

Fall 2024 Gratitude Report

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Mission

The Connect Center provides help for a more connected life.

Vision

The Connect Center believes in a community that knows we are all connected.

A letter from the Director

Our 2023-2024 fiscal year flew by as years often do! Time passes quickly but when one is in a crisis, unhoused, struggling to pay for groceries or rent or simply without funds to put gas in the car to get to work, time can go very slow. That's where The Connect Center (TCC) meets people and helps them to get to a better place in their lives.

Youth with unstable or no housing were connected to housing programs, subsidized or market rate housing, and connected to community resources and services.

Families that needed help with rent to avoid eviction were helped with financial assistance resources. Families needing new housing were helped with finding new housing. TCC also helps families with long-term serves to maintain their housing, reach goals towards financial stability and connect with community resources.

With the addition of two AmeriCorps Housing Resource Navigators, TCC also helped single adults find housing. We helped singles to work through barriers to affordable housing.

Needs have grown bigger and deeper. The Connect Center helped coordinate the PIT Stop Community Resource events at First Presbyterian Church in January and July. This is one of many ways that faith communities, nonprofits, County departments, healthcare organizations and businesses work together to fill needs in the community. Hundreds of people come to the PIT Stop events to receive hot meals, gift cards, food, personal care items, clothing, vaccinations, haircuts, showers and to learn about resources.

The Connect Center worked with County Social Services, faith communities and other non-profits to develop a Cold Weather Plan that made hotel stays available for the sub-zero nights during the '23-'24 winter.

TCC Staff and Board members during the spring of 2024 completed a new Strategic Plan. Goals are to strengthen a Staff Development Plan, create a new Programs Assessment, to create a more efficient and effective Data Management System, and to address Space and Building Needs.

I am grateful for the support from the community which includes Washington County, nonprofits, schools, businesses, foundations, faith communities, civic clubs and other groups, and individuals. I am also very grateful for the TCC Board of Directors, TCC staff, volunteers and donors for their care, support and passion for The Connect Center.

Cindy Parsons
Executive Director

The Connect Center was fortunate to have two AmeriCorps Housing Resource Navigators during this past year. We are grateful to have three Americorps Housing Resource Navigators this year. This increases our capacity go serve more people in need of housing. TCC Advocates work with families and youth while AmeriCorps Navigators, can also help singles that need housing. Many singles served were adults. With rates for rental housing climbing, older adults on fixed incomes are being evicted. TCC Advocates and AmeriCorps Housing Resource Navigators work together to help people overcome barriers to housing and to apply for different kinds of housing and housing programs.

When Tim (not his real name) began working with his TCC Advocate, he was in an abusive relationship with his girlfriend, who was unwilling to actively parent their daughter. As the situation escalated and became threatening, Tim recognized the need to protect himself and his child. He took his daughter to stay with a family member but, unfortunately, became homeless himself due to a lack of space.

A TCC Advocate conducted a coordinated entry assessment, which led to a housing referral to the The Link. Tim found an apartment that qualified for the housing program and was soon approved to move in with his daughter. During this period, Tim lost his job, but The Connect Center stepped in to cover his car insurance, allowing him to maintain transportation to see his daughter and search for new employment.

Tim's TCC Advocate assisted him in updating his resume and with job hunting, and he ultimately secured a full-time position at Jimmy John's. Once Tim was settled into his new apartment, his Advocate closed his case due to his move out of Washington County. Tim was thrilled about his new living situation and overjoyed to have his daughter back with him.

Tami (not her real name) lived in a townhome in Washington County, MN, facing challenges with her mental health and finances while escaping an abusive relationship with her four young children. Despite these struggles, she remained positive and focused on her future, often discussing ways to support her children. Tami shared her aspirations with her TCC Advocate, expressing a desire to become a mental health and body positivity influencer and life coach. She aimed to share her journey to help others overcome similar obstacles. Motivated to achieve this goal, she began taking classes and saving for equipment to launch her podcast.

