



Five-Year Strategic Plan

FY22-FY26



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with
promise

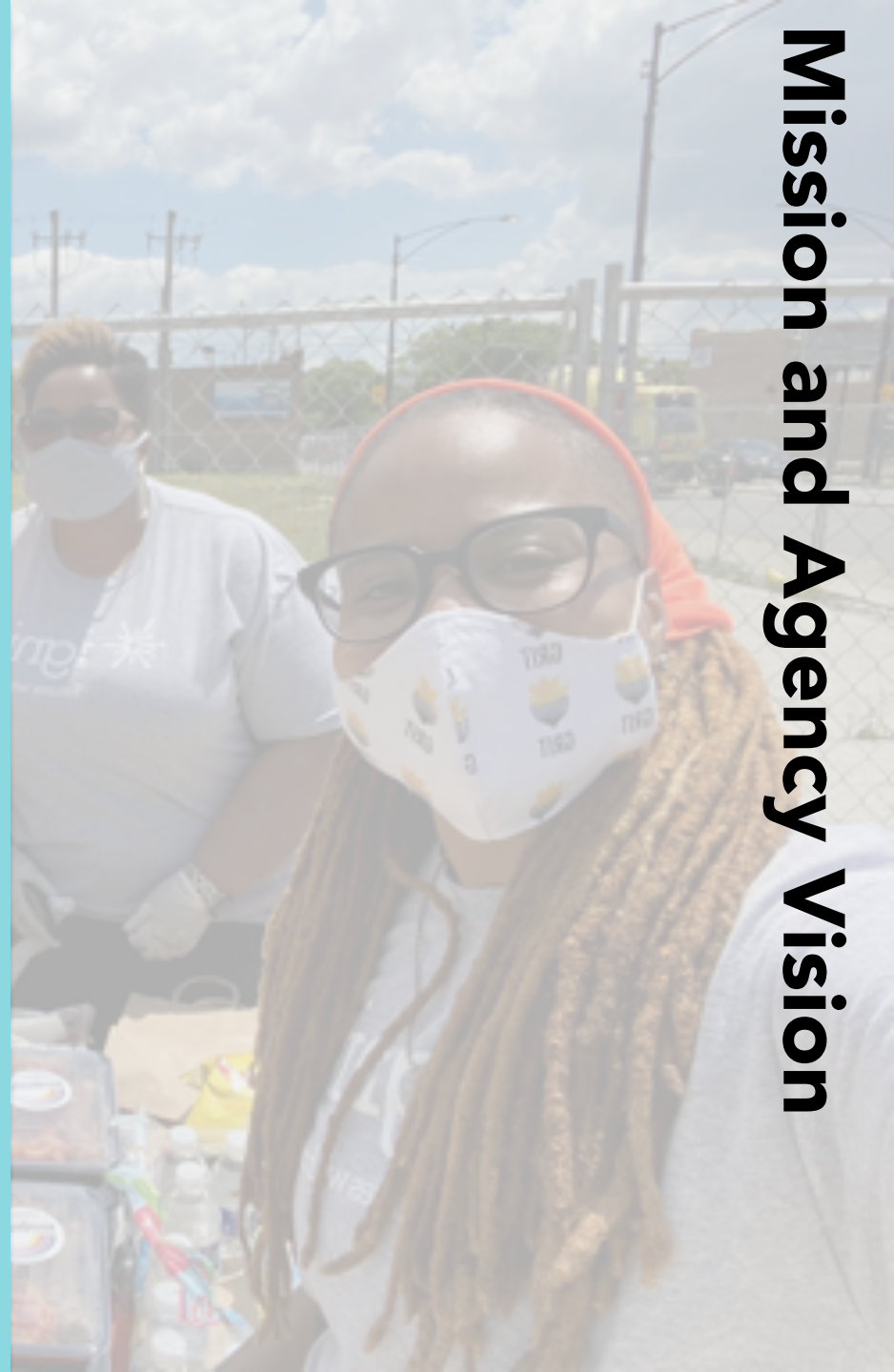
Ignite stands with youth on their journey to a home and a future with promise.

Vision:

Ignite envisions a world where all young people have the support they need to be defined by their potential, not their circumstances.

Beyond meeting their immediate needs, we provide our young people with all the tools and support they need to succeed: stable housing, access to employment and education opportunities, primary and mental health care, lasting connections with caring adults, and the skills to live healthy, independent lives.

Our holistic model is trauma-informed, evidence-based, and culturally sensitive.



Mission and Agency Vision

Who We Are Today



At Ignite, we envision a world where all young people have the support they need to be defined by their potential, not their circumstances.

For over 45 years Ignite has broken the cycles of poverty and youth homelessness for those aged 14-26 through transformative programming and services that spark opportunity, achievement, and resiliency.

Ignite works with approximately 400-500 young people annually, building their personal and economic independence through our services.

Ignite has pioneered a groundbreaking, nationally-recognized approach to stopping youth homelessness while preventing adult homelessness. Our model, which has progressed in complexity over our 45-year history, is responsive to youth's needs as defined by them.

Vision for the Future Five-Year

Ignite will strengthen its mission by adapting its model to meet young people, 14-26, where they are and continue to walk with them until they develop the support systems, skills and safety-nets they need to move from survival mode to resilience. Our model of service will operate within a period of intervention driven by youth needs, goals and vision. All young people experiencing homelessness in Chicago will know of Ignite and experience a level of service built on trust and quality. We will have a fully invested infrastructure that supports meaningful change, brand recognition and builds sustainable impact.

