



GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

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Date 10/28/2025

Contact Information

Organization Name: PA Home of the Sparrow (HOS)
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Phone: 610-647-4940
Website: www.homeofthesparrow.org
Year Incorporated: 1994
FEIN: 23-2775004

ED/CEO Name: Michelle Venema
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Board Chair Name: Kelly Besack
Board Chair Approval (check here): ☒
Primary Contact Name: Kathleen Sanger
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Organization Information:

Field/s of Interest:

☐ Arts, Culture, Heritage	☐ Education, Library	☐ Environment, Animals
☐ Health	☒ Human Services	☐ Social Justice, Civic Engagement
☐ Religion	If other, please describe:	

Mission: Home of the Sparrow's mission is to partner with women facing homelessness to secure housing and achieve long-term stability.

Geographic Area Served (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served):

Chester County

Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served. (Include Chester County # &/or % served.)

100% of the women and children we serve live in Chester County, PA and are experiencing a housing crisis that often includes eviction. Our typical client has a high school diploma or GED and is Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed (ALICE).

Annual Budget \$ \$1,526,114

76 % of budget for program expenses
6 % of budget for administrative expenses
18 % of budget for fundraising expenses
100% = total

7.5 # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff
13 # of Board Volunteers
111 # of Active Non-Board Volunteers
1,377 # of Volunteer Hours

Top 3-5 funding sources: Individuals (35%), Foundations (26%), Government (18%), Events (11%)

This grant proposal is for: ☒ Direct Service Programs & General Operating &/or ☐ Capacity Building

If Capacity Building Proposal, the focus is:

☐ Contingency Planning	☐ Partnerships, Collaborations	☐ Merger, Closure
☐ Mission, Vision, Strategy	☐ Board Engagement & Leadership	☐ Marketing, Communication
☐ Resource Development	☐ Operations	☐ Technology
If other, please describe:		

Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation: \$ Grants of any size

Proposal Summary: Rising costs and an affordable housing crisis are putting too many economically marginalized women and children at risk of homelessness in Chester County. As conditions worsen, HOS is addressing rising need with innovative programming that fills critical service gaps in the safety net. Your support is urgent as we strain our budget to keep up with need.



Proposal to The Chester County Community Foundation, October 2025

ORGANIZATON SUMMARY

Home of the Sparrow (HOS) was founded in 1994 by members of the Paoli Presbyterian Church to help local women and mothers who were facing homelessness. Within two years, HOS had purchased a building and with the help of 400 volunteers, transformed it into a Transitional Housing facility. Since our founding, HOS has evolved into a comprehensive homelessness prevention program that assists single women and single mothers facing eviction and housing insecurity in Chester County. Using the evidence-based Supportive Housing model, HOS ensures women maintain their housing, progress towards stability, and achieve a long-term housing solution.

Key Achievements

- Since 1994, HOS has helped over 9,000 women and children avoid the trauma of homelessness.
- Maintain low administrative to programming costs, about 7%.
- Successfully raised one year of operating costs in a savings account to mitigate a catastrophe thanks to a strong and wide funding base.
- Maintained full services without interruption throughout the pandemic and was one of the first nonprofits in Chester County to have all staff back in the office just four months after the nationwide shutdown.
- Continue to proactively address emerging needs in the community with innovative programming that fills service gaps and strengthens the safety net.

Distinction: Home of the Sparrow is **not a shelter**. Our **goal is prevention** – ensuring that women and children in Chester County never experience the trauma of homelessness. We are the only organization in the County dedicated solely to assisting single women and single mothers who are experiencing a housing crisis.

We are a member organization of Chester County Partnership to End Homelessness. Like our 24-Housing Solution Partners, we address immediate housing crises to help Chester County residents avoid homelessness with emergency financial assistance paid directly to landlords. 100% of the women we serve are *ALICE* (Asset Limited, Income Constrained and Employed) and are among the hardest hit by the county's affordable housing crisis and rising costs for basic living expenses.

After 35 years of service, HOS has developed a comprehensive set of unique services that provides a **safety net to maintain housing** and progress beyond housing insecurity, and we have a rich history of proactively responding to shifting and emergent needs in the community. We are a primary safety net organization and were recently recognized as West Chester Chamber of Commerce's Community Service

Organization of the Year. Current programmatic advancements to strengthen the safety net and fill service gaps include:

- Creating new affordable housing options specifically for pre-Senior women and women re-entering the community after incarceration by leasing apartments from trusted landlords and subleasing them to women in need.
- Subsidizing mental health services to alleviate the long waits that women and children are currently experiencing for appropriate therapeutic support via the County.
- Addressing the growing need for supervised summer programming so that our mothers can continue their full-time employment and trajectory toward self-sufficiency with peace of mind that their children are safe during the summer months.
- Launching a pilot program in partnership with Delaware County Community College to bridge employment and training gaps that make higher-wage jobs out of reach for the women we serve.

FUNDING REQUEST

Home of the Sparrow is eager to partner with Chester County Community Foundation and your donors who care deeply for the residents of this county. Your general operating investment will prevent over 925 vulnerable Chester County women and children from experiencing homelessness and will put them on a path towards economic self-sufficiency.

