Margarita Inn FAQs- Detailed

# Physical space

* Where is the Margarita Inn?
  + 1566 Oak Street, Evanston.
* How many rooms are there at the Margarita Inn?
  + The hotel has 46 rooms, 43 of which are used for participants and available to them 24/7. The remainder of the rooms is used as offices and consultation rooms.
* What are the rooms like?
  + Rooms are private and semi-private, with some roommate matches.
* How many people can you serve at one time?
  + We can serve on average 63 people.
* Why do you need this facility?
  + The community needs about 185 year-round shelter beds. Although the Margarita Inn is triple the size of our former shelter at Hilda’s Place, it cannot serve all those in need. Our waitlist hovers between 50 - 80 people.
* Why do you need a hotel to do this work? What’s the difference between a hotel and a church basement?
  + Our experience during the pandemic taught us that providing dignity-based services where people have individual rooms from which they don’t have to exit during the day is not only kinder but also a more effective way of providing those services. Unlike an emergency shelter model, participants have dedicated beds and do not queue outside to wait for openings. Communicable diseases are also much less of a risk to both staff and participants when people are in individual rooms.
* What are you doing to maintain the exterior space and aesthetic?
  + Onsite staff conduct regular rounds of the external property to pick up litter and trash and clean the site. Additionally, Connections is in conversations with the Garden Club of Evanston and Natural Habitat Evanston to update the front and patio landscape. Finally, Connections will continue to maintain the flags and has no plans to remove any of the Margarita Inn signage.

# People served

* How many people have you served since opening operations?
  + Almost 300 people
* How many people are from Evanston?
  + 86% of the residents are Evanstonians.
* What sorts of households/people do we serve at the Margarita Inn?
  + We serve households of all configurations. This includes single men, women, and gender non-binary individuals, couples, and families with children in their care.
* How long is your waitlist?
  + Our waitlist is 50-80 people at any given point. This does not translate directly into when someone enters the Margarita Inn as a resident. We manage our waitlist dynamically by prioritizing based on vulnerability.
* Where do people come from who stay at the Margarita Inn, and how do they get in?
  + People generally learn of our services by visiting our drop-in centers at Hilda’s Place (1458 Chicago Avenue) and Dewey Avenue (2121 Dewey Avenue). We also work closely with Interfaith Action of Evanston, which operates a year-round drop-in (the Hospitality Center) as well as a cold-weather shelter and warming centers that operate from November to April.
* How long do people stay at the Margarita Inn?
  + The average length of stay is currently 289 days or approximately ten months.
* What are the rules for entry into the Margarita Inn?
  + Upon entry, every participant meets with Connections’ staff and starts a service plan for exiting into stable housing. They also review and agree to community guidelines and expectations about sheltering at the Margarita Inn. These guidelines include respecting oneself, fellow residents, staff members, and neighbors and focusing on maintaining safety for all staff and residents. For this reason, no weapons of any kind are allowed on site.
* Are drugs and alcohol allowed?
  + Illicit drugs are not allowed. Alcohol is not permitted in common areas, but as it is a legal substance, residents who are 21 years or older are allowed to drink alcohol in their rooms if it does not cause any safety issues or disturbances. Smoking is not permitted inside the building.
* Do you have individuals with criminal backgrounds staying at the Margarita Inn?
  + CFTH does not do background checks. However, we check the sex offender registry before entry into the shelter. People are unable to stay there if they are on the registry.  If someone behaves in a way that is causing safety issues at the Margarita, they would be discharged. It is important to note that poverty, race, and criminal backgrounds are inextricably linked, so people with criminal justice involvement may be staying at the Margarita Inn.
* Are people being released directly from jail and coming straight to the Margarita Inn?
  + No. Connections, along with other shelter providers, is listed as a resource for returning citizens who may experience homelessness after exiting jail or prison. These returning citizens are not given special access to “jump the line” and enter the shelter sooner than others on the waitlist.
* Why is a person standing in front of the Margarita Inn right now?
  + They might be waiting for a ride, parking their bicycle, or going for a walk. Loitering, yelling, partying, and smoking are prohibited in front of the Margarita Inn.
* What should I do if I see someone behaving inappropriately in front of the Margarita Inn?
  + If the behavior violates the law or appears to be a danger to themselves or others, please call 911. If they appear to be having a mental health crisis, please call Trilogy’s First-response Alternative Crisis Team at **1.800.FACT.400** (1.800.322.8400). In specific cases related to activities directly on the Margarita Inn property, please call Connections’ number at **224.422.7969.**
* What are the racial demographics of the people you serve?
  + 53% Black, 18% White, 17% LatinX, 6% AAPI, 6% Other/Unknown

