



ANNUAL REPORT

- Fiscal Year 2024 -



**Strategic Partnerships Toward
Ending Homelessness**

From the Executive Director

After more than two decades of helping with efforts to end homelessness in Iowa, I honestly thought we'd be in a much better place by now. The reality is frustrating. While the state has invested at the same level since 1997, Polk County is currently experiencing a record number of residents in need of housing support.

As Polk County's planning organization, Homeward is dedicated to creating strategic partnerships toward ending homelessness. We are investing in the research to uncover the roots of the crisis and collaborating to develop a strategic framework for positive change.

While I loathe running, this strategic, data-driven approach is much like running a marathon. Crossing the finish line requires patience, endurance, and continual focus. We are prepared for the hard work it will take, and we know that in the end, the entire community wins.

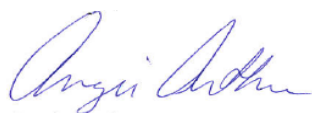
At the same time, I've been told that marathon runners can hit a "wall" during the race. When energy reserves are depleted, taking even one more step is a very serious physical and mental struggle. It's disheartening to see that homelessness service providers are hitting their wall. They are beyond fatigued: body, mind, and spirit. Without enough funding, resources, or shelters to serve the rising numbers desperately in need of help, these providers won't be able to fill the gaps until systematic changes are in place. We need more active supporters to help get everyone across the finish line together.

Homelessness is very much a community problem. In 2024, our community members with extremely low incomes are at highest risk for experiencing homelessness: 33% seniors, 33% employed, 21% individuals living with a disability, 4% students, and 1% single caregivers. It is entirely possible that someone you know will face the threat of homelessness within your lifetime.

Evidence-based practices have proven that when we have the appropriate level of resources, positive change happens. I hope this report shows how ending homelessness in Polk County sooner must happen through more community collaboration.

YOU are the community. We all are. If we can get a lot more people to actively join in the effort, we'll be much stronger together and far more capable of creating the stability needed for a thriving community.

For ways you can take action now, see page 8.



ANGIE ARTHUR
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Why Homeward Exists

A safe place to call home is the foundation for thriving individuals, families, and communities. Only when lowans have a stable place to live, can they focus on well-being, attend school or work, and engage productively with their community. However, this year alone, **7,940** Polk County individuals experienced homelessness, depriving them of a safe and secure foundation, causing our own neighbors to suffer the devastating consequences of poor mental and physical health, stress, and trauma.

At Homeward, we believe the Polk County community has a collective responsibility to support each other, including any resident experiencing homelessness. Through work to expand housing options and services, together we can ensure our neighbors have access to critical resources needed not just to survive, but thrive in stable, permanent homes.



What We're Doing to Address the Needs

Homeward serves as Polk County's homelessness planning organization, forging strategic partnerships between organizations, community partners, and government officials focused on improving homelessness and assisting people experiencing homelessness themselves. Through these partnerships, we're working to create an efficient, effective homeless response system that meets all residents' needs.

Homeward takes a **system-wide approach to homelessness** in Polk County. We **operate as a hub for strategic planning and expertise on homelessness services** in the following ways:

- collect and **analyze data** and **disseminate best practices**,
- coordinate homelessness **strategic planning** work,
- **manage \$5.72M** in federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding, and
- **advocate** and share information with local officials to **build systemic, long-term solutions** for homelessness and affordable housing options.



State of Homelessness in Polk County

The **need** for homelessness supports far outpaces available resources in the community:

- As of June 30, 2024, there are currently over **700 households experiencing homelessness on the waitlist** for housing support.
- As of June 30, 2024, there were **126 family households (with children) on the waitlist** for emergency shelter, the highest number of families on the waitlist the metro has ever experienced. Not having shelter means families are living in cars, with other families or friends in cramped spaces, or in dangerous situations.
- The January 2024 Polk County Point-in Time data mirrors national data trends with **715 individuals experiencing homelessness, an 11% increase from 2023 (644)**. Unsheltered individuals also rose from 129 in 2023 to 147 in 2024, a record high in the metro. **The Housing Inventory Count indicates the system is operating at maximum capacity.**
- Of those who are unsheltered, **84% report their last permanent address in Polk County.**
- For every 100 households who are extremely low income, **only 26 housing units are available** in Polk County.
- Homelessness among seniors continues to increase in Polk County as well as nationally. **Seniors (60+) comprise 9.1% of Polk County's homeless population.**



Moving our System Forward

In FY24, Homeward worked with Housing Innovations and the community to analyze the gaps within our homeless system, which identified the following needs for our community to achieve “optimal” homelessness response.

- 1) **Increase emergency family shelter space** with at least 29 new emergency shelter units.
- 2) **Expand Rapid Re-Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing** for single adults and **expand additional affordable housing** for extremely low-income people.
- 3) **Increase housing-focused case management** for all people experiencing homelessness.

