

Siena/Francis House strives for nothing short of remarkable

By Christain Rush

Not only is the Siena/Francis House homeless shelter the largest shelter in Nebraska; it's also the largest shelter in the region. In terms of meals served and number of overnight stays, the Siena/Francis house is the largest shelter from Denver to Chicago, says Tim Sully, development director.

The Siena/Francis House boasts more than size alone. This year marks the sixth consecutive year the shelter has won the coveted four-star rating from Charity Navigator.

"Attaining this rating verifies that Siena/Francis exceeds industry standards and outperforms most charities in this line of work," says Michael Thatcher, president and CEO of Charity Navigator.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Siena/Francis is its residential addiction recovery program, Miracles Treatment Center. This program is free to adult men and women. Within the program, along with basic sobriety classes, patients receive counseling and are taught life skills through various classes.

"Generally, people get sick and tired of being sick and tired," Sully says. "This is why they are attracted to the Miracles Treatment Center."

The addiction recovery program is unique because it is a long-term commitment program. Patients are required to complete a minimum of four months within the program. The maximum time of stay is however long it takes each patient to graduate.

All patients of the Miracles Treatment Center are automatically enrolled into the on-site employment-training program. In this program, patients are assigned "first-level" jobs within the shelter such as front-desk staff, kitchen staff and maintenance.

The Siena/Francis House is referred to as a "low-barrier" shelter. In other words, the shelter does not discriminate on who comes through the door. If someone is struggling with addiction or mental health issues, the Siena/Francis staff welcomes with open arms. A lot of shelters across the country are not "low-barrier."

Sully says very rarely do they turn down or kick out someone from the community. If a resident continuously causes problems with other members of the community, then the staff takes action.

"We rarely see problems in the community because the staff behind the desk used to be in the same position as the incoming men and women into the shelter," Sully says. "There is



Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless

a compassion and understanding on their part because they've been in the same boat."

Siena/Francis also provides excellent health care to its residents. The shelter has partnerships with three organizations that provide healthcare within its in-house clinic. Charles Drew Health Center, a local nonprofit, provides healthcare Monday through Friday at varying times.

Students and volunteer physicians from Creighton University Medical School donate their time to provide healthcare on Saturdays from 2 to 6 p.m. Creighton also provides psychiatric care in the Siena/Francis in-house medical facility every other Saturday. Finally, Siena/Francis residents receive healthcare assistance from the Visiting Nurse Association (VNA).

In 2016, the Siena/Francis House served 417,226 meals, or 1,143 meals per day, including breakfast, lunch and a hot dinner. Every meal is donated, Sully says.

However, the meal-provider program costs \$425,000 annually. The program consists of two trucks that drive to partnerships that provide the shelter with food each day. These partnerships include various grocery stores, butcher shops and bakeries.

Another key supporter of food comes from the numerous food drives that happen each year. The majority of the food drives take place in November and December. The largest annual food drive is Creighton University Medical Center's drive in December. This provides more than 30,000 pounds of food each year.

Siena/Francis has big plans to renovate and expand its already established apartment complexes on campus. As of today, the shelter has two separate apartment complexes totaling up to 48 units, which are almost all full. Every night the shelters in general are "grossly overcrowded, regardless of weather," Sully says.

"A main reason we, along with other shelters across the nation, are overcrowded is because there isn't enough affordable and appropriate housing options outside of the shelters," Sully says.

Quite possibly the aspect of Siena/Francis that makes the shelter stand out the most is its rehousing and reintegration program. The shelter provides staff whose primary job everyday is to work with residents to help them navigate their way out of Siena/Francis House. The shelter partners with 70 other local programs and businesses to assist the residents.

For professional or educational purposes, the Siena/Francis House also partners with Metropolitan Community College and Heartland Works Force Solutions. Within these partnerships residents can take classes to acquire a GED or even take basic competency classes to receive a certificate, which will help them acquire a job in the future.

The rehousing and reintegration program can provide services as simple, but necessary, as paying for residents to acquire their birth certificate so they can obtain a driver's license or state ID necessary for attaining a job or housing options. Gestures like these prove the Siena/Francis House is dedicated to not only care for its residents, but also ensures those in need have a future.

"This is the pillars of who we are," Sully says. "First we take care of the emergent needs, then work with individuals and families to help navigate their way out to a better life."