



# Memorandum

TO: Kevin J. Jackson, Village Manager *KJ*

FROM: Dr. Danielle Walker, Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer *DW*  
Vanessa Matheny, Grant Manager *VM*

FOR: Village President and Board of Trustees

DATE: October 23, 2023

SUBJECT: Asylum Seeker Update

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## Purpose

This memo is to provide an update on Village staffs' efforts to support the migrant population. Below are a few key points to summarize the current status. Whereas the rest of the memo will go into more detail on previous, current, potential future action, and staff/financial impact.

## Key Points

- Village staff has been diligently monitoring this situation over the last several months.
- Staff applied for the Supporting Municipalities for Asylum Seekers (SMASS) grant in the amount of \$7.5 million in September 2023.
- The \$7.5 million was for transitional housing, food, wraparound services, legal assistance, and health and wellness.
- The Village of Oak Park was subsequently awarded \$150,000 for planning purposes.
- Staff held a call with the grant program managers to flush out more details on the parameters of the grant requirements. At this time staff is awaiting a determination on if funds can be planned to be used for direct support and not for solely planning purposes from the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus and Illinois Department of Human Services.
- The migrant population continues to grow at the Chicago Police Department's (CPD) 15<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> District headquarters. These are located near Oak Park in the Austin (15<sup>th</sup>) and Grand Central (25<sup>th</sup>) neighborhoods of Chicago.
- Currently, zero migrants are being housed in Oak Park on Village property (i.e. police station, Village Hall) or by community partners.

- Migrants that are stationed in the Chicago police stations are coming to St. Catherine-St. Lucy's rectory to receive access to shower, laundry, respite, and childcare services during the day.
- Village staff remains committed to supporting asylum seekers and working with community partners with identified immediate, short term, and long-term plans.

## Overview

Since August 2022, more than 17,000 migrants have arrived to the city of Chicago seeking asylum. The State of Texas has been sending migrants to various cities across the U.S. Asylum seekers are defined as "an individual who crossed the Mexico/U.S. border on or after August 1, 2022, with the intent to stay permanently, and who does not possess any permanent or interim U.S. legal status (which does not include being in parole status), such as legal permanent residency, a student or work visa, etc. Refugee status or asylum may be granted to people who have been persecuted or fear they will be persecuted on account of race, religion, nationality, and/or membership in a particular social group or political opinion. Migrants that have arrived need access to shelter, food, healthcare, legal support, and overall wraparound services.

Village staff has been monitoring the arrival of asylum seekers for the last several months. Staff has heard from several community members of the conditions occurring at the 15<sup>th</sup> District police station in Austin. Staff has also connected with community partners to better understand how Oak Park can support migrants seeking asylum. The Village is aware that the migrant population continues to grow at the Chicago Police Department's (CPD) 15<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> District headquarters.

Currently, no asylum seekers are being housed on public property in Oak Park as there would be a need for collective intergovernmental support to explore all viable housing options. Asylum seekers that are stationed in the police stations in the Austin area are coming to St. Catherine-St. Lucy's rectory to receive access to shower, laundry, respite, and childcare services during the day. The individuals rotating throughout the week as there are now approximately 200 individuals between the two stations identified.

## Previous Action Taken

The Village of Oak Park took the initiative to apply for the Supporting Municipalities for Asylum Seeker Services (SMASS) grant in the amount of \$7.5 million to serve as a passthrough to organizations such as Housing Forward, Catholic Charities, Beyond Hunger, PCC Wellness, Greater Chicago Legal Clinic, West Cook YMCA, and Thrive Counseling Center as those organizations have established methods to support asylum seeker's access to transitional housing, food, wraparound services, legal assistance and health and wellness. The Village was also contacted by the City of Chicago, specifically spoke with Deputy Mayor of Immigrant, Migrant, and Refugee Rights, Beatriz Ponce De León, to think through a potential collaboration. The Village received official notice on October 6, 2023 that Oak Park received

\$150,000 to assist in preparation for future opportunities to support asylum seekers. Staff was unaware when applying for funding that a planning element could be up for consideration.

