

# The Simpson Community:

## Staying True to Our Mission During Challenging Times

Dear Friends,

The past nine months have presented significant uncertainty, emotional turmoil, and unprecedented challenges. We have worked together to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and advocate for racial justice following the tragic loss of George Floyd at the hands of police.

**Amidst these challenging times, we stay true to our mission to house, support, and advocate for people experiencing homelessness.** With dignity and respect for the uniqueness of each person, we help individuals and families navigate challenging barriers, advocate against systemic injustices, and help our guests and participants get stabilized in our communities through safe shelter and sustainable housing.

**Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, we have maintained our commitment to 24/7 shelter operations, and we will continue to do so for the duration of the pandemic.**

We extend our gratitude to our dedicated staff members who have, without interruption, responded to the needs of individuals and families (531 households) through phone, Zoom, and socially distanced check-ins, deliveries of food and basic needs items, distance learning support for

children, and other strategies to ensure housing stability and social connections.

We are grateful to our community supporters who have provided generous donations for our shelter program during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the onset of COVID-19, we have provided safe shelter for 242 guests and helped 26 guests transition to stable housing.

With an alarming number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, Simpson is engaged in community efforts to develop and offer safe and dignified temporary housing solutions – and help transition individuals into housing as quickly as possible. Simpson offers leadership and collaboration, leveraging nearly 40 years of experience in shelter operations, to help increase the number of shelter beds and develop our community's continuum of housing solutions.

### **I would like to share with you our recent work and accomplishments:**

In September, we announced our plans for moving forward with the new Simpson Community Shelter and Apartments at the site of our current shelter. This modern

## Announcing Simpson Community Shelter and Apartments

Together, we are building up a national best practice shelter and housing model, a welcoming, low-barrier space that creates community and embraces the dignity and uniqueness of the shelter guests.

Visit [simpsonhousing.org](https://simpsonhousing.org) to learn more.



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## OUR MISSION

To house, support, and advocate for people experiencing homelessness.

(continued from the cover)

and dignified low-barrier shelter space will include 70 beds and 42 units of permanent housing to meet the short-term housing needs of our guests and position us to provide shelter, advocate support, and intensive resources to guests. For more information, visit [simpsonhousing.org](http://simpsonhousing.org).

With generous funding from Hennepin County, Simpson added 20 new women's shelter beds at our current shelter site in September, accommodating the increased need for housing and services for women experiencing homelessness.

The Single Adult Shelter Collaborative, including Simpson and four other shelter partners, and Hennepin County have been actively working on projects that will add another 200 shelter beds to our shelter system by the end of the calendar year.

## There is more work to do.

Together, we are addressing the lack of affordable housing and complex issues surrounding the housing crisis – by doing what we do best – building partnerships with our participants, community organizations, and people like you to help end homelessness, one individual and one family at a time. The commitment of our Simpson community makes this work possible.

## Will you please join us by making a gift to help end homelessness?

We are grateful for your partnership in this critical work. Thank you for your generosity and support.

Sincerely,



Steve Horsfield  
Executive Director

## Double the Impact of Your Gift!

Every new or increased gift  
(10% or more) received by  
**December 31, 2020** will be  
matched dollar for dollar  
up to \$100,000 by the  
**Frey Foundation, Tom Barry,  
and The Barry Foundation.**

## Three ways to make a gift:

1. Make a donation online at [simpsonhousing.org](http://simpsonhousing.org).
2. Mail a check in the enclosed envelope.
3. Make a gift on Give to the Max Day – November 19, 2020.

**give** TO THE **MAX**   
Nov. 19, 2020



Aidan and Molly, middle school mentoring coordinator

## Meet Aidan

Thirteen-year-old Aidan is a smart and outgoing eighth grader with a great sense of humor. He likes school – especially science and social studies. He likes to spend time with his friends at the neighborhood park, playing soccer and basketball, skateboarding, and watching baseball. Aidan also participates in Simpson's Middle School Mentoring Program. He has been matched with his mentor Jessica for just over one year.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and Simpson's volunteer program on pause, Middle School Mentoring Program Coordinator Molly Dubois and her Children and Youth Services (CYS) teammates worked closely with students and families, like Aidan, to support their needs.

"Initially, a lot of time was spent responding to families' immediate needs. Many kids were frustrated to not be in school, to not see friends. The murder of George Floyd caused many young people to feel more isolated and scared. Families lost access to neighborhood grocery stores and needed help getting food. Talking about feelings became most important. There was also a focus on the need to just be a kid," she says.

Molly offers individual support to students and families over Zoom once or twice per week. When the weather is nice, she meets with students outdoors. Molly creates individualized programming that incorporates internet research, craft activities, and learning related to student interests. "I've been surprised and excited by how much connection can happen within these virtual relationships," she says.

