

+ METROWEST OUTREACH CONNECTION, INCORPORATED

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1. **Description of Our Organization: Background Information**

MetroWest Outreach Connection, Incorporated (MWOC) is an **all volunteer** 501 © 3 non-profit organization that is dedicated to seek solutions for and respond to the needs of low income people and the homeless in MetroWest. ***Our mission is to prevent homelessness and to assist those who have lost their housing, obtain permanent housing.*** Our motto is “*Every family needs a home . . . every child deserves a home.*” We believe that every child should have their most basic needs met – food, shelter, clothing and an education. Families living in shelters are challenged in every one of these areas. Those who eventually attain permanent housing usually are able to obtain the other three most basic needs with or without the help of service organizations and government programs. We are a new organization that was formed in the fall of 2001 to address the needs of families housed in local motels. In the spring of 2003, our focus changed to raising funds to assist low-income families at risk of losing their housing and those seeking permanent housing. MWOC applied for and received its Articles of Incorporation in the fall of 2003 and a 501 © 3 non-profit status in March 2004. During the past fourteen months, we have raised more than \$125,000. At least 98% of the funds we raise will provide assistance to families in rent arrears and aid those attempting to secure permanent housing with their first month’s rent and security deposit. We have just completed the first year of our Homeless Prevention Program that commenced on August 2, 2004. Since that date, we have provided financial assistance to one hundred thirty-nine (139) households that include three hundred seventeen (317) people. We have averaged ten to eleven clients per month since January 2005 and we anticipate assisting approximately 150 households during this calendar year. **While more than sixty percent of these clients reside in Framingham, we have assisted households in Natick, Holliston, Ashland, Milford, Acton, Lincoln, Wellesley, Brockton, Worcester, Marlboro, Wayland, Needham, Dedham, Millis, Hudson, Stow and Franklin.** The average grant per family has been \$650; the range of awards has been as low as \$111 and as high as \$1,825. There is no other local program that is focused entirely on this issue and there are no indications that the housing problems faced by the economically disadvantaged in our society will be solved soon.

In order to place the Homeless Prevention Program in relation to other services and agency functions, we use the model of the Continuum of Care process as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development. This process contains *seven components: prevention, outreach and assessment, emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, permanent affordable housing, and supportive services.* MWOC is concentrating on homeless prevention and reacquisition of housing for those who are homeless. We work with other agencies and organizations that provide the other six components.

Homeless Prevention Program

Our primary objective is to help low income families retain or secure a permanent residence, one where the children in these families are less likely to move from school to school. They will have a better opportunity to attain the education necessary to escape the cycle of poverty and homelessness. An article based upon recent studies, written by Dr. Rachel Blatt, Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning at Tufts University, indicates that homeless children's nutrition suffers significantly and affects their mental and physical health. Their ability to sustain friendships is impaired and their self-esteem is adversely affected. *The cost of housing a family in a motel or shelter can be three to six times more expensive than providing that same family with rental arrearage assistance. Our program saves money and helps families.*

MetroWest Outreach Connection is collaborating with organizations that include South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC), South Middlesex Legal Services, Catholic Charities, St. Vincent DePaul Society, Advocates and other social service agencies. Using our Eligibility Guidelines and Client Application Forms, these organizations screen potential clients. They only recommend families to us that meet our two principal requirements: (1) They must be low-income and (2) they must be able to sustain their rent payments once they have received financial assistance from our organization.

MetroWest Outreach Connection is attempting to fill a void in the support services available to low and very low-income families at risk of becoming homeless and those families already homeless in the MetroWest area and beyond. The prevention program provides an economic safety net for families who, for legitimate reasons, are unable to make their rent payments. Unfortunately, there are insufficient financial resources available for these families when they have an economic crisis. Organizations growing out of faith communities, SMOC, Advocates and Catholic Charities have continued to try to assist these families but their levels of funding are not adequate. What we have now is an absence of a safety net that would help keep many needy families in permanent housing.

Target Population

The two common characteristics of all the households MetroWest Outreach Connection will assist are (1) they will be low income and (2) in need of financial assistance. Those families eligible would include racial and linguistic minorities and the low-income families, infants through senior adults. The racial breakdown of the 317 people served during the first fourteen months is: 60% White, 28% Hispanic and 12% Black. We intend to aid the maximum number of Metro West families possible, hopefully 150-175 in 2005, with the available funds obtained from grants, donations and fundraising.

We have assisted clients facing a myriad of crises including: Physical abuse from a family member; loss of income due to an accident or unforeseen medical emergency not covered by health insurance; major automobile repairs (car needed for employment) causing family to make the decision to pay these bills rather than the rent; people on fixed incomes that do not

have funds to secure housing, and spousal accidental death eventually resulting in the mother not being able to afford daycare so that she could continue to work. These are just a few of the crises faced by some of the families that we have helped.

Evidence of Program Need

During the months of October 2004 through February 2005, the State's Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) distributed seventy-eight (78) percent of the \$2,000,000 of the amount budgeted to assist 1,192 families with security deposits, first and last months rent and rent arrearage. Less than fifty (50) percent of the families who applied for this assistance received it due to the ever-changing guidelines and limited funds available. We provided financial assistance to 108 families during the past twelve months with over eighty percent of those funds expended since January 2005. During the Department of Transitional Assistance's last year of providing funds for rent arrearage, 2001, there were approximately 140 families in Metro West who received financial assistance. While we are a relatively new organization, we anticipate having the funds available to provide financial assistance to at least 150 families in 2005.

