



## Press Release

Date: April 22, 2020

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### **MN Department of Human Services COVID-19 Emergency Response Funding awarded to local homelessness efforts**

**ROCHESTER, Minn.** – As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, along with the state’s Stay at Home order, Olmsted County, the City of Rochester, and Catholic Charities of Southern Minnesota are entering their fifth week of a joint venture to address homelessness in the community. The organizations successfully coordinated efforts to staff a day center and warming shelter at the Mayo Civic Center. On April 20, 2020, notification was received that aid was on the way to help cover the costs associated with providing these services through the Minnesota Department of Human Services COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund.

“This grant will allow our innovative and unique public private partnership to assist vulnerable residents in Olmsted County,” said Olmsted County Director of the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) Dave Dunn. “This funding will be used for our temporary shelter at Mayo Civic Center, hotel rooms where we are sheltering families and high-risk individuals, and on the supplies needed to safely continue these operations during this pandemic.”

The City of Rochester opened a temporary day center for the community’s unsheltered homeless on March 24, 2020, less than one week after the library and other downtown entities closed in response to the growing pandemic.

From 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., the Day Center is operated at Mayo Civic Center, with staff from the city and the Rochester Public Library leading the daytime operation. Visitors are given access to food, water, and other essentials.



“Everyone deserves access to basic necessities, especially during a nationwide health crisis,” said Director of the Rochester Public Library Audrey Betcher.

Just days after the Day Center opened, Olmsted County and staff from Catholic Charities of Southern Minnesota worked with the city to move the Rochester Community Warming Center (RCWC) into the Mayo Civic Center as well. During overnight hours, from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m., the RCWC provides a safe place for homeless adults to sleep. Approximately 125 individuals have used the Day Center / RCWC since it opened at the Civic Center in March.

“The Stay at Home order has been stressful for all Minnesotans. However, for those without a place to call home, the anxiety has been magnified. Through our innovative partnership with the City of Rochester and Catholic Charities of Southern Minnesota, together we have found a temporary home for our vulnerable residents to wait out this storm,” stated Olmsted County Director of the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) Dave Dunn.

“Catholic Charities is so privileged to be working with representatives of the City of Rochester and Olmsted County,” said Shanna Harris, Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Southern Minnesota. “This partnership has provided us with the opportunity to help those who would otherwise go without shelter, which is a basic need. We look forward to continuing our work in this fine community with such generous donors.”

Dunn and Betcher say the partnership will continue at least through May 4, 2020, aligning with the governors Stay at Home order, and they will re-evaluate as information becomes available. Ongoing efforts remain to provide residents with opportunities to obtain quality, affordable housing.

Said Dunn, “Emergency shelter is our first step, but it’s only the first step. Our goal is to use this opportunity to work with our homeless population to develop housing strategies for each individual. To meet this need, the Housing Stability Team from the HRA has been working with these guests daily to assess their needs and determine how to find permanent housing options for them.”

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