF program. These resources will provide safety, stability, and most importantly hope for the future.

SHELTER, HOUSING, & SUPPORTIVE SERVICES AT YWCA CASS CLAY

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca
cass clay

YWCA Cass Clay 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 over 45 years - sheltering 1,200+ individuals in 2024 for an average stay of 45 nights.

We also operate a sizable Supportive Housing Program serving 97 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.

Collectively, YWCA provides safe shelter and housing to 350 women and children every day. 90% of the time women seek services because of violence. All have faced homelessness.

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.

Expansion of services was a planned response to an unmet need, and 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 97 today.



Across our shelter and housing programs, **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.



With the addition of Lantern Light: A YWCA Supported Residence in 2023 and the completed renovation of Cove Lane in 2024, YWCA Cass Clay has created a campus-like environment for easier access to supportive services for participants across shelter and housing programs.



YWCA EMERGENCY SHELTER

is a safe, temporary home for women and children escaping domestic violence or homelessness. Here, 24 hours a day, we first provide food, clothing, hygiene supplies, and safety.

Domestic violence casts a shadow of physical health challenges, depression, low self-esteem, fear, substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Other common barriers survivors face in moving ahead are poor or no credit history and lack of transportation, childcare, or access to healthcare.

Women need not walk alone in addressing these barriers when paired with an Advocate at YWCA. Our team understands the effects of trauma and takes a compassionate empowerment approach in

everything we do. We listen without judging or giving advice on how to “fix” her life. Only she can decide her future. Empowerment honors her choices so she may walk her path freely. Discovering and using her own strengths cultivates hope. Advocates help survivors move forward through YWCA programs and connect them to resources in the community that will be helpful on their journeys.

As the largest emergency shelter serving women and children in North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota, YWCA Cass Clay brings safety for women to begin new lives. Through a caring team and programs shaped over 40+ years, women find transformation, healing, and empowerment.

AT YWCA EMERGENCY SHELTER IN 2024:

24,076

nights of shelter were provided

1,238

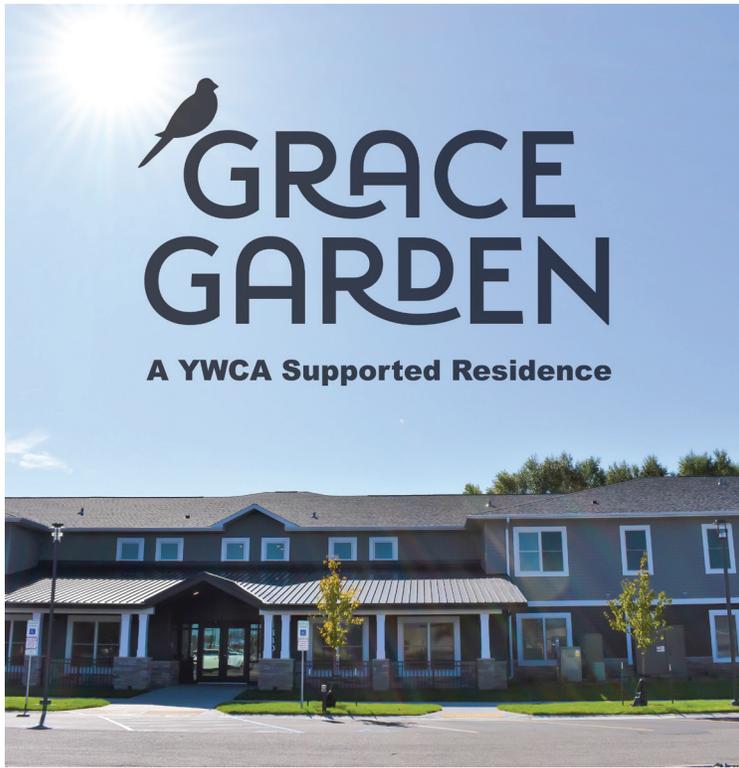
women and children were safely sheltered

84%

of individuals were from Cass and Clay counties

90%

of individuals sheltered were survivors of domestic violence



GRACE GARDEN

is a YWCA residence that opened in 2019 and serves individuals and families with its 30 one- to four-bedroom units. On-site 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 2024:

25,740

nights of housing were provided

94

adults and children were housed

62%

increased their income level

90%

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

is YWCA's newest residence that opened in 2023 and serves individuals and families with its 23 one- to four-bedroom units.

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's partnership with the Sisters began with leasing apartments dating back to 2006 in three locations. In June 2022, YWCA purchased from the Sisters of the Presentation their former Sacred Heart Convent adjacent to the Emergency Shelter.

AT LANTERN LIGHT IN 2024:

20,308

nights of housing were provided

96

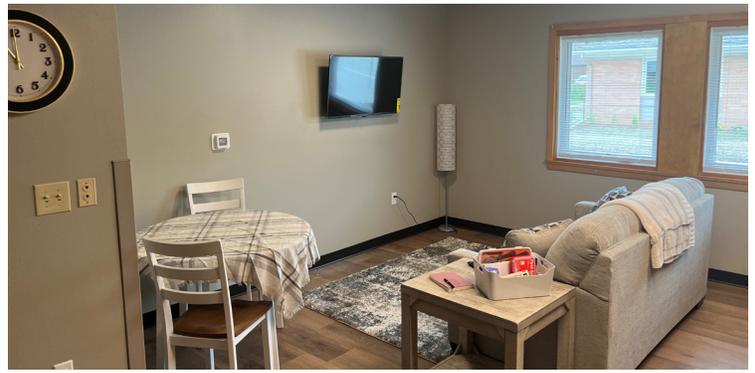
adults and children were housed

78%

reported a reduction in use of emergency services



Scan the QR code to watch a short video about Lantern Light



COVE LANE

serves individuals and families in 12 one- to three-bedroom apartments in close proximity to YWCA Emergency Shelter in Fargo.

Here transitional housing participants have convenient access to the supportive services provided on site at YWCA Emergency Shelter including childcare, education & employment programming, health services and more.

This location was leased to YWCA Cass Clay by the Sisters of the Presentation from 2006-2023. YWCA purchased the two buildings from the Sisters in 2023 and began renovations.

AT COVE LANE IN 2024:

7,533

nights of housing were provided

42

adults and children were housed

50%

increased their income level

78%

reported a reduction in use of emergency services

The residences have been named Cove Lane in honor of YWCA's longstanding partnership with the Sisters.

Cove Lane is where Sisters of the Presentation foundress Nano Nagle ministered to children, widows, and the poor in Cork, Ireland in the 1700s. The legacy of Nano Nagle and the Sisters will continue as Cove Lane provides safe refuge and new beginnings to families who have experienced violence and homelessness.

In 2023, YWCA was awarded \$3 million by the North Dakota Finance Agency to update and renovate the buildings and preserve affordable housing.