



CHANGING SYSTEMS, CHANGES LIVES

## **Innovative Housing Collaboration Breaks the Cycle of Homelessness and Incarceration:**

Exploring the Impact of The Way Home  
Reentry Collaborative Permanent Supportive  
Housing Initiative in Lane County, OR

February 2025



**"Changing Systems, Changes Lives"** is a series of case studies that explore the impact of a broad range of projects supported by the national nonprofit organization **Third Sector**. The case studies highlight the work of the forward-thinking government agencies and nonprofit organizations that partner with Third Sector to design, implement, and continuously improve initiatives aimed at dismantling historical inequities and advancing outcomes-focused public systems. **These initiatives are transforming local systems and catalyzing positive change for local communities—reducing homelessness and reincarceration, increasing health equity and access to care, and expanding access to education and work that lead to economic mobility.** They provide a valuable lens into the processes and people that drive systems change and offer lessons for changemakers hoping to do similar transformation work to address complex social issues in their own communities.



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# Introduction

Housing plays a key role in the success of individuals reentering society following incarceration, providing a stable foundation from which they can rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society. Yet, formerly incarcerated people are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general population.<sup>1</sup> In Lane County, Oregon, recidivism is particularly high for the 50 percent of individuals who are homeless at the time of release from prison. Fifty-six percent are rearrested by police and 26 percent are reincarcerated in prison.<sup>2</sup> Not only does this limit individual growth and quality of life—especially for low-income individuals and communities of color, who are disproportionately impacted by the criminal-legal system—it also contributes to adverse outcomes for communities, exacerbating the homelessness crisis, constraining health care resources, and removing talented individuals from the labor force and social life. In order to address the cycle of homelessness and reincarceration, improving access to stable and affordable housing is a critical consideration.

This case study shares the story of **The Way Home Reentry Collaborative (The Way Home)**, an innovative housing-centered reentry initiative launched in Lane County in 2018. The Way Home is a partnership between the leading local nonprofit reentry services provider, Sponsors Inc.; Lane County’s public housing agency, Homes for Good; and the local corrections office, Lane County Parole & Probation (P&P). The three Lane County-based organizations have worked together for more than 25 years to develop affordable housing and comprehensive reentry services for people with conviction histories. The initiative was initially funded through a \$1.3 million Pay for Success Permanent Supportive Housing Demonstration project grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). Third Sector secured the grant for the county and delivered technical assistance with design and implementation. The Way Home strives to measurably improve the lives of individuals returning to Lane County from state prison by providing access to “Housing First”<sup>3</sup> permanent supportive housing (PSH). It is the first project in the county’s history that is dedicated to this specific housing model. Prior to this development, Lane County had short-term transitional housing options for the reentry population, but it lacked continuation to long-term housing pathways to achieve self-sufficiency.

Permanent supportive housing is a leading, evidence-based model that provides individuals with access to long-term housing coupled with intensive, individualized case management and a broad range of wraparound support services.<sup>4</sup> For The Way Home, key support services included cognitive behavioral therapy, substance abuse programs and counseling, supervision services, housing navigation support, and additional support services related to self-sufficiency, including employment, education, and mentoring programs. **The partners set an ambitious goal to develop 100 units of permanent supportive housing and serve at least 125 individuals over a period of five years**, prioritizing individuals who had the highest need and

who were most likely to recidivate. **To date, more than 230 individuals have been housed with a housing stability rate greater than 85 percent and only 11 percent of residents reincarcerated due to a new felony conviction.**

This case study explores the impact of The Way Home Reentry Collaborative in driving systems- and community-level change across Lane County from the time the project launched in 2018 to the present. Specifically, it seeks to understand how The Way Home initiative transformed participating county government agencies and community-based organizations, as well as the program's impact on the lives and outcomes of formerly incarcerated individuals themselves. This project is noteworthy for a number of reasons. First, it provides an example of permanent supportive housing in action, demonstrating how county government agencies can leverage housing as a key lever to reduce recidivism and encourage stable reentry. It also provides a strong example of why performance-based contracts have tremendous promise as a tool for governments seeking to advance equity, given how these contracts more intentionally center the needs of impacted communities and align efforts towards improved outcomes. Finally, The Way Home provides an example of an effective cross-system partnership, demonstrating how the public housing and criminal-legal systems can come together to address systemic barriers and advance equity for the most vulnerable and high-need communities.

The case study begins with an overview of the needs and challenges facing the reentry population, with a specific focus on the Lane County and Oregon contexts. It then provides a detailed overview of the evolution and goals of The Way Home initiative and presents key findings on the systems- and community-level impacts of the program. The study concludes with reflections on drivers that contributed to the initiative's success, as well as the challenges and barriers that may have hindered progress. It captures key insights and lessons learned over the past five years and highlights promising signs of change, offering valuable insights that can inform the development of additional efforts to break the cycle of homelessness and reincarceration in communities across the nation.

## Methodology

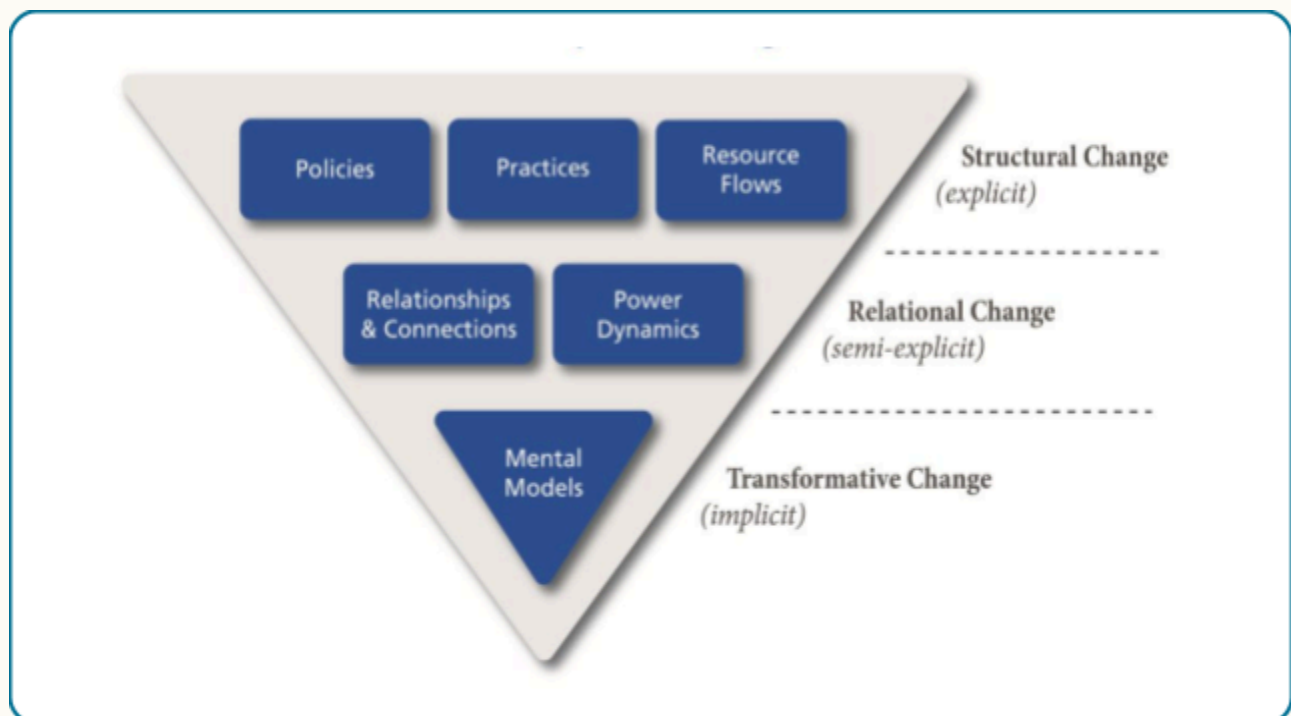
**This case study presents key findings from an evaluation process carried out by Cause IMPACTS Consulting between April and September 2024.** The evaluation was initiated by Third Sector in order to better understand the long-term impacts of its work on the government systems it serves and on the communities those systems serve. The evaluation leverages best practices from the emerging field of systems-change evaluation and takes an equity-centered, participatory approach to examine the systems- and community-level impacts of Third Sector client projects like The Way Home Reentry Collaborative in Lane County. The ultimate goals of this impact evaluation are: (1) to understand if Third Sector is

making measurable progress toward its mission of “transforming public systems to advance improved and equitable outcomes”<sup>5</sup> and (2) to contribute to collective learning for the broader field on what factors enable lasting systems change. The evaluation and the resulting case study signal Third Sector’s first attempts at measuring and sharing the long-term impacts of its work, demonstrating the organization’s and its partners’ deep commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

## GUIDING FRAMEWORK

The evaluation leverages FSG’s **“Water of Systems Change” framework**<sup>6</sup> to conceptualize systems change and describe systems-level impacts. This framework defines six conditions that hold complex social problems in place and have the potential to drive progress and change. These conditions include policy, practices, resource flows, relationships, power dynamics, and mental models. The six conditions exist at three separate levels of visibility, from the explicit to the implicit: structural, relational, and transformative (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. 6 Conditions of Systems Change**



To understand systems-change impacts, the evaluation looks for signs of change that may have come about at each of these three levels as a result of The Way Home initiative and, where possible, as a direct result of Third Sector's involvement in the initiative.

The ultimate goal of any Third Sector project is to transform systems to become more focused and aligned to the needs of communities that are most impacted by a specific issue, referred to as an "outcomes-focused" approach. **Positive systems change occurs when public systems evolve toward a more outcomes-focused approach.** Any changes that center or are responsive to the voices, perspectives, power, or needs of community members, especially those from historically underserved and oppressed groups, indicate positive momentum toward becoming outcomes-focused.

## CONTRIBUTION VS. ATTRIBUTION

It should be noted that true social change cannot happen in a silo or through the efforts of one organization or even one initiative alone. **As one actor in complex systems, Third Sector cannot reasonably prove or claim attribution for most systems- and community-level impacts described in this report.** Recognizing this, the current evaluation does not attempt to prove causation or attribution. Instead, it focuses on exploring the ways in which Third Sector and implementation partners like Sponsors Inc. and government departments may have *contributed* to broader change and social impact. **This represents a unique and emerging approach to nonprofit impact evaluation that acknowledges the true nature of systems transformation and systems-change work.**

## CN EQUITY-DRIVEN, PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

The evaluation process and the final case study aim to embody the core values of equity, inclusion, accountability, and shared learning. **The evaluation centers authentic stakeholder engagement and an emphasis on lived experiences and storytelling over quantitative data and metrics alone.** Given the complex and intangible nature of systems-change work, the evaluation relies heavily on qualitative stakeholder feedback to assess and understand systems-change impacts. It also incorporates qualitative data from individual program participants in order to explore and understand community-level impacts.

### Key evaluation methods included:

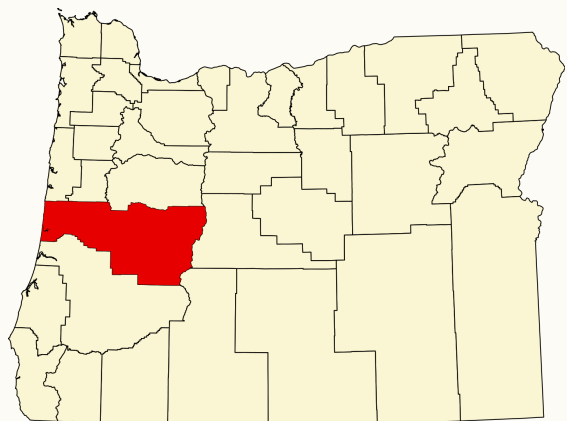
- **A detailed review** of existing documents, research, and data related to The Way Home initiative;
- **One-on-one or small group interviews** with seven project stakeholders, including leaders and staff from Sponsors Inc., Lane County Parole & Probation, Homes for Good, and Third Sector; and
- **A community survey** of 16 individuals who received permanent supportive housing services through The Way Home and are currently participating in a formal evaluation of the program.

The case study went through a participatory review process, with stakeholders engaging in collaborative sessions and focus groups to review, refine, and co-create portions of the case study. They also provided feedback on draft versions of the report. **The final case study represents a culmination of this collective work, capturing the diverse perspectives of those involved in and impacted by The Way Home Reentry Collaborative.**

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## Understanding the Lane County Context

Lane County, Oregon, is a geographically diverse region in the Pacific Northwest, stretching from the Cascade Mountains in the east to the Pacific Ocean in the west. The county covers more than 4,500 square miles in the central-western portion of the state and includes a mix of urban, suburban, and rural communities.<sup>7</sup> Home to nearly 400,000 residents, Lane County is the fourth most populous county in Oregon and home to the state's second-largest city, Eugene. Eugene is a quintessential college town, well-known as the home of the University of Oregon, one of the largest public universities in the state. Lane County is less racially diverse than the nation as a whole. The county's population is predominantly White, accounting for around 80 percent of residents, but it also includes a growing Latino population, making up about 10 percent. Smaller percentages of residents identify as Asian, Black, Indigenous, or multiracial (see Appendix for a Demographic Profile of Lane County).<sup>8</sup>



Economically, Lane County reflects a mix of opportunity and challenge. Its vibrant local economy centers around the key industries of education, health care, manufacturing, and

tourism, alongside a traditional reliance on natural resource-based sectors (e.g., timber and agriculture).<sup>9</sup> However, the county also faces a number of pressing challenges, including economic disparities between urban and rural areas, rising homelessness and a need for affordable housing, and the impacts of natural disasters and climate change. Approximately 16 percent of residents live below the poverty line, a rate that surpasses both state and national averages.<sup>10</sup> These dynamics make Lane County a microcosm of broader trends across Oregon and the nation, where growth and opportunity exist alongside inequity and gaps in access for certain communities.

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## The Challenge: The Revolving Door of Incarceration and Homelessness



When you think about the challenges that people face reentering the community post-incarceration, the availability of housing and the cost of housing in this community (are key). ... (A) lot of the housing that's available is student housing that our folks can't compete with or private market housing that—either because of their conviction or the cost—is unattainable.”

