



PRESS RELEASE **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Shelter, Inc. Breaks Ground on New Community Home for Youth Survivors of Human Trafficking in Palatine

October 30, 2024, Arlington Heights, IL --[Shelter, Inc.](#) is proud to announce the groundbreaking on Illinois' first DCFS-licensed home for CSEC (Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children) survivors, the first of its kind, with completion expected in 2025. The home, intended for female youth survivors of human trafficking, is being developed in partnership with Housing Opportunity and Development Corporation (HODC) and Buffalo Grove's SI Container Build, Inc., a women-owned company. The 12-bedroom home will be constructed utilizing shipping containers, an environmentally friendly construction method that is efficient, economical, and will minimize Shelter's carbon footprint.

Shelter, Inc. Executive Director, Carina H Santa Maria reflects on the milestone event, "Today's groundbreaking marks an incredibly important milestone for Illinois and for the vulnerable children who will now have access to the specialized care they desperately need. This home, the first DCFS-licensed our state, provides critical services for CSEC survivors, a need that too often goes unrecognized. The importance of this work cannot be overstated—these young survivors deserve a safe space where they can heal, rebuild their lives, and find hope for the future. I am proud to be a part of this project and committed to ensuring that every child receives the protection and support they need to thrive."

Human trafficking occurs every day across Illinois to children whose average age is 14, and youth exiting the commercial sex trafficking industry require specialized trauma-informed care. The opening of this Palatine home will finally offer Illinois a DCFS-licensed program to provide safe, affordable, supportive housing and case management for human trafficking survivors.

Sophia Manera, Survivor Leader & Consultant, spoke at the event saying, "These beds will be filled quickly—which is a tragedy in itself—but the important thing is that they will be open. And when those youth arrive, they will be met by people ready to receive them, to create a community around them that will allow them to heal, to see beyond their trauma, and to dream—maybe for the very first time, or maybe for the first time in a long time."

Shelter will extend its comprehensive support services within the new home, which will help survivors build the skills, strength, and self-esteem they need to develop to their full potential. All of this has been made possible with generous support from Foglia Family Foundation, The Canning Foundation, and The Fitzgerald Family Foundation, as well as a \$5.1 million grant from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

More than 60 members from the community and Shelter, Inc. gathered for the milestone occasion. Attendees included Shelter, Inc. Executive Director, Carina H. Santa Maria and staff; HODC Executive Director, Richard Koenig; DCFS Chief Deputy Director, Child & Clinical Services, Keith Polan; IL State Senator, Mark Walker; IL State Representatives, Mary Beth Canty, Nicolle Grasse, and Michelle Mussman; Celine and Denise Fitzgerald, and many more.

Follow the progress on this project here, <https://hodc.org/buildings/palatine-shelter/>. For inquiries, contact Shelter, Inc. Director, Marketing & Communications, Christine Roerig, at croerig@shelter-inc.org.

Shelter, Inc., founded in 1975, is a leader in Chicagoland for providing emotional and physical care, programs, and services that children need to build safer, healthier, and brighter futures. Shelter, Inc. is the only agency in Illinois to provide comprehensive and community-based services for children and families at risk and in need. Programs include emergency housing, transitional living, foster care, home visiting and clinical support services. www.shelter-inc.org.

Housing Opportunity Development Corporation (HODC) is a community-based nonprofit developer of affordable housing. Founded in 1983 by local community leaders who were inspired by Martin Luther King Jr's impact on fair housing, HODC works primarily in Chicago's northern suburbs where affordable housing options remain scarce. <https://hodc.org/>

SI Container Builds (SICBS) strives to make a positive impact on the living conditions of our communities and the wellness of our planet by offering innovative solutions that are driven by quality to combat the housing crisis and update traditional ways of construction. www.sicontainerbuilds.com/

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