The Village of Oak Park's Department of Public Health is also assisting in supporting migrants. Per vaccination policies within local schools, the Health Department is providing required vaccinations for migrant children to ensure they can attend school.

### Current Actions

The Village is aware that the migrant population continues to grow at the CPD 15<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> district headquarters. Asylum seekers that are stationed in the police stations are coming to St. Catherine-St. Lucy's rectory to receive access to shower, laundry, respite, meals, and childcare services during the day. The individuals rotating throughout the week are now approximately 200 individuals between the two stations identified. This number is expected to continue to quickly grow given the current rate.

Dr. Danielle Walker, Chief DEI Officer went to the 15<sup>th</sup> District headquarters in Austin on October 19, 2023 to meet with local volunteers. At this meeting, volunteers emphasized the need for immediate housing, legal assistance, drinking water, laundry support, and food delivery as some of the top pressing needs for migrants. Although a visual confirmation was not needed to understand the level of urgency, it provided validation that Village staff is dialed in on the situation, and committed to thinking through solutions.

Also, on October 19, 2023 Village Staff held a Zoom call with BRick, the program managers for the Supporting Municipalities for Asylum Seekers (SMASS) grant. In this call the program consultant discussed that Oak Park was awarded money to support in planning for support. The program managers emphasized the proposed plan for the award was for funding and staff repeatedly addressed the severe need to provide support immediately. Staff also inquired if BRick was aware of the Village gaining access to additional funding given recent developments from other communities. The consultants were unable to speak on this. Furthermore, staff inquired directly with Metropolitan Mayors Caucus regarding plans for the unallocated funding. In response, they had no additional information to share and will let staff know when they find out.

The other municipalities that received funding include:

- City of Chicago: \$30.25 million
- Joliet Township: \$8.6 million
- City of Elgin: \$1.27 million
- Lake County: \$1 million
- City of Urbana: \$250,000

Since May 2023, Village staff has been meeting with our community partners to understand the need for support and collaboration and the Village's role. Further Staff has also reached out to the State and Governor's office to express need and support for the migrants within the

region to understand which resources and financial support may be available as more migrants are displaced in the area. Staff has continued to connect on a weekly basis with key organizations and individuals to understand pressing needs as they arise.

### **Current Needs of Community Organizations**

Village staff has continued to remain in communication with community organizations providing aid to the migrant population. Below is a snapshot of how these various agencies have been impacted.

**Health:** As the Village remains committed to supporting both our local community and displaced migrants, we seek to be responsive to holistic health needs that may be disproportionately impacting the migrant community. In response, the Village of Oak Park Health Department, in collaboration with our community partner PCC Wellness, is actively working to establish vaccination programs and implement crucial health measures to address and manage these health challenges. Without having access to insurance, all of the costs associated to ensure individuals receive access to health needs including vaccinations have been at the expense of the organization. Dental coverage has been identified as a need primarily amongst youth as they are enrolling in our school districts. Schools will not allow the students to attend the school without the proper vaccinations and dental records. The Village of Oak Park intends to host several vaccination clinics as the Health Department continue to provide leadership in this area.

**Housing:** The Oak Park community is constrained in some respect in emergency housing. Thus, staff sought to connect with key partners to cast a wider net in housing availability for the migrant community. West Cook YMCA has identified sheltered housing specifically designed for single men. Meanwhile, Housing Forward has been using motels as a means to assist displaced migrants. The organization has also experienced capacity constraints at their emergency shelter, which has regrettably led to the refusal of migrants seeking shelter. While Housing Forward strives to transition migrants into more permanent housing arrangements, they encounter challenges as the individuals seek to accommodate their arriving family members in one-bedroom apartments, exacerbating the difficulties of securing housing amid the already limited available resources for payment. Housing Forward is utilizing unrestricted funding sources that have been previously provided for individuals experiencing homelessness to help support migrants in apartments.