Prioritizing the youth perspective, Molly turns to the youth she serves to help design programming. "At Simpson, we know the best thing to do is listen to the young people we partner with. It's not just a hope, but an expectation. The

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During one of their one-on-one meetings, Aidan shared with Molly his vision for what soon became an outdoor, socially distanced summer kids' club, a weekly group of young people who also participate in Simpson's Housing and Middle School Mentoring Programs.

"I talked to Molly and thought it would be fun if we all got together in a group and did activities we like. I already knew the kids in the group. I talked to them about what they liked. One of my friends likes hopscotch, so we played the game. One day we drew stuff with chalk and guessed about each other's drawings. We played sports. Some days we would just talk. I helped Molly pick prizes. Everybody talks about how much they enjoyed the group," he says.

Molly is pleased with how the summer kids' club evolved. She found it a fun and creative way for young people participating in Simpson's Family Housing Program to connect with one another.

She is proud of Aidan for his leadership in creating a positive sense of community for youth: "Aidan is so humble and modest. He took the planning by the helm. He's an incredibly thoughtful guy."





The Children and Youth Services Team having a staff meeting in the park

## Navigating Distance Learning With Families

**Simpson's Family Housing Program, our largest program, is geared toward improving housing outcomes, increasing independence, and ending generational homelessness. Last year, we served 300 families with 600 children.**

The Children and Youth Services (CYS) Team supports the needs of each child and their families in the Family Housing Program through tutoring, mentoring, and parent education. Students participating in our programs achieve positive outcomes including enhanced literacy skills, school attendance, social-emotional connections, and participation in new community activities. The CYS program includes a literacy mentoring program for elementary school-aged students and a middle school mentoring program. Simpson also offers a site-based tutoring program at Passage Community, a Simpson-owned building that provides transitional housing for families.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Simpson staff pivoted quickly to respond to the basic needs of parents and children in our Family Housing Program. As students adapted to distance learning, the CYS Team helped facilitate the process with creativity and sensitivity, ensuring that students' educational and social-emotional needs were met, and all families had equitable access to resources.

COVID-19 and distance learning compound the barriers and stress of families who have experienced homelessness. Family homelessness, caused by systemic inequities and a lack of affordable housing, is devastating for the entire family and has particularly dire long-term

consequences for children – affecting their ability to learn and grow.

Complex barriers for families experiencing homelessness include job loss, insufficient income, domestic violence, and/or mental, chemical, or physical health challenges. People who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) experience disproportionately high rates of homelessness, educational disparities, and other socioeconomic inequities resulting from white supremacy culture and institutionalized racism.

Children and Youth Services Manager Jocelyn Pickreign describes the impact of COVID-19 and the team's role of walking alongside families as they navigate the added challenges of distance learning:

"Quarantine and social distancing are stressful for everyone. Families participating in Simpson's Family Housing Program, who recently transitioned out of homelessness, were already in a place of chronic stress. From the onset of these challenging circumstances, our team's goal has been to minimize learning loss, stress, and social isolation for children, youth, and families."

### Overcoming Disparities and Ensuring Equity

When school districts moved to distance learning, the CYS Team worked diligently with families to build on their strengths and creatively overcome barriers.

"A parent might say, 'I'm overwhelmed with distance learning. I could use the support. I have three kids with different learning needs in multiple schools.' Our team would ask questions: 'How are you and your children doing? Do you need a tablet and headphones? Do you need access to internet service? What other basic needs do you have?' The family shared information and problem-solved with staff to come up with creative solutions," says Jocelyn.

The CYS Team builds relationships with families and school district staff to support the educational needs of children and youth. These relationships have been especially critical for communication, connections to resources, and educational success during distance learning.

**Basic Needs:** With the onset of COVID-19 and following the murder of George Floyd, access to food and basic needs were jeopardized for many families due to quarantine and social distancing, financial stress, or loss of a local food source because of community unrest. Simpson family advocates and the CYS Team coordinated and delivered food and other basic needs items to families to ensure their safety and well-being.

Education Support Program Coordinator Jamie Gates describes the needs of families in Simpson's Passage Community:

"When families need food or need to make sure their rent is paid, logging on for distance learning is not the priority. We help parents connect with basic needs, so we can focus on educational needs. We help families pick up a week's worth of food at a time at their schools."

**Social Connection:** Parents and students report feeling more isolated from family, friends, and community activities with quarantine and social distancing. Frequent staff check-ins with parents and youth – via phone, Zoom,

or socially distanced interactions – provide support and help alleviate stress.

"Increased social connections have been so important for families, especially during the initial months of quarantine. Our team has been so creative and flexible – reading stories to children over Zoom, leading virtual craft camps for kids, providing virtual homework help, and youth mentoring over Zoom – they have been so passionate about building relationships and supporting families," says Jocelyn.

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**Technology and Supply Needs:** At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many households did not have a technology-based learning device in their home, other than a parent's cell phone which is a lifeline for parents not only to communicate with friends and family, but also to access resources, pursue employment opportunities, and complete homework for their own schooling. Some households were not equipped with internet access to participate in distance learning, and in many cases, internet connectivity was not ideal in the homes that had it.

