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NMTCs, Capital Campaign Drive \$14 Million Expansion of Indianapolis Women and Children's Center

TERESA GARCIA, SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER, NOVOGRADAC

When Wheeler Mission celebrated the Aug. 11 grand opening of its expanded Center for Women & Children (CWC) in Indianapolis, the local nonprofit marked a new chapter in its 128-year history of providing social services to the community. Funded by new markets tax credit (NMTC) financing and a robust capital campaign, the \$14 million development helps Wheeler Mission triple its capacity to serve women and children experiencing homelessness.

Wheeler Mission traces its roots to 1893 as a single ministry for women and has since expanded into a multifaceted services organization that assists thousands of men, women and children each year with shelter and various programs. Wheeler Mission merged with The Care Center, another services provider, in 2001 and opened the current location of the CWC in 2009 with the capacity to serve 100 women and children each night.

"Wheeler has long been the city's primary provider of emergency shelter," said Jeff Bennett, the Indianapolis deputy mayor of community and economic development. "Even pre-pandemic, it had outgrown its women and children's facility."

Colleen Gore, Wheeler Mission's chief program officer for women, said discussions to expand the CWC began almost immediately after it opened in 2009, with the demand for shelter services growing each year. Wheeler Mission tracks how many women request shelter space and are turned away for lack of capacity. The CWC averages 700 turn-away calls a month.

"It's a heartbreaking challenge and one that has been an ongoing issue for women and children in our community," said Gore. "There's a significant lack of emergency resources and long-term programs. That's the driving force behind our expansion and that the new markets tax credit helped move forward."

Wheeler Mission launched a capital campaign in 2018 for the expansion and broke ground in late 2019. Although the pandemic created a few supply chain issues during construction, the building timeline was only delayed a couple of months.

Gore said that because the pandemic hit while the expansion was still early in its construction phase, Wheeler Mission had the opportunity to rethink parts of the design to focus more on health and safety protocols. The CWC now offers additional hand-washing stations and has more flexible space to allow for social distancing.

The CWC expansion is a new construction addition to Wheeler Mission's existing facility, which already

consisted of a 10-story building that houses long-term programs, a three-story building for community support and emergency services, and a four-story building that houses a family facility and day care. The additional CWC space provides 164 new permanent beds, including 30 transitional apartments for mothers with children. There are also 84 new family shelter beds, 40 new emergency shelter beds, a day room, a secure child care area, an indoor play space for children, redesigned and expanded dining areas, an expanded education center and visiting rooms for community services.

The new facility will help CWC better address common challenges that its community faces. “There is a high rate of mental health issues, addiction and history of domestic violence that led to instability,” said Gore. “That’s a consistent trend we’ve seen over the years. Here in Indianapolis, we had our Point in Time Count and there was a 21% increase [in people experiencing homelessness] over the prior year.”

Gore said Wheeler Mission serves a growing number of women who are 50 or older, or who are 18 to 24. Having programs targeted at different age groups requires dedicated space for each, which the expanded CWC can now provide. All in all, the CWC can accommodate a 50% increase in programs, such as counseling, job training, addiction recovery, social enterprise and other services. The expansion also created 15 full-time and three part-time jobs for program and security support.

Community Partnerships

Wheeler Mission raised more than \$12.9 million from donors, with gifts ranging from a single dollar to \$4 million from Lily Endowment Inc. Steve Germani, Wheeler Mission’s director of grants and legacy giving, said combining strong community support with NMTC financing helped the CWC expansion cross the finish line.

“Without this NMTC support, it would be very difficult to conclude this campaign,” said Germani. “While we enjoy a great deal of community support, completing this initiative required a lot of support from our core

base of donors. In fact, we raised \$595,635 from our board of directors alone. This is a project that a lot of people have poured a lot of time, energy and resources into. And we are incredibly grateful for the much-needed boost of support from this new (for us) source of funding. And I also sincerely believe that the project was more thoroughly prepared than it would have otherwise been because of the NMTC application process and likely resulted in some additional community support because of how prepared the project was to complete.”

For the NMTC investment, Wheeler Mission turned to Chase, which provided \$2.9 million in NMTC equity. Chase had previous experience working with two of the other organizations—Indianapolis Redevelopment CDE, the city’s community development entity (CDE), and Capital for Compassion, the sponsor’s NMTC consultant. “Our community development team is proud to help support meaningful projects like Wheeler Mission and contribute to advancing their broader commitment to addressing the myriad challenges facing the individuals and families they serve,” said James Simmons, executive director for Chase Community Development Banking. “We focus on providing capital to revitalize low-income communities for vulnerable populations, which aligns with the firm’s \$30 billion commitment to advancing racial equity.”

Indianapolis Redevelopment CDE provided \$9 million in NMTC allocation to the CWC expansion. “One of the things that the CDE has done with its partnerships is to align priorities along with inclusivity and growth,” said Aryn Schounce, the chief policy officer for the Department of Metropolitan Development with the city of Indianapolis.

Schounce said that one of Indianapolis Redevelopment CDE’s areas of focus is “barrier busting” investments with components such as child care, professional training, transit-oriented development and other features that help promote more inclusive growth opportunities for the populations served. This, along with the city’s commitment to prevent homelessness and to invest in the area’s infrastructure, made the

Wheeler Mission expansion a good fit for Indianapolis Redevelopment CDE.

In addition to providing NMTC allocation through its CDE, the city offered other means of support to the development, such as helping with permitting, waiving certain fees, supporting Wheeler Mission's fundraising and grant-writing efforts and offering the use of a city-owned park as a staging site during construction.

With the CWC expansion completed, Wheeler Mission takes an important step in addressing the immediate needs of women and children experiencing homelessness, as they move toward the goal of housing stability.

"We have been running under-resourced for so long that it's exciting to have the resources to meet the needs out there," said Gore. "Along with that, we have an ability to collaborate with the community and successfully move more people into housing and equip them to be more self-sufficient in a way that is honoring to them." ❖

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