Homeward looks forward to continuing this work in FY25 with the completion of a five-year community strategic plan to define regional goals based on local priorities and best practices.



FY 24 At a Glance Accomplishments

The past year has presented tremendous challenges for our community and neighbors experiencing homelessness. Through it all, Homeward has grown, adapted, and welcomed new projects and partnerships working toward ending homelessness. **Some highlights from Homeward's Fiscal Year 2024 (July 1, 2023- June 30, 2024) include:**

SEPTEMBER 2023

Formally known as the Polk County Continuum of Care, staff and Board celebrate year two of the **Homeward brand**. The new brand represents the forging of strategic partnerships.



JANUARY 2024

Homeward and Housing Innovations release **Homeless System Needs Assessment and Centralized Intake Evaluation**, a gap analysis of Polk County's homeless system. With this data, the community can create a realistic strategic plan to address gaps in Greater Des Moines.



Homeward also welcomes its first practicum student!

APRIL 2024

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announces **funding for homeless services** through the Continuum of Care Program. Thanks to the hard work of community service providers and Homeward volunteers and staff, the Polk County community receives a record **\$5.72 million** for housing and supportive services for residents experiencing homelessness!



SEPTEMBER 2023

Amy Croll joins the Homeward staff in the newly-created role of **Community Engagement Coordinator**, expanding Homeward's capacity.



NOVEMBER 2023

Polk County's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) grants are officially included as part of Homeward's annual funding process.



FEBRUARY 2024

Homeward mobilizes providers to successfully challenge a study bill to criminalize homelessness while also partnering to educate lawmakers on the **need for eviction expungement legislation**.



APRIL 2024

Homeward and elected officials welcome **Dr. Gregg Colburn** to Des Moines to discuss how data demonstrates affordable housing as the root cause of homelessness.



JUNE 2024

Homeward and the Balance of State, receive a \$1M+ 3 year Youth Homeless System Improvement grant to increase system capacity statewide.





Homeward FY 2024 Board of Directors

Katie Albrecht-Snell- Nationwide

Brett Burk- RIVA

Rebecca Foster- City of Des Moines

Angela Dethlefs-Trettin | Secretary-
Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines

Reverend Frederick Gaddy- St. Paul AME Church

Lorna Garcia- Des Moines Police Department

Dennis Henderson- Broadlawns Medical Center

Charles Hill- Iowa Civil Rights Commission

Lori Jensen- Children and Families of Iowa

Amber Lewis- City of Des Moines

Jennifer Miner- VA Central Iowa

Tony Montgomery | Treasurer- Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines

Tami Nielsen- Food Bank of Iowa

Jill Padgett- Iowa Jobs for America's Graduates (IJAG)

Manisha Paudel- Des Moines Civil & Human Rights Commission

Alyson Simmons- Central Iowa Trauma Recovery Center

Nathan Simpson | Vice Chair- Primary Health Care

Ehren Stover Wright- Institute for Community Alliances

Annie Uetz | Chair- Polk County Behavioral Health and Disability Services

Amanda Wanke- Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority

Whitni Warnke- UnityPoint Health

David Weidt- Polk County Conservation

Lyn Wilson- Des Moines Public Schools

Homeward Staff

- **Angie Arthur**- Executive Director
- **Jim Cain**- Grants & Program Coordinator
- **Amy Croll**- Community Engagement Coordinator



FY 2024 Data and Insights

A look at the Polk County homeless response system from July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024

7,940

TOTAL INDIVIDUALS SERVED BY THE POLK COUNTY HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM

CLIENTS IDENTIFIED THEIR PRIMARY REASON FOR EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS AS ISSUES WITH THE FOLLOWING:

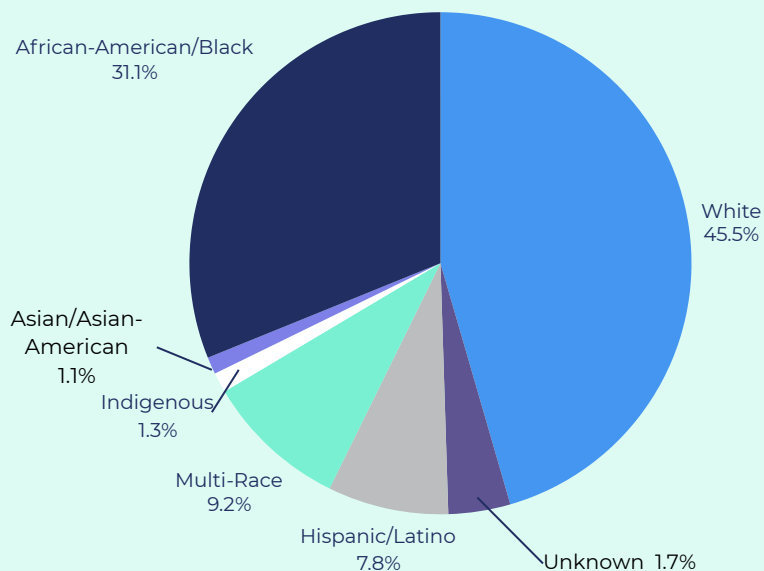
- 
« HEALTHCARE SYSTEM
- 
« EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM
- 
« RELOCATION
- 
« FAMILY SUPPORT
- 
« RE-ENTRY FROM CORRECTIONS SYSTEM
- 
« EVICTION
- 
« SURVIVOR OF VIOLENCE



