

LAHA Proposal - An expansion of the Minnesota Move-Up Program

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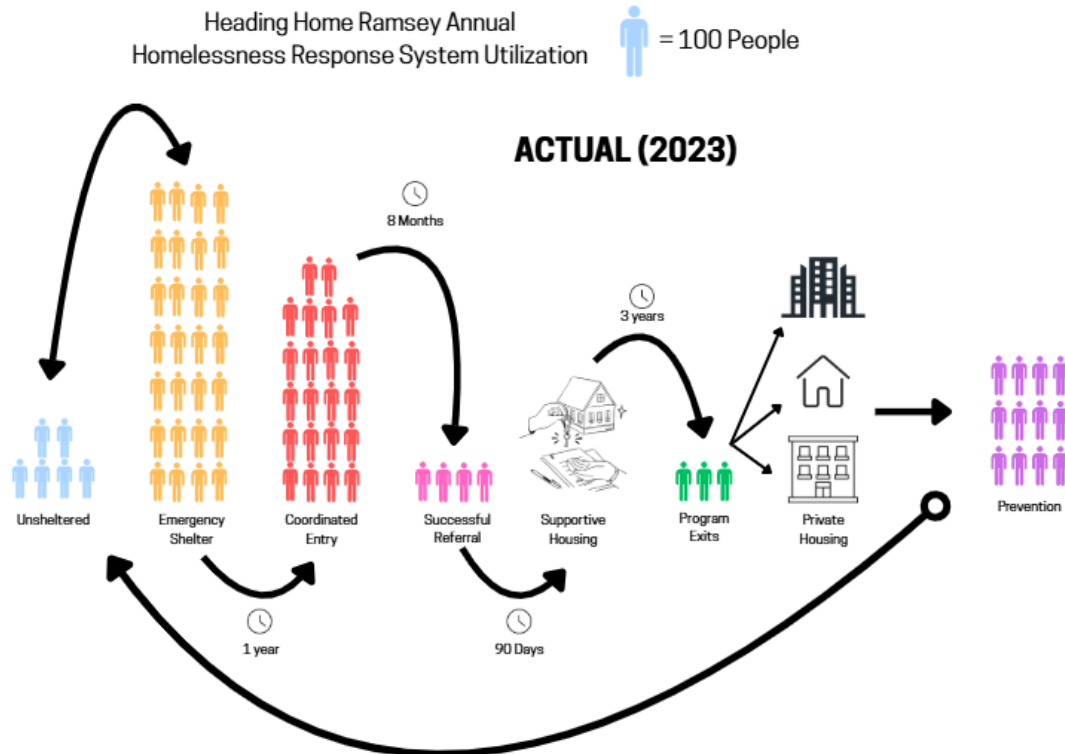
Introduction

This proposal outlines the way LAHA funding of \$880,000 can be used with efficiency and accuracy to improve outcomes in the homelessness response system. This proposal was created in collaboration with partners from the affordable housing, homeless response, and housing authority sectors. It describes the expansion of a current, successful voucher program that connects housing program participants with private, safe, stable, rent-subsidized housing. The implementation of this program would impact services upstream including Coordinated Entry, Outreach, Diversion, and Emergency Shelter. As such, it would improve the flow of people from each part of the system and result in more people accessing the housing they desperately need.

Background and Current Needs

The research and background for this proposal was prompted by members of the Heading Home Ramsey Governing Board Executive Committee in the Spring of 2025. The members of this committee were curious about how to most strategically use novel funding (including LAHA) to impact the Continuum of Care (CoC) and the Homelessness Response System. They approached myself, the System Performance Lead for Heading Home Ramsey, asking for additional research and a proposal that would be fast, effective, and efficient.

