



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hospitality House Celebrates 15 Years of Service

Grass Valley, Calif. (June 24, 2020) – This June marks 15 years of life-changing service from Hospitality House, the community's only year-round emergency homeless shelter for the general homeless population. When it first became a recognized 501(c)(3), it offered weekly lunches with plans to introduce a nomadic shelter to the community by fall of that same year.

Fred Skeen, long-time volunteer and employee of Hospitality House, remembers he was at a Thursday Night Farmers Market that same summer when he first heard about the newly established nonprofit.

"I saw Utah Phillips sitting at a table on Main Street with a couple of coins and dollar bills in a fishbowl, and I asked, 'What's this about?'" recalled Skeen.

Phillips, one of several original founders of the nonprofit, shared how he and other volunteers were trying to help people struggling with homelessness in western Nevada County, and creating accessible shelter was a high priority. The volunteers were working to identify churches in the community that could open their doors on select evenings to give people a chance to eat and sleep safely each night.

This endeavor became a reality in November and for the next eight years, Hospitality House operated as a nomadic shelter. Individuals struggling with homelessness would meet at a Welcome Center, then travel by bus to a faith community's facility at night and return to the Welcome Center in the morning. In addition, faith communities and volunteers would provide meals and companionship for guests.

In 2013, Hospitality House opened its permanent shelter, Utah's Place, naming it after Phillips himself. The shelter has the capacity to help up to 69 individuals struggling with homelessness each evening, including children. Over the last seven years, its operations have continued to expand to best assist people struggling with homelessness back into permanent housing. Some of these services include customized case management, job training, mental health counseling, peer support, financial planning, recuperative care, transportation, pet care, referrals for treatment, and extensive outreach on the streets and into camps to help move people from the woods into shelter or housing. The nonprofit also actively cleans up the forest and organizes camp cleanups.

"When Hospitality House first opened its nomadic overnight program in 2005, it partnered with four local faith communities hosting seven guests," recalled Joanna Robinson, a founder of Hospitality House. "By now, literally thousands of guests later, the shelter has partnered with scores of local organizations to provide our homeless community members with spirit-renewing, life-transforming support. The story of Hospitality House contains many heroes, guests and volunteers alike, all clear in the understanding that we have a responsibility to care for one another, and that doing so is a privilege."

In 2018, Hospitality House deepened its community partnerships to expand services. Working in close collaboration with County of Nevada and Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital, the shelter underwent renovations to expand from originally 54 shelter beds to 69, helping an extra 15 people every night of the year, and introduced to the community a recuperative care dorm, designed to welcome homeless patients released from Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital to Hospitality House where they can rest and recuperate from their ailments and injuries, 24 hours a day, seven days a week at the shelter.

(Continue next page)

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"In addition to shelter, our partnership with the county and hospital offers guests recovering in recuperative care in-house physical therapy and wound care as needed, reducing the number of repeat hospital visits and increasing the rate of recovery and returns to permanent housing," explained Nancy Baglietto, Executive Director of Hospitality House. "The program has been so successful that we will be expanding from four medical respite beds to 10 later this year."

In 2019, 170 people were helped back into housing and today, Hospitality House continues its expansion efforts, introducing a pet program to the community on New Year's Day this year that gives homeless individuals who own animals an opportunity for shelter and care together. Since 2018, the shelter also welcomes people who may be struggling with addiction to help connect them to services and treatment. Additionally, Hospitality House has worked closely with the County of Nevada, as well as with Regional Housing Authority and City of Grass Valley, in a shared initiative to create 40-units of subsidized housing for the community, including 12 units designed exclusively for those chronically homeless and mentally ill with an additional unit designated for an onsite manager. The project is expected to break ground this July and is slated to open in late 2021. The project location also includes future plans for a day services center to give people a chance to take classes, meet with case managers, receive medical referrals, get therapy, look for jobs, fill out paperwork in addition to accessing bathrooms, showers and food.

Since the onset of the pandemic, there have been no lapses in services provided at Hospitality House. Rather than slow down, Hospitality House shifted into a 24/7 operation to help even more people in crisis and has extended into several motels in partnership with County of Nevada via Project Room Key. Hospitality House also works closely with the County's Behavioral Health HOME team to try to find motel placement for those at risk, in addition to mitigating for COVID-19 on the streets by passing out preventive supplies, hygiene kits and helping people reach medical, including COVID-19 testing.

This shift has not been without its challenges. Since day one, volunteers and community donors have always been the mainstay of Hospitality House, having sustained the organization for several years solely through volunteerism and private donations. They are the heart and soul of the nonprofit organization and the backbone that has allowed Hospitality House to be where it is today. However, because of the pandemic, 300+ volunteers who faithfully gave their time and love every month at the shelter to serve the homeless community, many for all fifteen years, can no longer help inside the shelter due to safety precautions to slow the spread of COVID-19. Their absence is felt every day, but volunteers and local donors continue to support Hospitality House during these trying times by giving food for meals, financial support, advocacy, and prayers for the safety of all guests.

Because of Hospitality House's volunteers, donors, and community partners, all individuals, families and small children continue to receive the upmost of care and services in an effort to keep them not only safe during the pandemic but to help them back into homes of their own.

Hospitality House staff would like to thank its founders for having a vision to do more for those in need and bringing that vision to fruition. A special thank you to Christine Gentilhomme, Joanna Robinson, Karen Terpening, Mark Schlak, Theresa Lyon, Sue Gill, Frank Desplancke, Reverend Donald Lee, Cindy Maple, Janice O'Brien, Jim Ward, Margaret Little, Mary O'Brien, Doug Lautzenhiser, Utah Phillips, and to all the wonderful volunteers, donors, business and nonprofit partners, and supporters in the community who have continued to support Hospitality House now and through the years.

Donations to further the work of Hospitality House are welcome and may be made online at hhshelter.org or by mailing a donation to 1262 Sutton Way, Grass Valley, CA 95945.

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About Hospitality House

The mission of Hospitality House is to bring homeless people in Nevada County into a circle of community caring that offers shelter, sustenance, advocacy, opportunity, dignity, and hope as they transition from homelessness to housing. For more information about Hospitality House, visit hhshelter.org.



Utah's Place has been remained open 24 hours a day, seven days a week throughout the pandemic.
Photo by Ashley Quadros of Hospitality House.