

MARGARITA INN BY THE NUMBERS

> HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE HELPED?

	Start (7/1/2023)	Moved In	Moved Out	End (6/30/2024)	
Single Male	27	22	34	15	Total served during FY24 (start + moved in)
Single Female	12	15	18	9	
Couples	2	0	2	0	
Families	6	8	9	5	
Total Households	47	49	62	34	
Total # of people	56	66	78	44	122
Total # of kids	8	15	13	10	23

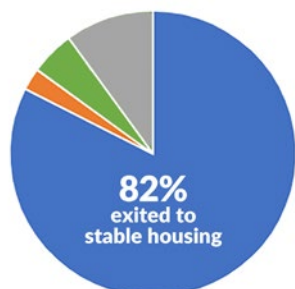
86
Percent of
households from
Evanston

(83 of 96 households)

10.6
Average length
of stay
in months

(317.5 days)

> MARGARITA INN SHELTER EXITS

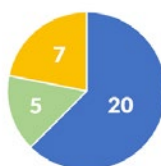


- > **82%** transitioned to stable housing
- > **6%** transitioned to similar or higher level of care
- > **1%** exited into homelessness
- > **10%** declined to share their housing destination

> EMERGENCY SERVICES

Number of incidents requiring emergency response

- > Evanston Fire Dept.: 20
- > Evanston Police Dept.: 7
- > Evanston Fire + Police: 5



> GNAC SUMMARY

In accordance with our [Good Neighbor Agreement](#) with the city of Evanston, the Margarita Inn Good Neighbor Advisory Committee (GNAC) met four times since its launch in fall 2023. This annual report is also part of fulfilling the terms of that agreement. The GNAC meetings, which are open to the public, include representatives from the downtown Evanston business community, nearby homeowners and renters, landlords, the Evanston Police Department, Fourth Ward Councilmember Jonathan Nieuwsma and City of Evanston staff. To date, there have been zero complaints about the Margarita Inn received through the communications channels established by the Good Neighbor Agreement.

MARGARITA INN

FY24

JULY 1, 2023 - JUNE 30, 2024

ANNUAL REPORT



connections
FOR THE HOMELESS

**“The Margarita Inn
saved my life.”**

> Margarita Inn resident
LOREN TAYLOR



I found my way to the Margarita Inn about halfway through my chemotherapy treatment. One of the big risks when you're getting chemo is having a suppressed immune system, so I was doing everything I could to stay out of a congregate setting. I knew that would put my health at risk. I successfully completed the chemo treatment in early 2024, and now I can start thinking about the future again. I graduated from Northwestern University. I'm living proof that anyone can end up in a situation like this.

Each meeting consists of data sharing from Connections for the Homeless program staff, reports from the Evanston Police Department and other city personnel, and community feedback provided by our community stakeholder group representatives, per the requirements of the Good Neighbor Agreement. These datapoints include the total number of services provided at the Margarita Inn, the number of households entering and exiting the Margarita Inn, the destination of households who exited in the previous quarter, the number of incidents that required emergency services, the type of emergency service response (police only, fire/EMS only, both police and fire/EMS), and the number of complaints received through the above-mentioned communication channels. The Evanston Police Department community policing division attends GNAC meeting to provide police statistics on emergency services.

Often the statistics shared by EPD aligned with the emergency service incidents recorded by Connections staff. However, because EPD's statistics are gathered based on address, their statistics sometimes reflect incidents that occur on the public right-of-way near the building that program staff are unaware of. After data sharing, each community stakeholder has the opportunity to give feedback. So far, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with stakeholder members stating that they haven't heard of or seen any community issues related to the Margarita Inn.

GNAC has seats for two homeowner representatives, two renter representatives, two business representatives, two landlord representatives, a representative from the City, up to three Margarita Inn residents, and three Connections for the Homeless staff. Fourth Ward Councilmember Jonathan Nieuwsma and a representative from Evanston Police Department have attended each meeting as well.

The Margarita Inn complies with all terms of its [special use permit](#).

> WRAPAROUND SERVICES AT THE MARGARITA INN

The model of non-congregate shelter services employed by the Margarita Inn provides residents with the dignity that comes with a door, a lock, and a private bathroom and without the need to exit each day. What's more, this model allows Connections to connect residents to robust wraparound services. Every household staying at the Margarita Inn works alongside a case manager to identify a housing solution that meets their specific needs.

The availability of rooms of various sizes means that the Margarita Inn can accommodate individuals as well as families of different sizes. There are many single adults who reside at the Margarita Inn, but there are also couples and adults with one, two, or three children.

Regular engagement with case managers is the only requirement for households staying at the Margarita. Last

year, our two (2FTE) case managers provided more than 900 hours of direct case management, according to case notes. These one-on-one services provide an opportunity for households to secure public benefits, navigate housing searches, apply for subsidized housing programs, build job and life skills, and navigate unique and often complex household circumstances.

The shelter has a wide variety of activity-based groups facilitated by staff, community partners and volunteers, including knitting, art, and kids' groups. The groups are ongoing with residents dropping by and engaging at their leisure and with projects that speak to their interests. In FY24, there were more than 170 group sessions — about three per week on average — attended by more than 40 unique individuals.