Tami's TCC Advocate assisted her in applying for a grant designed to support women of color in starting their own businesses, which Tami hoped would provide the necessary funds for her career ambitions. Additionally, Tami was passionate about helping others and sought a role in social services. During their collaboration, Tami's Advocate helped her enhance her resume and interviewing skills, leading her to secure a position at a non-profit that supports homeless youth. Together, they also worked on budgeting to help her pay off debts and save money.

However, shortly after starting her job, Tami's former abuser discovered her location and began harassing her. Prioritizing her and her children's safety, she decided to relocate. With her Advocate's assistance, Tami found subsidized housing in Ramsey County that was larger and more secure. They also worked with a program to ensure her address remained confidential, protecting her from her abuser.

Recently, Tami shared with her TCC Advocate that she has made significant strides in her career and has had no contact with her abuser. Feeling confident and optimistic, she expressed that she is in a much better place and is excited about her future.

During this past year, kids gathered after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays for Kids Connection at a local subsidized housing community where they live for fun learning activities, art and crafts, cooking classes and more. About 50 different kids participated in the program. From gathering carrots, onions and tomatoes from the gardens to making slime to creating watercolor masterpieces, the kids learned social emotional skills and had lots of fun.

TCC Advocates help families with many different needs. Some families have parents that have significant physical and mental health issues and need help connecting to resources while still having quality family life. Other families have goals to have careers that provide a living wage and need help with looking for better jobs, going back to school or even starting their own businesses. TCC Advocates help families with whatever is on their plates and can help connect them to needed resources, and also help them directly, whether it is updating a resume, completing applications, applying for school, or making and keeping a budget.

July 2023 - June 2024 Data & Financial Report

287 Individuals Served
in Long-Term Case
Management Programs

60 Families
23 Singles
43 Youth

141 Adults
146 Children

Volunteers

13 Volunteers
180 Hours Donated
1323 AmeriCorp Service Hours

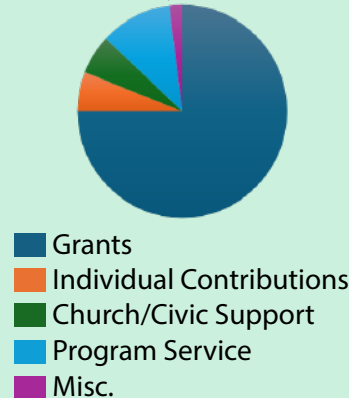
Summer & After School Program

Kids Connection
50 Children Served

When youth (youth are defined as youth through the age of 24) find themselves in unstable housing or have become unhoused, The Connect Center is the place to call. TCC Advocates can help youth with basic need items that include food, personal care items, clothing and even tents and blankets if needed. Youth can also take showers and wash their clothes, use computers for schoolwork, job or housing search. Advocates meet with youth and help them to make a plan to reach their goals. TCC Advocates help youth to apply for housing and conduct Coordinated Entry Assessments that often result in acceptance into youth housing programs. Youth are connected to local resources for County benefits, mental health and other needs.

