

HOW

**CREATE OPPORTUNITIES.
REBUILD LIVES.**

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*HOW empowers individuals
and families to break the cycle
of poverty and homelessness.*

HOW

Up To Date

Winter 2021/22

It's the Little Things
The Healing Power of Home

Norman Services
Keeping Families Together

Planting Joy
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Reflecting on the Year
A Message From CEO, Britt Shawver

HOW Up To Date

Winter 2021/22

It's the Little Things *The Healing Power of Home*

"With stable housing, we've been better able to mend both mentally and physically," shares Sabrina. She notes "the little things" that come with a home have had a profound impact on her family. Grabbing a snack in the evening or taking a walk in the neighborhood is now accompanied by a deep sense of gratitude. Today her family enjoys a renewed sense of hope and possibility. Not long ago, they were four people in a single room at the shelter. The lack of control and confinement generated anxiety and feelings of distress for the entire family. Sabrina, her husband Wayne, and their oldest son battled depression, while the youngest, a toddler at the time, turned inward and struggled with speech.

Just as quickly as things spiraled downward for the family, securing an apartment in a safe neighborhood put them on the fast track to healing. Their older son, now in high school, loves the privacy of his own room. He is thrilled to be back on campus for classes and is having a great school year thus far. His parents are equally thrilled about the new apartment, which they specifically selected due to its location in a safe neighborhood where their son could walk to school. "Our youngest son is also doing so, so much better," Sabrina shares through laughter, "he's now talking and talking; he's highly social."



The pandemic has highlighted the connection between health and housing for many, but at HOW, we have long known that a person's wellbeing is affected by access to basic resources, housing being the most fundamental among them. With each new client HOW serves, we bear witness to the impact of housing stability on every other aspect of a person's life. Angela, another HOW client, attributes her improved wellbeing to **all the "little" luxuries which accompany having a home such as a "bed to sleep in" or a kitchen to prepare meals.** And she recognizes that **"they're really not little at all."**

For HOW clients like Angela and Sabrina and her family, securing a home at HOW was the beginning of getting their lives back on track. **Housing is the critical first step in helping our clients begin to manage their health, gain confidence, succeed in school, and find employment.** Despite this, only one in four households eligible for a housing subsidy receive any assistance. We are heartened by recent efforts in the city to expand affordable housing and HOW continues to be committed to its role in developing more units of housing as well. Connecting people to housing is the catalyst that fuels our work each day, because we know that a brighter future begins with a place to call home.



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Norman Services

Keeping Families Together

Today, thousands of families in Illinois receive vital housing assistance, financial support, and additional resources from the Housing Advocacy and Cash Assistance Program, informally known as **Norman Services**. The state of Illinois administers this program for parents who are at risk of losing custody of their children due to homelessness or are temporarily unable to meet other basic needs for their family.

In 1990 James Norman filed a lawsuit against the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) after the agency refused to return his children to him while he was living in a shelter. Mr. Norman argued that as long as living conditions are safe, families should stay intact. As a result of his winning the case (and subsequent successful lawsuits claiming poverty-based discrimination by DCFS), the department created Norman Services, a multi-million-dollar fund helping families stabilize and remain together.

At HOW, Norman Services are an integral part of the agency's homelessness prevention efforts. HOW Housing Advocates work with families to identify, secure, and maintain housing; assist with income assistance programs; and connect families to additional resources. **To date in 2021, HOW has served over 74 families, comprised of 243 individuals, in its work to ensure access to vital resources for DCFS-involved families that are at risk of homelessness.**

Planting Joy

Cultivating a Special Tradition



One of the propagated spider plants

Through HOW's one-on-one support model, Case Managers build meaningful relationships with clients focusing on their strengths, abilities and goals. Creating a true sense of connection takes time, respect, compassion and small acts of kindness. One example of how these relationships begin to take root is through a long-honored tradition of providing small housewarming gifts to new clients.

When clients arrive at HOW, they frequently have very few belongings and rarely any decorative items. The sparse apartments lack warmth and a sense of home until HOW helps individuals acquire furniture and household necessities. Many HOW Case Managers also take this opportunity to offer a green plant to welcome clients into their new home. In fact, several Case Managers have re-propagated welcome presents from a single spider plant with its own beautiful origin story.

The initial plant was a gift from a client to his long-time Case Manager, Jamin Fox. As Jamin shares, "10 years ago, a client gave me a spider plant he had in his pocket. I planted it and these propagates are from that original plant. **I like the idea of this client's generosity spreading to make others' apartments feel a bit more like home.**" Additional HOW Case Managers have taken up the same practice, with their welcome gifts all stemming from that first plant.

Reflecting on the Year

A Message from CEO, Britt Shawver

As 2021 draws to a close, we look back on the year with gratitude and awe. We are in awe of our clients who continue to face huge challenges with grace and resilience. And we are grateful to all our supporters who help us to advance our mission despite some very difficult odds.

At the beginning of the year, we were still at the height of the pandemic, and remained deeply focused on keeping clients safe and healthy. As we continued to offer PPE and access to other supplies and resources that clients needed, we eagerly awaited the vaccine. By February, HOW staff quickly shifted to vaccine advocacy and education, working to ensure eligible clients were vaccinated as quickly and easily as possible.

Throughout the year, we continued to support all clients in accessing vaccines, as well as other essential resources and support. And most importantly, we continued to keep people safe and housed. **So far in 2021 we have served 1,327 clients, of whom 567 are children. Further, an impressive 99% of clients in our permanent housing have retained it for at least 12 months.**

In May, Jim Fox of North Wells Capital retired as Board president and closed out 17 years of dedicated service. He was heralded by his peers for his expertise, commitment to HOW's mission, and serving as a model for others. We are equally grateful that Urvi Shah has stepped into the role as our new Board president. Urvi, a Senior Manager at Deloitte Consulting, brings a unique set of skills in strategic transformation that can be well applied to HOW.

Our second annual virtual HOW 5K Plus was a huge success and saw over 100 people participating across the county on June 6th. The event raised over \$75,000 and we look forward to adding in person elements in 2022.

HOW's 2021 Speaker Series focused on the powerful connection between housing and health. The series kicked off in July with HOW Board member Michelle R.B. Saddler interviewing Chi Chi Okwu. They discussed the impact of the pandemic on maternal and children's health. The second session on HOW's Day of Giving, August 25, highlighted the voices of HOW clients who shared their stories of the impact stable housing has had on their lives. HOW's virtual luncheon, Rx Housing: the Intersection of Health and Housing, wrapped up the series this fall with a panel of experts: Christine Haley; Dr. David Buchanan; and Emily Metz sharing strategies for building healthier, stronger communities. If you missed any of these sessions, you can visit www.how-inc.org/series to view the recordings.

And finally, **in November we were delighted to secure the purchase of an eight-unit property in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood.** This building will be the first HOW-owned property on the city's south-side. We are excited to make this investment and diversify our portfolio of housing stock. And, we look forward to expanding our footprint across Chicagoland in the coming years.

Onward,

Britt



HOW's newest building in Chicago's South Shore