



CATHOLIC COMMUNITY SERVICES
CATHOLIC HOUSING SERVICES
SERVING PEOPLE OF ALL BELIEFS



HOUSING & HOPE

A monthly email series on housing & homelessness.

A New Normal: Innovative Housing in the Time of COVID-19

At CCS and CHS, we aim to uphold the dignity of our most vulnerable neighbors. During the pandemic, safe and dignified housing, more than ever, is an issue of life and death. For June's Housing and Hope email, we explore how CCS/CHS houses clients during the pandemic. COVID-19 increased poverty, homelessness, and hardship and at the same time led to unique opportunities for care. CCS/CHS used and continues to use creative programs like enhanced shelters and hybrid hotel programs to keep clients safe. These successful programs exemplify the positive impact that dignified, secured housing can have on vulnerable populations.

COVID-19 and Congregate Shelters

Right before Thanksgiving weekend, there was a positive COVID-19 case in a CCS King County congregate women's shelter. The potential for an outbreak loomed. CCS staff had to act quickly. Before Sunday evening, every single client was moved into a hotel room. This urgent response by dedicated CCS staff not only kept COVID-19 from spreading but also helped clients get on the pathway to housing.

Just as COVID-19 changed nearly every aspect of our lives, the virus also changed how CCS and CHS serve our clients. Dignified and safe housing became more medically necessary than ever. CCS/CHS had to rethink how to shelter and house people given the new standards of health and safety: keeping 6 feet apart, frequent hand washing, and wearing face masks. By working with local governments, CCS/CHS rapidly shifted our shelter model from overnight congregate shelters to 24/7 enhanced shelters. With hotel shelters and hotel hybrid programs, CCS/CHS provided pathways to housing in uncertain times, while keeping our community safe.

Prior to COVID-19, congregate shelters were a common form of shelter intervention. They provide basic services like bathrooms and meals as well

as a place to stay and sleep overnight. This kind of program responds to an unmet need for emergency shelter when resources and funding are limited. High volume, low barrier shelters became a mainstay in the homeless services system as they can be set up quickly and in a variety of settings, like a churches, community centers, or even office buildings. Congregate shelters are an effective short-term solution to homelessness but became unsafe as social distancing became necessary. As COVID-19 spread rapidly, congregate shelters had to be reimaged and CCS/CHS staff had to problem solve. A situation of severe need, combined with increased accessibility to funding from federal, state, and local government, and availability of local, vacant hotels led to the creation of numerous hotel shelters across Western Washington, many of which are staffed and managed by CCS.



The new Bob G shelter in Queen Anne, image from King County Executive Dow Constantine via [Twitter](#)

Formerly The Inn, now the Bob G

Located in Seattle, [St. Martin de Porres](#) has been operating for 35 years as an overnight congregate shelter. It was one of many CCS programs forced to reinvent the wheel when COVID-19 hit. In March 2020, 30 of the most vulnerable clients were moved to the King County Airport for shelter. Others temporarily moved to nearby motels and hotels. Eventually, 60 clients

moved into The Inn, an 80-room vacant hotel in Queen Anne. After nearly a year, working in tandem with King County authorities, CCS/CHS are converting The Inn into a permanent, 24/7 shelter. This new shelter is named for Bob Goetschius, the longtime director of St. Martin de Porres and the Lazarus Center. [King County Executive Dow Constantine](#) said hotels are a “stop on the way to permanent supportive housing or independent housing, including affordable housing — places where you could live for a while and stabilize and take advantage of services.” King County bought The Inn on May 12, 2021, the first of many planned [purchases](#); CCS/CHS will continue to fully staff the shelter. By converting The Inn into the Bob G, the current residents can elect to remain in a post-COVID-19 future. But the Bob G isn’t the only hotel being used for shelter. There are [other hotels](#) in Seattle being used this way, owned by the city and staffed by CCS and other organizations. [The goal of King County](#) is to create permanent, supportive housing for 1600 people by the end of 2021.

