



HOUSING FIRST

Bringing Mainers home for good

HOUSING FIRST

*connects people
experiencing
homelessness
to successful
permanent housing
by reducing barriers
to entry and
providing supportive
services.*

Housing First is ***an effective solution to chronic homelessness***, changing — even saving — lives. Housing First works because it offers support, builds trust, and empowers tenants to live independently. When they no longer have to deal with the stress and danger of the streets tenants begin the journey from homelessness to hope.

They focus on identifying and achieving their goals, work on mental health and substance use disorders, connect to healthcare resources, and reconnect to families. Some tenants go back to work. Others volunteer. Their lives improve. The community improves.

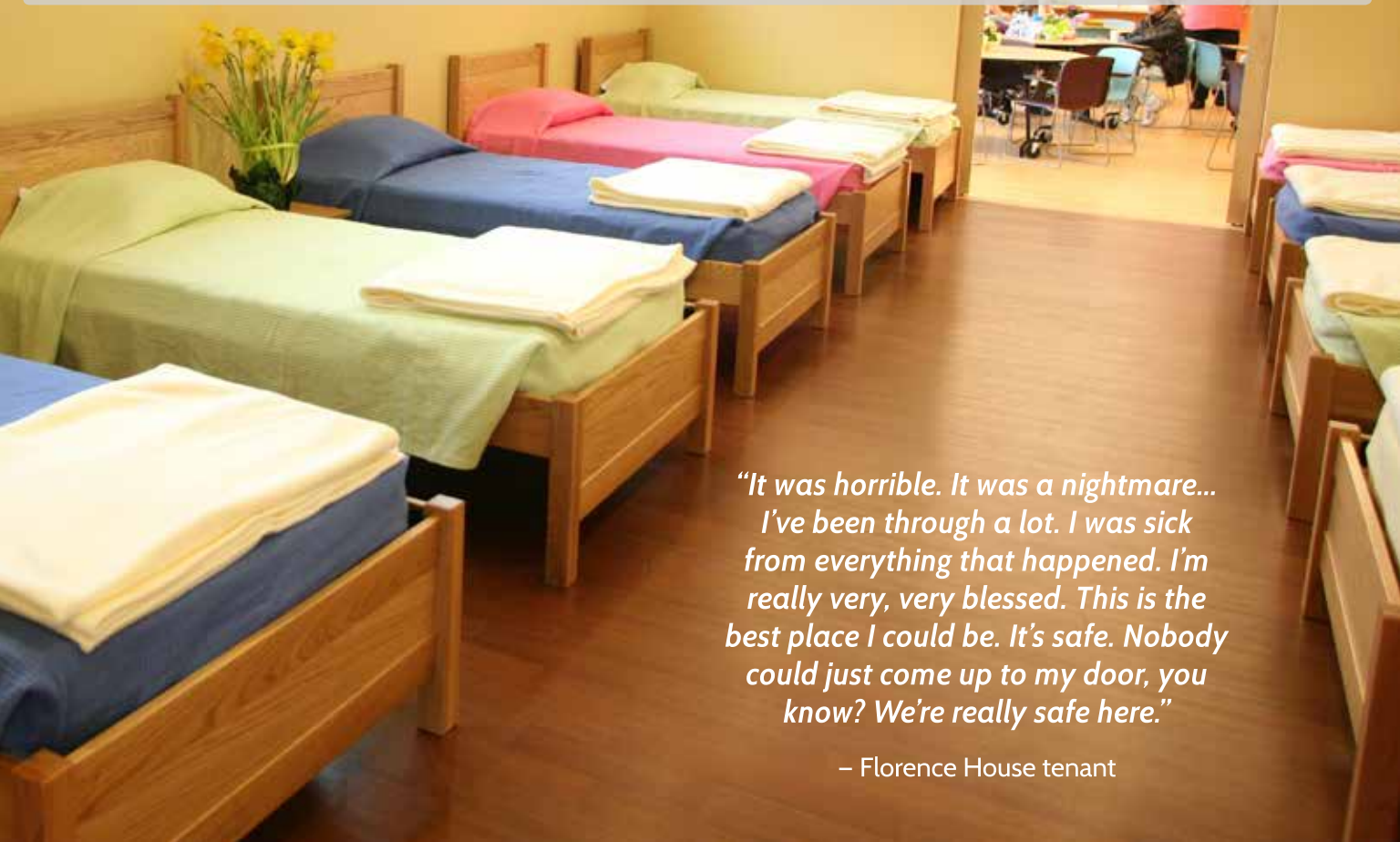
Housing First dramatically affects demand on the shelter system. Three years after Portland's original Housing First community opened, the City of Portland reported the percentage of people experiencing chronic homelessness had dropped from 37% to 19%. Housing First can end homelessness — not manage it, not deal with it — end it.

