

50,000 and Greater Population

OAK PARK RIVER FOREST HOME REPAIR PROGRAM

Oak Park, Illinois

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Since 2002, Oak Park Township and River Forest Township have been sharing senior services under an intergovernmental agreement. Both townships are dedicated to strengthening their community by implementing programs that promote the health and wellbeing of all Oak Park and River Forest residents. Their senior services department's mission is to enhance the quality of life for seniors in the community by providing a broad array of supportive services that promote the values of independence, self-esteem, and dignity. Collaborations beyond this initial intergovernmental agreement are prioritized to ensure that programming is innovative and meets the needs of older adults, their family members, and caregivers to ensure the fulfillment of unmet needs in the community, avoid duplication of service, and carefully conserve taxpayer dollars.

The need to create an initiative to improve accessibility and home repairs had been a longstanding one for older adults. Previously, the only way for seniors to secure these service referrals was through word of mouth or by weeding through local provider lists to research and vet each business—a lengthy process. The purpose of the Oak Park River Forest Home Repair Program is to provide older adults who want to age in place or downsize into alternative housing options with more resources so they can remain in the community. Housing stock is an issue in the community as it is aging, expensive to maintain, and oftentimes has limited accessibility accommodations for older homeowners.

These factors converged during a meeting between the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus and the Northwest Housing Partnership (NWHP), a local nonprofit organization, about their handyman program operating in the Northwest suburbs. The director of senior services for Oak Park and River Forest recognized the opportunity to partner with a proven local expert to fulfill unmet community needs. Securing a tentative agreement with MWHP, the director sought support from the Oak Park's and River Forest's respective boards to approve a new intergovernmental agreement to bring the program to residents, supported by funding from the partners.

This agreement spread the \$7,000 cost to NWHP for handling the administrative work, which included advertising, in-person recruitment, background checks, and insurance. It also combined the communication resources of the partners to market and promote the program to residents and staff, and to make referrals when necessary. The partners unanimously agreed to offer the Oak Park River Forest



Home Repair Program to older adults residing in Oak Park and River Forest. This program provides residents with secure services from reliable, screened, background-checked, and insured workers at a fixed hourly cost. In the first nine-month period of the agreement, over 145 residents used the service and over 45 were repeat customers. After analyzing the program usage and repair requests made in the first year, the partners decided to extend this valuable program to residents ages 18 to 59 with disabilities.

The program will be expanding to include the Community Aging in Place, Advancing Better Lives for Elders (CAPABLE) project, which allows a registered nurse, an occupational therapist, and a handy person to assist with the resident's challenges for accessibility within the home and make necessary home repairs to help them safely age in place.

The offerings of this program have been well received by the community, garnering repeat utilization, word-of-mouth referrals to friends and neighbors, and overwhelmingly positive reviews of the service, handypersons, and administrative team. This partnership also raises awareness of the contributions of local government managers by exemplifying the collaboration, responsiveness to community needs, and flexibility required for effective management while ensuring nonduplication of services and cost-effectiveness through services provided via intergovernmental agreements and in partnership with local nonprofit organizations. **PM**