



working together to navigate the complexities of ending homelessness

February 21st, 2023

Friends and partners in ending homelessness.

Greetings! We hope you and your family are all well. As you map out your giving plan for 2023, we are writing to ask you to consider beginning, renewing, and/or increasing your gift to MESH in 2023 to help support our special project—**The SMAC Directors Council**.

Imagine for a minute...you learn that a new playground is going to be constructed in your neighborhood—just down the road from your home. Exciting, right? Now imagine that you learn that the people who will design the playground have never actually used a playground before—nor have they ever brought their kids to a playground. What's more, they plan to design the playground without any involvement or input from the neighborhood; no input to consider concerns that you or other residents may have with parking, lighting, safety issues, etc. **Still excited?**

This example is akin to the design of our homeless response system; designed mostly by (well-meaning) people, with **no personal experience** of homelessness. Increasingly, we at MESH have recognized that empathy and good intentions cannot adequately replace **lived experience**. People who have experienced homelessness know the nuances of seeking help and navigating the resources needed for housing stability. It is vital that those with such knowledge and experience play a primary role in designing the system. MESH is therefore working to develop steps to improve the role people with this lived experience have in **designing and changing** homeless response systems—The SMAC Directors Council is a prime example of this work.

"I use my personal experiences, extensive knowledge, and natural strengths to see that those who come after me don't experience the same obstacles and heartache that my kids and I did when seeking housing. I will be forever grateful to the SMAC Director's Council." —Directors Council Member

The **SMAC Directors Council** formed in February of 2020 as a group comprised entirely of individuals that have recently experienced homelessness in the Suburban Metro Area (SMAC) region—Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Scott, and Washington counties. Their purpose is to guide the SMAC region in redesigning their homeless response system to better meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

In its short history, the Directors Council has **changed how SMAC works and thinks**. Directors Council members are now present at all policy and planning tables within SMAC. They are responsible for reviewing and approving all new policies, initiatives, and programs within SMAC. They are solely responsible for voting for all elected positions within SMAC planning bodies.

The manner in which the Directors Council is **empowered to lead decision-making** is unprecedented; the Directors Council has received **recognition and awards across the country** and is seen as the shining example for how communities can be led by those who have direct knowledge and experience in homelessness.



An Example of the Directors Council Impact—The Housing Access Line.

With limited housing resources, the SMAC homeless response system can't currently provide everyone facing a housing crisis with immediate assistance beyond shelter—leaving little hope or support for people while they await resources to regain housing stability. Data has shown that delays to stable housing are worse among Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in SMAC—largely due to more limited awareness, higher barriers to access help, and historic distrust of “helping” systems. To address these challenges, the Directors Council recently developed the **Housing Access Line**, a model designed (1) to target marketing, outreach, and access specifically to BIPOC communities and (2) to ensure that everyone has someone to walk with them as they navigate the messiness and the delays of our system. The success of the Directors Council's efforts in developing this model has led major funders to decide to implement the model not only for the SMAC region, but for the entire metro area (with Hennepin/Ramsey counties).

As the fiscal host of Directors Council, MESH is working to make sure that Directors Council members are **adequately compensated** for the time and leadership that they bring to shaping SMAC's homeless response system. With 15 Directors Council members contributing roughly 6-8 hours of support each month, **the Directors Council annual budget exceeds \$40,000**. Thus, we are seeking your help.

Can you help us support the SMAC Directors Council in the year ahead?

We have attached a **donation/pledge form** to this letter. Please check the “Program Support” box to ensure that your full contribution go directly towards supporting the Directors Council. Donations can also be made online at <https://mesh-mn.org/donate-to-mesh-2/>.

Thank you for your ongoing support for MESH and for your consideration of this request. Please reach out to me directly with any questions.

Sincerely,

Mike Manhard

Executive Director, Minnesota Engagement on Shelter and Housing (MESH)



One-Time Donation & Multi-Year Pledge *form*

Contributions can also be made online at <https://mesh-mn.org/donate-to-mesh-2/>

I/We wish to support Minnesota Engagement on Shelter and Housing (MESH) in the following manner:

A one-time gift in the amount of \$ _____

A three-year pledge

For the purpose of:

Program Support for the SMAC Directors Council (*funds will be restricted exclusively to this program*)

MESH General Operating (*funds are unrestricted and may be used at the discretion of MESH*)

If making a multi-year pledge

Total Pledge \$ _____

Frequency of payments (*select one*) Monthly Quarterly Semi-Annually Annually

Pledge Start Date: _____ *MESH will mail pledge statements based upon the schedule you determine is best for you*

Pledge End Date: _____

Optional Pledge Payment

Enclosed is the first payment of \$ _____

Check (<i>payable to MESH</i>)	Credit or debit card
As specified above, I authorize MESH to charge my:	Visa Mastercard
Card number _____	Exp date _____
Name on card _____	CVV Code _____
My credit card billing address is the same as the address listed below	
If Different, please provide billing address _____	
Signature _____	Date _____

Matching Gifts

I anticipate my gift will be matched by (*specify company*) _____

Donor Information

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone # _____ Email _____

I wish to remain anonymous