*—Paul Solomon, former Executive Director, Sponsors Inc.*

Everyone deserves a second chance and a stable home from which to rebuild their lives, and housing is a proven factor in reducing recidivism.<sup>11</sup> Yet, most individuals returning to the community after serving a prison sentence face significant obstacles to securing safe, high-quality, and affordable housing. These barriers contribute to high rates of homelessness and housing insecurity among the reentry population. Nationwide, the homelessness rate for formerly incarcerated individuals is 203 per 10,000 people, compared to 21 per 10,000 people in the general population. This means that **formerly incarcerated people are almost 10 times more likely to experience homelessness** than the general population.<sup>12</sup>

Housing insecurity is an important contributing factor to recidivism, and **these intersecting challenges come to a head in areas like Lane County, where rates for both criminal-legal system involvement and homelessness are high compared to state and national averages (Table 1)**. Each year, approximately 500 individuals are released from Oregon state prisons to Lane County and about 50 percent are homeless at the time of release.<sup>13</sup>

Without access to safe and stable housing and support services, 56 percent of these individuals are rearrested by police and 26 percent are reincarcerated in prison for a felony offense within three years.<sup>14</sup>

Lane County's three-year recidivism rate is substantially higher than the statewide average.<sup>15</sup> Some of the most common reasons for recidivism include possession of methamphetamine, unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, or assault.<sup>16</sup>

Homelessness is also a key challenge in the region. The state of Oregon has one of the largest homeless populations in the nation, ranking sixth out of the 50 states despite having a relatively small general population.<sup>17</sup> It also has the third highest rate of homelessness per capita in the nation.<sup>18</sup> Lane County has the second largest homeless population in the state and one of the highest rates of per capita homelessness among Oregon counties.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 1. Homelessness and Incarceration Rates in Lane County, the State of Oregon, and Nationwide**

	Lane County	Oregon	United States
Homelessness Rate <sup>20</sup>	2,824 individuals <b>74 per 10,000 people</b>	20,142 individuals <b>48 per 10,000 people</b>	653,100 individuals <b>20 per 10,000 people</b>
Prison Incarceration Rate <sup>21</sup>	1,503 individuals <b>599 per 100,000 people</b>	14,961 individuals <b>544 per 100,000 people</b>	— <b>658 per 100,000 people</b>



Close to 3,000 individuals are homeless in Lane County on any given night, according to the most recent point-in-time counts.<sup>22</sup> And, rates have only been rising over time, with the number of homeless individuals in Lane County nearly doubling between 2018 and 2023. This mimics a trend of rising homelessness across the state. Homelessness in Oregon has become such a pressing issue that Governor Tina Kotek declared it a state of emergency in January 2023.<sup>23</sup>

The homeless crisis in Lane County is driven by a combination of rising housing costs, a shortage of affordable housing, low vacancy rates among units that do exist, and economic disparities.



Last I looked, the vacancy rate in Lane County was 2 percent,” shared Paul Solomon, former Executive Director of Sponsors Inc. “It’s not uncommon for our folks to come out of prison, get a job that pays 15 to 20 bucks an hour, and have maybe half of that in disposable income after fines, fees, and debt. So then, if you’ve got \$7.50 an hour in disposable income, it doesn’t go very far towards housing.”

– Paul Solomon, former Executive Director, Sponsors Inc.

Given the already-tight housing market and rising costs, individuals released from prison struggle to compete for housing for numerous reasons, including discrimination based on conviction history, inadequate work or rental history, lack of funds, and low credit scores.

## THE EQUITY IMPERATIVE

**High rates of homelessness among the reentry population also represent a critical equity challenge since criminal-legal system involvement disproportionately impacts low-income individuals and communities of color.** Black and Native American individuals are overrepresented in Oregon’s prison and reentry populations at a rate three to four times higher than their share of the general population. While Black individuals make up only 2 percent of the state population, they account for 8 percent of the post-prison population. Similarly, Native American individuals make up less than 1 percent of the state population but account for 3 percent of the post-prison population.<sup>24</sup> Racial inequity compounds with other barriers to increase individuals’ likelihood of recidivating. For example, individuals with conviction histories also experience higher rates of mental health and substance use issues. Of the individuals incarcerated in Oregon state prisons, 47 percent have diagnosed mental health needs and 51 percent have a history of substance abuse or addiction.<sup>25</sup>

**Without access to stable housing and appropriate support services, it is nearly impossible for most recently released individuals to achieve self-sufficiency and successfully reintegrate into society.** This leads to eventual re-engagement with the criminal-legal system and makes recidivism inevitable for many individuals. This negatively impacts individual quality of life, preventing people from reaching their fullest potential while also straining public systems. **Targeted approaches that directly address the connection between homelessness and recidivism are critical to effectively disrupt the revolving door of incarceration and housing instability and increase social equity in Lane County and similar regions.** As the state of Oregon and Lane County expand their efforts to combat homelessness and expand housing access, it is critical to include people with conviction histories in these efforts.

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## Project History, Overview, and Goals



Ninety days wasn't enough time. What was happening was people were in this amazing environment at Sponsors (where) they had a lot of support. And then at 90 days, we were just moving them out into the community and oftentimes back into the same situations, which got them in trouble. ... We needed something where our highest-risk folks could transition into longer-term housing."

*- Donovan Dumire, Manager, Lane County Parole & Probation*

As part of its "Diversion and Reentry" portfolio, Third Sector works with government agencies and communities to shift the criminal-legal system toward diversion and community-based models that make housing and support services more accessible to all.<sup>26</sup> **In 2015, Third Sector approached Lane County Parole & Probation (P&P), Homes for Good, and Sponsors Inc. to pursue a new federal funding opportunity, the Pay for Success Permanent Supportive Housing Demonstration** launched by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). The partners in Lane County had a long history of working together to address issues at the intersection of housing and criminal-legal system reform and had been thinking about the need for additional affordable housing solutions for the reentry population. While the county had an established transitional housing program for the reentry population, the average length of stay was 90 days and there was a need for longer-term support. Parole & Probation Manager Donovan Dumire provided more detail about this need, sharing, "Ninety days wasn't enough time. What was happening was people were in this amazing environment at Sponsors (where) they had a lot of support. And then at 90 days, we were just moving them out into the community and oftentimes back into the same

situations, which got them in trouble. ... We needed bridge housing. We needed something where our highest risk folks could transition into longer-term housing until they can actually meet sustainable full-time housing.”

## SERENDIPITOUS TIMING

**Recognizing this need, work was already underway in Lane County in 2015 and 2016 to develop longer-term housing solutions for formerly incarcerated individuals. Sponsors Inc. and Homes for Good** secured more than \$9 million in state funds and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to build a 54-unit development called The Oaks at 14th.<sup>27</sup> However, it was unclear how resident services would be funded long term. Donovan Dumire also shared, “We have tax credits that purchased (The Oaks), but how do we sustain it? At the time, we were looking at creative funding models and really thinking outside the box.” **The timing of the work already underway in Lane County aligned well with the HUD and DOJ Pay for Success Permanent Supportive Housing Demonstration grant.** The partners came together to apply for the opportunity, with Third Sector guiding the development of the HUD and DOJ grant application, and The Way Home Reentry Collaborative was formed.

**The Way Home would allow partners in Lane County to pilot a performance-based contracting model to provide permanent supportive housing (PSH) services for formerly incarcerated individuals in the region.** Performance-based contracting models link payment for programs to specific outcomes achieved by clients. Providers have unrestricted use of funds to the extent that they meet specific outcomes, and they receive success payments as these outcomes are achieved. This project built on Third Sector's history of leveraging innovative financing models and supporting performance contracting initiatives across the country. For example, Third Sector helped launch “Project Welcome Home,” the nation's first permanent supportive housing performance-based contracting program, based in Santa Clara County, California.<sup>28</sup> Third Sector had also supported a number of past projects in the state of Oregon, including “Oregon Juvenile Justice Pay for Success” in Marion and Multnomah counties, “Pay for Prevention” with the Oregon Health & Sciences University, and the “Youth Development Pay for Success Initiative” in partnership with Friends of the Children.

Erik Bishoff Photography



## ABOUT THE WAY HOME

### THE WAY HOME, At a Glance

**Overarching Goal:** To strengthen Lane County's ability to prevent and end homelessness and reduce avoidable incarceration by increasing the provision of permanent supportive housing (PSH) to the highest-need individuals.

**Specific Targets:** To develop 100 units of permanent supportive housing, serving 125 formerly incarcerated individuals reentering Lane County from state prison over a period of five years.

### Unique Features:

1. Housing First permanent supportive housing model.
2. Performance contract structure.
3. Cross-sector partnership across the public housing and criminal-legal systems.

### Target Population:\*

Currently experiencing homelessness

1. Returning from state prison (Oregon Department of Corrections).
2. Assessed as being at medium to high risk of recidivating.

\*Priority given to women, families, veterans, and participants with conviction histories that exclude them from federally funded programs (i.e., sex offenses, methamphetamine production<sup>29</sup>).

### Key Outcome Measures:

1. Avoiding recidivism at 12 and 18 months after housing placement. "Recidivism" is defined as incarceration for a new felony conviction.
2. Maintaining stable housing at 6, 12, and 18 months. "Stable housing" is defined as (1) remaining in a The Way Home permanent supportive housing unit or (2) residing in another housing unit with a validated lease or sub-agreement.



The Way Home coincided with the construction of a new 54-unit apartment community that we were building that was designed as permanent housing for people that are justice-involved. ... We were planning on providing on-site staffing, some case management, and access to other supports. **But, when this project came to be, we really built out the permanent supportive (housing) side of things. It probably wouldn't have evolved to the extent that it did without the grant and Third Sector's involvement."**

**— Paul Solomon, former Executive Director, Sponsors Inc.**

The Way Home program was a housing-oriented reentry initiative that sought to decrease homelessness and recidivism and to increase self-sufficiency for individuals returning to Lane County from state prison by providing access to stable and affordable permanent supportive housing (PSH). **While the partners in Lane County had worked together in the past, The Way Home represented a number of firsts. It was the first time the partners had pursued a performance-based contract. It was also the first time they had explored Housing First permanent supportive housing as a model to address homelessness and recidivism in the region.**

Permanent supportive housing was to be provided via dedicated buildings like The Oaks at 14th, public and affordable housing units, private market rentals, and tiny homes. As a Housing First PSH initiative, The Way Home would connect eligible individuals to stable housing without preconditions or barriers to entry, building on the well-established notion that many individuals experience improvements in quality of life—in health, mental health, substance abuse, and employment—as a result of having stable housing. In addition to long-term housing, the program provides intensive case management services, supervision services, and connections to a robust network of wraparound support services. The table below provides a list of key services available to participants (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Key Services Available to Participants Through The Way Home**

Services available based on individualized needs assessment		
Sponsors Programming (Sponsors Staff)	Supervision Programming (P&P Probation Officer)	Services Through Outside Providers (Community Partners)
<p><b>Cognitive Behavioral Therapy groups:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>oCognitive Behavioral Interventions</li> <li>oMoral Reconation Therapy</li> <li>oMotivational Enhancement Therapy</li> <li>oLiving in Balance</li> <li>oMoving On</li> <li>oParenting Inside-Out</li> </ul> <p><b>Individualized Case Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>oTransitions Coaching via 1-on-1 sessions</li> <li>oHousing Search Assistance</li> <li>oMotivational Interviewing</li> <li>oService referral to specialized providers</li> </ul> <p><b>Drug &amp; alcohol screening</b></p> <p><b>Added support services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>oMental Health Counseling</li> <li>oEmployment and Education Services</li> <li>oMentoring Program</li> <li>oBasic Needs (food, hygiene items, etc.)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Supervision Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>oCase planning (joint-system focused)</li> <li>oAssessment and re-assessment for level of service</li> <li>oDosage and benchmark tracking</li> <li>oSwift and strategic sanctions for anti-social behavior</li> <li>o8:1 affirmation to negative reinforcement ratio</li> <li>oDrug/alcohol testing</li> <li>oOffice, field or home skill building visits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5 min Check-in</li> <li>5 min Homework check</li> <li>30 min Skill building session</li> <li>5 min Assigning homework</li> </ul> </li> <li>oReferral for services through outside providers</li> </ul> <p><b>Drug &amp; alcohol screening</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health treatment <i>Lane County Behavioral Health</i></li> <li>• Domestic violence treatment <i>Bridges 2 Safety</i></li> <li>• IPV services <i>Victim Services, Womenspace</i></li> <li>• Sex offender treatment <i>McKenzie Counseling, Choices</i></li> <li>• Substance abuse treatment <i>Emergence, Chrysalis</i></li> <li>• Job placement, orientation, and certifications <i>Lane Workforce Partnership</i></li> <li>• Banking assistance &amp; financial literacy <i>Wells Fargo</i></li> <li>• Tenants' rights education <i>Rent Well</i></li> <li>• Legal clinic <i>UO Pro bono Clinic, Legal Aid</i></li> <li>• Family-marital services</li> <li>• Gender-responsive anger management</li> <li>• Education services</li> <li>• Relief nursery services</li> <li>• Food purchasing &amp; preparation <i>Food for Lane County</i></li> <li>• Homeownership training</li> <li>• Numerous other services provided by non-contract treatment providers</li> </ul>

**A unique, equity-driven feature of The Way Home initiative is its focus on serving individuals with the highest need** rather than those who are easiest to serve. Specifically, the program aimed to serve adults returning to Lane County after being in state prison who are homeless and have the greatest likelihood of recidivism (moderate to very high risk). These individuals face the highest barriers to stable housing and successful reentry. The initiative also prioritized serving the following high-need populations: women, families, veterans, and participants with conviction histories excluded from federally funded programs (i.e., sex offenses, methamphetamine production).



There are so many people who face extraordinary barriers, and to be able to prioritize those folks—I think that's been my favorite aspect of the project and made me most excited about it.”

— *Laura Johnson, Director of Program Development, Sponsors Inc.*

## Implementing The Way Home

In June 2016, partners in Lane County were excited to learn that they were one of only seven applicants from across the country selected for the Pay for Success Permanent Supportive Housing Demonstration grant, receiving an award of **\$1.3 million dollars** to design, implement, and evaluate The Way Home initiative. Third Sector served as the overall project manager and lead grant administrator. Over the next three years (2017–2019),<sup>30</sup> Third Sector supported partners in Lane County to bring The Way Home to life, leading research and data analysis efforts, supporting stakeholder engagement, and facilitating workflow and decision meetings for project partners to align policy, funding, and service delivery goals. The project was implemented in three key phases, as follows:

### Phase 1: Project Development.

During this phase, Third Sector led partners in conducting a feasibility study to understand what was possible with performance-based contracting in Lane County. This included a detailed review of current recidivism and housing data as well as economic modeling to predict outcomes payments. During this phase, the partners also implemented a pilot project at The Oaks at 14th. The pilot was a success, serving 92 individuals and achieving a one-year housing stability rate of 87 percent and a one-year incarceration recidivism rate of only 2.4 percent.<sup>31</sup> The pilot phase enabled partners to troubleshoot referral, enrollment, and training needs prior to the official launch of The Way Home.

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### **Phase 2: Implementation.**

Third Sector helped partners to structure the actual performance contract and all related continuous improvement and data-sharing processes. This involved establishing agreements between Lane County Parole & Probation, Homes for Good, and Sponsors Inc. that outlined when and how payments would be made and working with stakeholders to sign off on these commitments. The two key outcomes tied to success payments included recidivism for a new felony conviction at 12 months and housing stability at six months. These outcomes were validated with independent and administrative data sets from the Department of Corrections, the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, Homes for Good, the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and landlord documents.

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### **Phase 3: Success Payments and Evaluation.**

The final phase of Third Sector's work on The Way Home began in September 2018, when the first (nonpilot) permanent supportive housing placement was made. This phase involved the actual implementation of the PSH intervention and collecting success payments as outlined in the contract. In order to support this process, Third Sector developed tools and processes to streamline data collection and promote continuous, cross-department data review to inform service delivery and program improvements. A formal evaluation of program impact, led by a team of researchers from the University of Oregon, the University of Texas, and New York University, also kicked off during this time. The evaluation team played a key role in validating data for success payments.

