Investing in What Works: Addressing Trauma and Supporting Healing to Improve Community Safety

The Healing House model, conceptualized by individuals with lived expertise, is an intentional space for justice-systems involved Native American women to begin their journey towards healing and housing stability. Research has shown that trauma and abuse, particularly experienced by women, have strong links to involvement in the criminal justice system. Those impacts are felt generationally. Of the system-involved women who participated in developing this proposal, 90% have children of their own who have been impacted by their mother’s incarceration – collectively there are 184 children among this group of mothers.

“I needed to get away from my ex and everything that was connected to him. [I needed] help with the domestic abuse.”

“My biggest challenge has been trying to find housing. I have been denied so many times, before they even talk to me.”

Native Americans represent only 1.1% of Minnesota’s population, yet Native women make up 20% of Minnesota’s prison population, the largest disparity of Native women incarcerated anywhere in the United States. Approximately 70-80% of those women are transferred from Beltrami County, the likely location for the Healing House.

The goal of the Healing House is to create a space where women can address their trauma with a specific focus on sexual and domestic violence victimization. The focus is not securing housing and a job but rather on what women need to heal, to create long-term stability, support disconnection from cyclical involvement in the criminal justice system, and thrive. Everything from the design of the space to the programming offered and the policies that govern the house, will be created with direct input from women who have been incarcerated.

The catalyst for the Healing House was derived from engagement with incarcerated women through a federal grant administered by the DOC. But, once implemented, the Healing House will not be a DOC facility. Instead, it will be a housing resource tailored to the geographic community, responsive to the needs of the people it serves, and supported by resources within housing service system through partners such as the Minnesota Housing and Finance Agency, the Department of Human Services, and community organizations.
The Healing House model will:

- Provide a safe and effective intervention for housing stabilization;
- Create a housing resource in an area of the state where experiences of homelessness and housing instability disproportionately impact indigenous women;
- Create community-based services for women under the Healthy Start Program;
- Create an opportunity to invest in the development of restorative community-based services in a region of the state where institutional racism has long impacted the surrounding tribal nations and Native American community.

Request: Healing House Project Manager

**Invest in Temporary Coordinator for Planning, Building Partnerships, and Implementation of Next Steps**

The Walz-Flanagan Budget invests $150,000 in FY 2023, 2024, and 2025 to provide project management services in support of the Healing House model. The work of this temporary staff will be dedicated to building partnerships with the community, philanthropy, and connecting the project with resources within the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office at the Department of Public Safety. Upon project completion, the Healing House will serve justice-involved Native women and will not be directly regulated by the DOC. Instead, it will be led by the community, in partnership with the state.

“My cultural identity has absolutely helped me. My culture is where I gain strength. I held my rock on my way over here and sang. I feel stronger because of my culture, and it has made my family stronger as well. I spend a lot of time with my elders and children now. It has kept me from being around the using population. I have had a lot of “Ah ha” moments. I realized on my way over here that I don’t remember my OID number, and that was huge. Now I am mom, auntie, grandma. I am no longer that number that defined me for so long.”

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1 The Healing House is a product of conversations with incarcerated Native women through the administration of an Improving Criminal Justice Response Program (ICJR) grant from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women. The DOC, in partnership with Violence Free Minnesota, Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition, Sacred Hoop Coalition, and North West Indian Community Development Center (NWICDC), interviewed Native American women who are or were incarcerated at MCF-Shakopee to explore this population’s history of victimization and the context of their engagement with Minnesota’s criminal justice system.