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Malta House's new Norwalk space aims to serve more mothers in need

By Richard Chumney

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Malta House Board President Kim Petrone shows one of the client rooms as she leads a tour of the new home that assists homeless mothers Thursday, April 1, 2021. After 22 years at 5 Prowitt Street, Malta House is moving to their new home at 139 West Rocks Road after an extensive building renovation resulting from a \$4.5MM capital campaign.

Photo: Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

NORWALK — Malta House is putting the final touches on its new location, a former convent that will allow the nonprofit to serve more new and expecting mothers in need.

Construction crews are now wrapping up an about \$4.5 million renovation to the nearly 26,000-square-foot building, which sits behind All Saints Catholic School on West Rocks

Executive Director Carey Dougherty said the new Malta House will feature more offices, larger classrooms, a spacious kitchen and 15 bedrooms — a 50 percent increase over the 10 bedrooms available at the original East Norwalk location on Prowitt Street.

“We knew that there was more need in the community than we were able to address and serve in our current location,” Dougherty said. “We frequently have women on our waiting list and there continues to be a tremendous need. As affluent as Fairfield County is, there are still so many who are left behind economically.”

After more than two decades at the Prowitt Street property, Malta House residents will move into their new home by late May or early June. Three pregnant women, five mothers and their children are expected to make the trip across town, Dougherty said.

The move will end a yearslong saga to find a new location for the nonprofit, which was founded in 1998 as a haven for young homeless mothers and their babies.

John Altieri Jr., vice chair of the Malta House board, said the nonprofit has been searching for a new location since as far back as 2013. They settled on the old convent after Room to Grow, a Catholic preschool, moved out of the building several years ago.

Altieri said crews have been hard at work for more than a year replacing all of the building's pipes and wiring, erecting handicap accessible ramps, installing a new elevator and decorating the bedrooms, including three large family suites.

“I am very pleased to have been able to put together a team of contractors, architects and mechanical engineers who have done a terrific job for us,” Altieri said.

The renovation, which reached virtually every corner of the building, was funded by \$4.5 million in donations collected over the last two and a half years. Much of the building's new furniture was also donated by local residents, and contractors hired to help rehabilitate the structure offered discounted rates.

“This wouldn't be possible without the support of the community,” Dougherty said. “We don't receive any federal or state funding for our work, so everything we do is through the support and generosity of our donors.”

to reduce the number of families from 10 to eight to allow for adequate quarantine space.

“It definitely was not easy to balance the need in the community,” Dougherty said. “We wanted to continue serving moms. But we obviously also needed to ensure the safety and protection of the moms who were already in residence with us.”

Dougherty said the new location, which includes a much larger nursery and gathering spaces, will allow residents to spread out further and more easily adhere to social distancing guidelines.

Malta House residents generally stay with the nonprofit for about eight months, though some live with the nonprofit for up to 18 months, according to Kim Killoy, an events and community relations specialist for Malta House.

During their stay, the mothers often enroll in free life skills courses and counseling sessions. Case managers help residents obtain jobs and find a safe place to live within their budget. The nonprofit also offers child care for up to a year after the mothers move into their own homes.

In addition to housing mothers, Killoy said, the nonprofit provides diapers and other child care items to an average of about 50 families each month.

The larger facility will allow Malta House to store and collect more items for those families and other residents who rely on the nonprofit. Since the start of the pandemic, Killoy said the nonprofit has seen an increase in the number of people who need assistance.

“We love being a resource for the community and we’d like that to grow as well,” Killoy said. “Now that we have some more room, we want to develop more partner community relationships and help more people because the need is significant.”

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