



It's Time We  
End Homelessness  
in Oak Park.

**OAK PARK  
HOMELESSNESS  
COALITION**



**What does  
homelessness  
look like?**





.....  
**“We have no idea of the burdens  
the people we see may have.”**  
.....

**To be homeless is to live on the streets.  
Or in a Housing Forward shelter.  
Or on someone’s couch.**

In Oak Park, more than five percent of our residents live in extreme poverty, making less than \$9,000 a year.

About 7,500 of our residents are food insecure, meaning they don’t know where they will get their next meal.

Too many live one missed rent payment from eviction—and homelessness.

The homeless are not just on our streets. They are our classmates at school. Our parents and friends from work or church or baseball teams. They are members of our community.

In all, about 200 kids in elementary schools and high schools are homeless. They are living with friends or relatives. Sleeping on a couch with no permanence.

The Oak Park Homelessness Coalition is working to change that.

Together, we can end homelessness in Oak Park.

Our Aim:  
To Make  
Homelessness  
**Rare, Brief**  
and **One Time.**

Community residents and stakeholders,

Homelessness is a faceless issue, yet every day, each of us sees or speaks to someone who is homeless or at risk of being homeless. Some are children at school. People we see at the library. Faces on the street.

Each year, hundreds of people live without a permanent home in Oak Park, whether they are living in a Housing Forward shelter or couch surfing or living with relatives.

**The Oak Park Homelessness Coalition is working on a solution.**

With funding from the Community Mental Health Board of Oak Park Township, the Coalition has grown to 30-plus member institutions, including the school districts, congregations, social service agencies, local government, non-profits and businesses. Meeting quarterly, the Coalition identified the issues and potential solutions and began raising awareness of the issue.

It was clear that a plan—with goals and objectives, strategies and tactics, a timeline and budget—was necessary to end homelessness. The Village of Oak Park agreed to fund the development of this plan, led by Heartland Alliance and a5.

We have much to be proud of in the community we call home.  
Let's end homelessness together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa DeVivo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being the most prominent.

**Lisa DeVivo**  
Executive Director  
Community Mental Health Board of Oak Park

# Who is Working to End Homelessness in Oak Park?

---

The Oak Park Homelessness Coalition (OPHC) consists of 30-plus organizations working to end homelessness in Oak Park by making it rare, brief and one time.

Represented by government, healthcare, businesses, faith-based groups, school districts, social service agencies and non-profits, OPHC meets quarterly to educate the community, develop and implement a plan and take action to help those who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless.

---

## Members

(as of October, 2016)

8th Legislative District	Oak Park Elementary School District 97	Pillars
39th District	Oak Park Police Department	Proviso Leyden Council for Community Action, Inc.
a5 inc.	Oak Park Public Library	Rotary Club of Oak Park - River Forest
Adult Redeploy Illinois	Oak Park Residence Corporation	Rush Oak Park Hospital
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless	Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce	Thresholds
Collaboration for Early Childhood	Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation	Thrive Counseling Center
Community of Congregations	Oak Park Township	Triton College
Community Mental Health Board of Oak Park Township	Oak Park - River Forest School District 200	Village of Oak Park
Downtown Oak Park	Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry	The Way Back Inn
Hephzibah Children's Association	Park District of Oak Park	West Cook YMCA
Housing Forward (formerly West Suburban PADS)		West Suburban Hospital

# How Was This Plan Created?

---

**The Oak Park Homelessness Coalition led a community engagement process with key stakeholders in 2016. These events engaged community residents, the faith-based community, business, education and healthcare leaders, police and social service providers, funders and more.**

---

**1. Through three coordinated and facilitated workshops and presentations, we engaged more than 200 community members who will be critical to the plan's success.**

---

**2. We reviewed strategic plans to end homelessness in other communities across the country.**

---

**3. We culled the literature on best practices in addressing homelessness from ancillary systems such as libraries, schools, police and congregations.**

---

**4. We conducted a system and needs assessment based on local data and meetings with coalition members and homeless system providers.**

---

# Why Are We Doing This?

---

**Oak Park, Illinois is lauded for many important attributes—diversity, history, unique housing, environmentalism, great schools, and strong communities and neighborhoods among others. This report is a call to action to harness these strengths and resources to address the often hidden but very consequential issue of homelessness in the village.**

---

Why create a plan to end homelessness? Most centrally, no one should be without a safe, stable place to sleep at night. Everyone should be able to find housing they can afford and that meets their families' needs. Housing improves health, supports school progress, promotes dignity, and is a stabilizing force in communities.

Also important, places across the country have had tremendous success with implementing plans—from New Orleans to the state of Utah to our neighbor Rockford, Illinois—homelessness is being ended for veterans, people considered chronically homeless, and others. For example, Houston ended veteran homelessness in 2015. More than 70 local governmental, business, faith, non-profit, and charitable organizations are working together in Houston to build and manage a single homeless system focused on housing people first—quickly attaching folks to housing and having needed services and supports follow. They are at the point now where every homeless veteran who is encountered by a system partner has a permanent housing option available to them.<sup>1</sup>

Planning processes surface needs and concerns, document system strengths and gaps, and generate goals and solutions. When all sectors clearly understand and own their role in ending homelessness, progress is made. When all the key players are moving toward the goal of ending homelessness in a coordinated, accountable way, progress is made.

We are fortunate to have the Oak Park Homelessness Coalition which is focused on just this issue. Thirty-plus organizations from public and private sectors have been working together to create this plan.

