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## **Proposal to Conduct a County Wide Assessment and Count of Families and Children Living in Extended-Stay Motels in DeKalb County, Georgia**

**Date:** October 31, 2024

**To:** DeKalb County Board of Commissioners

**From:** Single Parent Alliance and Resource Center (SPARC)

**Subject:** Proposal to Conduct a County Wide Assessment of Families and Children Living in Extended-Stay Motels in DeKalb County, Georgia

### **Introduction**

The Single Parent Alliance and Resource Center (SPARC) is dedicated to supporting, especially those facing housing insecurity.

This is a proposal to conduct a county wide assessment of families and children living in extended stay motels in DeKalb. While the homeless population in DeKalb County has been counted through various efforts, one segment has been overlooked: families and children living in extended-stay motels. These families and children fall through the cracks of traditional homeless counts because of HUD's definition of homelessness. They technically have a roof over their heads, yet they live in a precarious situation where their housing stability is not often guaranteed.

To effectively manage this growing public health crisis and provide the necessary support for these vulnerable families and children, we must first assess the true scope of the issue. Our proposal seeks the county's support to conduct a comprehensive assessment and count of all families and children living in extended-stay motels across DeKalb County, Georgia.

### **Problem Overview**

Extended-stay motels have become an alternative shelter for families who have been barred from permanent housing. These working families pay an average rate of \$500 per week to live in one room. Children growing up in these unsafe environments face physical and mental health challenges as well as threats to their academic progress. Families living in these extended stay motels are often excluded from traditional homeless services, and there has never been an accurate count of how many families and children are living in these temporary spaces. Without this data, DeKalb County is unable to fully address the scope of the housing crisis.

## Why This Count is Critical:

- **Undercounted Population:** Many families residing in extended stay motels do not qualify for federal homeless assistance because they have a temporary roof over their heads, yet they are one step away from homelessness.
- **Housing Insecurity:** These families are often on the brink of eviction and face challenges in securing stable housing due to financial instability, lack of affordable housing, and employment barriers.
- **Crisis Management:** In order to allocate appropriate resources, support, and housing services, we need accurate data on the number of families and children living in extended stay motels.

## Assessment Overview

This assessment and count will be a coordinated event that will involve canvassing every extended-stay motel in DeKalb County over the course of several weekends. Seventy extended stay motels have already been identified. The Southern Poverty Law Center uses an estimate of 109 rooms with an estimated 80% occupancy rate per extended stay motel.

We will gather demographic data, including, but not limited to, family size, length of stay, income level, and barriers to housing stability.

## Objectives

- **Data Collection:** To accurately count all families and children living in extended-stay motels to quantify the extent of family homelessness in DeKalb County.
- **Identify Needs:** To assess the needs of these families and children and identify barriers to permanent housing as well as gaps in local services
- **Raise Awareness:** To bring attention to the hidden homelessness crisis and provide the county with actionable data to develop better programs.
- **Improve Resources:** To present actionable data to county officials, service providers and funding organizations to help the county target resources where they are most needed

## Project Scope:

The assessment will cover all extended-stay motels within DeKalb County. Data collection will involve surveys, interviews, and direct observational research with families, motel management, and other stakeholders.

## Key Deliverables:

### 1. Project Planning Document

- A detailed project plan outlining the objectives, timelines, resources required, and methodology.
- Expected Completion:

## 2. Volunteer Recruitment and Training

- Recruit and train a team of volunteers to conduct in-field surveys, perform data entry, and follow project protocols.
- Training topics include data collection techniques, confidentiality and ethics, and safety protocols.

## 3. Assessment and Count

- Conduct an assessment and count, documenting the number of families and children residing in extended-stay motels.
- Administer surveys to gather demographic information, housing barriers, etc .

## 4. Qualitative Data Collection (Interviews and Observations)

- Conduct interviews with families to understand the specific barriers to stable housing and gather narratives that highlight their experiences.
- Collect observational data on the physical and social conditions within the extended stay motel settings.

## 5. Data Analysis and Report Preparation

- Analyze quantitative and qualitative data to identify patterns, key challenges, and service gaps.
- Develop a comprehensive report detailing findings, potential interventions, and recommendations for county policymakers.

## 6. Final Presentation and Stakeholder Meeting

- Present findings to DeKalb County commissioners, community partners, and other stakeholders.
- Engage in discussions on recommended actions, possible partnerships, and further resources needed to address the issues highlighted.

## Project Timeline

### Phase 1: (4 Weeks) Planning, Recruitment and Training: \$18,000.00

- **Planning**
  - **Activities**
    - Develop a detailed project plan, outlining objectives and methodologies for data collection.
    - Define the scope of work, finalize survey instruments, and review sampling methods.
    - Identify and procure necessary data collection tools (e.g., tablets for surveys, consent forms, etc.).
    - Prepare a comprehensive timeline, clearly identifying all milestones and deliverable dates.
  - **Deliverable:** Finalized project plan with stakeholder agreements and consent for extended stay motel site access.

- **Recruitment and Training Volunteers:**
  - **Activities:**
    - Recruit a team of volunteers through community outreach, targeting those with experience in social services or data collection.
    - Develop training materials covering data collection techniques, ethical standards, confidentiality protocols, and safety guidelines.
    - Conduct training sessions (virtual and/or in-person) to ensure all volunteers understand the survey tools, consent protocols, and survey instruments.
    - Assign roles to volunteers based on location, extended stay motel assignments, and other logistical requirements.
  - **Deliverable:** Trained volunteer team ready for data collection.

