



*A Caring Family for  
Philadelphia's Homeless*

## Proposal to the Zelinda LeBoutillier Charitable Foundation

### May 2021

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Bethesda Project operates 16 sites of shelter and housing in and around Center City Philadelphia, serving 1,400 homeless and formerly homeless adults annually. The organization offers entry-level programs (street outreach, church shelters, Safe Haven), emergency shelter, and permanent housing. These programs include case management services to help individuals overcome personal challenges, and Community Life activities that facilitate the creation of caring communities at each program site.

A grant from the Zelinda LeBoutillier Charitable Foundation will directly help Bethesda Project to continue being a caring family for Philadelphia's homeless by funding critical case management support services and Community Life Activities. These are vital components of our service-delivery model and truly make the difference in helping our shelter guests and housing residents achieve successes in building self-sufficiency and realizing self-worth. It is this personalized, trusting, and compassionate level of care that catalyzes change and promotes opportunity for those living in the margins of society. This proposal describes Bethesda Project's background, programs and impact.

#### **Organization History & Mission:**

Bethesda Project began in 1979 when Reverend Domenic Rossi and members of his prayer group reached out to a group of women experiencing homelessness in Center City Philadelphia. Three years later, Bethesda Project bought a house at 11th and Spruce Streets, which became a permanent home for formerly homeless women. Bethesda Project became a registered non-profit and began to expand its programming, including more housing sites in the city and expanding our services free of any religious affiliation. Because we have learned that each individual experiencing homelessness has a unique story and unique challenges, the organization's locations and services are tailored to meet different sets of needs. From emergency shelters to permanent supportive and independent housing residences (definitions provided below), Bethesda Project's locations create a "continuum of care."

Now, over 42 years since its beginning, Bethesda Project remains committed to its mission "To find and care for the abandoned poor and to be family with those who have none," serving 1,400 homeless and formerly homeless adults each year at 16 sites throughout Center City Philadelphia.

#### **Who Bethesda Project Serves:**

In the many years that Bethesda Project has been serving individuals experiencing homelessness, staff members have identified clear trends in the struggles that guests and residents have faced. While any combination of misfortunes such as job loss, family dissolution, or incarceration can cause homelessness, Bethesda Project staff has recognized that mental illness, substance abuse, and medical conditions have most frequently contributed to chronic homelessness among shelter guests and formerly homeless residents.

These conditions, in addition to a shortage of affordable housing in Philadelphia, can make finding and keeping housing vastly challenging for many people. According to the City of Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services' 2020 Point-in-Time Count, there are 958 unsheltered individuals in the city. About half of these individuals are chronically homeless. The 2020 Point-in-Time Count also showed that there are 4,676 individuals in emergency, transitional, and Safe Haven



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shelters. These numbers illustrate a clear and ongoing need for a continuum of care for homeless and formerly homeless individuals in Philadelphia.

Of the 1,400 unique individuals who would benefit from this grant: 65% have serious medical conditions including cancer, high blood pressure, HIV-AIDS, diabetes, and kidney and liver diseases, 60% have diagnoses of mental illness, 45% have histories of substance abuse, 40% receive social security disability benefits, 31% are age 60 or older, 30% are dually-diagnosed with mental health issues and a history of substance abuse. Our demographics can further be broken down as follows: 24% White, 65% Black, 8% Hispanic, >1% Asian, 11% women and 89% men.

### **Bethesda Project's Approach:**

Bethesda Project is committed to using evidence-based, recovery-oriented approaches in working with the most vulnerable, chronically homeless population in Philadelphia. The organization is committed to the six core values of social work – service, social justice, dignity and the worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. The program leadership provides trainings throughout the year for all staff to provide guidance and information on evidence-based approaches to social services.

Bethesda Project subscribes to a Housing First model and uses a client-centered approach that includes trauma-informed practices. In all of Bethesda Project's residences, case managers work to build relationships with residents. Case managers work on a specialized care plan for each resident, and they focus on using a harm reduction model to help residents meet their goals.

