

LOCAL NEWS

Boulder's Bridge House, Har HaShem get creative in housing formerly homeless



Cliff Grassmick / Staff Photographer

Misti Doyle in her new home on Baseline Road in Boulder. Bridge House partners with Har HaShem to house Ready 2 Work graduates in a model they hope will scale across Boulder.

By **SHAY CASTLE** |

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Misti Doyle doesn't remember the last time she had proper housing.



She used to live with family, until one night, when they decided to get high. Doyle didn't feel like joining in, so they handed her \$20 and sent her out into a snowstorm. She was homeless in Longmont for awhile, and spent the past year living at Bridge House, participating in its Ready to Work program.

"It's been a long time," she said, since she had a real home.

But now she is newly installed in a three-bedroom house in Boulder, one of six Ready To Work graduates benefitting from a new partnership between Bridge House, Congregation Har HaShem and Boulder Property Management that the organizations hope will become a model for combatting homelessness and the city's housing affordability woes in one.

"We're always looking for creative ways to help people get permanent housing," said Isabel McDevitt, Bridge House CEO. "We really think this triumvirate of Bridge House, BPM and Har HaShem could be a model. We want this partnership to be a pilot for Boulder."

Har HaShem owns two single-family homes near its synagogue, purchased years ago for potential expansion and to serve as a parsonage. Both have been rented out in recent years to college students. But given the organization's [long history of helping the homeless](#), there was a desire to use the properties to further that mission.

Bridge House's [RTW graduates](#) will pay \$700 per month each for a room, plus utilities, in the homes, with the nonprofit subsidizing the difference between that amount and market-rate. The organization will also act as financial guarantor in the case of damage or unpaid rent. BPM will handle the property management.

Though RTW graduates are holding down steady jobs and are ready to move back into the rental market, on paper, formerly homeless applicants don't look like ideal tenants. Criminal records can complicate background checks; credit is poor or nonexistent; multiple previous evictions are common.

Adding to the difficulties are the extreme cost of renting in Boulder — the median rent for a one-bedroom was \$1,155 in July, [according to Apartment List](#) — and vacancies consistently are under 5 percent.

Using this model, "we can address the homeless challenge and the affordable housing challenge" at the same time, said Alan Halpern, executive director of Congregation Har HaShem. Renting to formerly homeless instead of college kids "furthers our mission of social justice."



Halpern and McDevitt also hope other small-time property owners are inspired to replicate their efforts — be it religious organizations or homeowners with a spare room.

“There are a lot of landlords that own single-family homes who would be interested in renting to low-income populations, but they also need to bring in rent and have some assurances that the screening is going to be good,” said McDevitt. “I think it’s a really terrific model, especially for landlords.”

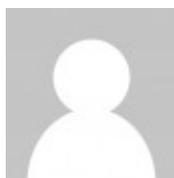
The current arrangement will cost Bridge House \$5,000 per person, per year — far cheaper than what’s needed to build new houses or apartments that then also need to be subsidized, McDevitt said.

“It’s not a complete fix,” said Halpern. “It’s a step in the right direction.”

For Doyle, it’s a huge step.

“I see the rent (costs) in Boulder,” she said. “It’s amazing (Har HaShem) gave us this opportunity, that they’re trusting us to take care of their property. I don’t know if the people who donate to Bridge House know exactly what help they’re giving, but Bridge House changed my life. They do everything in their power to help you.”

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