Since 2005, Avesta Housing and Preble Street have applied their respective strengths to solving homelessness in Portland with support from Portland Housing Authority and the Portland community, opening the initial Housing First site in Maine at Logan Place.

With data showing significantly improved tenant lives and decreased financial burdens on city emergency services, shelters, jails, and detox programs, Avesta and Preble Street replicated this model in 2010 at Florence House, specifically focused on women experiencing homelessness. Then in 2017, in response to increasing homelessness in Portland precipitated by rapidly diminishing state support for social services, we collaborated once again to build Huston Commons.

Avesta develops, owns, and manages the Housing First buildings, and Preble Street provides on-site staffing 24 hours a day, including social work services for tenants.

These programs have been enormously successful, providing our vulnerable, traumatized neighbors the opportunity to reclaim their lives and contribute to the larger community.



*"It was horrible. It was a nightmare...
I've been through a lot. I was sick
from everything that happened. I'm
really very, very blessed. This is the
best place I could be. It's safe. Nobody
could just come up to my door, you
know? We're really safe here."*

– Florence House tenant

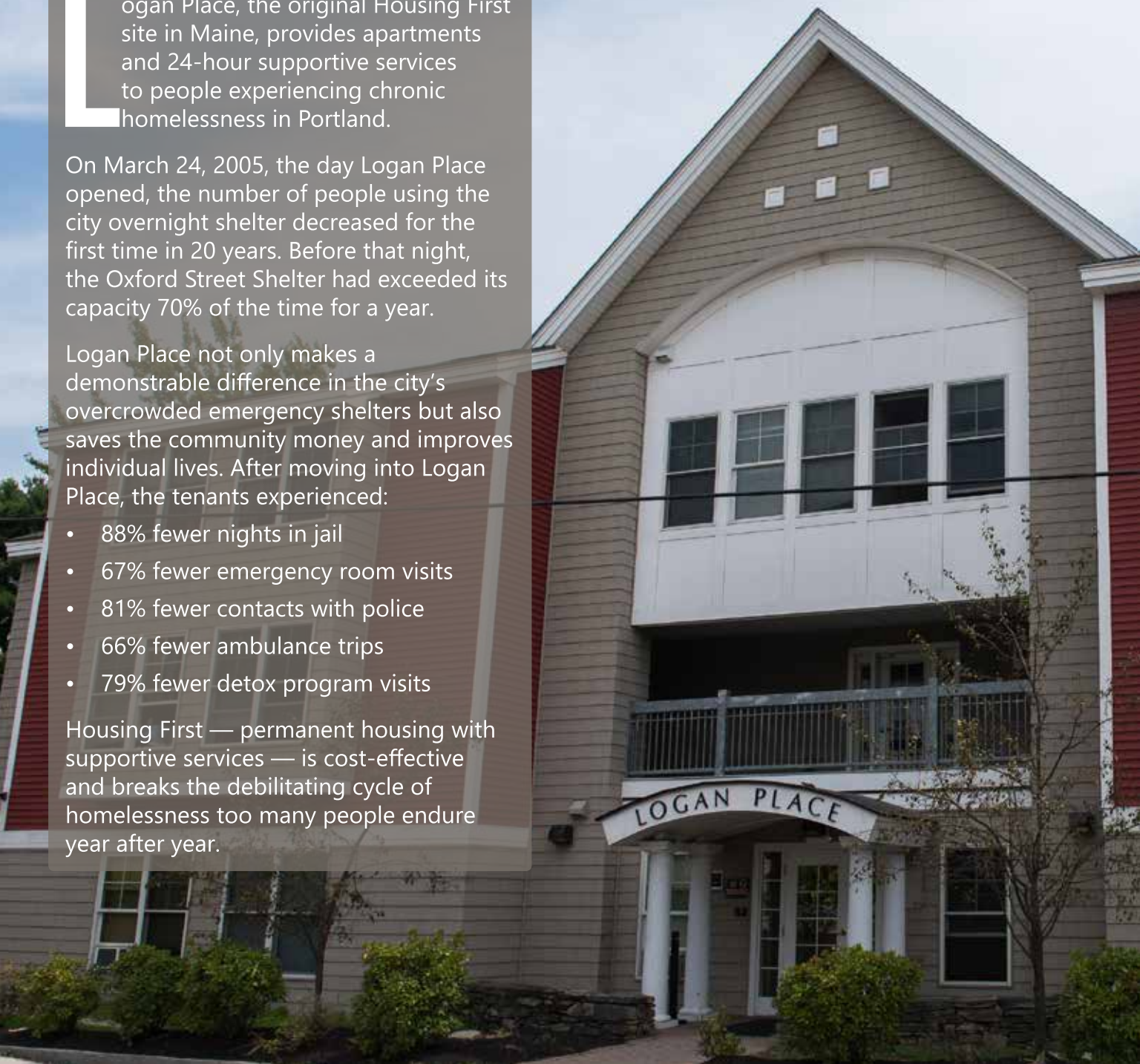
Logan Place, the original Housing First site in Maine, provides apartments and 24-hour supportive services to people experiencing chronic homelessness in Portland.