In 2014, Suburban Cook County's homeless system created a county-wide plan to end homelessness. It prioritizes housing, services, and system operations improvements. This Oak Park plan builds on the county plan with localized recommendations tailored for our community context.

**The goal? That homelessness in Oak Park is...**

- **RARE**, meaning that the numbers of people experiencing homelessness decrease and numbers for whom homelessness is prevented increase;
- **BRIEF**, meaning that length of time spent homeless declines and is very short, and
- **ONE-TIME**, meaning that returns to homelessness decline.

There will always be unanticipated crises that cause housing instability. Changing economic realities, the unpredictability of life, and unsafe or unwelcoming family environments may create situations where individuals, families, or youth could experience or be at risk of homelessness.<sup>2</sup> How we set up our response to that makes all the difference. An end to homelessness means that Oak Park will have a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and one-time, non-recurring experience. Here's our plan to do just that.

---

1 <http://www.thewayhomehouston.org/houston-receives-national-recognition-for-permanently-housing-4114-homeless-veterans/#more-763>

2 [https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Webinar\\_Criteria\\_Benchmarks\\_Ending\\_Veteran\\_Homelessness.pdf](https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Webinar_Criteria_Benchmarks_Ending_Veteran_Homelessness.pdf)

# Who is Homeless in Oak Park?

The people experiencing homelessness or who are at-risk are quite diverse—in experiences, family composition, age, and situations. What follows are data and snap shots of Oak Parkers, people you may know, who illustrate the diversity of people who are struggling, the hiddenness of

homelessness, and the challenges in ending it.

Residents of Oak Park are facing a number of challenges that put them at risk of homelessness. For example, being extremely poor—having income below half the poverty line, which

translates to less than \$9,000 a year for a family of three—puts people at risk for homelessness since there is so very little money to pay for rent, let alone for other basic needs. Nearly 2,700 residents (5.2% of people in Oak Park) live in extreme poverty<sup>3</sup>, and at-risk of experiencing homelessness.

## Oak Parkers At-Risk of Experiencing Homelessness<sup>4</sup>



**DAVE, ANGELIA  
and 2 CHILDREN**  
Received a 5- day notice



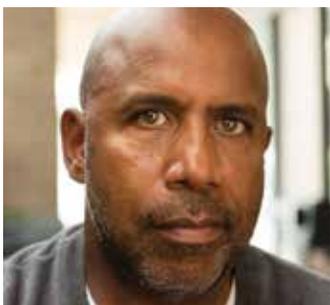
**SUSAN**  
Age 50  
Doubled up



**JENNIFER**  
Age 29  
Fleeing Domestic violence



**ROSE (Age 45) and  
her children, JAKE, 15  
and ALEXIS**  
Doubled up



**JOHN**  
Age 45  
Homeless 1 Month



**RACHEL (Age 36) and  
Daughter SAMANTHA  
(Age 8),**  
Homeless 4 Months



**Steve**  
Age 24  
Homeless 18 Months



**VICTORIA**  
Age 68  
Homeless 10 Years

<sup>3</sup> Social IMPACT Research Center's analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

<sup>4</sup> Names and some details changed to protect confidentiality

## Oak Parkers At-Risk of Experiencing Homelessness<sup>4</sup>

	SITUATION PUTTING THEM AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS	INTERVENTION NEEDED TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS
<p><b>DAVE, ANGELIA and 2 CHILDREN</b></p> <p>Received a 5- day notice</p>	<p>Angelia and Dave have been married 7 years and have two small children ages 5 and 3. Dave works for a utility company where he was recently injured. He has filed for worker's compensation but has been unable to pay rent for the last two months. Angelia works part-time as a teacher's assistant</p>	<p>Dave and Angelia were provided with two months financial assistance under the Homeless Prevention program and eviction was averted. They were also offered budgeting and financial literacy assistance (voluntary).</p>
<p><b>SUSAN</b></p> <p>Age 50</p> <p>Doubled up</p>	<p>Susan suffers from Lupus and has been living with a friend in a one-bedroom condo. Susan receives a disability check of \$1,200 each month and is on a number of lists for subsidized housing. Susan would like to rent a nice room or a studio apartment. She can afford rent at 30% of her income or \$360 per month.</p>	<p>Susan needs ongoing rent assistance due to her limited fixed income but because she is doubled up she is not considered literally homeless under HUD regulations. Therefore, her housing options are limited until a Housing Choice Voucher subsidy is available.</p>
<p><b>JENNIFER</b></p> <p>Age 29</p> <p>Fleeing domestic violence</p>	<p>Jennifer was discharged from the hospital after suffering abuse from her boyfriend and cannot return home to retrieve her belongings. The limited number of domestic violence safe-beds are full.</p>	<p>Jennifer was quickly connected to a domestic violence agency to assist with legal advocacy and provided a hotel voucher until a safe-bed becomes available. Jennifer is eligible for short-term housing, but needs to remain in the safe-bed until a unit is found.</p>
<p><b>ROSE</b></p> <p>Age 45 and her children, JAKE, 15 and ALEXIS</p> <p>Doubled up</p>	<p>Rose is a single, recently unemployed mom with two teenagers who attend the local high school. They recently moved-in with her sister, who also has two children, after an eviction for inability to pay rent. The landlord informed the sister that they are in violation of local ordinance and threatened to evict her unless Rose moves.</p>	<p>So both families don't lose housing, Rose will need to vacate the unit. She can't be immediately assisted with homeless housing because she doesn't qualify immediately as she's been living in a doubled-up situation for six months. Rose does qualify for shelter diversion services.</p>

4 Names and some details changed to protect confidentiality

.....

