

Milwaukee County Exec. Abele: Addressing homelessness through regional cooperation

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Milwaukee County, City of Milwaukee, State of Wisconsin and other partners continue collaboration to connect individuals in encampments with permanent housing

MILWAUKEE, Wednesday, Jan. 16, 2019 – Following extensive regional cooperation to address the health, safety and housing needs of homeless individuals at outdoor encampments, Milwaukee County, the City of Milwaukee and the State of Wisconsin have made enormous progress in connecting individuals to permanent, supportive housing, County Executive Chris Abele announced on Wednesday.

In recent months, a number of homeless residents had temporarily located near the interstate overpass at 6th and Clybourn Streets, drawing significant community attention to the need for addressing homelessness in Milwaukee County.

The encampment presented a number of health and safety issues for the State, County, City and for individuals residing there, including rodent infestations related to large deposits of exposed food.

Currently, only a few homeless individuals remain in this area, as County officials have successfully connected more than 100 people who had been living in temporary encampments with permanent housing.

“We’re tremendously grateful for the collaboration between the State and County Departments of Transportation, the City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works and the Milwaukee County DHHS Housing Division to address this complicated issue,” said Abele.

“I’m encouraged by so many individuals and groups who have engaged in efforts to help our homeless friends and neighbors, but our efforts are most effective when we’re working together,” he added. “I can’t stress enough that the best way for us to truly fight homelessness is by supporting our Housing First initiative.”

Housing First is a County-led partnership that includes the City, a number of nonprofits and other community allies and that connects homeless individuals with permanent housing, as well as wraparound services to address issues that may have caused them to become homeless.

Since the Housing First initiative began in 2015, homelessness in Milwaukee County has dropped by 42 percent.

County officials noted that well-intentioned large donations actually hampered some of the regional efforts to maintain the safety and health of everyone in the 6th and Clybourn area.

“It’s been a challenge to protect the health and safety of the individuals who have been residing at 6th and Clybourn, as well as safety inspectors and maintenance workers who use this space regularly to maintain the bridge above,” said Donna Brown-Martin, director of the Milwaukee County Department of Transportation. “Unfortunately, some well-meaning individual efforts presented serious issues, creating food and debris that attracted geese and rodents to the space. This hampered our ability to protect the safety and dignity of people at this location – as well as the safety of travelers on the interstate.”

James Mathy, administrator for the Housing Division at the County Department of Health and Human Services, noted that many community partners serve the immediate needs of individuals who are homeless and others who need a helping hand. These organizations have opportunities for individuals to volunteer or make direct donations.

He added, though, that the Housing First initiative addresses both immediate and long-term needs of homeless individuals, and that effort needs public support to be

successful.

“While the support of the County and its partners has given a great start to the Housing First initiative, to keep growing we need help from everyone in Milwaukee County who cares about homelessness,” said Mathy. “Donations to our Housing First fund and items purchased from our Amazon wishlist will directly help individuals overcoming homelessness in our community and empower safe, healthy, meaningful lives.”

Donations to the Housing First fund can be made through HousingFirstMilwaukee.org. Items needed to outfit apartments for people moving into permanent housing can be purchased at bit.ly/housingfirstmke.