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## **CURRENT STATUS OF THE WAY HOME**

The Way Home was originally conceptualized as a five-year program. Over time, it has evolved into a permanent fixture of Lane County and remains in operation to the present day. The program has achieved sustainability beyond the HUD and DOJ grant period, which ended in May 2023, and is currently funded through a combination of state, county, and philanthropic investments as well as partners' general operating funds. Though it is no longer structured as a performance-based contract, most other elements of The Way Home remain unchanged, including the original set of three partner organizations proactively managing staffing and services to improve housing stability and reduce recidivism. Additionally, the formal evaluation of the program is still underway. This seven-year study analyzing recidivism, housing, and health care outcomes among participant and control groups is set to be completed and published in 2027.

## PROJECT TIMELINE:

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- November 2016 to May 2023→HUD and DOJ Pay for Success Permanent Supportive Housing Demonstration official grant period
- January 2017 to September 2019→Third Sector technical assistance for grant implementation

## DETAILED BREAKDOWN:

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- October 2015 to February 2016→HUD and DOJ grant proposal socialized, drafted, and submitted by Third Sector
- June 2016→ HUD and DOJ grant award announced; Lane County is one of seven grantees
- June 2016 to April 2017→The Oaks at 14th development was constructed and opened<sup>32</sup>
- January 2017→ Begin design, negotiation, and implementation of The Way Home with Third Sector
  - **Phase 1**
    - April 2017 to August 2018→Pilot period
    - May 2018→Completed feasibility analysis
  - **Phase 2**
    - August 2018→ Finalized performance-based contract between The Way Home partners, HUD, and DOJ, alongside design of a continuous improvement process
  - **Phase 3**
    - September 2018→The Way Home officially launched, first housing placement
- September 2019→Contract ends with Third Sector, end of technical assistance
- Present→The Way Home is still in operation as of fall 2024



# About The Way Home Reentry Collaborative Partners

PARTNER	ABOUT
<b>Sponsors Inc.</b> <i>Nonprofit reentry services provider</i>	<p>Sponsors Inc. is a leading nonprofit organization that provides a broad range of reentry services for people in Lane County with conviction histories. Services include housing, case management, cognitive behavioral therapy, evidenced-based behavioral health counseling and education programs, mentoring, substance abuse treatment, employment services, and legal aid. Sponsors operates 20 buildings on seven sites with more than 200 beds of transitional and permanent housing. It provides housing to approximately 500 people and additional services to more than 1,500 people annually.<sup>33</sup></p>
<b>Lane County Parole &amp; Probation</b> <i>Local corrections department</i>	<p>Lane County Parole &amp; Probation is a community corrections department that provides supervision and rehabilitative services to individuals with conviction histories. Its mission is to improve the quality of life in Lane County by effectively responding to risk, need, and promoting positive change. Parole &amp; Probation supervises a population of approximately 3,000 individuals each year.<sup>34</sup></p>
<b>Homes for Good</b> <i>Local public housing authority</i>	<p>Homes for Good is the public housing authority for the city of Eugene, the city of Springfield, and Lane County. Homes for Good's primary mission is to provide affordable, decent, safe, and sanitary housing to low- and moderate-income families and households.<sup>35, 36</sup></p> <p>Homes for Good is the second largest housing authority in the state of Oregon, with an annual budget of \$40 million and a staff of 130 employees. It provides services to more than 5,000 households across Lane County at any point in time.<sup>37</sup></p>
<b>Third Sector Capital Partners (Third Sector)</b> <i>Lead technical assistance provider</i>	<p>Third Sector provided technical assistance to The Way Home partners to develop tools and practices that enabled leaders and staff to manage services toward specific recidivism and housing-stability outcomes. Third Sector served as an intermediary and project manager on</p>

behalf of the project stakeholders and was the primary administrator of the HUD and DOJ grant.

For a more detailed breakdown of key activities carried out by Third Sector as part of The Way Home initiative, see the “Spotlight On: Third Sector” box below.

## SPOTLIGHT ON: Third Sector



***Third Sector** is a nonprofit technical assistance organization that advises government agencies on effective ways to reshape their policies, systems, and services to achieve better outcomes for all people, no matter their race, background, and circumstances. Third Sector helps unlock possibility, confront inequity, and catalyze change to the benefit of the people and places governments, community-based, and philanthropic partners serve.*

All Third Sector client projects focus on six key levers within public systems: policies, services, data, funding, external relationships, and internal culture. These levers have the potential to be critical drivers for change in public systems and also reflect the key areas in which Third Sector provides support.

While The Way Home was a collaborative effort, Third Sector made a number of noteworthy contributions that moved the work forward. These contributions highlight its immense value as a technical assistance provider.

### Third Sector added essential daily capacity and carried out the following key activities for The Way Home project:

#### FUNDING

- Secured a **\$1.3 million federal grant** from the HUD and DOJ Pay for Success Permanent Supportive Housing Demonstration, which provided initial funding for The Way Home.
- Raised **additional philanthropic funds** to support project implementation, including a **\$500,000 startup loan** from the Oregon Community Foundation to fund the first phase of the project before success payments were available.
- Educated partners about **performance-based contracting** and

	<p>the required changes in collaboration and data sharing across departments needed to support the model.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Led partners through a <b>feasibility study</b> for the performance-based contract.</li> <li>• <b>Structured the performance-based contract</b> between The Way Home partners and HUD, including negotiating specific payment terms, defining success metrics, and getting all involved parties to sign off on the final contract terms.</li> <li>• <b>Managed success payments</b> between HUD and The Way Home partners.</li> </ul>
DATA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created an <b>economic modeling tool (population cash flow tracker)</b> for partners to plan for success payments, enabling them to predict cash flow over time.</li> <li>• Outlined <b>specific definitions and outcomes metrics</b> for the performance-based contract and success payments. The two key metrics were the absence of recidivism at 12 and 18 months and the presence of stable housing at 6, 12, and 18 months.</li> <li>• Developed a data <b>performance dashboard</b> partners could use to monitor progress toward outcomes goals over time.</li> <li>• Established <b>continuous improvement practices</b> for partners to review data and plan improvements, including scheduling and facilitating regular monthly meetings.</li> <li>• Secured <b>data-sharing agreements</b> with county and state agencies that allowed for the integration of justice, housing, and health care data to inform service delivery.</li> </ul>
POLICY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supported Homes for Good in establishing a <b>local Housing Choice Voucher preference</b> for reentering individuals in Lane County (Sponsors Inc. clients).</li> <li>• Provided a forum for partners to <b>test evidence-based practices</b>—including systems case plans; dosage, duration, and intensity tracking; smaller caseloads; etc.—some of which were eventually incorporated as permanent internal policies.</li> </ul>
SERVICES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed <b>new enrollment protocols</b> for participants who may be incarcerated, transitioning through shelters or temporary housing programs, or unsheltered.</li> <li>• Designed a <b>Common Assessment Tool for Reentry</b> to determine how individuals should be prioritized for housing, in collaboration with individuals with lived experience, The Way Home partners, and the National Alliance to End Homelessness.</li> <li>• Implemented <b>a pilot program at The Oaks at 14th</b> to test service delivery and integrated case-management practices (referrals, placement, and services).</li> <li>• Developed an <b>“Operations Guide”</b> to guide the implementation</li> </ul>

	<p>of the permanent supportive housing program. The guide outlined how partners should work together to coordinate services and staffing and introduced new standard operating procedures for participant referral, assessment, screening, and intake.</p>
EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthened <b>cross-departmental partnerships</b>, bringing together the criminal-legal and housing systems to design and execute an intervention that was responsive to local unhoused needs and complied with federal and state regulations.</li> <li>Formalized partnerships by establishing <b>memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and data-sharing agreements</b> between key stakeholders, including between Homes for Good, Parole &amp; Probation, Sponsors Inc., and other systems partners.</li> <li>Assembled a cross-sector <b>Steering Committee</b> that included 15–20 stakeholders from across the county and state. Facilitated monthly committee meetings and biweekly meetings for three sub-committees (<b>workgroups</b>) to support project planning and implementation and build broad-based public support. In addition to The Way Home partners, the Steering Committee included representatives from the Lane Council of Governments, the governor's office, the Criminal Justice Commission, the Oregon Health Authority, and the Department of Corrections.</li> </ul>
INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provided resources and training to support partners in understanding and operationalizing evidence-based practices introduced through The Way Home, including: <b>"Housing First," "performance-based contracting," "permanent supportive housing," etc.</b></li> </ul>



## Reflections on Third Sector's Role and Value-Add:

- "I think what Third Sector did that was the most helpful was keep us on track. (When you have a lot of ideas, a lot of excitement, a lot of, 'Hey, I want to see this,' all of a sudden, the program becomes this monster. **What Third Sector was really great at doing was keeping us on task, keeping us focused, and taking our ideas and putting them into a plan that was easy and clear to follow.**" – Donovan Dumire, Manager, Lane County Parole & Probation
- "Third Sector really helped us. ... Without them, we wouldn't have been able to do all of the feasibility analysis. We didn't have the internal expertise. ... Their ability to help us with the transaction structuring was critical. They helped us think through how we defined success and recidivism. Having a thought partner like Third Sector to be able to jump on a call with to help work through things (was really helpful, like): How are we going to implement this new housing vulnerability tool? How are we going to operationalize our intake process? How are we going to deal with issues in property management? **There wasn't an area where they weren't able to be a thought partner and, in many cases, they would also bring us the answers.**" – Paul Solomon, former Executive Director, Sponsors Inc.



# Systems-Change Impacts

More than five years have passed since The Way Home Reentry Collaborative officially launched in 2018. There are clear signs that the initiative has contributed to changes in the structures, relationships, and mental models of the individuals and organizations involved, signaling change and transformation in the broader housing and criminal-legal systems in Lane County. Key findings on systems-level impacts are summarized below and described in more detail in the pages that follow.

Structural change	Relational change	Transformative change
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increased the supply of affordable housing in Lane County</li> <li>2. Introduced a new housing model—permanent supportive housing—that has been sustained and replicated</li> <li>3. Established a local Housing Choice Voucher preference for the reentry population and inspired an expansion of preferences to other community-based organizations working with underserved communities</li> <li>4. Strengthened partners' data infrastructure and promoted data-driven decisionmaking</li> <li>5. Increased operational capacity through the addition of more staff and specialized roles</li> <li>6. Introduced system case plans and other operational improvements, resulting in more coordinated and efficient service delivery</li> <li>7. Secured and shifted public funding to sustain The Way Home over time, despite initial setbacks</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthened ties between the housing and criminal-legal systems in Lane County</li> <li>2. Inspired county government agencies to deepen ties with community-based organizations</li> <li>3. Improved relationships between parole officers and formerly incarcerated individuals returning to Lane County, building more genuine relationships and trust</li> <li>4. Strengthened connections with local property managers, leading to more opportunities for clients</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. County government agency staff and leaders have a more nuanced understanding of the reentry population</li> <li>2. Partners recognize the need for continued investments in permanent supportive housing</li> <li>3. Housing First pushed reentry services providers to think differently about how and when to integrate harm reduction practices into housing</li> <li>4. Changed the way leaders think about performance-based contracting</li> <li>5. Ignited a desire to amplify and share best practices, providing a model for others in the field</li> </ol>

# Structural Change

## *Policies, practices, and resource flows*

The Way Home marked Lane County's first major investment in a permanent supportive housing project specifically aimed at serving the reentry population. This project and Third Sector's dedicated technical assistance and support have created profound and lasting structural impacts in the county. Key impacts include increasing the supply of affordable housing, expanding access to housing vouchers for the reentry community, enhancing the operational capacity of government and community-based organizations, and increasing resource flows toward the implementation of more outcomes-focused and evidence-based practices. These structural changes have transformed the way the housing and criminal-legal systems in the area work together to provide more effective and equitable services, supporting successful reentry for Lane County's residents with the highest barriers to securing housing in a supportive, safe, and responsive environment.

### 1. Increased the Supply of Affordable Housing in Lane County



Actually, building up the supply of (affordable housing) units in our community has been extremely gratifying. ... (C)reating 100 units of permanent supportive housing is no small feat."

— **Paul Solomon, former Executive Director, Sponsors Inc.**



A key achievement of The Way Home project was **increasing Lane County’s supply of affordable housing by more than 50 units and the supply of permanent supportive housing by 100 units**. This included 54 new-construction affordable housing units at **The Oaks at 14th**, a \$9 million, publicly funded housing development opened in 2017 and operated by Sponsors. The Oaks at 14th represents one of the largest affordable housing developments to break ground in Lane County over the past decade.<sup>38</sup> In fact, it accounted for almost 10 percent of the total affordable housing target outlined in the county’s strategic plan at the time, which sought to “create 600 additional housing opportunities throughout Lane County by 2021.”<sup>39</sup> All 54 of the units at The Oaks continue to be used as affordable housing to the present day.

Homes for Good provided the remaining 46 permanent housing units as “scatter sites” using a combination of public and affordable housing, private-market units subsidized with Housing Choice Vouchers (commonly known as Section 8), and tiny homes. Third Sector played a pivotal role in guiding The Way Home partners to include scatter site housing to establish the desired number of permanent supportive housing units. Initially, partners assumed that standalone developments combined with public housing sites would be sufficient to meet the program’s goals. However, economic modeling by Third Sector showed that slow resident turnover and limited inventory would create gaps in housing availability. To address this, the partners expanded the use of scatter site housing to meet the ambitious goal of developing 100 PSH units.

## **2. Introduced a New Housing Model—Permanent Supportive Housing—That Has Been Sustained and Replicated**

While partners in Lane County had recognized the need for additional housing support for the reentry population for some time, The Way Home represented the county’s first project dedicated specifically to permanent supportive housing (PSH), and The Oaks at 14th represented its first exclusively permanent supportive housing development. PSH is unique because it combines affordable housing with intensive wraparound support and case management services for individuals, supporting their individual needs in a holistic way. **One of the most significant impacts of The Way Home is that the PSH model has continued to be sustained and replicated across the county to the present day.** Existing and new PSH units are expanding housing access for the highest-need members of the reentry population and other chronically homeless individuals in the county.



## SUSTAINING PSH

**The 100 permanent supportive housing units developed as part of The Way Home continue to be used to house formerly incarcerated individuals returning to Lane County.** Although the initial grant funds from HUD and DOJ have been expended, the program is sustained through funding from program partners, public grants, and philanthropic funds. Sponsors Director of Program Development Laura Johnson highlighted this collaborative effort, “Homes for Good and Parole & Probation have committed to continuing the services for the foreseeable future at this point, and Sponsors has been writing grants and wrapping it into our budget to make sure we have enough financial support.”

## REPLICATING AND EXPANDING PSH

In addition to sustaining existing units, the number of permanent supportive housing units in the county has grown over time, inspired in large part by the success of The Way Home and The Oaks at 14th. At Sponsors, leaders share that the number of PSH units the organization operates now exceeds the number of transitional housing units. Today, there are 122 PSH units and 119 transitional housing units.<sup>40</sup> The rise in the number of PSH units indicates their growing importance for the organization and the community. Prior to The Way Home, Sponsors had dabbled in providing some longer-term housing for the reentry community but offered mostly transitional housing options that set 90-day tenancy limits.