The three pillars to our strategic plan are:

Deliver a model that meets all youth where they are and stays with them until they move into long-term stable housing.

Deliver services in all areas of Chicago where unaccompanied youth are experiencing homelessness.

Build organizational capacity to support innovation, recognition and build sustainable impact.

An Inspired and Equitable Path

Diversified funding with youth-centered timelines driven by needs and dreams, not funding restrictions.

Based on years of experience working with youth, Ignite is acutely aware that one of the challenges facing youth is the current public funding restrictions that force a young person to exit residential programs within 18-24 months upon entry. This is not a sufficient length of time for a young person to begin transitioning from survival mode to resilience and achieve personal and financial independence. Not only is this unrealistic, it is not an age-appropriate expectation. Comparing circumstances and resources of youth, as young as 18 who have the necessary support systems and safety nets, our youth are placed in a distinct, inequitable disadvantage. It's time to stop the time clock for youth experiencing unstable housing, so we can effectively stand with them not just through the end of the time with us but on their journey to a permanent home and a future with promise.

Broad outreach and supports that honor each young person.

We also understand that youth homelessness occurs for many reasons and under a variety of circumstances, possessing no single solution. Effective intervention requires flexibility, innovation, and continuous action to meet a person where they are both emotionally and physically, as needs and situations shift over time. This requires Ignite to have a reach that is vast and ever-changing.

A legacy that is built to last.

Finally, we know growth requires the proper foundation, including necessary staff, systems and technology that will make reaching and supporting more youth possible. Ignite believes in evidence-based and trauma-informed care, delivered by trained staff who embrace the spark in each young person.

When young people envision a future for themselves it includes many things - education, career opportunities, exploration, growth, relationships, family and independence. For most youth, this vision and path is usually tethered to strong supports, safety nets, friends and family – available often without a specific timetable or expiration date.

Now imagine for a minute if a young person's vision for their future isn't connected to anything they need that is stable or available - no safety nets or support systems that many youth experience as they grow. A path also marked with unstable housing, lack of food and financial supports, and increased exposure to trauma.

Ignite sees the distinction between these two journeys as a profound intersection between equity and inequity.

Deliver a model that meets all youth where they are and stays with them until they move into long-term stable housing.

Ignite will diversify funding and program models and expand financial resources to create a pathway that eliminates a funding time clock - allowing youth and staff to determine a timeline set up for each young person's success.

Growth over the next 5 years will take place in the following programs:

- **Community-based Housing:** A two-year program where young adults (ages 18 to 24) reside in community-based apartments and focus on goals that will allow them to achieve personal and financial independence. By adding privately funded apartments to this program, youth who transition from publicly funded housing, within Ignite or from another referral partner, will be able to stay for the duration of this program – with the opportunity to transition to Supportive Affordable Housing.
- **Supportive Affordable Housing:** A three-year program where young adults (ages 21 to 26) live as roommates and work on employment goals and leadership skills, preparing them to be responsible for market-based leases and to live independently by their program exit. Adding units to this program supports the growth of Community-based Housing and offers youth, outside of Ignite, more opportunities to qualify for affordable housing units.

90% growth in number of youth served through apartment housing.

Deliver services in all areas of Chicago where unaccompanied youth are experiencing homelessness.

700 youth served, agency-wide, per year.

Ignite will grow outreach to communities on the south, north and west sides of Chicago through an extensive mapping project and direct outreach in new neighborhoods.

Inclusive of these strategies we will continue and add expand the following:

Street Outreach: Create a presence in various locations and communities where young people experiencing homelessness are known to be to provide them with emergency services, food, safe-sex kits, cold weather items, referrals, and impromptu crisis counseling, as well as information about how to access Ignite's resources, programs, and services.

Community Presentations: Build awareness and understanding of youth homelessness through presentations at various community sites and events, such as libraries, community colleges, and neighborhood fairs and parades, so our partners can refer and direct youth in need to our services.

Digital Outreach: Our virtual outreach, QR codes, text line and Chatbot, keeps our clients apprised of and connected to our programs and resources, as well as other community resources. It also spreads the word about what we do to youth in need who are unfamiliar with Ignite.

24-Hour Crisis Line: Youth have a place to turn 24/7 for support, crisis counseling, referrals, and information about resources.

Community Hub: Whether one is in crisis or focused on building their independence over the long-term, this is a one-stop-shop where youth have access to wide-ranging case management services, hot meals, and other basic needs items, storage lockers, transportation cards, housing assessments and referrals, and different groups for education, support, and life skills building.

**Build
organizational
capacity to
support
innovation,
recognition and
build sustainable
impact.**

Ignite will ensure staff, systems, technologies and resources are in place to support our 5-year plan.

Over the next five years we will:

Grow as a sought-after employer, with competitive benefits and a rich culture of connectedness and achievement.

Add key positions to finance, administration and development.

Further implement the work of our inclusion and diversity focus groups.

Create a comprehensive technology plan that supports our growth and vision.

Expand program data measurements, inclusive of adding new, evidence-based outcomes.

Invest in marketing and communications materials and videos - targeting new neighborhoods, corporate partners, national publications and policy stakeholders.

**28% increase in
funding
resources to
support long-
term growth.**