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THE TEXAS CATHOLIC

Partnership offers hope, housing for those in need

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The Texas Catholic

As old as civilization and as widespread as the globe, the problem of homelessness is riddled with complex causes and often devastating consequences for the hundreds of thousands of people it touches in the United States alone. Recognizing the seriousness — and persistence — of this weighty issue, Catholic Housing Initiative and Catholic Charities Dallas have joined forces for the better part of a decade to address homelessness in north Texas through their St. Jude Centers.

The St. Jude Centers are properties that provide permanent supportive housing to formerly unhoused adults in Dallas County. CHI, a community-based nonprofit with a mission for affordable housing, owns and develops the properties; while CCD, a charitable multi-service agency serving nine counties, manages the centers and offers social services to residents — a match made in heaven, according to CCD President and Chief Executive Officer Dave Woodyard.

“It wouldn’t have worked without each other,” he said.

Together, CCD and CHI now provide nearly 700 permanent supportive housing units across five properties, including three St. Jude Centers, to support formerly unhoused residents. The centers have made such a marked impact that CCD and CHI received the Mutual of America Foundation’s Community Partnership Award earlier this year, which recognizes exemplary nonprofit partnerships — and, Woodyard said, the work continues.

A new collaboration

The St. Jude Centers got their start through the urging of a big name in local nonprofit work, Larry James. The former chief executive officer of CitySquare, James invited CCD’s Woodyard and CHI co-founder Joe Dingman to a meeting, where he asked them one simple question: What are you doing about homelessness in our community? The answer, Woodyard recalled, was a sheepish “nothing really.”

“We were doing a lot of other things, but we were not addressing homelessness directly,” he said. “That [question] was the match that lit the fuse.”

Woodyard and Dingman left the meeting with a shared commitment: to address homelessness in the local community — and to do that together.

In 2018, the first of the St. Jude Centers opened its doors. The St. Jude Center Forest Lane, a property repurposed from a failed retirement community, had been renovated to fit the needs of its new residents, formerly homeless seniors 55 years old and above. The 104 units of the center quickly filled.

“We realized it was a great thing for the community,” Woodyard said.

The second center, St. Jude Center Park Central, opened in 2020 as a COVID-19 relief center, a place for unhoused people experiencing the disease to isolate. As the pandemic passed, the space was converted into permanent supportive housing for single occupants 18 years old and above. The property, previously a hotel, was transformed to provide 202 housing units, as well as spaces for residents and case managers to meet.

“We were able to create some conference rooms and some co-work space for others to just be able to utilize the space in a very open way,” Woodyard added, “and then we converted the kitchen area of the hotel into a client choice pantry, which is now called Joe’s Pantry.”

The pantry, the CEO said, annually serves more than a million pounds of food, equivalent to a million meals, to members of the local community.

The third center, St. Jude Center Vantage Point, opened in 2024. The space has 136 permanent housing units for single adults 18 and older. Like the Forest Lane property, the Vantage Point building had been repurposed from a former hotel.

“Each of our St. Jude Centers was adaptively reused from another property,” explained Dingman, who is treasurer of CHI in addition to being its co-founder. “Those buildings have something in common, which is they all have rooms that are suitable for small apartments, and they all have plumbing in them.”

Adaptively reused spaces can reduce a project’s cost by half compared to new purpose buildings, Dingman shared, enabling more cost affordable permanent supportive housing.

CHI and CCD have also combined forces at The Cottages at Hickory Crossing, which has 52 units, and City Walk at Akard, which provides 200 units for low income and formerly homeless residents.

A family of neighbors

Because the causes of homelessness are multifaceted — ranging from rising costs to deteriorating relationships — the needs of those touched by this social ill go well beyond just a roof overhead. Recognizing this fact, CCD provides a range of resources to residents of the St. Jude Centers, including case management, access to medical care, transportation, and other services geared toward helping the center’s occupants “to thrive, to become able and capable, to really interface in a normal way in our community,” Woodyard said.

Among these resources are community-building opportunities. Because people who have experienced homelessness often have “torn and damaged and wounded and scarred” relationships with their own family and friends, Woodyard said, they need “a new family, a family of their neighbors.” To avoid the residents becoming mere passing figures in the hallway, the centers offer opportunities for camaraderie — from Thanksgiving dinners to birthday celebrations to bingo nights.

Woodyard recalled a particularly moving moment of connection that occurred at one of the centers during a “Park Central Has Talent” event. During the show, a resident began performing the song “Stand By Me,” but, overcome by emotion and a creeping stage fright, he began to struggle with the performance.

“Very quickly, one of the other residents got up and started singing it with him; and then, all the sudden, more got up,” Woodyard shared. “Then the whole room was singing ‘Stand By Me.’”

Some residents have also reconnected with their previously ruptured support systems through their newfound abode.

“People that have experienced homelessness... for the most part have zero ability to get mail, because they don’t have an address,” he explained. As they move into a St. Jude Center, they gain a postal address, and “a few times, that mailbox alone was the conduit that allowed their family to reconnect with them.”

St. Jude Center Oak Cliff

As CHI and CCD continue to work collaboratively across five properties, they also look to the future of their shared mission. The two nonprofits are currently in the process of bringing to fruition an additional St. Jude Center, located at 1950 Fort Worth Ave.

“Our fourth St. Jude Center is in the process right now of being developed,” said Shannon Ortleb, CHI’s chief operating officer. The new property, formerly the Hotel Miramar, is an approximately 20,000 square foot building, which is set to provide 71 permanent supportive housing units for formerly unhoused residents. “It’s going to be known as St. Jude Center Oak Cliff.”

Though currently empty — Ortleb described the site’s present state as “bricks and sticks” — renovations on the former hotel are expected to begin in early 2026, following a previous holdup on the project. The Oak Cliff renovations will be more extensive than any others that have been undertaken at the St. Jude Centers so far.

“This new project in Oak Cliff will require money to renovate it and to get it up and running,” Woodyard noted. “So, there are lots of opportunities to help and to get engaged.”

Cutline for featured image: St. Jude Center Park Central is one of the three St. Jude Centers currently housing previously homeless residents. Catholic Housing Initiative owns and develops the properties, while Catholic Charities Dallas manages the centers and offers social services to residents. (Catholic Charities Dallas photo)



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