



## Hospitality Homes: Now and in the Future

*The following are excerpts from Executive Director Marianne Duddy-Burke's speech at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Harvest Breakfast fundraiser, held on October 26, 2006. In it, she describes the current state of Hospitality Homes and her vision for the future.*

The year 2006 has been a momentous year for Hospitality Homes. In September, ***we provided our 125,000<sup>th</sup> night of host home housing.*** We have housed nearly 12,000 individuals and families in the course of 23 years, many of them for multiple visits. Hospitality Homes currently has 126 active host families, and has trained over 650 families as Hospitality Hosts throughout our history. Using the *most conservative* of estimates, Hospitality Homes has saved our guests \$13,094,000 in hotel costs since its founding. It is an amazingly cost-effective program. Our 2005 audit showed that 64% of our budget comes from donated labor, goods, services and accommodations—mostly the value of housing provided through the gracious welcome of volunteer hosts. ***So every dollar donated to Hospitality Homes leverages an additional \$1.78 in services!***

Of course, this program is about much more than financial relief. The support, caring and security offered by our amazing hosts create a haven of comfort for people who don't even realize just how frightened and alone they have been feeling. Guests value the hosts' help in figuring out how to get to and from the hospital easily—especially when they come from places where the traffic and public transportation we have here in Boston are completely unheard of. Patients write to tell us how much it meant to them to know their spouse or children had a safe place to stay.

For many people, the hospitality our program offers enables their family members to get life-saving or life-changing treatment. Hospitality Homes is a Health Care Access Program. It enables people of limited resources to obtain specialized medical care that may otherwise be beyond their reach.

Hospitality Homes is the ONLY Boston-area hospital housing program that is open to ALL families. It doesn't matter what the family's income is, where they come from, whether the patient is a child or an adult, what hospital they are using or what the diagnosis is—if you need housing, pass our reference check, and it's safe and appropriate for us to serve you, we will do everything possible to find a host home that meets your needs.

The Hospitality Homes model also enables us to be nimble enough to respond to the ever-evolving needs of people traveling to Boston for medical care. In the last two years, the number of guests staying for a month or more has climbed dramatically. We responded by conducting special campaigns to recruit hosts willing to take longer-term guests, and by working with applicants to determine how comfortable they might be with the idea of moving once or

twice during a long stay. This year, the closure of Shannon's House, a facility that provided housing for adult cancer patients, led to increased need for host home housing for this population. We worked closely with both Dana-Farber's Resource Specialists and our hosts to determine which patients we could house. And as Shriners Hospital realized the value of having its clients live in the community between surgeries, we were asked to house more of these families, as well. The result is that we have seen an increase of **20% more guests than at this point last year**, surpassing the total number of guest nights provided during all of 2005 by the end of August. *We now average 161 guests in residence each week, compared to about 110/week last year.*

There are two other accomplishments of the last year that you should be aware of. Hospitality Homes now has an on-line application, making it easier for potential guests to apply for housing at any time that is convenient for them. While we still speak with every applicant by phone, this form saves both guests and the program time and money. It has also proven particularly useful for international visitors, a group dramatically increasing for the first time since 2001.

Secondly, Hospitality Homes now has a full-time staff member fluent in Spanish. Not having to scramble to find a translator every time we get an inquiry from a Spanish-speaker has enabled us to be both more efficient and more welcoming.

As proud as we are of our accomplishments since our inception nearly 24 years ago, we are very much aware of the challenges we still face. During three weeks this summer, we were simply overwhelmed with requests for housing. For the first time in at least three years, we had to turn families away, because we could not find them a host within a distance that was acceptable to them. That was heartbreaking and sobering for our entire staff. We need the resources to do more host recruitment, training and support.

We still hear of people who sleep in hospital waiting rooms, because they don't know of any alternatives to expensive hotels they cannot afford. Clearly, we need to do even more outreach, training of hospital staff, and other work to make sure that every family who needs a safe, comfortable, restful place to stay has ready access to information about Hospitality Homes.

Hospitality Homes' outreach materials must also be better reflections of the quality of service we provide. Our current paper brochures, although comprehensive and inexpensive to produce, do little to assure anxious people that we are an organization that has experience they can trust. We are committed to developing brochures that will give traveling families an immediate sense of welcome and relief, and that incorporate our new logo.

Our Board has recently adopted a strategic plan for Hospitality Homes called Vision 2010. In response to needs presented by guests, hosts, staff, hospital personnel and consideration of demographics and expected hospital usage patterns, Hospitality Homes has developed a plan to address anticipated needs over the coming years. Key strategies include:

- Continuing to develop and expand on relationships with current and new host families
- Broadening community awareness of our program

- Evaluating opportunities to supplement host home housing with other alternatives, including adding additional apartments for long-term guests and those with mobility challenges, managing hotel voucher programs on behalf of a group of hospitals, and running a facility-based housing program

These are exciting new directions for our organization, and all of them keep us true to the organization's mission.

**If you would like to share your thoughts on the future of Hospitality Homes, contact Marianne at [mduddy@hosp.org](mailto:mduddy@hosp.org) or 617.482.4338.**