## **Phase II: (8 weeks) Quantitative Assessment of Extended Stay Families: \$68,000.00**

- **Assessment and Data Collection**
  - **Activities:**
    - Conduct an assessment and count across all identified extended-stay motels, documenting the number of families and children residing at each location.
    - Administer assessments to families, collecting information such as demographics, family size, employment status, educational background, and health and housing needs.
    - Provide survey participants with a small incentive for their time, ensuring equitable participation across all extended stay motels.
  - **Deliverable:** Preliminary report of assessment and count and demographics of surveyed families.

## **Phase III: (4 weeks) Qualitative Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting; \$33,000.00**

- **Assessment and Data Collection**
  - **Activities:**
    - Conduct structured interviews with a subset of families to capture qualitative data on their experiences, needs, and barriers to stable housing.
    - Collect observational data on living conditions within extended stay motels, noting any health, safety, or accessibility issues that may impact residents.
    - Compile detailed field notes and record themes emerging from interviews to supplement the quantitative data.
  - **Deliverable:** Completed qualitative interview summaries and observational field notes.

- **Data Analysis and Report Preparation**

- **Activities:**

- Analyze both quantitative and qualitative data to identify patterns and key findings related to family homelessness in extended-stay motels.
    - Summarize insights on barriers to stable housing, resource gaps, and extended stay motel living conditions.
    - Develop actionable recommendations to address identified needs, including suggested program models, policies, and funding allocations.
    - Prepare a comprehensive final report, including data visualizations, summary of findings, and recommendations.

- **Deliverable:** Final assessment report.

- **Final Presentation and Stakeholder Meeting**

- **Activities:**

- Organize and conduct a meeting with DeKalb County commissioners, community partners, and stakeholders to present findings.
    - Share insights on service gaps, family needs, and potential interventions, encouraging discussion on next steps.
    - Gather stakeholder feedback on the report and discuss plans for ongoing support and potential future projects.

- **Deliverable:** Final presentation materials and feedback from stakeholders.

### **Anticipated Outcomes**

- **Quantitative Data:** A detailed count of families and children living in extended stay motels and demographic data describing their circumstances.
- **Qualitative Insights:** A narrative summary highlighting the lived experiences, challenges, and immediate needs of these families.
- **Actionable Recommendations:** A set of strategic recommendations aimed at reducing family homelessness and enhancing resources within DeKalb County.
- **Community Awareness and Engagement:** Heightened understanding among stakeholders and community partners regarding the scale of the extended stay motel crisis and the need for collaborative intervention.

**Total Cost of Project: \$119,000.00**

This groundbreaking community wide assessment of families and children living in extended stay motels requires an agency with the experience, resources and expertise to execute it successfully. SPARC is that agency. With a proven track record of addressing the complex needs of families and children facing housing instability across DeKalb County, SPARC is uniquely positioned to lead this initiative providing the insights and data needed to drive meaningful solutions.

Since its inception, SPARC has initiated innovative programs like Motel to Home, a pathway from extended-stay motel living to stable housing, and has gathered extensive insight into the circumstances faced by families and children residing in extended stay motels. This experience positions SPARC as the ideal organization to conduct this comprehensive, community-wide assessment.

**Qualifications and Expertise** SPARC's experience in assessing and supporting homeless and housing-insecure families stems from a commitment to deeply understand and serve this population through:

- 1. Comprehensive Data Collection and Analysis**

SPARC utilizes effective data-gathering methods to track family needs, barriers, and outcomes throughout our programs. We have conducted similar surveys in Charlotte, NC, Metro Atlanta and will be in Greensboro, NC in November 2024 to survey families there as well. With experienced staff and skilled partners adept at quantitative and qualitative data analysis, SPARC is equipped to gather insights to inform local policy and provide actionable data to drive future resource allocation.

- 2. Strong Community Partnerships**

SPARC has built a network of partnerships with housing authorities, nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher learning as well as local government agencies. These partnerships ensure that SPARC has access to resources, collaboration opportunities, and valuable information-sharing channels, all of which will strengthen the quality and reach of this assessment.

- 3. Direct Service Expertise**

SPARC's Motel to Home program has connected hundreds of families with stable housing, helping transition them from extended stay motels to long-term housing. This direct service experience provides SPARC with an unparalleled understanding of the day-to-day realities and challenges families and children face when living in extended-stay motels. SPARC's Motel to Home program has a 92% success rate. When SPARC helps families find housing, they stay housed.

- 4. Tailored Program Development for Unique Community Needs**

In addition to housing, SPARC's programs like the Financial Achievement Club and New Neighborhood Initiative focus on family financial stability and community integration. By tailoring these programs to address specific community gaps, SPARC has demonstrated adaptability and an understanding of the interconnected needs of housing-insecure

families, uniquely qualifying us to conduct an assessment that considers the broader social and economic contexts.

## Conclusion

By conducting this assessment and count, DeKalb County will not only be the first in Georgia to have an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the scope of homelessness among families and children in extended-stay motels but will set the precedent for other counties to follow. The findings will allow for more informed decision-making, better allocation of resources, and improved programs to support these vulnerable families. Additionally, the results could serve as critical evidence for the county to demonstrate the true scale of this crisis, strengthening applications for increased state and federal funding to address the needs of these families.

Families and children living in extended-stay motels in DeKalb County are a hidden population that has long gone unnoticed in traditional homeless counts. In order to effectively address this crisis and provide adequate support, we must first know the scope of the problem. A partnership between DeKalb County and SPARC will raise the necessary awareness of this critical issue, paving the way for a brighter more stable future for these families. By joining forces, we can foster meaningful change that addresses the unique challenges they face and build a foundation of support, hope and opportunity for lasting impact.

