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WISCONSIN

- Fond du Lac
- Winnebago
- Green Lake



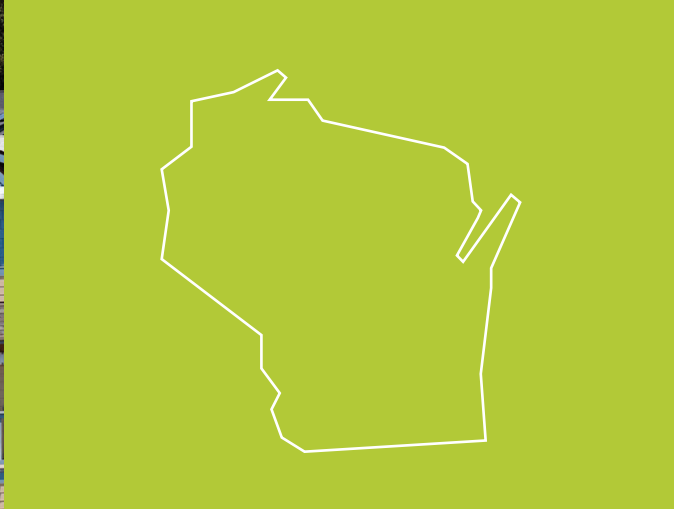
ADVOCAP

For more than 50 years, a private nonprofit Community Action Agency in Wisconsin called [ADVOCAP](#) has been helping families break the cycle of poverty, build on their strengths, and develop the knowledge and skills they need to strengthen their economic futures. One way it helps eligible families is through a successful rapid rehousing (RRH) program that has long-term employment and financial stability at its core.

This agency serves three counties in Wisconsin—Fond du Lac, Winnebago, and Green Lake. This mostly rural and suburban area covers more than 1,500 square miles and has a combined population of around 287,000 people. ADVOCAP has five program offices in those counties and offers a range of services for income-eligible clients, such as food and nutrition programs, Head Start programs, many education and employment-related programs, and housing and housing-related grants and programs.

Rapid Rehousing Programs

With funding from three distinct U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) grants administered by the Wisconsin Balance of State, ADVOCAP operates three RRH programs. Two serve clients in all three counties, and one serves only Fond du Lac County. The three programs have a combined capacity to offer RRH assistance to 29 households at any point in time. During the most recently completed program year, the programs served 58 households.



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The RRH programs mostly serve families with children, with more than half experiencing domestic violence. The programs have been very successful, as among participants exiting in the two most recently completed years, 83% had permanent housing “destinations.”

Client Assistance

As with most RRH programs, those at ADVOCAP offer both housing-related case management and housing assistance.

Case management can include help:

- Finding housing based on what the client can afford and their needs/desires (e.g., being close to their workplace, childcare, or school for their children).
- Understanding and cleaning up clients' credit reports and addressing past-due rent or utility and other debts that can stand in the way of getting a lease.
- Practicing how to present oneself to potential landlords and employers, focusing on a person's strengths, and addressing employment gaps or issues, if needed.
- Finding and keeping employment.
- Pointing clients toward landlords who have been willing to take a chance on applicants with a less-than-perfect work history, credit history, and/or rental history.
- Accessing benefits that clients may not be receiving and that can help sustain them once they have housing (SNAP, WIC, TANF, SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, Fuel Assistance, etc.).
- Applying for subsidized housing or housing subsidies if clients seem likely to have trouble keeping their housing depending on the wages they can earn.



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Housing assistance includes guaranteed up-front payment of first and last months' rent, as much as a 2-month security deposit, and ongoing financial help to supplement the client's ability to cover rent and utility costs. ADVOCAP clients have no rent obligations for their first month in housing. Once they are settled and working, they pay 30% of their adjusted gross income toward rent (using the standard HUD formula).

