

Our Work to Address Homelessness

[Frequently Asked Questions]



How did the plan to address homelessness, with the goal of establishing a new shelter, begin?

In January 2019, United Way of East Central Alabama held two roundtable meetings as soon as it learned that The Salvation Army was closing its shelter facilities in Anniston. United Way entered into a collaboration with The Right Place and Interfaith Ministries of Calhoun County to draft a plan, working under the Homeless Coalition of Northeast Alabama, to address homelessness in Anniston and the surrounding communities in Calhoun County. It was obvious that establishing a low-barrier shelter, to include comprehensive services, should be the priority.

Did United Way receive a grant for \$300,000 to fund this work, and who is the funder of this grant?

Yes. United Way has been awarded an Emergency Solutions Grant in the amount of \$300,000 from the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) to fund services to address homelessness in our community. The proposal was a collaborative effort with The Right Place and Interfaith Ministries. All three organizations will be responsible in playing a role to deliver direct services to our local homeless residents, with United Way designated as the fiscal agent for these dollars.

Why did United Way choose these organizations for collaboration in this plan?

United Way is a proud funder and supporter of 25 diverse non-profits and initiatives in Calhoun County. Please note that United Way only funds organizations who have applied for and been granted "Community Partner" status. These Community Partners have met criteria to ensure transparency, as well as high ethical and fiduciary responsibility. In looking at its Community Partners, both The Right Place and Interfaith Ministries were recognized for doing incredible work, on a daily basis, by serving our local homeless population. In particular, our homeless residents find care, respect, empathy, and direct assistance from the volunteers and staff members at these organizations. These reputable agencies were obvious choices in bringing together a core partnership to build capacity and offer more comprehensive services for our homeless residents.

Are the collaborative partners willing to work with other organizations who have a desire to serve the homeless?

Of course. We believe that our community can only benefit when we come together for a common goal. The Emergency Solutions Grant required United Way to name all sub-recipients of the grant dollars as part of the Request for Proposal. This locks in how and by whom the funding can be used. We have always had a vision of building out services, bringing other organizations to the table to enhance the plan, and providing as many wrap-around services as possible. Three organizations will not be able to do all of that alone. However, there has to be a starting place for this work, and we believe this is it! It is important to note that we will expect any organization involved with this collaborative to operate with the same ethical and fiduciary responsibility as mentioned in the above previous answer.

Is the City of Anniston funding this plan?

No. It is important to understand that this is not a city-led plan, and no funding is coming from the City of Anniston. The funding is through the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA). United Way, along with The Right Place and Interfaith Ministries, applied for this Emergency Solutions Grant independent of the City of Anniston, just as it does with other grant opportunities.

Are the grant funds specifically for operating a shelter?

While there are several types of services for the homeless the funds could be used for, we believe, along with our funder, ADECA, that establishing an emergency shelter is the priority use for these funds.

Is grant funding renewable?

Yes. As we work incredibly hard to create positive outcomes for our clients and ensure all grant funding criteria is met, we will be able to continue to apply for and receive the Emergency Solutions Grant to support shelter operations and program work.

Do the agencies involved have the good will of the citizens in mind?

Yes. United Way, The Right Place, and Interfaith Ministries care deeply for our city, our county, and our residents. That is obvious in the work we do every day! Our sole agenda is to build a coordinated response system to combat homelessness in our community.

Can you simply explain the role of the non-profits vs. the role of the city in trying to implement this work?

Simply put, the collaborative partners put together a plan to address homelessness and establish a new shelter, and then wrote for and received grant funding to implement the plan. Now, these non-profit organizations must rely on the City of Anniston to allow use of a building for emergency shelter and comprehensive services for the homeless.

Have any city officials been involved in this project?

In the initial stages of planning, the collaborative partners discovered that zoning ordinances within the city would not allow for a new shelter to open. Previous and existing shelters are grandfathered in and exempt from these ordinances. City officials have been involved in discussions on how to solve this issue. However, as a group of non-profits, we are not experts in zoning ordinances. We have relied on city officials when it comes to identifying buildings within the city that may accommodate an emergency shelter, and whether or not that use would be allowed by the city according to its ordinances. For transparency and full disclosure, the partners were made aware of, and have toured, the Noland Health facility (former Beckwood Manor) located at 500 Leighton Avenue, as a possibility of use for shelter space. While we believe the Noland property would be an ideal space for the type of shelter we are hoping to establish, United Way, The Right Place, nor Interfaith Ministries have been involved in any negotiations with Noland Health Services to create or set-up a “deal” to receive this property.

