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NMTCs Make Miracle Come True for Homeless in Tampa

By Teresa Garcia, Staff Writer, Novogradac & Company LLP

Almost 18,000 people are homeless in Tampa, Fla. on any given night, with one in five of them children. Thanks to new markets tax credits (NMTCs) and tremendous local support, a new \$23 million community services campus in Tampa is being built to serve the metropolitan area with the highest per capita rate of homelessness in the nation.

To address the growing needs of the local homeless community, a group of 13 downtown churches of different denominations formed Metropolitan Ministries in 1972. The founding churches represent Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal and Catholic denominations. Today, Metropolitan Ministries functions as a single organization to offer services, serve hot meals and provide both temporary and transitional shelter.

"There are many good providers of supportive housing and attendant services to the homeless. However, few match the longevity, stability, breadth and scale of [Metropolitan Ministries'] operation. Many operations provide housing and mental health or job counseling or they provide food services, but not all four. [Metropolitan Ministries] does these and more, and has for quite a while," said Nelson Black, director of lending for the Florida Community Loan Fund (FCLF).

The motto of Metropolitan Ministries is, 'Hope lives here.' That message will reach more people as the organization continues work on doubling the number of families and children it serves with the expansion of its campus.



Rendering: Courtesy of Metropolitan Ministries
Miracle Place will feature a welcome center for donors, volunteers and community members.

Metropolitan Ministries will develop vacant land next to its current facility into the Miracle Place development, a 93,000-square-foot center with space for education, rehabilitation, family counseling, child care, food service facilities, a chapel and emergency and temporary housing. The site, which borders a designated community development area, will take up three full city blocks and adjacent property.

"This is in a census tract that is considered severely distressed," said Metropolitan Ministries Chief Financial Officer Phil Signore. "The poverty rate is nearly 48 percent, median family income is \$21,518 and 15.7 percent are unemployed."

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The \$13 million first phase of development will include both rehabilitation work and new construction that will create 115 construction jobs and 44 permanent jobs upon completion. A focus for phase one will be construction of new housing units for Metropolitan Ministries' Uplift U, a transitional supportive housing program that provides housing, education, training and work experience to help families become self-sufficient. "That whole program is the reason for this new markets project," said Signore.

The demand for emergency and transitional housing in Tampa is high. There are typically as many as 40 families on a nightly waitlist for emergency housing and the wait time for temporary housing is usually 90 days. Metropolitan Ministries currently has 44 units that were originally built as a dorm-room-style emergency shelter but are now being used both for emergency and transitional housing. The 50 units under construction will create a more home-like atmosphere for clients, said Signore. Some of the new 450-square-foot, two-bedroom apartments will have mini kitchens. All families living in the old 44 units will be moved into the 50 new units upon completion and Metropolitan Ministries will then begin plans to rehabilitate the older units.

The organization's community kitchen and dining room will be updated and expanded to accommodate the new families. In addition to providing meals for residents, Metropolitan Ministries cooks 2,000 meals a day on-site and distributes them to other soup kitchens in the area that may not have the space or resources to cook their own food. Including pantry food provided to families, the kitchen provided more than 2.1 million meals in 2012 alone.

Miracle Place will also focus on early childhood education. Part of the new construction will include the Promise Land early childhood center that will serve 172 infants, preschool children and children with special needs.

Phase one will include a new welcome center. "We don't have a front door right now," said Signore. The new center will be a welcome hub for volunteers, donors and other members of the community who visit Miracle Place.

Local support played a large role in the development of Miracle Place and community members raised \$9.85 million in capital for the center. "We invested in this project because it provides a sustainable solution to helping those who are homeless in Tampa and because of the tremendous amount of fundraising support and donated hours we saw from the local community," said En Jung Kim, vice president of Chase Community Development Banking. Chase invested \$5.2 million in federal and state NMTCs and gave \$100,000 in grants to Metropolitan Ministries.

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FCLF provided \$10 million in federal NMTCs and Hancock Bank provided \$6 million in federal NMTCs. "We see this as a catalytic business development and a project of this nature carries a moral component," said Scott Scheffy, assistant vice president for specialty finance at Hancock.

Enhanced Community Development contributed \$10 million in state NMTCs. "The Florida [tax credit] program has a \$10 million transaction cap and we wanted to maximize that for this project. What we loved was that Met Min is such a high impact organization providing housing and other critical services to homeless and low-income persons," said Richard Montgomery, managing director of Enhanced Capital. Miracle Place also received a \$500,000 HOME grant and \$100,000 Community Development Block grant from the City of Tampa and \$350,000 in HOME loan funds from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Dallas.

Phase two of the Miracle Place development is in the planning stage. It will include a new warehouse, distribution center and multipurpose facility that could serve as a chapel or meeting area. A new school and general purpose building will be built nearby. Metropolitan Ministries created an on-site charter school for homeless children 13 years ago, which was later opened up to all neighborhood children. "It started as a 'one-room schoolhouse,' but grew one classroom a year," said Signore. Three years ago, the Hillsborough County Public School system offered to take over the school so that it could dedicate more resources to the 100 enrolled students. Metropolitan Ministries now runs the K-5 elementary school in partnership with the school district. Once the new school building opens, it will serve as many as 136 children.

Although Miracle Place will be developed in two phases, it's being funded as one project. "I think the accelerated structure of new markets deals was a big benefit [to Metropolitan Ministries] because they were able to pull many elements of phase two into phase one, which wouldn't have been possible if they had to raise that extra capital," said K.C. Misemer, vice president of commercial banking at Hancock.

Phase one is scheduled for completion in December 2013. ♦

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