



Care For **Friends**

Annual Report and  
Services Overview

530 W. FULLERTON PKY  
CHICAGO, IL 60614 PHONE:  
773.932.1010

## Hunger and Homelessness in Chicago

Despite a 10% reduction in homelessness across the City of Chicago over the past year, the incidence of homelessness in Lincoln Park has increased threefold during the same period, according to the City's 2016 Point In Time count<sup>1</sup>. With roots dating back to 1968, Care For Friends has seen the shifting character of the neighborhood as its grown to one of the wealthiest in the city, and understand that Chicago's shrinking homeless population has gravitated to this part of the city in part because of the perception that life-changing resources are concentrating with the wealth there.

Indeed, our experience shows that neighborhood homeless have travelled from the far South, West, and North sides to the neighborhood – a gathering that is particularly common among single men aged 18-62 who fall through the cracks of government programs that are in place to support seniors, women, infants, and children.

Nationally, a recent study found that 76% of Americans are living “paycheck to paycheck,” with “fewer than one in four Americans [having] enough money in their savings account to cover at least six months of expenses,” while 50% have “less than a three-month cushion, and 27% [having] no savings at all<sup>2</sup>.”

This precarious financial situation makes paying grocery bills, rent, or mortgages difficult – let alone medical bills when health emergencies strike. Many Americans who can't

---

<sup>1</sup> 2016 Homeless Point-in-Time County & Survey Report from [https://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/fss/supp\\_info/Homeless/2016PITHomelessCount/2016PITSummaryReportFinal091216.pdf](https://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/fss/supp_info/Homeless/2016PITHomelessCount/2016PITSummaryReportFinal091216.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> “76% of Americans are Living paycheck-to-paycheck”, CNN Money, June 24, 2013, from <http://money.cnn.com/2013/06/24/pf/emergency-savings/>

afford medical treatment turn to hospitals, placing strain on the “free care” that is available there. In fact, in late 2015, the Center for Disease control reported that one in five Americans will visit the ER at least once annually – with as many as 65% of their visits deemed “non-emergencies” and delivered at about four times the cost of a similar visit in non-emergency venues.<sup>3</sup> For an individual struggling to balance home costs, health costs, and food costs, without a financial safety net, a precarious situation exists – where one mis-step can result in homelessness. Consequently, there are three major factors that can upset the balance and cause one to experience homelessness – the lack of affordable housing, the lack of education or current job skills, or a challenge with maintaining sober physical or mental health.

**50% of Individuals who achieved permanent housing through a leading city program were brought into the program through contact at Care For Friends. 80% remained housed after a one-year checkup**

### **Creating a Community of Trust To Address Community Challenges**

Recognizing the paradox involved in a community where Chicagoans who have access to the most resources are living alongside those with absolutely the fewest resources, Care For Friends engaged in a dialog with all of our neighbors about ways to continue to reduce homelessness citywide through our programs.

---

<sup>3</sup> Why Do We Continue Using the ER for Care? Elaine Cox, M.D., December 14, 2015 at <http://health.usnews.com/health-news/patient-advice/articles/2015-12-14/why-do-we-continue-using-the-er-for-care>

We found that for each of the three major challenges – affordable housing, job skills, mental and physical health – there were very strong programs in the city (even, on our block) that could create sustainable change in circumstances for those who experience homelessness. Yet, while they have very high rates of success in changing lives, they also come with reporting or registration requirements that scare off potential participants, creating an artificially high barrier of entry for the city’s most vulnerable. Studies have shown within just three months of “living rough,” there is a notable decline in mental and physical health.<sup>4</sup> With issues of paranoia emerging over time, homeless populations have a high level of distrust of others, and are skeptical of those who may say they can help – but require registration, identification, and other sensitive personal information to proceed with a plan.

These issues of distrust for things involved in simple intake procedures are compounded when the individual experiencing homeless may have a prior criminal record, or a questionable immigration status.

The consequence, then, is that life-changing programs that homeless individuals are entitled to, are not accessed at the high volumes they should be.

With this knowledge, Care for Friends has created all of our programs with a focus on creating a trusted community – that connects homeless individual to one another, to our neighbors, and to agencies that can help – accessible through a no-barriers-to-entry suite of services that can launch them on the road to a better future.

---

<sup>4</sup> Megan Ravenhill, 2016 “The Culture of Homelessness.” Routledge.

## **Addressing the Immediate Needs**

At the center of our program is a community meal, prepared three times per week.

