

SMOC Opens Supportive Housing Facility in Fitchburg



*Pictured above are SMOC CEO Susan Gentili, Senator John J. Cronin, and Fitchburg Mayor Stephen DiNatale
Source: SMOC Facebook page*

On May 12, [South Middlesex Opportunity Council](#) (SMOC) hosted a ribbon-cutting event and open house to celebrate the opening of 14 units of affordable, supportive housing in a newly renovated historic home at 94 Highland Avenue in Fitchburg. To ensure safety and accessibility of the facility, the Foundation awarded a \$75,000 Activation Fund grant in 2019 for installation of a building-wide fire, sprinkler and standpipe system, and for ADA-related modifications. Foundation staff attended the event to celebrate completion of the renovation and recognize the many people who contributed to its success.

Susan Gentili, CEO of SMOC, remarked, “We are grateful for funding from The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts and MassHousing’s Center for Community Recovery Innovations (CCRI), and for support from the City of Fitchburg, in making this facility a reality. This beautiful home will provide essential affordable and supportive housing for people in need in the region.”

The project increases the supply of affordable housing and support services for historically marginalized populations in the North Central region, an area with a severe shortage of affordable housing options and emergency shelter beds, which has resulted in a growing population of people facing homelessness. This beautifully renovated residence will house up to 13 recently homeless adults in recovery from substance use disorders in a safe and supportive environment that includes an onsite house manager. Residents will receive full access to support services to promote continued recovery, including mental health and counseling services and wrap-around resources to foster housing stability such as job training and placement.

Founded in 1965, SMOC is an umbrella organization that works in the community to provide opportunities to enhance self-sufficiency and to create a safety net when short-term and/or continuing support are needed. The agency expanded its mission in 1998 to address the housing and supportive service needs of homeless and at-risk single adults in Middlesex, Worcester and Hampden Counties.

SMOC is among the agencies participating in the North Central Housing First Workgroup, a coalition of area stakeholders that meets regularly to share resources, coordinate referrals, and build local capacity to address regional housing issues. This work builds on the success of [Home Again](#), a Round 2 Synergy Initiative project in which a coalition of providers, including SMOC, piloted a Housing First approach to address chronic adult homelessness in Worcester. The Foundation invested \$2.2M in the Home Again project over five years beginning in 2007, and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness recognized Worcester as the first city of its size to effectively end chronic adult homelessness in 2011. Though that accomplishment was sustained for several years, the number of individuals facing chronic adult homelessness has increased yet again, leading to renewed efforts in Worcester and throughout Central Massachusetts to develop strategies to support this population.

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