Costa Mesa’s Shelter Model Successfully Houses the Homeless

As the Costa Mesa Bridge Shelter nears six months of operation, its unique model has successfully transitioned 18 clients from homelessness into permanent housing.

And that’s not all. Six additional clients will be opening the door to a new home and a new future by late October.

“Costa Mesa is leading the way with a successful shelter model that helps those experiencing homelessness find housing,” Mayor Katrina Foley said. “Earlier this year, the City Council took a courageous step to create a Bridge Shelter. It was the humane and right thing to do and the result has been a significant improvement to our community and neighborhoods.”

Since its opening on April 5, the Costa Mesa Bridge Shelter has been providing shelter and case management services for up to 50 individuals daily.

Clients at the Bridge Shelter have ranged from college students to senior citizens and are from all walks of life including those who have lost everything, have a mental health diagnosis, suffer from addiction or need temporary shelter to get back on their feet.

One of the clients who was successfully housed is Gerald, a 59-year-old Orange County native who has spent most of his life in mental hospitals or living on the streets. Unable to get consistent treatment or access to medication, Gerald unfortunately became a casualty of the system.

After entering the Bridge Shelter, case managers helped stabilize his condition until the proper mental health

placement was found. He is now in permanent supportive housing where he is finally receiving proper medical and mental health services.

Gerald was a beneficiary of Costa Mesa's "Housing First" philosophy, which establishes a Housing Plan aimed towards securing permanent housing to end homelessness for all clients.

To carry out the "Housing First" philosophy, the City adopted an operating model where expert shelter operator Mercy House works alongside the City's client case management staff for optimal results.

"This unique model, which separates day-to-day shelter operations from client case management, has undoubtedly been the catalyst to our success," City Manager Lori Ann Farrell Harrison said. "The numbers speak for themselves. Many cities throughout the county, and even the state, are looking to Costa Mesa for advice on how to address the root causes of homelessness while enforcing their anti-camping ordinances."

A key part of the hybrid model is the expectation that each client at the Bridge Shelter is required to meet with their case manager no less than once per week. If they are not following through on the steps of their Housing Plan they run the risk of being exited from the shelter. Fortunately, many clients are exceeding those expectations and meet with their case manager 2-5 times per week, resulting in better outcomes.

Since April, more than 130 individuals, including 11 veterans, have received services from the Bridge Shelter. City case managers have assisted those clients with nearly 1,500 linkages to healthcare, County resources, social services, job connections, legal services, mental health resources, transportation and other services.

By embarking on this plan, the Costa Mesa Police Department was permitted to reintroduce enforcement of the City's anti-

camping ordinances on public property. The City was also able to settle with the plaintiffs in the OC Catholic Worker lawsuit that was filed when the County of Orange cleared the Santa Ana River homeless encampments.

“I am proud of the City Council and City staff for all the work they have done to create this successful Bridge Shelter,” Farrell Harrison said. “Our City Council’s unanimous call to action to address homelessness in the City is money well spent. We still have more work to do, but we are definitely on the right track. I look forward to the opening of our permanent facility next spring and helping more clients end the cycle of homelessness.”