



Marlene M. von Friederichs-Fitzwater, Ph.D., MPH
Executive Director
Health Communication Research Institute, Inc.
5025 J Street, Suite 311
Sacramento, CA 95819

Dear Dr. von Friederichs-Fitzwater:

First Step Communities is pleased to support the development and establishment of Joshua's House, a hospice/respite house for the homeless on the Loaves & Fishes campus in Sacramento. We are aware that, on average, one homeless person dies on the streets every week in Sacramento County and that number has steadily increased in the past few years. This translates into rates three times higher than the housed population in Sacramento County. Approximately 38% die alone on the streets and 35% die in emergency rooms or as inpatients. Cardiovascular disease and internal disease (AIDS, cancer, etc.) account for more than 20% of deaths in this population.

First Step Communities administers *PilgrimageSac*, a successful rotating church-based shelter program assisting unsheltered homeless adults in Sacramento. Collaborative efforts with six midtown churches, foodbanks, local volunteers and social service organizations provide shelter, a nutritious dinner, a light breakfast, and community. The services operate year round and have been in constant operation since 2009, serving over 125,000 meals and providing over 65,000 shelter-nights, and provided an estimated \$3M in value to the community at no cost.

First Step Communities is also working on a proposal to create a public-private partnership to create an Interim Housing and Services Community and medical clinic as a model that can cost effectively address the needs of up to 100 people experiencing homelessness at a time. Replication of the community across the Sacramento Region would greatly impact the number of unsheltered and vulnerable on our streets. However, far too many lives are still lost without the appropriate care Joshua's House would provide.

We agree that having a safe, comfortable, home-like facility for our terminally ill homeless neighbors where they would receive hospice care, have private rooms, regular meals and opportunities to interact with each other as well as caring volunteers would allow them to die with dignity and respect. The opportunity to keep their pets with them will be an added benefit.

Equally important, Joshua's House would serve to significantly reduce healthcare costs while providing quality hospice care to those in the homeless community. The largest "service" cost for the city and county is the cost for the Fire Department to transport people experiencing homelessness in ambulances. Joshua's House would provide a place for local hospitals to discharge terminally ill homeless patients with the knowledge that patients would receive quality hospice care! Hospice care significantly reduces the costs of re-occurring ambulance usage, ER visits and sort term hospital stays.

We are pleased to partner with you to provide hospice services to the homeless guests staying at Joshua's House. In addition, while financially unable presently, in the future First Step Communities expects to be able to become a supporting partner in bringing much-needed hospice/respite care to our homeless community to ensure that the poorest among us have an opportunity to die with dignity and respect.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Stephen Watters".

Stephen Watters, Executive Director
First Step Communities

a bridge out of homelessness

www.firststepcommunities.org