

Otto Bremer Foundation

Expanding Opportunity, Strengthening Community

Support for Homeless Youth in the Twin Cities Metro Area

December 2011

What is the current situation for homeless youth in the Twin Cities?

While homeless youth are often referred to as an invisible population, the data paints a striking picture:

- *Numbers.* On any given night 2,500 youth are homeless and on their own in Minnesota, with 550 age 17 or younger and 1,950 between 18 and 21. The rate of youth homelessness increased by 46 percent from 2006 to 2009.
- *Multiple challenges.* Many homeless young people face multiple challenges including mental illness (46 percent) and parental neglect (34 percent). Almost half have been physically or sexually abused and one-third have considered suicide. Three-quarters have been homeless before and 38 percent have had no regular place to live for a year or longer.
- *Race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation.* Two-thirds of homeless youth are African American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic or multiracial; 60 percent are female. Between 20 and 40 percent of unaccompanied homeless youth are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.
- *Impact of limited number of emergency shelter beds.* While the number of homeless youth has increased, the number of available shelter beds has remained the same. Ramsey County has only 16 emergency shelter beds for youth while Hennepin County has only 49. This discrepancy between need and availability leads many homeless youth to seek shelter with friends, on public buses, under bridges or in shelters designated for adults. Thirty percent have stayed in an abusive situation because they lacked other alternatives.

How is the Foundation helping to address youth homelessness in the Twin Cities?

The Foundation is pursuing a systemic approach to the complex issues surrounding youth homelessness. Our work is informed by research indicating that a homeless child on a path to a healthy life moves through three stages: safety and short-term stability, establishment of life direction and long-term healthy development. Foundation grants totaling \$4 million over three years will help six organizations in the Twin Cities metro area enhance safety and short-term stability for homeless youth and enable them to move forward on the path of healthy development. Specifically, funding will support:

- Building additional capacity for *street outreach* to homeless youth, via a grant to Lutheran Social Services for the Streetworks Collaborative
- Increasing the *emergency shelter space* available for youth, almost doubling the number of shelter beds in St. Paul (from 16 to 28) and increasing by one-third the number of shelter

beds in Hennepin County (from 49 to 65), via grants to Avenues for Homeless Youth, Catholic Charities Hope Street Shelter and Salvation Army Booth Brown House

- Providing operating support for *opportunity and drop-in centers* where homeless youth can find daytime support and connections to health, educational and employment opportunities, via grants to Face to Face SafeZone and YouthLink

Grants require increasing matching funds to help the organizations broaden their base of support and increase their fundraising capacity.

Why is the Foundation doing this work?

The Foundation strives to help build healthy, vibrant communities—communities where basic needs are met, mutual regard is prized and opportunities for economic, civic and social participation are within everyone’s reach. We understand the importance of young people for community vitality, now and in the future, and we believe the entire community benefits when all youth have opportunities for healthy development.

What are your plans for future work in this area?

We are committed to working with this cohort of organizations for three years, learning along with them about the effectiveness and impact of these grants and what approaches make a difference for youth. We look forward to participating in dialogue with others and to sharing what we learn.

While we don’t know now whether the Foundation will support additional clusters of funding on youth homelessness, we will continue to review individual proposals as part of our regular strategically responsive grantmaking. Potential applicants can find information about what we fund and how to submit a proposal on our website, ottobremer.org.

Who can we contact for further information?

We welcome your questions. If you have questions about the Foundation’s grants to support homeless youth, please contact Kari Suzuki, director of operations, 651-312-3565. For questions about submitting a grant application, please contact us at 651-227-8036 or toll free at 888-291-1123.

About the Foundation

Created in 1944, the Otto Bremer Foundation assists people in achieving full economic, civic and social participation in and for the betterment of their communities. This mission is based on the intent of founder Otto Bremer. His vision and longstanding commitment to communities during and after the Great Depression are carried forward today through the Foundation’s work in the places that are homes and neighbors to Bremer banks.

The Otto Bremer Foundation owns 92 percent of Bremer Bank and receives an equivalent share of the bank profits that are paid out as dividends. This means that a large portion of bank profit is invested back in local communities through grants and program-related investments.