



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Transitions-Mental Health Association and the Housing Authority of San Luis Obispo Celebrate Launch of New Bishop Street Studios Housing Project

San Luis Obispo, CA –Bishop Street Studios is a visionary supportive housing project eight years in the making, a collaboration between Transitions-Mental Health Association (TMHA) and the Housing Authority of San Luis Obispo (HASLO). The partners are delighted to announce they will dedicate the project at a **Grand Opening on Saturday, November 16 at 2 pm** at 1720 Bishop Street in the City of San Luis Obispo. This will be a chance for the entire community to see Bishop Street Studios, tour the refurbished old orphanage, and celebrate the achievement with local community leaders.

TMHA and HASLO will stage the Grand Opening with funding partners Aetna, a CVS Health Company; Red Stone Equity Partners, LLC; the California Tax Credit Allocation Committee; the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco; San Luis Obispo Nonprofit Housing Corporation; Ten Over Studio; J.W. Design & Construction; and the City and County of San Luis Obispo.

CHANGING LIVES

Ahead of this community celebration, Bishop Street Studios has opened its doors to residents of San Luis Obispo County with behavioral health needs. 24 adults moved in at the end of September, and an additional 9 residents will join them at the end of October. In total, 33 men and women living with a mental illness will now have permanent housing and supports in a dazzling, historical setting.

“I’ve been giving each resident a walk-through tour of their apartment,” says Residential Manager, Jose Gonzalez. “At the end I put the key in their hand and say *Welcome Home*. And that’s when the tears start flowing.”

The vast majority of TMHA clients are on the lowest rung of the economic ladder. According to the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), 71% of mental health clients report an annual income of \$20,000 or less and “an estimated one-third to one-half of people who live with serious mental illness lives at, or near, the federal poverty level.” The National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors has observed that for this population unemployment rates can be “as high as 90 percent.”

Bishop Street Studios is an extremely convenient location for residents, within easy walking distance of San Luis Obispo County Behavioral Health facilities, as well as public transportation on Johnson Avenue. The apartments are also in close proximity to both the Growing Grounds Farm and Growing Grounds Downtown, two social enterprise businesses run by TMHA. The Growing Grounds programs offer the

best ground floor opportunity for adults with mental illness to reenter the work force and receive vocational training that can help them find employment in the greater community.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The old Sunny Acres building above Johnson Avenue, once used as both an orphanage and a juvenile detention center, was abandoned 45 years ago. What was once a magnificent building designed by the William Mooser Company was reaching derelict condition, a hub for vandalism and graffiti. For decades, the building posed a riddle to the City and County: *what should be done with the place?*

TMHA and HASLO believed the answer was to preserve the unique character of this building *and* preserve the essence of its original intent: to be a valuable community resource. The two agencies renovated the historical building and added three more modern buildings designed to complement the original. The result is **Bishop Street Studios**: 34 single occupancy apartments, with one reserved for an on-site residential manager. The project has increased the amount of affordable supportive housing for adults with mental health needs in the city of San Luis Obispo by nearly 30%—a huge impact for a single project.

TMHA and HASLO will dedicate the new Bishop Street Studios housing project as a renewed place of compassion and care for those in need. "This is an example of community partnership at its best," said Anne Wyatt, Executive Director of SmartShare Housing Solutions. "The project represents a win all around, for the county, the city and our neighbors in need."

ABOUT TMHA

This year TMHA is proud to celebrate 40 years of providing mental health services throughout San Luis Obispo and North Santa Barbara counties. TMHA has been providing mental health services and promoting recovery and wellness through work, housing, community and family support. TMHA is a duly qualified charitable 501c(3) organization that operates 40 programs at over 35 locations which reach more than 4,000 individuals and family members in San Luis Obispo and North Santa Barbara counties. For more information about the Grand Opening, contact Caity McCardell at cmccardell@t-mha.org.

ABOUT HASLO

The Housing Authority of San Luis Obispo celebrates 51 years of serving the most vulnerable in our community. HASLO houses 3,000 families, seniors, veterans and disabled each month throughout San Luis Obispo County. HASLO is recipient of HUD's High Performer award and the National Award of Excellence from the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials.