

## HOUSING AND HOME

We have learned so much over the years from those who have experienced homelessness, and perhaps no lesson is more compelling than the meaning of home.

We see men and women on the streets, and the first impulse is obvious and urgent: People need a place to get off the streets, to come in out of the cold. Shelter from the storms, both literal and figurative.

We seek to provide housing. But there is housing, and then there is home.

Housing is a practical reality, one that takes different forms according to varying needs and circumstances. For our residents, it might be an entry-level safe haven specially designed for persons with chronic mental illness, a highly programmed recovery house, or a HUD-subsidized single-room-occupancy unit. For others it will be a beautifully rehabbed affordable row home with room for all the kids – and complemented with extensive training and support for new homeowners. Housing necessitates a team of architects, developers, lawyers, financiers, government officials. Housing development demands that idealism gets translated into brass-tacks realities of zoning, licensing, accounting, and contracting.

As we have become adept at developing housing, we have also learned deeper textures to the idea of home. We have heard the longing so many times, whether from those on the streets or those in the struggling neighborhood, for “a place of my own.” It’s more than the four walls – far more.

Home is a sense of security, a refuge from the world, a place where we feel safe to be who we are. Home is a part of our identity, the place where we know ourselves and are known – by kin, by friends, by neighbors. Home is the place from which we have the most fertile possibilities of growth, the rich soil out of which we are most capable of bearing the fruit of our gifts and our passions.

Home includes the four walls around us, but it is also a sense of rootedness in community and relationships. That is why all the housing we develop is done within a context of the community, the neighborhood, the integration with the broader programs and people of Project H.O.M.E. Housing is necessary, but it becomes a home when it is infused with all those aspects of life that humanize us and help us to grow.

Yes, we all need to come in from the cold. We all need a place to call our own. And we need to recognize that we are on the journey home together. There is no other way to get there.