Data from the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness states that a "Housing First" approach improves housing outcomes by removing as many obstacles and unnecessary requirements as possible that stand in the way of people's access to permanent housing. In all of Bethesda Project's residences, case managers work to build healthy relationships with residents. Case managers work on a specialized care plan for each resident and focus on using a harm reduction model to help residents meet their goals. Over 350 hours are spent annually connecting individuals to services such as employment and income/financial stability in Entry-Level Programs and 96% of residents remain in Permanent Housing for a year or longer.

Bethesda Project's guests and residents receive personalized, caring attention, and are encouraged to achieve the most independent level of housing possible. Staff work with guests and residents to set achievable, realistic goals appropriate to each individual, utilizing a three-pronged approach.

**Shelter and Housing:** To stabilize single adults who are homeless and help them find and remain in affordable housing that meets their personal needs within the most independent setting possible.

**Case Management and Supportive Services:** To provide case management and follow-up support to help people progress in their efforts to secure a reliable income, manage mental illness and medical conditions, and remain drug and alcohol free.

**Community Life Activities:** Bethesda Project's mission embodies a belief in the power of positive relationships among shelter guests, residents, staff, and volunteers to help people heal from the alienation of homelessness



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and become valued members of a caring community. Volunteers cook and serve meals, assist with facilities improvements, take residents to appointments and celebrate milestones together as one compassionate family.

Bethesda Project maintains strong connections to other organizations and participates in formal and informal collaborations. The organization operates Connelly House in partnership with Project HOME, and partners with five churches to provide emergency shelter (St. Mary's, Old First Reformed, Trinity Memorial, Church of the Holy Trinity Rittenhouse Square, and Christ's Presbyterian). Bethesda Project is a founding member of the Philadelphia Partnership to End Chronic Street Homelessness (with Project HOME, Horizon House, and Pathways to Housing PA). This partnership coordinates and shares knowledge, resources, and services to help chronically street homeless individuals in Philadelphia find and maintain permanent housing. Bethesda Project's Case Managers also refer residents and guests to an array of agencies and providers around the city who can best address their social service needs.

Bethesda Project's goals and objectives are best summarized by its mission statement, "to find and care for the abandoned poor and to be family with those who have none." Every decision Bethesda Project makes is an effort to enact the organization's mission, and our dedication to that mission is expressed by staff at every level. From outreach staff engaging chronically homeless individuals on the streets in the winter, to housing residents in apartments directly over Bethesda Project's administrative office, the organization strives to take every opportunity to reach out to those in need.

### **Bethesda Project's Programming:**

Bethesda Project operates 16 locations in Center City Philadelphia. Each site is designed for adults with specific sets of needs, and each Case Manager personalizes his or her work to best meet individual challenges. Guests and residents may stay at a Bethesda Project site for a few nights or for years, depending on their needs. The following is a description of each of the organization's locations.

#### **ENTRY-LEVEL PROGRAMS**

*Goal: Engagement with vulnerable individuals who are street homeless to build trusting relationships and meet their most basic needs utilizing a Harm Reduction approach*

#### **Safe Haven**

Vulnerable men are offered an array of supportive services to stabilize their medical and mental health conditions to help prepare them for more independent living. A Housing First philosophy helps negate relapse and/or avoidance of recovery by providing an individual a stable living environment and meeting basic needs.

#### **Location:**

#### **My Brother's House, 609 S. 15th Street**

Safe Haven for 20 vulnerable men with chronic mental illness and substance abuse problems.

#### **COVID Prevention Space Program**

#### **Location: 1917 W. Oxford Street**



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Operated with the City of Philadelphia, the COVID Prevention Space Program provides short-term housing for 44 vulnerable individuals who are experiencing homelessness to protect them from potentially contracting the virus in congregate sites.

#### **Church-Based Shelters**

Overnight shelter for 116 homeless adults each night.

##### **Locations(s):**

**Church of the Holy Trinity Rittenhouse Square** (*winter shelter for 20 men*)  
1904 Walnut Street

**St. Mary's Episcopal Church** (*year-round shelter for 32 men*)  
1831 Bainbridge Street

**Old First Reformed Church** (*winter shelter for 30 men*)  
4th and Race Streets

**Trinity Memorial Church** (*winter shelter for 22 men*)  
22nd and Spruce Streets

**The Well** (*year-round respite for 12 women*)  
Operated in partnership with The Welcome Church and Trinity Memorial Church

#### **EMERGENCY SHELTER**

*Goal: Connecting guests who are episodically homeless to resources, moving them to stable housing, and ending housing crises quickly at our 149-bed shelter*

##### **Location:**

**Our Brothers' Place**, 907 Hamilton Street

Overnight shelter for 149 men each night as well as meals and a day program for up to an additional 75 men who walk in every day seeking help. Our Brothers' Place also supports Bethesda Project's church shelter program with meals, clothing, showers, case management and other resources. This shelter is operated in partnership with the City of Philadelphia.

