June 19, 2020

An Update on the News of Recent Events at the Bedford Veterans Quarters

As you may be aware, the sad death of Timothy White, a 62-year-old U.S. Army Veteran and a resident of our Bedford Veterans Quarters residential facility on the Veterans Administration Medical Center campus in Bedford has been in the news. Our condolences continue to go to Mr. White’s family and friends. The news reports have been confusing and problematic, so we want to communicate the facts.

The facts of the situation have been misreported.

1. Mr. White was last seen in our building the evening of Friday, May 8. On Monday, May 11, staff became concerned that the gentleman had not been seen over the weekend, and began to reach out to family and friends who knew him, and performed multiple wellness checks in his unit. At noon on Wednesday, May 13, staff communicated Mr. White’s absence to Caritas’s Director for Property Management Tom Nee and the COO Victor Martinez, who in turn reached out to the VA’s Chief of Social Work to see if Mr. White had checked into an inpatient program. They responded that he had not, and recommended Caritas call the Bedford Police. Staff complied and reached out to the Bedford PD that afternoon. On Thursday morning Caritas staff followed up in person with the VA police, who had already been made aware of the situation by the VA’s Chief of Social Work.

2. Ultimately, sadly, Mr. White’s body was discovered in an emergency stairwell that is federal property managed exclusively by the VA. Neither Caritas staff nor the residents have control or keys to the area and they have always been explicitly forbidden to enter except as an emergency egress.

3. While there was initial confusion in the media concerning who controls the access to the emergency stairwell in the building Caritas leases from the VA, there is now no dispute between the VA and Caritas on that issue, following a conversation we had with officials from VA headquarters in DC on Wednesday. The emergency stairwells are sole property and jurisdiction of the VA.
The nature of Caritas and its relationship with its residents has been mischaracterized.

Caritas provides housing for low-income individuals. The primary relationship between Caritas and its residents is that of landlord and tenant. Like any rental situation, the landlord has certain rules with which tenants must comply, but tenants are otherwise free to come and go as they please and are not required, for instance, to sign in or out or keep staff apprised of their comings and goings.

Our residents often struggle to succeed in permanent housing due to the traumas associated with poverty and homelessness. Therefore, we support them by making resident services staff available if they need help connecting with community and VA resources ranging from employment training to emergency rental assistance. New residents are provided a Welcome Basket of essential personal care and home items when they move in from homelessness. The BVQ has a food pantry and offers art workshops and holiday meals to create community and healing for those suffering from trauma and isolation. We offer these programs to help our residents avoid backsliding into homelessness, because we care.

Caritas does not provide Supportive Housing nor is it a nursing facility or continuing care facility or a program where residents are committed to Caritas’s care and oversight, nor does Caritas provide any medical or other sort of treatment to its residents. The only contractual obligation we have with residents is to provide a clean, well-maintained, and affordable place to live.

We are heartbroken at the loss of this Veteran, and the pain his family is experiencing. We care deeply for our residents at the BVQ and all of our houses.

Please reach out to Amy Meneely, our Director of Communications at ameneely@caritascommunities.org, if you have any questions.

ABOUT CARITAS COMMUNITIES

Caritas Communities works to prevent homelessness by providing very low-income individuals with permanent housing, support, a sense of community and expanded opportunities. For more than 35 years, Caritas has helped fill the need for safe, secure housing in Greater Boston. Caritas has 33 buildings in 17 Greater Boston communities, housing more than 1,000 individuals annually. Caritas provides on-site support services, emergency rental assistance, veterans-specific housing and services, and on-site property management. Caritas enables working people on minimum wage, veterans experiencing
post-service challenges, and low-income elderly and disabled citizens to live in a clean, safe home that they can afford. To learn more, please go to www.caritascommunities.org.