On March 24, 2005, the day Logan Place opened, the number of people using the city overnight shelter decreased for the first time in 20 years. Before that night, the Oxford Street Shelter had exceeded its capacity 70% of the time for a year.

Logan Place not only makes a demonstrable difference in the city's overcrowded emergency shelters but also saves the community money and improves individual lives. After moving into Logan Place, the tenants experienced:

- 88% fewer nights in jail
- 67% fewer emergency room visits
- 81% fewer contacts with police
- 66% fewer ambulance trips
- 79% fewer detox program visits

Housing First — permanent housing with supportive services — is cost-effective and breaks the debilitating cycle of homelessness too many people endure year after year.






Ox is living at Logan Place after having been homeless on and off since 2002 and on his own since he was 12. Thanks to Logan Place, his life has changed, and he deeply values his space and the respect and support of staff.

Looking for ways he can reciprocate, Ox rearranged a shared space on the third floor, turned it into a reading room, and works with the Portland Public Library to organize a book exchange.

"This is the best place I ever lived. I know 95% of the people in the building. It's like a family here. I make sure the light's on at night — if the light ain't on, no one's gonna come in. You come in here, you feel like you're at home."

A blanket rolled up and hanging above the door of his apartment reminds Ox of what life was like before he had a home. "That's why I'm here doing as much as I can for this place. I'm proud of my place. This is my home."



Florence House provides emergency shelter in addition to permanent supported housing for women who have experienced chronic homelessness. Whether they are shelter guests or apartment tenants, they have all experienced the trauma of loss — loss of home, family, health, jobs, relationships. At Florence House, staff bear witness to the factors that have formed their unique stories, whether they are 18 or 85: domestic violence; disabilities; mental illness; and medical, educational, and vocational systems that were not able to meet their needs.

At Florence House they find a sense of safety and stability, connection to the community, and skilled caseworkers to help them access treatment for chronic health problems and substance use disorders, resolve legal issues, develop skills, and build a new life off the streets.

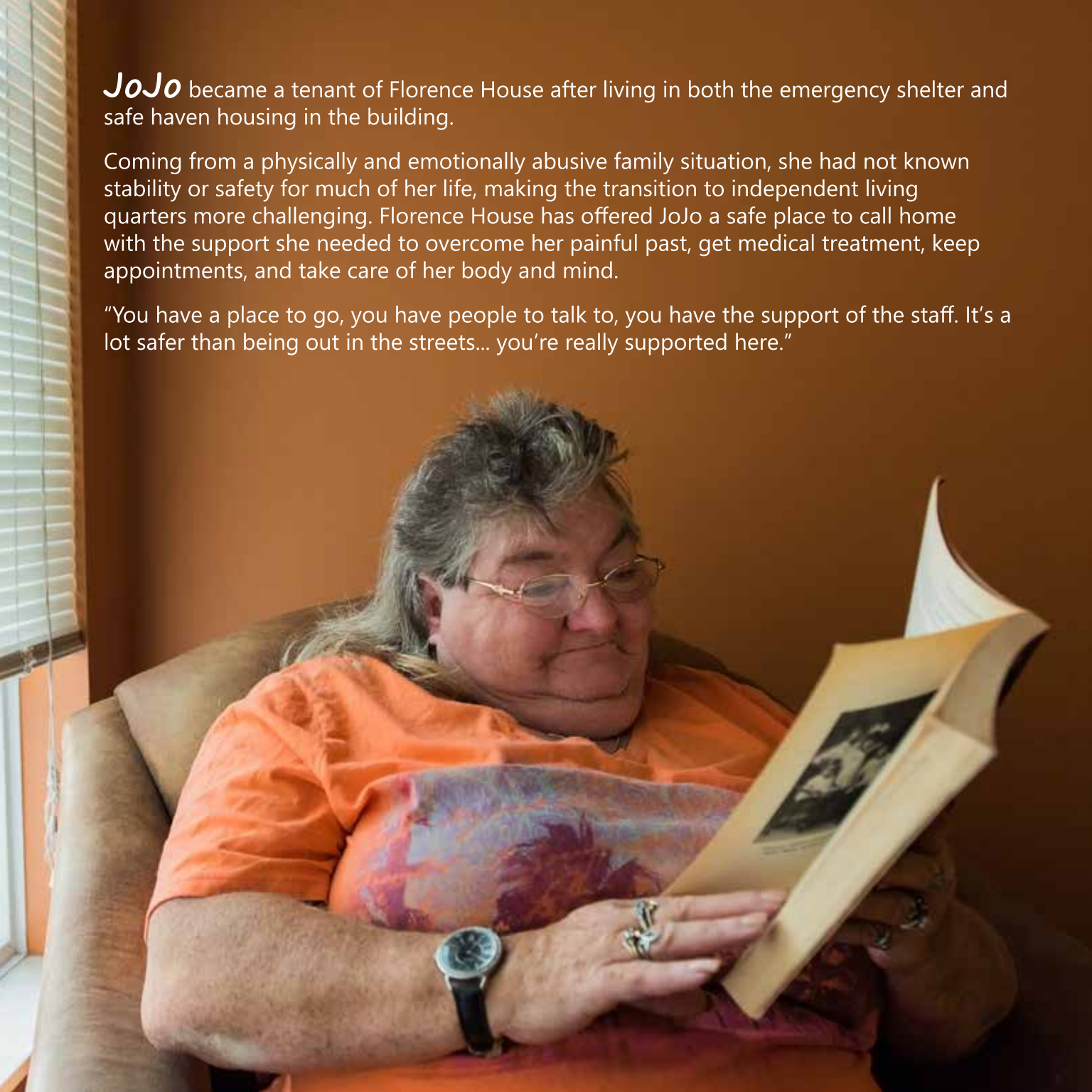
Florence House includes:

