

NEWS RELEASE

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United Way Launches Fund to Prevent Homelessness in Rhode Island

100% of proceeds will help people in danger of losing their homes

Providence, R.I. (Jan. 12, 2009) – Rhode Island’s economic downturn has already displaced many Rhode Islanders from their homes. As the recession deepens in the coming months, projections show many more will become homeless.

United Way of Rhode Island (UWRI) is responding to this urgent call for need today (Jan. 12) by announcing a community-wide education and fundraising initiative called the *United Way Fund to Prevent Homelessness in Rhode Island*. One hundred percent of the contributions made to the Fund will be distributed directly to people who need assistance to meet rent, mortgage and utilities.

UWRI’s CEO and President, Anthony Maione, announced that UWRI will match contributions to the Fund dollar for dollar up to \$100,000 between now and March 31. “In effect, United Way will double the donor’s gift,” said UWRI President and CEO, Anthony Maione. “It demonstrates just how grave we perceive this need to be.

“We can’t stand by while we watch hard working Rhode Islanders become homeless because they can’t pay basic household expenses,” said Maione. “We are hopeful that all of Rhode Island will come together to help our neighbors in need by contributing to the Fund.”

The goal is to keep people stable and out of the already over-burdened shelter system as well as help those hardest hit by the economic downturn and in need of assistance.

“During these difficult economic times, we have to work harder than ever to provide opportunities for struggling families, especially those in danger of losing their homes,” said Mayor David N. Cicilline. “I applaud the United Way for establishing the Fund to Prevent Homelessness, and I encourage everyone to support this critically important initiative for Rhode Island families.”

United Way via its United Way’s Housing and Homelessness Committee will join forces with other organizations that advocate for and serve the homeless to build awareness regarding how current economic conditions are placing people in danger of losing their homes and becoming homeless.

“Certainly, this focus on prevention is critical, given the economic hardships that people are encountering,” said Noreen Shawcross, Chief of the State Office of Housing and Community Development.

Monies contributed to the Fund will be distributed to people in need through the following agencies: The following agencies distributed money from the *Fund* to those in need: Amos House, Bradford Jonnycake Center, Comprehensive Community Action Program, Crossroads R.I., East Bay Community Action Program, Family Resources Community Action, Progreso Latino, Providence Community Action, Providence Neighborhood Community Centers Association, Salvation Army, Providence Corps, South County Community Action, Tri-Town Community Action Agency, WARM Shelter, Westbay Community Action Program, Wood River Health Services.

“Every man, woman and child across America deserves a safe and affordable home,” said Eileen Hayes, President and CEO of Amos House, a R.I. agency that offers social services to the homeless. “Housing insecurity puts undue stress on families; hurts a child’s ability to perform well in school and ultimately erodes communities. United Way of Rhode Island’s campaign to prevent homelessness creates an opportunity for all of us to help our neighbors.”

At the press conference, Georgeinna “Georgia” Moten, of Providence, recalled how she received an eviction notice, and was at risk of becoming homeless. A grant from United Way gave her enough funds so she was able to move to a safe home.

Similarly, Madeline Silva, a family advocate and housing support specialist for Woonsocket-based Family Resources Community Action’s Family Support Center, spoke about a local mother who used grant money from United Way to prevent her from falling into homelessness. She was forced to quit her job to care for her son who was born with a serious form of asthma. The financial assistance allowed her to pay for an apartment and buy diapers, food and other necessities.

“This is an issue that is not going away any time soon,” Maione added. “We need to keep drawing attention to what is occurring currently in our community in hopes of affecting change.”

How to Give

Anybody can help support the *United Way Fund to Prevent Homelessness in Rhode Island*. Credit card contributions may be made by dialing 2-1-1 or online at www.LIVEUNITEDri.org or by mailing a check payable to the *United Way Fund to Prevent Homelessness*, 50 Valley Street, Providence, RI 02909.

How to Get Help

Anyone in need of assistance can dial 2-1-1 or visit www.211ri.org, United Way’s confidential, around-the-clock health and human services hotline staffed by information-referral professionals. In 2008, *United Way 2-1-1 in Rhode Island* received nearly 100,000 calls. 2-1-1, backed by a yearly commitment of \$500 thousand from United Way, is also supported by a grant from the Hasbro Children’s Fund as well as additional funds from the state.

To qualify for assistance from this special fund a family or person should meet with the caseworker at one of the participating agencies. The caseworker will determine what other state, federal, or nonprofit assistance is also available to the family/individual. As demand for assistance is great, the general limit on assistance is \$1,200 per individual or family, although the caseworker has some discretion in very special cases. The money must be used to keep a person or a family in a home or an apartment.

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Participating agencies will pay bills on behalf of the persons requesting help. No money will go directly to families; the agency will pay bills to the appropriate vendor.

About United Way of Rhode Island

United Way of Rhode Island has been working to improve the quality of life in Rhode Island communities for over 80 years. UWRI's mission is to mobilize the caring power of the community to improve the lives of people in need and address the issues Rhode Islanders care most about. United Way's goal is to create long-lasting changes that prevent problems from happening in the first place. We believe that all Rhode Islanders deserve the opportunity to have a better life, as when any one of us succeeds, we all succeed. At United Way, we refer to this as advancing the common good. For more information, visit www.LIVEUNITEDri.org.