

GROWING NEED

# CTI to open women's shelter in Lowell

Construction started on 50-bed emergency shelter with 2026 opening



Community Teamwork will open a 50-bed shelter for homeless women on the corner of Church and Warren streets in 2026, the only shelter of its kind in Lowell. COURTESY CTI

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LOWELL >> According to a 2024 report published by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the total number of homeless women in Massachusetts between 2022 and 2023 increased by 24.2%.

Lowell is not immune to the state's homeless crisis, and Community Teamwork Inc., a locally-based nonprofit community action agency, is opening the first women's shelter in the city to address the increased need.

“With the growing number of homeless women in our community — especially seniors — the need for a safe, dedicated emergency shelter has become more urgent than ever,” CTI CEO Carl Howell said by email.

Studies have found that as many as 70% of homeless women are victims of domestic violence and 41% have experienced sexual assault. CTI said that there are far fewer shelters for women than for men in the commonwealth, and the majority of women’s shelters are located in Boston.

The nonprofit has been providing shelter and other services to families since 1983. It expanded into individual adult housing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Its Individual Homelessness department was founded to plug the significant gap in services for this population including housing case management, rapid rehousing, emergency shelter (including hotel beds) and permanent supportive housing.

In 2024, CTI purchased the building on the corner of Warren and Church streets. Construction and renovation has already started and is expected to take a year. The women’s shelter project reflects a deepening commitment to addressing the housing crisis in this particular population.

“The shelter we are creating will provide a safe haven for all women, but especially for those fleeing abusive relationships who have nowhere else to go,” CTI said in a statement this past week.

The new temporary housing for women will provide emergency shelter to more than 50 women over the age of 18 who are categorized as unhoused individuals, but who do not meet the criteria for family shelter or do not feel safe staying in co-ed accommodations like what is available at the Lowell Transitional Living Center on Middlesex Street.

The plans call for not only emergency housing, but case management and other wraparound services to help the women get permanent housing and a chance to get back on and stay on their feet.

“The road from homelessness to permanent housing can be long and could involve transitions that could allow individuals to fall through the cracks,” CTI said. “By centralizing services and providing a trauma-informed environment, CTI seeks to shorten periods of homelessness for women in the community and place more individuals into their own permanent housing.”

In March 2024, CTI demonstrated its new adult housing model with the ribbon cutting at 275-277 Summer St., in the Back Central neighborhood. After two years of planning and construction, some of the city’s most vulnerable residents moved into the building that has 19 permanent supportive housing units.

Part of CTI’s housing vision includes a 15-bed emergency shelter for youth in the city.

The Theodore Edson Parker Foundation granted \$250,000 over five years toward CTI's women's shelter, which Howell called "instrumental."

Beacon Hill's housing bond bill that passed last fall invests over \$1.1 billion in housing, dedicating resources for housing stability, residential assistance, emergency shelter services, and homelessness assistance programs. Housing investments included \$110 million for individual homeless shelters, separate from the family shelter program.

The women's emergency shelter will include a dining hall, quiet space and storage. A team of support staff will help clients navigate issues including housing, finance and budgeting, employment, education, food and nutrition, school, legal, health and parenting issues and daily living skills.

The shelter is located near necessary services — Lowell Community Health Center, Eliot Church Day Center and the Gallagher Transportation Terminal, and shopping at Central Plaza — making the site an ideal location to bring together a full complement of community services for this vulnerable population.

The entire budget for the project is estimated to be \$5.4 million including acquisition and professional services. CTI has in place a contract with the state Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities to provide ongoing funding for shelter operational expenses once it is open. CTI has raised close to half of the total budget for the shelter, and is actively seeking additional funding and donations.

"Housing is a right, not a privilege," Howell said.

CTI is accepting donations for the new women's shelter at [donate.onecause.com/womenshelter](https://donate.onecause.com/womenshelter).