One of our community partners — Open Studio Project — has organized group art therapy sessions, for example. Other group sessions help build life skills that contribute to participants' ability to secure and maintain housing, such as financial literacy and job readiness preparations. There are also group sessions that focus on maintaining physical and mental health as well as building community through activities such as knitting, movie nights, and activities for kids.

Additionally, we are conscious of setting up the Margarita Inn in such a manner as to give participants space to build community. In the past year, we have opened the shelter's main meeting room for more free use, where it's not uncommon to walk by and find participants gathered to watch a show or share their lives and break bread together. The patio is also a meaningful space for casual community, and there are four to five participants who call themselves the "breakfast club," like to drink their coffee together on the patio, and discuss philosophical questions. This all makes an impact, and we are conscious of maintaining these essential community spaces as we embark on our extensive renovation of the Margarita Inn.

> HEALTH SERVICES

Housing and healthcare are closely connected: serious illness and medical debt frequently contribute to homelessness, and the experience of homelessness is linked to poorer health outcomes and a lack of access to medical care. The core of Connections' Health and Wellness program at the Margarita Inn is an on-site health clinic offering basic physical and behavioral health services as well as staff who provide health care navigation and coordination to ensure participants' health needs are met.

Our on-site health team is led by Medical Director Dr. Keith Boyd, MD, and two (2FTE) licensed Behavioral Health professionals as well as volunteer medical professionals and residents. Services are available as individual appointments, group counseling sessions, and community clinic hours. Our health team, which operates clinics in the Margarita Inn and our two drop-in locations, provides ser-

VICES onsite to about half of all Margarita Inn participants every year.

This year, we also began the planning process to launch a Medical Respite Pilot Program, which will provide short-term shelter placement alongside enhanced access to medical care for individuals experiencing homelessness with an acute illness or injury getting discharged from the hospital. With no place to recover and heal, this population is at high risk of hospital readmission, unnecessary emergency room visits, and poor medical outcomes. Once the pilot is launched next year, several Margarita Inn beds will be set aside specifically for Medical Respite, giving participants enhanced access to medical care while they recover and work towards a housing solution.

> TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Connections staff provided the equivalent of \$1,654 in daily and monthly CTA transit cards and ride shares. Staff also provided transportation support using agency vehicles. In total, Connections staff distributed 92 transit cards were distributed last year and provided 128 rides through our agency vehicle or in partnership with a ride-share provider such as Uber or Lyft.

> MEALS

Every participant at the Inn is provided three daily meals. We partner with local restaurants and volunteers to provide prepared meals. In 2024, Margarita Inn staff served approximately 65,700 meals, spending \$125,974 food with local restaurants and businesses, and leveraging roughly 35,000 in donated meals through 204 volunteer groups.

> PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION

Annual participant surveys are conducted each spring. In our last survey, 100% of respondents said they would recommend Connections for the Homeless programs to a friend, and 80% said they feel mentally healthier since moving into the Margarita. In the words of one Margarita Inn resident, "These services are desperately needed in this newer model that allows health care to help."

> COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Connections staff participate in monthly homeless task force meetings, and Connections Chief Programs Tina White also hosts a regular task force meeting.

As part of our onsite wraparound service model, we work with a variety of non-profit partners as well as health care organizations. Some of these groups include PEER Services, Community and Economic Development Association of Cook County (CEDA), Impact, Live for Lali, Erie Health, and Endeavor Health.

> FUNDING SOURCES

Annual operating funds for the Margarita are supported through a diverse set of sources. Presently, the operation is not funded by any direct Cook County or Evanston taxpayer dollars.

STATE FUNDS

Illinois Department of Human Services' Emergency and Transitional Housing Grant: \$1.05M

FEDERAL FUNDS

Emergency Solutions Grant: \$125k

Federal Emergency Management Agency's Emergency Food and Shelter Program: \$35k

PRIVATE FUNDS

Monetary and in-kind donations: \$327k

> CELEBRATING THE MARGARITA INN

On February 13, 2024, we held a celebration of Connections' purchase of the Margarita Inn with the support of Cook County. About 100 community members, neighbors, elected officials, and other stakeholders got tours of the building followed by a series of short speeches.

"This place has really made a big difference in my life for the good," said Jelani Davis, who moved into the Margarita Inn in November 2023 after he was diagnosed with congestive heart failure, to applause from the crowd. "Hopefully, if everything goes well, I'll have an additional 20 years of life thanks to Connections." Just days before the event, Jelani was able to sign a new lease and move into his new apartment in Park Ridge.

Other speakers included Connections Board President and Pastor Monté Dillard; Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle; Cook County Commissioner Josina Morita; Chief Homelessness Officer for the State of Illinois Christine Haley; HUD Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Richard Monocchio; Evanston Mayor Daniel Biss; and neighbor and ally Toni Rey.



From left: Evanston Mayor Daniel Biss, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, Connections CEO Betty Bogg, HUD official Diane M. Shelley, Illinois Chief Homelessness Officer Christine Haley, and HUD official Richard Monocchio