# “I’m shocked at how high the numbers are—especially in our schools.”

.....

As you can see, a number of forces that contribute to increases in poverty play a role in the existence of and increase in homelessness. People who are on the losing end of these fundamental forces—for example, unemployed people, people with no assets, or people with physical, mental or developmental disabilities—are then vulnerable to experiencing homelessness.<sup>5</sup> Childhood risk factors such as inadequate care by the parents, experiencing foster care or group placement, and prolonged periods of running away from home are indicators of future homelessness.<sup>6</sup> Homeless episodes often result from a combination of factors that accumulate over the course of life.<sup>7</sup>

There are also institutional pathways into homelessness—some people become homeless when discharged from institutional, temporary settings with nowhere stable to go in terms of housing. Often they entered the facility unstably housed or homeless. These

institutions include behavioral health facilities, hospitals, and jails.

At its core, homelessness is about not having stable housing and there are economic drivers to that. Rents are relatively high in Oak Park, with median rent over \$1,000 a month—unaffordable for most low-wage workers. This results in a situation where over one in five (23%) of renter households are paying over half their income on rent, making their housing situations unstable.<sup>8</sup> Any unexpected financial crisis could jeopardize housing stability and lead to an increased risk of homelessness.<sup>9</sup> This high rent burden is not unique to Oak Park; 25% of people across the entire state are in this situation. To provide a sense of scale of the problem, rental units comprise a significant share of Oak Park’s housing market—of the 21,658 occupied units, 40% are occupied by renters.<sup>10</sup>

These economic and social drivers help create a situation in which an estimated 2,182 people, including 322 families, 178 veterans, and 129 people living on the street, experienced homelessness last year in west suburban Cook County.<sup>11</sup> Further, 469 people needed help avoiding imminent homelessness.<sup>12</sup> While not all of these people spend a majority of their time in Oak Park, many do. Often not captured in counts of homelessness, 173 students were reported as homeless by the local elementary and high school districts.<sup>13</sup>

## Definitions

### Homelessness Prevention

Housing relocation and stabilization services and short-and/or medium-term rental assistance as necessary to prevent an individual or family from moving to an emergency shelter or a place not meant for human habitation.

### Emergency Shelter

Immediate, temporary housing for those experiencing a loss of housing and related crises.

### Transitional Housing

Up to 24 months of housing with support services, providing a period of stability to allow people to transition to and maintain permanent housing within 24 months of program entry.

### Rapid Re-Housing

Short- and/ or medium-term rental assistance and limited supportive services, as needed, to help an individual or family that is homeless move as quickly as possible into permanent housing and achieve stability in that housing.

### Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent housing with indefinite leasing or rental assistance paired with services to help homeless people with disabilities achieve housing stability.

5 <http://www.bentham-open.com/contents/pdf/TOHSPJ/TOHSPJ-3-41.pdf>

6 [http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=spp\\_papers](http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=spp_papers)

7 [http://www.amchp.org/programsandtopics/data-assessment/LifeCourseIndicatorDocuments/LC-07AB%20Homelessness\\_Final-9-15-2014.pdf](http://www.amchp.org/programsandtopics/data-assessment/LifeCourseIndicatorDocuments/LC-07AB%20Homelessness_Final-9-15-2014.pdf)

8 Social IMPACT Research Center’s analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

9 <http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/infrastructure>

10 Social IMPACT Research Center’s analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

11 Reflects people served in Oak Park and other west suburban Cook County communities from October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2015. These groups are not mutually exclusive.

12 Reflects people served in Oak Park and other west suburban Cook County communities from October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2015. Refers to people receiving homeless prevention assistance.

13 Districts 200 and 97.

## Oak Parkers Experiencing Homelessness <sup>14</sup>

	BARRIERS TO HOUSING	PATHWAY TO HOUSING
<p><b>JOHN</b> Age 45 Homeless 1 Month</p>	<p>John is divorced with two children and is a 15 year military veteran. John lost his apartment after losing his job as a laborer and found himself at Housing Forward's PADS Shelter. John has fortunately found a new job earning \$20 per hour.</p>	<p>John was assisted by Housing Forward's Prevail Emergency Assistance program with a security deposit, first month's rent and short-term housing stabilization services.</p>
<p><b>RACHEL (Age 36) and Daughter SAMANTHA (Age 8),</b> Homeless 4 Months</p>	<p>Rachel and Samantha generally stay at the PADS Shelter, but occasionally stay in a hotel as a break. Rachel works as a bus driver part-time and receives \$450 monthly in public benefits. She lives with bi-polar disorder stemming from childhood trauma. Unfortunately, family conflict has prevented her from reaching out to her immediate family for help with housing and support she needs with Samantha. Rachel also has a chronic medical condition which is stable, but requires regular prescriptions and visits to her doctor.</p>	<p>Rachel was enrolled in employment readiness services at Prevail. Working with Nurse Case Manager at the Support Center to find a medical home. Connected to mental health services. Approved for Rapid Re-Housing for up to 18 months.</p>
<p><b>STEVE</b> Age 24 Homeless 18 Months</p>	<p>Steve has been unstably housed since he was 18 after aging out of the foster care system. He has no solid work history stemming from a criminal background and has a documented mental illness. He regularly self-medicates with illicit drugs and doesn't have any family support network. Steve randomly stays in the local PADS shelter and on the streets between bunking with friends.</p>	<p>Steve received outreach services and he was connected to Housing Forward's Career Passport program. He graduated from the program and was then linked to vocational training and was assessed and accepted into permanent supportive housing.</p>
<p><b>VICTORIA</b> Age 68 Homeless 10 Years</p>	<p>Victoria has a severe mental illness that pre-dates her homelessness. She is often seen on the streets bundled up and rolling her belongings in a shopping cart. Her paranoia prevents her from fully engaging with staff at the PADS Shelter and she mistrusts those who want to help her. She receives Social Security benefits of \$763 per month. She does not mention having any ties to family.</p>	<p>Housing Forward's In-reach staff in the PADS Shelter will continue to try and engage with her. If she begins to trust staff, the process can begin to document her eligibility for permanent supportive housing.</p>

