



A unique, “inside” perspective on housing and community development from the executive director of the Washington State Housing Finance Commission.

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The Washington Families Fund: Spawning partnerships that are helping homeless families

The Washington Families Fund (WFF) is an incredible success story. Established by the Washington State Legislature in 2004, WFF is a critical financial commitment by the state dedicated to helping homeless families get the services they need to break the cycle of homelessness. In just two short years we have seen funding that has grown from \$2 to \$9 million, creating a phenomenal partnership between the public sector and private philanthropic organizations. We have also seen the extremely successful launch of the Fund's third-party grant-making, administration and technical assistance functions through the capable hands of AIDS Housing of Washington.

To get WFF off the ground so quickly was extraordinary. How did all this come about? This is the story I'll be telling in this newsletter.

THE GATES FOUNDATION THINKS BIG

You can't understand the genesis of WFF without reviewing the development of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's efforts to make a big difference for homeless families in our region. The Gates Foundation launched its Sound Families Initiative in 2000 with a \$40 million commitment to build 1,500 units to provide homeless families in three counties in the Puget Sound region with service-enriched transitional housing.

Service-enriched housing gives homeless families a home for long enough to stabilize their lives and get their bearings, in conjunction with the services they need to address the causes that brought them to that juncture. These services may include needs like substance abuse

treatment, mental health treatment, vocational counseling and training, and parenting classes. Sound Families has always been envisioned by the Gates Foundation as a partnership. \$40 million is a generous commitment, but it isn't going to solve family homelessness by itself. It was devised from the start to bring in and leverage the contributions and efforts of housing and service providers, property managers, and public agencies.

One of the most essential elements of Sound Families' success was the formation of partnerships with housing authorities in King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties. The housing authorities secured waivers that allowed for the flexible use of Section 8 project vouchers, which in turn helped nonprofit grantees cover their operating costs. As such, Sound Families has been the catalyst for setting in motion long-term solutions that bring everyone to the table.

As of April of this year, Sound Families had funded more than 1,100 units of housing and served more than 2,500 adults and children. More than 30 new partnerships have been formed through the initiative. And Sound Families allocated the necessary resources to fund a longitudinal evaluation of the work being accomplished. This evaluation has been performed through the University of Washington's School of Social Work, and positive results have been coming in for some time now.



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THE IDEA FOR WFF IS BORN

I've been lucky to have a front row seat for observing Sound Families' success, having served on Sound Families' Steering Committee, which sets policies and makes funding decisions. About three years ago it was becoming increasingly clear to us that, as Sound Families was seeing its goals of producing service-enriched housing met, the funding to ensure the sustainability of those services was in peril. For the work of the Initiative to continue, we needed to find a way to fund those critical services for homeless families.

And that's where the idea for WFF was born. The Steering Committee came up with the idea of a fund combined of both public and private money that would make multi-year service grants. The point was not only to continue the great work that Sound Families had launched; it was also to make these kinds of intensive, turn-your-lives-around services available to homeless families across the state—beyond the three counties that already had the opportunity through the Initiative.

LEVERAGING SOUND FAMILIES' LARGESSE

Since its initial planning phase, Sound Families has subcontracted with the **City of Seattle Office of Housing** to tap into the expertise and leadership of its staff in administering the

program. In 2003 Katie Hong, Maureen Kostyack, Bill Rumpf and other staff members at the Office of Housing brainstormed about putting together the WFF concept and adding the details to make it work.

Katie Hong has served both the public sector and private funder worlds with Sound Families, formerly as Director of the City of Seattle Office of Housing, and now as **Acting Director, Pacific Northwest Giving for The Gates Foundation**.

From the start, Katie says, Sound Families insisted on local public funder support for every project. "We don't put money in unless they decide to put money in. Sound Families' funding model was that we helped fund part of capital, we helped fund part of the service model, but it was for a five-year commitment. And it wasn't at 100%—it was one-third of the service budget. We thought that this money could help nonprofits use that and leverage that to seek other money. And they did.

"But we also knew that operating dollars were critical," Katie continues. "We wanted to make sure we could work with the housing authorities throughout the state of Washington if we set up this fund: If grantees got WFF awards, would they also be able to access Section 8 dollars? Project-based Section 8 is a critical source of operating dollars."



