

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FINANCE

Francis House of Peace Provides Hand Up for Residents

Project HOME and Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corp. partner on 94 units of housing, services for city's most vulnerable.

By [Christine Serlin](#)

Named in honor of Pope Francis for his commitment to helping the poor, the newly constructed Francis House of Peace in Philadelphia's Chinatown shares that same mission by serving some of the city's most vulnerable residents.



Hugh Loomis/Courtesy Kramer Marks Architects

Francis House of Peace, developed by Project HOME and the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corp., is providing permanent supportive housing for the formerly homeless, young adults, and other low-income households. Project HOME's vision, "None of us are home until all of us are home," appears on the exterior of the building.



Hugh Loomis/Courtesy Kramer Marks Architects

The 94-unit Francis House of Peace was named after Pope Francis because of his commitment to improve the lives of those living in poverty. A dedication ceremony was held in September prior to the pope's visit to Philadelphia.

Co-founded by Scullion in 1989, the nonprofit is committed to providing more than just housing. In its name, HOME stands for housing, opportunity for employment, medical care, and education.

Residents will have access to a wealth of supportive services through Project HOME's Personal Recovery Services program. Its Honickman Learning Center and Comcast Technologies Labs, Stephen Klein Wellness Center, and Employment Services Department are just a few of the resources from which the residents can benefit. Programs and services will also respond to the bilingual and multicultural character of the community.

"It's in the heart of Chinatown, and we wanted the project to fit within the existing community as well as create a community in the new building," says Stearns.

Set on a small urban site that was contributed by the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, the nine-story building includes laundry rooms, exercise rooms with equipment and without for yoga and tai chi, and computer rooms. The building includes a number of green features, including energy-efficient heating, rain gardens, and high-performance insulation.

The project also includes outdoor space for the residents. Part of the Francis House of Peace's grounds is another nod to Pope Francis. A grotto structure that was located at the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul during the pope's visit to Philadelphia in September 2015 now resides in a courtyard. Thousands of people visited and tied knots on the grotto with their prayers and struggles. The pope made an impromptu stop to bless the grotto before presiding over an open-air mass.

The \$24.5 million development was financed primarily with low-income housing tax credits (LIHTCs) allocated by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. National Equity Fund served as the LIHTC syndicator, and Capital One was the investor as well as the construction lender. Additional financing was provided through the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta's Affordable Housing Program.

The 94-unit development, which opened to residents in January, is home to people who had been homeless or at risk of homelessness; young adults, including those aging out of the foster-care system; and other low-income residents, including seniors 62 and older.

Developed by Project HOME, in partnership with the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corp., it is the fourth project of its Middleton Partnership, which was created through a leadership gift from Leigh and John Middleton to end and prevent chronic street homelessness in Philadelphia by leveraging the support of public and private funders.

Thirty-seven units are set aside for residents earning 60% or less of the area median income (AMI), 42 for residents earning 50% or less of the AMI, and 15 for residents earning 20% or less of the AMI. The developer expects the building to be fully occupied by the end of April.

Janet Stearns, vice president of real estate development and assets at Project HOME, says she believes Francis House of Peace will be transformative for the residents.

Housing is the first step. "Sister Mary [Scullion, president and executive director of Project HOME] says it's not just a handout but a hand up to have that housing in place and find a job and stabilize," says Stearns.