As illustrated here, tailored responses are needed for each situation. For Rachel's family, Rapid Re-Housing makes a difference—short to medium-term rental assistance and limited supportive services, as needed,

to help move as quickly as possible into permanent housing and achieve stability in that housing. For the Oak Parkers experiencing both housing instability and mental illness, Permanent Supportive Housing—permanent

housing with indefinite leasing or rental assistance paired with services to help people with disabilities achieve housing stability—is a more effective response.

<sup>14</sup> Names and some details changed to protect confidentiality

# The Response to Homelessness in Oak Park

Fortunately, we have learned a lot over the past 25 years about what works to end homelessness and Oak Park has used those lessons to bolster its response, as seen throughout the case studies.

Much of Oak Park's response centers around shelter, housing and services provided by Housing Forward, a non-profit focused on preventing the loss of housing before it occurs, alleviating the need for long-term

shelter, moving people into sustainable permanent housing solutions, and improving housing retention. An outline of their services is below.

## Prevail Emergency Assistance

- Financial Assistance and Referrals
- Short Term Stabilization Services
- Shelter Diversion
- AfterCare to prevent a return to homelessness

## PADS Shelter

- Provides basic needs of food and shelter
- Emergency Shelter (September to May)
- Transitional Shelter (June to September)

## Prevail Employment Readiness

- One-on-one Employment Readiness counseling
- Career Passport group program

## Supportive Services

- Year-round Support Center for basic needs (showers, laundry, lockers for storage, and an address to receive mail)
- Life skills and wellness classes
- Case Management
- Medical Clinic & Legal Clinic

## Outreach & Engagement

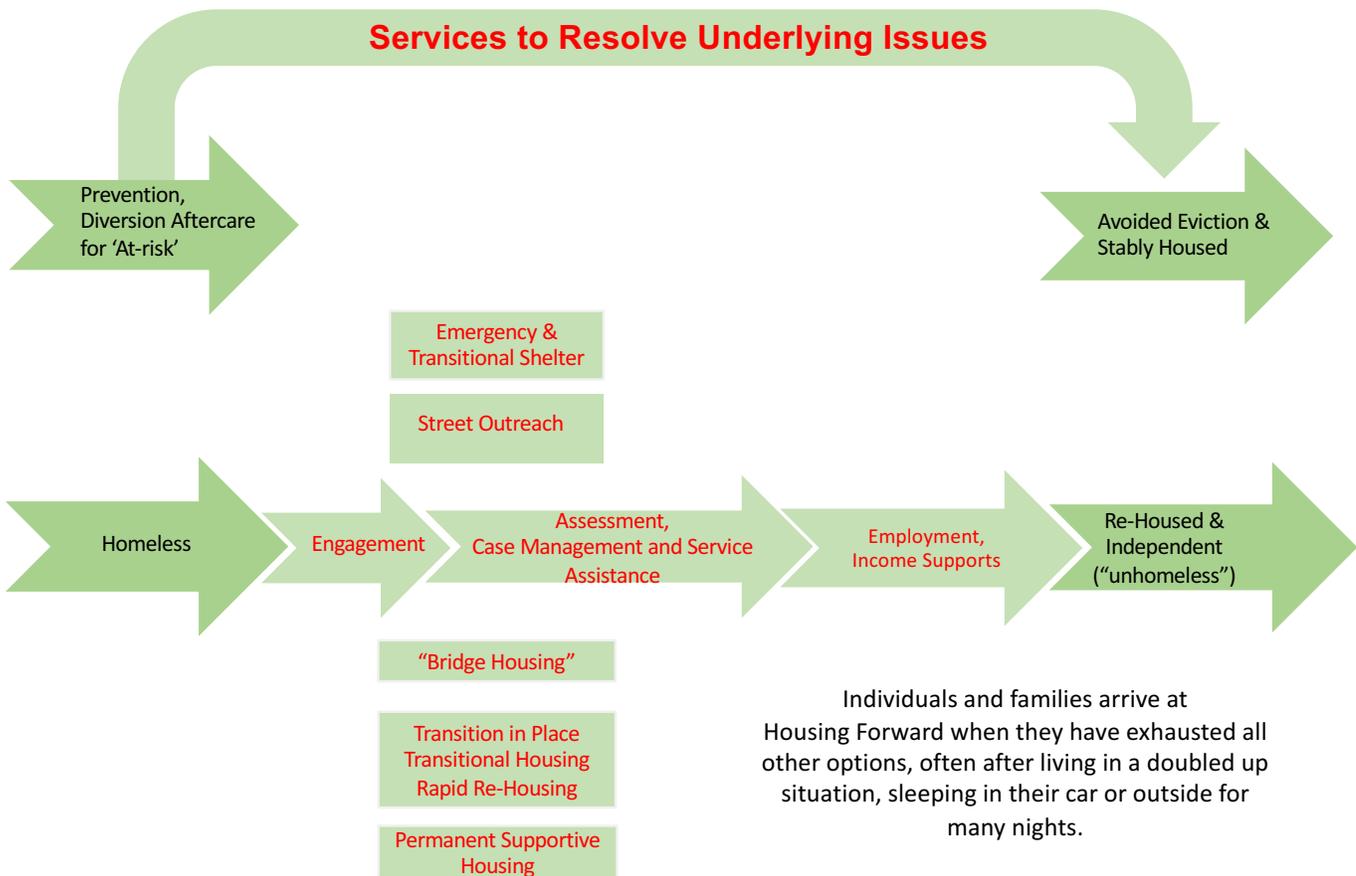
- PADS Shelter In-Reach: Specialists connect clients to services and housing
- Street Outreach: Specialists connect with homeless persons living on the street

