



2021 ANNUAL REPORT



PARTNERS,
PROGRAMS,
AND
PROJECTS

Homan Square strives to sustain an environment that helps students and families live their best lives through quality education, recreation, health care and family support services, while instilling the desire to dream big and the skills to maximize success.



SAIC

WEST SIDE UNITED:



The Homan Square campus includes:

- Chicago Park District
- DRW College Prep
- Family Focus Lawndale
- Free Spirit Media
- Gardeneers - Homan Rails Farm
- Green Garden Café
- Holy Family School
- Lawndale Business Renaissance Association
- Lawndale Christian Health Center
- The Lunch Box Café
- Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago
- North Lawndale YMCA
- Options for Youth
- School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- Turning the Page
- West Side United
- YWCA Julian Grace Innovation and Technology Institute



PARTNERS, PROGRAMS, AND PROJECTS

Dear Friends,

In looking back at our work during the past year, I'm struck by the astonishing ways we've continued to serve the community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In many instances, Foundation for Homan Square and its partners were set up for moments like this, when historic times demand rapid responses and creative solutions. That we are here and able to respond is a testament to the vision of our founders, who saw the former Sears campus and imagined a renewal that would meet the challenges long facing the West Side.



Partnerships have always been at the core of our efforts, and that was the case this year too as we went further with existing projects and expanded our reach by launching new initiatives. One of our earliest partners, Lawndale Christian Health Center, was ready when the City of Chicago called to set up a vaccination site at Homan Square Community Center. A merger between a founding partner, Family Focus, and another historic nonprofit, Chicago Child Care Society, will help keep families safe and healthy in the short-term while creating long-term opportunities to bolster the education pipeline. And we welcomed a new tenant, West Side United, just as it made extraordinary community-based investments in small business in response to the pandemic.

The lengthy waiting list for Homan Square housing units is a testament to just how desirable our community has become. In partnership with IFF, we are responding to that demand by breaking ground on affordable, accessible housing thanks to a \$5.72 million grant from the Illinois Housing Development Authority. The result will be vibrant new units for families and increased independence for people with disabilities.

The reality is we could not do this alone, and that is where you come in. Your generosity is what makes Homan Square a thriving community and what gives us hope for our future endeavors.

Kevin Sutton
Executive Director
Foundation for Homan Square



Long-term relationships drive COVID-19 vaccination effort

Affordable housing, quality health care, and outstanding recreational and family supports were part of the original DNA of Homan Square when conversations about how to develop the community were taking place in the mid-1990s. Amid the pandemic, the benefits of this comprehensive, place-based approach have been more evident than ever.

In February, Lawndale Christian Health Center (LCHC) answered the call from the City of Chicago to make COVID-19 vaccines as accessible as possible to Black and Latinx Chicagoans by quickly establishing a vaccination site in the foyer of the Homan Square Community Center. In the next four months, LCHC provided more than 7,000 vaccinations for residents at the site.

To do so required coordination among LCHC, other tenants in the community center, and the Foundation for Homan Square; made possible because of trusting relationships nurtured during the last 20 years.

“The relationships that made it possible for us to run the vaccination site didn’t just start during the pandemic,” said Pastor James Brooks, Lawndale Christian Health’s Vice President of Mission and Community Engagement. “So, when it was time to respond to the need to get residents in the community vaccinated, the relationships were already there, and it was just a matter of picking up the phone or shooting an email out and letting everyone know what we needed to do. In a time like this, I love how the Homan Square family gathered together to make a huge difference in the North Lawndale community.”

“One of the wonderful things about Homan Square is that the group we have on the campus has developed relationships with each other, and it’s part of the culture at the community center to support one’s another’s efforts to support the community,” added Dr. Daisey Dowell, LCHC’s Medical Director at the Homan Square site.

In addition to providing the physical facility for the vaccination site, LCHC’s long-term presence in the Homan Square community also provided a sense of trust that was crucial to the vaccination effort. LCHC staff canvassed the neighborhood, along with members of the Chicago Police Department’s 11th District and Alderman Michael Scott Jr. to get the word out.

“It made a big difference that we’ve been in Homan Square for so long and already established trust with members of the community before this need arose,” Dr. Dowell said. “It’s easier to have a conversation with someone about the importance of getting the vaccine when you’ve already provided high-quality care for them or their children in the past. That trust factor is huge.”



Merger bolsters Family Focus' ability to strengthen the education pipeline

Family Focus has long been an organization that provides vital resources to Chicago area families, offering everything from support services to parenting classes and youth development opportunities.

Those efforts received a significant boost as the Chicago Child Care Society merged with Family Focus earlier this year. The new organization, which has taken on the Family Focus name, will provide enhanced educational offerings, including early childhood through secondary education and beyond. The merger leverages the expertise and assets of two organizations with a rich history in serving Chicago, which is particularly important during the historic COVID-19 pandemic.

“This merger has been in process for more than a year due to the outstanding opportunities for synergy around both organizations’ shared mission to provide early childhood and family support,” said Dara Munson, the CEO of Chicago Child Care Society and now the President & CEO of the combined organization. “In a crisis situation like we face now, our priority is keeping our families safe, healthy, in their homes, and informed about the best way to respond to the enormous challenges they are facing.”

Family Focus has been an anchor at Foundation for Homan Square since redevelopment efforts began in 1988. Along with Lawndale Christian Health Center and North Lawndale YMCA, Family Focus was among the initial partners identified to provide high-quality recreation, health, and social services to the Homan Square community.

