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February 22, 2019

Dear Members of the Common Council,

As the City Council weighs the decision to increase funding for Tree Lane Apartments, I am writing to express United Way of Dane County's support for the project and specifically for an increase in funding to deliver more comprehensive services to families living at Tree Lane.

For over a decade, one of our top community priorities at United Way has been to end family homelessness. Each year, we direct close to \$2 million towards this goal, and the largest single initiative at our organization is a rapid rehousing program for families that has housed and stabilized over 400 families since 2008. In this program and in our work at large, we are committed to a Housing First approach—the national best practice that views the best way to address homelessness as first providing housing, and then from the stability of a home, addressing other barriers a family (or individual) may be facing.

Since the planning phases of Tree Lane Apartments, we have eagerly anticipated a dedicated affordable housing project for families that would utilize a Housing First approach to serve our community's most vulnerable households. Data tells us that children experiencing homelessness are twice as likely to repeat a grade, twice as likely to go hungry, and four times as likely to get sick. Homelessness equates with trauma, instability, poor health, and missed educational opportunities.

When 45 families made the move to Tree Lane this past June, they made the move from unstable living situations to permanent homes and new opportunity. Over 100 children, with just this one change, increased their chances of staying healthy this flu season, of eating a nutritious meal at the end of day, of developing strong friendships, of graduating from high school. The odds of long-term stability for these families is an incredible 8 in 10, since we know Housing First programs in our community have consistently exceeded an 80% stability rate (the national standard for Housing First success).

Due to the timing of our funding cycles, we were able to commit \$25,000 for support services in the first year of Tree Lane operations, and this year—considering the clear need for more funding—we are asking our board to increase our commitment to \$75,000. It is our hope to grow this commitment in 2020 and beyond, pending our request for proposal process. We have been and will remain in constant communication with the Community Development Division and our partner agencies as we all work to ensure continued support and stability for the families living at Tree Lane and work to provide continuity for the surrounding neighborhood as well as the homeless services system at large.



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The Tree Lane building has obviously garnered quite a bit of attention in our city, but fundamentally, it is important to note that the families who have moved into Tree Lane are housed, many stably for the first time in years, and now they can begin the process of addressing and overcoming their other barriers. It is an adjustment for these families as much as it is for their neighborhood, and at United Way we are committed to the long-term success of both.

In Dane County we have recently seen a remarkable decline in family homelessness. Based off our Point-in-Time count (which takes place on a single night in July and identifies those in shelter, cars, outdoors, etc.) there has been over 50% decrease in family homelessness since 2014. With cross-sector investment from the City of Madison, Dane County, United Way of Dane County, and a myriad of philanthropic supporters, as well as the diligent and compassionate work of local nonprofits, we can continue this trend and lead the way nationally.

Right now, Tree Lane Apartments is the project most in need of our investments to keep our good work going, and we hope the City Council will recognize the need for increasing funding to this vital project. Thank you for your consideration of this critical community need.

Thank you,

Renee Moe
President & CEO
United Way of Dane County