



## **SAFER (Solutions for Achieving Fast, Effective Response)**

An Arapahoe County Foundation **SAFER Fund** was created to accept local donations to support the SAFER program to address the short-term housing needs of disabled individuals with behavioral health issues homeless due to COVID-19. As a first step to address this major health need for these individuals in our county, short-term motel vouchers are approved. Requests for emergency shelter vouchers go through one of three points of referral, South Metro Fire, pretrial services/sheriff's office, or behavioral health services. All participants have case oversight or management through Arapahoe County Pretrial Mental Health Program; "Bridges Program" (AllHealth Network,) with the 18th Judicial District Courts; AllHealth's ACT (assertive community treatment team); VOA veterans program; or public defender/alternate defense council social worker. SAFER provides participants motel vouchers and in collaboration with local non-profits for food and hygiene . SAFER coordinates with Arapahoe County 's Community Resources Department, Human Services, and Housing and community development departments; Veteran Services; local faith based communities (specifically those associated with Change the Trend); Hornbuckle Foundation; and its major partner AllHealth Network, and other local behavioral health providers. Due to the high needs and limited dollars, all coordination is done with volunteers and the number served depends on dollars available. SAFER grew out of a grass roots response to a need to address an overwhelming health and safety issues brought forward to the county's behavioral health subcommittee by South Metro Fire and Rescue regarding cold weather releases. This need grew exponentially during the COVID releases from the Arapahoe County Detention facility when the number of in-custody individuals went from 1100 to 623 in a matter of weeks.

### **SAFER'S Background**

#### **OUR ARAPAHOE COMMUNITY SPECIFICALLY:**

Colorado is experiencing a homelessness crisis due to a combination of rising housing costs, increased behavioral health needs, underfunded re-entry programs, and the lack of a robustly funded, statewide supportive housing infrastructure. Currently there are over 10,000 persons experiencing homelessness in Colorado



Even more Colorado residents are unstably housed and on the verge of homelessness. Many of these individuals have mental illness, substance abuse challenges, or other disabilities that make it extremely difficult to house them without a coordinated approach that links them to both housing and robust supportive services.

Arapahoe County, excluding Aurora, has no emergency shelter, coordinated homeless service program or navigation system to address this overwhelming need. Individuals experiencing chronic homelessness disproportionately utilize significant public and private government resources in the form of emergency room visits and first responders' time and resources. A 2018 study published by Colorado Dept. of Public Safety, which included Arapahoe County Detention facility, showed 80% of respondents reported being homeless in the year prior to their incarceration. Over sixty-four percent of those who reported homelessness also reported a mental health diagnosis. . This is the population is being released from our jail at an even larger alarming rate due to COVID-19. Arapahoe county Detention facility went from 1100 individuals to 623 in a matter of weeks due to COVID safety releases. Using the above data from Colorado Dept. of Public Safety, The need is great. The Arapahoe County Detention Facility went from 1100 to 623 inmates due to COVID releases within a matter of weeks. A study of homelessness in seven Colorado jails (including Arapahoe County Detention facility) by Jack Reed, Division of Criminal Justice; Department of Public Safety, 2018: [https://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/ors/docs/reports/2018\\_Jail\\_Homelessness\\_Study.pdf](https://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/ors/docs/reports/2018_Jail_Homelessness_Study.pdf) found that nearly 40% (39.7%) of 491 inmates across facilities reported that they will be homeless after release from jail. Over 60% of homeless respondents reported needing mental health treatment. 39% of the individuals being released homeless stated they needed drug treatment with 13.5% were unsure if they needed treatment. One can realistically estimate that of the 477 released individuals from Arapahoe County Detention Facility due to COVID, 191 were homeless. Of those 191 homeless released individuals, 116.51 individuals needed mental health treatment and 74.49 are in need of drug treatment with an additional 25.8 individuals who thought they might need drug treatment for a total of approximately 100 homeless individuals potentially needing drug treatment.

**RESPONSE:** These high needs and at risk vulnerable homeless individuals with mental health disorders, who have contact with first responders or are being



released from our county jail, have always fallen outside present resources and funding streams. COVID has exacerbated this lack of funds and resources. Critical non-congregate housing and supportive housing services are needed for this population. These services are non-Medicaid reimbursable, yet essential for this population.

An Arapahoe County behavioral health group had previously been working on a cold weather release problem. Several individuals from that group responded to this immediate need for non-congregate shelter for this vulnerable disabled population of homeless individuals unable, without assistance and support, to follow public health guidelines. This small group was comprised of South Metro Fire and Emergency, several private attorneys, a social worker, and a supervisor from All Health Network (the local community mental health agency). They collectively pooled personal funds to get SAFER able to start providing emergency shelter at motel/hotels. A motel in the community was found willing to address this community's need by renting rooms through vouchers. SAFER (Solutions for Achieving Fast, Effective Response) Fund was created under the nonprofit umbrella of Arapahoe County Foundation to accept local donations to address the short-term housing needs of disabled individuals with behavioral health issues homeless due to COVID-19. As a first step to address this major health need for these individuals and our county, short-term motel vouchers were approved. In addition to donations, SAFER applied for in collaboration with All Health Network and one with Arapahoe County for two separate grants to United Way - Help Colorado Now COVID grants. Arapahoe County was awarded 25 thousand dollars and All Health was awarded 12,500 dollars to fund vouchers for SAFER. Since then AllHealth Network in collaboration with SAFER has received in excess of \$100,000 from Arapahoe County COVID CARES dollars for motel/hotel vouchers. All grant funds are limited to motel/hotel vouchers. Hornbuckle Foundation provides peer coaching to vouchered guests and the consortium of nonprofits with Change the Trend help provide food, hygiene and other support.. SAFER is proud to announce its recent partnership with Mental Health Colorado to continue what SAFER began and to take the next steps beyond emergency sheltering by planning and beginning to implement more



appropriate and sustainable bridge housing while working towards the long-term goal of permanent supportive housing.

SAFER provides short-term emergency shelter vouchers in motel/hotels to vulnerable individuals living with mental health issues being released homeless from the Arapahoe Detention facility or homeless on the street in contact with co-responders as a result of COVID crisis. Homelessness is not just a public safety issue, but also a public health issue especially during COVID-19. Homelessness is intrinsically linked to sustained deterioration of mental and physical health for homeless individuals. These issues increase exponentially during COVID-19 when individuals with mental health disorders are being released from our county jail homeless. SAFERS' short-term shelter project is the first step to improve their situation while connecting them to more appropriate and longer-term assistance and solutions.

**RESULTS:**

Arapahoe County CARES dollars allowed SAFER to provide 51 unduplicated individuals non-congregate shelter as the first step to help the most vulnerable to stay alive, to follow public health guidelines, and access to case management. These funds and the collaboration between Arapahoe County, AllHealth Network, SAFER, and its other partners, allowed mental health providers to locate, shelter, and engage the most vulnerable at risk in treatment. This grant allowed for the expansion and further collaboration across the county and the community when the United Way Caring for Colorado dollars ended. No vouchered individuals were hospitalized due to COVID-19. Four individuals were hospitalized on mental health holds that were brief; early intervention and a place to go back to when they were released. All three were reaccepted after they were stabilized. Only three of the 51 were re-introduced into the jail.

This motel/hotel sheltering enabled case managers to locate and engage their clients. All were enrolled in or applying for Medicaid and food stamps and offered appropriate services. No vouchered guest contracted COVID-19. SAFER collaborated with a consortium of non-profits and business to provide weekly food



boxes and at least one fresh hot meal a week in addition to microwavable meals. In addition to the above longer term vouchers, SAFER was able to collaborate with Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office Co-responders to shelter individuals they encounter who needed emergency sheltering due to mental health crisis or inclement weather.

The United Way Caring for Colorado and the Arapahoe County's CARES grants allowed county partners to begin first steps for a sheltering/housing project when none existed before for this very vulnerable population. These grants ensured that the highest needs of the most severe population was not overlooked. Continued funding and collaboration between SAFER; all of SAFER's partners including Mental Health Colorado; Arapahoe County; DOH, DOLA; and private foundations are the next steps.

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**ARTICLES:**

<https://denverite.com/2020/10/08/suburbs-dont-have-as-many-shelters-as-denver-so-some-have-started-relying-more-on-motel-rooms/>

[https://issuu.com/thevillageradmin/docs/12-31-20\\_villager](https://issuu.com/thevillageradmin/docs/12-31-20_villager)

<https://www.9news.com/article/life/holidays/christmas/gifts-for-children-experiencing-homelessness/73-765d7d4f-7629-4e78-951a-edd5d5fd31a4>

**Donations:**All contributions go directly to providing temporary housing and supportive services. SAFER a Colorado non-profit is in the process of becoming its own 501 (c)(3). Until then donations can be made at:

<https://www.mightycause.com/story/Saferhomeless>. Or checks, payable to Arapahoe County Foundation: SAFER Fund, can be sent in care of Loren Kohler, Arapahoe County Administration Bldg.; 5334 S. Prince St.; Littleton, Co. 80120