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NYC Department of Social Services and HELP USA Open First-of-Its-Kind Shelter Intake Center for Women Experiencing Homelessness

New 60,000-square-foot center is designed as a dedicated gateway for women entering shelter, supporting person-centered intake, assessment, and care

BROOKLYN, NY – The New York City Department of Social Services (DSS), HELP USA, and Camber Property Group, and today marked the opening of HELP Women’s Center (HWC) at 114 Snediker Avenue in East New York, Brooklyn. The new five-story, 60,000-square-foot, 200 bed facility will begin operations on March 30, 2026, and serve as an intake and assessment center for women entering the homeless shelter system. It is the first in NYC designed specifically for this purpose, ushering in a new national standard and creating a facility built to support DSS and HELP USA’s person-centered care model.

"In times of crisis, providing a safe, welcoming environment can make all the difference to someone seeking shelter," said NYC **Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Dr. Helen Arteaga**. "I am proud that HELP Women's Center will establish a secure and inclusive place for 200 women in need to find safe harbor, and the person-centered details—which promote a comprehensive approach to wellness—reflect this administration's commitment to thoroughly addressing New Yorkers' needs while helping them build more dignified lives."

"The first point of interaction with our system should be welcoming and supportive. That is what New Yorkers will experience when they walk through the doors of HELP Women’s Center," said NYC **Department of Social Services Commissioner Erin Dalton**. "This facility is what the future of shelter intake should look like as we phase out facilities that are outdated and make vital investments in new models. We are grateful to the partners who came together to realize this vision and infused this space with help, hope, and light. We look forward to building on our long-standing partnership with HELP USA as we collaboratively raise the bar on supports to help women experiencing homelessness get back on their feet."

"Every aspect of the new HELP Women’s Center reflects HELP USA’s trauma-informed approach to care," said **Dan Lehman, President & CEO, HELP USA**. This is a critical entry point for women into the New York City shelter system. From the moment a woman walks through these doors, everything about the building design and the service model is centered on stabilization, respect and the transition back to sustainable, permanent housing. Having this type of environment will ultimately help shorten stays in shelter and ensure people are able to remain housed. It has been a great partnership with the Department of Social Services, Camber Property Group and others to bring this project to fruition; and it will have a real impact for the people we serve."

"Today marks a transformative day for the East New York Community with the opening of a purpose-built state-of-the-art women's intake and assessment center for women entering the homeless shelter system," said **Rick Gropper, Principal at Camber Property Group**. "We are

proud to have played a role in bringing this facility to life and look forward to welcoming residents whose lives will be positively impacted from this space and these crucial supportive services. Thank you to our partners, the New York City Department of Social Services and HELP USA, for seeing this life changing project over the finish line and for providing critical services and care for up to 200 women each day.”

A New Approach to Intake and Stabilization

HELP Women’s Center was designed to support **person-centered intake, assessment, and care**, creating an environment that prioritizes safety, privacy, accessibility, and stability. The facility reflects New York City’s ongoing efforts to modernize shelter infrastructure while providing high-quality spaces for women entering shelter.

The building **incorporates** abundant natural light, calming materials, intuitive wayfinding, wide corridors, and open vestibules that improve visibility and ease of movement. The facility is fully ADA-compliant.

Resident accommodations include a mix of room types tailored to different needs, including single rooms for women with mobility or medical needs and shared rooms that allow flexibility while maintaining privacy and personal space.

The center brings together intake, services, and daily supports in one location, helping streamline access to care and housing pathways. On-site medical and clinical services are provided in partnership with Project Renewal. Media and computer rooms support employment and housing searches. Philanthropic support from Sun Life helps fund wellness and healthy living programs for residents.

Additional features support daily routine, wellness, and connection, including a communal dining room and full-service commercial kitchen, a resident laundry room, a comfort room designed for low-stimulation self-regulation, and outdoor and rooftop gardens.

Art and Healing

Anchoring the building’s interior is *Open Light*, a large-scale, site-specific mural by internationally recognized artist **Shantell Martin**, permanently installed in the entry lobby and visible from multiple floors.

The installation creates a welcoming and visually cohesive environment. The mural is part of HELP USA’s broader **Art of Resilience** initiative, which integrates creative expression into clinical care to support healing and individualized recovery from trauma.

HWC features a dedicated space for creative arts, led by a full-time certified arts therapist.

Sustainable and Resilient Design

HELP Women’s Center was developed as an all-electric building with sustainability features that include solar panels, a green roof garden, and a courtyard. The project was designed to meet Enterprise Green Communities standards, supporting long-term environmental performance and operational efficiency. The building also includes increased stormwater retention capacity due to

the implementation of sub-surface stormwater retention chambers, green roof infrastructure and bioswales.

The project was developed by Camber Property Group; built by Fifth Avenue Builders, a joint venture with Urban Atelier Group; and designed by Curtis + Ginsberg Architects in collaboration with HELP USA. Project partners also included HELP Development Corporation, AKRF, Skyline Engineering, and NV5. Financing was provided by Citi Community Capital and Sun Life U.S.

“HELP Women’s Center is a testament to the creativity and capability of two strong partners, HELP and Camber, working in conjunction with City agencies to find cost-effective, thoughtful solutions to one of the most challenging societal issues we face, finding temporary shelter for the unhoused,” said **Richard Gerwitz, Originating Banker, Citi Community Capital**. “We appreciate having been part of the team that financed this project, having placed \$90 million of investment certificates that will be repaid through lease payments made by the Department of Homeless Services.”

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About the New York City Department of Social Services: DSS, comprised of the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and the Human Resources Administration (HRA), serves millions of New Yorkers annually through a broad range of services that aim to address poverty and prevent homelessness. DHS oversees a broad network of shelters, re-housing solutions, and outreach programs designed to help New Yorkers experiencing homelessness get back on their feet. HRA serves over three million New Yorkers through the administration of more than 15 major public assistance programs. DSS is central to the City’s mission to expand opportunity for New Yorkers in need, address housing insecurity, and ensure that low-income New Yorkers receive the benefits and assistance for which they may be eligible.

About HELP USA

For 40 years, HELP USA has worked to ensure that everyone has a place to call home. Serving nearly 600,000 individuals and families since its founding in 1986, the organization has provided shelter for people in crisis, built affordable housing, and strengthened communities through prevention and supportive services. Today, HELP USA addresses the root causes of homelessness at more than 70 sites across New York City and the country. For more information, visit www.helpusa.org.