

WHAT IS FUNCTIONAL ZERO?

A Plain-Language Guide for Norman / Cleveland County

Ending homelessness doesn't mean no one will ever lose their housing. It means that when someone does, the system responds so quickly and effectively that homelessness becomes **rare, brief, and non-recurring**. That is the standard known as **Functional Zero**.

The Definition

Functional Zero is reached when a community drives homelessness — for a specific population such as veterans, chronically homeless individuals, or families — down to a number that its local housing system can reliably resolve. In practice, that typically means the number of people experiencing homelessness at any given moment is equal to or less than the average number housed in a single month.

It is not a permanent finish line. It is a maintained condition — one that requires ongoing vigilance, real-time data, and a coordinated team ready to act.

How It Works

Functional Zero depends on three interlocking elements:

- 1. Real-Time, By-Name Data.** Every person experiencing homelessness is tracked individually — by name, history, and need. There is no anonymous count. The community knows exactly who needs housing and what barriers stand in the way.
- 2. Coordinated Teams.** Nonprofits, government agencies, housing providers, and healthcare systems work from the same list and meet regularly — often weekly — to move people into permanent housing as quickly as possible.
- 3. Prevention and Rapid Response.** The system does not wait for crises to deepen. It intercepts housing loss early, resolves new cases swiftly, and measures its own performance continuously.

Why It Matters

Functional Zero is transformational because it shifts the entire orientation of a community's response — away from managing homelessness and toward ending it. That shift matters in concrete ways:

- It creates **accountability** — communities measure outcomes, not just activity.
- It **inspires collaboration** — when organizations can see shared progress on a single list, competition gives way to coordination.
- It **unlocks significantly more funding** — federal and philanthropic funders prioritize communities with proven, data-driven systems. Communities that achieve and maintain Functional Zero position themselves for tens of millions of dollars in grants, federal allocations, and foundation investment that would simply not be available otherwise.

Communities That Have Done It

Functional Zero is not theory. Communities across America have achieved and sustained it:

Rockford, Illinois — The first U.S. community to achieve Functional Zero for both veteran and chronic homelessness (2015–2017), by unifying data systems and aligning every agency around a single by-name list.

Lynchburg, Virginia — The 12th U.S. community to reach Functional Zero for veterans (2020), housing 50 individuals in under two years on average through weekly case conferencing. They have sustained it while expanding to chronic homelessness.

New Orleans, Louisiana — After reaching Functional Zero for veterans, housed 191 additional individuals with an average time-to-housing of 27 days — demonstrating the model sustains momentum after the milestone.

Houston / Harris County, Texas — Achieved Functional Zero for veteran homelessness and produced a 63% reduction in overall homelessness since 2011, proving the model scales from small towns to the fourth-largest city in America.

What This Means for NORMAN / Cleveland County

The City of Norman's April 7, 2026 YES vote on Proposition 5 was a critical and major step in achieving more than approving the building of another homeless shelter.

That vote, combined with what is already on the ground, forms one of the most compelling implementation foundations in Oklahoma:

- **\$8M approved by Norman Citizens** — directed specifically toward ending homelessness in Cleveland County
- **The Salvation Army's \$10M, 144-bed shelter** — the largest emergency housing resource in Cleveland County
- **McKown Village** — 32 permanent supportive housing cottages created by Food & Shelter, Inc.
- **The Share Center** — coordinated wrap-around services at 211–213 Reed Avenue
- **120+ faith communities** across Cleveland County — actively engaged, organized, and delivering compassionate care on the ground every week
- **A robust NGO network** — nonprofits, social service agencies, healthcare providers, and community organizations across every corner of Cleveland County working in concert toward the same goal
- **Dedicated websites** — EndHomelessnessNorman.org and HomewardNORMAN.org — built specifically for this cause
- **A state-of-the-art volunteer management database** — tracking capacity and deployment across the county
- **Full county-wide coordination** — uniting City and County governments, municipal partners, NGOs, faith communities, and every organization already engaged in this cause under one coordinated system
- **HMIS / WellSky ServicePoint** — the by-name, real-time data system that is the backbone of any Functional Zero effort

Together, these are not aspirations. They are the proof of implementation — the data infrastructure, the housing capacity, the provider alignment, and the community will — required to achieve Functional Zero in NORMAN / Cleveland County by 2030.

Our goal is not to manage homelessness in Cleveland County. Our goal is to end it — one population at a time, with data, with urgency, and with the full force of every partner willing to work toward that standard.