New Grant, Partnership Offers Temporary Housing for Front Line Healthcare Workers

Asheville, NC: A new hospitality partnership will offer free temporary housing to those on the frontline.

Virtelle Hospitality in partnership with Buncombe County and Dogwood Health Trust Partner, will pilot a new lodging program for healthcare workers, first responders, and front line community members in response to COVID-19.

“We are proud to be a part of this community and this great partnership between the public, private, and non-profit sector,” said Himanshu Kervir, president and CEO, Virtelle Hospitality. “Not only are we glad to provide a safe place for our community members in this time of need, but also grateful for the opportunity to help get some of our furloughed employees back to work.”

The program offers free temporary housing for those on the frontline working to prevent communicable diseases and that require a safe residence to self-isolate if they were to contract the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19.

The partnership consists of a grant of more than $54,000 from Dogwood Health Trust to cover half the cost of 30 hotel rooms for a period of 60 days. As the goal of this program is to support a still-active workforce, guest access will be managed to promote social distancing and other best practices for public health. Hotel cleaning staff will be provided with proper personal protective equipment (PPE) and training by Buncombe County, as well as cleaning supplies that meet CDC guidelines. Laundry service and meal options will be made available while maintaining social distancing guidelines.

“The county values and appreciates the support of Virtelle Hospitality and Dogwood Health Trust in helping to slow the spread of COVID-19 locally. The innovative partnerships formed during this unprecedented crisis have allowed us to expand the safety net for our community,” notes County Manager Avril Pinder.

Virtelle, a hotel management company led by industry leaders Swati Patel and Himanshu Kervir, was created in 2018 to make a positive impact on our visitors, our properties, and our community. They currently manage multiple hotels in the Asheville area including the Element Asheville Downtown, which is currently under construction.

Dogwood Health Trust has been actively looking for partnerships during this health crisis – with outcomes that are a win for the community, for healthcare providers, and for the economy. The primary goal of this project will help reduce risk of transmission of COVID-19 to the families of front line staff, especially those that have high-risk family members at home such as seniors or those with respiratory conditions. At the same time, the collaboration leverages under-utilized hotel rooms and potentially keeps a baseline set of hotel staff employed.
Dogwood and the County recognize that there are others within the community who would benefit from such a partnership, including confirmed cases who require safe isolation and community members who lack secure housing. They hope that this partnership can serve as a model for future public/private collaborations to address those needs.

“Our healthcare professionals and first responders have been working around the clock, putting their lives on the line to tackle this crisis and keep our community safe,” said Antony Chiang, CEO, Dogwood Health Trust. “Our appreciation to Virtelle and the County who had already stepped up early on to partner to provide temporary housing needed for isolation cases, and continues to partner on temporary housing for others in need. Dogwood is honored to help support this latest partnership.”

Dogwood is working throughout the region to cultivate partnerships that will both flatten the curve and reduce negative societal impacts as a result of COVID-19. Interested partners are encouraged to send an email to covid@dogwoodhealthtrust.org or visit WNCready.org to explore opportunities.

Dogwood Health Trust is a North Carolina nonprofit corporation with the sole purpose of dramatically improving the health and well-being of all people and communities of Western North Carolina. Dogwood Health Trust became operational upon the sale of Mission Health’s assets to HCA Healthcare and is the recipient of the net proceeds of the sale. To learn more, please visit www.dht.org.