



H O M E W A R D

ANNUAL REPORT

- Fiscal Year 2025 -



**Strategic Partnerships Toward
Ending Homelessness**

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From the Executive Director

Like many years in the recent past, 2025 brought both unrelenting challenges and successes to those providing services to our community members most in need. One of the brightest sparks of hope was catalyzing over 250 individuals who care about the well-being of our community to address homelessness. These providers, businesses, elected officials, and individuals with lived experience worked together over the year to create a strategic blueprint to guide community action and investments. This Blueprint provides a roadmap for private foundations and donors to join their support alongside federal funding to better address the housing needs of our community. This is an important step for our community and it couldn't come at a better time.

In Fiscal Year 25, significant federal and state challenges plagued the homeless system. With a new Presidency, we saw stalled HUD contracts and numerous Executive Orders that brought work to a halt. These changes dramatically shifted our system to extents that remain to be seen. At the state level, a complete overhaul of the mental health, disability, and Medicaid systems threatens to leave vulnerable individuals without a clear path to accessing resources, putting them at greater risk of entering the homeless system. After all of these changes combined, we find ourselves bracing for what might result, which makes the work to align efforts through the Blueprint that much more important.

While challenges certainly lie ahead, we are grateful for the renewed energy The Blueprint has brought to our community. We recognize that how we weather the storms will depend on the commitment of our region to address the ever-evolving needs of seniors, children, the working poor, Veterans, and individuals with disabilities. Thank you to the many who continue to dedicate your time, talent, and treasures to our community's most critical needs. Your voice is invaluable, appreciated and needed now more than ever.



ANGIE ARTHUR
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





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Why Homeward Exists

A safe place to call home is the foundation for thriving individuals, families, and communities. Only when Iowans have a stable place to live, can they focus on well-being, attend school or work, and engage productively within their community. However, this year alone, 9,171 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 or family experiencing homelessness. By working together to expand housing options and services, we can ensure our neighbors have access to critical resources needed not just to survive, but thrive in stable, permanent homes.



What We Are Doing to Address the Needs

As Polk County's homelessness planning organization, Homeward forges strategic partnerships between organizations, community partners, and elected officials focused on reducing homelessness. 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 county-level homelessness **strategic planning** work,
- **manage \$7M** 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, 2025, there are over **800 individual households experiencing homelessness on the wait list** for housing support. Individuals on the wait list are currently living in shelter or in a place not meant for human habitation.
- As of June 30, 2025 there were **126 family households (with children) on the wait list** for emergency shelter. Not having shelter means families are living in cars, with other families or friends in cramped spaces, or in dangerous situations.
- The January 2025 Polk County Point-in Time (PIT) data mirrors national data trends with **779 individuals experiencing homelessness, a 9% increase from 2024 (715)**. Unsheltered individuals, those who are living in a space not meant for human habitation, also rose from 147 in 2024 to 206 in 2025, a record high in the metro. **The Housing Inventory Count indicates the system is operating at maximum capacity.**
- Of those who are unsheltered, **78% report their last permanent address in Polk County.**
- For every 100 households that are extremely low income, **only 21 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

Homeward worked with Housing Innovations and the community to create the “Blueprint to Address Homelessness”, a community-wide strategic plan that builds off of the 2024 Polk County Gap Analysis highlighting these three goals:

- 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.

The Blueprint aligns resources to create an “optimal” homelessness response system to achieve these three goals. Seven strategies are outlined in the Blueprint which can be found on the next pages.