REPRESENTATIVE RUTH KAGI
Chair of the House Children & Family Services Committee

TAKING IT TO THE LEGISLATURE

After some initial conversations with the governor's office, it became clear that a mandate like WFF would need to go to the legislature for funding. That's where **Maureen Kostyack** really rolled up her sleeves. Maureen is **Housing Program and Development Manager** with the **City of Seattle Office of Housing**. Maureen was asked to work with statewide advocacy organizations on advancing the proposal to the legislature.

"Tom Byers, a consultant working with Sound Families, made the contact to **Representative Ruth Kagi**," says Maureen, "and I went along with him to describe the proposal." This was in mid-2003. Ruth Kagi, who represents the 32nd District, is **Chair of the House Children & Family Services Committee**, under which Housing was subsumed at that time.

"I thought it was a great idea," Ruth Kagi says. "To have a group come to a legislator, and say, 'We have private money we're willing to put into this if the state will just pony up one-time money.' This was at a time when we were facing severe deficits. We did not want to put money into ongoing funding streams."



"We thought that this money could help nonprofits use that and leverage that to seek other money. And they did."

KATIE HONG, Acting Director, Pacific Northwest Giving for The Gates Foundation



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“The fact that the three largest statewide housing associations were behind the idea made it a big issue for everyone.”

MAUREEN KOSTYACK
Housing Program & Development Manager, City of Seattle Office of Housing

For Ruth, there were two other compelling reasons for getting behind WFF so strongly. “The evaluations from Sound Families so clearly showed the impact on children, families, employment—just a whole range of issues that the state is very concerned about. It was the combination of that evaluation, which was outstanding, and the stepping up with the private partnership, which was a commitment. Along with the one-time funding: those three factors drove the issue from the very beginning.”

HOUSING GROUPS LEND SUPPORT

The other part of the effort was to get statewide housing-related organizations on board. The Washington Low Income Housing Alliance (WLIHA), the Washington State Coalition for the Homeless (WSCH) and the Association of Washington Housing Authorities (AWHA) were all preparing their legislative agendas for 2004. Maureen pitched the idea of WFF to all three organizations to ask them to make it a legislative priority. They all signed on. “The fact that the three largest statewide housing associations were behind the idea made it a big issue for everyone,” Maureen adds. “From there, it was still pretty much a concept but the goal was to get everyone together, understand it better, and develop it into a proposal.”

With the assistance of WLIHA, Maureen and others established a work group that worked through the fall of 2003 to refine the proposal. “There was a lot of enthusiasm,” says Maureen. “Those organizations outside of the three counties where the Sound Families program was in place wanted to have the same opportunity to combine public and private money and Section 8 funding. We had housing authorities from all parts of the state and a lot of service providers come together in several statewide meetings. People flew in to SeaTac to work on this. It was a fast but focused and thorough effort. In the end, WSCH took the lead in terms of advocacy, but the others were very much involved.”

WFF LEGISLATION MOVES QUICKLY

Ruth worked extensively with Greg Shaw, then-Director of Pacific Northwest Giving for the Gates Foundation, to fashion a bill that he thought the philanthropic community could support. “The Gates Foundation was very present in the legislature in terms of stating the need,” Ruth reports. “Of course a foundation can’t lobby, but they did an extraordinary job of educating legislators about the need for ongoing services, and the potential benefits. Greg Shaw was one of the leaders in moving WFF forward. I met with a number of editorial boards with him, to talk about this partnership, and we had

a lot of conversations about how this partnership could and should work.”

The WFF legislation moved quickly. “I think everyone was surprised. It was a brand new concept—these often take a couple of years. Helen Sommers, the Appropriations Committee Chair, was excited about it. And with Speaker Frank Chopp on board as well, we had strong leadership support in the House.”

Although the bill did not pass, WFF had strong bipartisan support as a project that could be funded from the state’s operating budget. “I love legislative strategy,” Ruth says. “Even though it did not pass, the fact that we had introduced that bill and we had hearings on it, and people came down and testified—we got a lot of people educated and excited about this whole concept. And we were able to move it forward.”

