

2022 - 2023 Annual Report

A letter from the Director

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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.

Reflecting on The Connect Center's (TCC) last fiscal year that ended June 30, 2023 I think about changes. Changes in our world, the United States, Minnesota, and our Washington County communities. I also think about so many changes that individuals have experienced. Some of the changes people had no control over. Some changes happened in response to situations, and others happened because people set goals and worked hard to make changes happen.

Inflation caught many people off guard as food, gas and other costs soared. TCC responded to the hike in gas prices by securing new funding to be able to provide generous gas gift cards to all TCC clients that were actively working with a TCC Advocate. TCC also received additional funding to help our clients with car repairs and rental assistance when other financial assistance was not available or enough.

Kids back in school after the pandemic had to adjust to the change of being back in school again and this took a toll on many students. Rates for anxiety and depression measured on the MN School Survey are very high. I worked with the CONNECT Leadership team to do a deeper dive into understanding the results of the survey. The monthly CONNECT Collaborative will address the areas of greatest concern.

We welcomed AmeriCorps Housing Resource Navigator, Tabitha Thurman, who not only worked with families needing safe, affordable housing but even more so with elderly singles who had lost their housing. Older people who have rented for decades are losing their housing due to rents that have risen above their fixed incomes and leases not being renewed.

Work continues with youth that are in unstable housing or unhoused. Strengthened partnerships with schools, libraries and other nonprofits have helped youth to get help through our services. Washington County does not have a shelter for youth. Canvas Health runs the only youth housing program that can serve 5 youth. TCC asked what we could do within our capacity to address the lack of housing for youth. We developed a Host Home Program for Youth. An amazing couple from Lake Elmo welcomed a youth into their home in the fall of 2022 and she thrived in this safe and loving home for 10 months.

As the winter grew colder and colder with no shelter for those zero and sub-zero nights for the number of people living in their cars through the winter, TCC collaborated with All Saint's Lutheran Church and Basic Needs, Inc. to open a Cold Weather Shelter. A family with a 5-year-old boy had been living in their vehicle. We sheltered them for those freezing cold nights and then connected them with Hope for The Journey Home Family Shelter where they were able to live for the rest of the winter and spring.

We celebrated many good changes along the way. A single dad purchased a home for his family with the help of TCC Advocate, Emily Nelson, and Loan Officer at Old National Bank, Rhonda Mann. Youth were referred and accepted into metro youth housing programs where they would have safe, affordable housing. Youth with unstable housing trying to graduate from high school were supported and helped with a plan that led to earning their high school diplomas.

Life is full of surprises and changes. Amid them all, I am so grateful for the community which includes Washington County, non-profits, schools, businesses, foundations, faith communities, civic clubs and other groups, and individuals for helping to make good changes. I am very grateful for the TCC Board of Directors, TCC staff, volunteers and donors that helped TCC meet challenges with good changes.

With a very thankful heart, Cindy Parsons, Executive Director

Since working with The Connect Center, I have made great progress towards my goals. Ever since I came to the United States 4 years ago, my daughter and I have lived with family members and never had a place of our own. My advocate at The Connect Center helped me search for apartments and apply for them. Recently I qualified for a low-income apartment and moved in



with my daughter. It has been amazing being able to have a place of our own. I am going to continue to work with my advocate to reach even more of my goals in the future.

A TCC Mom

Marie, a mom who had recently lost two young adult children, was living in her car and grieving the loss. Marie received a section 8 voucher but in her grief was in jeopardy of losing it because of her state of mind. TCC was able to help with the process of keeping and porting the voucher to Washington County, to work with both Ramsey and Washington County to make this happen quickly as there was a property manager willing to rent to Marie. TCC also helped connect a faith community to help with the damage deposit and first month rent. Marie has maintained her permanent housing for almost a year now and has enjoyed the strengthened relationships that she has with her remaining adult child and grandchildren.

Unhoused Youth Find Housing

TCC Youth Advocates walk alongside youth, through age 24, who are unhoused or have unstable housing. Advocates provide individualized services that help youth find housing, employment, education, and more. Youth are helped with getting into youth housing programs and/or finding affordable rental housing. Advocates help youth learn “Adulting 101” skills, to have hope and to work towards having greater self-esteem and confidence. TCC has two Drop-In Sites that youth can use to access basic needs, take showers, wash clothing, and meet with TCC Advocates. This past year, TCC also launched a Host Home Program where community members open their homes to youth who need housing while TCC Advocates work with them to find permanent housing.

I am a youth that has been working with The Connect Center for the last couple of months. My daughter and I recently left an abusive situation and are looking for a place of our own. My advocate at The Connect Center has connected me with multiple housing resources and I am currently in a housing program that is helping me look for an apartment and will be helping me pay for rent for the first couple of months. I also recently got a new job and bought myself a new car. The Connect Center has helped me stay motivated and accountable so I can reach my goals.