The Blueprint to Address Homelessness: Polk County



Scan the QR code to access The
Blueprint published in May 2025



Overview and Focus of the Plan

From September 2024 to March 2025, people with lived experiences of homelessness, service providers, business leaders, elected officials, and other community stakeholders throughout central Iowa developed The Blueprint to Address Homelessness (The Blueprint), shaping the region's priorities, strategies for improvement, goals, and values. The resulting comprehensive document outlines **seven strategic improvement focus areas** to drive progress toward goals and strengthen core elements of the homelessness response system:

- 1. Reduce Inflow.** Homelessness prevention addresses the root causes of homelessness before people lose their homes, thus reducing the overall number of individuals experiencing homelessness and helping to alleviate the pressures on the system.
- 2. Improve Crisis Response Capacity.** Emergency shelters are an essential component of a larger response and rehousing system that helps people regain stability, health, and independence.
- 3. End Unsheltered Homelessness.** Implementing best practice strategies like Housing First, low-barrier crisis shelter, rapid resolution housing, and permanent supportive housing provide the best opportunities to reduce this complex issue.
- 4. Accelerate Exits from Homelessness to Stable Housing.** Expansion of specialized housing programs is necessary to address the complex, interrelated issues contributing to homelessness.
- 5. Strengthen Connections to Adjacent Systems.** Institutional partners adjacent to the homelessness system have a critical role to play in identifying and supporting the housing stability needs of people exiting those systems.



6. Actively Manage the System. Use real-time, comprehensive, accurate data to track outcomes and inform policy decisions.

7. Expand Affordable Housing. Work in collaboration with housing developers to leverage funding opportunities and reduce barriers to tenant selection, providing access to housing for people at the lowest level of income and at highest risk of continued homelessness.



FY 2025 Data and Insights

A look at the Polk County homeless response system from July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System

8,475

TOTAL INDIVIDUALS
SERVED BY THE POLK
COUNTY HOMELESS
RESPONSE SYSTEM



61%

OF PEOPLE ACROSS ALL
PROGRAMS HAVE A
DISABLING CONDITION

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



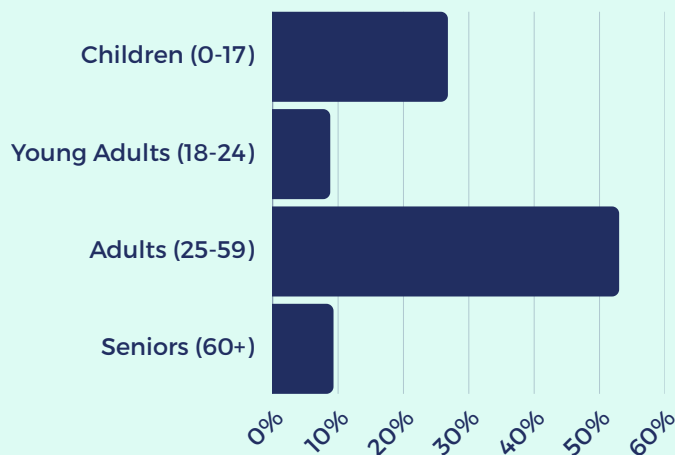
« EVICTION



« SURVIVOR OF VIOLENCE

AGE

OF POLK COUNTY INDIVIDUALS
SEEKING HOMELESSNESS
SUPPORT



6.7%

of individuals
experiencing
homelessness in
Polk County were
Veterans

100%

of Veterans able to be served
by the Polk County
Homeless Response System



FY 2025 Data and Insights

A look at the Polk County homeless response system from July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025