Negotiations in the Senate presented a struggle. “We actually almost lost it at the 11th hour,” Ruth recalls. A series of intense conversations that took place with Senator Darlene Fairley on Ways and Means and Helen Sommers resulted in Helen calling Senator Joe Zarelli, ranking minority member of the Senate Ways and Means. “And we worked it out,” Ruth says. “Clearly the intent was to fund WFF, and there was language in the budget that provided the policies that we needed.”

So in 2004 WFF was put into the state’s operating budget. The initial state contribution to WFF was \$2 million, which was met by \$1 million from the Gates Foundation. The Gates Foundation offered an additional \$1 million as an incentive match: if other private funders



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would step forward to collectively add \$1 million, the WFF total could come to \$5 million.

One of the challenges to work out at the beginning was how to administer WFF. "This was an unusual state role," Ruth points out. The money was allocated to the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) to put in the Fund, and to determine how it would be spent. "We were well aware that when there is state funding involved, there's a strong need for accountability. All of those issues have to be worked through. CTED was very responsive at getting to a solution. They did a great job in making sure state rules were followed and accountability issues were addressed, but that it was flexible enough that it would work."

BRIDGING DISCIPLINES

CTED was charged with establishing the administration of WFF. "The concept was already embedded that we would have a third-party administrator to broker between philanthropies and the state," says **Stephen Buxbaum**. Stephen is **CTED's Assistant Director, Housing Division**.

Stephen believes that the most unique feature of WFF is the direct connection it creates between public funding and philanthropic funding. "In advance," he says, "we were making commitments of state resources, with the direct intent to leverage philanthropic resources. What was special in this arrangement was that we needed an intermediary that was active and operating in both worlds. Having that intermediary was a critical part of this whole approach." Stephen and CTED set up an advisory commit-

tee that included all parties involved in getting WFF funded, including housing authorities, service providers, and several private funders. A request for qualifications was circulated. They sought an organization that had a good track record in program administration, program evaluation, and ongoing technical assistance—as well as fundraising.

"We were intent on expanding the number of projects that directly combined services with housing," Stephen says. "AIDS Housing of Washington (AHW) has a distinguished record in performing service-enriched housing; first in working with individuals living with HIV. But their orientation has gradually expanded, and they have broad experience working with homeless populations. They were perfect in many ways to fill this new niche of a provider that was bridging disciplines."

Within six months of WFF's creation, AHW was selected as the administrator. In record time,

AHW had created structures and procedures for WFF, circulated RFPs to agencies across the state, created an evaluation process and announced the first 10 grantees. Not to mention garnering the additional \$1 million from private funders across the state to match the Gates Foundation's \$1 million—and raise the total WFF pot from three to five million dollars. "So much of why we were able to pull this off so quickly was because of the amazing capacity and wonderful leadership of AHW," says Katie Hong.

Adds Stephen, "Philanthropies have been able to come together in a very powerful way to pool their resources. But at the same time, they're not losing their own special identities. The way AHW is managing this resource, they're being very thoughtful to the needs of all the different funders."



"We were intent on expanding the number of projects that directly combined services with housing. AIDS Housing of Washington (AHW) were perfect in many ways to fill this new niche of a provider that was bridging disciplines."

STEPHEN BUXBAUM

Assistant Director, Housing Division, CTED



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AHW: BREAKING NEW GROUND WITH WFF

The way **Betsy Lieberman** tells it, AIDS Housing of Washington was the only intermediary agency in the state that had the interest, and perhaps the capacity at the time, to apply for this role with WFF—which she affably calls ‘Woof.’ Betsy is the founding **Executive Director of AHW**, which has been a national technical assistance provider for some 15 years. Betsy and AHW got their start back in 1988, when their original mission was to develop and build a 35-bed skilled nursing facility in Seattle for people with AIDS called the Bailey-Boushay House.

Since that time, AHW organized the first national housing conference for AIDS, out of which emerged the National AIDS Housing Coalition. They also lobbied to get a dedicated HUD funding stream that funds AIDS housing across the country, now known as Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA). They’ve created a total of 141 units of housing for people living with HIV/AIDS and their families in King County. And AHW’s National Technical Assistance Program (NTAP) advises organizations all over the country on planning and implementing AIDS housing and support service policies and programs at both state and local levels.

