

Overview of Homeless Street Outreach Team

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What is Independent Living Resources?

Independent Living Resources, Inc (ILR) is the area's local Independent Living Center that provides services to 13 counties in southwest Wisconsin, including La Crosse County. ILR is an advocacy-based, consumer driven nonprofit organization that works with people with disabilities across the lifespan. ILR's services include information and referral services, peer support, skills training, advocacy, and transitional support in addition to a variety of other services. All services that are provided by ILR are provided utilizing the Independent Living Philosophy- the belief that people are experts in their own lives and should be supported and empowered to increase their independence.

What is the history of the ILR's Homeless Street Outreach program?

ILR began providing Homeless Street Outreach services in 2019, based upon a request by the Coulee Collaborative to End Homelessness. It was originally called the Coulee Collaborative to End Homelessness Outreach team and was supported for the first year with funding the Collaborative had secured and designated for it. When the Collaborative went through a redesign shortly thereafter that did not have specified funding for the team, ILR chose to continue the program due to the extensive need for the services in the La Crosse community.

What is the Homeless Street Outreach program?

The Homeless Street Outreach program, commonly referred to as the Outreach team, is a team consisting of 2 full ILR staff members who are focused on providing support and bridging the gaps in services for unsheltered people in La Crosse. While the City has a variety of organizations that help people who are unsheltered, it can be a confusing service system for people to navigate and know where to start and people face a variety of barriers with figuring out how to access those systems. The Outreach team actively works to locate people who are unsheltered in the community and works to connect them with a variety of resources and supports that can help people with finding long term, sustainable housing. This includes regularly going into the community to look for people who are unsheltered- in the parks, parking ramps, trails and known encampments, etc. The approach taken is one of community collaboration- the Outreach team does not duplicate services that other organizations are already providing and instead works to help people who are unsheltered with learning skills and connecting with resources and organizations that provide the services they need.

Examples of services Outreach provides:

- Completion of Coordinated Entry Process (This is an important intake process that helps not only with service coordination but also helps communities track the number of unsheltered people in their region and the outcomes those people experience).
- Information and Referral services- Education and assistance with connecting with a broad array of resources to help people get their needs met and find long term housing.
- Connection with emergency shelter- Providing information on available emergency shelter options and assistance with accessing those shelter options.
- Assistance with accessing resources- The team helps people address barriers that make it difficult to access resources. This includes things such as helping people figure out transportation, assistance with completing applications, helping people access resources for basic needs such as hygiene needs, etc.
- Housing supports- The team helps people with looking for housing opportunities, which can include filling out housing applications, assistance with finding apartments in the person's price range, learning to talk with landlords about any previous housing issues, education on housing programs that may be a good fit for the individual, etc.
- Advocacy services- The team helps people with addressing advocacy needs such as application denials for subsidized housing.
- System navigation- The team helps people figure out what they need and how to access it, increasing people's ability to quickly access the appropriate resources and support. Not knowing where to go for what resources can present a huge barrier for people and increase the length of time they are unsheltered.
- Community Collaboration- The team works with a wide array of community resources that provide assistance and works to reduce barriers between those resources, increasing efficiency of the services as a whole. Examples of this include the expanded team of service providers and community organizations that provide services 3 times per week with the Outreach team directly with people out in the community, as well as the team having an active role at REACH.

How is the Outreach team funded?

Due to the frequently time limited nature of funding sources for nonprofits, it is often necessary for the organizations to utilize a variety of funding sources to continue programming for extended periods of time. The Outreach team has been funded through a variety of funding sources over the last 4 years, including private grants, local, state and federal funding. These sources include, but are not limited to: Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration grant, City of La Crosse CDBG/CDBG CARES funding, Wisconsin Mental Health Block Grant funds (via Couleecap), ESG/EHH funding through CCEH, Otto Bremmer Trust grant, La Crosse Community Foundation, La Crosse County Prevention funding, YWCA equity funding, City of La Crosse ARPA

funding, etc. ILR continues to look for additional funding sources for the sustainability of the program. Currently, ILR has funding to sustain the Outreach team through the end of 2023.

What is the impact the Outreach team has on the community?

In the last 4 years, Outreach staff have worked with 867 unduplicated individuals on a wide array of identified needs to help them on their housing journey. The Outreach team has also had direct involvement with over 120 individuals finding long-term, sustainable housing. Over 80% of people working with the team report completing their personal goals that they set for themselves on the path to finding housing. Each year, the Outreach team puts in 3900 hours of service to people who are unsheltered in the La Crosse community, connecting them with a variety of resources and support to minimize the amount of time that they are living unsheltered.