

TSRE Program NARRATIVE

The Clare of Assisi House (Clare House) Transitional Housing program provides 12-18 months of gender specific, evidence based and trauma informed programming, services and supports to female ex-offenders to empower each individual to stabilize, learn the skills and change behaviors to avoid recidivism, and successfully transition to independent living within her community. Clare House opened its doors in 2017 and has provided 46 female ex-offenders to date with transitional housing and supportive services to assist in successful re-entry after release from jail or prison. Women reside in Clare of Assisi House Transitional housing as they work with a case manager, an LSW, and additional support staff and volunteers to connect with community resources, to develop a goal plan, and to address the issues that contributed to their incarceration. The overall goal of Clare House is to fill the extreme gap in services and supports for this historically underserved population and ultimately- to reduce recidivism and homelessness. With the assistance of PHARE funding, Clare of Assisi House will implement the Transitional Supports for Re-Entry Program (TSRE). The TSRE Program incorporates gender specific, evidence-based practices and utilizes effective models to provide robust programming, services, and individualized supports within a Transitional Housing environment and additionally, through a “bridge” to our graduates who have successfully secured a permanent home in the community.

PHARE funds will be used to support the Clare House newly developed TSRE Program which was designed to reduce barriers for female ex-offenders who have historically faced tremendous inequities with community re-integration, specifically regarding employment and housing. TSRE will be delivered in Three Program Phases. The first two phases are interconnected and delivered at the transitional housing facility. Phase One of the TSRE Program provides female ex-offenders with food and shelter, addiction treatment support, life skills, medical care, counseling, and access to community resources for them to gain individual stability in multiple life areas. Once stable, the resident enters Phase Two and is ready for more independence and goal setting to include Family Reunification to reunite with their children. The importance of family reunification – noted throughout the literature, by Carter et al. (2006), Brown and Bloom (2009), Wright, et al. (2012), the NIJ (2012), among others – cannot be overstated, especially given the trauma experienced by children when separated from a parent. Additionally, within Phase Two, the residents receive supports and training for financial goal setting, finding and securing a job, and planning for permanent housing.

The TSRE Program will allow Clare House to expand and enhance these services and will add a Bridge Program (Phase Three) for Clare House graduates who are ready to or have already secured an independent living situation in the community. Phase Three allows for the continuation of financial advising and coaching, removes housing barriers and provides extended support services within the community to include permanent housing and stability case management services. The TSRE Bridge will also address Fair Housing as our residents are typically rejected for independent housing. The TSRE will work with community landlords and address issues that arise during the residents’ background and credit checks. Property managers/landlords will work with Clare House and together, will address present housing needs for this historically disparate population while providing a process and actions for stability for the future.

There is a dire need for this program and for the services proposed. As in other stages of the criminal justice system, most post-release policies and programs were created with the much larger male population in mind. But research makes clear that women returning home have “a significantly higher need for services than men,” and that reentry supports should be responsive to the particular needs of justice-involved women to include the perseverance of economic marginalization and poverty. Formerly incarcerated women have much higher rates of unemployment and homelessness and are less likely to

have a high school education, compared to formerly incarcerated men. These findings help explain why, in a 2012 National Institute of Justice (NIJ) study, 79% of women interviewed 30 days pre-release cited “employment, education, and life skills services” as their greatest area of need (followed closely by transition services). An earlier study (Holtfreder et al., 2004), found that poverty is the strongest predictor of recidivism among women, and “providing state-sponsored support to address short-term needs (e.g., housing) reduces the odds of recidivism by 83%” for financially underprivileged women on probation and parole.

A 2017 Prisoner Reentry Institute (PRI) report identified homelessness and the lack of stable housing as the biggest problem facing women in the justice system, noting that 80% of women said they needed assistance finding housing upon discharge. A 2006 California study found that 75% of formerly incarcerated women surveyed had experienced homelessness at some point, and 41% were currently homeless. Many female ex-offenders have significant health challenges as well as emotional and behavioral disorders. For those who have not received the mental health or substance abuse treatment needed during incarceration, rates of relapse are high, especially in the absence of appropriate community-based services. Stigma facing female parolees has been found to be greater than that facing males. Fewer halfway programs or shelter beds exist for women. Female parolees have greater difficulty obtaining employment and housing than males and are at greater risk for living without homes (Bandelet, 2017). Without comprehensive supports, women are likely to be revictimized and experience reoccurring trauma.

The PRI report emphasizes the importance of gender-responsive and trauma-informed interventions such as those described in the Clare House TSRE Program for reducing recidivism among women. According to that report, such interventions should: provide a safe, respectful environment; promote healthy relationships; address substance use, trauma, and mental health issues; provide women with opportunities to improve their socioeconomic conditions; establish “comprehensive and collaborative” community services; and prioritize women’s empowerment.