Currently > **700 households** are on the Centralized Intake waitlist for housing support in Polk County

RACIAL IDENTITY

OF CLIENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN POLK COUNTY



7.4%

of individuals experiencing homelessness in Polk County were veterans



POLK COUNTY YOUTH HOMELESSNESS DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM GRANTS SERVED

252

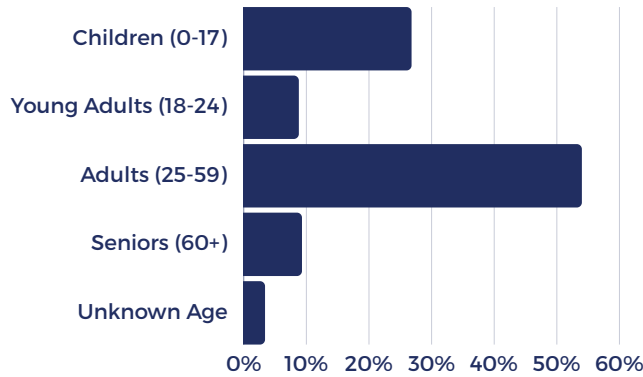
youth ages 16-24



FY 2024 Data and Insights

A look at the Polk County homeless response system from July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024

AGE OF POLK COUNTY INDIVIDUALS SEEKING HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT



\$5.72

MILLION DOLLARS

in federal homelessness funding distributed by Homeward



OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WERE HISPANIC/LATINO

HOMELESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS INCLUDE:

- Emergency Shelter
- Street Outreach
- Transitional Housing
- Supportive Services Only
- Safe Haven
- Rapid Rehousing
- Permanent Supportive Housing



2,909

clients were enrolled in emergency shelter, safe haven, transitional housing, or street outreach

(the most crisis-oriented projects in the system)

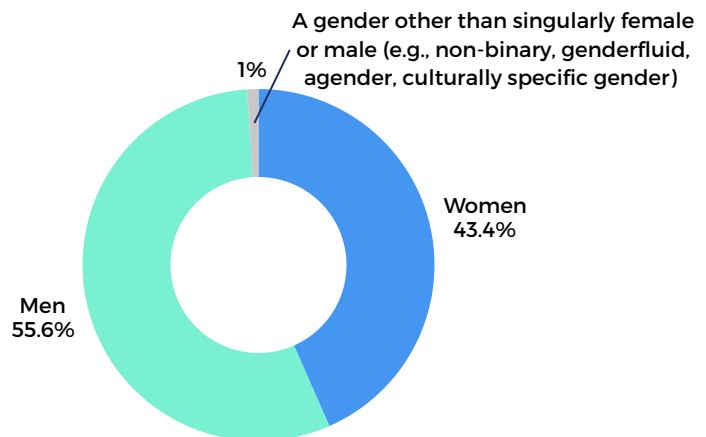
>100

Polk County community organizations

PARTNERED WITH HOMEWARD

GENDER IDENTITY

of people experiencing homelessness in Polk County



How Can My Network Help?

We know challenging economic conditions and the shortage of affordable housing resources can cause individuals to feel powerless to help their neighbors experiencing homelessness. There are still many ways we can improve systems to strengthen our community and create more equitable housing and support services for all in need. It will take the entire greater Des Moines community to act on Homeward's vision that **one day, everyone in Polk County will have a safe place to call home.**



ADVOCATE

- Engage with local and statewide officials about the **need for additional resources** to support your neighbors experiencing homelessness.
- Join community conversations to encourage the development of **more affordable housing units**.
- Help advocate for the passage of statewide **eviction expungement** legislation to ensure access to housing despite an error or mistake from decades ago.
- Help fight reactive and ineffective **criminalization of homelessness** efforts.



VOLUNTEER

- Join a **Homeward committee** in support of Polk County's homelessness service providers and clients.
- Opportunities are available for **many skillsets and interests**, including finance, grants, communications, racial equity, youth leadership, and program evaluation.
- **Volunteer your time** with shelters and housing programs across our community to serve meals and support residents.