Homes for Good has also developed a number of new PSH projects across the county, including The Commons on MLK (51 units), The Keystone (15 units), and The Nel (45 units), **adding a total of 111 new PSH units** to Lane County’s inventory.<sup>41</sup> Additional projects, including Bridges on Broadway (57 units) and The Coleman (52 units), are also in the pipeline.<sup>42</sup> Jacob Fox, Executive Director of Homes for Good, noted that The Way Home inspired many of the county’s subsequent PSH projects, sharing, “There was definitely a relationship between The Oaks at 14th and all these other developments.” While the majority of Homes for Good’s new PSH developments do not focus specifically on serving the reentry population, The Coleman is a notable exception.

The upcoming Coleman development represents a new collaborative effort between the three core The Way Home partners—Sponsors, Homes for Good, and Lane County Parole & Probation.<sup>43</sup> Paul Solomon, former Executive Director of Sponsors, shared, “As a result of that project and our success with The Oaks at 14th, we’ve been able to do a lot of things. We got the county to give us a piece of property to develop another similar project. So, we’re in the process of developing another 52-unit permanent supportive housing, a \$25 million capital project (The Coleman) that we hope to break ground on next year.” Parole & Probation Manager Donovan Dumire added, “We are looking really hard at duplicating this model in Lane County.”

The Coleman is slated to break ground in 2026 and would likely welcome its first residents by 2028.

### **3. Established a Local Housing Choice Voucher Preference for the Reentry Population and Inspired an Expansion of Preferences to Other Community-Based Organizations Working with Underserved Communities**

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There's a long wait list for HUD housing vouchers in every community, and I think that's a really important part of the project that Jacob (Homes for Good) was willing to create a priority voucher for this population for this program (so that) folks who were applying for housing vouchers got to skip the line and get placed.”

*- Third Sector Project Team Member*



Through the federal Housing Choice Voucher Program, commonly known as Section 8, local public housing agencies provide rental assistance to low-income individuals to access homes on the private rental market.<sup>44</sup> Homes for Good administers about 3,000 Housing Choice Vouchers per year, and there is a long waitlist to receive a voucher in Lane County.<sup>45</sup> As part of The Way Home, Homes for Good established a new Housing Choice Voucher preference for Sponsors' clients. The preference ensures residents with a conviction history experience minimal wait times for housing vouchers, helping to increase housing access for this underserved group.

As of October 2024, **The Way Home has referred 359 eligible individuals for a Section 8 voucher, and 177 vouchers have been issued, a rate of 49 percent (or 1 in 2).**<sup>46</sup> Compare this to national statistics, which estimate that only 20 percent of individuals eligible for housing assistance receive it.<sup>47</sup>



The Way Home forced us to expand our local preferences significantly, increasing the number of Sponsors clients we served."

**-Jacob Fox, Executive Director, Homes for Good**

Prior to The Way Home, formerly incarcerated adults waited in the queue with all other families and individuals on the voucher waitlist. Establishing the voucher preference solidified a commitment from the housing authority to prioritize public safety and community-building alongside existing preferences for children, youth, and families, which ultimately reduce wait times and barriers to housing at various segments of the community. The housing voucher preference was directly inspired by Third Sector, which recommended this approach based on best practices from other communities across the country.

Providing a local preference to Sponsors as part of The Way Home also had another enduring impact: **it inspired Homes for Good to continue expanding local voucher preference partnerships to additional community-based partners**, eliminating barriers for other high-need populations. This impact is discussed in more detail in the "Relational Change" section of the report (see "Relational Change: 2. Inspired County Government Agencies To Deepen Ties With Community-Based Organizations").

While the introduction of the local Housing Choice Voucher preference has been a significant positive development, it has not been without its challenges. There is often a waitlist for vouchers, resulting in delays in issuance regardless of preference status. Once a voucher is secured, actually utilizing it can also be a challenge. "The search can be tough," Beth Ochs of Homes for Good shared in a recent public interview. "They (voucher recipients) only have 120

days to locate the housing. ... (For many,) it turns into a situation in which they're not able to use the voucher."<sup>48</sup> In order to ensure participants could utilize vouchers effectively, The Way Home provided additional assistance and support through housing navigators. Sponsors' Director of Program Development Laura Johnson shared the following reflection: "I would definitely say that if (a program is) going to utilize Section 8 vouchers, they need to employ adequate staff to support people in finding housing to use those vouchers. ... People are generally not positioned to do that on their own."

#### 4. Strengthened Partners' Data Infrastructure and Promoted Data-Driven Decisionmaking



I think we've aspired to a data-driven culture, but operationalizing that has been challenging. ... **This project provided us with the data collection process and reporting processes that illustrated why and how important it is to have good data.** ... Third Sector was really helpful in helping us build (that understanding)."

*—Paul Solomon, former Executive Director, Sponsors Inc.*

The inherent data-focused nature of performance contracting, coupled with the intense reporting and evaluation requirements of the federal grant from HUD and DOJ, necessitated that The Way Home partners upgrade, strengthen, and increase the level of coordination between their data systems. **This gave way to stronger data systems and more data-driven practices at each of the three partner organizations.** For example, Sponsors invested in a **new database system** that not only impacted The Way Home program but is being used across all Sponsors programs, resulting in improvements in data use and performance management across the entire organization.

Third Sector played an important role in supporting The Way Home partners to improve internal data systems and adopt more data-driven practices. First, it supported partners to **establish specific definitions and outcome metrics to track program performance.** It also helped partners **secure data-sharing agreements and aggregate data from a range of diverse, typically siloed public sources,** integrating justice data from the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) and Department of Corrections (DOC), housing data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and health care data from local Continuum of Care Organizations (CCOs) in new and innovative ways. Finally, Third Sector established and facilitated a

**continuous improvement process** by which partners could regularly come together to analyze data and leverage key insights to improve the equity and efficiency of service delivery.

As part of this continuous improvement process, leaders and staff from Sponsors, Parole & Probation, and Homes for Good met on a recurring basis to review a **performance dashboard** to ensure the program was on track to meet referral, enrollment, and retention goals. Paul Solomon reflected on the value of this process and dashboard tool, “When I was in the executive director role, I would take the numbers from the dashboard on a regular basis and build them into presentations that I would give on the project that would show how many people had been referred, how many people had been housed, how many people were issued Section 8 vouchers, what the recidivism rates were, what the housing stability numbers were. ... (I) t’s been really useful for me.”

Data-sharing and continuous improvement practices established during Third Sector’s involvement in The Way Home project continue to be used to the present day. Sponsors now leads these efforts, sharing a monthly update of the performance dashboard with The Way Home partners.



Did the project change the way you use data? Yeah, it did, for sure. We haven’t arrived yet. We’re not very sophisticated in how we review data and report on data. But we have made a decision to change software platforms and we have done some data sharing agreements.”

**–Jacob Fox, Executive Director, Homes for Good**





I think we're doing a better job of consistently collecting data, and not just for people in The Way Home. ... We implemented a new database as a direct result of this project that we use organization-wide. I think we've aspired to a data-driven culture, but operationalizing that has been challenging. ... **This project provided us with the data collection process and reporting processes that illustrated why and how important it is to have good data.** ... Third Sector was really helpful in helping us build (that understanding)."

*-Laura Johnson, Director of Program Development, Sponsors Inc.*

## 5. Increased Operational Capacity Through the Addition of More Staff and Specialized Roles

Implementing The Way Home initiative required a significant expansion of human resources in order to deliver the permanent supportive housing intervention effectively. This included developing **two new reentry navigator** positions at Sponsors. One navigator serves as a dedicated housing liaison, supporting individuals with voucher applications and housing placements, while the other provides general resource navigation support after participants are placed in a unit through the program. Lane County Parole & Probation also hired a dedicated **parole officer** who exclusively serves The Way Home participants and is stationed on-site at The Oaks at 14th. Paul Solomon, former Executive Director of Sponsors Inc., shared more about the unique parole officer position: "We really wanted to be able to provide a best practice in community corrections supervision. That meant creating a position that was dedicated to this project and that had a cap on the number of people that they would supervise." Expanding staff roles to provide dedicated support means that Sponsors, Homes for Good, and Parole & Probation can collaborate on intake, case planning, and case management in a more coordinated way to ensure services remain responsive to the needs of all participants in The Way Home, no matter the stage of service delivery.

The addition of new staff has also had long-term impacts on the operational capacity of The Way Home partner organizations, most of whom have maintained higher staffing levels over time. Paul Solomon also shared, "We didn't have any projects that were staffed at this level. In the past, we only had skeleton-staffed long-term housing projects. This project provided the initial allocation of resources to staff it beyond just a nominal level. And then, it provided us with the evidence to say, 'Okay, Lane County, now that it's time to renegotiate our contracts, this is a high priority.' Because of the success of the project, I went out and fiercely advocated for continued funding (to maintain) the staffing levels that we had." Thus, evidence of The Way Home's effectiveness enabled partners to maintain higher operational capacities over time, expanding the overall size and reach of the reentry services landscape in the region.

## 6. Introduced System Case Plans and Other Operational Improvements, Resulting in More Coordinated and Efficient Service Delivery

The Way Home provided a unique opportunity for partners to innovate and test new ways of operating, and many of the tested approaches have been adopted as permanent practices by partners over time. For example, a key operational change introduced through The Way Home was the use of a centralized **system case plan** for client case management. A unified case plan ensured that all partners involved in a client's care—including corrections officers, reentry services providers, housing services, behavioral health care providers, and clients themselves—could work collaboratively to support successful reentry. Lane County Parole & Probation Manager Donovan Dumire described the system case plan approach in more detail:

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Typically, in our profession, we work in silos. (For example) we (Parole & Probation) might be working on addressing cognitive and behavioral therapy while Sponsors is working on drug and alcohol treatment, and maybe another (organization is providing) a parenting class. What we did (with The Way Home) is actually create one case plan based on validated assessments (to focus on) the two top criminogenic risk factors (per participant). ... The system case plan involved all partners, so that everybody was really working off the same script. ... There was a lot of collaboration with system partners to really make sure that we were (creating) a united front for the population that we were serving.”

*–Donovan Dumire, Manager, Lane County Parole & Probation*

By reducing duplication, addressing service gaps, and aligning interventions with clients' specific needs, the system case plan resulted in more coordinated and efficient service delivery for the county's reentry population. The case plans also **integrated dosage, duration, and intensity benchmarks**<sup>49</sup> to track specific interventions and progress over time. Initially introduced through The Way Home, these tracking practices are now standard at Lane County Parole & Probation.

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“It really started with The Way Home. This was the incubator. In 2016, we knew of (dosage, duration, and intensity), but it really wasn't a practice. ... Today, we're having conversations and actually looking at dosage. It's written into our policies around tracking. These things are actually a part of our everyday practice. But, in 2016 and before, when we were starting to have conversations about what this looked like, this was some big pie in the sky stuff.”

*–Donovan Dumire, Manager, Lane County Parole & Probation*

Third Sector played an important role in supporting the systems case plan and other operational improvements introduced through The Way Home, **developing standardized tools and processes to bring new operational elements to life.** For example, Third Sector developed an **“Operations Guide”** outlining the coordinated case management model and a **Common Assessment Tool for Reentry**, in partnership with the National Alliance to End Homelessness and community-based nonprofits, to evaluate housing vulnerability and prioritize housing placements. Many of the tools and processes that Third Sector developed are still in use today, evidence of their value and relevance for partners. Paul Solomon from Sponsors noted, “Pretty much all the (operating) processes have remained pretty static (since Third Sector’s departure in 2019) as it relates to referrals, assessments, screenings, intakes. There have been some little tweaks, but for the most part, they’ve been pretty consistent.”



We created a brand-new assessment to determine how someone should be prioritized for housing in the county. That had never been done before, and (it was) customized for the reentry population, not just for anyone that’s homeless. That’s a big thing.”

–*Third Sector Project Team Member*

## 7. Secured and Shifted Public Funding To Sustain The Way Home Over Time, Despite Initial Setbacks

A key challenge faced by partners during the initial phases of The Way Home was securing funds to support the project in the period before success payments from the HUD and DOJ grant were available. Over the course of two consecutive legislative sessions, partners attempted to establish a contract with the state of Oregon to secure these funds. However, bipartisan political turmoil and legislator walkouts—unrelated to housing or public safety policy—ultimately derailed their efforts.

Third Sector and The Way Home partners pivoted and were able to successfully secure additional state, county, and philanthropic funding to not only support the startup costs of The Way Home, but also to sustain the initiative over time. Sponsors former Executive Director Paul Solomon shared, “We were never able to develop a state contract for the project. ... We wound up having to pivot, and ultimately, we got a **\$500,000 loan** from the Oregon Community Foundation that we structured into an outcomes contract. When that ended, **we were able to develop a new contract with Lane County Parole & Probation to pay for the services at The Oaks.** ...That was a key tool in our ability to sustain the work.”

**As the program went on, evidence of success enabled partners to shift additional public dollars toward The Way Home.** For example, The Way Home received funds through Homes for

Good's annual budget<sup>50</sup> and Lane County's Community Corrections Budget.<sup>49</sup> The program—including the evaluation of the program—also received significant funding through The Oregon Criminal Justice Commission's Justice Reinvestment Grant Program.<sup>52</sup> Paul Solomon added more detail, sharing, "(We were) able to leverage approximately **\$400,000** in additional funding for the research (evaluation) for the project from state sources. The money came through the Justice Reinvestment Grant Program. There is a certain carve-out for research. Most counties do not take advantage of it because they don't have quality research projects, but we did." In addition to shifting a significant amount of public dollars, partners secured more than **\$200,000** in philanthropic grants from organizations such as the Trillium Community Health Plan and Meyer Memorial Trust. **The Way Home partners have shown tremendous innovation in their ability to secure and braid funds to ensure long-term program sustainability, increasing local resource flows toward better serving the reentry population.**

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## Relational Change

*Relationships, connections, and power dynamics*

A deeper layer of systems change brought about by The Way Home Reentry Collaborative is the strengthening of relationships between cross-sector actors in Lane County, including local government agencies, community-based organizations, and private landlords and property owners. While most organizations involved in The Way Home had some existing level of familiarity and partnership, these connections were deepened and transformed as a result of this work, resulting in more open channels of communication, stronger cross-system coordination, and innovations in service delivery. The dynamic between service providers and community members with conviction histories has also shifted to one of greater trust and mutual understanding. Taken together, these relational shifts are giving rise to less-siloed and more-coordinated systems that are better equipped to empower and serve the county's reentry community.

## 1. Strengthened Ties Between the Housing and Criminal-Legal Systems in Lane County



With Sponsors, (The Way Home) has definitely increased the relationship and made it more successful. We work closer together because Sponsors directly works with the same clients. ... (Our relationship) with housing (Homes for Good) has improved as well because they're involved more in the decisionmaking with The Way Home clients that are at The Oaks and other permanent housing sites. We have meetings and we'll all just kind of talk about what's going on and what we can do to improve things."

— *Evan Loock, Parole Officer for The Way Home*

A strong, collaborative relationship between Sponsors, Homes for Good, and Lane County Parole & Probation existed long before the initiation of The Way Home. The three agencies had been working together for more than 25 years on various initiatives at the intersection of housing and criminal-legal reform in the region. However, The Way Home **strengthened and formalized these existing relationships, enabling the organizations to unlock new levels of trust, coordination, and partnership.** These strengthened relationships have been crucial in delivering more coordinated, client-centered services to impacted community members.

