



Conard House's current portfolio of supportive housing consists of 11 residential buildings and 22 shared apartments, including clockwise from top left: Jackson Street (which today houses Conard's Cooperative Apartment Program Office), McAllister Street Co-Op Apartments, The McAllister, The Lyric, The Allen, The Aranda, The El Dorado and Jordan Apartments.

Places to Belong

For low-income San Franciscans living with mental health conditions, Conard House ensures that they have supportive housing — and community.

BY JENNIFER MASSONI PARDINI

In 1960, when social worker and activist **Elaine Mikels** cofounded San Francisco's first "halfway house," as a residential treatment program was called back then, she named it after her cofounder and mentor **Conard B. Rheiner**. At the time, the deinstitutionalization of mental health care was taking place in the country — including at the nearby Napa State Hospital. Mikels knew that mental health patients returning to San Francisco needed care, support and inclusion to live independently. It's a way of thinking that may feel commonplace today but was pioneering then.

At Conard House's opening, the Queen Anne Victorian on Jackson Street in Pacific Heights had eight rooms for residents. Today, the organization operates a portfolio that includes 11 residential buildings and 22 shared apartments with the capacity to provide 726 residents with affordable and supportive housing — which includes other wraparound services, such as money management and clinical mental health services. Additional administrative buildings and community service sites bring the total capacity of clients served annually to approximately 1,500. With this growth, seven of the 11 districts in San Francisco have one or more Conard House locations, with most in the Tenderloin and South of Market.



A Conard House resident selects a meal from a food kiosk, part of a popular program the organization introduced in 2022.

According to the 2022 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey, "60 percent of respondents reported living with one or more health conditions," including chronic substance use and severe mental health conditions. "To stay healthy is really complicated ... what services you need, what therapy you need," says CEO and executive

director **Anne Quaintance**, who came to Conard House in 2020 after working at Meals on Wheels San Francisco for over a decade and having spent her entire career addressing poverty and human rights issues in the City. As Quaintance explains, bringing together housing and specialized services — with on-site mental health services and case management, which is unique to Conard House — has enabled it to serve a diverse population dealing with one or more mental health challenges, medical conditions, homelessness, poverty, trauma and substance use issues, as well as vulnerability related to aging.

In the last two years, Conard House has piloted an on-site food kiosk to combat food insecurity with fresh meals, food and vouchers, and a pet support program so that 80 companion animals can bring comfort to clients who are then assisted with access to pet supplies, pet food, training and veterinary care. A big focus has also been put on advancing the work of its Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Committee; expanding digital access and literacy for residents; and enhancing its money management program, designed to help residents and clients budget monthly expenses and navigate Social Security or disability benefits.

The majority of residents are between the ages



Conard House CEO and executive director Anne Quaintance stands before the Jackson Street Victorian where the supportive housing organization started serving San Franciscans in 1960.

of 40 and 69 and referred from shelters, unstable housing, treatment programs and hospital wards. “There’s a phrase that I’ve heard for the last 13 years,” director of development **Angie Tanielian** says of her time at Conard House. “And that is we meet people where they’re at. ... We’ve never been one size fits all. We really do work with each individual.” Individuals like **Gus**, who had been “episodically homeless” and often opted to sleep on BART rather than in a shelter, and **Queen**, a writer who grew up in Oakland, are among those now housed. Other clients, like **Catherine**, a licensed vocational nurse, receive mental health services and assistance to maintain their own housing. “Conard House has helped me a lot,” she shared with the organization in a 2021 e-newsletter. “My [therapist] has helped me stay grounded. I didn’t go from the experiences I had to where I am

now [without] therapy.”

One-to-one and group counseling services with therapists, like those Catherine receives, are also critical to long-term stability, as is support from case managers, social workers, health navigators, job counselors and 24-hour desk clerks. In practice, that might mean a case manager works with a resident on positive daily living habits; a trained peer health navigator might use lived experience to help a higher risk resident connect with a dentist or doctor; or a partner from the San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services might assist a resident with online access to skills training or something as seemingly basic yet vital as social connection.

“You don’t seek supportive housing and money management because things were going smoothly,” Quaintance says of issues ranging from general

health care to trauma and aging in place. “Everyone has a story of how you arrive to Conard House. And I’d say most of the staff, we all have a story of why we came to Conard House. Doing this work — there is something that made you want to do it and stick with it.” The longevity of senior leadership is notable: director of clinical services **Louise Foo**, PhD, director of real estate **Paul Schmidt** and director of property management **Eliah Bornstein** each have logged over 20 years. And director of supportive housing and community services **Liliana Suarez** came to Conard House more than 30 years ago.

“Many of our residents no longer have close ones in their lives, and our staff are the only individuals left in their significant support network,” says Foo, who has participated in the training of close to 70 practicum students and provided licensing hours to master’s- and doctoral-level clinicians completing postdoc training at Conard House. “It also is very rewarding to be able to start new programs that aim to improve residents’ lives, like Peer Health Navigation Program and the Marilyn Inn, a [Mental Health Services Act] transitional housing program with the goal to strengthen the skills of residents for a more successful experience in permanent supportive housing.”

With the recently opened Marilyn Inn on Nob Hill offering 28 residential units of transitional housing, Conard House continues to grow alongside similar citywide initiatives. In June, Casa Adelante opened on Florida Street in the Mission. As district supervisor **Hillary Ronen** explained at the grand opening, it is one of seven new affordable housing sites in District 9, and 39 out of its 130 homes are permanent supportive housing units for previously homeless residents. And in April, the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing — which Conard House has been working with since its 2016 inception and is one of its public funders — announced its Home by the Bay plan. In addition to the more than 3,000 new permanent supportive housing units that were added over the last few years, more supportive housing units are included in its ongoing plans for new permanent housing in the homelessness response system.

HSH executive director **Shireen McSpadden** sees Conard House as a key partner. “Conard provides comprehensive wraparound services — housing and behavioral health primarily — to ensure that they are creating healing and thriving communities,” McSpadden says. “HSH is proud to collaborate with Conard House as we strive to make homelessness a rare, brief and onetime experience for unhoused San Franciscans.”

While Conard House also receives the support of corporate contributions and local foundations like Tipping Point Community and the William G. Irwin Charity Foundation, it aims to grow its private funding in part to enhance its support programs. Quaintance has been hard at work on a three-year strategic road map and business plan recently approved by the board. “We need to enhance private funding as we seek increased government support,” she says. Take the popular and unique food kiosk and pet support programming, which are new and therefore not yet government funded. “We want Conard House to showcase this amazing, sustainable and impactful model to improve the system and eliminate poverty,” Quaintance says of Conard House leading by example. “Our vision is that everyone in San Francisco has a welcoming, safe and secure place to call home and equal access to quality mental health services.” **NHC**

“Conard House provides comprehensive wraparound services to ensure that they are creating healing and thriving communities.”

— Shireen McSpadden