

# ONWARD HOUSE NEWSLETTER

## Winter 2026

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Dear {{Household Salutation/Salutation/Preferred Name}},

For more than a century, our neighbors, partners, and supporters have come together with a shared belief that when families have access to opportunity and support, entire communities grow stronger. Across our programs, we are seeing firsthand how meaningful it is when people come together around a common purpose.



This past week, we broke ground for our new CARES Community Center, an important milestone — not just for Onward House, but for the children, families, and communities we serve. This is a key step toward increasing access and improving coordination, and it's possible because so many partners, neighbors, and supporters believe in investing in our community's future.

What makes this work possible is the network of people who stand beside us. Whether through collaboration, volunteering, advocacy, or philanthropy, your partnership fuels this progress. Together, we are laying the groundwork for new opportunities that will help our community continue to grow stronger.

At the same time, the daily work happening inside our classrooms, food access programs, and support services continues to remind us why this investment matters. Every day, people walk through our doors looking for resources, connection, or simply a place where they feel seen. Our staff and volunteers meet them with respect, consistency, and care.

As we look ahead to the coming months, including our annual Gala and other opportunities to gather, I'm grateful for everyone who helps sustain this work. Whether you volunteer, advocate, donate, or simply share our mission with others, you are part of what keeps Onward House strong.

Thank you for your continued partnership and for believing in what we can accomplish together.

Wishing you a wonderful spring,



Mario F. Garcia  
Executive Director  
Onward Neighborhood House

Support Onward House - Donate Today!

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### ***Onward House CARES Community Center Groundbreaking***

On Monday, March 30th, Onward House broke ground on the brand new CARES Community Center, a visionary new one-stop hub for health and human services on Chicago's Northwest Side. This center will expand access to care and bring critical resources under one roof, including primary and behavioral health services, food access, education, and immigrant support.

Rooted in our 130+ year commitment to Chicago's Northwest Side, the CARES Center reflects the future of how we serve: reducing barriers, strengthening coordination, and ensuring families can access the care they need with dignity and ease.



This milestone would not have been possible without the leadership of so many of our incredible partners who believe in investing in our community. Thank you to the elected officials U.S. Congresswoman Delia Ramirez, IL Senators Graciela Guzmán and Omar Aquino, IL Representatives Eva-Dina Delgado and Will Guzzardi, and Alderpeople Ruth Cruz and Felix Cardona for your support with this project and at the Groundbreaking!

“Onward House shows us how, in community, we care for one another and help each other live with dignity, health, and prosperity. At a time when lifesaving services are being threatened and our diverse communities targeted, I am proud to have worked by their side to secure \$3 million in federal funding to expand Onward House's services with a new community center,” said Congresswoman Delia C. Ramirez. “The center will expand their live-saving work of providing food, health services, and other vital assistance to our community members, whether they’ve been here for a decade or have just arrived. Today’s groundbreaking shows us what’s possible when our tax dollars are invested back in our communities.”

Read more about the event from the news channels that covered it!

- **Sun Times:** [Onward Neighborhood House breaks ground on Belmont Cragin community center](#)
- **Block Club Chicago:** [Onward House Breaks Ground On Community Center And Food Pantry In Belmont Cragin](#)
- **Chicago Today & National Today:** [Onward Neighborhood House breaks ground on Belmont Cragin community center](#)

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## Lea E. : Finding Community at Onward House

Originally from Mexico City, Lea learned about Onward Neighborhood House through another student. She had never taken a computer class before, and on her very first day in Onward House's Computer Class, she was afraid to even touch the computer.

"I was really scared," she recalls. "Professor Juan told us we had to turn on the computer, and I had never used one before."

Lea also has limited vision in one eye, which made learning even more intimidating. But instead of giving up, she stayed.



"After I started the class, I started learning a little more," she says. "Now I don't get scared of doing tasks on the computer. Now I can send an email. Before, that was impossible for me."

Week by week, Lea's confidence grew.

"I feel very good in the Computer Class," she says. "All of this is new for me, but I like it. It makes me feel like a new person."

But Lea's experience at Onward House went beyond learning how to use a computer. She joined a community.

Last November, she asked Professor Juan if she could celebrate her birthday at Onward House: the answer was yes. Staff and classmates gathered to celebrate with cake, laughter, and community.