Third Sector supported the **formalization process** by establishing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and data-sharing agreements between the organizations. Sponsors Director of Program Development Laura Johnson provided more detail, sharing, "We have MOUs with Homes for Good that have to do with our provider preference for Section 8 vouchers and public housing that outline what our responsibilities are, and there are broader MOUs between the three partners about data-sharing and about our roles in the partnership." These formal agreements built on existing trust, enabling greater collaboration to address systemic challenges.

Operationalizing key elements of The Way Home, such as the **system case plan**, also pushed partners to work together in deeper ways. A Third Sector team member reflected, "(Before The Way Home, they) all knew each other and could call in a favor or do one-off work together, but they weren't partnering at a programmatic level the way they were for this project." The Way Home's integrated services required that housing and criminal-legal system partners execute interventions in a coordinated way that was responsive to client needs. **Third Sector supported this collaboration by developing enrollment protocols, a detailed "Operations Guide," and other tools** that clarified standard operating procedures for leaders and frontline staff implementing the program. Third Sector also facilitated **joint training and data-review (continuous improvement) meetings** for leaders and staff to align on client and program needs.

Physical proximity through the **co-location of services**, such as embedding a parole officer at The Oaks at 14th, helped to reinforce and strengthen connections between partners.

By intentionally formalizing and strengthening connections, The Way Home set a new standard for housing and criminal-legal system partnerships. Sponsors, Homes for Good, and Lane County Parole & Probation continue to work closely together to the present day, and their partnership has even received national recognition as a best-practice model of cross-system collaboration. They were recently highlighted in a **2022 Bureau of Justice Assistance toolkit report**<sup>49</sup> and were even invited to present during a **2023 webinar organized by the Council of State Governments and U.S. Department of Justice** to showcase their collaborative model as a blueprint for others. More than 200 people attended their webinar session entitled, “Partnering Across Systems for Reentry Housing Development Success.”<sup>54, 55</sup>

“

We really are blessed in Lane County to have such a high degree of collaboration with our system partners. Our Lane County Parole & Probation team has closely partnered with both Sponsors and Homes for Good for well over 25 years. Today, in fact, we're located across the street from Sponsors. ... As a true measure of our collaboration, we have officers stationed at multiple Homes for Good and Sponsors locations.”

— **Donovan Dumire, Manager, Lane County Parole & Probation**<sup>56</sup>

## 2. Inspired County Government Agencies To Deepen Ties With Community-Based Organizations



The Way Home helped county government agencies recognize the value community-based organizations bring in reaching the most vulnerable, historically underserved, and hard-to-reach populations. This realization increased agencies’ willingness to engage in partnerships and solidified their commitment to collaboration since these partnerships could help them further their own equity and service delivery goals. Studying the evolution of Homes for Good’s approach to partnerships with local community-based organizations provides clear

evidence of this shift. “The partnership with Sponsors really infused within us the desire to seek out and implement more cross-sector partnerships,” shared Jacob Fox, Executive Director of Homes for Good. **The success of The Way Home helped make Homes for Good more receptive to future partnerships with community-based organizations to address local housing challenges and meet the needs of historically underserved groups.** In fact, such partnerships have become a cornerstone of the agency’s approach to service delivery.

**One key area where the expansion of partnerships with community-based organizations is evident is in Homes for Good’s local preference program.** The partnership with Sponsors on The Way Home created a precedent for Homes for Good to engage other community-based organizations in Lane County as local preference partners. In 2016, Homes for Good had close partnerships with just a handful of organizations, including Sponsors.<sup>57</sup> The number of partners has steadily increased over time, and the agency now has MOUs in place with about 30 local preference partners.<sup>58</sup> Further emphasizing the importance the agency places on these community partnerships, establishing a network of preference partners was defined as a key goal in the agency’s inaugural “Strategic Equity Plan” in 2022 and has remained present in subsequent updates of the plan, including the most recent 2025–2026 plan update.<sup>59</sup> These partnerships contribute to equity in the region by enabling Homes for Good to engage and prioritize high-barrier populations who may not otherwise have access to Housing Choice Vouchers or other public housing assistance services.

**Another area where the elevated importance of community-based organizations is clear is in Homes for Good’s development projects.** It is now a standard practice for the agency to partner with a community-based organization on new affordable housing developments. In fact, Homes for Good Executive Director Jacob Fox shared that the agency often does not begin new projects *unless* a local community-based organization partner is involved. The growing number of partnerships is significant because they are not only resulting in an uptick in the number of affordable units in the county, but also because these partnerships often exhibit a higher level of innovation and creativity than traditional housing projects, addressing intersecting systemic challenges. For example, Homes for Good recently partnered with Head Start of Lane County and Early Childhood CARES<sup>60</sup> on a development called **Ollie Court**, which broke ground in August 2024.<sup>61</sup> Ollie Court will co-locate 81 units of new affordable housing with an early learning center to address the concurrent need for affordable housing and affordable child care in Lane County. In a recent article, Homes for Good Board Chair Michelle Thurston shared, “By embracing innovative approaches, collaborations, and partnerships, we are able to open new possibilities for our community and provide safe, stable housing where we as residents are able not just to live but to thrive.”<sup>62</sup>

### 3. Improved Relationships Between Parole Officers and Formerly Incarcerated Individuals Returning to Lane County, Building More Genuine Relationships and Trust

A unique feature of The Way Home is that there is a **dedicated parole officer located on-site** at The Oaks at 14th. This officer provides exclusive support for The Way Home program and has a smaller caseload that only includes program participants (around 50 people at any given time) to provide more targeted, robust, and responsive care. **Having a parole officer embedded in the residential community has transformed the relationship between community members and Parole & Probation.**

Parole Officer Evan Looock, who has been stationed at The Oaks since the start of The Way Home initiative, shared, “Before I did The Way Home, I was more removed. I would meet with clients typically just once a month, and that would be it. Being stationed with my office in the same apartments ... I see them more frequently. We have closer interaction. **I develop a stronger rapport with them**, and then I can directly connect them to housing or insurance or different services like treatment or cognitive behavioral interventions and things that they need more quickly. I see them a lot more, so I have a lot more contact with them than other POs (parole officers) might and so this helps form better relationships. ... **Now I'm in it, I'm embedded right next door to them so it helps a lot.**”

Stronger connections between the parole officer and community members have shifted the traditional power dynamics in these relationships from punitive to supportive. Community members understand that corrections officers are there to help them succeed, in partnership with other members of their support teams. Conversely, parole officers have a deeper appreciation for the challenges individuals face and may be more understanding and flexible in meeting their unique needs. A community member described this shifting power dynamic, sharing: “I had a really good PO (parole officer). He was very understanding. And he talk(ed) to me, like, ‘Hey, if you're feeling depressed, or if you need anybody to talk to, just give me a call anytime.’ I pictured PO's being more by the book, but he's just been more understanding. As long as I meet the requirements that he puts for me and I do everything (he) seems like a real good person. I've had my talks with him, things about life, like what I'm doing to get closer to my kids and he'll give me some advice as well. It's pretty cool.” (For more community perspectives on The Way Home, see the “Community-Level Impacts” section of the report, beginning on **page 48.**)

## 4. Strengthened Connections With Local Property Managers, Leading to More Opportunities for Clients

The Way Home project has also promoted the development of stronger relationships and coordination between **housing services providers and private landlords** in Lane County. Sponsors Director of Program Development Laura Johnson shared, "It wasn't an initial goal, but I do think establishing more positive relationships with local property managers who weren't previously attached to our (Sponsors') work or to Homes for Good has helped open doors. ... I think people really see that this is a population that's not well-served in the rental community and appreciate that the work that we're doing is affording people an opportunity to live, to have a home, despite the lack of access that they have elsewhere."

**The use of scatter site housing as part of The Way Home made it necessary for partners to build strong relationships with local landlords and property owners.** Sponsors led the efforts to increase housing access in affordable and public housing units, private rentals, and tiny homes. Sponsors conducted outreach to local landlords and property management companies to educate them about The Way Home initiative, provided information on program outcomes, and cultivated relationships that would support residents in maintaining long-term housing stability. This process has helped establish communication pathways between local housing providers like Sponsors and property managers that, in turn, have served to mitigate evictions and other adverse outcomes, as well as dismantle stigmas and biases. The perception of local landlords and property managers has also shifted toward a better understanding and acceptance of the reentry population.

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## Transformative Change

*Mental models (mindsets, ways of thinking)*

The deepest level of systems change is the transformative change that results from a shift in mental models or ways of thinking. Many stakeholders involved in The Way Home have experienced transformative shifts as a result of the project. Specifically, leaders and staff at partner organizations have a deeper understanding of the reentry population and key evidence-based practices introduced through The Way Home (e.g., permanent supportive housing, performance-based contracting, Housing First). Many leaders have evolved into advocates for specific issue areas or approaches they were exposed to through the initiative, which is giving way to additional change and impact across the region. These transformative changes will continue to influence how individuals and organizations develop and deliver services for Lane County's reentry population for many years to come.

## 1. County Government Agency Staff and Leaders Have a More Nuanced Understanding of the Reentry Population

Working on The Way Home has changed the way key leaders and staff at partnering county government agencies think about the reentry population. Many leaders and staff have confronted their own biases and developed **a more nuanced understanding of the complex mix of challenges and barriers facing people with conviction histories as they navigate reentry.** Jacob Fox, Executive Director of Homes for Good, used himself as an example, sharing that he had many stereotypes about who people were and was not educated on what may lead someone to be convicted. Parole Officer Evan Loock also shared how The Way Home shifted his perception of the reentry population, saying, “When I first started, I didn’t realize that it would be such a big need ... just to know what they’re going through on certain days or if they have mental health concerns or things like that. People need help; people struggle; people go through a lot. Our population of clients are usually not raised in the greatest environment. They didn’t have the greatest parents, or they got into drugs and alcohol early. ... I probably didn’t think at the beginning that it would be as important as it is to be able to develop a really good relationship with them.”

This transformation in thinking was inspired by leaders’ and staff members’ **firsthand experiences working with the reentry population as part of The Way Home,** as well as additional **training sessions led by Sponsors over the course of the project.** Homes for Good invited leaders from Sponsors to attend staff meetings to educate staff about the reentry population. This work was outside of the scope of The Way Home project and was self-initiated by partners, demonstrating how stronger partnerships can help advance equity and inclusion for historically underserved communities.

**The shift in understanding of the reentry population is also resulting in changes in how agencies approach serving the population.** Jacob Fox gave an example of this shift, “Before (The Way Home), if there was someone in our apartment community we suspected of criminal activity, we would ask Parole & Probation if they were engaged in criminal activity and get information to enforce the lease. Now, it’s more about helping people with criminal histories be more successful over time.” This example demonstrates how a better understanding of the population has helped agencies deliver services with greater empathy and compassion for the unique barriers and challenges faced by this population.

## 2. Partners Recognize the Need for Continued Investments in Permanent Supportive Housing

The Way Home represented Lane County’s first housing project explicitly focused on permanent supportive housing (PSH). Designing and implementing the project in partnership with Third Sector, and seeing the impact on clients firsthand, inspired all three partner

organizations to develop a greater appreciation for the permanent supportive housing model and its immense potential for impact.

Sponsors former Executive Director Paul Solomon shared,



“The Way Home has) changed my thinking about the importance and value of permanent supportive housing versus transitional housing. For most of my career at Sponsors, our housing had been largely focused on meeting the needs of people coming directly out of jail and prison. Over the course of this project, the number of units that we have that are dedicated to long-term and permanent supportive housing now exceeds the number of units that we have for transitional housing. ... **I'm no longer director, but if I was, I wouldn't be investing in any more transitional housing.** ... I think what has become abundantly clear is that we could replicate this project three or four times over and still not meet the needs of all people who struggle to overcome barriers.”

— **Paul Solomon, former Executive Director, Sponsors Inc.**

At Sponsors, this shift in thinking about PSH has resulted in an expansion of their service offerings to include PSH in addition to their traditional focus on transitional housing.

Leaders at Lane County Parole & Probation are also thinking differently about the PSH model. One piece of evidence demonstrating this is the fact that Donovan Dumire, Manager at Lane County Parole & Probation, currently chairs the Oregon Association for Community Corrections Directors' (OACCD) Supportive Housing Workgroup,<sup>63</sup> where he uplifts PSH and The Way Home as models for other regions to replicate. Paul Solomon reflected, “That never would have happened without his involvement in this project.”

A change in the way local partners are thinking about PSH is also evident at Homes for Good. Homes for Good recently started **incorporating PSH into their annual and strategic plans**. For example, PSH does not appear in Homes for Good's five-year plans for the 2015–2020 period, but it does appear in subsequent plans as a key indicator.<sup>64</sup> While shifts in thinking are difficult to prove, the expansion of PSH services, engagement in statewide commissions, and incorporation of PSH in key planning documents provide evidence of change in the ways key organizations in Lane County are thinking about the value and importance of the permanent supportive housing model.

### 3. Housing First Pushed Reentry Services Providers To Think Differently About How and When to Integrate Harm Reduction Practices into Housing



“In a ‘Housing First’ project, both income and substance use are not reasons for eviction. ... (I)n some cases, it was contrary to beliefs held about substance use and the best way to address it, so it took some time to get people on board. I think over time the training coupled with the success of the project brought pretty much everybody along.”

– **Paul Solomon, former Executive Director, Sponsors Inc.**

Along with other factors like the COVID-19 pandemic, The Way Home initiative has contributed to shifts in how reentry service providers think about and serve members of the reentry population who struggle with substance use challenges. As part of The Way Home’s Housing First approach, individuals with current substance use challenges are provided with housing regardless of their addiction status or other underlying issues. **This approach to service delivery encouraged Sponsors to rethink its existing housing-placement practices and beliefs about substance use.** In order to implement Housing First, the organization had to be willing to house people who may be experiencing a wide range of barriers, including drug, alcohol, or other substance use issues. Director of Program Development Laura Johnson from Sponsors shared the following reflection: “It’s hard to say how much of this has to do with The Way Home, but I do think there’s been a general shift toward a greater understanding around addiction and recovery being a process and having greater sensitivity to relapse. ...We (Sponsors) used to be pretty strict—any indication of use and you’re gone. We still have pretty hard lines about people bringing drugs onto the property, but if somebody has a positive drug test, we don’t have the reactionary response that we used to.” Third Sector played an important role in facilitating this shift by providing dedicated training to Sponsors staff on how to implement the Housing First approach.

Despite the fact that The Way Home partners have done their best to fully embrace Housing First and meet the needs of those battling substance abuse, **it has sometimes been a challenge to effectively serve this population while maintaining a safe and stable environment for others.** Sponsors Former Executive Director Paul Solomon shared, “Because it was technically a Housing First project, we wound up with some folks who were continuing to use and deal drugs. And we had to employ a whole host of measures, including hiring security, looking at addressing the right-of-way issues on the project more proactively, and ultimately, in a few cases, moving through the eviction process to really get things back on track.” These challenges may cause The Way Home partners to reconsider certain aspects of the Housing First approach as The Way Home continues. Laura Johnson elaborated, “Once the (academic evaluation of The Way Home) has concluded, I think there are aspects of the model we’ll

certainly maintain. (Such as) we don't require that you have to have a certain amount of money to move into housing, those kinds of things. I don't think it's going to be the financial piece that's going to be the concern; it's the substance part of it." Based on this, the shifts in thinking and approach to serving individuals with substance use challenges may not have the same longevity as other impacts generated by The Way Home project.