PHARE priorities addressed through the TSRE Program include:

5. Innovative Housing Solutions The TSRE is a Pilot for a unique and creative approach to addressing unmet housing needs and historic disparities in housing.

7. Housing Counseling and Financial Education specifically, financial education and direct client counseling to assist renters.

Objectives: The objectives of the Clare House TSRE Project includes improved self-esteem, building healthy relationships and acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve a stable, sustainable independent living situation. The TSRE is a multi-faceted Program that incorporates many supports and education to assist residents to work toward the ultimate goal of sustained independent community living and to avoid homelessness and recidivism.

1. Provide each female ex-offender with individualized services and supports necessary for independent living and successful community integration.
2. Provide evidence-based programs specifically, robust employment services and supports, intensive financial education, instruction in basic computer skills, and a solid family reunification/mediation program to foster individual confidence for independent living along with a framework for a family/community support network.
3. Provide community follow up/outreach programming and supports for our “graduates” so that they have ongoing support as they navigate their community (Bridge Program) in their newly acquired

independent living situation. The Bridge Program is designed to enhance success for sustainable independent living.

Anticipated impact: The TSRE Program will empower a minimum of 12 women who are returning from jail or prison over an 18 month period of performance to establish and maintain a stable, productive, independent life in their community.

TSRE Program Impact on Inequalities and Disparities

“Rising rates of female incarceration reflect disturbing social trends: A criminal justice system that exploits the poor and vulnerable; emphasis on law enforcement and punishment over treatment for substance abuse; throw-away attitudes towards persons with serious mental illness; and misogyny” (Incarcerated Women and Girls, The Sentencing Project, 2018). “The push to incarcerate more women ignores the social and psychological forces that often underlie female offending, including higher-than-average rates of lifetime exposure to cumulative trauma, as well as physical and sexual victimization; untreated mental illness; the use of substances to manage distress; and behavioral choices that arise in conjunction with gross economic disparities” (Bloom and Covington, 2008).

Clare House is poised and ready to address the overwhelming injustice present in regard to this marginalized target population by providing a comprehensive transitional housing program tailored to meet individual female ex-offender’s risks and needs. The TSRE program is a gender-responsive alternative designed specifically for women. Located in East Reading, Clare House helps women access treatment and services to address the underlying causes of criminal involvement. Our model offers a range of programs to eliminate barriers for this population and help each woman to successfully navigate the challenges of reentry, access opportunities to improve their lives, and avoid recidivism and homelessness. Our reentry services provide practical pathways to a better future by incorporating educational advancement, employment-readiness, job placement, positive engagement in the community, financial education, stable independent living supports and family reunification services for diverse female ex-offenders who are historically underserved and undervalued.

TSRE Program Comprehensive Plan

Clare House was founded in 2014 and opened its doors in 2017. Since then, we have increased our capacity (both in staffing and in number of beds available), expanded our programming, and enhanced services and supports each year based on the needs of the population we serve. We have been able to create a continuum of care model in-house and are able to provide not only shelter, access to medical care, food and clothing but also therapeutic counseling, parenting classes, job search assistance, basic computer skills training, transportation and GED/educational support. As Clare House continues to be the only Transitional Living Facility in Berks County explicitly serving the needs of female ex-offenders, our justice sector, social service sector, government sector and our broad and local community recognize the need for Clare House and support us via donations, volunteerism, services and referrals. Our impact has thus far been sustained through support, partnership and coordination with these sectors and our community. Clare House continues to be the only means for women in Berks County who are re-entering the community to do so in a safe, sober, welcoming community

environment and each year we become stronger and more present in the everyday lives of Berks County. Along with the supports expressed that have allowed us to not only be sustained, but also to grow and flourish, the TSRE Program will additionally help us to continue to fill the enormous gap for this severely underserved population.

Administration: Clare of Assisi House will administer the Transitional Supports for Re-Entry Program (TSRE) utilizing the skills and expertise of our in-house staff, along with our community partner organizations, and contracting with two consultants (one for research and one for grant management as evidenced in the support and participation letters attached). Since 2014, Clare House has successfully been awarded and has administered more than 25 grants to include Foundational, Corporate, State, and Federal flow downs such as the Community Development Block Grant (X3), the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (X2), United Way Berks, Mary's Pence Foundation, Conrad Hilton Fund, and others and has maintained all required documentation and successfully completed all grant activities to include timely and accurate reporting. Clare House works with a certified grants management specialist (Mary Chown) to assist with compliance and reporting and with professors at local colleges, such as Dr. Ebonie Cunningham Stringer from Penn State University to assist with research and evaluation. The Executive Director of Clare House, Pam Mills, with support from the Board, leads all project development and implementation and leads the administration of all Clare House grant funding. The Executive Director will oversee the further development, implementation, assessment and coordination of the TSRE Program and will spend at least 25% of her time dedicated to this important work. She will be supported by the Clare House Staff, the Grant Task Force, the Clare House Board, community support and consultants all dedicated to the sustainability and impact of the PHARE objectives and goal.

