

Regarding The Palms Inn and Permanent Supportive Housing

A Closer Look at its Mission and History

The Palms Inn, 104 units in Santa Rosa, was the first program of its kind to collaborate in such a powerful way to bring supportive housing to unhoused individuals in California. Its founding is a testament to Sonoma County's commitment to the most vulnerable. Catholic Charities stepped up to make this happen in 2016. Akash Kalia, owner of the property and property management lead, has been a steady partner to maintain a safe and healthy environment for residents.

Our focus is to provide hope, dignity, and love to those who are most in need, and often this means working with groups that are severely marginalized and neglected.

As part of a national organization that has been rooted in this country's history of advocating and serving those who are most vulnerable, Catholic Charities looks to step into the local roles that the community needs us to fill. By targeting those who are most vulnerable and have the highest needs, we do, at times, face challenges serving our community members. But just because the work is not always easy doesn't mean it is not also the most important and necessary thing to do.

Our team at Catholic Charities intentionally worked to find those who had been homeless for the longest periods of time, those who had the most health ailments, and those who were most likely to die on the streets of our community if they didn't receive immediate housing.

Catholic Charities and Veteran's Affairs (VA) case management housed 479 individuals since 2016.

Catholic Charities provides case management for about half of the individuals living at The Palms Inn, predominantly the civilians, with the VA being responsible for the case management of the residents who are veterans. We work closely with the VA to make sure that all tenants are supported and often share best practices on how to best support residents. Every resident is assigned a case manager, but case management is voluntary and as part of their tenant rights, they are not required to participate in case management to retain their housing. Of those housed, only 2.5% have ever been evicted. That is 12 out of 479 in seven years that have been evicted.

Catholic Charities is always willing to serve when others fear because our mission compels us to do so. Caring for those most in need is not optional; it is a mandate to make sure that every person has a safe place to be.

We at Catholic Charities will only offer services that provide real solutions grounded in evidence, particularly The Housing First. One of the most important components of Housing First is being a low-barrier harm-reduction model. For years, homeless service organizations would place prohibitive rules and requirements in place that would inadvertently keep people from entering services and leave them on the streets with no options. Sobriety, pets, and discriminatory background checks could all be used against participants, all of which risked stalling their path to housing stability. By contrast, Catholic Charities uses a behavioral model to guide our work, which we have seen deliver substantially more positive results.

We are serving the community's most vulnerable, specifically targeting those with the greatest health ailments. The healing will take not months, but many years due to compounding traumas, behavioral and physical health needs as well as healing from being unsheltered for so long, some as long as 20 years. Many need intensive mental health and substance abuse services, resources which are severely lacking in our community. We have publicly advocated for more on-site services and have recently been awarded funds to bring dedicated mental health workers to The Palms Inn.

One struggle lies with the physical constraints of The Palms Inn facility. In the history of homeless services, providers are asked to do what they can with buildings that were never designed for the challenging, high-use services we offer. Every unit is inspected by our local housing authorities and no resident is able to move in unless the unit meets all city or county housing standards. Each unit is also reinspected annually after a resident moves in to ensure compliance with all health and safety standards. Palms Inn Property Management is continually evaluating its building and making improvements in security and overall infrastructure needs.

Unfortunately, PSH has historically been underfunded, which guts the impact of these life-saving measures dramatically. We need to make sure that projects have the right amount of maintenance funds as well as fully funded supportive services. When participants are housed, mental health and treatment programs must be more accessible and fully funded. It is far more expensive to the community when we don't have these programs, and if we believe in the dignity of each human being they should be provided the services at the right level needed.

Due to the nature of the resident population, namely their health challenges as a result of chronic homelessness, deaths do occur occasionally.

In recent public discourse, there have been some incorrect numbers circulated that are not based on truth. While we mourn the loss of any life, and one life lost is too great, the number of deaths is very low in comparison with those whom we serve and is just a fraction of the lives that have been saved.

Additionally, we are one of the few sites that take individuals who are terminally ill. This is an important nuance to understand because it exposes a huge gap in the homeless system of care that we have tried to fill at The Palms Inn.

Individuals who are homeless are not able to receive hospice care when they are living unsheltered, so The Palms Inn made some great exceptions knowing that individuals we were bringing into living at the site had a terminal diagnosis and may soon pass away. We have partnerships with St. Joseph Mobile Health bringing on-site medical services every week. However, without this site, these individuals would not have received the hospice care that they deserved, and they would have died without the dignity of a roof over their heads.

The true mark of a healthy community is coming together to tackle the toughest issues and to make sure that we build bridges. You are on that journey with us, and we thank you.

We hope you will remain curious about how we can all work together to solve homelessness in our community because one thing every sector can agree on is that reducing homelessness helps everyone. And at the end of the day, we will not stop advocating for those who are suffering from homelessness and that means being laser-focused on long-term evidence-based solutions, and permanent supportive housing is the best option we have to move the needle on homelessness.

Homelessness will not be solved by maintaining the status quo. This will take the whole community to get it done. Most people have their own views on the reasons and solutions for homelessness, but we can all agree that less homelessness is the goal. We won't be silent when it comes to protecting those we care for.

Thank you for joining in the fight to reduce homelessness in Sonoma County.

With gratitude,



Jennielynn Holmes
Chief Executive Officer, Catholic Charities