**Food:** Beyond Hunger has identified an increase of unhoused individuals who are in need of food. While the organization has decided to not require identification to receive food they have continued to collect data on individuals arriving at the pantry. In the last 6 months, there has been an increase of 127 unduplicated individuals. This increase has accounted for an

additional \$6,000 per month in food purchase which is \$30,000. At this rate the organization anticipates the additional costs until June 2024 would be \$72,000.

**Legal:** Greater Chicago Legal Counsel has offered to support through some pro-bono support to help triage current migrants with documentation to seek residency and ultimately employment. The cost of legal services is exponentially high and believed that housing and food are a better fit. They stated that this documentation can take months to be approved and needs regular follow-up. With additional resources the organization would be able to hire additional 1-2 staff to help with processing documentation and move the process along faster.

**Wraparound Services:** Our network has been providing meals to 200 individuals twice per week, laundry, showers, clothing, transportation, case management for documentation, childcare, translation and language access.

The Village maintains an ongoing dialogue and collaborative relationship with its initial set of seven partner organizations, which include West Cook YMCA, PCC Wellness, Greater Chicago Legal Counsel, Beyond Hunger, Housing Forward, Thrive Counseling Center, and Catholic Charities. This partnership is vital in comprehending their evolving capacity and requirements, particularly as the number of individuals in need has grown beyond the initial count of 70. In the past month, the scope of our collaborative efforts has broadened, as additional organizations such as BUILD Chicago, Oak Park Township, IWS Children's Clinic, St. Catherine-St. Lucy Parish, and the Collaboration for Early Childhood have joined forces. These organizations collectively provide essential resources to the displaced migrants within the Oak Park community. Village staff have been on calls with the identified community partners from the grant application to better understand their needs. Partners have communicated the need of financial relief due to increased costs in supporting migrants. Therefore, the needs of all current identified partners' collective costs exceed \$1,000,000 with costs continuing to accumulate.

### **Proposed Plans of Action**

As staff awaits a decision on the status of the current grant funds, and potential access to unallocated funds from the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, all proposed plans of action are contingent on funding. Below are proposed actions for consideration;

#### Immediate Steps

- Provide financial support to St. Catherine-St. Lucy's water bill
- Host a winter clothing drive
- Food delivery support
- Laundry services support

In Process Steps

- Village of Oak Park's Migrant Triage Response Plan
  - o Conduct health screenings and vaccinations
  - o Provide language access support in filling out forms
  - o Wi-Fi access
  - o Food and wellness baskets
- Develop a request for proposals to community partners providing support to migrants
  - o Provide grant opportunities to community partners currently providing aid to migrants in the area of housing, legal, health, food, and wraparound services.

In the Queue

Village staff remains ready to execute the plan that was put forth in the grant application. This included working with the seven identified organizations to execute service provisions across, housing, food, legal, health, and wraparound services. Which would require

*Additional Considerations:*

- Continue to seek additional unallocated funds from the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus
- Seek other grant opportunities
- Explore possible Village job opportunities for asylum seekers with work permits
- English language learner classes

**Unhoused Community Perspective**

Village staff is cognizant of the simultaneous need to provide support for the unhoused and the migrant community. These are not competing efforts rather codependent needs that by addressing both increases the network of support. Although limited resources are available, Village staff are continuously working to collaborate and ensure access to needed resources are available for all communities.

**Village Staff and Financial Impact**

As Village staff continues to provide leadership and support for migrants, this will have a noticeable impact on other key priorities. Staff anticipates providing about at least 40% work time a week in coordinating these efforts that would impact several departments. As the need would necessitate cross departmental coordination. Additionally, depending on the proposed action plans the financial impact to support of the next several months would range conservatively starting at \$500,000.

In conclusion, Village staff remains committed to thinking through many phases of support for asylum seekers. For more information please reach out to Dr. Danielle Walker, Chief DEI Officer at [dwalker@oak-park.us](mailto:dwalker@oak-park.us) or 708.358.5778.

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