AmeriCorps Housing Resource Navigator



The Connect Center gave me the opportunity to serve as an AmeriCorps Housing

Resource Navigator (HRN) for the service year of 2022-2023. I was grateful for the opportunity to gain experience and expand my professional career. It was a challenging but rewarding experience. My very first client was someone who was living out of her car; unhoused and winter was fast approaching. I was able to get her housing in a little over a month! The expression on her face was priceless! -Tabitha Thurman, AmeriCorps HRN

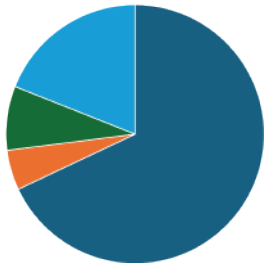
Reaching Goals, Connecting with Community

TCC helps families to have more secure and connected lives by partnering with community members, nonprofits, businesses, and accessing Washington County services. TCC Advocates meet with families to connect them to local resources and work directly with them to reach their goals. Some families have significant mental and physical health needs and are limited in their abilities to have a job. After assessing needs and goals, a TCC Advocate connects them to needed services, helps them to live within their budget, and to have a quality family life. TCC helps families to reach their short and long-term goals. Several families have even fulfilled their dream of owning their own homes.

Financial Report

Revenue

\$375,263.57



■ Grants
 ■ Individual Contributions
 ■ Church/Civic Support
 ■ Program Service

Expenses

\$359,863.34



■ Program Service
 ■ Admin
 ■ Fundraising

Services

214 Individuals

Served in Long-Term Case
 Management Programs

72 Families

84 Adults
 130 Children

57 Youth

Served in Youth
 Connections Program

Kids Connection

Summer & After School Program
 48 Children



Children learned social-emotional skills, participated in academic activities, cooking classes, large motor outdoor games and gardened in three large, raised garden beds.

Volunteers

24 Volunteers

475 Hours Donated

2022 - 2023 Financial Supporters

Corporations, Foundations, and Community Organizations

Dennis Amoth
 Millie Ballfanz
 Joan & Colleen Bourdaghs
 Suzanne Brandon
 Tom Brockman
 Janine Campbell
 Gail Cragoe
 Corine Crea
 Mary & Bob Deatch
 Marguerite DeFore
 Cheryl Eaton
 Sue Favilla
 Shawn Fischer
 De Granstrom
 Mary Griffeth
 Janet Hamernick
 Jane Hanson
 Peggy and David Hayden
 Merritt Heaney
 Margie Hedin
 Bob and Kathy Iverson
 Judy and David Jessup
 Cheryl Jogger
 Abby Johnson
 David & Naomi Kirstein
 Sue Langer
 Nancy Levine
 Cheryl Linderman

Lawrence & Mary McFadden
 Marcia McGowen
 Lori Mildon
 Kristie Neuenfeldt
 Sharon Neuenfeldt
 Erica Oesterreich
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 Kelsey Robbins
 Judith Romans
 Amy Schwantes
 Cindy Scruggs
 Adam & Christine Smerud
 Catherine Solheim
 Paul and Claire Spilseth
 Jan St. Ores
 Julie Sutter
 Evelyn Teitelbaum
 James & Jane Vehling
 All Saints Lutheran Church
 Ascension Episcopal Church
 Bridge for Youth
 Columbine Garden Club
 Community Support Our Students
 Community Thread
 Cottage Grove Lion's Club

Crowning Achievements
 Crumbl Cookie
 Degan Family Fund
 ECMC Foundation
 First Presbyterian Church
 Fred C. & Katherine B. Anderson Foundation
 Gene Haas Foundation
 Hardenbergh Foundation
 Holy Cross Lutheran Church
 King of Kings Lutheran Church
 King of Kings Retired Men's Group
 LutherHands
 Margaret Rivers Fund
 New Richmond High School
 Our Community Kitchen
 Our Savior's Lutheran Church
 Peoples Congregational Church
 PFLAG
 River Valley Church
 St. John's Lutheran Church
 St. Paul Foundation
 St. Paul Lutheran Church
 StreetWorks-Lutheran Social Services
 The Grove Methodist Church
 United Way of Washington County East
 Anonymous Donors

With our fiscal year ending in June 2023, we know that the economy has been robust for many and devastating for those unable to overcome economic and social forces. The housing shortage in the Twin Cities and suburbs hits the low-income housing offerings especially hard causing people with limited incomes difficulty in to secure affordable housing. Finding living wage opportunities near low-income housing and public transportation is challenging. Inflation continues to make basic needs impossible to obtain on a small budget.

Knowing the barriers, the Connect Center offers clients hope and hands-on assistance to secure basic needs, find options for housing, transportation, employment, mental health and more. Clients gain confidence to face the world. Connect Center advocates and volunteers help clients to break free from barriers and thrive in our community.

We look forward to 2024 with confidence that we can provide the resources and services to assist families and youth to make healthy community connections for a more secure life. - John Richards, Board Chair



For More Information or to donate, please use the QR code to visit the TCC Website.

Staff



The Connect Center's Staff, from left to right

Bre Isken (Youth and Family Advocate), Dixie Scruggs (Youth and Family Advocate), Alexa Shelton (Youth Connections Coordinator and Outreach Worker), Cindy Parsons (Executive Director), Bob Dickie (Communications and Development Director), Tabitha Thurman (AM-PACT Housing Resource Navigator), and Kristin Nelson (Office and Volunteer Coordinator).

Board of Directors

John Richards, Board Chair
Dr. Paul Spilseth, MD
Ann Johnson
Catherine Solheim
Marguerite DeFore
Evelyn Teitelbaum
Jean Larson
Cheryl Jogger, PhD



Office: 609 5th Street South Stillwater MN 55082 | Mailing: P.O. Box 73 Bayport MN 55003
info@theconnectcenter.org | www.theconnectcenter.org | 651.231.7807