# Services

* How long has Connections been providing shelter at the Margarita Inn?
  + Since March 2020, the beginning of the pandemic.
* What services do you provide to people staying at the Margarita Inn?
  + On-site physical and mental health care via licensed health care practitioners, medical referrals
  + Laundry services
  + Three daily meals
  + Mainstream benefits enrollment assistance
  + Enrollment into Cook County's Coordinated Entry (CE) system, administered by the Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County, to help people connect to housing opportunities across suburban Cook County
  + Art and other recreational therapy activities
  + Support groups
  + Transportation to medical and other appointments
  + Intensive case management
  + Housing location services
  + Linkages to:
    - Literacy services
    - Legal support
    - Substance and alcohol use treatment
    - Childcare
* What community organizations do you partner with and why?
  + Connections works with a variety of community partners, including Open Studio Project, Live4Lali, McGaw YMCA, YWCA Evanston/North Shore, Y.O.U, Curt’s Café, Moran Center, Infant Welfare Society, Youth Job Center, Interfaith Action of Evanston, Peer Services, school districts, faith communities and organizations, community volunteers, the City of Evanston, and many more.
* Do you feed people, and where does the food come from?
  + We provide three nutritious meals per day. Food is purchased from local restaurants as well as provided by community volunteers.
* Do you drug test people?
  + No, not unless they request it. Many people who experience homelessness, like many who do not, use alcohol and other substances to cope with the stress of their situations. In cases where their substance use impairs their lives, we partner with them (when they are ready) to create individual plans to reduce or eliminate harmful behaviors.
* Where do kids play when they are staying at the Margarita Inn?
  + Children staying at the Margarita Inn with their families play in their rooms in some of the common spaces with supervision. The Margarita Inn does not have a dedicated play space for children, but case managers work with each household to ensure that children have appropriate access to school, childcare, and recreational activities.
* How many staff are present on-site?
  + There are a minimum of two residential staff present at all times. On weekdays, five staff are present on average, including case managers, management staff, behavioral health specialists, and nursing staff.

# Impact

* Where do people go when they leave the Margarita Inn?
  + Most people exit the Margarita Inn for stable housing. Other destinations could be a different shelter, returning to family, a hotel the resident pays for, and sometimes, sadly, returning to homelessness.
* How many people have you served?
  + Since the beginning we have served almost 300 participants.

# Costs & Funding

* What does it cost to run the Margarita Inn?
  + Connections pays the hotel a nightly rate for all 46 hotel rooms. These costs, in addition to staffing, insurance, supplies, food, laundry, and other standard expenses, we’ve paid approximately $3.5 million dollars to the hotel owner. Purchasing the Margarita Inn would eliminate hotel room rental costs, making its ongoing operation more cost-effective and sustainable.
* How are you paying for operations right now?
  + Connections pays for the current operations of the Margarita Inn primarily through federal funding passed through Cook County and privately raised donations from our supporters.
  + No Evanston-specific tax dollars are used to fund operations.
* How much have you paid to the Margarita Inn so far?
  + Connections has operated out of the Margarita Inn since March of 2020. To date, we have paid $3.5 million to the Margarita Inn, including $165,000 in hotel taxes.
* How are you going to pay for operations in the future?
  + Connections has operated shelter services for more than 37 years. Although a 24/7, service-rich environment is more expensive, Connections has increased its footprint in both government and private fundraising spaces. We are confident that we will generate sufficient income to operate the Margarita Inn perpetually.
* Why do you want to own this building?
  + As mentioned above, owning the facility rather than renting hotel rooms makes the hotel’s operation sustainable for the long term. In addition, the agency has had a long-standing goal to increase its fixed asset inventory to create long-term financial stability and flexibility for the organization.