"I felt very happy," she says. "Like a new person."

Today, when Lea walks through the doors of Onward House, she feels something she had been missing for a long time.

"When I come here, I forget about my personal struggles. I feel like I have a family."

She has attended the Free Farmers Market and the Health Fair. She talks with classmates outside of class. She is excited to continue learning and hopes to join even more programs in the future.

Most importantly, thanks to Onward House, Lea knows she is not alone. "If I need help or need to talk to a social worker, I know they're going to help me," she says. "I'm grateful for every person here."

Lea's journey is still unfolding. But already, she has gained something invaluable: confidence, community, and the belief that it is never too late to learn.

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***Power to the People: Belmont Cragin***  
**— In Partnership with the ACLU of**

## Illinois

Thank you to all of our neighbors, volunteers, and supporters who joined us for *Power to the People: Belmont Cragin*. We were also honored to welcome Congresswoman Delia Ramirez of IL-03, whose opening remarks set the tone for the evening.



The conversation between Colleen K. Connell, Executive Director of the [ACLU of Illinois](#), and our Executive Director Mario F. García centered on the urgent challenges facing the communities we serve and the concrete steps organizations like ours are taking in response.

Mario spoke about A Bridge Home, Onward House's emergency response initiative that mobilizes a volunteer network across the North Shore suburbs to deliver food and essential items directly to vulnerable families in Belmont Cragin. He described the volunteers and community members showing up with a clear message:



"We have a mix of people, from all backgrounds, saying to families who are hiding, who are afraid, 'we got your back.'"

Colleen echoed that spirit of mutual support:

"If Onward House has the community's back, the ACLU of Illinois has Onward House's back."



She also offered a call to action that stayed with many of us in the room:

"Find an organization or a church or a synagogue or a mosque that you trust that gives you an anchor and a community. Our basic humanity is what carries us through helping people. It's about doing the right thing in the moment someone needs help. Asking 'can I help you?' is the most human thing each one of us can do."

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## Inaugural Onward Neighborhood House Pickleball Tournament



On January 29th, Onward Neighborhood House hosted our Inaugural Pickleball Tournament, bringing together supporters and community members for an evening of fun, friendly competition, and meaningful impact.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our players, sponsors, raffle participants, and supporters, we surpassed our \$10,000 fundraising goal to support children and families across Belmont Cragin and the Northwest Side of Chicago. Every serve, rally, and raffle ticket purchased directly supports Onward House's education, economic, and human services programs.



We are especially grateful to the [Onward House Auxiliary Board](#), whose leadership, planning, and marketing efforts brought this event to life.

We are grateful to everyone who helped make our first Pickleball Tournament such a success. We cannot wait to see you back on the court next year!

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## Upcoming Onward Neighborhood House Gala

Join us on **May 30th** for an evening celebrating community and resilience. Together, we will honor the unity, perseverance, and positivity that carry us through challenging times and uplift us all.

This year's Gala will feature local vendors who reflect the rich diversity of our community. The night will begin with a cocktail reception, followed by dinner and inspiring program including words directly from our program participants, and will conclude with music, dancing and connection.



Get Gala Tickets and Sponsorships Here!

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## Onward Neighborhood House Featured on WGN Spotlight Chicago

In February, Onward Neighborhood House was featured on WGN Spotlight Chicago, where our Executive Director, Mario F. García, and our Director of Development and Communications, Emilio Araujo, shared more about the work happening every day at Onward House and what the future holds.

The conversation highlights the story of Mrs. Hernández, an Onward House community member and parent whose resilience and growth shows the

strength of both our incredibly vibrant community and the value of putting wrap-around social services together under one roof.



[Click here for the full clip.](#)

Support Onward House - Donate Today!

### Want to Learn More?

Whether you're interested in making a difference, touring our space, or simply learning more about how your support can impact families, we'd love to connect.

Please contact [Emilio Araujo](mailto:earaujo@onwardhouse.org), Director of Development & Communications at [earaujo@onwardhouse.org](mailto:earaujo@onwardhouse.org).

We'd love to hear from you!

# ONWARD HOUSE AT A GLANCE



**YOUTH  
EDUCATION**



**ADULT  
EDUCATION**



**FOOD  
PANTRY**



**ILLINOIS  
WELCOMING  
CENTER**



**HEALTHCARE**

