

“It’s not just keeping the lights on in their house…” How United Way’s Grants Impact Homeless Families in Frederick County

By Kristen Proffitt

Updated 01 May 2019 12:08 PM

When Marie* aged out of foster care, it wasn’t just herself she had to look out for- she had a one year old son in her arms as well. Refusing to turn back to a drug-addicted household, she decided that being homeless was far better than living in those circumstances.

After being referred to Advocates for Homeless Families in Frederick County, she found many other pathways for her life that did not include homelessness, nor a problematic household. As a local non-profit, Advocates strives to achieve permanent solutions to homelessness for Frederick County families each day, all through providing access to housing, education, employment, and supportive services to the families they serve.

“The people that come to us, they come to us from other shelters, they’re people that are homeless and living in motels, or they’re people who are living in places... like storage facilities or in their car...” Says Kenneth Allread, CEO of Advocates for Homeless Families, “our goal is to move them into permanent housing and make them financially stable as quickly as possible.”

The expenses that Advocates typically assists their families with are (but not limited to) gas, food, school fees, and child care expenses. “That’s where some of our grants come in from the United Way” says Allread.

Currently, as receivers of a 2018-2021 Community Impact Partner Grant, Advocates for Homeless Families will receive installments of money until 2021 from United Way to fund their transitional housing program, as the CEO expresses “we have this grant for three years and we’re thrilled, absolutely thrilled.”

United Way’s Community Impact Partner grantees represent a three-year commitment as well as United Way of Frederick County’s largest grant cycle. Called “partners”, these organizations collaborate with United Way to achieve a common goal for the Frederick Community. These efforts are highly coordinated and result-driven as funds are given to selected projects each year, for a three-year pledge.

Allread states that the money provided by United Way will fund “emergency financial assistance which can be used for assistance with security deposits of first month’s rent, back rent to avoid eviction, and utility payments to avoid energy shut off”, adding that “the Community Impact Partner Grant helps with these expenses, so they’re a direct assistance to the families we serve... It’s not just keeping lights on in their house.”

The Community Impact Grant is not the only assistance Advocates has received from United Way; they have been provided with numerous grants from United Way of Frederick over the years including Live United and Laughlin Family Foundation Grants. Each of these grants provided by United Way are essentially what support the high success rate that Advocates has with their families.

“If you look at the success rate, 90% of these families [we served in 2018] are still in stable housing,” states Allread, “they’ve overcome their homeless circumstances. Many of them would never have been able to achieve it without the help we get.”

Allread further explains that “you know, when you’re living on the margin like that, a flat tire can mean that you can’t go to work, and if you can’t go to work then you can’t pay the rent and you can’t pay your utility bills.” Attributing the successful financial future of these families to the money received, he says “that’s where this little assistance become critical, so these grants are really highly valued.”

United Way has been collaborating with Advocates for nearly six years now (and counting), and the relationship between the two organizations has only grown.

Allread says that the relationship between Advocates and United Way has been largely based on the trust and reliance that each non-profit has towards each other.

He says “I’ve been here now with Advocates for ten years, and when I first came here... there was very few communications between agencies and funders.” He then adds “this interdependency we now recognize and we cultivate, and United Way has been a major influence in all of that.”

“We have to work with shelters because that’s where our families come from. We have to work with public housing because that’s one of the destinations. We have to work with United Way and the Prosperity Center because a lot of the answers that our families need are embedded there” he explains.

It is because of this assistance that Marie overcame her homeless circumstances. The journey from where she started could not have been an easy one, but at least she was not alone. With the generous assistance provided by United Way, Advocates was right there by her side each step of the way. Just look where she is now: an amazing mother and currently working as an outreach coordinator for HIV/AIDS patients, now making \$40K a year. Marie has become an inspiration and help to others through her own journey.

Advocates is not the only receiver of a United Way grant, but they do exhibit exactly what it means to be a partner and show the direct effect that United Way’s grants have on the Frederick community.

United Way strives to enhance the health, education, and financial stability of the entire Frederick community. They do just that every day through assisting organizations, such as Advocates for Homeless Families, so they can then assist families such as Marie’s. Strong families, who just need support from the community during critical times.



*Top left to right: Kenneth Allread, AFHF CEO; Dan Herbert, Property Manager
Bottom left to right: Connelly Stewart; Charlotte Strine, Family Advocates*