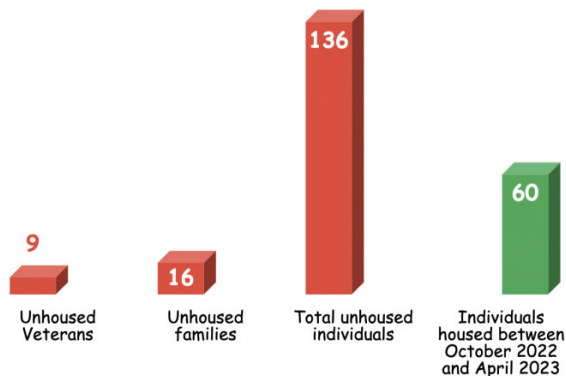


# Homeless collaborative receives massive grant

News | By James Steindler, Published Jun. 7, 2023



*This visual represents data collected by VAEH as of April 2023 for the tri-county area. Note, the number of “total unhoused individuals” includes the nine “unhoused Veterans,” but only the heads of household from the 16 “unhoused families.” Chart by James Steindler*

The Valley Alliance to End Homelessness (VAEH) is made up of a group of organizations with a mission to do just what its name implies: end homelessness in the tri-county area.

West Mountain Regional Health Alliance (WMRHA) was awarded \$2,743,690 through the Transformational Homelessness Response Grant Program (THRGP), within the Colorado Department of Local Affairs Division of Housing, to go toward VAEH’s collective mission. The award represents the second

largest grant amount in Colorado for the first round of the THRGP, according to a press release.

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VAEH is composed of public and private organizations including: Garfield and Pitkin County Human Services, Eagle County Homeless Services, Catholic Charities of the Western Slope, Mind Springs Health, Recovery Resources and Salvation Army. WMRHA acts as the coordinating organization.

“The VAEH regional collaborative exists to institutionalize best practices in three areas: policy and procedure development, strategic planning and consolidated regional funding, to achieve a sustainable regional response for ending homelessness,” the press release stated. “The THRGP grant will provide up to three years of collaborative funding to expand the continuum of care for the region to transform homelessness response.”



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The collaboration began somewhat informally in 2019. Then, their cooperation was put to the test during the pandemic which prompted working together to keep people safe and housed. The core members later decided to formalize VAEH, developing a strategic plan and working on collaborative fundraising. This, quite literally, paid off.

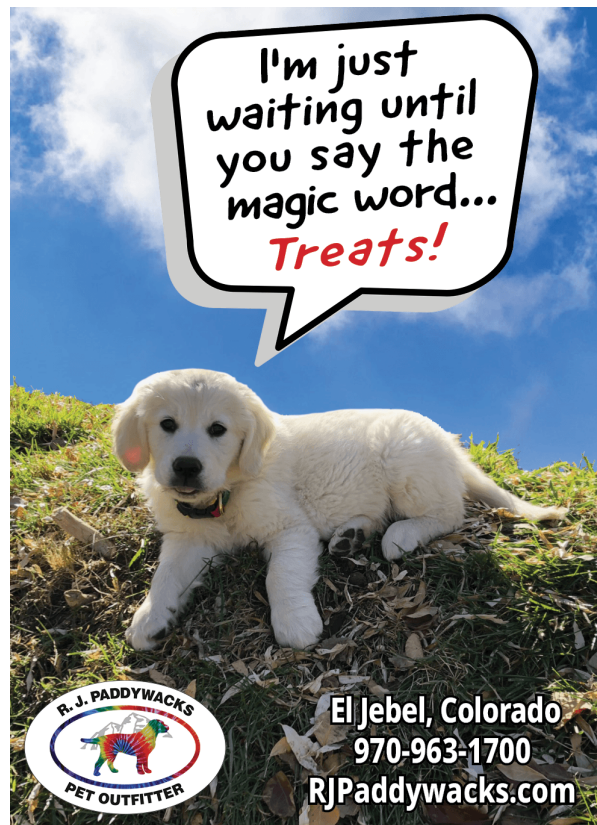
It's often said that addressing homelessness is not a one-size fits all approach. “All of these organizations are doing a piece of what we call the ‘continuum of care,’” Cristina Gair with WMRHA told The Sopris Sun. “It's a complex challenge to serve those who are experiencing homelessness, whether they are individuals or families.”



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Of course, the level of need varies. While some people are faced with becoming unhoused, others in the Valley are considered chronically homeless, as defined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

“The whole idea is that you look at each person, or each family, and say, ‘How do we get those individuals housed?’” said Gair. “We believe a regional continuum of coordinated and accessible resources, guided by a shared housing-first approach, is the foundation for ending and preventing homelessness.”



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The fact that it's a regional grant, meant to serve the three counties, is pertinent, she explained, "because we know that people experiencing homelessness are not concerned with jurisdictional lines."

Regional collaboration is not easy, she said, "but this group of people has worked together to figure out how to actually make it happen, and WMRH has just been supporting and convening that process because we know we're better together."



She mentioned two significant challenges when it comes to getting more people housed in the area: capacity and resources. “This grant will address both of those,” she stated.

Preventing someone from becoming homeless is better than losing housing and having to start over. Therefore, the collaborative also serves people on the verge of becoming homeless.

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The housing market, as she put it, “is extremely, extremely tough,” which makes it more difficult for people to stay housed. “There are programs that

can pay for housing for individuals and families, but it's not at the market rate that rents are going for right now.”

VAEH's strategic plan includes an intent to one day offer permanent supportive housing options in the area. Gair described permanent supportive housing as a “proven model,” that has had success in more urban areas, including Denver.



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In fact, the “Denver Social Impact Bond Initiative,” a 2021 study which focused on chronically homeless individuals who cycle in and out of jail, saw that 77% of those clients aided with permanent supportive housing remained stably housed after three years.

In the Valley, people identified as chronically homeless are primarily individuals, not families. “With someone who’s experienced chronic homelessness, it’s a more involved process,” Gair shared. “You not only need affordable housing, but you also need supportive services attached.”

Gair concluded, “We want to thank our state partners, because they believe in what we’re trying to do as a region. We’re showing that this is really possible.”

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