

Tucker's House “...A Safe Place to Rest My Head...”

MaineHousing

Special Needs Housing: Housing for Persons with Special Needs

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Tucker's House "... a safe place to rest my head ..."

In Bridgton Maine, an innovative approach to helping women in recovery heal and build their lives back up is among the kinds of supportive housing that MaineHousing financed in 2022.

Ten beds in all, the old brick farmhouse, renovated for the needs of a group of women healing, provides a safe, and healthy environment. The project was funded under MaineHousing Recovery Housing Program.

"This house has given me a safe place to rest my head at night, a warm hug when I'm down, and the necessary tools to navigate difficult mental health diagnoses, stressful life experiences, and substance abuse disorders," one resident wrote. "I am reminded every day that I'm beautiful, resilient, worth fighting for, and more than my addictions."

The house's executive director and founder, Kirsten Wears, said the support she received from MaineHousing's development staff is a key reason her idea of a safe and peaceful place for women in recovery to continue to heal was able to move forward. She said MaineHousing Development Director Mark Wiesendanger and Construction Services Manager Don McGilvery were instrumental in the house's creation.

"Honestly, if I didn't have Mark and Don in my corner, this wouldn't have happened," Wears said.

Wears also credits the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development for allowing flexibility in its grant awards and for believing in the concept of a place like Tucker's House.

Beyond staying away from substance use – staying sober – the house rules are fairly simple. Be kind, be respectful, be helpful. Residents share in the housework, they have bi-weekly family-style dinners, daily exercise requirements, and journaling, they must work at least part-time, and they pay rent. "Some have never even experienced a family dinner before," Wears said. They come from many places – some from jail, some from homelessness.

Residents can only stay up to two years but when their time at Tucker's House ends they have exit plans including stable housing, ongoing health care, education, and work.

The house's mission is simple:

"To provide a safe and supportive temporary home environment, to serve as a stepping stone while gaining skills to maintain a healthy life in recovery. We believe in second chances. You will be welcomed with love and kindness as you begin the journey to recovery. We believe everyone can recover. We believe in you!"

Innovative:

The use of an existing large, well-maintained, farmhouse and barn allowed this facility to begin serving clients quickly. Renovations to the existing building were largely only confined only by local building codes and construction standards. Community partnerships, including with a local high school National Honor Society have dramatically trimmed building and grounds maintenance costs. For example, snow removal and summer grounds keeping is done by student volunteers. Meanwhile residents are also responsible for home maintenance, meal preparation and cleaning as part of their recovery activities.

Are Replicable: Building collaborative relationships in the local community between a variety of stakeholders, the project's developer/operator and nearby treatment facilities is very replicable. Finding a willing seller for an appropriately sized and adequately maintained house of this size may be the largest hurdle in replicating this effort.

But proof this type of development is replicable is easily found as the non-profit owner and operators of Tucker's House are now moving forward with a second recovery home for women at a former bed and breakfast inn only miles away in nearby Harrison, Maine.

Respond to an important state housing need: The need for supportive and recovery housing in Maine, like elsewhere in the U.S., has not abated. In recent years substance use overdose deaths have increased as Maine continues to grapple with an ongoing opioid addiction crisis that has touched thousands of families across the socio-economic spectrum in Maine. Particularly hard hit are low-income families and individuals, many of whom already struggle to maintain stable housing.

Demonstrate measurable benefits to HFA targeted customers: "This house has given me a safe place to rest my head at night, a warm hug when I'm down, and the necessary tools to navigate difficult mental health diagnoses, stressful life experiences, and substance abuse disorders . . ." Testimonials like this come with each of the beds in the house.

Provide benefits that outweigh costs: The cost of supportive housing when compared to the costs of keeping a person in prison, jail, a secure mental health care facility or hospital emergency rooms are proven to be dramatically lower. The compounding financial gains of maintaining a person's long-term recovery compared to the costs of a return to substance abuse is also certainly significant. This likely represents a dramatic savings to the public and the recovering individual.

Demonstrate effective use of resources: From start to finish the development and renovation of this home, including a large meeting and fitness area, a secure medication storage room and bed space for 10 women in recovery was completed for less than \$1 million (\$875,000).

Effectively employ partnerships: The development of this home requires multiple ongoing partnerships including with local substance use counselors, state and municipal officials including law enforcement, the courts and a nearby public high school.

Achieve strategic objectives: This project readily achieves the strategic objective of steadily increasing available recovery and supportive housing unit and bed space in a cost-effective way.

Appendix A Testimonials

I am the second resident to move into the Tuckers House.. When I came here I was only 1 month clean living with my mom, I could barley function.. Tired, Depressed and Broken... When I moved in the House manager and other Resident made me feel at home within my first couple weeks I accomplished more then I have in the last couple years. I bought a car got it legal and a job and was making all my Drs Apointments And attending NA meetings and Groups. I feel Grateful that I was giving the opportunity to be part of this Home at the tuckers House. HS made

me grow and Ive started working the 12 steps. I feel Recovery is possible here.

Appendix A

Testimonials continued

M S H

I want to start by saying how sincerely grateful I am for Kirsten, and the immense work, time, energy, and care she has put not only in this house, as well as us women. For me personally, this house has given me a safe place to rest my head at night, a warm hug when I'm down, and the necessary tools to navigate difficult mental health diagnoses, stressful life experiences, and substance abuse disorders. I am reminded every day that I'm beautiful, resilient, worth fighting for, and more than my addictions. This house has had an incredible impact on my recovery and the steps since made to better my life. I thank the Tucker's House, board members, Lakes Region Recovery Center, the surrounding community, and Kirsten.

Appendix B Property Images

