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Mutual Ground will reopen with local grants

■ **Where state failed:** Dunham Fund leads; United Way plays major role

By **Andre Salles**
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AURORA—Linda Healy calls it a miracle. And it came not a moment too soon.

The sign hanging outside Mutual Ground in Aurora, where Healy has been executive director for 23 years, tells the story. Since July 1, when Healy was forced to close the doors of the 24-hour domestic violence shelter here, Mutual Ground has turned away 24 women and 32 children seeking protection.

All that, she said, ends now.

In a Monday morning press conference, Healy announced that the emergency shelter would reopen, thanks to grant money from the Dunham Fund

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and the Fox Valley United Way. The grant money will come from the Dunham Emergency Assistance Fund, established in March.

"I am so stunned by this," Healy said. "This community is incredible."

The fund contains \$350,000 — the Dunham Fund provided an initial \$50,000 gift, and matched United Way donations for the remainder. This is the first of 10 grants Dunham will provide to area service agencies, as a way of plugging the holes left by a lack of state funding,

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according to Ryan Maley, president of the Dunham Fund Board.

Mutual Ground will share \$205,000 with three other shelter agencies, according to Michael Meyer, executive director of the Fox Valley United Way, which administers the fund. There is no set grant amount, however — Mutual Ground will simply draw down on the fund whenever it's needed. Healy said it costs roughly \$30,000 a month to operate the shelter.

In a pointed, emotional

speech, Healy took aim at Gov. Pat Quinn and state legislators, who have been "holding us hostage," she said. Because the state government could not agree on a full budget by the June 30 deadline, the state is now funding Mutual Ground (and many other social service agencies) at 25 percent of its requirements.

"We are being held hostage by a governor and legislators whose own egos will not allow them to come to a compromise without harming victims," she said.

"I suggest they enroll in our children's program, which offers thousands of hours of conflict resolution (training)."

Legislators will reconvene in

Springfield today to continue hashing out the budget. Healy said she is prepared for budget cuts of "up to 10 percent," and may have to consider layoffs, but she urged the General Assembly to keep funding social services.

Meyer said he is not concerned that local grant money would let legislators off the hook. He said the grants provided by the Dunham Fund would be short-term fixes, and are small compared to the loss of state funding.

Meyer said the Dunham Emergency Assistance Fund is still accepting donations. Log on to www.uwfoxvalley.org or call (630) 896-4636.

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Emergency assistance

The Dunham Fund plans to make 10 grants to different Fox Valley service agencies, splitting up a \$350,000 emergency assistance fund among them. While breakdowns by agency were not available, here is a look at the amount per category of assistance, and who stands to share in the funding:

- **Shelter services:** \$205,000
Split among: Mutual Ground, Hesed House, Association for Individual Development, Wayside Cross
- **Food services:** \$125,000
Split among: Aurora Interfaith Food Pantry, Batavia Food Pantry, Marie Wilkinson Food Pantry, Kendall County Food Pantry, Aurora Salvation Army
- **Rental assistance services:** \$20,000
Split between: Aurora Salvation Army, Quad County Urban League