Served family style at tables of 8-10 guests, a typical meal is prepared by volunteers “to a quality level you would be proud to serve to guests in your own home.” A typical hot lunch can host up to 125 guests, and we intentionally invite our volunteers and representatives from partner organizations to mix in to the various tables and participate as a member of the community.

To foster relationship development, we open our doors at 10:30 for a noon meal service, staying open until about 1pm, so that there is ample opportunity for conversation and connection to take place. No sign-in sheet is used, no IDs are checked, and there is no distinction made between volunteer, partner, neighbor, or homeless guest throughout the day. Indeed, all are welcome, as often as they wish.

Alongside this Food for Friends program, we’ve build a number of other simple services that build trust around interactions to support basic needs. Our Clothing for Friends program makes a seasonal clothes closet available for each guest to take two items of clothing per day, Toiletries for Friends provides thousands of hygiene kits containing toothbrushes, combs, soap, and the like each year. Healthcare for Friends delivers clean socks, basic footcare, and confidential interactions with medical professionals (who perform upwards of 600 doctor-patient visits), and our Book for Friends lending library contains over a thousand titles for use by our guests.



**Meet “John.” John was a regular attendee of Care For Friends meals who connected with our partner organizations. Today, he has achieved sobriety, maintained stable housing, and held down a full-time job, for over 10 years.**

*\*to maintain the dignity and respect of our guests, names and photos are not shared in this report*

### **Connecting to Lasting Change**

Beyond providing an immediate resource, however, we believe that these interactions are important because they begin to create trusting relationships between our homeless guests and our partner organizations who can deliver long-lasting life-changing resources. When our guests interact with “Patrick the guy with the beard who cooked that great chicken dish” instead of “Patrick, the substance abuse counsellor who is going to demand I quit drinking today,” they become more receptive to the message he might deliver, and more likely to engage in the intake process required at the organization he represents.

By creating intentional partnerships with strong organizations who can address each of the three major causes of homelessness and including their representatives in our community, we increase the likelihood that our guests will receive the resources they need for sustained change.

In the area of affordable housing, we’ve partnered with a program who is widely recognized for producing meaningful results - 76% of the guests who enter their interim housing program obtain long-term housing - and 80% of those folks remained housed when contacted for a one year followup. Connection with Care for Friends has

significantly impacted their intake program - through the first half of the year, they report that 46% of all new clients originated at a Care For Friends' meal. 50% of those who achieved permanent housing originated at CFF, as did 43% of those who achieved temporary shelter, and 40% of those who avoided becoming homeless through the partner's programs.

Following the same model, we also implemented a job readiness and training partnership with a leading program in Chicago that prepares and inspires motivated individuals to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty, transform their lives, strengthen the community, and forge paths to real and lasting success.

After participating in the program, participants are placed in jobs – working an average of 38 hours per week, at an average wage of \$12.34 per hour. One year followup shows that 78% of program participants remain employed at the same firm after one year.

Our linkage agreement with this program was established in early 2017, and six of our guests were registered into the program within the first 90 days. As of this writing, the first class is just completing, and two of our six guests have already found job placement.

**Graduates of our partner's job skills and education program earn an average wage of \$12.34 per hour and work 38 hours per week. 78% of program graduates are still employed by the same firm in one year follow-up surveys.**

Similar success has been found in the area of sober mental and physical health partnerships. Issues of mental and physical health are challenging to address for those with job that provide insurance – but exponentially harder for homeless or uninsured individuals who may also be battling with issues of addiction or mental illness that cloud their ability to think clearly.

Nevertheless, there are social safety nets in the form of Medicare, Medicaid, and insurance through Obamacare that many of Chicago’s homeless are already entitled to – along with community outreach programs that provide no-cost care as an alternative to the emergency room treatment that these individuals would otherwise be using for primary care.

Through CFF’s “Healthcare For Friends” program we provide three-times-per-month /health screenings, a foot clinic, consultation with health care navigators and caseworkers, and confidential conversations with doctors and nurses through partnership with Heartland Health Outreach and PrimeCare Chicago – a Federally Qualified Health Center. New referral sources have also been developed at the CJS Senior Life and Northwestern Medicine Streeterville Outreach. This program averages 600 doctor-patient contacts annually, and has resulted in the management of a variety of chronic health issues – including high blood pressure, diabetes, STI education and treatment, and more.

## Care For Friends Partners Network



## Neighborhood Relations

We also recognize that service to the community does not simply mean service to those community members who are experiencing homelessness – it also demands respectful inclusion of those who are housed. With multi-million dollar homes sharing the same block as our program building, we recognized early on that there could be tension between wealthy homeowners and the hundreds of homeless guests we open our doors to each year.



**Meet “Debbie”. Debbie was a regular attendee of Care For Friends meals who was able to earn her cosmetology license. Today, she holds a steady job in a local hair salon, and periodically donates her time to serve our guests.**

*\*to maintain the dignity and respect of our guests, names and photos are not shared in this report*

We address this tension by maintaining an ongoing dialog with the housed members of our community about their needs and challenges, often having those conversations over a meal. As a result of those conversations, we’ve developed a set of policies and conduct that these housed neighbors are comfortable with – and we’ve also included a neighborhood relations team whose job is to be a positive presence in the immediate two block radius of our building before, during and after each meal service. Team members are identified with Care For Friends clothing and hats, and are an easy group to talk to if a neighbor feels uncomfortable or fearful of something they’ve seen or heard. Fortunately, those incidents are few and far between – and the neighborhood relations

team spends most of their time picking up trash and having friendly relationship-building conversations with those they encounter on their walks through the community.

## **Ways To Get Involved**

Recognizing that homelessness is an issue that touches many different constituencies in the Chicago community, we are constantly looking for ways to bring a diverse set of individuals into our ongoing work. Consequently, we have a continuum of ways that individuals can get involved with the program:

**Care Cards.** One of the easiest ways to make a difference is to spread the word about our programs to those who would benefit from them. We've found that one community interaction that is particularly awkward for all involved is the moment when a homeless individual asks a passerby for spare change or a meal – and is often turned down or completely ignored. For these situations, we've created a business card-sized invitation to our programs that describe the services we offer, where, and when. They are easy to carry in a wallet or purse, and an easy way to respond to requests for help – knowing that you are ultimately connecting the homeless individual with a resource they need to achieve a better life. Care Cards are free to all who request them – a simple form on our website asks for an address you'd like a complimentary stack of cards sent to, and we'll send them as often as you ask. See <http://www.careforfriends.org/cards> for details.

**Healthcare For Friends produces 600 doctor-patient interactions annually, and are often the only “medical home” that our guests experience.**

**Without these experiences, most guests would rely on the emergency room for treatment at much greater expense.**

**Volunteer With Us.** Given the volume of work we do, there is always a need for volunteers to participate in a meal – preparing, serving, or engaging in conversation, assist in our medical clinic, organize our clothes closet, or perform other tasks.

Volunteers can participate as a one-off activity or on a recurring basis, and there are opportunities for individuals as well as larger groups. The easiest way to learn about volunteer opportunities is to contact us via our website - our Volunteer Coordinator will then be in touch promptly. See <http://www.careforfriends.org/volunteer> for details

**Financial Contributions.** We know that for some individuals, it is easier to give support through a financial gift rather than a gift of time. Gifts of all sizes can make a difference. Due to our great partnerships with food providers, we are able to serve an individual guest four meals a month for as little as \$8. At the same time, we are looking for ways to upgrade and improve our building (which is now over 150 years old), and have opportunities to put larger gifts to use in solidifying our own program home. See <http://www.careforfriends.org/donate> for details.

**Advocacy** For some folks, participating in an advocacy event and sharing experiences with others is an important way to make an impact on their community. At Care For Friends, we host an annual “Sleepout for Homelessness” where we invite our friends and supports to spend a night sleeping outdoors in solidarity with the thousands of Chicagoans experiencing homelessness on one of the coldest nights of the year. To learn more about the event (including details for participation), visit <http://www.careforfriends.org/sleepout>



**Meet “Andrew.” Andrew visited our Healthcare for Friends clinic for routine foot care, and was diagnosed with a life-threatening case of cellulitis.**

**Care for Friends physicians were able to refer him to a facility that would treat his condition without insurance. Andrew was hospitalized for 3 days, his condition was treated, and he is now literally “back on his feet” as a result of the care.**

**\*to maintain the dignity and respect of our guests, names and photos are not shared in this report**

A group of people are gathered around a long table in a kitchen, serving themselves from large metal trays of food. In the foreground, a woman in a grey sweater is holding a white plate and looking down at it. Behind her, a man in a grey hoodie and black beanie is also serving. Further back, a man in a black t-shirt is wearing gloves and serving. On the right, a man in a blue t-shirt with white text is looking towards the camera. The table is filled with trays of food, including what looks like chicken, potatoes, and a large bowl of salad. The background shows a kitchen with white cabinets and a dark door.

## Our Mission

To provide easy access to community, food and overall wellness for Chicago's most vulnerable and under-served people, in an atmosphere of dignity and respect.