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# Inside Wheaton

The key to your community



## A Place to Call Home

DuPage Pads provides assistance to get people thriving

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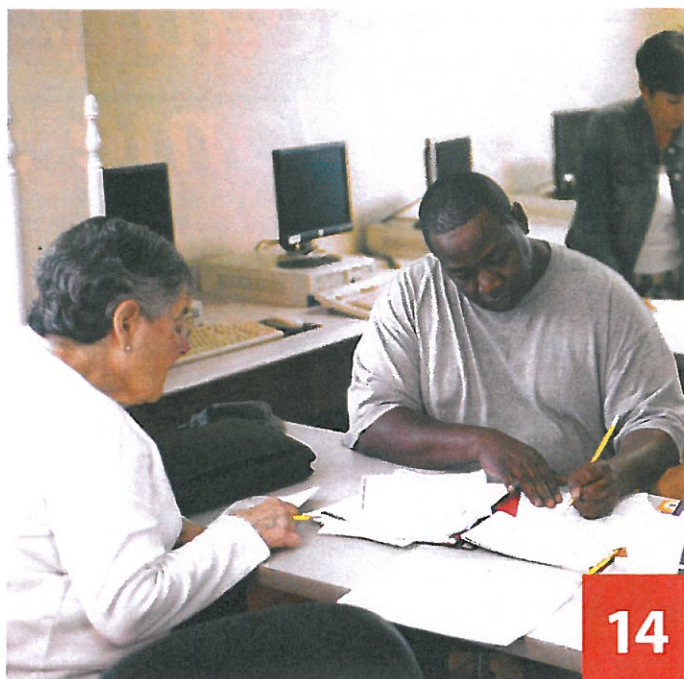
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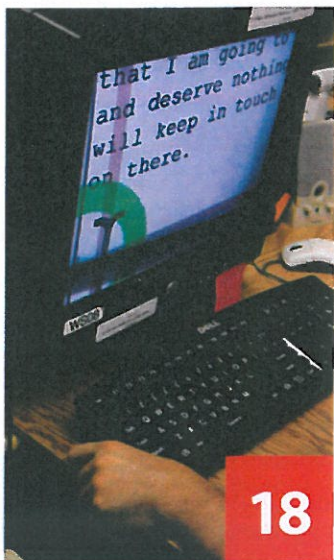
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Cover Photo courtesy of DuPage Pads



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### Get Involved!

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# Everyone Needs a Place to Call Home

*DuPage Pads provides assistance to get people in homes where they can thrive.*

by Doug Gausepohl  
Publication assistant

When people think of homelessness, a lot of their thoughts may be misconstrued or uninformed. Some people tend to think that homelessness is a choice, that people would rather be homeless than work for a living or that they aren't trying hard enough. Carol Simler and DuPage Pads is working to end the stereotypes of homelessness and get people back into a place they can truly call home.

DuPage Pads launched in Wheaton in 1985 as an organization aimed at providing people with a solution to end homelessness for them and their families. Along with giving people a safe place to stay, the organization provides support services to people in order to make them self-sufficient.

At the time DuPage Pads first opened, homelessness was increasing around the country. And the issue of unsheltered people still exists today. According to [thechicagoalliance.org](http://thechicagoalliance.org), approximately 750,000 people in the United States are homeless. Out of those 750,000, only 56 percent are living in shelters or other kinds of housing, while the other 44 percent are unsheltered.

Simler has been the executive director of DuPage Pads since 2000 and has been with the organization since 1998. She said stereotypes of what kind of people are homeless and why people become homeless is a big part of the battle against homelessness.

"People have not had the same opportunities or support in their lives as many of us have had," Simler explained. "It's up to us to work in a spirit of hope. These are our brothers and sisters."

These people are truly very close to home for the people of Wheaton. According to DuPage Pads, 71 percent of the 1,938 people it served in 2011 and 2012 listed their last address in DuPage County.

When these people come into DuPage Pads for the first time, the first thing Simler usually notices is the negativity that surrounds them.



**A woman sits on the bed of her new apartment, provided by DuPage Pads. The organization provides permanent housing programs to assist people that are homeless. In order to be eligible for permanent housing, a person must be either homeless for a full year or have been homeless four times in the past three years.**

Photo courtesy of DuPage Pads

"When I look in their faces, I see the lack of hope in their eyes," Simler said. "They come to us with very complex and challenging needs."

**"Homelessness is 365 days a year."**

**—Carol Simler, executive director of DuPage Pads**

DuPage Pads has both interim and permanent housing programs to assist the homeless. The interim, or overnight program, offers families a place to stay for the night. The organization has three interim housing sites open at various local congregations each night between October 1 and April 30, and one to two sites open between May 1 and September 30. DuPage Pads currently has 150 congregations that are partnered with the organization and hold interim housing. The housing site provides a bed, three meals a day and support activities to help get people back on their feet. The interim housing acts as a



ing a place to call home,” Simler said. “If you don’t have that place, it’s difficult and challenging to make changes in your life.”

There are often other problems that come with being homeless. Often, these people are unemployed and lack a sense of stability. DuPage Pads’ Client Service Center offers help to address the issues that result in homelessness and give support to those looking to make positive changes in their lives. Along with the Client Service Center is the Employment and Education Center, which provides mentoring and coaching for those looking for employment. DuPage Pads is partnered with employers around the area in an effort to find jobs in the area for people who are served by the organization. Jobs that these people are offered are in fields such as manufacturing, health care, finance and the service industry. According to the organization’s website, 73 percent of the people that sought job assistance from DuPage Pads found jobs in 2012.

