



OVERVIEW OF INTERIM HOUSING PROGRAM AT THE WRITE INN

Housing Forward is excited to announce that we have negotiated a one-year exclusive lease of the Write Inn, a historic boutique hotel immediately north of downtown Oak Park.

The leasing of the entire 65-room hotel is a move that follows a national trend of nonprofit organizations serving the homeless utilizing empty hotel space to safely house homeless individuals and families, who are among the most vulnerable to the coronavirus.

Who is Housing Forward?

Housing Forward is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit founded in the community 28 years ago to address an identified need in community to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness. In our nearly three-decade history we have become a regional leader in the delivery of comprehensive programming. Our programs and services are designed to PREVENT, RESPOND, and STABILIZE to mitigate and end homelessness.

What happened to the PADS Shelter program?

We have suspended our PADS rotating shelter program due to the inability of faith communities to host clients during the continuing pandemic. Further, providing shelter service in a congregate setting places homeless individuals and families at considerable risk for contracting COVID-19.

What is an interim housing program and how is this different from a shelter?

Both Emergency Shelter and Interim Housing provide short-term places for people with nowhere else to live to stay temporarily, meet basic needs such as food, safety and hygiene, and be supported to seek and obtain housing. Interim housing, however, varies from shelter based on 1) the configuration of the space (congregate vs. dormitory style living arrangements), 2) the limit of a person's stay, and 3) program structure designed with housing-oriented services. This is NOT a shelter, and people will reside here temporarily, NO ONE will live here permanently.

Who will be served by this program?

The program will serve homeless men, women and families with minor-children, and adult couples. The focus will be on making connections to housing resources and ending their homelessness as soon as possible. We will provide structured programming with intake and assessment, housing-oriented wrap-around services, case management on-site health assessments, screenings and income supports either through employment and/or entitlement benefit supports.

Why The Write Inn?

This location and accommodations serve as an ideal opportunity to design a program model that offers a safe environment and a temporary place for people to stabilize while they seek a permanent housing destination.

The hotel has sat empty since March, 2020 when the pandemic struck. The owners do not see a reopening soon based upon declining travel and tourism trends due to the pandemic.

This program puts the building to productive use and assist the owner financially. The owners genuinely feel that serving the needs for those with no home is the right use of their hotel during the pandemic.

Will Housing Forward use the entire hotel?

Housing Forward will occupy all four floors of the hotel, 65 rooms, and the outside patio. The program will have rooms on each floor for staff and one communal area where meals will be set-up 2x a day – morning and evening.

How will meals be provided?

We will be working with traditional PADS shelter meal teams and caterers that we have been using since March. Unlike the shelter model, meal distribution will require individual portioning and distribution, to align with COVID-19 safety best practices. We will provide individually packaged hot dinners, grab-n-go breakfast and sack lunches since no congregated meals will be served.

Is this a better model for Housing Forward clients?

YES! Because the program will operate 24/7 keeping clients safe who may otherwise be on the streets. They are engaged with us in a way that was always difficult because of the limited hours of the old PADS Shelter model. Everyone is connected to a Case Manager, we have a nurse on staff, our employment team connects people jobs.

Did you get help in figuring out this model?

Yes, we engaged two consulting firms – one to help us identify a fixed-site location and ONE to help use with the program design. We continue to engage both firms.

How will you ensure the building is safe and secure?

We have made a number of modifications to the building. We have created a new entrance, separate from the accessible entrance to Hemmingway's Bistro, on the south side of the building. The new entrance has controlled access with key cards. We have installed exterior cameras on all sides of the building and interior cameras on all floors and the south stairwell.

We will have 24/7 staffing on site and people monitoring the front entrance during hours when the hotel entrance is open for Hemmingway's Bistro and the side entrance 24/7.

Can you describe the staffing?

We have consolidated our staffing from the two programs that have been closed since March – PADS Shelter and our day-time Support Center. Three program managers, our case management team (3.5 FTE), full-time nurse will be on-site throughout the week. Resident Assistants will be on-site in the evenings/overnight. The program will be supplemented by volunteers, social work interns and AmeriCorps members.

Will you serve families?

We have rented a three-flat to provide temporary accommodations for large families. Small families with minor children have reserved rooms on the fourth floor.

How will clients of Housing Forward be approved for the program?

Since March, Housing Forward has created a new protocol for clients seeking shelter within our service area. Clients seeking shelter and referring agencies and hospitals are connected to our new diversion and intake team to screen referrals for the program. We work to divert individuals and families whenever possible to avoid literal homelessness. For persons with no other shelter options, Housing Forward will provide assessments off-site. All approves will be signed-off by the program manager and clients will be oriented to the program and be required to sign an agreement outlining the rules and expectations for engaging in services. Clients will be asked to leave the program if they are unable to follow the rules. We will routinely involve clients in the program development so they feel a sense of ownership in the program's development

Will volunteers be needed?