#### **PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING**

*Goal: Maintaining long-term residential housing stability through case management and supportive services.*

##### **Location(s):**

**Bethesda Bainbridge**, 700 S. 15th Street (30 adults)



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**Bethesda North Broad**, 722 N. Broad Street (49 adults)

**Bethesda Spruce Street**, 1110 Spruce Street (16 adults)

**Connelly House**, 1212 Ludlow Street (24 adults)

**Bethesda Sanctuary**, 816 S. 20th Street (16 adults)

**Bethesda Serenity**, 1829 Wolf Street

Row home for four formerly chronically homeless adults. This house is operated in partnership with the City of Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services.

**Domenic House**, 1628-1630 South Street

A six-unit apartment building for seven formerly homeless adults.

**Mary House**, 707 S. Hicks Street

Subsidized living arrangements for four adults.

#### **Impact/Evaluation:**

Bethesda Project measures the overall success of our social service delivery based on the individualized care plans developed with case managers. Because each person who experiences homelessness faces unique challenges, each individual measures success differently. Success can mean finding work through a job program and moving from shelter into permanent housing. It can mean learning to keep doctors' appointments independently, staying sober or learning to manage mental illness. With this personalized definition of success, Bethesda Project compassionately and strategically engages residents to help them meet their highest personal potentials. Case managers work with residents to identify and achieve goals in three areas: residential stability, increased skills and income, and greater self-determination. Case Managers are responsible for entering activity notes and care plan updates in a centralized data system; Program Coordinators are responsible for monitoring progress, reviewing database activity, and reporting monthly to respective Directors; and Directors are responsible for reporting and sharing data with our Board of Directors on a monthly basis.

Because of the importance of "family" to Bethesda Project's mission, our success is also measured qualitatively by the creation of our housing communities. The organization's Community Life department works with staff at each site to create events and bring volunteers to the sites. Staff also mediates interpersonal dynamics and work with residents and shelter guests to maintain clean facilities and instill a sense of personal pride in the physical environment of their homes. The Community Life department has developed a Family Spirit Survey designed to gauge satisfaction among residents and our application of the mission. The most recent survey completed in 2020 indicated that 85% of guests and residents feel that Bethesda's way of doing things is positively and noticeably different from other housing experiences.

Success can also be seen anecdotally with the increase in quality of life our residents achieve by becoming more self-sufficient and independent.



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The following indicators are evidence of our best practices yielding positive outcomes for those experiencing homelessness across our programs:

- Guests in our Entry-Level Programs have an average length of stay of 140 days.
- In our Emergency Shelter, 930+ unique individuals are served annually.
- Our Permanent Housing Programs maintain a 94% occupancy rate with 95% housing stability rate

#### **Updates:**

##### Impact of COVID-19:

Bethesda Project has continued to provide services at our sites and programs throughout the pandemic, and we have not been forced to cut programming or reduce our workforce. Despite these successes, we have had to modify the way that we operate, which has impacted the experience of our guests and residents. We quickly developed protocols and procedures for safety, found supply chains for Personal Protective Equipment, instituted new cleaning regimens, and required all staff, guests and residents to wear masks and practice social distancing. We additionally installed plexiglass protective barriers to enhance safety at all sites and invested in air purifiers. Restrictions were put in place that stopped the hosting of volunteers or visitors, we prohibited in-person meetings, we ceased hosting walk-in guests at our largest shelter, and we stopped transporting guests and residents in our passenger van. The restrictions on volunteers and in-person activities have been extremely challenging for our guests and residents, as a core component of our mission is human connection and fostering of healthy relationships to promote healing. We are currently analyzing the prospect of safely introducing volunteers back in a limited capacity, with the same safety expectations in place that we have for our staff, guests, and residents.