Method of Evaluation

MetroWest Outreach Connection and referring agencies work together to select recipients that best meet the criteria for housing reacquisition, intervention and stabilization grants. We will not always provide 100% of the funds required to assist a family. We will seek to leverage our funds through collaboration with other funding agencies such as SMOC, Catholic Charities, Advocates, St. Vincent DePaul Society and houses of worship. Thus by combining funds from other groups, we will extend our funding and be able to help more families. We work closely with referring agencies to make sure that the recipients of this funding have documented and verifiable needs – rental arrears, need for security deposits – and have the financial resources to pay their rents once they have received this assistance.

We have developed and maintained a database of the clients served and the funds allocated to these households. All clients will be required to sign a release form that will give MetroWest Outreach Connection permission to contact each family or their landlord six months after they have been assisted and again at one year to see if they are still in permanent housing. It will be our goal to keep at least eighty percent (80%) of our clients housed for one year. On September 15, 2005, eighty-eight percent (91%) of our clients who were helped at least six months ago are still in permanent housing. Overall, ninety-six percent (96%) of all clients provided with financial assistance are still housed. We will use all successful methods employed by SMOC, Catholic Charities and Homestart, a very successful Boston-based organization that focuses on meeting the housing needs of people experiencing homelessness, to assess the effectiveness of our financial interventions. At all times, we will respect the confidentiality of our clients.

All financial contribution made to MWOC will help to reduce the number of children, at risk of homelessness, who will become victims of an inferior education due to the disruptions in a stable living environment, poor nutrition and the risk of deteriorating mental and physical

health. Older children and young adults need time and a place to be able to study and complete their homework; this is possible if they are in permanent housing. Compounding the affects of homelessness, some families are forced to move from a shelter in one community to a shelter in another one. The vast majority of children with stable housing and educational opportunity will make positive contributions to their communities. They will pay taxes rather than consume state tax dollars. This program offers children a chance to obtain an education by keeping them in permanent housing.

While we provide financial assistance primarily to households in Metro West communities, we have helped clients beyond those communities who face a crisis, usually eviction. We try to stay within the MetroWest area.

We only have one program, the Homeless Prevention Program, and it is based in Framingham.

2. Facility Specific Questions. (Answers)

We do not have any facilities. We operate out of Plymouth Church, paying them a very small stipend for the use of their facilities one evening every month. Our Homeless Prevention Program subcommittee meets once every week to review client applications forwarded to us by social service agencies.

3. Program Specific Questions. (Answers)

See previous responses for name of program and organization history.

Funding Sources: Most of our funding comes from grant awards from foundations, including banks. We have also received donations from individuals and houses of worship. Our two annual Walks to Prevent Homelessness have raised approximately \$21,000.

Clients Served: Eighty-eight (88) of the one hundred thirty-nine clients we have assisted reside in Framingham. The others reside in 16 other communities in and around Metro West.

We do not attract clients to Framingham. We work with social service agencies that have clients either in rent arrears or those seeking permanent housing and need security deposits. Nearly forty (40) percent of our clients live in another community. We rarely have clients requesting funds to move from another community to Framingham.

We serve between 125 and 150 households per year.

We do not have the data you are asking for regarding placement of students in the Framingham Public Schools. We assume that the families who reside in Framingham will send their children to school in Framingham.

Standards to measure results with clients: Because our goal is to make sure that household members do not become homeless, we monitor the housing status of our clients every three months. Because we have only been in operation for fourteen (14) months, our statistics cover that period. The last time we checked client housing status, **September 15, 2005**, we had provided financial assistance to 119 households. Of the 43 clients that received assistance from us 6 or more months ago, 39 are still housed. Overall, 114 of the 119 clients we have assisted are still housed.

Program evaluated by the State? We are a 501c3 non-profit organization. We received our incorporation status from the State two years ago. They have not evaluated our program.

4. What sitting criteria does you agency use? Most of our members attend a house of worship in Framingham and/or live here. Please refer to the answer given to the first question. We started our organization helping homeless families housed in local motels.

General Agency Questions:

- (1) No.
- (2) No.
- (3) No clients are referred to our program from social service agencies. We do not deal directly with clients. Households that need funds for rent arrears or security deposits are working with local social service agencies. If the social service agencies do not have funds to help these clients and their clients meet our guidelines (they must be low income and able to sustain their rent payments once they receive financial assistance from MWOC), they complete our application with the client and submit it to us for consideration. So far, we have collaborated with South Middlesex Legal Services, Advocates, South Middlesex Opportunity Council, Catholic Charities, St. Vincent DePaul, social service agencies in other communities and local houses of worship.
- (4) None.
- (5) Refer to our answer to question one. We have only been operating the Homeless Prevention Program for approximately fourteen months. We are an all-volunteer organization. Over 98% of the funds we raise go directly to serve our clients. We have already stated our funding sources.

Local Payroll and Spending:

As we stated, we have NO paid employees. We are an all-volunteer organization. We have had to pay for our applications to become incorporated and a 501c3 organization. We also paid for Statements of Financial Condition and our annual tax returns. The total cost of our operating expenses for a calendar year is less than \$2,000.