The CYS Team helped families secure devices through school districts. If there were outstanding technology needs, staff purchased tablets for families. Staff worked with families to install software, solve internet connectivity issues, and access free internet service for educational purposes. Together, they learned how to navigate multiple distance learning platforms used by students – across many classrooms and school districts.

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The CYS Team (left to right): Jocelyn Pickreign, Molly Dubois, Jamie Gates, Nick Simmons, and Amra Mucic





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Jamie describes her role as a navigator in the learning process:

"I'm here to help parents and students. I'm getting parents comfortable with teachers and connected with school in a different way. I can run point with the schools, picking up supplies as needed. I am going through a stack of student schedules and helping students stay on track with their classes and learning goals. I help students log into their learning platforms and assignments."

Advocating for families, the CYS Team worked with local school districts to allow student access to Zoom on district-issued devices. Gaining this access for students in Simpson's programs was a "game changer", according to Jocelyn. Now students can access Simpson staff and volunteers for learning sessions via Zoom for educational and social-emotional support.

**Creating Space for Learning:** The physical space of peoples' homes can provide challenges for distance learning. Families with multiple students or in smaller apartments may have limited space for learning. Staff collaborated with families to organize functional learning spaces and routines for school, work, activities, and needed breaks.

The lower level of Passage Community has been transformed into a vibrant learning hub. Socially distanced work stations, a library, and responsive staff surround the students who come in on school days, eager to learn. Additional students also participate in Passage's after

school tutoring program.

"There is a wild amount of curiosity for learning in the group of students we serve. In such a structured and personal environment, we can really engage young people. They can dig into their own interests and learning. Students who are BIPOC can also explore history and curriculum that is accurate and relevant to their own experience and not sanitized by white supremacy culture," says Nick Simmons, a VISTA volunteer through a partnership with Americorps and Literacy Minnesota and Culturally Relevant Curriculum Coordinator with Simpson.

### **Amplifying Strengths and a Love of Learning**

With the school year well under way, the CYS Team is committed to helping each student in Simpson's Family Housing Program achieve educational success through distance learning. Grounded in Simpson's values, the team embraces the uniqueness and dignity of each person, working with each family to achieve housing stability and their own unique goals – through COVID-19 and into the future.

"The families we are privileged to work with have so much resilience. So much capacity and so much love," says Jocelyn. "We understand that parents are the experts on their own families, and they know what is best for their families. Our team offers resources, and we foster and celebrate what is already there. We meet families where they're at, and we're excited to support them in whatever they want to do next."



## **Tools for School**

## **Thank you! We raised more than \$25,000 for Simpson's Tools for School program.**

This year's back-to-school campaign provided technology resources and school supplies to support students in their changing learning environments throughout the school year.

Simpson's Family Housing Program annually serves **300 families** with **600 children**.

We extend a special thank you to these organizations for their participation in a successful Tools for School program.

**BLAKE**

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YOUR HOME. OUR COMMITMENT.

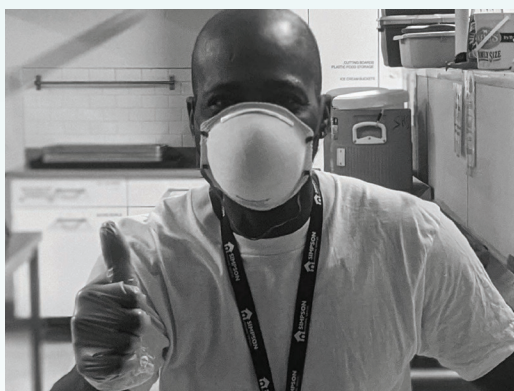
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# We're in this together. Stay healthy.



We would like to acknowledge and thank these institutional funders and foundations for providing generous COVID-19 relief support to Simpson in the spring of 2020.

We extend our gratitude to the thousands of individual donors who also contributed an outpouring of financial donations for our shelter and housing programs during the past nine months. Your generosity has been vital to the safety and well-being of the individuals and families we are honored to serve.



The Alice and Fred Wall Family Foundation

Marlys Barry, Tom Barry & John Barry

Turner Family Foundation

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The Joel & Teresa Pfister Foundation

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Ann & Todd Miller & the Fiterman Family Foundation

Anonymous (2)

Thank you to the above supporters who donated \$10,000 or more during the period of March 1 – June 30, 2020.



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MINNESOTA  
**Homeless Memorial**  
MARCH & SERVICE

**THURSDAY | DEC. 17, 2020**

**4:00 p.m.** Memorial March  
**7:00 p.m.** Virtual Memorial Service

Details on the evening will be  
announced in the coming weeks.

**Honoring people who have died  
while homeless in Minnesota**

Amidst the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are making modifications to the Homeless Memorial March & Service to ensure social distancing and safety, while keeping with many traditions of the evening and honoring each person who died while homeless in Minnesota this past year. For information or to share a remembrance, please visit [simpsonhousing.org](https://simpsonhousing.org).