

City gets \$1.3 million grant for HIV/AIDS housing

STAFF REPORTS

New federal funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development will help house and provide services for homeless Portlanders with HIV/AIDS.

The city of Portland was one of eight to receive a competitive grant from HUD to provide short-term rent assistance, employment services and permanent housing for people living with HIV and experiencing homelessness. Portland received \$1.3 million, which will provide homes for 60 people per year and connect them with employment opportunities. The city reports that more than 600 people in the Portland metro area are living with HIV/AIDS and experiencing homelessness or are on the brink of homelessness.

According to HUD, 70 percent of people living with HIV/AIDS have incomes below the federal poverty level. Lack of employment and benefits income presents a major barrier to securing housing.

The funding will support programs by Cascade AIDS Project in providing rent assistance, case management and employment services, with the employment and training services offered at WorkSource Portland Metro funded by WorkSystems, Inc.

Cascade AIDS Project is the largest provider of housing for people living with HIV/AIDS in Oregon and southwest Washington. Michael Kaplan, executive director of Cascade AIDS Project, said the funding will reduce the current housing waitlist of individuals living with HIV and, with the job training component, help them toward self-sufficiency.

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Needy families show strain from state cuts

TANF programs, already slashed earlier this year, drop again Oct. 1

BY JOANNE ZUHL
STAFF WRITER

Misty McGee is stuck in the waiting game. "I feel like I'm on hold. It's really frustrating."

Her biggest opponent is her own health. Cancer at a young age took her out of school life and into a hospital regimen that included two surgeries, chemotherapy, radiation treatments. Working against her are multiple disabilities that have hampered her attempts to secure gainful employment. Three years ago she escaped with her son from an abusive relationship and into shelter.

She got out of the shelter with the help of the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF program. Now, with chronic health issues preventing her from working — she's says her doctor has had her on medical leave for the past year and a half — she's wading through the years-long process of getting Supplemental Security Income. As is the routine for the majority of applicants, Misty was denied in the first round. She believes that she could get back to work eventually, but the program — that in her own words has helped her so much — will not be there to provide child support should she look for and secure work. And the TANF JOBS program is mere shadow of its former self, leaving people with high barriers to employment, similar to Misty, on the bubble.

"I'm just going through the hoops right now," she says.

This year, those hoops tightened dramatically, and will again on Oct. 1, when the pre-Supplemental Security and Disability Insurance for people unable to work will drop on average about \$116 a month. With these cuts, a family of three, with one adult (the most common client household configuration for the program) who was receiving \$637 a month, will receive after Oct. 1 only \$506. It's expected to impact nearly 700 families in Oregon.

This comes on the heels of massive state budget cuts to the network of TANF programs intended to help people get jobs and out of the welfare system.

"I would have already started looking for some part-time work if they would have had the child care or JOBS (assistance)," Misty says, her leg in a cast. "You can't afford to look for a job if you're not going to get help for those things. It's just physically not possible. It's going to cause people to stay on TANF even longer. When you think about it, the JOBS program is so people go back to work, and when they go back to work they need help for child care. It just doesn't make sense. Those are the two keys to getting people off TANF."

As Oregon's primary program for poor families with children, TANF provides cash assistance to help cover the basic needs, along with job training and skills programs to help people get into the workforce. But with a maximum 5-year assistance period, TANF was never designed to be a lifelong support system.

There are essentially two ways of moving off TANF — either by attaining gainful employment for those who can work, or by transitioning to the federally funded Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) for people who, either because of age or physical or mental disability, cannot work.

In the spring session, the Oregon Legislature cut funding for the JOBS

program by 51 percent, reducing services to target only those considered "job ready" or "near job ready." Those with more complex barriers to employment are less likely to receive the program's trainings and job services. And those who do get into the employment

program are now limited to just two months of training and job search

services. Transportation services to and from interviews and work, and child care were also drastically reduced and eliminated for some clients.

For those unable to work who are engaged in the years-long wait for SSI or SSDI approval, they will see the reduction in the family pre-SSI/SSDI payments, which was a stipend to help families cover costs, and in some cases even avoid full TANF enrollment altogether. This program serves individuals with severe physical and/or mental impairments, who are unable to work, that meet Social Security disability criteria. It also provides clients professional assistance through the SSI and SSDI application and appeals process, which takes on average about three years.

"As one might imagine, these clients, they have very little income and very little resources, so any reduction in their resources is going to have an impact," said Erika Miller, program manager of the state family pre-SSI/SSDI program.

The pre-SSI/SSDI program is also a gateway for people to begin the application process for the federal supplements, a

process that, as Misty is experiencing, takes years of paperwork and patience.

Miller says that that component remains intact.

"That service is immeasurably valuable because the process for applying can be especially onerous," Miller said.

The cuts to the TANF JOBS program, and related child care and transportation that began July 1 have already washed up casualties.

Rachel Post, director of Supportive Housing and Employment with Central City Concern (CCC), oversees the transition of families from tragedy to self-sustainment. The program operates 85

units of drug- and alcohol-free housing for families reunited after foster care, sobriety, disability and after 10 years, has an impressive track record of getting families reunited, parents employed, and families back to independence. Last year, nearly half of those in the program went into their own permanent housing beyond CCC. It's an intensive support program that works

entirely with families reliant on TANF support.

"It really takes a long time for these families, who may have led pretty impaired lives for many years of intergenerational poverty, to get back on their feet," Post says.

"The cuts in child care and transportation in the JOBS program has made it tremendously difficult for us to help families continue with their educational programs."

Post can list off the losses: A mother who was one test away from completing her GED but without child care could not take the last test; several others who to drop out of the JOBS program for lack of child care. "They can't leave their children while they're out looking for jobs."

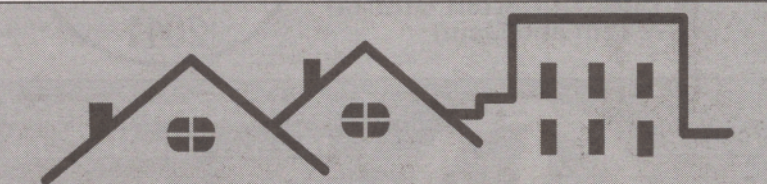
In one case, a child was sent back to foster care after the family lost TANF's wraparound supports.

"The system has invested so much in these families to get them into clean and sober housing and their children returned

"The system has invested so much in these families to get them into clean and sober housing and their children returned from foster care, that to just leave them without the supports they need to complete their journey into self-sufficiency, it just makes no sense."

— RACHEL POST
CENTRAL CITY CONCERN

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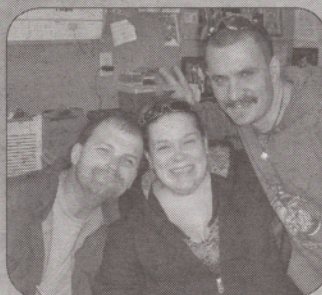
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