## Supportive Housing

- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Rapid Re-Housing/Transitional Housing

Contact Housing Forward for these services: 708.338.1724 or 888.338.1744  
[www.housingforward.org](http://www.housingforward.org)

Services and housing are being organized to move people as quickly through the homeless system as possible. Here is a snapshot of how they are being aligned and how people move through them.



## Where Can You Learn More?

We need your help to make homelessness rare, brief and one time. To learn more about the issue and how you can participate, connect with:

**OAK PARK  
HOMELESSNESS  
COALITION**

[www.endhomelessnessoakpark.com](http://www.endhomelessnessoakpark.com)

**housing  
FORWARD**

[www.housingforward.org](http://www.housingforward.org)

Many other providers and programs also play critical roles conducting outreach, providing behavioral health supports, affordable housing, food, early childhood, and other interventions.

In addition, Oak Park is an active leader in the wider suburban Cook County homeless system efforts that are bringing new resources and solutions

to the community. Considerable effort is going into developing a 'Coordinated Entry' process—a process that combines technology, intake and assessment as a powerful tool for making rapid, effective, and consistent matches of people in need of housing and services regardless of their location within a geographic area. Suburban Cook County was also

selected to participate in Zero: 2016, a national campaign to end Veteran and chronic homelessness; that effort is making tremendous progress towards ending Veteran homelessness locally.

So the foundation is very strong. That said, there are gaps in the response that need to be addressed if Oak Park is going to end homelessness.

### 1. Housing needs:

- There are simply not enough affordable rental units for households at or below 30% of the Area Median Income. The median household income (in 2014 dollars) in Oak Park is \$78,895.
- Federal housing and homeless funds have a number of restrictions which can make quick or short-term rentals a challenge, despite their value in getting someone off the streets while better solutions are identified.
- There are not enough leasing and service dollars to support those needing housing with support services.
- Shelters have been at capacity and turning people away since last October—but Housing Forward guarantees housing for families so single adults are often turned away a couple nights a week when additional local beds are not available.
- Pool of flexible, non-public, funds to support bridge units where shelter clients can go as they wait for a permanent unit to become available.

### 2. Prevention limitations:

- Capacity is limited to provide timely services for those at-risk of homelessness.
- Funding for prevention needs to be more flexible to allow tailoring to unique needs such as security deposits, first month's rent, rent arrears, and others.
- More education is needed of those at-risk of homelessness and residents to promote more openness about housing status, willingness to ask for help without repercussions, and knowledge of resources in the community.
- There are not widely adopted screenings or process for at-risk households who are touching ancillary systems (e.g., schools, hospitals) to connect people to services before they become homeless.

### 3. Service gaps:

- There is not enough capacity or resources to serve the demand across a range of services:
- The outreach team is small so day/time coverage is limited.
- There are gaps in hours between service locations at walk-in sites and shelter sites.
- There are not enough resources for tangible goods including transportation to get people to appointments, food and items to address other basic needs.
- There is limited access to employment opportunities.

All this work is further clouded and challenged by the state of Illinois budget crisis. The crisis has put human service and homeless providers at risk and many have gone unpaid for a year. Services are being dialed back and programs closing.

While not an exhaustive list, you can see that these are tangible problems the community can address through strategic investment and alignment of resources, policies, and efforts. The next section outlines the action areas Oak Park will focus on in the next three

years to move the community towards ending homelessness.

# What Is It Going to Take to End Homelessness in Oak Park?

---

**Exciting things are happening in Oak Park to align its homeless system for maximum impact, and the 2016 planning sessions spurred new activity. The action steps identified here reflect work underway, best practices from other communities, and plans and new ideas which, taken together will significantly strengthen the local homeless response and will move the community towards its goal.**

---

## **1. Increase support for affordable housing: To end homelessness in Oak Park, we must create both an affordable housing approach and leverage existing units in the private rental market.**