AHW’s staff has grown from four to 18, but Betsy laughs that it feels like it should be 700. They have a lot of irons in the fire.

What people working with them value is their effectiveness. “I always felt like we needed to run ourselves like a business,” she says. “We really pride ourselves by having the back office side of our agency working. People knew we



BETSY LIEBERMAN
Executive Director of AIDS
Housing of Washington

had all the structures in place.” AHW subcontracted with the **Corporation for Supportive Housing**, who helped them develop the underwriting for the services side of WFF—“because no one around the country had ever developed a multiple-use service funding underwriting tool,” Betsy says.

“The timing was incredibly important,” she believes. “The tipping point has happened on supportive housing.” Here’s what Betsy and AHW are seeing and doing in their work with WFF:

Agencies within the same region are partnering together to apply for WFF grants.

In the first funding round announced last year, five Spokane organizations banded together to win a WFF 10-year grant, something each probably couldn’t have accomplished on their own [see the accompanying article on **Spokane Families Futures**]. This year, three organizations in Yakima accomplished the same feat.

There’s a significant amount of demand for these services. “It’s a fantastic opportunity,” Betsy says. WFF funds up to \$3500 per year per unit of services; projects encompass

between 10 and 20 WFF units. AHW received some 55 applications in the first round in 2005, and about 35 in 2006.

The funding is being used creatively. One of the 2006 grantees, Clallam County’s Serenity House, is applying its grant to service-enriched multi-site homeless family projects in Port Angeles and Forks—in both their own housing, as well as leased homes. 2005 grantee Community Psychiatric Clinic in Seattle [see the accompanying article on **The Willows**] is targeting treatment for homeless pregnant and brand-new mothers who are both chemically addicted and in need of mental health services.

AHW wants to use WFF more judiciously.

Some families require a lot more funding than others. “We’re working right now to restructure the fund,” says Betsy. “We want to fund, probably multiple levels, but at least two service levels for homeless families.” This includes developing “a more robust funding stream that can serve the 15 or 20% of what are called chronically homeless families—those that have continued to cycle.”

AHW is committed to finding additional local and national resources for evaluation.

“There’s a lot of interest around the country in the data,” she affirms. “We’re trying to work thoughtfully with some national foundations around funding a more robust evaluation for WFF. There is real interest, and very little data nationally, on homeless families around the country. This is the first time there’s going to be a statewide data set.”



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WFF'S APPEAL TO PHILANTHROPIES

As I mentioned earlier, a large part of AHW's role with WFF has been fund-raising on the private funding side, initially, to raise that first \$1 million to match the Gates Foundation's challenge grant—and to continue raising awareness of and support for WFF among private foundations. This is a remarkable piece of what Betsy and AHW have helped to achieve. Private foundations from all over the state have stepped up to the plate. Initial funders included The Seattle Foundation, Spokane's Foundation Northwest, Tacoma-based Ben B. Cheney Foundation, the Community Foundation of North-Central Washington, the Boeing Foundation and the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation.



TRICIA MCKAY,
Executive Director
The Medina Foundation

One strong partner from the start has been the **Medina Foundation**, headed by **Executive Director Tricia McKay**. Homelessness, including support services for the homeless, is an important focus for this foundation. "We fund from shelter to transitional to permanent housing," she says.

Tricia and the Medina Foundation got involved with WFF early on. "I approached the Gates Foundation in 2003," Tricia says. "I thought Sound Families was doing such great work—we could go and do something on our own, as a

small foundation and a small staff, or we could build on what Gates had already done." When discussions about WFF first began to emerge, "they approached me about this as a concrete possibility. And I thought it was a great thing to explore with my board."

While WFF was still in the planning phase, Tricia was able to provide the perspective of a private philanthropic organization in terms of how WFF might be structured to accommodate their giving objectives: "What it would look like and how it would function as far as selecting projects, providing technical assistance, and measuring the success of the program," says Tricia.

