

Nomination: Caroline Gregerson, City of La Crosse Planning Department
Outstanding Friend of Community Action Award

Caroline Gregerson, Community Development Administrator for the City of La Crosse Planning Department, believes strongly that every person deserves affordable and safe housing, economic stability, and that unfair policies that discriminate should be addressed. It is in this vain that Caroline collaborates with Couleecap and our partners, local advocates, and businesses to make her community a place where people with low income can prosper.

Caroline has been a key leader in many initiatives that Couleecap is leading or helping to facilitate, including homeless initiatives. Caroline is a tireless advocate for ending homelessness. Caroline serves as the Co-Chair for the La Crosse Collaborative to End Homelessness, a community-wide effort that brings together public and private entities to address homelessness and give voice to those who experience homelessness. From inception, Caroline helped to organize and facilitate the Collaborative, but was also a strong voice for the homeless in City Hall and to the Mayor. She has advocated for the City of La Crosse to fund two rounds of Tenant Based Rental Assistance funding where the City provided funding for housing vouchers and case management services during special initiatives to house families and chronically homeless persons. Her successful advocacy also prompted the city to engage in a community initiative to move residents from a famed "Tent City" in La Crosse to shelter and housing.

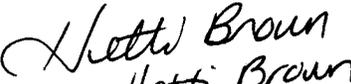
Caroline has spearheaded the effort to ensure new, city-funded projects are mixed-income and that new housing developments have set aside units for homeless or formerly homeless. This is evidenced in the 2219 Lofts development, which set aside 6 units for homeless, the Kane Street Gardens, where 15 units are set aside for homeless vets, and the St. Andrews development, where 12 units are set aside for homeless. This allows Couleecap and other homeless providers to access safe and decent housing for individuals and families.

As member of the Planning Department, Caroline also plays a critical role in addressing the affordable housing crisis in La Crosse. She worked with Couleecap to develop innovative solutions to pilot, such as a Rental Rehabilitation project, and to plan housing development or rehabilitation projects in key areas of the city that are most in need. Caroline supports the Community Development Block Grant Committee and liaisons with organizations like Couleecap to ensure our planning efforts are in alignment with the current and future goals of the committee. This not only ensures a collaborative effort to meeting community needs but enables more strategic funding requests and responsible investing. Because of this partnership, Couleecap has successfully secured funding to develop several units of affordable housing in the city.

Also, in her role as liaison to the Community Development Block Grant Committee, she has worked with Couleecap to identify opportunities to create women- and minority- owned businesses, and to provide business support to low-income entrepreneurs. She pushes us to think bigger and challenges us to expand services, while offering the support we need to be successful.

Caroline has taken the lead to initiate a Fair Housing Assessment across the Couleecap Service area to identify barriers to housing. The study examined patterns of race, housing, and poverty; access to opportunity; and housing needs in the region. Caroline involved Couleecap from the beginning of the project to leverage our understanding of the needs of people living in poverty. She wanted to make sure that throughout the project the people we serve were encouraged to participate and that their voice was strong in the initiative. She continues to work with us to organize community listening sessions in areas where people with low-income can participate.

Caroline promotes and enhances the efforts of community action by offering key connections to new program opportunities, invitations for Couleecap to participate in events that will help us reach new audiences and serving as a valuable advisor to our work. She shows up to every event sponsored by Couleecap as an engaged advocate and helps to promote our work in the community. She is an amazing friend and ally to community action.


Hetti Brown
Executive Director