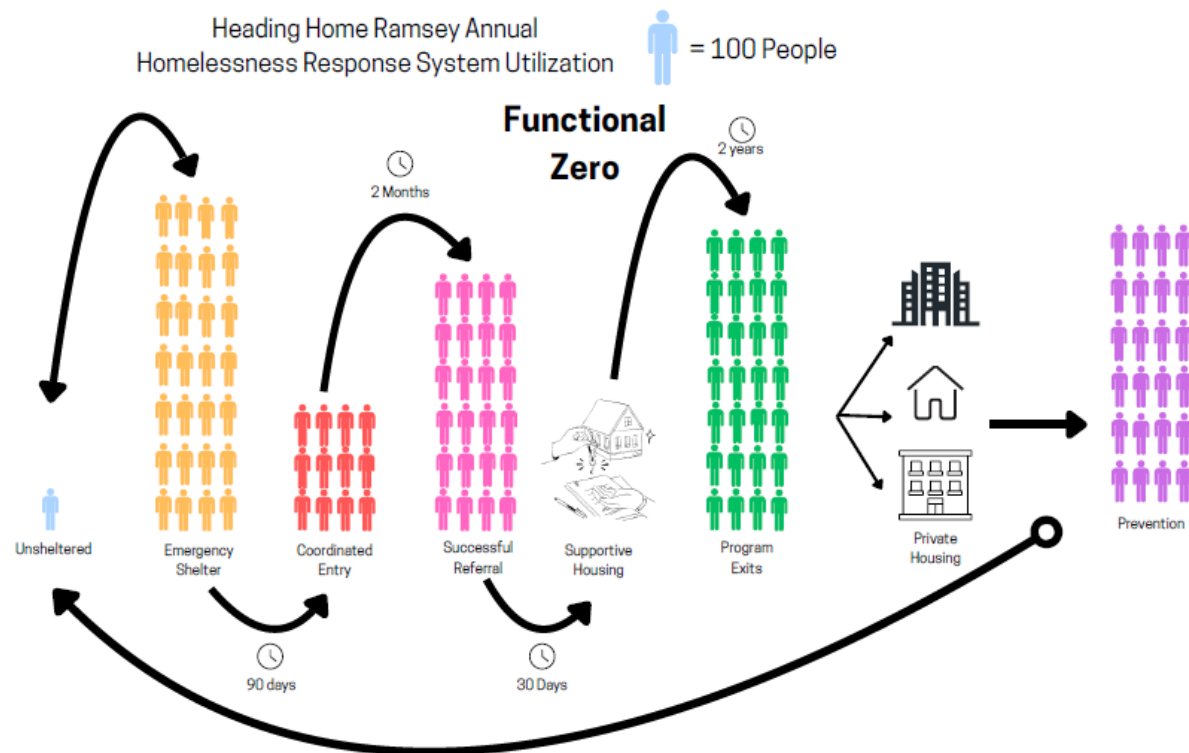
Following this request, I turned to the 2024 Needs Assessment, to gauge what the needs are for our community and the homelessness response system.¹ Using the information within the quantitative sections of the needs assessment, I produced the following graphic. The graphic illustrates how members of our community flow from experiencing unsheltered homelessness to gaining safe, stable housing. The graphic shows the time each section takes as well.



Altogether, currently, it takes **at least two years on average** for someone experiencing unsheltered homelessness to go from living in a place not meant for human habitation to safe, stable housing. The reasons for this extended period of time are plenty. There are bottlenecks and problems that need to be addressed at every stage of the above graphic. However, the place that will likely have the largest impact is on the right side of the graphic, **specifically in successful referrals, housing program placement, and program exits.**

Presently, the vacancy in housing programs is dwindling due to a lack of program diversity and the complex needs of housing program participants. In current programs the lack of flow out of programs decreases the number of available units and thereby increases the wait time for these units. The lack of flow out of these programs is more than likely due to a combination of limited affordable housing and the complex needs of housing participants. There are affordable housing options, but most rent-subsidized options are only **available through waitlists that open once or twice a year and take years to move placement on.**

This is what I have kindly referred to as “the clog”, it’s the part of the homelessness response system that essentially backs up everything else. An example is that since the wait time for housing programs have increased, people spend longer on the coordinated entry priority list awaiting a referral, and thus stay in shelter for longer periods of time. **This is contrast with our goals.** As a community, we are trying to move towards functional zero, where everyone who is in need of housing is able to flow through the homelessness response system and receive housing. Visually, that would look something like this:



Partnerships

After diving into the needs assessment, my next task was to determine what could be done to address the clog that was timely and efficient. Is there a way to move folks from housing programs into permanent, rent subsidized housing faster? Or is the solution to expand housing programs? To answer these questions, I consulted the teams that work closely on affordable housing both at Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul.

I spoke with the Ramsey County Community and Economic Development Department and the City of St. Paul Planning and Economic Development Department on possible solutions. To improve the flow of folks from housing programs to affordable housing, the first thought is to build more affordable housing.

This solution is appropriate, but it would take at least 3-5 years for a building to be constructed and available for residents, so for this reason, it was not considered. Another solution aimed at the vacancy of housing programs would be to expand current housing programs. This is possible, but would likely require a lengthy RFP process, local competition, and a contract through Ramsey County Procurement. The total time would likely be less than two years, but I was interested in determining if there would be any faster processes. In conversation with CED, we investigated and agreed on the proposal presented here. It's validity and implementation have affirmed by CED, PED, and the St. Paul PHA.

