

# NAPERVILLE SUN

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## Loaves & Fishes partners with DuPagePads to bolster car donations for homeless facing transportation roadblocks

By Tess Kenny  
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Loaves & Fishes client Nula stands by a car she received through the nonprofit's longstanding CARES Car donation program. (Loaves & Fishes/HANDOUT) (HANDOUT)

# Chicago Tribune

accommodates at a time.

But there's a component to helping clients get back on their feet that's onerous for the center alone to facilitate — personal transportation. By pooling resources with a partner, though, the nonprofit agency is hoping it can get more clients on the road.

DuPagePads is working with Naperville-based Loaves & Fishes Community Services to give donated cars to clients who lack reliable transportation. The groups' joint focus is bolstering self-sufficiency.

“Automobiles are needed to access pediatric care, school programs — all these things that we get behind the wheel and drive to without even thinking twice,” said Chad Pedigo, DuPagePads' vice president of development.

Pedigo said the initiative is “about getting (clients) the tools they need to be financially independent and maintain a home for themselves.”

“In most cases, transportation is a very important factor to be able to do that,” he continued. “That's why partnering with Loaves & Fishes is so essential.”

The collaborative effort is an extension of an already existing program Loaves & Fishes has run for the past 25 years. A few months ago, Pedigo and DuPagePads CEO April Redzic approached Loaves & Fishes about how they could partner with them on this need.

While DuPagePads clients have benefited from Loaves & Fishes' longstanding car donation program before, the need for personal transportation among its clientele is “extreme at this point,” Pedigo said.

Active since 1985, DuPagePads is the largest provider of services to those experiencing homelessness in DuPage County. That includes one-on-one case management, but also access to basic everyday needs like mail service and showers through its Interim Housing Center.

The shelter serves more than 300 guests — many of whom also need a way to get around.

“We’re continually identifying guests at our shelter ... that need a car,” Pedigo said. “Personal transportation is a big barrier.”

Knowing that establishing a car donation program of their own would be a sizable undertaking, an alternative solution was tapping into the infrastructure that Loaves & Fishes already has in place.

Loaves & Fishes welcomed the idea. For the nonprofit, collaboration was a win-win, officials said.

For two and a half decades, Loaves & Fishes has taken community-donated cars and given them back to local families who lack reliable transportation. Called the CARES Car Program, the initiative has rehomed as many as 35 used cars a year, according to CARES Director Mary Boulos.





Loaves & Fishes client Ahmed stands by a car he received through the nonprofit's longstanding CARES Car donation program. (HANDOUT)

That is, until COVID-19 hammered the auto industry, leaving Loaves & Fishes' with a far smaller pool of donated cars to hand out. Two trends in particular have made donated cars a rarer commodity these days, Boulos said.

First, [car prices — new and used — have soared](#) since the pandemic. Meanwhile, as a consequence, [Americans are hanging on to their cars longer than ever](#). For Loaves & Fishes, the effect was “dramatic,” Boulos said.

“The car market has changed so much,” she said. “We’ve been seeing fewer and fewer car donations.”

Last fiscal year, the CARES Car Program helped five clients. Receiving eight times as many inquiries, the past few years proved that a larger support network would serve the Loaves & Fishes car donation program well.

That’s where the DuPagePads partnership comes in.

“This collaboration allows us to tap into a network beyond Loaves & Fishes,” Boulos said.

Pedigo added, “step one is awareness.”

“There might be potential donors out there,” he said, “that just aren’t aware that they can donate in a way that would forever change someone’s life.”

More information about Loaves & Fishes’ CARES Car program can be found at [loaves-fishes.org](https://loaves-fishes.org). Clients are required to go through an application process and must meet specific qualifications to be eligible for the program.

*The Associated Press contributed.*

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