Approach to Employment Services

All referrals to the ADVOCAP RRH programs come through the coordinated entry process. People who are homeless can present at any CoC-funded program or partner agency. They are then prioritized for assistance based on their score on the CoC's standardized triaging instrument, called the VI-SPDAT. Once an RRH program has an opening, ADVOCAP staff start contacting those at the top of the waiting list. If a candidate has interest in RRH, that person is enrolled as a client.

ADVOCAP staff stated that although the ability to sustain housing typically depends on employment income, their RRH programs follow a Housing First model and doesn't screen out candidates who aren't working, aren't able to work, or don't initially appear motivated to work. RRH enrollment doesn't depend on any formal assessment of a person's employment readiness, but there is an *expectation* that participants who are *able* to work *will* do so. Client coaching always includes talk about the importance of employment income in achieving housing stability.

Staff explain that landlords often base their willingness to offer a tenancy on the client's ability to show some type of income, so a job search can't wait until the client is housed. Given the importance of employment, staff have "vocationalized" their case management practices.

Being in the RRH program is framed as a chance to move beyond homelessness once and for all. Staff ask clients about changes they want to make in their lives, the goals they have, and the kind of support they need from staff to make the changes and achieve their goals.

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Strengths-based Approach and Addressing Employment Barriers

ADVOCAP staff describe their approach as strengths-based and personalized. Building on the foundation of a trusting relationship, staff listen and ask questions to gain insight into clients' thoughts about employment, jobs they've enjoyed or hated, their work-related goals and challenges they face, and how prior experiences have shaped their hopes, fears, and expectations. Once they have a better understanding of clients' needs, preferences, and concerns, staff are better positioned to 1) help their clients determine the direction they want to take, 2) support them in developing a realistic plan that will help them get where they want to go, and 3) help them address anticipated obstacles to success.

ADVOCAP staff spend a lot of time working on identifying and figuring out how to address clients' employment barriers. Common barriers and solutions to employment include the following:

Transportation. Lack of transportation can be a major barrier to getting and keeping a second- or third-shift job, or a job with 12-hour shifts. Fond du Lac and Oshkosh have bus transportation, but service is infrequent on weekends and evenings and stops before the end of second shift. Green Lake County has no public transit.

ADVOCAP can offer interim financial help with transportation until clients receive paychecks and can put together a sustainable system. Also, Winnebago and Oshkosh Counties provide a reduced cab fare for after-hours travel for people who can prove they are working. Some clients have a car or bike that can get them to work, and staff encourage other clients to build relationships with people

with whom they can carpool. ADVOCAP also sponsors a zero-interest loan program that clients who have maintained 6 months of employment can use to buy a car. Staff work with each client to figure out the best options, given individual circumstances and resources.

Lack of childcare and/or lack of back-up childcare options. Second- and third-shift childcare is pretty much non-existent, but there are some in-home childcare providers. When possible, staff also help clients think through informal options, such as friends, relatives, or neighbors who are reliable, safe, and can be trusted with the care of their children.

Difficulty being on time and keeping appointments. Staff often must help clients break old dysfunctional patterns, such as showing up to work late. Sometimes the problem is related to a mental health issue or trauma and requires more professional help, when available.

ADVOCAP has funds that can help pay for a mental health assessment, if a client is willing, but not every client is willing. Staff encourage clients to see a primary care physician, have a physical, and get the referrals they need to get healthy. Of course, healing and life changes take time. The program emphasizes staff patience, building trusting relationships, listening, providing positive reinforcement, and helping clients address issues *they* want to address.

Keeping employment. ADVOCAP's relational, strengths-based, and personalized approach to client services helps support program participants survive the ups and downs of work. It also helps them deal with bigger threats to job retention, such as issues with a co-worker. Even if they don't meet face-to-face, staff can



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call or text clients to find out how things are going—the commute, the childcare, the workload, the relationship with the supervisor, etc. By touching base and staying connected with clients, staff are there to provide support when and if it is needed.

Losing or leaving a job. When this happens, the case manager works with the client to assess the experience, talk about what went wrong, what could've helped the client avoid the job loss, and what the client may want to do differently next time.