#### 4. Changed the Way Leaders Think About Performance Contracting



We created a brand-new assessment to determine how someone should be prioritized for housing in the county. That had never been done before, and (it was) customized for the reentry population, not just for anyone that's homeless. That's a big thing."

*-Third Sector Project Team Member*

Another key transformational shift resulting from The Way Home was a change in leaders' thinking about performance-based contracting, in general, and Pay for Success, in particular. The Way Home represented the first time Homes for Good, Parole & Probation, and Sponsors had engaged in performance contracting, as Pay for Success (loan repayment) or as a direct relationship with the federal government. Organization leaders entered the process with curiosity and excitement about the new funding model. The HUD and DOJ grant initially required fundraising and repayment, dictating that partners use outcome payments to repay the startup loan provided by The Oregon Community Foundation once certain housing stability and recidivism milestones were met. For the remaining grant funds, The Way Home partners successfully advocated for the federal government to evolve their payment requirements and embrace a simple disbursement of funds to Sponsors based on the achievement of the same housing and recidivism benchmarks.

By the end of the HUD and DOJ grant period, consensus on the model was split. **Some leaders have fully embraced performance contracting and are eager to scale the solution.**

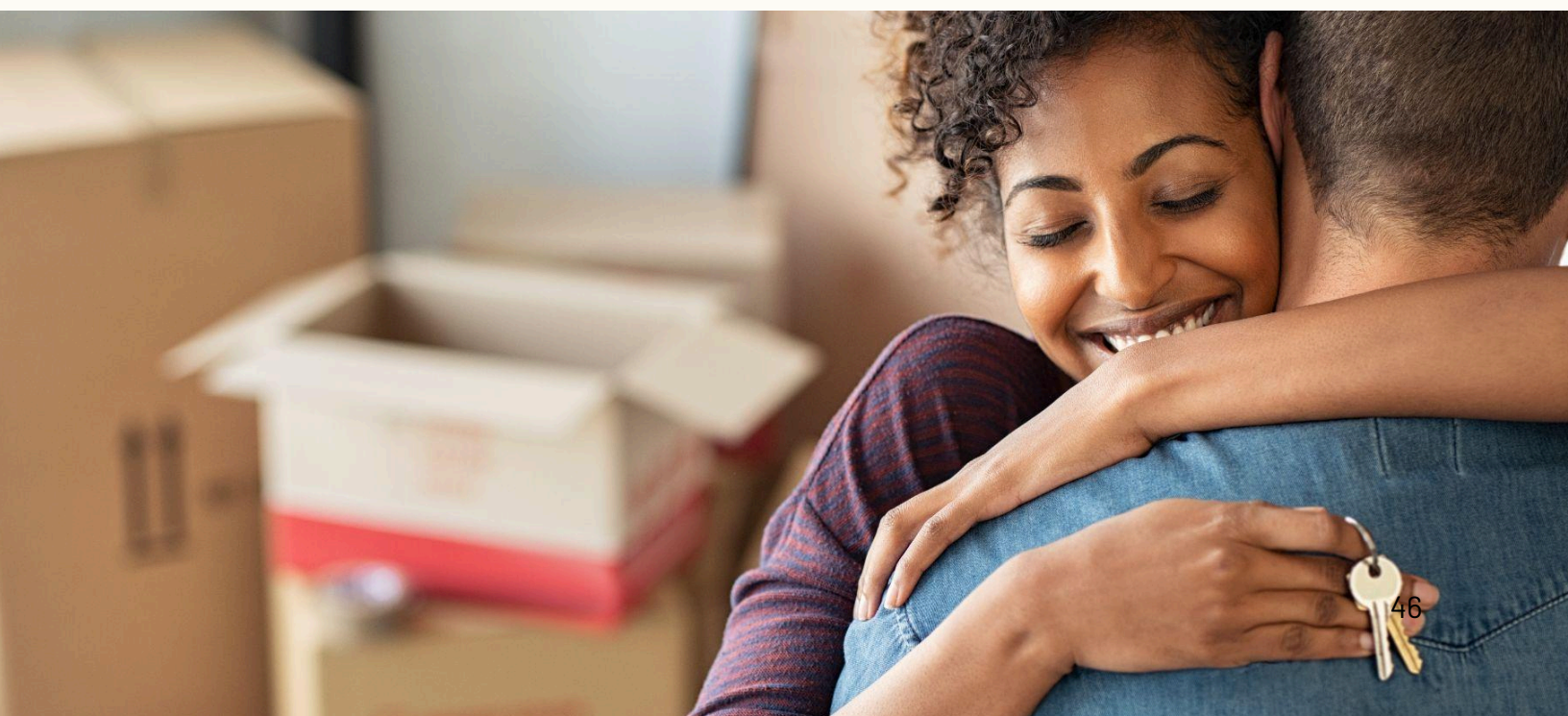
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I think one of the things for me personally is I have become a big believer in performance-based, outcome-oriented contracting and have used the knowledge that I've gained in this process to advocate for system change in local and state government...I'm now chairing the Criminal Justice Commission. We manage hundreds of millions of dollars in state grants, and I've been really pushing for us to begin the process of using performance-based contracting. I'm excited about what the future is going to look like in the next five to 10 years in Oregon state government as a result of this project.”

– *Paul Solomon, former Executive Director, Sponsors Inc.*

Other leaders have shifted to the opposite end of the spectrum, developing a negative perception of performance contracting. They see it as “too complicated” and “a logistical nightmare,” especially when reporting data to the federal government and receiving payments months or years after outcomes are achieved. Laura Johnson, also an executive leader at Sponsors, shared, “If I was asked, do you want to do this project in this type of format again? I would say no. We’ve not gone in for certain types of grants because they’re Pay for Success. **We want to do the work, we just don’t want to do the work that way.** ... We can promise to meet the outcomes, but the (Pay for Success) structure is taxing and you have to be sophisticated enough as an organization to be able to do it, which I think is inequitable. ... (I)f you don't have a partner like Third Sector to hold your hand, a lot of organizations that are otherwise qualified to do the work would be overlooked in the process.”

Regardless of whether leaders embrace or dislike performance contracting, it is clear that their firsthand experiences participating in a project that used this funding structure has had an enduring impact on their mindsets and perceptions of the model.



## 5. Ignited a Desire To Amplify and Share Best Practices, Providing a Model for Others in the Field



I think the seeds were planted with me, and I'm not the only one. I feel like this project germinated a lot of advocates in leadership roles—people like myself, Jacob Fox, Donovan Dumire—who are now taking either the model of the Oaks itself or the model of performance-based contracting and now trying to see that implemented in different spaces. I think that's pretty powerful.”

— *Paul Solomon, former Executive Director, Sponsors Inc.*

Another key shift seen among The Way Home partners—especially organizational leaders—is **a desire to advocate for, amplify, and share evidence-based strategies and approaches they learned over the course of their engagement with Third Sector and their work on The Way Home.** Implementing key evidence-based approaches and seeing this work produce real impacts for individuals in their own community helped to drive this shift in thinking. Project leaders now see themselves as innovators in the field; they are eager and excited to share best practices and inspire innovation in others. For example, Paul Solomon from Sponsors shared, “One of the things I've been talking to Third Sector about this is how do we (the partners in Lane County) foster the growth of projects like these in Oregon and beyond? I think that's another one of those intangible things that I never really thought about when we started this.”

Organizational leaders have evolved into more vocal advocates for issues or practices they were exposed to through The Way Home, and this advocacy is taking root across multiple areas. For example, Paul Solomon is an advocate for performance contracting, Jacob Fox is working to expand housing access for people with conviction histories who are typically excluded from federal programming (i.e., people with sex offense convictions), and leaders from across all three partner organizations are promoting the development of more permanent supportive housing. As mentioned previously, Donovan Dumire is such a champion of the permanent supportive housing model that he even serves as the chair of the Oregon Association of Community Corrections Directors' (OACCD) Supportive Housing Committee.

The Way Home has positioned leaders as innovators eager to advance housing and criminal-legal reform. **With a public criminal-legal system leader advocating for housing reform and a public housing-system leader advocating for criminal-legal reform, leaders involved in The Way Home are challenging entrenched beliefs that keep public systems arbitrarily siloed.** Over time, the transformative shifts among program leaders may inspire more significant changes in the way others think, influencing public perception and

institutional thinking about the interconnectedness of housing stability and recidivism and giving way to even deeper change in the region.

## COMMUNITY-LEVEL IMPACTS

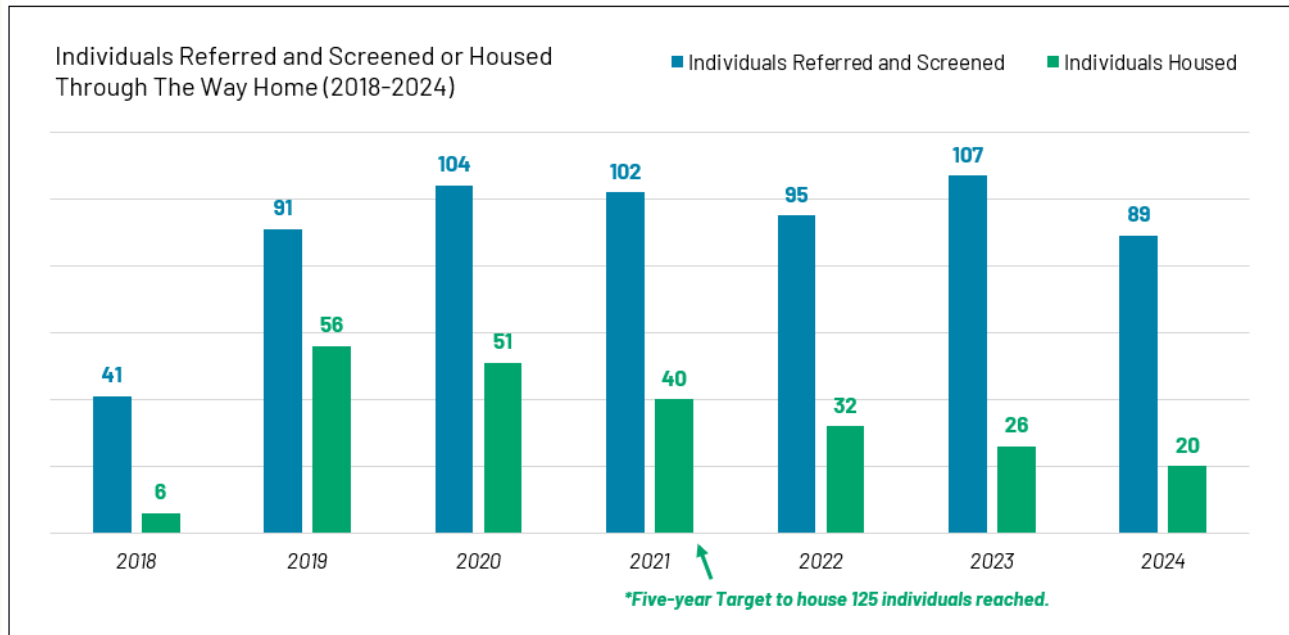


The thing I'm most proud of is the reduction in recidivism. From the statistics I've heard, it's some of the lowest recidivism rates in our county. Seeing that and seeing how well they (The Way Home participants) have done ... This could be their first house or apartment that they've ever had in their life, and then seeing them go from that to getting their own place to having a family—it's really impressive and nice to see.”

— *Evan Loock, Parole Officer for The Way Home*

**The Way Home Reentry Collaborative’s original goal was to serve 125 people returning to Lane County from state prison over five years (2018–2023)** as part of the HUD and DOJ Pay for Success Permanent Supportive Housing Demonstration project grant period. The program surpassed its five-year target within the first few years of implementation and remains active to the present day. As of October 2024, **629 individuals returning to Lane County from state prison have been referred to and screened for services, and 231 have been placed in permanent supportive housing**—nearly double the program’s initial goal (Figure 3).<sup>65</sup>

**Figure 3. Number of Individuals Referred and Screened or Housed through The Way Home, per Year**



## HOUSING AND RECIDIVISM OUTCOMES

Preliminary findings for the two key success outcomes of the program reveal the following trends for individuals who were placed in permanent supportive housing through The Way Home:

- **RECIDIVISM REDUCTION** – The incarceration rate due to a new felony conviction has fallen to 11 percent.
- **HOUSING STABILITY** – 87 percent have maintained stable housing, successfully avoiding homelessness.

While a formal third-party evaluation of The Way Home is currently underway, preliminary findings and outcomes of the program available to date are extremely promising.<sup>66</sup> For those participants enrolled in the program for at least six months, **87 percent of individuals placed in housing remain stably housed. About 11 percent have been convicted of a new felony offense and returned to prison. This represents an almost 60 percent reduction in recidivism for individuals enrolled in The Way Home compared to the overall high-risk reentry population in Lane County, which has a recidivism rate of 26 percent.**<sup>67</sup> For the first time, the county is

seeing recidivism rates for individuals assessed as high-risk that are on par with lower-risk individuals.

Adding color and nuance to these outcome metrics, leaders and staff from partner organizations involved in The Way Home shared the following stories about the success of program participants:

- *"I can think of all of these faces of people who I know are thriving. (For example) we have a woman who was admitted into the program about five years ago, close to the beginning. **She has recently been hired as a staff member (at Sponsors), and she's actually helping people do some of the same things that she received help with.** She had a bunch of other jobs and had supervisory responsibilities, and then she said, 'I'm ready to come back. Are you ready for me to come work for you?'" — Laura Johnson, Director of Program Development, Sponsors Inc.*
- *"I can think of a couple of people who have been in and out of the system. One individual, for the better part of his 60 years. He has been stably housed in the Oaks for the last four or five years, has a stable source of income, and is now a contributing member of the community. (He) volunteers at Sponsors and has made really profound changes in his life. It's pretty cool when I get to see the excitement when they get the keys to their new apartment, and then you run into them over the course of months and years and **see how this housing intervention has made a huge difference in their ability to live in the community crime-free** and in a way that supports their human dignity." — Paul Solomon, former Executive Director, Sponsors Inc.*
- *"I've had clients that lost connection with their children due to their conviction or have very limited connection to their families. (One client) did treatment and supervision, maintained a great job, moved up in the job as a supervisor, and had the condition lifted to have contact with his children. (He also re-established) contact and he moved back in with his wife. Last I heard, now he lives with his kids and his wife and he's still working full-time. I have another client that moved into The Oaks and was getting help for housing from Section 8. He moved out, got off Section 8, and got a job. (He) got his own place and got engaged to get married. He has even brought his daughter from Florida to here." — Evan Loock, Parole Officer for The Way Home*

## COMMUNITY INTERVIEW INSIGHTS

To understand community-level perspectives on the impact of The Way Home initiative, an analysis of interview data from 16 individuals who received permanent supportive housing services through the program was performed.<sup>68</sup> The sample overrepresents the experiences of participants from priority groups, including women and people of color (Table 2). More than

forty percent (44 percent, or 7 of 16) of interview participants identified as female and 50 percent (8 of 16) identified as people of color.

