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A Safe Place to Stay

BY KARA BASKIN

Caritas cares for its disadvantaged neighbors in a most fundamental and essential way.



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Everyone should have a safe place to sleep at night. Caritas Communities provides for that basic need for nearly 900 people across eastern Massachusetts, many of whom are formerly homeless, low-income, disabled, or elderly; some are military veterans.

In a region where real-estate and rental prices are staggering, Caritas lessens the need for homeless shelters. This non-profit group, with offices in Braintree, operates 29 homes in 14 Greater Boston, North Shore, and South Shore communities, including properties in Arlington and nearby Bedford and Wakefield. Nearly 59 percent of Caritas residents earn less than \$15,000 per year, making it impossible to find market-rate housing on their own salaries.

Caritas celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, and its mission remains as vital now as it was at its founding. "Our vision was to provide affordable housing to people who worked but couldn't make a living wage," explains Karin Cassel, Caritas's director of fund development and communications. "What's interesting is that you fast-forward 30 years, and the need is even more relevant today."

Many residents arrive at Caritas directly through a partner program, providing a sense of continuity and support. Caritas has strong roots throughout the Bos-



ton area, serving as the housing platform for 16 organizations, including Heading Home and the AIDS Action Committee. Project Place provides case management to residents, helping formerly homeless people become job-ready.

"For most social-service organizations," Cassel notes, "housing is beyond their scope." Caritas's partnerships ensure that while residents are receiving crucial social-support services, they enjoy a permanent and dignified place to live, too. Most residents stay at Caritas for three years.

Each 150-square-foot residence is fully furnished, with a desk, a chair, a nightstand, a bureau, a mattress and bed, and a refrigerator. Homes have communal bathrooms, kitchens, and free laundry. A Caritas staff case manager is responsible for residents' well-being. Because so few residents arrive with cars, every Caritas home is within 10 minutes of public transportation. Rent is roughly \$145 per week, with utilities included. Many properties host ongoing events such as group meals, an open art studio, and community meetings.

"For many people, Caritas provides the best and most affordable housing they've had in years," Cassel says. "Now they have a place to call home."

To learn more, visit: caritascommunities.org