

Staff Report

**UPDATE ON OUTREACH EFFORTS TO INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

June 24, 2025

**BACKGROUND:**

In November 2024, members of Alternative Response for Community Health (ARCH), the City of Ames Mental Health Advocate, the Social Worker with Mary Greeley, and The Salvation Army staff started conducting street outreach together to connect individuals experiencing homelessness with services. Since November, the team has conducted outreach once a week. In March, the team expanded their efforts and started holding service coordination meetings, inviting other service providers to attend. The purpose of the broader service provider meetings is to more effectively and efficiently coordinate care for individuals in need of assistance. These additional meetings have been beneficial for direct service providers.

In January 2025, the City Council allocated \$11,250 towards the outreach team, now known as the Homelessness Outreach Services Team (HOST), to pilot the concept of a flex fund to meet needs encountered during outreach activities. The flex fund not only covers expenses that can be difficult for any agency to provide for varying reasons but also allows HOST members to build trust amongst unsheltered individuals encountered. The HOST members have been, and continue to be, diligent about learning what services already exist and utilizing those services before using the pilot flex funding. As of May 27, 2025, \$6,517.66 of the \$11,250 has been spent.

Listed below are some important observations the HOST group would like to share:

- The estimated number of people assisted during their weekly team outreach is approximately 7 people per week or \*168 in the last six months.
- The team estimates that approximately 25% of the individuals assisted are unique individuals (of the estimated 168 people encountered, there are 42 unique individuals).
- Of the individuals encountered more than one time, the majority are likely to struggle with mental health, substance use or have some sort of justice-system involvement.
- The team estimates there are roughly 15-20 chronically unsheltered individuals in Ames that have been in Ames for several years.
- The team estimates that approximately 30% have minor children where the State of Iowa Health and Human Services have or are involved. It's important to note that not all individuals are comfortable disclosing if they have children for fear of the children being removed.

- Most of the outreach activities have been in the central area of Ames (downtown and immediate surrounding areas). Some outreach activities have happened in west Ames and in City parks.
- According to what is shared or known, the most common reasons why individuals encountered are homeless are related to:
  - Landlord is not allowing a renewal on the lease.
  - Individuals/families are unable to afford rent. Several have jobs but employers provide varying hours of work per week.
  - Some have eviction records- sometimes for non-payment. Sometimes for behavioral reasons.
  - Some do not want to be housed.
- Some of the people HOST has encountered aren't from Ames but come to Ames believing Ames has greater services only to learn the resources are already at capacity.
- Some of the gap services HOST believes exists are:
  - Assistance helping people apply for jobs; applying for rental housing; and obtaining IDs, especially birth certificates.
  - The lack of case management during sheltering. This can negatively exacerbate the situation.
  - It is difficult to declare an adult a dependent adult so for those with an intellectual disability, it is challenging to help them get a guardian who can help them access services.
  - There is a shortage of mental health services.
  - There is a shortage of shelter beds.
  - There is a shortage of affordable housing opportunities.
  - There is a significant amount of health illiteracy in the community so it's hard for people to understand how to navigate accessing health services.
- A common challenge encountered is the lack of a storage space or locker for unsheltered folks to keep their belongings.

### **Pilot Flex Fund Uses**

Of the \$11,250 Council made available to the HOST team, \$6,517.66 has been used as of May 27, 2025. The table below summarizes the amounts and types of uses the flex fund has covered:

<b>Type of Purchase</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Bus pass	\$214.50
Cleaning supplies	\$102.48
Clothing	\$3,702.16
Equipment (batteries, storage tub, move-in shelter items like hangers, baskets, etc.)	\$376.57
Grocery/Food	\$317.63
Fees for obtaining IDs	\$317.62
Laundry/Cleaning	\$136.05
Personal hygiene	\$618.61

Phone – minutes or devices	\$732.04
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$6,517.66</b>
<b>Remaining Funds Available</b>	<b>\$4,732.34</b>

### **What's next for HOST?**

- The team has found it invaluable to take a team approach to conducting outreach and addressing needs. HOST will continue to conduct outreach weekly and to hold the service provider coordination meeting once a week.
- The HOST team would like to find ways to continue building the knowledge of all service providers in this space. They would like to convene monthly lunch-and-learns to increase knowledge sharing and seek professional development opportunities.
- The HOST team would like to develop a logo or obtain some identifying clothing or ID so they can be easily identifiable.
- The HOST team would like to figure out a way to continue supporting the service provider care coordination meeting, including assistance with note-taking, figuring out release of information forms for agencies that participate, and finding a central system where notes can be shared.
- On June 27, HOST will be piloting a new training session offered by ISU Extension and Outreach on "Creating Purposeful Partnerships Through Effective Meetings."
- The Iowa Finance Authority currently has a grant opportunity available known as the "2025 Iowa Innovation in Homelessness Incubator" program. The HOST team intends to coordinate with other service providers to put forth an application. Funding is available up to \$100,000. The specific program being recommended is still being determined, however, HOST believes a regional application may increase the chances of being selected.

### **STAFF COMMENTS:**

Near the end of this calendar year, the HOST team will provide another update.

### **ATTACHMENT(S):**