

Life Saver Ministries
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Grant Proposal

Purpose

We are seeking grant support in the amount of \$10,000 for general operating expenses for My Father's House, our home and education center for homeless pregnant and parenting young women between the ages of 13 and 21 and their children.

Program/Need Description

Life Saver Ministries is a non-denominational, faith-based organization located in North Chelmsford, Massachusetts that provides a stable, healthy environment for homeless teen moms and their children through its core program, My Father's House. Since the organization was founded in 1991, it has served more than 250 homeless pregnant and parenting young women, providing them with a safe, nurturing home, 24 hour supervision, training, education, and counseling. Follow up support is also provided to ensure a successful transition to independence.

While Life Saver Ministries is a non-denominational, faith-based organization, services are provided to young women regardless of their religious beliefs. The organization does not discriminate against any individuals nor proselytize when delivering services.

My Father's House is a unique program. It is the only program in Massachusetts that is licensed to house young mothers below the age of 18 that is not state funded. All other programs are funded by either the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) or the Department of Children and Families (DCF). By law, these programs have strict eligibility requirements.

Programs funded by DTA can only accept clients who are eligible for DTA benefits. One of the criteria is that pregnant clients must be in the third trimester of their pregnancy. Women less than seven months pregnant are ineligible. In addition, women who receive assistance from agencies other than DTA, Social Security for example, are ineligible.

Programs funded by DCF can only accept clients who are in the custody of DCF. These state funded programs also have a cutoff age of nineteen. Clients must leave those programs before their twentieth birthday.

While My Father's House is licensed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, we receive no state or federal funding. Therefore, we can help clients who "fall through the cracks" of the state funded programs. In fact, the DTA and DCF often refer clients to us that they are unable to help.

My Father's House is a Victorian style, eight bedroom home located in a residential neighborhood in North Chelmsford. Its location just outside the city of Lowell addresses one of Massachusetts' most prevalent needs. According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, among the 30 largest municipalities in Massachusetts, Lowell has the 5th highest teen birth rate, the 8th highest infant mortality rate, ranks the 5th highest in low birth weight, and ranks 4th from last in adequate prenatal care. According to the same source, teenage mothers in Massachusetts had almost double the rate of inadequate prenatal care compared with mothers ages 20 and above.

Additional information regarding teen mothers:

- Children born to unmarried school drop-out teen mothers are ten times more likely to live in poverty than those born to married women over the age of 20.
- Although children of teen parents have more health problems than children born to older parents, they receive only half the level of care and treatment.

- Children born to teen mothers are more likely to grow up in a poor and mother-only family, to live in a poor or underclass neighborhood, and to experience high risks to both their health status and potential school achievement.
- Only 77% of children born to teenage parents will receive a high school diploma compared to 89% of children born to older parents.
- Children born to teen mothers are more likely to be abused, abandoned or neglected.
- Teenage sons of teen mothers are 2.7 times more likely to be incarcerated than sons of older mothers.
- An adolescent mother's education level is one of the best predictors of small children's outcome.

The target population of My Father's House consists of unmarried, pregnant or parenting young women, ages 13 to 21 and their children, who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless, or are in need of a safe environment. Often, these young women have dropped out of school, have no income, and have no support system. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of young women served are low income/working poor; 53% are Latina, 36% are Caucasian, 6% are African-American, and 5% are Asian. My Father's House provides them and their small children with a safe place to live, to learn parenting skills, and to complete their education.

My Father's House can house eight mothers and their children at one time and is usually at or near capacity. On average, 10 to 15 families participate in the My Father's House parenting program per year. While living at My Father's House, teen mothers who haven't graduated from high school enroll in a local school or GED program. Graduates continue their education at Middlesex Community College or a career training center or find employment. All residents participate in weekly classes, groups, and individual counseling sessions to learn parenting skills, life skills, and communication skills. All children participate in an early intervention assessment in addition to an on-site child development program. The average length of time mothers live at My Father's House is 9 to 18 months.

Our organization has two main goals:

- 1) To provide young mothers and their children with a safe, healthy, and stable environment; and
- 2) To equip these young women with the tools they will need to care for themselves and their children, to enhance their economic opportunities and become self-sufficient, and to not become homeless again.