**Table 2. Demographics of Interview Participants (n = 16) Compared to the Overall Reentry Population**

SURVEY RESPONDENT GROUP	The Way Home Interview Participant Sample (n = 16)		Oregon Prison Reentry Population (n = ~10,600) <sup>69</sup>	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Gender</b>	16	-	10,636	-
Female	7	43.8%	1,341	12.6%
Male	9	56.3%	9,295	87.4%
<b>Race</b>	16	-	10,667	-
Black	2	12.5%	10,667	8.2%
Hispanic	2	12.5%	931	8.7%
White	8	50.0%	8,345	78.2%
American Indian or Alaska Native (Native American)	1	6.3%	359	3.4%
Other Race, including Two or More Races	3	18.7%	153	1.4%

Perspectives directly from program participants provide valuable firsthand insight into how The Way Home initiative is impacting individuals returning from prison to Lane County, including what programming and supports have been most helpful and what challenges still persist.

Overall, The Way Home participants appeared satisfied with the program, and **100 percent of interview participants were stably housed and living in the community (non-recidivated) at the time of the interview.** While **housing support and navigation services were popular**, few participants mentioned taking advantage of the numerous other wraparound support opportunities available through the program. The most impactful aspects of the program were

largely relational and included the dedicated housing navigators, case managers, parole officers, and other program team members who played a critical role in helping participants along their reentry journeys. Streamlined access to Housing Choice Vouchers was also mentioned by a number of participants, highlighting the value of local policy change in improving the experiences of the reentry population.

Participants also shared persisting barriers and challenges they continue to face despite The Way Home and the efforts of partners in the region. **Key challenges include access to high-quality jobs and housing, discrimination based on conviction histories, navigating personal relationships, managing substance use, and financial difficulties.** Some of these challenges, such as substance use, are more individualistic in nature and require lifelong management. Other challenges, such as ongoing discrimination, are rooted in larger, underlying systemic issues that The Way Home cannot fully address on its own. While The Way Home provides clients with critical resources and support, addressing these multifaceted challenges requires broader systemic change and continued collaboration across multiple sectors.

Despite the persisting challenges, **the overwhelming sentiment from interview participants was positive, and most admitted that The Way Home program has helped them in some way.** Specifically, the program has helped participants confront one of their most difficult reentry challenges: securing safe, high-quality, and affordable housing. However, **it is also evident that not all program efforts are reaching their intended audiences.**

*An interesting thing to note is that most individuals were not able to identify The Way Home initiative by name. Instead, they often referred to agency names, like Sponsors and Homes for Good, or development names, such as The Oaks at 14th, when describing the program. This indicates that individuals may not know what program they are enrolled in or the full extent of resources and supports that are available to them.*

This points to a need for additional outreach and communication to the reentry community to ensure they can take full advantage of the breadth of support services available through The Way Home program.

# Key Themes from Participant Interviews

## MOST HELPFUL PARTS OF THE PROGRAM

Many interview participants noted that the housing and support services provided through The Way Home were helpful as they navigated their reentry journeys. Key features highlighted by participants include:

- **Dedicated Housing Navigators.** The Way Home's housing navigators play an important role in connecting individuals to local housing resources and were frequently mentioned as helpful components of the program. Interview participants described how navigators helped them secure Housing Choice Vouchers, provided information on potential openings, and supported them in completing rental applications. They also shared how navigators acted as spokespeople and advocates, with one participant noting that his navigator *"kept fighting for me until I got a place."*

One participant shared the following success story demonstrating the impact of the housing navigators: *"(Looking for housing) was a little frustrating at first because I applied to all these different places, and I got rejected. I took rejection after rejection after rejection, mostly because of my criminal history. None of them wanted to take me on as a tenant. This is where (the housing navigators) really, really put it down for me. They were able to help me write letters and ask for reasonable accommodations and things like that. (One day they) called me while I was at work and said, 'Hey, Homes for Good just had this place open up. Do you want it?' ... And it turned out to be a great place!"*

- **Empathetic Program Staff (Navigators, mentors, case managers, parole officers, etc.).** Apart from housing navigators, The Way Home participants also found support from other members of the program team, which was especially helpful during their reentry journeys. Navigators, mentors, case managers, and the parole officer were mentioned specifically by a number of interview participants. Reflecting on his overall experience with the program team, an interview participant who lives at The Oaks at 14th shared, *"It's been really good. The management company's great. ... If I needed anything from Sponsors, I've always had a (reentry navigator) I could go to. I don't have to travel downtown to see my PO (parole officer). Yeah, it's been a great experience. If I need something, it's been here."*

Participants appreciated the dedicated support they received from these staff members as well as the fact that many of them have lived experience with the criminal-legal system and could truly empathize with what clients were going through. One participant shared, *"I had a real good case manager there that understood the amount of time I had done and he kind of helped me break things down. Himself being a person that did prison time, I guess he had first-hand knowledge of what we go through. ... You know, the nervousness ... (of) just being out of society for so long. You view things and you see things differently."*

- **Housing Choice Voucher Preference.** A couple of interview participants commented specifically on how impressed they were with the speed at which The Way Home was able to connect them to Housing Choice Vouchers and place them in housing. One participant shared, *“Going through Sponsors, they have this setup where you can get approved to have Section 8. Basically, all these people are waiting for years and years and years to get on Section 8, and I was put on the top (of the) list.”* Another participant shared, *“One thing that opened my eyes—and I gotta respect Sponsors for—is how quick they got us approved (for Section 8). Most people are waiting a year or two just to get their Section 8. I got it within three months.”* This feedback speaks directly to the impact of the local Housing Choice Voucher preference introduced by Homes for Good as part of The Way Home and provides evidence for why such policies are important.
- **Being Treated With Dignity and Mutual Respect.** Another feature of The Way Home that stood out to interview participants was how the program staff took the time to get to know them as people and treated them with empathy and respect. This made a huge impression on participants and helped them feel supported in their reentry journeys. One participant shared, *“They gave me an opportunity to speak my mind, voice my opinion, and I was heard. That’s all I cared about, that my opinion was heard about and it wasn’t just shut down. I felt that I was being treated (as an) equal.”* Another echoed a similar sentiment, *“They really give you that one-on-one conversation and get to know you. They take the time to help you, and they make sure that whatever they’re helping you with gets done.”*
- **Personal Motivation and Self-Advocacy.** Though not an explicit service or support offered through The Way Home, another factor that played a key role in participants’ successful reentry was their own personal drive and determination to transform their lives. Many individuals reentering Lane County were deeply motivated to change their circumstances, often setting ambitious personal and professional goals like advancing in a career, owning a home, and reconnecting with family. For example, one interview participant highlighted their aspirations, sharing, *“I’m working towards getting my career started. I actually have an interview on Friday to do an internship at Serenity Lane to become a certified drug and alcohol counselor.”*

This intrinsic drive and motivation pushed individuals to seek support and engage in self-advocacy. As one participant noted, *“Closed mouths don’t get fed. Speak up if you need something—there are people whose job is to help, but you’ve got to ask for it.”* Thus, participants played an undeniable role in shaping their own outcomes. One interview participant put it well, saying, *“They guided me. They gave me everything I needed to succeed. I just had to want it bad enough. ... They can’t push you to do it. They can offer the services (but) you gotta want it.”* Ultimately, personal determination, coupled with the program’s resources, created a foundation for participants to achieve meaningful change.

## PERSISTING CHALLENGES FOR THE REENTRY POPULATION

Interview participants also shared challenges they continue to face despite the comprehensive supports available through The Way Home. Common challenges faced by the reentry population include:

- **Accessing Public Housing and Navigating Section 8.** Even with Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, many participants struggled to secure stable and affordable housing in Lane County within the given timeframe and cost parameters, and they found Section 8 guidelines tough to navigate. This points to some general limitations of Housing Choice Vouchers as well as the limited inventory of affordable housing options in the county. Individuals often have to settle for housing that may not fully meet their expectations or needs. One interview participant shared the following story:

*"I actually had a hard time getting an apartment. I was able to get Section 8 through Sponsors and I received that before I even left Sponsors (transitional housing). I had been applying for apartments and I kept getting denied because of my criminal background or because I had an eviction from five or six years ago and I still owed the property management \$2,000 from that eviction, or because I wasn't at my job long enough. It was kind of disheartening. ... Finally, I got a call from the apartment that I'm in now. This apartment is super, super tiny. There's barely room for a bed and a little table, but I felt like I had no other choice but to accept this apartment because of my Section 8. They only let you look for an apartment for so long, and I had already received an extension. So I accepted it. ... I mean, it's an apartment and I'm thankful for that. But I would have liked something with just a little bit more room. Now that my boyfriend lives here, it's definitely way too small for us."*

- **Securing High-Quality Jobs.** Many interview participants were able to secure jobs relatively quickly following release. However, a persisting challenge is securing high-quality jobs that actually align with their personal aspirations and career goals. Many individuals settle for jobs they do not really want (e.g., fast food or convenience stores) in order to achieve progress toward self-sufficiency. These jobs are often low-wage positions with limited opportunities for career progression or upward mobility. One participant shared, *"You have to swallow your pride and be willing to just look at it as a stepping stone. The first job I had (out of prison) was at 7-Eleven. I didn't want to work at 7-Eleven, but... just remembering everybody starts somewhere. You put one foot in front of the other, life will get better."* Another job-related barrier mentioned by a handful of participants is the inability to work in jobs they worked in prior to incarceration. For example, one participant shared, *"The biggest challenges that I have faced in the last six months are trying to go back into nursing. I was a nurse before ... and*

*it'll be five years since my charges. They say (you have to) wait five years, so I'm really excited about that. I'm taking the steps to move forward to that."*

- **Underlying Challenge: Discrimination Toward People With Conviction Histories.**

Underlying both of the above challenges (access to housing and high-quality jobs) is a persistent negative social stigma toward people with criminal records. Individuals with conviction histories often experience a lifetime of housing and employment discrimination. This makes the journey to stable reentry incredibly challenging. One participant summarized it as follows: *"Your criminal background will always affect everything that you do, even though you paid the price of going to prison, and going through the programs or whatever. The outside people, especially property managers and whatnot, don't care about that."* This was a common sentiment echoed by other program participants and highlights the need for ongoing advocacy and community outreach to continue shifting peoples' perceptions of the reentry population, especially the perceptions of local employers and landlords.

- **Personal Relationships, Especially Reestablishing Relationships with Family and Kids.**

Spending time away in prison can negatively impact many relationships in individuals' lives. Participants noted challenges with interpersonal relationships, including relations with family members, spouses, children, and roommates. The most common relational challenge was parents hoping to reestablish relationships with their children. One parent shared, *"I lost contact with my kids when I went to prison. ... I wanted to be part of their life and guide them, but it was a big challenge."* The housing and support services provided through The Way Home are often a positive and stabilizing force for these relationships, with another participant sharing, *"Things are looking up. I'm able to talk to my kids now...I think (my partner) noticed that I've been working hard. I have my own apartment. I have my own car. I've worked my way up to getting my own things again. I think she's starting to see that and... she's allowing me to talk to my kids again."*

- **Substance Use Challenges.** The majority of interview participants have a history of substance use, including drug or alcohol addiction. Maintaining sobriety is a key personal goal for many participants, but it is an ongoing struggle, and participants are interested in more support and resources for recovery. Some interview participants even noted that it may be helpful to be connected to substance use recovery programs earlier in the reentry process. One participant shared their experience: *"I had a recovery mentor through Sponsors who was really helpful, and it was just really nice to be able to talk to her. We went to a lot of meetings and stuff together ... but it wasn't right away. (Getting connected to that mentor) was something that happened a few months down the road."*

- **Financial Difficulties.** Though The Way Home provides emergency financial support to program participants experiencing challenges in paying rent or utility bills, financial difficulties were still mentioned in a number of interviews. Specific challenges included

the inability to pay bills or cover the cost of rent, limits on payment standards for Section 8 vouchers, and the high cost of housing application fees. In most cases, these financial issues were not so severe that individuals felt they were insurmountable. As one participant shared, *"I got some trouble meeting some bills. But that worked out fine. ... I just took a closer look at my finances, saw things could be rearranged or eliminated and lived a little more within my means."* Another interesting financial challenge was navigating benefits cliffs. Some participants fear that earning more income will disqualify them from housing assistance, leaving them unable to afford unsubsidized housing in the county.

Project outcomes data, coupled with direct feedback from community member interviews, makes it clear that **The Way Home is creating tangible impacts for the members of the reentry population in Lane County with the highest needs.** Increased access to stable housing and holistic support services is enabling individual community members to achieve better reentry outcomes. However, despite this progress, key challenges persist, highlighting the need for continued investment and the scaling of promising community-driven solutions to end the cycle of homelessness and reincarceration in Lane County and beyond.

## DISCUSSION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS:



I just want to clarify or reaffirm my gratitude to Third Sector for reaching out to us back in 2015 to consider being a partner in this (HUD and DOJ) grant. It really has been a game-changer for us organizationally, in our processes, in our ability to carry out a project like this, but most importantly, in the ways that it's impacted the lives of hundreds of individuals who benefited directly from this intervention."

***—Paul Solomon, former Executive Director, Sponsors Inc.***



## By the Numbers

Since 2018, the Way Home has achieved the following:

<b>629</b> individuals referred and screened	<b>231</b> individuals placed in permanent supportive housing	<b>359</b> individuals referred for Housing Choice Vouchers	<b>177</b> individuals received Housing Choice Vouchers	<b>97</b> individuals successfully utilized Housing Choice Vouchers to secure housing	<b>11</b> percent recidivism rate for program participants	<b>87</b> percent housing stability rate for program participants
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The Way Home marked Lane County's first major investment in a permanent supportive housing project specifically aimed at serving the reentry population. This project and the dedicated technical assistance and support of Third Sector have created lasting impacts on local public systems and impacted communities.

Now, more than five years since the project began, The Way Home has already supported more than 230 individuals in successfully avoiding homelessness and has reduced the recidivism rate for high-risk populations by more than half (from 26 to 11 percent). The housing and criminal-legal systems in Lane County are also showing promising signs of change and transformation inspired by The Way Home and the organizations and leaders at its helm. **The Way Home has fundamentally transformed the way local organizations think about and serve the reentry population.** The initiative has shifted resources to expand the range of evidence-based services and supports available for the highest-need segments of the reentry population; it has deepened relationships and increased coordination between cross-system stakeholders in the public housing and criminal-legal systems; and it has transformed mental models pertaining to the needs of the reentry population and the interconnectedness of housing and criminal-legal system challenges.

**The breaking down of silos between Lane County's housing and criminal-legal systems to better serve formerly incarcerated individuals also signals positive momentum toward a more outcomes-focused approach.** Today, the county's public housing agency (Homes for Good) has increased its prioritization of the reentry population, while its corrections department (Lane County Parole & Probation) views long-term housing as a critical intervention to support reentry. This cross-system understanding serves as a powerful ongoing driver of change. By addressing the interconnectedness of complex issues, Lane County is taking meaningful steps to dismantle systemic barriers. Ultimately, these connections help to advance social and racial equity for the highest-need community members who are disproportionately impacted by multiple issue areas across multiple systems.