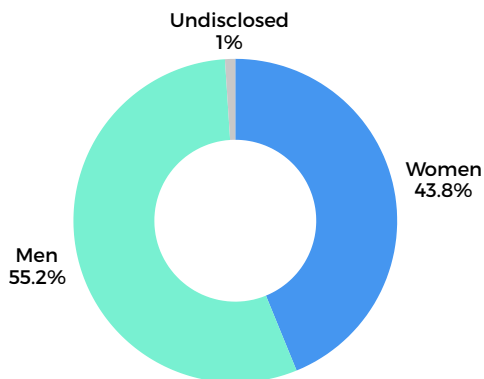
699

**TOTAL INDIVIDUALS
SERVED THROUGH
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE FUNDING.**



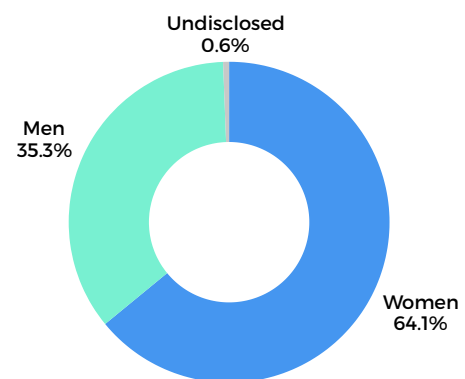
Data Source: Domestic Violence Management Information System

BIOLOGICAL REPORTED SEX of people experiencing homelessness in Polk County



ALL PROGRAMS

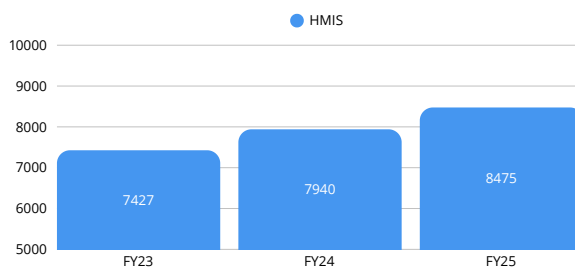
Data Source: Homeless Management Information System



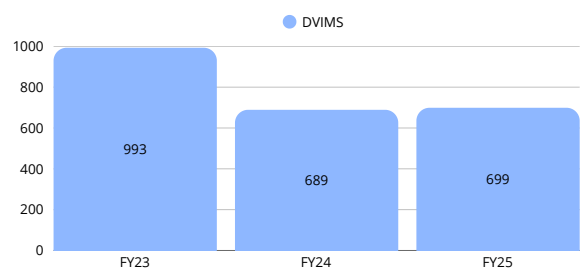
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS

Data Source: Domestic Violence Management Information System

INDIVIDUALS ACCESSING SERVICES



INDIVIDUALS ACCESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES



FY 25 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.

Highlights from Homeward's Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024- June 30, 2025) include:

NOVEMBER 2024

Drake University and Homeward jointly release the **Unsheltered Families Des Moines Study**.



DECEMBER 2024

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announces **funding for homeless services** through the Continuum of Care Program. Polk County is awarded a record **\$7 million** for housing and supportive services for residents experiencing homelessness!



FEBRUARY 2025

Homeward mobilizes advocates to successfully defeat legislation that would criminalize homelessness state-wide.



SEPTEMBER 2024

New Youth Homeless System Improvement staff join the Institute for Community Alliance and Homeward staff to move forward staff training opportunities in Polk County.



NOVEMBER 2024

Homeward is awarded the Bezos Family Foundation Day One award. This award helps families move out of shelter faster.



JANUARY 2025

Homeward works with local elected officials and the Iowa congressional delegation to release federally designated Continuum of Care homeless services funds for local providers. Funds were released May 2025.



MAY 2025

The Blueprint to Address Homelessness strategic plan is formally unveiled.



How Can You Support?

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.



LEARN

- **Learn about the causes of homelessness** and the needed changes for ending it.
- Read the **Unsheltered Des Moines Study**, the **Blueprint to Address Homelessness** or executive summaries of each to learn from unsheltered people and system providers.
- Subscribe to Homeward's **newsletter** and **social media platforms** for opportunities to learn about homelessness.