Tricia and Katie Hong accompanied Betsy Lieberman on several road trips to meet with both eastern and western Washington foundations to enlist their support for WFF. Betsy Lieberman remembers this well. "As a nonprofit leader who has raised a lot of private money over the years, it's really profound when you have a partnership with your philanthropic partners. It gives you total credibility," Betsy recalls. What was the appeal of WFF to the Medina Foundation? "Speaking from our own perspective," says Tricia, "there's so much need in the homelessness arena. We fund organizations that provide services and it's just a slog every year for them to raise money to provide these services. As an individual foundation we can be out there investing our money in a variety of organizations and hope that it can really make a difference. But this is such a wonderful opportunity to actually pool our funding, for all of us who want to see the same outcomes: we want to see people move out of homelessness into

self-sustaining lives and permanent housing."

For Tricia and Medina, with WFF, not only is the impact magnified, but the process is more efficient. "As an individual foundation, we can't fund all the technical assistance. There's the whole process of selecting the grantees. We can't fund sophisticated evaluation: we don't have the staff capacity or expertise. These are the things we should be working on together. And then we all get the benefits of best practice, great research, great pilot projects like Sound Families that truly laid the groundwork for WFF. Homelessness is an almost overwhelming problem. If we're truly going to tackle it, we have to do it working together. We realize that as investors in social change, this was one of the best ways that we can do it.

"AHW is one of the key reasons for the success of this effort," Tricia says. "They're a non-government organization everyone is comfortable with, they bill on the quarter hour, have a really talented staff, and are quite nimble. Ensuring that the funding is going to be used well has ensured the success of this program. Our foundation would not have been as inclined to send our money to a government agency."

15 PROJECTS FUNDED AND \$9 MILLION IN FUNDING—AND COUNTING

By any measure, WFF has notched a remarkable string of successes in two short years.

With the additional \$4 million allocated from the 2006 legislative session, funding for WFF has gone in two years from \$2 to \$5 to \$9 million. Last month, WFF received a private funding commitment of \$200,000 from



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Oregon-based Meyer Memorial Trust. Also last month, AHW announced the second round of grants, to bring the total of 10-year service-enriched housing projects for homeless families from 10 to 15. These projects span 11 Washington counties.

WFF is expected to double its grant award payout during the next three years. As part of WFF's technical assistance mandate, AHW visits many applicant agencies, and advises many of those who don't get funded on how to retool their application for the next year's round.

Another aspect of WFF's success is the new model it has provided for funding other worthy projects. Ruth Kagi thinks so highly of the WFF model that she's since applied it to other legislation, particularly early learning, which is an abiding legislative issue for her. "Working with the Gates Foundation showed us how effective this private/public partnership and collaboration can be," she says. In addition, using an outside administrator for the funding "is also a model I believe we'll follow with early learning."

A FANTASTIC JOB—BUT WE CAN'T CLAIM VICTORY YET

"WFF was a wonderful project," Ruth sums up. "I just continue to be impressed. The role of strong evaluation is clear. It was very defined, you could really see what success would be, and it has been implemented pretty much just exactly the way I envisioned it. Except there's been more of a private match in dollars than was even promised. Everyone has done a fantastic job."

Despite WFF's milestones thus far, the fact remains that although 15 projects have gotten funding, more than four times that many have been turned away. As Katie Hong says, "we can't claim victory yet."

In my view, the story of the Washington Families Fund provides a lesson in how to fund important projects on a long-term basis so they can achieve results. It's a story about people coming together from across the state—from within the legislature, from city and county jurisdictions and all of our state's public housing authorities, from private foundations and homeless coalitions and affordable housing advocates and nonprofits that serve homeless families—who all realized that if we can pool our resources and expertise we can accomplish great things.



JULIE DHATT-HONEKAMP
Executive Director of Mission
and Service for Transitions

SPokane Agencies Collaborate to Win WFF Grant

In late 2004, **Northeast Washington Housing Solutions (NWHS)**, Spokane's regional housing authority, brought together a diverse group of housing organizations to apply for a grant from WFF to support a portion of the services each provides to homeless families. "We became the core group of what we call **Spokane Families Futures (SFF)**," says **Julie Dhatt-Honekamp**. Julie is **Executive Director of Mission and**

Service for Transitions, the agency tapped as lead in the WFF application process.