LEARN

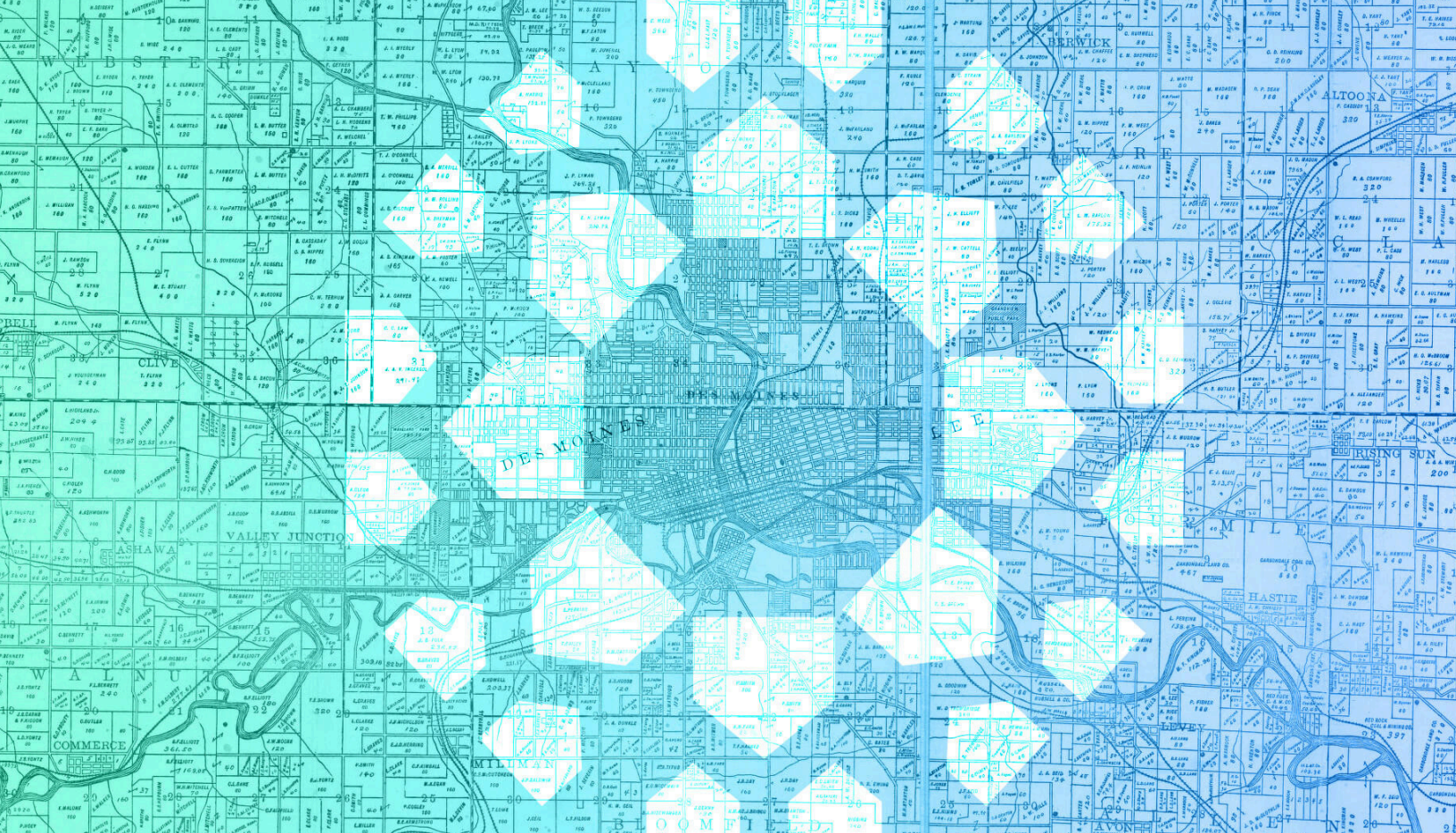
- **Learn about the causes of homelessness** and the needed changes for ending it.
- Read the **Unsheltered Des Moines Study** or executive summary to learn firsthand from people experiencing homelessness.
- Subscribe to Homeward's **newsletter** and **social media platforms** for opportunities to learn about homelessness in the Polk County community.



DONATE

- **Give** financially to support people experiencing homelessness and the organizations serving them across Polk County.
- Host a **supply drive** to collect hygiene items, clothes, and non-perishable food.
- **Contribute financially** to Homeward to support the systems-level work needed to prevent and end homelessness for central Iowans.





Thank You!

Thank you for your continued care, support, and partnership to end homelessness in our Polk County community! We look forward to our continued partnership to ensure that one day, everyone in Polk County has a safe place to call home.

Stay in Touch with Homeward



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