

# WHY WE MUST WORK TOGETHER

*A Case for Unified Action in Norman / Cleveland County*

Some problems are too large for any single organization, any single city, or any single act of generosity to solve alone. Homelessness in Cleveland County is one of them.

The 240 men, women, and children counted on a single January night in 2024 did not become homeless because one system failed them. They became homeless because multiple systems — housing, healthcare, employment, mental health, substance abuse treatment, family stability — failed them simultaneously. And they will not find their way home unless those same systems work together to bring them back.

*That is why we must work together.*

## Why NORMAN Cannot Do This Alone

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Homelessness does not recognize city limit signs. The families we serve live in Norman, Moore, Noble, Purcell, Lexington, Little Axe, Slaughterville, and the rural stretches between them. A family sleeping in a vehicle on the outskirts of Lexington has the same need as a veteran sleeping under a bridge in Norman. The zip code is different. The humanity is identical.

No single organization — not Food & Shelter, not the Salvation Army, not Thunderbird Clubhouse, not any church, not any government agency — has the staffing, the funding, or the reach to solve this county-wide. What each of them has is a piece of the answer. Unified, those pieces become a system. Divided, they remain islands of compassion in a sea of unmet need.

*The Citizens of Norman voted YES on April 7, 2026. That vote was not just for Norman. It was the first declaration that Cleveland County intends to end homelessness — together.*

## It Is the Most Cost-Effective Thing We Can Do

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Homelessness is expensive. Not for the person experiencing it — for all of us.

Every person living unsheltered cycles repeatedly through emergency rooms, county jails, and crisis shelters. Studies consistently show that permanently housing one person offsets more than \$30,000 per year in emergency services, law enforcement responses, and hospital costs. Coordinated prevention and rapid rehousing programs reduce per-person costs by 35% compared to emergency responses alone.

The \$8M approved by Norman voters, combined with the Salvation Army's \$10M shelter investment, the 32 cottages at McKown Village, and the coordinated resources of 120+ faith communities, represents tens of millions of dollars already committed to this cause. Coordination is what transforms that investment into lasting outcomes rather than an endless cycle of crisis response.

**Working together is not just the right thing to do. It is the fiscally responsible thing to do.**

## **It Strengthens Our Entire Community**

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Ending homelessness makes Norman and Cleveland County stronger — economically, socially, and reputationally.

Housed individuals pay taxes, hold jobs, volunteer, and participate in civic life. Communities that have achieved Functional Zero — Rockford, Illinois; Lynchburg, Virginia; Houston/Harris County, Texas — report measurable reductions in crime, lower public health burdens, and stronger local economies in the years following their milestones.

Norman is home to the University of Oklahoma — a world-class institution whose reputation, recruitment, and community relationships are directly shaped by the health and vitality of the city around it. A Norman that leads on homelessness is a Norman that attracts talent, investment, and national recognition. A Norman that ignores it pays a different kind of price.

## **It Unlocks Funding No Single Entity Can Access Alone**

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Unified action through CoC OK-504 is the key that unlocks resources that no single organization can access independently.

HUD's Continuum of Care and Emergency Solutions Grant programs direct millions of dollars annually to coordinated community systems — not to individual organizations. The stronger

the coordination, the more complete the PIT Count data, and the closer the community moves toward Functional Zero, the more competitive OK-504 becomes for federal funding.

The \$8M from Proposition 5 is Step One of a leverage strategy designed to attract \$37M to \$100M in federal, state, foundation, and corporate investment by 2030. Oklahoma funders — Zarrow, Sarkeys, OCCF, and Inasmuch — along with national foundations that target collaborative models are watching communities like ours. They fund systems, not silos.

## **It Creates the Infrastructure That Lasts**

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Working together builds something no single organization can build alone — a data-driven, coordinated system with the capacity to sustain results over time.

By-name lists. Real-time HMIS tracking. Coordinated entry. A PIT Count committee that includes every sector of the community. These are not bureaucratic overhead — they are the architecture of a system that can achieve Functional Zero and maintain it, year after year, regardless of which organizations come and go.

This infrastructure also ensures equity. Veterans, students, families, and chronically homeless individuals — the most vulnerable among us — are tracked by name, served by a coordinated team, and never lost in the gaps between organizations that do not communicate.

## **The Invitation**

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Norman and Cleveland County have everything needed to end homelessness — the resources, the organizations, the faith communities, the data systems, and now the public mandate. What has been missing is the unified commitment to use them together.

That is what this work is about. Not charity. Not crisis management. A coordinated, county-wide, evidence-based system — built by everyone, for everyone — that makes homelessness in Cleveland County rare, brief, and ultimately over.

*Our Love Makes A Difference.*