These goals are achieved by providing each girl with individualized attention and support. Young women and their children can come to My Father's House at any time during pregnancy or after the child is born. Their length of stay depends on the mother's age, how far she has progressed in her education, how much family support she has, and what she needs to accomplish in order to reach her goals. Incoming residents are assessed and immediate attention is given to those in need of medical and dental care. The counseling staff works individually with each young parent to establish a service plan and enroll them in the appropriate educational facility or job training program. They also assist with procuring child care, WIC, Early Intervention, therapy, and DTA assistance as needed. Life-skills classes include topics such as finances, resume writing, job searching, interview skills, housing search techniques, communication skills and nutrition. Collaborations with local partner organizations help with the implementation of this program.

In order to give our families the opportunity to experience cultural, community, and seasonal events they would be unable to experience due to financial or other hardships, we offer a Sunday Enrichment Program as part of our education program. Our staff takes mothers and children to museums, theater presentations, exhibits, zoos, parades, festivals, and other events to stimulate their minds and expand their horizons.

As the moms transition to independence, My Father's House encourages them to sign up for its Transition and Care (TAC) visitation program, which extends services to ensure a successful transition and helps measure the success of the My Father's House program.

Within two weeks of departure from My Father's House, the TAC visitation team initiates a meeting at the new home of the mother and children. After the initial meeting, the TAC visitation team and family meet as needed and requested, biweekly or monthly, for the first six months. At that time an assessment is made with the team and their supervisors along with the family to determine the need, frequency, and duration of future meetings.

The TAC team works with the parents on child development skills and behavioral techniques, and measures success in improved health and behaviors of the children. They encourage mothers to continue or locate services with other resources, such as early intervention, Healthy Families, local therapists, food pantries, support groups, and other support services in their area. They assist with transferring doctors and other health care providers. The team also works with these young parents on nutrition and health, and assists them with budgeting, time management, and job support so that they can become independent, self-sufficient, and contributing adults and successful parents.

My Father's House makes a meaningful impact in the lives of homeless teen moms and their children in Middlesex, Essex and Suffolk Counties. Our program houses and educates young mothers with the goal of enabling them to become successful in setting and reaching goals while giving them the tools to secure a future that is successful for themselves and their children.

In an effort to maintain continuity and services for our families it is important that there be no interruption in our functioning and hence in our funding. As our population increases through our TAC visitation team, in addition to new parents and children arriving at My Father's House, we have an ongoing need for more qualified personnel to work both at the facility and off-site. Additional training for our staff as they interface with collaboratives to improve our educational program and our support services requires more funds each year. Additional funds will not only help us maintain existing programs but also assist us in reaching further out into the community and moving more families off the poverty and homeless track to becoming self-supporting, community supporting citizens. We also believe continued support from people who have established relationship and rapport with our families will help reduce poor decision making that often leads to greater violence, addictive behaviors, and more children becoming a part of the foster care system.

Results and Measurement

Our clients come to us with a wide variety of needs and abilities. Many of our young moms come from families with parents who are drug addicts or alcoholics and have lived lives filled with neglect and abuse. Others have lived most of their lives in the foster care system, bouncing from foster home to foster home. Still others come from supportive families and, although they find themselves in circumstances similar to our other young moms, have a much better foundation from which to work.

Measuring success for clients is varied, depending on the client's history, abilities, and the opportunities available to them prior to entering our program. Since many struggle with a variety of mental health issues, the focus for these parents differs from those who are more stable. We assist our young mothers to set and meet goals on an individual basis. For one, overcoming her anxiety and taking a bus or other public transportation for the first time is a difficult hurdle to get over. For another, making a doctor's appointment for their child by herself is something she has never done. Things that you or I don't think twice about, such as filling out an application for housing or a job, getting a prescription filled, or keeping track of your expenses, can be frightening for someone who has been told all her life that she is a failure.

For a client with a less traumatic background, her goal might be finishing high school or a GED course, applying for college, or getting her driver's license. No matter what a mom needs to accomplish, our staff works with her individually over the course of her stay at My Father's House to consistently move toward meeting her goals.

Our main objective is to enable these all of young women to be self-sufficient. We don't do things for them. We teach them how to accomplish their goals on their own.

Some of our overall objectives for all of our clients are:

- leaving MFH with a minimum of a high school diploma
- obtaining a driver's license
- participating in some form of employment before their departure
- moving into their own apartments
- earning enough to pay rent and utilities through employment within 6 months of departure
- moving on to some form of higher education for those who choose to
- returning to advise and encourage new residents
- providing homes for their children that are free of drugs, alcohol, and violence.

