



COMMUNITY ADVOCATES
Where Meeting Basic Needs Inspires Hope

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HARVARD STUDY: STIMULUS FUNDS PREVENT HOMELESSNESS FOR 836 FAMILIES IN MILWAUKEE COUNTY

Average Evictions Dropped 15 Percent in First Eight Months of Funding

Milwaukee (Aug. 31, 2010)—An influx of federal stimulus funding to stem evictions and prevent homelessness in Milwaukee County has saved at least 836 families from homelessness, according to a Harvard University study examining local eviction records.

The study shows that from August 2009—when Community Advocates' stimulus-funded landlord-tenant mediation programs began—to March 2010, 836 fewer eviction cases were filed than compared to a year earlier, from August 2008 to March 2009. A month-to-month comparison shows an average decrease of 15 percent, and in some cases in excess of 20 percent.

From August 2009 to March 2010, Community Advocates distributed a total of \$200,000 in eviction assistance aid to eligible clients, 30 percent of the total funding it received through the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*. Community Advocates' landlord-tenant mediation services include financial assistance for rent arrears and case management.

In total, Community Advocates received \$670,000 in stimulus funds for mediation. The agency expects to assist 550 more families over the next two years with the remaining funds.

Community Advocates is the lead agency in Milwaukee County in the effort to utilize stimulus funds to prevent homelessness among families.

In order to receive emergency funding, Community Advocates requires that clients must be facing an imminent threat of homelessness, have exhausted all other financial resources and have a good reason for not paying rent, such as loss of income or unemployment. Additionally, all clients must show proof of their ability to maintain housing after assistance is given.

In addition to Community Advocates, more than a dozen other local organizations have received and distributed stimulus funding to fight homelessness.

Rep. Gwen Moore (D-Milwaukee) and Joe Volk, Community Advocates Chief Executive Officer, announced the results of the study during a press conference today at Community Advocates' offices, 4906 W. Fond du Lac Ave.

“This study shows that the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* has helped more than 800 Milwaukee-area families avoid eviction, which helped prevent homelessness during this recession,” said Rep. Moore. “I’m so proud of everything Community Advocates does to keep families in continued, safe housing.”

According to Volk, the stimulus funding proved both a lifeline to families teetering on the edge as well as a cost-effective investment for the community.

“It’s far more expensive to pull a family out of homelessness than it is to prevent it,” said Volk. “Using pretty standard metrics, the cost of sheltering a family of three runs over \$6,000 per month, including shelter, food, emergency room visits and other associated costs. I thank Rep. Moore and her colleagues in Congress not only for their humane action in saving these families the heartbreak of losing their homes, but also for their forethought and wisdom in saving the community hundreds of thousands of dollars in unnecessary costs.”

The report, authored by Matthew Desmond, Harvard University Society of Fellows, draws from eviction records collected by the Milwaukee County Clerk of Circuit Courts. It explores patterns of evictions in Milwaukee County from early 2003 to early 2010, and is available for download at Community Advocates’ Web site, www.communityadvocates.net.

In total, \$1.5 billion in stimulus funds were distributed for rental assistance and housing relocation nationwide. Funding was distributed based on the formula used for HUD’s Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG) program, which requires of all grantees an approved Consolidated Plan that includes plans for using funds to address the jurisdiction’s homeless assistance needs.

President Obama signed the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* on Feb. 17, 2009.

Since 1976, Community Advocates has provided basic-needs advocacy and services to low-income and at-risk Milwaukee families and individuals by offering more than 30 specialized programs, including health care advocacy, case management, protective payee services and energy assistance.