- 25 permanent furnished efficiency apartments
- 15 semi-private living spaces for women who need time to develop the self assurance and skills to manage an independent apartment
- 25 emergency beds providing immediate, short-term housing for women experiencing temporary homelessness

JoJo became a tenant of Florence House after living in both the emergency shelter and safe haven housing in the building.

Coming from a physically and emotionally abusive family situation, she had not known stability or safety for much of her life, making the transition to independent living quarters more challenging. Florence House has offered JoJo a safe place to call home with the support she needed to overcome her painful past, get medical treatment, keep appointments, and take care of her body and mind.

"You have a place to go, you have people to talk to, you have the support of the staff. It's a lot safer than being out in the streets... you're really supported here."



Huston Commons is the third Housing First program in Portland and was completed in 2017. Huston Commons provides essential 24-hour support services, including a tenant support office to accommodate regular practitioner hours for tenants, all of whom have disabilities. As with Logan Place and Florence House, tenants pay 30% of their income toward rent, while HUD funds cover the balance.

Together, the 30 tenants of Huston Commons spent thousands of nights in Portland shelters, in the woods, or under bridges before finding their way home to a furnished efficiency apartment at Huston Commons. A home for good.



Dawn loves to cook and aspires to teach kitchen skills to other tenants. "You gotta know how to cap a green pepper, you gotta know how to skin an onion, which kind of knife to use. Then just how to pan fry an egg." She also wants to lead a grocery class, "so when you walk in you go for produce, second you go for coffee, cream, sugar, spices, then get all the meats... and I know how to bag the food."

Although Dawn enjoys socializing, she also looks forward to time for herself. To relax, to reflect, and to heal.

"I want my life back. I want to get back to working part-time. I can't wait to cook. I can't wait to have my own shower. I can't wait to just live a life again. I'm so grateful... I'm so grateful. I've earned this."





WE CAN END CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS.

Homelessness in Maine is truly awful — it's gruesome and it's painful. The numbers are staggering.

But we don't have to accept homelessness. We don't need to build more shelters.

Things can change.

It's not enough to feed people at soup kitchens. It's not alright for people to sleep on mats on the floor. It's not okay for our neighbors to live for years on the streets. As one Housing First tenant said, "Since I've gotten off the streets, five more people have taken up the spot where I slept outside. The homelessness problem needs to stop."

Homelessness is not okay.

Supportive housing has proven successful locally and across the nation, both for the tenants and for the entire community.

Logan Place works. Florence House works. Huston Commons works.

Housing First works.

And we need more.





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Avesta Housing improves lives and strengthens communities by promoting and providing quality affordable homes for people in need.



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The mission of Preble Street is to provide accessible barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger and poverty, and to advocate for solutions to these problems.