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CONNECTIONS HOUSING DOWNTOWN MARKS ONE YEAR OF COLLABORATION IN ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS WITH SUCCESSFUL “HOUSING FIRST” MODEL

*Almost 400 formerly homeless San Diegans have rebuilt their lives at Connections Housing;
San Diego Housing Commission contributed federal housing vouchers to
financially support the residential programs*

SAN DIEGO, CA—[Connections Housing Downtown](#), the City of San Diego’s first-ever collaborative venture into the “Housing First” model for addressing homelessness, is showing remarkable success in its first year. Nearly 400 formerly homeless individuals who received help in stabilizing their lives have now moved into permanent supportive or longer-term housing.

The San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC) supports the City-sponsored public-private collaboration with federal Project-Based Housing Vouchers. These housing vouchers help fund 89 of the housing units, which are critical in helping to provide homeless men and women with a place to live as quickly as possible, the goal of “Housing First.”

“What we have seen here today is not only a vision met, but is also a promise kept,” said Richard C. Gentry, President & CEO of SDHC, which provides ongoing residential funding for the center. “It’s not enough to get people off the streets for just a short time. Transitional housing is important. But permanent supportive housing is where we need to go.”

The year-round homeless facility is part of an innovative approach to ending homelessness that combines housing with an array of support services for men and women taken off the streets of downtown San Diego. In addition to its 150 interim housing beds and 73 permanent studio apartments, Connections Housing helps its residents with a community health clinic operated by Family Health Centers of San Diego, substance-abuse counseling, employment services and other assistance.

SDHC contracts with People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) San Diego to operate the interim housing. PATH Ventures was co-developer of the project with Affirmed Housing Group.

[Connections Housing](#) marked its first year of operations today with a celebration at the 12-story facility at Sixth Avenue and A Street.

City Council President Todd Gloria said Connections Housing is part of a results-oriented approach to homelessness. “Here we are a year later to really mark the fact that great progress has been made and more progress is being made because of this facility,” he said. Particularly impressive, Gloria said, is a 98 percent retention rate for formerly homeless persons living in the supportive housing units.

Homelessness in the neighborhood surrounding Connections Housing has dropped

approximately 70 percent since the center opened.

During that year, according to PATH, Connections Housing also:

- Provided 15,000 service appointments in the PATH Depot Multi-Service Center, where 34 service providers offer assistance with job counseling, legal aid, veterans services and more.
- Helped 123 homeless veterans find jobs
- Provided nearly 12,000 medical and mental-health visits at the Downtown Family Health Center at Connections Housing Downtown

SDHC contributed a \$2 million loan toward the \$38 million cost of extensively renovating the Connections Housing building, once the San Diego Athletic Club and later the San Diego World Trade Center.

SDHC awarded 89 federal Project-Based Housing Vouchers, valued at \$849,660 annually, to support the 73 residential studio apartments and 16 special needs emergency units. In addition, 50 federal housing vouchers valued at \$565,200 annually are helping formerly homeless individuals who are ready to transition into housing elsewhere in the community while they continue to receive supportive services from PATH.

SDHC was one of the first housing agencies in the nation to use federal housing vouchers to make housing available for homeless individuals, an approval SDHC received from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Joel John Roberts, CEO of PATH, said that with the assistance of Alpha Project, “69 percent of the people who entered interim housing moved into permanent or long-term housing – almost 400 people.”

“We are very grateful that we are just a small part of the bigger picture of downtown San Diego’s response to address homelessness,” Roberts said.

James Silverwood, President/CEO of Affirmed Housing Group, credited Roberts with helping convince him to approve Affirmed’s first-ever homeless project. “Everything he told me about how it would perform has come true,” Silverwood said.

Background:

[SDHC](#) has been a key leader in the process that brought Connections Housing to fruition. On Dec. 2, 2008, the San Diego City Council requested that SDHC collaborate with the former Centre City Development Corporation (now Civic San Diego) to issue the request for proposals for a permanent homeless services facility.

A nine-member volunteer citizens committee to review the proposals was organized on April 3, 2009, by SDHC and Centre City Development Corporation (CCDC). The volunteer citizens committee members represented:

- SDHC
- CCDC
- United Way
- City of San Diego
- County of San Diego
- Downtown San Diego Partnership
- East Village Community Action Network
- Downtown Residents Group
- Corporation for Supportive Housing

The volunteer citizens committee recommended the development team of Affirmed Housing Group and PATH, and the San Diego City Council approved that recommendation on Oct. 5, 2010.

Connections Housing Downtown celebrated its [grand opening](#) on March 11, 2013.

For more information about SDHC programs, visit www.sdhc.org

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