

Partners for Housing: Guiding on a path toward housing stability

By BRANDON FLUEGGE Guest Columnist

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Homelessness is a constant concern in southern Minnesota and the surrounding areas. Partners for Housing (P4H) is among several organizations that provide housing solutions to those in need. P4H runs and maintains Union Street Place (USP) in St. Peter, as well as two additional emergency homeless shelters, below-market rentals, and case management in Mankato. USP, formerly the St. Peter Motel, provides residential shelter, in which “guests” can settle in while they work with P4H staff and partner agencies to identify and overcome obstacles that propelled them toward homelessness.

Believing that housing is a human right, P4H's staff and board take on the mission of guiding people on a path toward housing stability. Guests are allowed to stay for up to 90 days in the shelters, with an average stay of 60 days.

Jen Theneman, Executive Director, explained, "At these locations [in the emergency shelters], we really feel it's important for us to provide an atmosphere that's not just for the evening, but to allow people to move in, settle in, and to work on their challenges.

"We prioritize women and small families," Theneman continued, "providing intensive case management and other services related to employment, budgeting, childcare, transportation, food resources, behavioral and physical health."

Recently, USP has undergone some improvements and renovations to the building and the grounds, and Theneman noted that these improvements will help deliver services more effectively, while making guests more comfortable during their stay.

Some of the recent improvements include a new playground area for the children. The playground was made possible through donations from three area churches — Union Presbyterian, Church of the Holy Communion, and First Lutheran Church of St. Peter. Keeley Landscaping donated and delivered sand for the sandbox. This small addition has been on many hearts and minds since the grand opening of USP as a shelter in October 2019. Now complete this addition makes this temporary place just a little bit more like home.

Safety of guests and the neighborhood has been a top priority. Through a 2019 grant from Open Your Hearts to the Hungry and Homeless (OYHHH), and steep discount from Spectrum Systems LLC, a camera-enabled security system was installed throughout the shelter this spring. Additionally, a new door lock security system prevents entry by uninvited visitors, while also allowing staff to better administer curfew requirements. Knowing that when guests return to shelter after a long day, they will be safe, adds a peace of mind.

Other improvements to the exterior of the building have enhanced the curb appeal and brightened the space. Mankato Clinic staff, during Greater Mankato Area United Way's Week of Action, and kids from First Lutheran and Trinity Lutheran, during their Week of Mission, helped to clean up and establish landscaping around the shelter.

Made possible by the generosity of Slumberland, all the shelter rooms have been upgraded with new twin beds, replacing the old motel beds of varying sizes. With ongoing help from several area businesses, P4H continues to renovate the site, working previous garage and laundry spaces into commons areas and meeting spots.

"Without these volunteers and donations, we wouldn't have been able to complete this whole list of renovations," explained Holland Petersen, USPs shelter Manager. "Through the generosity of the community, we have been able to improve the lives of our guests."

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