

UNUSED BUILDING? CONSIDER HOUSING HOMELESS FAMILIES THERE

Nonprofit Mary's Place has been working with developers and property owners to create temporary shelters before development begins.

What would it take to bring every homeless child in our community inside?

Mary's Place, a nonprofit organization that runs several family day centers and shelters that provide just over 450 beds each night in



BY KRIS RICHEY CURTIS
KINZER PARTNERS

King County, has given this question a great deal of thought. The answer, according to Executive Director Marty Hartman, is partnerships.

"Family homelessness is our community crisis right now, and the community must come together to solve it," Hartman says.

Mary's Place partners with service providers, medical professionals, employers, landlords, community groups, congregations, schools — anyone and everyone — to address the issue of family homelessness. Their goal is to move families into permanent homes and get them stable as quickly as possible.

But while Mary's Place staff and the families they serve search for that affordable house or apartment in a white-hot rental market, they are also increasingly working with forward-thinking developers and property owners to expand their shelter capacity. These unique public-private partnerships are turning out to be a win-win for the entire community.

Last year, Amazon partnered with Mary's Place to convert a vacant hotel on the site of a future headquarters building in the Denny Regrade neighborhood into a shelter for 200 family members. Last month the Seattle-based company announced that the new building would contain 47,000 square feet of space for a permanent Mary's Place shelter.

While Amazon is the best known of Mary's Place partners, other local corporations and businesses have also provided temporary shelter space in their unused buildings.

Vulcan Inc. has made available a single-family home in South Lake

A former Travelodge on the site of a future Amazon high-rise serves as a Mary's Place shelter for homeless families.



PHOTO BY BEN VANHOUTEN PHOTOGRAPHY

Union, and office space for the growing staff at Mary's Place in the old KEXP radio building on Dexter Avenue in downtown Seattle. Pemco Insurance provided a large office building in the Cascade neighborhood of South Lake Union that served as a family shelter for just over a year, and smaller property owners have provided a former restaurant space and two single-family homes in North Seattle.

The organization also partners with local governments.

The Mary's Place Family Center in North Seattle is a resource center and night shelter for 100 family members in a former bank building on loan from the city of Seattle. King County has provided a public health building in White Center that sleeps 70, and Mary's Place will soon open a shelter in another county-owned building in Kenmore, a former sheriff's precinct, for 80 family members.

Other communities like Auburn, Tukwila and Federal Way are considering similar arrangements to accommodate this interim use in their communities.

Mary's Place also partners

with companies like BNBuilders, GLY Construction, Perkins + Will and Kinzer Partners who provide pro bono or low-cost services to quickly convert these empty buildings into shelter. They add showers, washers and dryers, curtain room dividers, kitchens, fire and earthquake upgrades, and other improvements that may be required to make the buildings family ready.

Jessica Clawson, a longtime volunteer and now board member at Mary's Place, says the organization is a great tenant and neighbor.

"Mary's Place comes into a building and breathes life into it, preventing vandalism and other illegal uses," Clawson says. "The building is well cared for and property owners get the additional benefit of providing an interim use that helps solve a community problem. It just doesn't get much better than that!"

Clawson is a partner at McCullough Hill Leary, a business, real estate and land-use law firm that works with developers to obtain permits for their projects.

Pearl Leung, external affairs director at Vulcan Inc., confirms

that the interim shelter use has worked well for them.

"Mary's Place takes care of the building, provides 24-7 eyes on the property, and the families that call it home-for-now are positively engaged in the neighborhood," Leung says.

Clawson participates on a team of volunteer real estate and development professionals working with Mary's Place that is continually researching and exploring opportunities for new partnerships. When buildings in current use as shelters are ready for development, the committee ensures that new buildings are coming online to replace and grow shelter capacity.

Clawson encourages property owners to take a look at their portfolios and development plans and consider if there is an opportunity there. "You may not think that your space would work, but Mary's Place is very creative. Let's talk!" she says.

Kris Richey Curtis is partner at Kinzer Partners, a real estate consulting and brokerage firm based in Seattle. She is a Mary's Place board member and chairs their Site Selection Committee.