- Invest development fees in affordable housing. The Village has negotiated the construction of mixed-use, multi-family buildings on two publicly-owned parcels in the downtown area. As a condition of both redevelopment agreements, the developers will invest a combined \$1,000,000 in affordable housing in Oak Park. This summer, the Board of Trustees began to discuss how best to invest those funds. The Coalition should work together to identify a specific investment request that would have a substantial impact on reducing homelessness in Oak Park.
- Facilitate the development of affordable housing through local ordinances. The Village regulates the construction of housing through planning, zoning, and permitting. Envision Oak Park, the Village's comprehensive plan adopted in 2014, includes several recommendations to promote the development of affordable housing in response to market demand. The comprehensive plan is intended to set a vision for future development, and the zoning ordinance regulates the type and intensity of development that is allowed in each parcel of land. This summer the Village reviewed several changes to the existing zoning ordinance. One of those changes would name affordable housing set-asides as an option to meet the compensating benefit requirement of all planned developments. If approved, this change would create the potential for new affordable housing units in the most exciting new developments in Oak Park.
- Create a working group to identify additional policy goals. There are many other ways to encourage the preservation and development of affordable housing in Oak Park. Most of them fall under two umbrellas: change land use regulations and invest in new development. The coalition should create a working group to study best practices in policy that have been successfully implemented in other communities. Based on that review, the coalition could make specific requests for policy changes from the appropriate local government.
- Through landlord engagement: creating partnerships with private market landlords is a critical step to be able to move people out of homelessness quickly. To increase buy-in and success landlords need to be assured that services will be there if needed in a crisis. Explore incentives to landlords who make housing units affordable and available to homeless or at-risk households such as small cash grants or loans to pay for minor repairs. Work to create and support partnerships between service providers, the Oak Park Regional Housing Center, and landlords to help identify and set aside units and to remove barriers to renting.
- Through unit donations: explore how donation of apartments could work and if there are tax benefit as opportunity for landlords to provide brief housing during periods of vacancy.

**2. Expand capacity of specialized homeless housing responses: There are a number of evidence-based housing plus services interventions proven to end homelessness that are being used in Oak Park. The challenge is that demand exceeds capacity.**

- Grow support for rental subsidies/ leasing and service dollars for those needing housing with support services.
- Encourage the Housing Authority to implement a homeless preference in housing voucher wait list.
- Increase short- and medium-term housing options for families experiencing homelessness, including those identified as homeless or doubled-up through the schools.
- Explore ideas around diversifying YMCA housing.
- Identify funds and units for bridge housing. This could be a flexible pool of funds to lease units that can be held and available the minute someone experiencing homelessness is identified.
- Identify units or resources for respite housing. Medical respite care is short-term acute and post-acute medical care for people experiencing homelessness that are too ill or frail to recover from an illness without being housed, but are not ill enough to be in a hospital. It can be offered in a variety of settings including freestanding facilities, homeless shelters, nursing homes, and transitional housing.

- Identify fund to evolve rapid re-housing funds beyond the current imposed cap of six months.
- Target some homeless housing resources for teenage families and homeless youth.

**3. Align and grow funding to advance the goal of ending homelessness: While a subset of these recommendations requires low- and no-cost changes, some will require new and ongoing support to see them through. There are tremendous personal, financial and community tolls to allowing homelessness to continue; the investments needed to address it pale in comparison.**

- Local funders should align their funding when appropriate with these plan priorities.
- Explore dedicated local funding from the Village. Other communities have dedicated funding sources, such as a targeted sales tax, to provide homeless services. Examples include the Health and Human Services Levy in Cuyahoga County and the King County Homeless Housing and Services Fund .
- Work in partnership with the village Development Customer Services Department to continue to prioritize ending homelessness when allocating municipally controlled funding resources as it has been doing with ESG and CDBG entitlement funds.

- Explore with HUD and Chicago if we could reallocate excess funds in from Chicago's homeless system to Oak Park to serve those who flow between communities, a 'money follows the person' concept.
- Engage the private and philanthropic community to fund and support non-government supported services and housing.

**4. Scale up prevention activities: Homelessness prevention activities are designed to reduce the number of people who become homeless for the first time. Activities include short- or medium-term financial assistance and services as well as tenant and legal services.**

- Grow staff capacity so more timely services can be provided including foreclosure counseling, income and asset development, and money management.
- Increase flexible funding for prevention to cover expenses such as security deposits, first month's rent, rent arrears, mortgage assistance and others.
- Explore feasibility of a flexible revolving loan fund funded by private individuals.
- Develop screening protocols so at-risk households who are touching ancillary systems (e.g., schools, hospitals) are connected to services before they become homeless.

.....

**“Our community will look very different soon without enough affordable housing units.”**

.....

.....

**“I am very concerned about our high number of at-risk.”**

.....

**5. Create new service intersections and coordination: While housing is the centerpiece of local responses to homelessness, success in housing and becoming stabilized is often a result of receiving needed services and supports. These aren't an addendum, they are crucial.**

- Continue to support new outreach services for people experiencing mental illness and expand outreach coverage across populations to evening hours and coordinate services across providers to reach 24/7 coverage.
- Increase efforts to connect service providers and to communicate with each other to decrease fragmentation and information gaps. Move beyond communication and collaboration toward real integration and coordination.
- Assess feasibility/salience of a service presence in the Harlem CTA station.
- Create a local, accessible walk-in service center as part of the regional Coordinated Entry efforts to improve the local response to preventing homelessness or quickly stabilizing homeless adults, families and youth.

**6. Strengthen attachments to jobs and income: Linking individuals and families with stable income and employment is a critical tool in the fight to prevent and end homelessness. In addition, many individuals who are homeless may be working but not earning enough to keep a stable roof over their heads. Better jobs are important.**

- Work with case managers across providers and township staff to ensure people are getting all the public benefits for which they are eligible including TANF (cash assistance/welfare), SSI (disability), SNAP (food stamps), and childcare assistance.
- Grow pool of local employer partners. Recruit within congregations and business districts. Provide coaching and other supports to employers to set both parties up for success.
- Explore opportunities for vocational training partnerships with the high school and local colleges.
- Assess procurement/contracting opportunities with the village and with the business districts akin to Chicago's partnership with CleanSlate. Determine if existing funds, such as government landscaping contracts could support hiring of people experiencing homelessness.