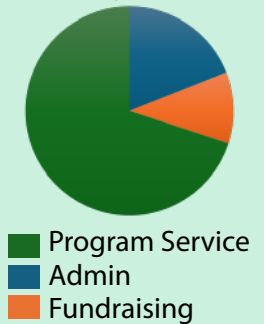
Revenue

\$388,392.68



Expenses

\$331,040.41



July 2023 - June 2024 Financial Supporters

Corporations, Foundations, and Community Organizations

Millie Balfanz	Judy & David Jessup	Cindy Siegel	ECMC Foundation
Gurtie Burkner	Abby Johnson	Miriam Simmons	F.R. Bigelow Foundation
Joel Carlson	Janet Kilkelly	Adam & Chris Smerud	First Presbyterian Church
Karen Celski	Ann Kirn	Catherine Solheim	Fred C. & Katherine B. Anderson Foundation
Corine Crea	David & Naomi Kirstein	Lois Sortedahl	Hardenbergh Foundation
Barb Dahler	Keaton Koenig	Paul and Claire Spilseth	Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Bob Dickie	Mike & Vicki Kramer	Mark & Michelle Stephan	King of Kings Lutheran Church
Marguerite DeFore	Tina Larson	Jane Stevenson	King of Kings Retired Men's Group
Loralee DeLorenzo	Ann MacCormac	Sarah & Tom Stivland	King of Kings Quilter's Group
Sarah Eagle	Vida MacDonald	Evelyn Teitelbaum	Lift Bridge Brewing
Cheri Eaton	Cathy McEachern	Mary & Ron VanEss	Margaret Rivers Fund
Joette Ebert	Leanna Miller	Dale & Cathy Vogt	Nystrom & Associates
Deb Eilers	Tamara & Larry Morrissey	Madeleine Weidner	Our Savior's Lutheran Church
Tina Eisenmenger	Kristin Nelson	Tracy Weidner	St. Charles Catholic Church
Onnolee Erickson	Sharon Neuenfeldt	Zack & Tara Wild	St. Croix Valley Foundation
Shawn Fischer	Rhett & Julie Neuman	Judy Winter	St. Paul Foundation
Gretchen Froehner	Erica Oesterreich	Jeff Virant	St. Paul Lutheran Church
Tamara Gentry	Robert Olson	Affinity Plus	StreetWorks-Lutheran Social Services
Julie Grecian	Sharon Peterson	Afton Lakeland Bayport Lions Club	Stillwater Area Foundation
Clare Gromoll	Sue & Tom O'Malley	All Saints Lutheran Church	Stillwater Elks
Ms. Hagestad	Cindy Parsons	Bremer Trust	The Alley Church
Janet Hammernick	Kim Pepera	Christ Lutheran-Marine On St. Croix	The Grove Methodist Church
Melissa Hauser	Cleone Pritchard	Columbine Garden Club	United Way of Washington Co. East
Jessica Holmes	Lynn Raarup	Community Support Our Students	Anonymous Donors
Breanna Isken	Joan Richert	Community Thread	
Peggy and David Hayden	Walt & Paula Richey	Cottage Grove Lion's Club	
Bob and Kathy Iverson	Doug & Diane Rupp	Crumbli Cookie	
Laura & Joel Jensen	Cindy & Warren Schulze	Degan Family Fund	

I first met Cindy Parsons, Founder and Executive Director of The Connect Center when she came to give a presentation at our local Rotary Club. I distinctly remember Cindy describing her vision for a community that is all connected, where organizations work together to create a network of support, and everyone has the resources they need. This vision really resonated with me and is the reason why I joined The Connect Center Board of Directors in 2022.

As a Board member I've been able to see firsthand what makes the work of The Connect Center so remarkable. It is the direct impact that this organization has on lives. The staff build meaningful relationships with clients and help connect them with the resources they need, empowering them to work towards their own goals. There are countless ways that The Connect Center helps their clients. They help secure affordable housing, they cover damage deposits on leases, they assist with applications for insurance and green cards, they offer free after school programs for children. With the help of a donor, they were even able to get a car for a young man so he could be more independent and drive to a job. These are not just inspiring stories we hear at the Board meetings, these are acts of compassion that are changing real people's lives.

Earlier this year, The Connect Center worked with a consultant to identify Goals and Action Steps for the future of the organization. The process involved 2 meetings, the first with all the staff and the Board, followed by a second meeting with just Cindy and the Board. Both sessions were very productive, but it was especially helpful for the Board to hear from the staff directly. As the boots on the ground, their perspectives are invaluable to guiding the direction of this organization. This collaborative process of strategic planning was an effective approach to integrating the ideas and concerns of everyone involved. We now have a plan for both the staff and the board for the next 3 years with goals that will undoubtedly strengthen the health of the organization. I am so proud to be a small part of the success of The Connect Center and can't wait to see where we go!

Cheryl Jogger, PhD



For more information or to donate, please use the QR code to visit the The Connect Center Website.

Board of Directors

John Richards, Board Chair

Catherine Solheim

Jean Larson

Cheryl Jogger, PhD

Leadership

Cindy Parsons, Executive Director

Bob Dickie, Development Director

Breanna Isken, Program Manager



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