

Liberty Mutual sponsors home for homeless young adults

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Brunson Liberty House is named after president Elizabeth Jackson's former boss, Richard Brunson, who was legally blind. The plaque on the door is written out in braille for Brunson to feel his namesake.

A decades-old partnership between an insurance giant and a youth homelessness prevention organization has created a new home to ensure a brighter future for young adults. Bridge Over Troubled Waters has used a \$1.3 million grant from Liberty Mutual to open a home in Brighton for young adults working their way out of youth homelessness. The new Brunson Liberty House opened on June 24.

“It feels really good working with such a corporate partner that has the resources and the ability to move the needle,” said Elisabeth Jackson, president of Bridge.

Liberty Mutual is one of the largest global property and casualty insurers globally, and it is headquartered in Boston. It has been working with Bridge for decades, according to the president of the Liberty Mutual Foundation, Melissa MacDonnell.

The new Brunson Liberty House cost over \$3 million from purchase to renovation, according to Jackson.

“What’s so important to us about the Liberty House is that it provides that security that young people need today and it also helps them to build resiliency and to build their futures,” said MacDonnell.

Since the year of its initial house investment, Liberty Mutual has committed over \$28 million to addressing youth homelessness. Its corporate partnerships for the issue of youth homelessness have been fruitful, with new programs blossoming out of current ones, according to MacDonnell. Bridge was recently selected to collaborate with Liberty Mutual’s corporate strategy and research group to focus on the organization’s strategic growth for three months.

“We look at organizations that are at pivotal points of inflection,” said MacDonnell, noting that other projects included HopeWell’s RISE initiative focused on educating children in the foster care system.

Corporate partnerships were essential for the completion of the project, Jackson said. Liberty Mutual’s Torchbearers, as employees engaged in community impact are called, helped pick out the decorations and furnishings for the home. True North Construction was the general contractor for the project. General Electric and Yale Appliances donated appliances that Jackson hopes will last for generations.

Brunson Liberty House will serve as a place for young adults aging out of Bridge’s transitional living homes and into more independent, but still supported, living styles. The house will hold around nine young adults at a time. It is the second of its kind, with the original model opening in Dorchester in 2018 with the help of a \$1.1 million grant from Liberty Mutual.

“This is where our young people can go and be on their own. The market rent will be what we prorate it,” said Jackson, noting that they keep rent in the Liberty House at a fixed lower cost around \$200 per month that residents are able to pay while most are working and in school.

In the first model in 2018, 100% of the young residents were employed with over 72% earning a living wage. Over 86% were in post-secondary education. Combined together, the residents saved over \$100,000 while staying in the house.

The home is across the street from a more intensive transitional-housing facility that Bridge oversees and is in close proximity to public transportation, supermarkets, and other institutions that young adults need.

There are approximately 11,000 young people in the Boston area aged 14-24 who experience at least one night of homelessness every year, according to Jackson. Bridge is responsible for over 250 of those young people every night and over 2,000 a year. It offers a variety of different services to help youth experiencing homelessness including a mobile aid van, emergency overnight shelters, and transitional housing in addition to its least hands-on assistance tool, the Liberty Houses, according to Jackson.

Youth homelessness most directly affects LGBT and minority individuals. Approximately 65% of young people experiencing homelessness are Black and some research shows that as many one out of ten people 18-24 will experience homelessness in the course of a year nationally, according to MacDonnell.

“It’s important to have the Liberty houses that give them the opportunity and springboard to move through. To be able to save money, be able to learn, and make mistakes under our umbrella,” said Jackson.