

# HOW: Housing Opportunities for Women

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The average age of a homeless person in Chicago is 9 years old, which makes Housing Opportunities for Women's mission of providing "permanent solutions to the

problems of homelessness and poverty for women and children" even more important, pressing and difficult.

Last year, the Baird & Warner Good Will Network donated \$30,000 to help fund the organization's HomeFirst Program, benefiting 10 single female-headed households vulnerable to homelessness. The program's goal is to provide a three-year path toward rebuilding economic and housing stability for women who do not qualify for housing subsidies.

HOW, which celebrated its 20th anniversary last year, is Chicago's oldest transitional shelter for women, helping thousands of women and their children gain "sustainable self-sufficiency." Not only does the organization assist with acquiring housing, but it also provides supportive services to help women retain permanent housing.

The nonprofit benefits homeless women and children who have suffered hardship and are without any resources to acquire housing on their own. More than half of those who enter HOW's program have been victims of domestic abuse and almost 60 percent are recovering from substance abuse; between 40 percent and 50 percent suffer from mental illness.

HOW's Permanent Supportive Housing Program was established in 1999 with 10 families. By January of 2005, HOW was serving more than 125 households using a combination of the program's three components: subsidized housing, prevention and retention and supportive services.

With subsidized housing, HOW helps women and children leave the homeless shelter system as quickly as possible by giving them rental subsidies to use on permanent housing. Also, the residents contribute a percentage of their income to rent.

Prevention and retention works on keeping the women in the program from going back into the homeless system by providing them with one-time cash grants for rent or utilities to help them retain their housing.