

‘Safe haven’ for people transitioning from homelessness opens in Downtown Berkeley

A seven-bedroom house on Haste Street will offer a bridge between encampment or street living and permanent housing.

By Supriya Yelimeli

Sept. 22, 2022, 4:42 p.m.



The front entrance of the new “Almost Home” safe house in Downtown Berkeley for homeless residents transitioning into permanent housing. Credit: Supriya Yelimeli

Homeless advocates unveiled a bright, renovated Victorian home in Downtown Berkeley Wednesday to offer temporary housing for people transitioning into their own apartments.

The Homeless Action Center (HAC), which offers legal services and outreach for homeless residents throughout Alameda County, will operate a seven-room home with a resident manager at 2207 Haste St. The Northern California Land Trust owns the home and it was previously occupied by Options Recovery Services.

Called “Almost Home,” it’s the first safe house in Berkeley, though the nonprofit Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency runs a similar **Casa Maria** program in Oakland.

Talks to convert the property into a safe home began in 2021 after HAC Executive Director Pattie Wall saw the listing for the property, and after HAC signed a 15-year lease for the building, renovations took most of this year.



The upstairs living room. Credit: Supriya Yelimeli



Attendees from local housing nonprofits line up for food at the opening on Thursday. Credit: Supriya Yelimeli



A fan printed with the facade of the home given out during the opening ceremony. Credit: Supriya Yelimeli

Alameda County residents on the **coordinated entry** list are eligible for temporary stays at the home, likely between 30 to 120 days, according to Wall.

“If somebody is homeless and we’re working on their case, it’s super hard to stay in touch with them and help them through the instability of living in an encampment,” Wall said, explaining that many of HAC’s clients are working through Supplemental Security Income processes that can take months.

The safe house will help HAC arrange primary care doctors for their clients and offer a bridge between encampment or street living and permanent housing, which can be a jarring shift at first.

“Our clients deserve a little place to just take a breath,” Wall said. “[Here] they can sort of integrate a little easier into our community and remember how to be a householder.”

Opening of the first Homeless Action Center "safe haven" home on Haste/Fulton, owned by the Northern California Land Trust. pic.twitter.com/UduYupOKBG

— Supriya Yelimeli (@SupriyaYelimeli) **September 22, 2022**

HAC outreach workers will take residents to appointments and needed services, and there will also be “enrichment” programming like movies and art talks, Wall said.

House Manager Brad Merrill, who worked for about a decade previously at the **Dorothy Day House**, will be moving into the property soon, followed by the first set of residents later this fall.

He said there will be rules and restrictions in place at the property — no pets, no drug or alcohol use, no visitors and there will likely be a nighttime curfew — but it will give residents an opportunity to ease into permanent housing.

“Not everybody is going to fit, but we’re going to give everybody a chance,” Merrill said. “It’s kind of a new experience for [HAC], but we’re going to give it a shot and hopefully it’s going to help people.”

