

Louisiana Safe Havens

Louisiana Housing Corporation

Special Needs Housing: Combating Homelessness

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Louisiana Safe Havens Program

On the heels of the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Louisiana Housing Corporation (LHC) partnered with nonprofits in Louisiana to combat chronic homelessness in Shreveport and Lafayette by creating Safe Havens – additional shelter spaces with diminished barriers to access. These Safe Havens marry low barriers to shelter access with on-site services to support persons experiencing chronic homelessness, with Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds.

Tearing Down Barriers: An Innovative Model

Louisiana's Safe Havens are an example of a program that recognizes the importance of providing affordable housing and services for individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Louisiana through local collaborative partnerships.

Safe Havens are set apart by their adoption of a low-barrier shelter model that ensures that individuals facing homelessness can seek refuge without hindrance, facilitating their journey toward stability and self-sufficiency. LHC does not require sobriety checks, identification, criminal background checks, or income verification for guests to stay at the shelter, nor are they required to pay for any services offered on site. Additionally, Safe Havens welcome persons suffering from severe mental illness, addiction, chronic health conditions, and disabilities.

Beyond eliminating barriers that prevent the most vulnerable of Louisiana's homeless population from finding safe, adequate shelter, LHC offers a range of services to aid Safe Haven guests on their journey to securing permanent housing. Notably, the shelter engages in case management with its guests, connecting them with community resources best suited to their unique needs and situation that they can continue to utilize beyond their stay at the shelter.

Serving the Vulnerable: Filling a Gap in Louisiana's Housing Needs

The Lafayette and Shreveport areas both face their own unique challenges with homelessness rates. Shreveport's poverty rate ranks not only higher than the state average (25 percent higher)¹, but also alarmingly above the national average (91.4 percent higher)², with 23.4 percent of its total residents living in poverty.³ Lafayette sees approximately 19.2 percent of its population living in poverty⁴, with the Acadiana region having approximately 360 people unsheltered each night⁵.

¹ <https://www.welfareinfo.org/poverty-rate/louisiana/shreveport/>

² <https://www.welfareinfo.org/poverty-rate/louisiana/shreveport/>

³ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/shreveportcitylouisiana/PST045222>

⁴ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lafayettacitylouisiana/PST045222>

⁵ <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-report/louisiana/>

Louisiana’s Safe Haven Program serves to address critical poverty issues by providing affordable housing to persons experiencing homelessness while also creating a path toward stability and secure housing through its case management services. With a focus on serving the chronically homeless population, the program fills a gap in the existing scope of homeless care, ensuring that vulnerable individuals unable to meet requirements needed to have access to safe and stable housing options, such as proper identification or a proven source of income, can find adequate shelter.

Combating Homelessness Across Louisiana: Successful Replication

In 2023, LHC and Hope Connections launched Solid Ground Safe Haven in Shreveport with 37 beds for guests through \$1.75 million in CDBG-DR funding. Through a partnership between LHC and Catholic Charities of Acadiana, construction of a Safe Haven in Lafayette is currently underway with the help of \$1.8 million in CDBG-DR funding. The shelter is anticipated to open in May 2024, providing 60 beds to persons facing chronic homelessness.

The adoption of this low-barrier model across two distinctly different regions of Louisiana displays the most telling example of its replicability. Entities can recreate the Safe Haven model through procurement of grant funding and the establishment of partnerships with relevant local organizations that have extensive experience with the unique needs of a region’s homeless population. Additionally, the number of beds can be scaled up or scaled down, based on the population of the region in which the shelter is established.

Creating Short- and Long-Term Stability: Measurable Benefits to Customers

Cities across Louisiana have historically experienced poverty and homelessness at a staggering rate, positioning them as some of the most vulnerable in the United States based on defining factors including poverty and unemployment rates, levels of food insecurity, and inadequacy of homes⁶. However, despite the prominence of chronic homelessness across these cities, housing and shelters are often at maximum capacity or have entry requirements that some persons are unable to meet, leaving them without adequate opportunities for shelter.

Since its creation, Shreveport’s Solid Ground Safe Haven has regularly experienced maximum capacity. In 2023, the shelter had 22 beds, all of which remained utilized throughout the year, thus linking guests to community organizations and resources to help them find stability and a path forward in the fight to end chronic homelessness in Shreveport. By prioritizing the needs of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, the program empowers them to rebuild their lives and thrive within their communities, leading to improved outcomes and increased self-sufficiency.

“Unrestricted shelter where [people]...can get support”: Proven Program Success

The Safe Haven Program has established a proven track record of success in the marketplace, garnering support from stakeholders and local officials alike. Shreveport Community Development Director Bonnie Moore called the space an “unrestricted shelter where [people] can come in and they can get support, a decent safe place to stay while engaging them into a meaningful life conversation.”

⁶ <https://wallethub.com/edu/cities-with-the-highest-and-lowest-population-in-need/8795>

Additionally, the replication and upscaling of the Safe Havens model in Lafayette, also supported by CDBG funds, displays a positive response from state and community leaders to LHC's low barrier shelter model and a trust that the model can continue to grow and be successful for years to come, contributing to lowering Louisiana's statewide homelessness rate.

Reducing Long-Term Community Burdens: Benefits that Outweigh Costs

The costs associated with the development of Safe Havens mark a long-term investment in facilities and resources that support public health and well-being, ensuring benefits extend to both those directly impacted by the shelters and their respective communities.

The average cost of supporting a person suffering from homelessness can add up to roughly \$50,000 upon taxpayers. Providing safe housing to homeless persons impacted by disabilities, addiction, and illness helps to keep them out of prisons and hospitals, reducing the burden on emergency services and healthcare systems and ultimately generating cost savings for taxpayers while improving the overall well-being of the community.