## Commitments Made

**Lynda Schueler, Housing Forward**

**Action item:** integrating Oak Park Homeless Coalition plan strategies into Housing Forward's strategic plan

**Start:** Fall 2016 / implementation 2017

**Milestones:** Agency's fall retreat with Board leadership staff; approval of plan; implementation 2017-2019

**How will you know it's been accomplished:** planning document becomes living document

**What's needed:** resources, partnerships

**Support from coalition:** building up communication between providers; buy-in and commitment in contributing to implementation of the plan

.....

# “There is such a strong correlation between health and homelessness.”

.....

**7. Build community awareness and support: An informed public is an engaged public. Community education is important to advance this ambitious plan.**

- Create ambassadors and responders in partnership with congregations and other interested groups. Develop a presentation/training that could be easily repeated in congregations and other sites.
- Community education and engagement can de-stigmatize homelessness and shine a spotlight on ways to make homelessness rare, brief and one time. The Coalition should continue its poster and advertising campaign and consider developing a speaker series, increasing its presence via the media, creating “advocacy actions” and making presentations to community groups (churches, service organizations, etc.).

- Consider launching a multi-faceted “Good Neighbor” campaign all Oak Park residents could participate in that would include:

- Education to counter resistance to locating programs and housing in neighborhoods; address concerns and stereotypes; and increase knowledge of how to respond.
- Stakeholder involvement to increase landlord participation; and increase prevention and support resources in system - such as food, clothes, and private funding for utility and/or rental assistance.
- Resident engagement to have a bigger, louder voice for advocacy; and most importantly to proactively prevent homelessness (share in the responsibility of preventing at-risk-to-homelessness households from becoming homeless within their immediate neighborhood).

- Update resource cards and distribution plan. Consider multiple distribution formats including print, an app, link on village website, and monthly ‘cut out’ version in Wednesday Journal. Make available at public counters including libraries, schools, post offices, hospitals, and Village Hall public service counters.

**8. Strengthen community homeless touchpoints: Many of our community systems and resources touch homelessness but are not a core part of the response, such as libraries, health providers, schools, and police. Better collaboration with these touchpoints will be critical to preventing homelessness and for ensuring a quick response.**

- Work with them on pressing concerns e.g., local hotspots, coverage gaps and crisis response.
- Foster institutional support to have staff assigned as liaisons to the homeless system.
- Hold periodic trainings for these systems on how to identify and refer people experiencing homelessness and those at-risk of homelessness to immediate supports.

.....

# “We need to keep front and center the unique needs of the different populations experiencing homelessness.”

.....

- Support cross-training and networking opportunities to keep knowledge fresh and to identify new concerns.
- When appropriate, have these systems assess their participants for housing status during intake to prevent discharge into homelessness. Homeless system data continues to show that a share of people experiencing homelessness were in an institutional setting just prior—such as a hospital, treatment facility, or jail. To prevent release into homelessness, identify those who might be homeless during intake and establish a process. For example, a hospital social worker could be engaged from that point, or a local outreach team, or a homeless provider.

**9. Mobilize for advocacy: in the movement to end homelessness we face significant policy barriers as well as opportunities. Local, state and federal elected officials are more likely to focus on ending homelessness if they understand how it affects people and programs in the area they represent.**

- Use the plan as a tool for elected official and key stakeholder engagement. This could include soliciting plan endorsements, having a release event with elected officials invited, and hosting site visits to show off the great work being done.
- Stay closely connected with local and national groups leading the advocacy efforts including the Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, the Responsible Budget Coalition, and the National Alliance to End Homelessness.
- Consider every convening and contact as an opportunity for people to take action. Make it easy and keep up a drum beat.

- Advocacy efforts could focus on drivers of homelessness and solutions: increased funding for affordable housing and housing subsidies for people with very low incomes; adequate and stable funding for homeless housing and services, mental health and substance abuse treatment and recovery services, and services for victims of domestic violence; an increased wage floor so workers can afford rents and subsidized employment opportunities to support entry into work.
- Explore local policy change opportunities that would further the goals of preventing and ending homelessness, including the residency requirement process for the school districts; right to housing policies and affordable housing policy options; and policing policy and practice as it intersects with homelessness.

# Commitments Made

## Lee Owens, North Avenue Business Association

**Action item:** educating members on homelessness problem

**Start:** as soon as I get literature

**Milestones:** mass email to all members and partners

**How will you know it's been accomplished:** replies to email

**What's needed:** email flyers

**Support from coalition:** literature

## Rachel Rettberg, Wonder Works Children's Museum

**Action item:** contact Housing Forward to find families who need or use memberships and/or passes to use with their kids during the day

**Start:** 2017

**Milestones:** contact Housing Forward, ensure memberships & passes are sent out and then on a continuous basis as needed

**How will you know it's been accomplished:** we track all our passes and funded memberships as they visit so we would see how many families were using them

**What's needed:** possible buy in from staff if they are unsure how this would work or concerned about other visitors perceptions or families, etc.

**Support from coalition:** training for staff at the museum to ensure families are made welcome. Train staff on the resources available to families, so they can support & give information out.

.....

**“People are drawn to Oak Park’s welcoming spirit. We need to step up.”**

.....