VOLUNTEER

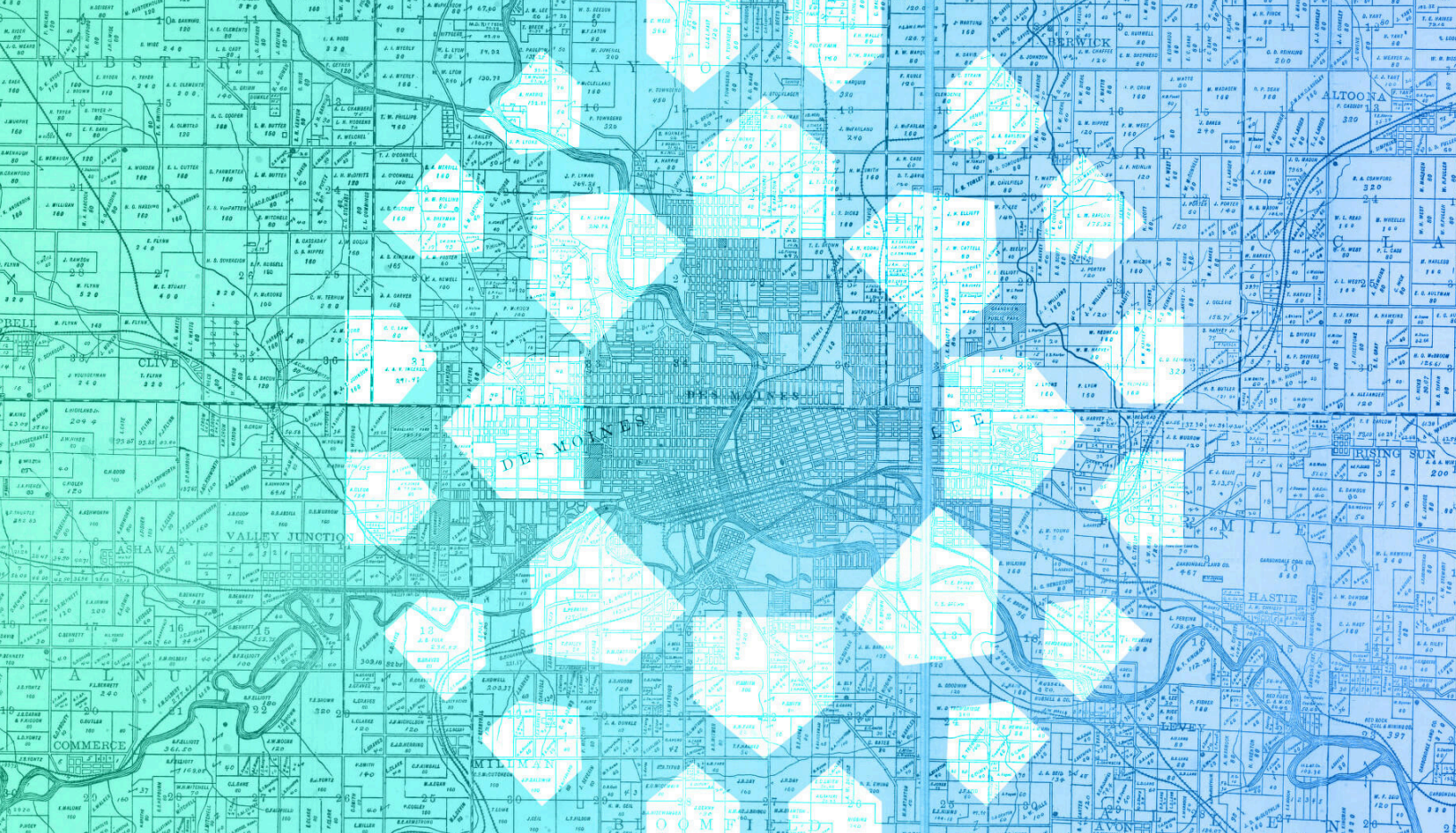
- **Become a Continuum of Care Member** in support of Polk County's homelessness service providers and clients at www.homewardiowa.org.
- Opportunities are available for **many skillsets and interests**, including finance, grants, communications, youth leadership, and program evaluation.
- **Volunteer your time** with shelters and housing programs across our community to serve meals and support residents.



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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facebook.com/HomewardIowa



www.homewardiowa.org



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