At the start of the pandemic in March 2020, 61 percent of Family Focus participants had lost income and were facing crisis. The new organization will address short-term needs as well as long-term opportunities for students preparing for post-secondary education.

“Prior to the merger, both organizations relied on many community partnerships to address the layered needs families had with children of all age groups,” Munson said. “The newly merged organization has the combined resources of over 200 years of service and an expanded service area to support children and youth from prenatal to early childhood through high school at most of our centers. This pipeline is critical to support older youth as they prepare for college or a career.”

Students and teachers at Hyde Park Preschool Center, a Chicago Child Care Society site that is now part of Family Focus.





New development will transform vacant lots, fill housing gap

The importance of independent living options for people with disabilities has come into clear focus during the Covid-19 pandemic. A new housing development in Homan Square will expand accessible, affordable rental options for people with disabilities while making use of vacant land. It's a win-win for individuals who might otherwise reside in congregate settings that have experienced deadly outbreaks of coronavirus since March 2020.

A \$5.72 million grant from the Illinois Housing Development Authority is providing the vast majority of funding for the Permanent Support Housing development, which is a partnership between Foundation for Homan Square (FHS) and IFF's Home First Initiative. IFF, which strengthens nonprofits and the communities they serve by providing leadership, capital, and real estate solutions, is working with FHS to implement the long-term Homan Square strategic plan.

Four vacant parcels are set to be developed into 21 new rental units, with construction set to begin by the end of 2021. The new buildings will feature state-of-the-art, accessible one-bedroom apartments on the first-floor, as well second-story units intended for families. A Community Advisory Council (CAC) provided input for the project, weighing in on everything from access to outdoor spaces, aesthetics and safety measures.

"The CAC is made up of people who have been here for years, homeowners and renters alike," said Lydia Collins of IFF. "Residents want to be able to talk to their neighbors, see who's coming down their block, and still have privacy."

Until the new homes are constructed, a public art display will generate positive programming and activation on vacant lots. Artist Alexie Young will display work from her 2020 project, Lawndale Love Letters, as well as new work inspired by conversations with Homan Square residents. There is a waiting list of 140-plus individuals for housing in highly desirable Homan Square. If all goes as planned, tenants are expected to move in by winter 2022.



IFF and FHS have sought feedback from community members as part of the proposed housing development.



The new units will feature welcoming outdoors spaces and vibrant aesthetics.



Artists shape connections among West Side communities

The impact of the School of the Art Institute (SAIC) Artist-in-Residence program stretches beyond ceramic techniques and art instruction at Homan Square's Nichols Tower. It stretches into the community—to workshops that foster healing and well-being.

"The more connected we are to the earth and the soil, the more grounded we are," said Artist-in-Residence Sonja Henderson. "The earth can absorb our anxieties. It has deep healing qualities when you first put your hands into it."

Henderson has worked with grieving mothers, using poetry, ceramics and guided meditation to promote healing following trauma. After adapting her workshops for Zoom at the start of the pandemic, she's turned to the outdoors and a kiln that helps community members make a profound connection as they fire clay from Chicago soils.

"It's building new solutions and grappling with heavy histories and turning them into a positive," Henderson explained.

The School of the Art Institute's work at Homan Square aspires to engage artists from a variety of disciplines to combine their skills and engage the community. Other recent artists-in-residence include JoVonna Jackson of Englewood, who specializes in mosaics, and Alfonso "Piloto" Nieves Ruiz, whose expertise is in clay.

"I'm delighted to work with artists like Sonja, Piloto and JoVonna," said Jaclyn Jacunski, Director of Community Engagement at SAIC. "I feel I am just the conduit to getting the conversation up and running."



Uniting the West Side to address life expectancy gap

The COVID-19 pandemic and the response by (WSU) West Side United reflect the adage that success is when preparedness meets opportunity. Brought together by six hospital partners, West Side United formed in 2018 to address the life expectancy gap that West Side residents face. West Siders have a projected life expectancy of up to 14 years shorter than those who live downtown.

By early 2020, West Side United had already begun addressing health equity through measures to reduce health disparities while scaling interventions across hospitals and community partners. Mayor Lori Lightfoot reached out to West Side United in April 2020 to lead a rapid response team that could distribute food and personal protective equipment while continuing health outreach to West Side partners. Support from the Oprah Winfrey Charitable Foundation enabled WSU to allocate \$5 million in Covid response and recovery funding and programs.

West Side United will be headquartered at the historic Nichols Tower on the Homan Square campus by October 2021. It's an important milestone for an organization dedicated to providing coordinated support to neighborhood networks of community-based organizations.

"Being in Nichols Tower is extremely meaningful for us as an organization," says Tenisha Jones, Senior Director of Strategy & Operations for West Side United. "North Lawndale is a priority community for us. And it's a very symbolic location because Nichols Tower housed what was a significant economic engine in Sears. It played a role in the economic vitality of North Lawndale and in the wages that were [eventually] lost."

"It is an honor to be based in the historic North Lawndale community that served as a classroom for Dr. King and the world by highlighting limited economic mobility and justice denied to residents," said Ayesha Jaco, West Side United Executive Director. "Fifty-five years later, we are still committed to addressing these same inequities by focusing specifically on decreasing the life expectancy gap by 50 percent by 2030."

OUR SINCEREST THANKS TO THE INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND ORGANIZATIONS WHO SUPPORT FOUNDATION FOR HOMAN SQUARE. BECAUSE OF YOU, WE ARE ABLE TO MEET THE NEED FOR EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE, RECREATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES IN OUR COMMUNITY.

**2020/2021
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