

Grantee: Caring House, Inc.

Program Area: Human Services

Headquarters: Durham, NC

Total funding: \$222,500 since 1995

Most recent grant: \$17,500 in 2018

As many of you likely know, due to the social responsiveness intentionally developed over the past several years, October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, an annual international health campaign organized by major breast cancer charities (in part by our grantee, the American Cancer Society) to increase awareness of the disease and to raise funds for research into its cause, prevention, treatment, and cure. While initially tempted to highlight one of our world-renowned medical research grantees, we thought we'd take this opportunity to instead highlight an organization which focuses on the cancer patient experience and the necessary, though often forgotten, holistic support services essential to well-rounded care: Caring House (CH). Alice and Laura are long-time supporters and volunteers, and Drayton Virkler is a former Board Member.

CH was established in 1984 after founder Frankie DuBose (actually a long-time family friend of Mrs. Walker Kirby) learned from the social workers at the Duke Cancer Institute (DCI) that a patient's highest need while receiving treatment for cancer was affordable housing, a trend that has become even more significant over the past ten years as hospitals are performing more procedures and treatments on an outpatient basis to help contain costs. Following the donation of land by DCI and six years of fundraising, the first patients and accompanying family caregivers were welcomed in 1992 to an 18-bedroom facility characterized by various common areas, healing gardens, and a reported feeling of "home." In addition to this residential environment, CH offers, at no additional cost to guests, holistic services, such as a healing arts program, oncology massage, music therapy, and yoga, all in an effort to continue its mission of providing affordable housing, a healing environment, and a positive and supportive community to patients of DCI. Throughout its 26 years of service and with a current operating budget of approximately \$765K, CH has provided a home for over 12,500 guests, 659 of which were during just this past year. While the majority of guests draw from the North Carolina area, about one-third are from other states or countries, and patients reside for about 4-6 weeks at a time with a subsidized cost of \$35 per night. (The actual cost is \$82; rooms are subsidized by at least 60%.) In FY17 alone, guests saved over \$545K in lodging costs.

We can be confident that CH has reached an excellent level of service, though challenges still remain that will test the Board going forward as this is, in the grand scheme, a relatively young organization. Basic guest satisfaction feedback is exceptionally high (97.5%), but as more and more patients come to the DCI from beyond the immediate Durham area, the percentage of those who cannot be accommodated in the near-term also continues to increase. As such, we have been informed that the Board is seriously considering a campaign to increase the number of rooms from the current 18 to 56 which will include 8 isolated, specialized rooms (in addition to the three-bedroom apartment added this past year) to accommodate Adult Bone Marrow Transplant patients undergoing one of the more complex and high-risk cancer treatments that require extended stays. In preparation for this expected growth, CH has created, though not yet publicly released, a business expansion plan, but it is clear that without a total buy-in by and substantial support from the DCI, growth is going to be nearly impossible; however, the current

leadership talent assuages any doubts that CH will have trouble engaging DCI to the critical degree necessary.

Though medical expenses may be covered in part by health insurance, living expenses are not. The finances of lodging, meals, and travel become a significant concern if a patient is being treated at a facility far from their home, and CH eases the stress of considering housing as a significant cost factor when making the decision whether or not to pursue the high-quality healthcare available at DCI. And beyond even this, CH acts not only as an affordable option, but a unique healing environment in which patients can seamlessly tend to their minds and self as their bodies endure the side effects of their treatment regimens. As it is often challenging to fully comprehend the relief and hope an organization like this can provide until its mission becomes a necessity in your own or a loved one's life, I'll conclude with this patient testimony to provide some insight:

“I was devastated; nobody else in my family had ever had cancer. Caring House is a blessing to people who don't have a lot of money. It is a place that promotes healing in several different ways, between private time and community areas. It's a place that fosters togetherness and talking as a type of therapy. It seems like everywhere you look you have friends and supporters. Having other people here going through it with you is so helpful, and to be there and be in that moment is very important. We couldn't have asked for better.”

October 1, 2018
Prepared by Erin Clifford