Yes! Volunteer resources will be very helpful in operating a 24-hour-a-day program. In addition to meal preparation, we will need Site Captains and trained volunteers to provide support to staffing levels and provide socialization. To learn more or sign-up for a volunteer opportunity, contact Enid Johnson at ejohnson@housingforward.org or 708.338.1724 ext. 222.

How is this being paid for?

This project will be funded by funding from the Coronavirus Relief Fund and additional CARES Act funding through Cook County. The support of the community through contributions, in-kind donations such as food and supplies, and volunteerism is a vital part of this project.

How long is the lease?

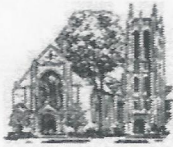
The lease is for a one-year term. It is too early to decide if Housing Forward will stay longer. Any decision will be made by the agency's Board of Directors.

Who do I contact if I have a concern?

Janet Hotch is the program manager and can be contacted M-F 8am-8pm at (224) 215-6032. On the weekends and between 8pm-8am please contact our Emergency Line (708) 265-0612 which rotates each week between our five program Managers.

Want to learn more about Housing Forward?

Visit our website housingforward.org. Also, follow us on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter.



First United Methodist Church of Oak Park

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Rev. Dr. Katherine Paisley, Pastor

September 26, 2020

Lynda Schueler
Executive Director
Housing Forward
1851 South 9th Avenue
Maywood, IL 60153

Dear Ms. Schueler:

On behalf of the congregation of First United Methodist Church of Oak Park, I am pleased to write this letter of support for Housing Forward's plan to utilize the Write Inn building for an interim housing program for homeless individuals and families.

First United Methodist Church has been a partner in Housing Forward's PADS Emergency Shelter program since its inception. In that time, our church has witnessed first-hand the tremendous impact their services have on those experiencing homelessness. When the COVID-19 pandemic began to take root in our community, we were pleased to see how Housing Forward adapted, responding swiftly and decisively to safeguard the health and wellbeing of those they serve by shifting from the shelter model to remote individual accommodations where those they serve could safely shelter-in-place.

As the pandemic persists, the PADS Emergency Shelter program is at a crossroads; congregation partners like First United Methodist Church are unable to reopen their doors to provide shelter space. Housing Forward is again taking decisive action. In leasing the Write Inn, Housing Forward will create a safe and stable 24-hour-a-day interim housing model which builds on the expertise they have developed over the past 28 years. We are excited about the shift to a case-management approach, with medical attention and program services available on site as you work to move those facing homelessness more quickly into permanent housing. We understand that it will be staffed around the clock by Housing Forward case workers and health care professionals, and will incorporate the support of the hundreds of local volunteers who have been a vital part of Housing Forward since its inception.

We know that there are questions and procedures remaining to be worked out. But we are excited about this new approach to truly provide our homeless neighbors with the needed support and opportunity to repair their lives and move to permanent housing.

I am proud to provide my enthusiastic support for this important development in Housing Forward's respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most Sincerely,

Reverend Dr. Katherine Thomas Paisley

First United Methodist Church of Oak Park



FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF OAK PARK

an open community united in love & justice

I write today in my role as Lead Pastor of First United Church of Oak Park to strongly support Housing Forward's plan for the Write Inn. First United has long been a supporter of Housing Forward. Among other forms of support, we hosted for many years the PADS emergency shelter in our building. As a community, Oak Park is built on the value of the dignity of all persons. And protecting the dignity and safety of the unhoused is work that must be held in common.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Housing Forward has had to adapt to a radically changed world. It is no longer safe or dignified to gather dozens of unhoused people in emergency shelter in church fellowship halls. Housing Forward had to change how they provide community support services.

To adapt, Housing Forward has been placing unhoused people in hotel rooms at great organizational expense. This lease of the Write Inn represents an important step forward, a way to recognize the reality that this pandemic is not simply going to disappear overnight. This also is a way to further serve the dignity of unhoused people.

In addition to being a longtime supporter of Housing Forward, First United is also very close to the site of the Write Inn. We look forward to the new inhabitants of the Write Inn. Unhoused people in transitional housing share one thing in common: they are trying to rebuild their lives. People who are trying to rebuild their lives will place high value on the place they live. Centrally located near downtown Oak Park, and close to public transportation, the Write Inn is an ideal place for this project.

Please feel free to reach out if there is any way our church can assist this project moving forward.

Sincerely,

Rev. John Edgerton

Lead Pastor

First United Church of Oak Park