"There's a great spirit of collaboration in this town," Julie says. She counts seven partners in this effort, which includes WFF as the funding partner and NWHS as the Section 8 operating fund provider. Two of the SFF partners run transitional housing programs, St. Margaret's and the Transitional Living Center. Two agencies, Spokane Neighborhood Action Program and Summit View, are permanent housing providers. Additionally, The Arc of Spokane, which provides services to disabled individuals, contributes to SFF in a homeownership capacity: they work with clients served by the partnership who are working towards homeownership.

SFF won a grant from WFF in the first application round, in 2005. "One of the things that's so fantastic about this funding is the 10-year commitment," says Julie. "It helps providers get off the treadmill of having to be constantly applying for funds. With the time that's freed up, we can focus on best practices, outcome evaluation, or other high priorities. Ten years is just unheard of in our world. It's not a huge amount of money but we're grateful to have it."

Altogether, SFF serves 20 families every year with the WFF grant. The funds come through Transitions, and each of the participating agencies get a portion. "Some may use it to fund a caseworker," Julie says, "some use it to provide parenting services or vocational counseling." The one commonality is that all families have a case management plan. "Families work with their case manager to develop a plan based on their goals. Their services are customized to their needs."



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“Spokane Family Futures is about wrapping services around these families,” Julie sums up. “Housing is key, but what these families need also are services that address parenting, job training, substance abuse, mental health—and that’s what finally stabilizes that family. For the kids, too: not only to prevent further harm, but to remedy through these services any harm that may have been done. For us, it’s about housing and services linked together with the goal of long-term stability.”

THE WILLOWS BREAKS NEW GROUND IN PROVIDING SERVICE-ENRICHED HOUSING FOR PREGNANT AND POSTPARTUM HOMELESS WOMEN

WFF grant recipient **The Willows**, in unincorporated King County, is a dream transitional housing project. Launched in April 2005, The Willows helps a homeless population that many family housing programs have found too tough to take on. The 15 units of service-enriched housing owned and run by Seattle’s **Community Psychiatric Clinic (CPC)** provide support and specialized treatment for homeless mothers who are either pregnant or up to six months postpartum. These mothers also have both persistent mental illnesses and drug or alcohol addictions.

Mike Nielsen, Residential Services Director at CPC, is delighted with how The Willows has come together, and how they’re already starting to see families graduate from the program into more independence and greater stability. The Willows is the product of multiple service providers, a host of funders who have provided capital, services and operating dollar support for



MIKE NIELSEN
Residential Services
Director at Community
Psychiatric Clinic

this brand-new facility—and enormous vision. A portion of The Willows’ original capital and services budget came from the Sound Families Initiative.

The Willows began as a collaboration between CPC and the **Parent-Child Assistance Program (PCAP)**, a project developed by Dr. Therese Grant, an epidemiologist with University of Washington Department of Psychiatry. PCAP is both a research project and a direct service program that works with high-risk homeless women for three years. PCAP projects, says Mike, have been highly successful—they’re located all over the state, and are now being replicated nationally. One of biggest PCAP’s challenges has been securing homes for the women in the program.

“We knew how to do all three,” Mike says, referring to CPC’s expertise in housing, mental health treatment and support services, and substance abuse treatment. Mike and his Willows partners, including PCAP, worked for over a year on project and program design to “make this a one-stop shop for women and their kids—to wrap as rich an array of services around the project as we possibly could.”

At The Willows, substance abuse and mental health treatment are just the beginning. PCAP has staff on site. A nurse from the Public Health department addresses pre- and post-natal health concerns. Staff from the Parent Trust for Washington Children work with moms to help them build their parenting skills. Child and family specialists on staff work with resident children who have emotional difficulties or have experienced abuse. Many of the children have had fetal exposure to alcohol and drugs. “The kids we’re working with are all very much at risk,” Mike says. Part of The Willows’ goal is family reunification. Many of the residents have been involved with the courts and CPS, and have had children removed from their custody.

In speaking with Mike, it’s clear that The Willows has truly been a labor of love for many of its partners. “Sound Families has been great, but we still had a service dollar gap. The WFF was just a godsend,” he reflects. “We applied in the first round and got it—we were overjoyed. I can’t say enough about what that grant award has meant to us, including on the credibility side with other funders. When WFF came along, we had a big hole in our service budget, and we still haven’t completely closed that gap. But we think this project is important enough that we’re continuing to search for other funding.”