## DRIVERS OF (AND BARRIERS TO) CHANGE

The Way Home serves as a useful model for other regions working to tackle the complex and interconnected social challenges of homelessness and recidivism, demonstrating how cross-sector collaboration and innovative approaches to aligning local resources can uplift individuals and transform communities. Several key factors contributed to The Way Home's success. These drivers of change represent strategic levers that can make future housing and reentry programs more inclusive and impactful, while the barriers highlight common challenges similar efforts may need to overcome.

### The key drivers of The Way Home initiative include:

- **Personal Motivation of Impacted Community Members.** Participants' internal motivation played an important role in the program's impact and success. Personal drive and motivation, coupled with access to housing and critical wraparound supports, created the right mix of conditions for many program participants to achieve self-sufficiency.
- **Visionary Leaders Committed to Equity and Innovation.** Cross-sector leaders in Lane County were eager to innovate and test new approaches to combat some of the region's most persistent challenges. These leaders were committed to equity and doing things differently from the status quo. Many drew inspiration from evidence-based practices from the field or their own lived experiences with poverty, housing insecurity, mental health challenges, and criminal-legal-system involvement. The presence of visionary leaders who cultivated a culture of innovation was a key driving force in The Way Home's progress and success. Executive Director of Homes for Good, Jacob Fox, described it well, sharing, "At Homes for Good, we've created a culture around taking risks and being in service to the community; Paul (Solomon, Sponsors Inc.) and his team had a similar culture; when Donovan (Dumire, Lane County Parole & Probation) was hired he really changed the culture at Parole & Probation."



"I think what made this project successful is that you had buy-in from leadership from the very, very beginning. Leadership were involved in almost every detailed portion of the proposal and of the plan to design it and to actually deliver the work."

- **Third Sector Project Team Member**

- **Consistent Staff and Leadership.** Many of the individuals involved in The Way Home have been present and serving in the same roles since the project's inception. Low turnover among key project leaders and staff has helped ensure that the program continues to be prioritized and implemented with fidelity. For example, Evan Loock, the parole officer for The Way Home, has been with the program from the start.
- **Existing History of Partnership.** The three core The Way Home partner organizations—Sponsors, Homes for Good, and Lane County Parole & Probation—have a long history of partnership and were used to working together. Paul Solomon shared the following reflection, “We were uniquely situated and the fact that this (HUD and DOJ) grant was awarded to us really speaks to that partnership. When you take a look at the other awardees in our cohort, almost all of them were much bigger jurisdictions. ... The (existing) partnership that we had developed helped elevate our grant application and allowed us to be competitive even though we are a much smaller jurisdiction.”
- **Alignment to Strategic Goals in the County and State.** The Way Home initiative, with its focus on community-based solutions to support reentry and combat homelessness, aligned well with existing strategic priorities in Lane County and the State of Oregon. For example, Lane County’s Poverty and Homelessness Board Strategic Plan 2016-2021 called for the creation of 600 housing units for homeless populations by 2021<sup>70</sup>, and the county’s 2018 Shelter Feasibility Study set a goal of developing 350 new units of permanent supportive housing.<sup>71</sup> Statewide, former Governor Kate Brown prioritized criminal justice reform throughout her tenure, including initiatives aimed at reducing the prison population, improving reentry programs, and expanding clemency measures. Current Oregon Governor Tina Kotek, who took office in 2023, is dedicated to alleviating the state's homelessness crisis. The close alignment between the goals of The Way Home and local and state priorities is a key driver that continues to push the work forward.
- **An Influx of Federal Grant Funds.** The \$1.3 million HUD and DOJ Pay for Success Permanent Supportive Housing Demonstration grant brought a significant influx of resources to Lane County, enabling The Way Home project to come to fruition. Smaller, semi-rural counties like Lane often lack the funding capacity of larger metropolitan areas such as Portland but face comparable challenges, including homelessness and recidivism. The Way Home’s broad range of impacts highlights the transformative power that a federal investment can have on local systems and the level of innovation sparked through these investments, especially for smaller communities with limited resources.
- **Third Sector’s Essential Technical Expertise and Tangible Tools.** Third Sector brought to The Way Home a deep understanding of federal grants, strong project-management processes, and subject matter expertise in performance-based contracting and Housing First permanent supportive housing. Third Sector applied this expertise to create tangible tools and resources to support program design and implementation. Most partners agree that without Third Sector’s tailored contributions, The Way Home would

not have achieved the same level of success it has to date (see pages 21-24 for an overview of Third Sector's contributions).

### Barriers to implementation and project impact include:

- **Complexity of Implementing the Pay for Success Contract.** Performance-based contracts can be notoriously difficult to implement. It is a slow process to define outcome measures, secure funders, and get key contracts created and signed by stakeholders. This was no different for The Way Home, and many partners found the Pay for Success structure overly complex and difficult to navigate. Furthermore, this complexity sometimes delayed progress toward project goals. For example, construction on The Oaks at 14th was completed in 2017, months before transaction structuring for the performance-based contract was finalized. Because The Oaks was funded through Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, units had to be leased within 30 days. By the time the contract was signed and The Way Home was ready to officially launch in 2018, most of the units were already leased. Partners had to wait for units to turn over before they could use them for permanent supportive housing, which took a significant amount of time that partners had not anticipated. Long delays in federal repayment for success payments have also been a challenge for The Way Home partners following the end of the official HUD and DOJ grant period.
- **Legislative Processes and Ability to Secure Funding.** Partners' original intention was to secure sustaining funds for The Way Home through the Oregon state legislature. However, state funding was denied in two consecutive legislative cycles due to factors beyond the partners' control, including bipartisan turmoil and legislative walkouts. Partners had to quickly pivot to secure state, county, and philanthropic funding to sustain the project, despite winning a noteworthy federal grant. Thus, state legislative processes and the ability to secure funding were key barriers, especially in the initial stages of The Way Home initiative.
- **Difficulty Supporting Clients With Substance Use Challenges.** Individuals involved in the criminal-legal system who face housing insecurity often also grapple with additional personal barriers. Providing support to individuals with substance use challenges through The Way Home while maintaining fidelity to the Housing First model has been a key challenge for program partners.

The drivers and barriers described above helped to create the systems- and community-level impacts seen to date from The Way Home initiative in Lane County. While every context is unique, leveraging these factors can support the replication of similar work in communities across the nation.

## TOP THREE LESSONS FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS

The Way Home also highlights a number of key lessons or best practices technical assistance-providing organizations like Third Sector can leverage to drive momentum on cross-cutting social impact projects. Three key lessons include:

- **Invest in Cross-System Partnerships, amplifying Existing Partnerships.** Complex social issues, such as the intersecting challenges of homelessness and criminal-legal system involvement, cannot be solved by a single organization or a single initiative alone. Looking across organizational and sector-specific silos to identify opportunities for innovation, alignment, and partnership is a well-known strategy for addressing such challenges. The Way Home initiative shows how improved collaboration between the public housing and criminal-legal systems can effectively address systematic barriers, strengthen the coordination of services, and reduce gaps in support for the most vulnerable and high-need communities. The initiative also demonstrates how identifying areas where such partnerships already exist can enable technical assistance providers to catalyze deep, transformative impacts since a foundation of trust and camaraderie is already well-established. A Third Sector project team member reflected, “All three of the organizations (involved in The Way Home) had a working relationship before this project. So, there was trust in the very beginning. There was comfort with ambiguity. There was a welcoming of challenging conversations, all of which led to very constructive feedback and a good, healthy tension.”
- **Establish Structures To Ensure Project Sustainability.** An important consideration for any technical assistance provider is ensuring partners can sustain project implementation post-departure. Third Sector supported this process for The Way Home by establishing a clear, continuous improvement process with partners. Third Sector initially facilitated continuous improvement meetings but gradually transitioned ownership to project partners like Sponsors Inc. Partners practiced leading these meetings and feedback loops during the project, so they were able to successfully lead and maintain the meetings when Third Sector’s direct involvement in the project concluded. Paul Solomon, former Executive Director of Sponsors, shared, “Things have been pretty smooth sailing since Third Sector left the building, so to speak. You know, there was an infrastructure in place where we had regular monthly meetings with stakeholders and researchers to provide that continuous feedback loop that has allowed us to address issues as they come up on the fly.” The Way Home continued operations even through the COVID-19 pandemic, with minimal changes to key operating processes, and is still in operation to the present day. The strong systems and processes put in place by Third Sector, like the feedback loop, were intentionally practiced throughout the project to ensure the project partners could lead the work once Third Sector left. This support ensured the long-term sustainability and viability of the program.

- **Innovation is Iterative and Imperfect, but an Opportunity for Learning.** Often, technical assistance providers and client organizations feel pressure to implement “perfect” programs from the outset. The Way Home demonstrates how innovation is an iterative process that provides valuable opportunities for learning and continuous improvement. It takes time to get the pieces of a new initiative just right, and the most important consideration is not causing new or additional harm to impacted communities. The Way Home required more than a year and a half to collaborate, design, negotiate, and document all programmatic and financial facets of the project before launching. Even with intensive planning, there were some parts of the original program model that required adjustments when implemented on the ground. Feedback loops and continuous improvement processes that centered the needs of community members and community-level outcomes enabled Third Sector and partners to pivot and navigate through these challenges.

For example, The Way Home’s Housing First model was at odds with Sponsors’ programs and processes at the time. The Housing First model addresses housing before all other issues, but Sponsors had traditionally addressed challenges such as substance abuse and employment before placing individuals into housing. Third Sector and partners addressed this by providing dedicated training to Sponsors staff on how to implement the Housing First approach. Another key pain point of the project was HUD and DOJ’s Pay for Success contract requirements, which were difficult for The Way Home partners to manage and implement. When the HUD and DOJ grant period came to a close, The Way Home continued under a more traditional funding model and did not pursue further performance-based contracts. Overall, having the courage to innovate and test key evidence-based practices provided Lane County stakeholders with a stronger understanding of what does and does not work for them—valuable insights that can be used to inform future initiatives in the region.



# Looking forward

The Way Home Reentry Collaborative shows how an innovative housing-centered reentry program can break the cycle of homelessness and reincarceration, offering stability and dignity to those reentering society and catalyzing transformation in local systems. With more than 230 individuals housed and recidivism rates significantly reduced, the initiative has laid a strong foundation for future progress in Lane County.

Looking ahead, The Way Home partners are eager to expand their impact, sharing lessons learned and collaborating with other communities to address housing and reentry challenges, especially for the most high-need populations. Their recent application for the Bureau of Justice Assistance's Reentry Incubator Initiative in May 2024 reflects this ongoing commitment to innovation, learning, and sharing. As the needs of individuals impacted by the criminal-legal system evolve, Lane County is poised to continue pioneering solutions that prioritize stable housing and holistic support, creating pathways for success and stronger, more inclusive communities.

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## Glossary/Key Definitions

**Outcomes-focused approach**—An approach that centers and is responsive to the voices, perspectives, power, and needs of community members who are directly impacted by an issue area or who are the direct beneficiaries of a specific program or service. The ultimate goal of an outcomes-focused approach is to result in more improved and equitable outcomes for impacted communities. This approach moves public systems away from a traditional compliance-based approach toward one that centers the quality of life and life outcomes of real people and communities.

In practice, an outcomes-focused approach may look like:

- Using disaggregated data to drive decisionmaking that continuously improves community outcomes;
- Engaging stakeholders' perspectives and experiences to improve services and programs;
- Breaking down silos between agencies and departments to make services and programs more accessible and/or responsive to the needs of communities; and/or
- Using tools like human-centered design and root-cause analysis to ensure solutions reflect community needs.

**“System” definition**—The Way Home project works at the intersection of the housing and criminal-legal systems in Lane County, Oregon. Note: This definition is specific to this particular case study.

**Systems-level impacts**—Changes in the way government systems operate. How system stakeholders are working or thinking differently as a direct or indirect result of a project or initiative.

**Community-level impacts**—Changes individuals experience in accessing the system or services. Meaningful change for communities because of transformations to the system.

**Housing First**—An assistance approach that prioritizes providing housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life.<sup>72</sup> Housing is provided quickly without exclusive screening criteria and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation requirements.<sup>73</sup>

**Permanent Supportive Housing**—Permanent supportive housing (PSH) is an intervention that combines affordable housing with voluntary support services to address the needs of people who have struggled with homelessness.<sup>74</sup>

**Recidivism**—Returning to prison with a new felony conviction.

**Transitional Housing**—Short-term housing that provides a bridge to permanent supportive housing and prevents homelessness.



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- Donovan Dumire, Manager, Lane County Parole & Probation
- Evan Loock, Parole Officer for The Way Home, Lane County Parole & Probation
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# APPENDIX

## Lane County Current Demographic Profile, With State and National Comparison

All data from ACS 2022 5-year estimates, unless specified.<sup>75</sup>

	Lane County	Oregon	United States
<b>Total Population</b>	382,218	4,229,374	331,097,593
Land Area (sq. miles)	4,554.1	95,996.7	3,537,325.8
Population Density (people per sq. mile) <sup>76</sup>	83.9	44.1	93.6
<b>AGE</b>			
Under 18 year	17.8%	20.2%	22.1%
18 to 64 years	62.2%	61.5%	61.4%
65 years and over	20.1%	18.3%	16.5%
<b>SEX</b>			
Male	49.5%	50.0%	49.6%
Female	50.5%	50.0%	50.4%
<b>RACE/ETHNICITY (*Categories are mutually exclusive)</b>			
White	80.0%	73.3%	58.9%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	9.6%	13.8%	18.7%

Black or African American	1.0%	1.8%	12.1%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.6%	0.7%	0.6%
Asian	2.5%	4.4%	5.7%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.4%	0.2%
Some other race	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%
Two or more races	5.8%	5.2%	3.5%

#### INCOME & HOUSING INDICATORS

Poverty Rate (Percent Below Poverty Line)	16.1%	11.9%	12.5%
Median Household Income	\$65,157.00	\$76,632.00	\$75,149.00
Rental Vacancy Rate	2.5%	3.7%	5.5%
Cost-Burdened Renter Households (pay 30% or more of income toward rent)	52.9%	50.9%	49.9%
Homeless Population <sup>27</sup>	2,824 individuals –or– 74 per 10,000 people	20,142 individuals –or– 48 per 10,000 people	653,100 individuals –or– 20 per 10,000 people

## List of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Developments in Lane County, 2016 to Present

Development Name	Date Broke Ground	Date Completed	Number of PSH Units	Target Population, if applicable
<b>The Oaks at 14th</b> <sup>78</sup>	May 2016	Spring 2017	54	Reentry population / people with conviction histories
<b>The Commons on MLK</b> <sup>79</sup>	Fall 2019	Jan 2021	51	People experiencing chronic homelessness
<b>The Keystone</b> <sup>3</sup>	Jan 2021	Aug 2021	15	Families experiencing chronic homelessness
<b>The Nel</b> <sup>81</sup>	May 2021	Jul 2022	45	People experiencing chronic homelessness
<i>In Development</i> <b>Bridges on Broadway</b> <sup>82,83</sup>	Jun 2024	May 2025	57	Wildfire survivors
<i>In Development</i> <b>The Coleman</b> <sup>84,85</sup>	2026	2028	52	Reentry population / people with conviction histories

# Endnotes

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