**“These are our brothers and sisters.”**

—Carol Simler, executive director of DuPage Pads

Locals have benefitted greatly from the Employment Center. One woman, Francis, became homeless late in 2011 after breaking her toe. Francis was employed as a driver, and with the broken toe on her right foot, it became impossible for her to complete her job. Her boss gave Francis another position in the office so she could continue working, and even allowed her to stay in the office overnight to avoid paying rent. Eventually, Francis wound up losing her job and found herself at DuPage Pads.

Once getting past the shock of going to a homeless center every night, Francis began to appreciate the organization for the services it provides.

“Early on, the staff interacted with me in a very caring manner,” Francis said on DuPage Pads’ official website. “They reached out to me, and their commitment to help me and my situation is something I will never forget.”

Francis completed the Pharmacy Technician program that DuPage Pads offered, received her Pharmacy Technician License and is currently working at the DuPage Community Clinic in Wheaton.

“I’m proud to say that with DuPage Pads’ help, I’m on my way to succeed,” Francis said.

A man named Larry moved into his own apartment in October of 2011 after being homeless for four years. Larry lost his job in 2007 when his employer went out of business, and eventually wound up at a DuPage Pads facility. Things took a turn for the worse in 2010 when Larry was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He was already dealing with arthritis, neuropathy and a recent stroke. DuPage Pads worked with Larry to get him benefits that he was entitled to as a veteran, and the medication that Larry needed. Today, Larry’s cancer is in remission and he is living happily in one of the permanent housing apartments.

Francis and Larry are only some of the many that have been helped.

“Why am I here?,” Simler asked herself. “The faces of the participants.”

place of assessment, so workers can figure out what needs to be done next with a certain person or family.

“We want people to reach their highest potential,” Simler said. “We’re ending homelessness by using the tools that we have in the most effective way possible.”

The interim housing program is open 365 nights a year, as the organization knows homeless people need the housing there every single night.

“Homelessness doesn’t stop and start,” Simler said. “Homelessness is 365 days a year.”

The permanent housing program places people into affordable apartments as a permanent residence. According to Simler, DuPage Pads will have 80 apartments around the county that are inhabited by people DuPage Pads has taken under its wing. The permanent housing program is intended for people that have either been homeless for at least an entire year, or people that have been considered homeless at least four times in the past three years. People in this program must be employed and able to pay 30 percent of their monthly income to DuPage Pads as payment for their housing. Simler says the permanent housing program has been quite successful. The organization reports 93 percent of the people in the permanent housing program have had an apartment to call home for at least a year.

“We’ve seen people’s lives change as a result of people hav-

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**Top:** Olympus Place is one of the apartment complexes DuPage Pads uses for its permanent housing program. Many people have been placed in apartments similar to this thanks to the organization.

**Top-right:** A mother reads with her two children. This woman and her kids moved into their new apartment right around the holidays.

**Middle-left:** A man with hopes of landing his GED studies with one of the tutors that DuPage Pads provides.

**Middle:** The DuPage Pads' Run 4 Home helps raise money in an effort to end homelessness. This picture was taken in the 2012 race.

**Bottom-left:** A gentleman enjoying his job as a manufacturing plant. This man was helped into this position by the Employment Center.

**Bottom:** One of the DuPage Pads' clients uses a computer in the Client Service Center.

**Bottom-right:** A client talks with a case manager about his current situation. Case managers make assessments on what's next for a client.

Photos courtesy of DuPage Pads



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DuPage Pads would be impossible without the help of Wheaton and other surrounding communities. Volunteers join to help set up beds, serve dinner and provide support during the overnight shift at the interim housing centers.

"We rely heavily on volunteers," Simler said. "We're very blessed in this agency from the support we get from the community."

Helping out at a homeless center can help someone break out of the stereotypes people often associate the homeless with.

"Once you sit down and talk to somebody who's homeless, I think that changes people's lives," Simler said. "Some people have a fear of talking to a person that is homeless. Once people get engaged with us, their lives change as a result of that."

There are currently more than 4,000 volunteers that donate their time to DuPage Pads. The thousands that serve the organization in all different ways help people put their lives back together. Many volunteers run in the Run 4 Home, which is a race DuPage Pads holds to help raise money for the services that the organization provides. The 2013 run will be held in September.

"People can accomplish amazing things when they have a place to call home," Simler said. "I understand their struggle. That's what inspires me to be their advocate. We all need someone who believes in us."

One of the important things to remember about people that are unfortunate enough to be homeless is that they are often just victims of misfortune. As DuPage Pads has learned about what puts people in these situations, it has revamped its goal for the people it serves.

"We've moved from managing homelessness to treating the whole person," Simler said. "These people have skills that are underutilized. I've had the support in my life, which often times we take for granted. The fact that we live in a community and have the support of our families and had an education, these are all things these folks never had."

Homeless people are looked at as people looking for second chances, but in many instances, they're still looking for their first chance. DuPage Pads' slogan is 'When someone believes in you, everything can change.'

"After 15 years of being here, we've learned a lot," Simler said. "I really strongly believe that we're stronger when we harness the power of we, our and us. Everything can be different with a steady hand of someone who cares."

To find out about volunteering for DuPage Pads, log on to [DuPagePads.org](http://DuPagePads.org) or call 630-682-3846.