Geographic Description: The TSRE Program will be primarily located at our Transitional Housing Facility in East Reading, PA. Clare House will engage with, build relationships and contract with (MOU's) local landlords from the East Reading neighborhood. A description of this neighborhood and the market is as follows: The East Reading Homeownership Rate is 38%, the Renter Rate is 62% and the Vacancy rate is 14.4%. The average Age of Homes in East Reading is as follows: 52.5% of homes are from 1939 and older, 30.6% of homes are from 1940-1969 and only 1.5% of homes were built after 2000. The East Reading median real estate price is \$58,771, which is less expensive than 95.9% of Pennsylvania neighborhoods and 96.5% of all U.S. neighborhoods. 74.4% of the residential real estate in East Reading is classified as row houses and attached homes. The average rental price is currently \$1,033. Single mother households comprise 21.8% of those in East Reading, which is a higher concentration than found in 98% of American neighborhoods. East Reading is considered a low-income neighborhood and is among the lowest income neighborhoods in America (lower than 85.6% of U.S. neighborhoods). With 34.6% of the children here below the federal poverty line, this neighborhood has a higher rate of childhood poverty than 81.3% of U.S. neighborhoods. The East Reading neighborhood has more Puerto Rican and Dominican ancestry people living in it than nearly any neighborhood in America. 35.7% of this neighborhood's residents have Puerto Rican ancestry and 8.8% have Dominican ancestry. The most common languages spoken in East Reading neighborhood are English (62%) and Spanish (35.6%).

Delineation of Income Groups: The Census ACS 1-year survey reports that the median household income for the Berks County Pennsylvania area was \$67,708 in 2019, the latest figures available. 100% of Clare House residents and the incoming persons who will be served through the use of PHARE funds are well below the Area Median Income and are below or at the Federal poverty line established 2021 of

\$12,880 annual income per individual. They are of various ages (18-65), are single mothers or have grown children, and are dedicated to a fresh start where they can reunite with their families, become self-sufficient, and successfully reintegrate into their community with the supports and services provided by Clare House. Historically, our residents have hailed from neighborhoods with similar demographics as those in East Reading. Many of our residents were homeless or in abusive relationships with no way out prior to their incarceration. These women are anxious to start again with a bright future filled with hope and possibility. Our East Reading neighbors are supportive of Clare House and our residents and have assisted with opening doors through gatherings, NA and AA support groups, and other socially kind acts. Clare House promotes community integration and continues to encourage neighborhood relations in East Reading particularly with landlords, businesses, community organizations and individuals. This community integration is exemplified in the letter of support provided with this application from the [REDACTED]. This community business/individual not only assists Clare House with maintenance as a volunteer service but is also willing to work with Clare House to be a partnered community landlord, owning several apartments throughout Reading. We are thankful for our community and their involvement with our residents and believe that our community appreciates Clare House and has embraced our residents.

According to a study published by the American Psychological Association, the United States imprisons people at a higher rate than any other developed nation in the world. Historically, Black and Brown individuals and persons in poverty have been over-represented in prison populations, and these demographics continue to the present. While stressors associated with poverty are highly correlated with certain types of offending, intractable biases inherent at every level of the justice system perpetuate social and economic inequality and racism. While there is fewer female than male inmates in the overall population, over the past 30 years the phenomenon of confining more women to federal, state and local correctional facilities has exploded at an increase of 700%. While federal prisons have seen an uptick in numbers of incarcerated women during this period, the most dramatic increases are in state prisons and local jails (Kajstura,2017). Although there has been an increase in women convicted of violent crimes, most incarcerated females are serving sentences for property and drug offenses. As reflected in statistics compiled by the Department of Justice and several criminal justice advocacy organizations, women in prisons are overwhelmingly poor, with most living well below the poverty line and women of color are overrepresented among female inmates. (The Sentencing Project, 2018). 25% of women served by Clare of Assisi House are of color and all are well below the poverty line. Clare House assists these women to become stable through trauma therapy, addiction supports, counseling, mentorship, medical access, transportation services and supports, financial planning and budgeting, job search/ job readiness and placement services, to eventually secure an independent living situation and avoid recidivism.