

# Project Bridge Permanent Housing

## A Program of Community Advocates

Founded in 2007, Project Bridge was designed to be an innovative, scattered-site permanent housing program. It provided immediate, safe and affordable housing to 60 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. Project Bridge is now a premier *housing first* program and specializes in cutting-edge comprehensive supportive services designed to assist each program participant in their own, individual recovery plan. Program staff have been trained to use community-based, person-centered approaches within the services provided. They also emphasize assertive and long-term engagement while assisting participants in acquiring mainstream resources, disability/SSI benefits, and payee and healthcare services.

In 2010, Community Advocates added 20 more apartment units (for a current total of 80) along with a housing specialist and additional case management staff. Optional for program participants, Peer Specialist services began being offered in 2011.

Project Bridge is referral-based and accepts applications from active third-party professionals. Furthermore, the program collaborates with Community Advocates' Homeless Outreach Nursing Center to help reach individuals not accessible through traditional avenues. Minimum qualifications require the participant to have a verifiable disability and a history of chronic homelessness, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. For more information on the referral process, please contact Rosanne Norwood at (414) 270-6931.

### Housing First

The Project Bridge program employs a *housing first* model, an evidenced-based practice, which views housing as the first need to be addressed in successfully transitioning people from homelessness to independent living. In this model, it is believed that housing, in its own right, is therapeutic and encourages healthier behaviors. It recognizes that "the streets" are not a safe and supportive environment for people to pursue recovery. Specifically, when housing is immediately paired with case management services, an individual's success rate at recovery greatly improves.

The therapeutic relationship established between a program participant and their case manager is an important component to the recovery process. The stressors that can accompany the transition from shelter and street life to independent housing are oftentimes overwhelming and hard for an individual to handle on their own. Any problems that arise can be directed to the case manager and the assisting agency to work together to overcome the hurdles that accompany this transition. It is expected that these services, along with housing, will be needed for an undefined amount of time and thus the individual is allowed to participate at a pace that is right for them.

There are often ups-and-downs throughout the recovery process and self-sufficiency can take years to establish. *Housing first* recognizes these realities and addresses them proactively. The *housing first* model has become an important tool in ending homelessness.

### Harm Reduction

Project Bridge utilizes a harm reduction strategy that is inherent to the *housing first* model. It is designed to reduce the level of self-harm and negative behaviors in an individual's life. A participant's ongoing involvement in the program is, therefore, not contingent upon compliance or follow-through with provided services, but rather it models a traditional tenant-landlord leasing agreement.

Participants are held accountable for complying with the landlord's lease agreement and paying 30% of their income for rent. They are always provided with as much necessary support as possible to help them transition successfully. Program staff recognizes the need for additional supports in an individual's life and meet regularly with program participants to discuss, develop and implement care plans to address desired changes in their lives.

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