Community Partnerships

Collaboration and cooperation are central to the way ADVOCAP RRH staff deliver services. The six case managers (who work out of four different offices) meet regularly. They all have community partners with whom they discuss cases, brainstorm strategies to address challenges, and provide mutual support and encouragement for self-care. Staff share information with each other about new resources, new opportunities, and changes in staff at partner agencies.

ADVOCAP collaborates with the Forward Services Corporation (FSC), a multi-service agency that operates as an American Job Center (AJC) and offers services for TANF/SNAP-eligible clients, so clients can obtain all the benefits they are entitled to while working to stabilize their lives. ADVOCAP staff help clients gather the information their FSC case manager needs to establish eligibility for assistance and deliver effective services. Because most RRH participants are dually enrolled with FSC, ADVOCAP gets a release of information that lets the RRH case manager communicate with the FSC case manager. This communication allows a collaborative and non-duplicative approach in helping clients follow their

plans and achieve their goals. The release of information is particularly helpful if services are needed beyond the 1-year limit FSC has to work with each client. Because the two organizations have collaborated all along, ADVOCAP staff are prepared to pick up where FSC staff leave off, working on the same goals, “so clients don’t get treated one way at FSC and a different way at ADVOCAP.”

Another helpful program are Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)-funded employment services at the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development-administered AJCs. The centers in Fond du Lac and Oshkosh are called Comprehensive Job Centers (CJC). The CJCs provide a full array of employment and training-related services and house the full complement of mandatory WIOA partners (e.g., Veterans, Vocational Rehabilitation) onsite. The center in Green Lake County is an Affiliate Location, providing more limited employment and training-related services.

ADVOCAP staff encourage clients to take classes, such as resume writing or interviewing skills, offered at the AJCs and to take advantage of the help staff there can provide. For example, although RRH case managers may have connections with a small number of employers in the community, employment program staff at the AJCs typically have more contacts and can do the kind of job development that could easily make the difference between getting an interview and getting overlooked. RRH case managers can stage mock interviews and support other preparation for client meetings with employers, but career counselors at the AJCs may be able to provide more specific help in preparing for job applications or interviews. AJC staff also has been very helpful for clients with records of criminal justice involvement.

When appropriate, RRH clients are also referred to ADVOCAP's other in-house education and employment-related programs. Its adult basic education program helps participants earn their HSED (High School Equivalency Diploma) or GED (Certificate of General Educational Development). It also offers:

- A business development/self-employment program.
- A YouthBuild-type Americorps program for young adult participants (age 18 to 24) to continue their education, learn construction skills, and build houses that ADVOCAP sells to low-income families.
- A [Skills Enhancement Program](#), helping low-wage workers get a degree or certification at a technical or community college; providing individualized career

planning, job search, and job placement support; and offering financial support to cover class and/or training costs, as well as some child care and transportation costs.

- A United Way-funded job search assistance that targets clients in ADVOCAP's homeless-serving programs.

Finally, ADVOCAP offers clients a beneficial collaborative approach to services that encourages cross-program referrals. This approach encourages and empowers clients to get to know, and look to, the broader community for the support and opportunities they may want or need in the future.



Final Thoughts

The path from homelessness to housing stability is challenging, particularly for families with children. This is especially true if the breadwinner(s) has limited employment qualifications or other barriers that force them to enter the job market in relatively low-wage positions. Results from the 2016 and 2017 program years, as evidenced by Annual Performance Report data, suggest that ADVOCAP's RRH programs have given clients a strong start on the path to stability. A full 83% of program participants exited to permanent housing, and 44% exited with higher incomes (an average of \$1,551/month higher) than the incomes with which they entered the program. Whereas only 18% of participants entered the program with earned income, triple that number (54%) exited with earned income.

As discussed in this report, longer-term housing stability may well require a higher income than what many of the ADVOCAP clients have been able to achieve. Thus, future stability will depend on their efforts and successes in increasing their earnings and family income. But if the goal of RRH is to end participants' homelessness and put them on the right track, then the ADVOCAP RRH program has done its job well.