The Proposal

The option we arrived at that would be fast, efficient, and effective at improving the flow of persons in the homelessness response system would be a **locally funded voucher program** that is an identical set-up to the current Minnesota Move-Up program. The Minnesota Move-Up program is a program administered by the PHA in collaboration with the Heading Home Ramsey Continuum of Care. In this program, eligible participants from current housing programs are referred and receive a Housing Choice Voucher. **This program eliminates the need for them to join the Housing Choice Voucher waitlist.**

The eligibility requirements include being in a HUD-funded Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Program for at least 2 years, paying rent on-time for a 12 month consecutive period, having an ongoing source of income, and being connected to mainstream or community resources (ensuring program participants don't lose benefits or connections when they move). The program eligibility requirements work in such a way that it **targets those who are successful in housing programs** and gives them the ability to easily 'move-up' into necessary affordable housing.

The current Minnesota Move-Up program has been working well over the last year. The program is administered by two housing authorities with the Metro HRA reserving around 30 vouchers for the Move-Up program and the St. Paul PHA reserving around 50. After a change in staffing at Heading Home Ramsey, the program was re-introduced to the programs with eligible participants (HUD funded Permanent Supportive Housing Providers), and referrals began coming in. However, both the Metro HRA and St. Paul PHA stopped receiving referrals earlier this year due to fears of federal cuts and a financial shortfall. When the program was operational, there was concern that some of the eligibility requirements were too stringent and not all of those who may need this program would qualify.

Thus, the proposed use of these funds is to **create a locally funded voucher program** in the same vein as the Minnesota Move-Up program. This locally funded program would reserve and pay for vouchers at the St. Paul PHA. The eligibility criteria could be tweaked to include programs outside of HUD funded PSH such as Housing Support and Rapid Rehousing.

The Financial Scope

According to the St. Paul PHA in 2022, the total cost of sustaining one unit in the Housing Choice Voucher program is around \$10,800 per year.² This cost has likely increased to around the \$13,000 mark in 2025. These estimates include administrative costs. However, the **administrative infrastructure for the Move-Up Minnesota program is already in place** and would likely not require much additional costs if the program were to be expanded. Thus, if the entirety of the \$880,000 available through LAHA was used to fund this local program, it would create around 67 additional vouchers for use. Furthermore, because the program would be locally funded, it would be **protected from future financial shortfalls**. Meaning that even if HUD were

to instruct the St. PHA to stop administering housing choice vouchers, the LAHA vouchers could still be given to community members. The City Council may even decide to cap the number of vouchers at an even 50 or 60 and use remaining LAHA funds to develop a housing navigator position tied to this program. If 50 vouchers are included in the program, then there would be \$230,000 remaining for housing navigation services.

The Impact

The impact of this program would likely be **felt in the first 6-9 months** of implementation. The current shopping rate of those with a Housing Choice Voucher is around 85%. Therefore, a majority of program participants who are eligible and referred for the program would be able to find safe, stable housing and exit their housing programs. The vacancy this would leave in programs would lead to an increase in referrals from the priority list and potentially affect the overall wait times for housing. Most importantly, the expansion of this voucher program **creates a bridge for program participants to stable housing** that did not previously exist. It would start to decrease the clog and increase flow to the end of the response system, relieving overburdened systems or programs upstream. Finally, it connects people in need of housing with housing and begins the process of ending homelessness. As a community, we would begin moving closer to functional zero.

Next Steps if Recommended and Approved

- 1) Collaborate with the PHA on expansion protocol
- 2) Work with Heading Home Ramsey on eligibility criteria and eligible programs
- 3) Finalize and implement

Thank you for your time.

References

1. Schmidt M. Heading home ramsey continuum of care 2024 needs ... BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS. January 1, 2025. Accessed July 21, 2025. [https://www.ramseycounty.us/sites/default/files/Heading Home Ramsey 2024 Needs Assessment_Final_Approved_1.pdf](https://www.ramseycounty.us/sites/default/files/Heading%20Home%20Ramsey%202024%20Needs%20Assessment_Final_Approved_1.pdf).
2. Gutzmann J, Feilder L. Sustaining deeply affordable housing requires significant ongoing funding beyond initial development costs. MinnPost. February 6, 2024. Accessed July 21, 2025. <https://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2022/09/sustaining-deeply-affordable-housing-requires-significant-ongoing-funding-beyond-initial-development-costs/>.