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What are the goals of your plan?

Our goals are simply that: 1) homelessness is rare; 2) homelessness is brief; and 3) homelessness is non-recurring. We obviously have a lot of work to do. Our desire is to implement a shelter and a plan that is responsive and efficient, supportive and welcoming, transparent and navigable, sufficient relative to client need, and respectful and accountable.

How do you know this plan will work?

Of course, no plan will be perfect when working with unique individuals with unique situations. However, we have researched many plans throughout the country and talked with others who have created plans and implemented shelters to address the homeless issues facing other communities. The common thread for success is committing to providing more than an overnight shelter. In fact, a shelter alone makes very little difference in the lives of homeless people. But, programs providing a safe and secure place to stay, coupled with case management and comprehensive services, have had a dramatic, positive, life-changing impact on shelter/program participants. That is our vision and goal, and we have mirrored the success elements of other communities in our plan.

Why do you believe the Noland property (former Beckwood Manor) is suited for use as a shelter?

Here is what we know about the property. The building has three levels and allows plenty of space to safely and securely house individuals and families with children, and eventually provide space for transitional housing on the upper floors for residents graduating to that level of the shelter program. In addition, the space is also large enough to accommodate the planned on-site comprehensive services - medical and mental health care, case management, job skills training, and GED tutoring, among other wrap-around services. The building currently houses patients, and as a working healthcare facility, is up to code and meets fire safety regulations. Noland conducted major upgrades in 2015, investing over \$300,000 into the property. It is not an “albatross” as some have said. The facility comes with all beds, dining room furniture, laundry facilities, telephone system, and commercial kitchen. This alone allows for the grant funding for this plan to be poured into providing shelter and direct services to our homeless residents, instead of costly repairs and property rehabilitation that may come with other buildings.

Is it true that the proposed plan will only help 11% of the homeless population?

No, that is not true. While the grant was written to run a 35 to 40 bed facility, shelter clients are not permanent residents! The goal is to provide case management and supportive services in order to “walk beside” our shelter clients throughout an individualized plan, with the ultimate goal of transitional or permanent housing on their way to stability and independence. This means that as clients graduate through the phases of their plan, beds will open up for the next client entering the shelter program. Obviously, the shelter will have the capacity to serve more than 11% of the local homeless population.

Will fees be charged to stay at the proposed shelter?

No fees will ever be charged. Shelter clients will never be required to pay to stay overnight, nor will program participants pay to access other shelter services provided throughout the day.

How will the homeless access the proposed shelter without transportation?

While we understand that there is a concern that many of our homeless residents will have to cross a busy Quintard Avenue to access the proposed shelter property, we should also remember that walking is their main, and most times only, mode of transportation. They are used to maneuvering around traffic to get to their destination. They cross Quintard to eat at McDonald's and Wendy's, as well as visit the hospital, post office, mental health services, and the Social Security Administration, among other things. They truly are capable of crossing Quintard safely, and they do it every day. There is also a trolley stop at the corner at 5th Street & Leighton Avenue where the proposed shelter property is located.

Will sex offenders be allowed to stay at the proposed shelter?

The proposed shelter will abide by all laws concerning sex offenders. All shelter clients will be pre-screened and go through an in-take process at the offices of Interfaith Ministries and The Right Place. Known sex offenders will not be allowed to move forward in the process of staying at the shelter property. Likewise, screening and in-take will also take place at the shelter to ensure no known sex offenders are allowed to stay on the property. Shelter management will maintain a close partnership with local law enforcement to ensure the safety of clients, staff, and the area residents.

Will there be on-site security at the proposed shelter?

Absolutely. As part of the grant funding, we were sure to include support for safety and security. This includes fire and security monitoring, as well as on-site security personnel for the safety of shelter clients, staff, and volunteers.

I want to help. How can I volunteer?

There will definitely be opportunities to help when the shelter becomes a realization. There will be short-term, one-day volunteer opportunities to help with clerical and organizational projects, as well as long-term volunteer opportunities. Please note that, based on certain volunteer duties, a background check and training may be required before volunteer service can begin.

Can my church help?

We know that the faith-based community can play an integral role in this work. There will be nightly coordinated meals brought in by church groups, civic clubs, and other community groups. We know that spiritual needs are important to many of our homeless residents. So, during this time, churches are welcome to offer a group devotional and prayer time to shelter clients who may want to participate. Other volunteer opportunities will also be available for your church group as stated in the previous answer above.

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