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HavenHouse

LN Charity Awards Finalist

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In 2004, HavenHouse opened its doors as a hospitality home for families and patients who travel to St. Louis for vital medical treatment. The first month, it provided lodging, food, transportation and other services to 25 families; last month, it helped 279.

"Research shows that patients heal a lot better when they have their families with them," says executive director Kathy Sindel. "Those families need to concentrate on the wellness and recovery of the patient and nothing else."

Started through a large seed grant from YouthBridge Community Foundation, HavenHouse's 25,000-square-foot building sits on 19 acres in Creve Coeur. The nonprofit offers families an affordable place to stay while their loved ones are receiving quality health care. For a small flat fee per night, families of modest means receive a private room with bath, two home-cooked meals a day, transportation to and from hospitals, as well as access to a gym, computer center and other amenities. "When people come here, they leave their worries at the door because we take care of everything," Sindel explains. "It feels like you're at home."

The 24/7 facility can accommodate up to 100 people a night, and has housed people from all 50 states, in addition to 36 countries. "A great core is from rural towns in Missouri," Sindel says. "If they didn't know where they were going to stay, they might say, I can't go."

Families who have to remain in St. Louis for several months may still encounter financial hardship even with the small fee, Sindel acknowledges. "If you're here for a night or two, it's nothing, but if you're here for five months and still maintaining your household, it's harder."

To alleviate that strain, HavenHouse has a fund for long-term boarders, and its 15 hospital and medical facility partners help as well. The charity is able to keep its cost as low as possible through fundraising and special events, like its annual Hope Fest. The challenge to raise two-thirds of the budget is always daunting, but Sindel hopes that raising awareness in the community will aid in that process. "The more people know who we are, the more help will come."

Help already has come to HavenHouse in the form of volunteers, with more than 1,800 getting involved last year. From high school students to retirees, volunteers can provide extra support to the families in their times of need. "We want to lift the burden from families as much as possible," Sindel says. "And when patients are by themselves, we become their families."

Having served more than 38,000 individuals since opening seven years ago, HavenHouse is just getting started. Sindel frequently receives calls with requests to branch out into other cities around the country, but for the time being, she is focused on providing for the local community. "When you help people who are at such loose ends, you realize how minor your own preoccupations are. It is such a positive, supportive environment, and even when the situation is precarious, families find it uplifting." **LN**



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