



In a previous article we highlighted the incredible work of JustDane's Healing House, which opened in 2019 to give people experiencing homelessness a place to heal after surgery. Soon, the Madison area will be able to house some of the most vulnerable people in our community during their final stage of life thanks to the efforts of another local nonprofit, Solace Friends, Inc.

The mission of Solace is to provide dying people with a "place of compassionate, safe, comfortable presence and caregiving," particularly those who are "experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, extreme poverty, mental/emotional health issues, substance abuse disorders, and/or social isolation."



The group views a potential property for the Solace Home. From left are Dr. Ann Catlett, Solace Friends founder and board president; Kathy Kamp, Solace board member and facilities committee chair; Ann Raschein, realtor with Mad City Dream Homes; and David Kinyon, Solace volunteer and facilities committee member.

Realtor Ann Raschein first learned about this group through her brother, who has dedicated the majority of his career to working on affordable housing initiatives in our community. Since then, she's been on the lookout for a property that might fit the needs of the organization. The future "Solace Home" will be a place where terminally ill guests – likely up to 4 at one time – can reside as long as needed while they receive end-of-life care. No one will be turned away due to finances.

"I am honored to be working with Solace," Raschein said. "The work that they are striving to do within our community is kind and critical. I love helping people find their home, and for Solace this home will be a haven at a time when their guests need peace."

While Solace will not be a licensed hospice provider, the nonprofit will coordinate with existing hospice and clinical care staff in the area. Solace volunteers and staff will supplement their efforts by offering 24/7 family-like, non-medicalized care to the dying. Once operational, Solace Home will be

the first of its kind in Wisconsin. There are a few dozen community supported social model hospice homes in the country based on a concept supported by the Omega Home Network, of which Solace is a member.

Solace is in the process of hiring a full-time executive director who will eventually bring on more staff once doors open – ideally by the end of 2022. So far the nonprofit has been composed of a dedicated group of volunteers that formed a board of directors in 2018. Board President Ann Catlett, M.D., who also co-founded Madison Area Care for the Homeless OneHealth, is credited for the idea behind Solace. Over a decade ago while working as a Madison hospitalist, Catlett witnessed a patient who had a new diagnosis of lung cancer and was discharged back to the street.

"I knew he wasn't going to receive treatment without a plan," Catlett said. "At the same time, I knew of a place in Washington, D.C. called Joseph's House, that started in the 1980s when many people with HIV/AIDS were dying unsheltered. Now that beautiful home has expanded to welcome other terminally ill people. When I first went to volunteer there in 2008, I couldn't tell who was a patient, staff, or volunteer because of how they had community with each other. Barriers were broken down between who was giving and receiving. I sat vigil with some of those people in their last moments, and the design of their service with so much heart was so compelling to me. That planted a seed, and I wondered, 'Do we need this here in Madison?'"



Dr. Ann Catlett

Photos provided by Solace

After many meetings and a survey for member agencies of the Homeless Services Consortium, the answer was a resounding yes. Catlett acknowledges that Solace may not be the answer for everyone. That's why part of the admission assessment will be asking, for example, "Who are you? What do you need? What feels good to you? How can we best support you?" She also said that Solace aims to have its policies be minimally restrictive so as to be accessible to a wide variety of people and "to meet them where they are, recognizing their dignity and creating structure that honors that." That includes finding creative solutions to allow guests to potentially bring their pets, smoke, and wander while still maintaining a safe environment.



Solace Friends asks visitors of its website to "imagine having to face the end of your life without a roof over your head—sick and in pain, out in the elements with no bed, no bathroom, no medicine, and no one to help manage symptoms or provide even the most basic support and solace."

Catlett has already heard from many social workers and nurses who want to be involved and "do what I'm meant to do in my field without the red tape: come sit at their bedside; rub their feet; have a person-to-person connection." Trained volunteers will be critical to the ongoing operation of the Solace Home. Catlett expects to need a dedicated group of 20-30 volunteers: "large enough to cover our needs but small enough for all to be in communication and know each other."

Volunteers and donations are needed even before Solace Home opens, so be sure to visit their website at solacefriends.org. You can also help spread the word by inviting Solace to speak to your church, civic organization, and/or business about their mission and fundraising goals.

*- Story written by Samantha Haas,
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