Evaluation

The outcomes we strive for are:

1. Increasing Independence

This is evidenced when mothers obtain a driver's license and reliable transportation, when they independently advocate for themselves and their children with the providers they have in place and when contacting new providers, when they demonstrate financial stability by maintaining a job with the potential for career growth and development and have appropriate childcare, when they manage their money and bank accounts, pay bills on time and have no outstanding debt, and when they maintain a healthy safe home environment

2. Contributing to the Community and Society

This is evidenced when mothers are no longer relying solely on state or federal assistance, when they have been in full-time employment for at least six months, and are actively involved in their children's daycare or school.

3. Appropriate Parenting

This is evidenced by mothers keeping their children's medical and dental appointments on time and up-to-date, by continuing to interact consistently with early intervention, Healthy Families, and other children's resources in the area, by maintaining a safe and healthy environment for their children, by recognizing age appropriate behaviors and using disciplinary techniques to improve behaviors that are logical and age appropriate.

We endeavor to keep in touch with as many former clients as possible, even after their involvement with our Transition and Care program is completed. This helps us evaluate the effectiveness of our programs long term. For the most part, the progress of former clients is quite positive.

Keeping in touch also enables us to offer support to former clients who may need help. This past year, we were able to help 3 former clients in substantial ways. One mom who lived at My Father's House in 2010 and 2011 needed to take 3 separate buses in order to drop off her children at daycare and get to her job at a nursing home. She then needed to take the same 3 buses on the way home. We were able to obtain a reliable used car for her at no cost, enabling her to more easily take care of her children and get to her job. This reduces her stress and allows her to spend more quality time with her children.

Similarly, a mom who lived at My Father's House in 2008 and lives in Chelmsford, MA had a good job in New Hampshire and had recently received a promotion. Her car became unrepairable and there is no public transportation that could get her to her job. We were able to obtain a reliable used car for her at no cost as well, enabling her to continue to progress in her career.

One of the children who lived at My Father's House in 1998 and is now 18 years old had her heart set on studying at Middlesex Community College, but couldn't afford the textbooks. We purchased the textbooks for her. She received all As and Bs in her first semester.

Staffing

Executive Director – Kevin Coffey is co-founder of Life Saver Ministries. Kevin holds a BA in Mathematics and Economics. Prior to founding Life Saver Ministries more than 23 years ago, Kevin operated a photography and graphic arts business for 14 years, and a security systems company for 10 years. Kevin is responsible for overseeing day to day operations including financial administration, interacting with the Board of Directors, and ensuring the organization is in compliance with all government regulations.

Program Director – Catherine Coffey is co-founder of Life Saver Ministries. She holds a BA in Education and an MA in Counseling. Catherine has 12 years of experience teaching and counseling students in elementary schools. As the Program Director of Life Saver Ministries, she has 24 years of experience counseling single parent mothers, training and overseeing staff, volunteers, and all programs related to residents, as well as accessing services and providing referrals within the community.

House Manager – Renee Kutcheid started at My Father’s House in 2013 as an intern while working to earn a certificate in Child and Adolescent Behavior Health Care. She joined our direct care staff in 2014 and became House Manager at the beginning of 2016. Renee has 14 years of experience working with youth in varied capacities.

Resident Advisor – Sharon Desrochers holds a degree in Pastoral Ministry and is Early Childhood Education trained and certified. She has worked with children and youth for more than 25 years. Sharon joined the staff in 2008 as a direct care provider and assumed the role of resident advisor in January 2015. She has also served as MFH’s Child Development Specialist and led the Transition and Care visitation team.

Direct Care Staff – Our direct care staff are mature individuals who come from the same communities as do our clients. They all have experience in pregnancy and child care. Most have raised or are raising children of their own. They are certified in first-aid and CPR and receive ongoing education relative to their positions.

Sources of Funding

55% of our funding comes from individual donations. Our individual supporters are very loyal to our organization and the number of individual supporters has grown steadily over the years.

17% of our funding comes from foundation grants.

14% of our funding comes from church support.

11% of our funding comes from fundraising events.

3% of our funding comes from rent from clients and in-kind donations.