

## Housing Needs for Men

The Bridge House is applying for funding for a six unit apartment house located in Plymouth that will serve the Permanent Housing needs of men who have demonstrated a commitment to substance free living by having completed, at a minimum, a thirty day drug and alcohol rehabilitation program. Currently the BH meets the shelter needs of graduates of 30 day recovery programs such as the Daniel Webster Farm and Friendship House. However, in our inclusive shelter, we also address the concerns of women and children. *We find women, especially young women, are often needy and aggressively pursue men for affection and affirmation.* This said we believe there would be added benefit and long range success if we provided a separate men's program on an independent site.

Borrowing what we feel are best practices from our own experience, The Way Home, Housing First and Oxford House models, this six unit apartment house will provide small yet dignified individual accommodations. A recent study on homelessness confirms greater compliance with case management in this type of individualized structured setting as opposed to shelters where people are housed in a communal environment with shared bedrooms. The Bridge House experience is that people arrive at a shelter in chaos...social and financial. Then we, in the open shelter environment, expect these folks to figure out how to live in the communal setting... something others not dealing with homelessness would find challenging if not downright impossible.

Having said this we also recognize the need for socializing and this house would have a community room. This room would serve as a setting for, among other things, weekly case management, AA/NA meetings, group counseling sessions, educational lectures, chemical health assessments, peer support group meetings and animal therapy.

The BH recently completed animal safety training at the Meredith Humane Society and is looking forward to fostering abandoned pregnant animals in the near future. This weekend White Mountain Foster & Rescue will deliver a terrier mix and her four, 8-day old puppies for fostering. The dogs will be living on the men's side of the shelter providing the men with much needed touch and affection. Additionally, animal care chores provide a physical diversion to smoking, a growing health risk to this population, which, with greater frequency, is the activity of choice when jobs are scarce and boredom overwhelms.

Men, who are candidates for the new program, should have an income source such as a job, SSDI or SSI. If funding is adequate there may be room to accommodate someone working on a GED. They will all contribute equally to the support of the house. They will also design and execute a substance free tenant agreement. The BH recognizes the arch enemy of sobriety is boredom. In the absence of a job...a challenge in the current economy, volunteering will be mandatory.

The sites we are looking at have land for gardens and rooms for skill building such as carpentry and furniture refinishing. PSU provides a walkable opportunity for expanding into writing, art and pottery workshops. This new setting will also provide an opportunity for leadership development and self governance. The Bridge House is convinced it could do a far better job at supporting men in attaining healthy Independence in this proposed setting. With your support we look forward to creating a successful model which will open this summer.

Respectfully, Cathy Bentwood RN

Cathy Bentwood RN

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