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Friendship Shelter Appoints Nishtha Mohendra as New CEO

Laguna Beach, CA, January 5, 2026 — Friendship Shelter, Inc., a leading nonprofit serving individuals experiencing homelessness in Orange County, has announced the appointment of **Nishtha Mohendra** as its new CEO, effective March 1. Mohendra succeeds **Dawn Price**, who will retire after more than 17 years in that role.

Mohendra brings more than 16 years of experience spanning public policy, community-based service and executive leadership across India, Canada, and the United States. Her career reflects a rare combination of global perspective with proven local credibility and a human-centered leadership approach to deliver lasting impact in housing stability, health equity, and dignity for individuals and families facing crisis.

In announcing the appointment, Michael Gamerl, Friendship Shelter’s board president and search committee chair, said, “Nishtha is a proven leader who understands both the complexity of homelessness systems and the urgency of delivering results. Throughout her career, Nishtha has led complex systems-change efforts, scaled high-impact housing and prevention programs, and secured transformative public and philanthropic investments—always centering dignity, data, and long-term community well-being. With Nishtha’s leadership, supported by our senior leadership team, we look forward to a new era of innovation and community impact.”

“Friendship Shelter is powered by its people and accountable to the community it serves.” Mohendra shared in a message to Friendship Shelter staff following her appointment. “I am honored to lead Friendship Shelter at a time when innovative, compassionate solutions are more important than ever.”

“Our mission is clear: to ensure that every individual experiencing homelessness in our community has access to safe, stable housing and the support they need to thrive,” Mohendra continued. “As CEO, I will focus on strengthening the organization’s sustainability, expanding prevention and housing pathways, and deepening community partnerships. Together with our dedicated team and valued partners, we will build on

Friendship Shelter's strong legacy while advancing impactful, data-driven solutions that create lasting change for Orange County community members in need."

Mohendra most recently served as chief program officer at Families Forward, where she oversaw a \$10 million program portfolio and \$29 million in housing assets. In that role, she scaled affordable housing, homelessness prevention, rapid rehousing, and housing stability programs across Orange County while securing multi-year public and philanthropic investments. She is widely recognized for aligning mission impact with operational discipline and long-term sustainability.

Earlier in her career, Mohendra worked with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, partnering with India's Ministry of Health to help shape a national HIV/AIDS prevention strategy and contribute to the country's first Anti-Trafficking Bill. She later advanced her work within domestic violence and homeless shelter programs in Toronto, developing strong operational and programmatic expertise. She has held senior leadership roles at Human Options and Pathways of Hope, becoming a trusted voice in Orange County's homelessness response system.

Mohendra is at the forefront of regional homelessness leadership, serving as vice chair of the Orange County Continuum of Care Board, chair of the Emergency Food and Shelter Program Board, and vice chair of People for Housing, strengthening systems and driving meaningful outcomes across the county.

Mohendra was recognized in 2022 by the Orange County Register as one of the 125 Most Influential People in Orange County and as a 40 Under 40 Honoree by the Irvine Chamber of Commerce. She is known for aligning mission, culture, and financial sustainability with clarity and purpose.

"I've known Nishtha for most of my time here at Friendship Shelter, and I've worked alongside her on several initiatives to advance and preserve best-practice approaches to homelessness in Orange County," current CEO Price said. "Through this work, I know that Nishtha is deeply committed to ending homelessness through housing, fully knowledgeable about our systems of care, and centered on effective, client-centered solutions. In other words, she shares Friendship Shelter's values."

About Friendship Shelter

Founded in 1988, Friendship Shelter provides a full spectrum of housing and support services for individuals experiencing homelessness in South Orange County—from street outreach to permanent supportive housing. Each year, the organization helps more than 100 individuals move into housing, with nearly 100% retaining stable housing year over year. With

over 10,000 lives touched in its 38-year history, Friendship Shelter remains a leading force in addressing homelessness in our community. Learn more at www.friendshipshelter.org

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