TABLE 1: KING COUNTY EMERGENCY SHELTER PROGRAMS AND BEDS, BY PROVIDER AGENCY

Provider Agency	Number of Programs	% of Total Programs	Number of Beds	% of Total Beds
Catholic Community Services	12	11%	711	14%
Mary’s Place	9	8%	606	12%
Union Gospel Mission	6	5%	598	12%
The Salvation Army	15	13%	494	10%
Downtown Emergency Service Center	6	5%	488	9%
Other Providers	64	58%	2,163	43%
Total	112	100%	5,060	100%

Data Source: Seattle/King County Continuum of Care Housing Inventory Count, January 23, 2020

Source: Impact of Hotels as Non-Congregate Emergency Shelters, authored by Gregg Colburn and Rachel Fyall as a part of Urban@UW’s Homelessness Research Initiative

A Pilot Program in Puyallup

[Further south in Puyallup](#), a Hometowne Suites has been housing CCS clients for almost 6 months. Responding to the COVID-19 crisis, the City of Puyallup partnered with CCS to build this hybrid hotel program, the first of its kind in East Pierce County. The innovative pilot program began in February 2021, with 39 total residents as of May. Currently, 26 CCS clients are staying in 20 of the suites. CCS staff work at the hotel from Monday to Friday, 8 to 4. The hotel is staffed by its own employees and remains open to guests. Dawn Bohl, CCS Program Supervisor of Case Management, says that “our program

takes on a client-centered and strength-based approach. We want to see clients move from surviving to thriving and this program provides the tools to do so." On-site case managers help clients with all kinds of resource access: replacing IDs, applying for medical insurance, building resumes, and more. So far, 5 clients received housing referrals, 1 reunited with family, 4 got employed, 22 completed housing stability plans, and many more received medical and substance use treatment. These numbers express the success and positive impact of the program which has been embraced by the community and the city of Puyallup.

Serving with Dignity

Staying in a hotel instead of a shelter can be a game-changer for people experiencing homelessness. [UW researchers](#) found that moving people out of shelters and into hotels not only slowed the transmission of the virus but improved the lives of those who stayed in the hotels. CCS Director of Health Initiatives Emily Meyer says that 24/7 hotel shelters "can look really different but the benefits they bring are similar." Beyond the health and safety benefits, hotel rooms provide comfort and security not available in congregate shelters. Having privacy reduces the anxiety and trauma of homelessness. The stability of a single, private location allows staff to effectively manage cases and assess client needs, barriers, and strengths. Clients can store belongings, keeping their personal possessions secure. Families can stay together in their own space. Children can use Wi-Fi to access remote schooling. Enhanced shelters also provide predictable access to food. In programs where hotel staff run the buildings, residents are treated as any other hotel guest. Citing the hybrid hotel program in Puyallup, "this project has catapulted clients from immobility to mobility" says Bohl. Staying in a hotel eliminates the stigma of shelters, helping clients focus on their pathway to housing. "I cannot emphasize enough how much better it is for people to have a safe space," says Meyer.

"COVID has raised the bar for what a healthy, safe, and dignified shelter can look like" says Whitley Tucker, CCS Director of Program Support. Undeniably, the pandemic has created hardship and tribulation, for our unhoused neighbors more than most. But at that moment, when necessity and urgency came together, CCS responded in multiple ways: 24/7 shelters were one option in the portfolio of housing interventions. Hybrid hotel programs were another. Not every client can be served in these ways; some prefer the community of the congregate shelter. However, hotel shelters have successfully housed hundreds of people, kept COVID-19 from spreading in our communities, and improved access to services. Enhanced shelters are more dignified, offer a better experience for clients, and ultimately more successfully move people to permanent housing.

Investments from the city governments and the positive outcomes show that these solutions are here to stay.

- To stay up on the date on the Bob G shelter, check out our [webpage](#).
- Email questions, comments, or concerns to LeahD@cccsw.org.
- If you received this email from an outside source, you can [sign up](#) to receive our monthly Housing & Hope emails directly.
- For an archive of each month's story, please visit the [series homepage](#).