Fighting Homelessness Together: The Power of Resources and Partnerships

The success of the Safe Haven program is rooted in the financial support of grant funding, the experience of organizations leading the fight against chronic homelessness through similar programs, and the expertise and benefits of collaborative partnerships.

By partnering with HOPE Connections and Catholic Charities of Acadiana in establishing these Safe Havens, LHC was able to leverage the nonprofits' extensive experience in providing homelessness solutions to persons facing displacement as a result of challenging life circumstances, severe mental illness, physical disabilities, active addiction, and other issues. This experience extends to a decade of research on homeless shelters across the country with low barriers to entry, drawing inspiration from tactics that led to their success.

In addition to over \$3.5 million in CDBG-DR funding distributed by Louisiana's Office of Community Development so far to establish Safe Havens, LHC and HOPE Connections also secured a \$250,000 investment from the City of Shreveport, laying the groundwork for partnerships that could inspire further investments into the growth of Solid Ground Safe Haven and other Safe Havens established in Louisiana to expand their impact.

A Path Toward Statewide Homelessness Reduction: Meeting Strategic Objectives

In developing Louisiana's Safe Havens, LHC's goal was to not only offer temporary housing solutions to persons suffering from illnesses and conditions that have contributed to homelessness, but to offer them aid and resources that lay a path toward long-term security, health, and safety. Through LHC's efforts in partnership with HOPE Connections and Catholic Charities of Acadiana, LHC is committed to making significant strides toward ending chronic homelessness in Louisiana as the low-barrier model is repeated.

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Visual Aids

Shreveport Solid Ground Safe Haven

Interior/Exterior



Construction

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Ribbon-Cutting



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Lafayette St. Joseph Shelter



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News Coverage

Louisiana Housing Corporation: Office of Public Affairs

["Ribbon Cutting for Solid Ground Safe Haven With LHC and Local Nonprofit"](#)

Shreveport, LA — The Louisiana Housing Corporation (LHC) and Hope Connections, alongside local and state partners celebrated the opening of Solid Ground Safe Haven, a service facility for the local homeless population.

Solid Ground Safe Haven is a low barrier shelter with supportive services that include serving populations experiencing homelessness and persons defined as "chronically homeless." The facility has a total of 37 beds for those seeking shelter.

In November 2019, LHC issued a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) called Safe Haven/Low Barrier Shelter for nonprofits and organizations to obtain funding to produce developments and facilities that would provide supportive services and help homeless people. The intent for this funding was to address the need for shelter due to an increased number of people experiencing homelessness. LHC awarded \$1.75 million through CDBG-DR funding to Hope Connections for the Solid Ground Safe Haven.

"Solid Ground Safe Haven will provide shelter with minimal barriers to access, it will also provide intensive on-site services to people experiencing chronic homelessness," said LHC Interim-Executive Director Marjorianna Willman. "This project was originally awarded back in 2020, but due to COVID-19 and natural disasters it halted the development's progress. Today, that is no longer the case, we have a brand-new facility ready to assist one of our most vulnerable populations."

For more information, contact HOPE Connections

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KSLA News 12

["Hope Connections holds ribbon cutting ceremony for new safe haven"](#)

SHREVEPORT, La. (KSLA) - On Nov. 16, Hope Connections in Shreveport launched their new Solid Ground Safe Haven.

"We've built a safe haven that is specifically for people with severe mental illness, active addiction, chronic health conditions, other disabilities. They don't need an ID," said Christa Pazzaglia, executive director of Hope Connections.

This new safe haven will hold 37 people. Some beds are reserved for police drop offs and emergencies.

Tate Kendall, the safe haven manager, has worked with the organization for years.

"I started the very first day the temporary shelter opened, and I remember hearing everybody talk about one day there will be a new shelter built back here. And so, just being able to see it is awesome," Kendall said.

Also, people can bring their pets when seeking shelter at the safe haven.

KTAL News 6

[“HOPE Connections breaks ground on Safe Haven”](#)

SHREVEPORT, La. (KTAL/KMSS) – State and local leaders joined HOPE Connections on Friday morning to break ground on a new 6,000 square foot Safe Haven.

The low-restriction shelter is an addition to the current facility located at 2350 Levy Street in Shreveport. It will have 37 beds to house the area’s most vulnerable homeless population.

“The difference between what we’re creating and other shelters is that we allow people who have active addiction, untreated mental illness, They don’t need ID. They don’t need to have income. There’s no charge for services,” said HOPE Connections Executive Director Christa Pazzaglia.

Bonnie Moore, the City of Shreveport’s Community Development Director, was instrumental in the project. She says homelessness is a huge problem in Northwest Louisiana.

“There are many homeless living on the streets. You can see them downtown. You can see them under bridges,” said Moore. “This will be an unrestricted shelter where they can come in and they can get support, a decent safe place to stay while engaging them into a meaningful life conversation.”

Moore says once people are off the street and in a safe space, they are open to receiving other services to get their lives back on track.

Mayor Adrian Perkins said the City of Shreveport invested \$250,000 for the project, which he believes will benefit other agencies in the area.

“It alleviates pressure on prisons, hospitals, a lot of places people will end up because they don’t have housing,” Perkins shared.

“We’re trying to end homelessness and the way to do that is to get the people who have the most problems, who have been outside the longest, in housing first; and then work backwards until you get to the people who have been homeless the least amount of time, because they’re much easier to help,” Pazzaglia explained.

Research for the project began ten years ago. Pazzaglia and Moore said they found cities with low-restriction shelters had a great success rate with reducing the number of people who experienced homelessness.

“This is an innovative opportunity for our community to changes lives,” said Moore.

Construction begins in the spring. With the expansion, Hope Connections expects to help move more than 350 people a year into housing.