### 10. Foster ‘outside of the box’ responses:

- Grow innovative responses to meet basic needs akin to Delia’s Kitchen, where patrons can purchase tokens and then any person experiencing homelessness can use them; one token for a cup of coffee or a pastry or soup, and two tokens for breakfast or lunch.
- Develop a Centralized Professional Services Volunteer and Referral List drawn from congregations and others in the community who are willing to donate time and services.
- Get donated memberships for families experiencing homelessness to local children’s museum and create family spaces within to foster support and fun.
- Explore home sharing options to assist homeless students and their families.
- Identify new revenue sources such as micro fundraising and donation machines attached to obsolete parking meters.
- Learn from Oak Park Public Library’s addition of a social worker to address homelessness and efforts to create a safe and welcoming environment for all patrons.
- Offer to share open Resource Database (i.e. Solutions database) to search for services and housing for partnering agencies.
- Build from the collaborative success of Prevail, now a program of Housing Forward, which was founded through the collaborative efforts the Community of Congregations to provide a centralized location to refer people who came to the doors of local congregations seeking basic assistance, such as food, shelter, transportation and clothing and help avoiding eviction and utility shut-off.

# What's Next?

---

**Oak Park is putting forth a thoughtful and innovative plan to end homelessness. It accounts for local realities while taking on important new challenges and priorities. Growing homeless prevention opportunities. Growing affordable housing capacity and developing new models. Fostering innovation and cultivating unique community responses. These are bold goals, but in line with best practices and are needed to end homelessness.**

---

This new plan also identifies new partners, in new areas, to seize critical opportunities and to leverage more support for the homeless system. Finally, implementation of this ambitious plan requires new resources and new capacities.

So while the road ahead includes a lot of hard work, tough decision-making, and new ways of doing business, the ultimate outcome will be worth it for people experiencing homelessness in Oak Park—homelessness that is rare, brief, and one-time. This is a

community that can do it. Our commitment to a great local government, responsive resources, an inclusive community and neighborhood vitality are critical building blocks. Please join us.

---

## Report Information

The Social IMPACT Research Center thanks members of the Oak Park Homeless Coalition for all of time and thoughtfulness they put into this planning process and plan development.

### Report Authors

Amy Rynell and Amy Terpstra

### Report Design

a5 / a5inc.com

### Sponsors

Anonymous



### The Core Committee

Lisa Devivo, Community Mental Health Board of Oak Park Township  
Cristy Harris, Housing Forward  
John Harris, a5  
Vanessa Matheny, Community Mental Health Board of Oak Park Township  
Teresa Powell, Village of Oak Park  
Lynda Schueler, Housing Forward  
Drew Williams-Clark, Village of Oak Park

This report was made possible by the generous support of the Community Mental Health Board of Oak Park Township and Village of Oak Park.

### The Social IMPACT Research Center

The Social IMPACT Research Center conducts applied research for non-profits, foundations, advocacy groups, governments, coalitions, and the media to help them measure, inform, and grow their social impact. IMPACT also regularly reports on key poverty trends to equip decision makers with sound data to inform public policy.

Visit [www.socialimpactresearchcenter.org](http://www.socialimpactresearchcenter.org) to learn more.

OakParkApartments.com

# How Can We End Homelessness in Oak Park?

## 10 Things You Can Do to Join In:

- 1** Help raise funds: For the plan to succeed, additional resources are needed to support innovations in service delivery, expansion of key services, and creation of new responses. Help raise funds for the plan by hosting fundraisers or making personal donations to local foundations or service providers.
- 2** Spread the word: Share the plan with your social networks, keep solutions in the discourse, and write letters to the editor about the importance of the plan.
- 3** Volunteer your time: Attend the Homelessness Coalition meetings, help out at service providers, or become a board member of a non-profit working to end homelessness.
- 4** Provide affordable housing: A key contributor to the growth in homelessness is a lack of affordable rental units in Oak Park. Builders and housing developers can work to create or set-aside affordable housing units in new developments to help end homelessness in Oak Park.
- 5** Sponsor a talk on homelessness: Raising awareness is a first step in the solution. Help raise awareness of homelessness by focusing a talk, meeting, sermon or event with groups you are affiliated with such as your church, book club, Rotary Club, Kiwanis or Junior League.
- 6** Link those in need to services: If you know someone who is struggling connect them with Housing Forward to learn about what services they may be eligible for: 708-338-1724 or 888-338-1744 [www.housingforward.org](http://www.housingforward.org).
- 7** Advocate: Raise the issue with people running for local office, respond to state and federal action alerts about funding and policy for homeless programming and affordable housing, and change local policies to incentivize or support the creation of affordable units.
- 8** Assess your business: Assess the wages you pay relative to the local cost of housing. If you are a landlord, think about ways to maintain quality housing while lowering rents. Think about how your business expertise can help advance the plan to end homelessness.
- 9** Garner donations: people experiencing homelessness in Oak Park often lack even the most basic things needed to get by from day to day. Work with a local non-profit to determine what items are needed and collect donations.
- 10** Treat people experiencing homelessness with dignity and respect: People often fall into homelessness when a crisis occurs that could happen to any of us: a job loss, a health crisis, poor mental health, alcohol/substance addiction or domestic abuse. It is important not to judge as you don't know what that person has experienced, make eye contact and give them the same respect as you would to any other person that you come across during your day.

Thank you for your contributions to ending homelessness in Oak Park!

[endhomelessnessoakpark.com](http://endhomelessnessoakpark.com)

**OAK PARK  
HOMELESSNESS  
COALITION**

[endhomelessnessoakpark.com](http://endhomelessnessoakpark.com)