Community Need: Chester County, PA has little to no affordable housing for much of its low-income workforce. 40% of Chester County renters are cost burdened and rising costs and stagnant wages have had devastating consequences. Chester County has one of the highest eviction rates in Pennsylvania. Of the county's 50,031 renter households, 3,239 faced evictions between 7/2022 and 6/2023 (Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania). We expect worsening conditions if federal programs that many of our program participants rely on are cut. Once homeless, women lose educational and economic opportunities, are more likely to experience chronic medical and behavioral health issues, and their children are more likely to become homeless themselves as adults, creating a cycle of generational homelessness.

Program Description: With a focus on preserving a woman's current housing, our services include eviction prevention via direct rental payments to landlords, 12 to 24 months of trauma-informed case management alongside rental subsidies, and up to 3 years of on-going money management counseling and resource coordination, as well as access to the many in-kind donations HOS receives from the community, including household supplies not covered by the food benefits program, holiday gifts, gift cards, and back to school supplies. Services are delivered via trauma-informed case management practices and are buoyed by our deep community partnerships with over 25 local support providers to avoid duplication of services. Alongside this resource coordination, our Program Coordinators (case managers) build trusting relationships with the women we serve to learn the root causes of her housing insecurity so an appropriate housing plan can be constructed.

Our services mitigate the harms of housing insecurity and the individualized case management we provide helps women achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. Women receive financial, logistical, and emotional support to achieve their goals, including steps towards increasing their income, like access to job training and education programs, and money management and budgeting skills to reduce expenses.

Your support is urgent: As the county's affordable housing crisis worsens, and the cost of living continues to rise, community resources and federal benefits programs cannot provide a safety net. As a result, women have been staying in our program for longer, even as we increase our monthly rental subsidies to cover a widening gap between their income and their rent and living expenses. Previously, women accessed our programming for an average 12 to 18 months, during which time they received about \$350 per month in rental assistance. Today, it is taking at least 24-months to gain stability, and we are providing twice as much per month in rental subsidies.

As our costs per client increase, we are serving more women and children each year and expect need to worsen appreciably in the coming months as prices rise and safety net services break down. Further, the women and children we are serving are experiencing higher rates of mental and behavioral health needs, including school challenges, and rising frustration with the system: *"Prices of things are going up a lot quicker than my wages. The cost of everything is going up. I work so hard to just stay afloat, but the more you work the less help you get and it's frustrating. Sometimes it feels like I would be better off if I didn't work at all. No one would be able to kick me out of housing or say you're making too much money to qualify. It's very frustrating."*

In FY2025 we budgeted \$85,000 for critical financial support services, including mental health subsidies, camp/childcare subsidies, and other non-housing expenses, such as fees to renew a vehicle registration, a car repair, car insurance, or gasoline, which can be insurmountable obstacles. Because of rising costs and increased need, we expect to spend \$162,000 in FY2026. These services fill a critical gap for ALICE women and children and are vital to their success in achieving long-term economic self-sufficiency.

Meanwhile, like nonprofits across the nation, we are experiencing a downturn in revenue across multiple streams, including government sources, corporations, and individuals, making your support critical.

Measuring our Impact: An extensive body of research indicates the Supportive Housing model is both cost effective and successful for low-income individuals and families, including those facing complex issues like disability, mental illness, substance use disorder, and chronic health conditions. Our program model uses this evidence-based design that combines supportive services and financial assistance. The women and children we serve are maintaining their stability, avoiding the long-term devastating outcomes of homelessness, and progressing towards permanent housing and self-sufficiency.

In addition to tracking the number of women and children served, we track progress towards the individual stability goals each woman develops with the help of her case manager. Examples of individual indicators of success include:

- Informed understanding of the factors and experiences that led to their housing crisis.
- Creation of long-term strategies for housing stability that maximize and/or increase income through access to training and/or education.
- Obtaining financial literacy skills and a positive relationship with money.
- Gaining connections to mainstream and community services and supports, for example food, healthcare, clothing, furniture, and benefits.
- Becoming or staying current on mental and physical health needs for themselves and their children.

CONCLUSION Home of the Sparrow prevents homelessness by intervening before an eviction takes place. Prevention stops a woman and child from experiencing the trauma of homelessness and mitigates the long-term risks and poor outcomes that result from even a single episode of homelessness. With virtually no stock of affordable housing available in Chester County, it is imperative that we keep a woman stably housed while she works with us to increase her income, decrease her expenses, improve her credit score, and develop the self-confidence, empowerment, and resources to progress towards economic self-sufficiency. Your investment will help us address increasing need with critical programming that offers an innovative solution to the affordable housing crisis in Chester County, PA. Together, we will prevent homelessness for as many as 925 vulnerable women and children so they can thrive!

We thank you, most sincerely, for your thoughtful consideration and extend an invitation to come and meet with us so we may answer your questions and tell you more about our important mission!

ATTACHMENTS

- 501c3 Letter
- Board of Directors: <https://www.homeofthesparrow.org/board-of-directors/>
- Annual Report: <https://www.homeofthesparrow.org/financials-reports/>
- Audit: <https://www.homeofthesparrow.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Home-of-the-Sparrow-Audit-63024-Final.pdf>
- FY2026 Operating Budget with FY2025 Actual Comparison
- Strategic Plan