While this period has been challenging and demanding, it's also been a time of innovation. Without the luxury of time, we moved quickly to try new ways of doing things – establishing new safety measures at all sites, determining how to focus on essential tasks, learning how to use Microsoft Teams and Zoom to communicate virtually, offering additional pay to staff who filled in last-minute shifts, using a staffing agency to supplement open positions, interviewing job candidates virtually, installing handwashing stations and a port-a-potty at our largest emergency shelter to provide supports for those we can't serve, moving our fundraising efforts to a virtual platform, and pulling together resources for our leadership staff to utilize a Remote Work from Home option to limit time on site. These innovations and new safety protocols, as well as supplemental "hazard" pay for staff with increased risk, led to increased expenses. Another significant side-effect is the impact on the morale of our staff, who have continued to come to work despite their personal fears and concern of potential infection. At the senior leadership level, we have spent considerable time and resources identifying ways to support and motivate staff across all sites. This included a new Employee Appreciation Week, with food deliveries, external signage to highlight our "Frontline Family," branded t-shirts, and swag bags. We've also hosted external trainings with a Wellness Expert to facilitate conversation with peers and explore support systems available for staff who are struggling professionally and in their personal lives.

Over a year later, these same challenges exist. While we have adapted in ways that have allowed us to continue operations, the uncertainty still looms. We've shifted our focus in the past two months to educating our community about vaccination options, and helping to secure appointments for those who decide that they want



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to get vaccinated. And despite all of the challenges, we were able to open two new programs in December and January, at the request of the City of Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services. One is a fifth location for our seasonal church-based shelter program, in partnership with the Church of the Holy Trinity Rittenhouse Square. The second is a COVID Prevention Space for vulnerable individuals over 65 years of age in shelter settings who are susceptible to contracting the virus. We are proud to be recognized by City leadership as a leader, and actively worked to provide these new services on short notice to the population we are committed to serving.

**Resource Expansion:**

- Improved facilities in our permanent housing by replacing a roof and adding energy efficiency upgrades (with PECO's support) at Bethesda North Broad. Bethesda Spruce received a new basement staircase and Bethesda Sanctuary received new doors and flooring.
- Conducted a virtual legal clinic for shelter guests' legal needs.
- Instituted an organizational-wide "Green Light Award" program that measures our sites' efforts in such as recycling efforts, water and energy conservation, and reducing both our overall waste and carbon footprint.

**Operational Changes:**

- Expanded operations at Bethesda Project's Our Brothers' Place to include an additional PHMC nurse on site to assist with guest referrals for medical needs.
- Re-opened the Liberti Church outreach program for entry-level programs.
- Reduced number of shelter beds available online during a four-month period to allow for proper distancing for overnight shelter guests.

**Community Partnership:**

- Bethesda Project became a part of the PEW Charitable Trusts' Evaluation Capacity Building Initiative, a nonprofit training program that will build our skills in evaluation, monitoring, and program improvement over an 18-month period.
- Partnered with Broad Street Ministry to install two handwashing stations in front of Bethesda Project's Our Brothers' Place emergency shelter.
- Partnered with AmeriHealth Caritas and Keystone First to hold a Poverty Simulation as part of National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week.

**Conclusion:**

Bethesda Project approaches its mission with passion, competence, and genuine care and concern. A key strength of this approach lies in the breadth and depth of the services that the organization offers. Bethesda Project understands that recovery from homelessness operates on a spectrum and that diverse services must be provided to meet men and women "where they are." The organization helps adults achieve more than 350 positive housing moves each year. Bethesda Project's success is driven by the staff's ability to be tenacious in building positive relationships with those most reluctant to enter shelter. It is through this level of trust that Bethesda Project catalyzes change.

Over its 42-year history, Bethesda Project has learned that being family with the abandoned poor requires perseverance and significant material, human, and financial resources. Each gift made to the organization improves the lives of



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individuals living in poverty, surrounding them with a caring community and empowering them, with a dignified support system, to realize their goals.

As government funding to Bethesda Project remains stagnant, the organization's reliance on charitable contributions grows, all while the demand for and cost of services continues to increase. A \$2,000 general operating grant from the Zelinda LeBoutillier Charitable Foundation will help Bethesda Project continue to find and care for the abandoned poor and to be family with those who have none.