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“Heaven on Earth”

Local nonprofit Garrett’s Space got \$4 million of the federal omnibus budget bill—thanks to Debbie Dingell.

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Feb 23, 2023 | [Government](#), [News](#), [Nonprofits](#) | 0



“When the bill was about to pass, she actually called and told us,” says cofounder Scott Halpert. “She said, ‘We love you guys,’” adds cofounder Julie Halpert, Scott’s wife.

The call and the love didn’t come out of the blue. “Debbie Dingell had spoken at our fundraisers,” Scott says. “She really understands what’s going on out there with young people and their struggles with mental health challenges.”

The Halperts founded Garrett’s Space in 2019, two years after losing their young adult son Garrett to

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Cathy Barry Connatura Exhibition

February 27, 2023
Magic: The Gathering: Sylvan Factory.
Various times.

suicide. They plan to use the award to help build what they describe as a holistically focused residential center for young adults struggling with depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. They have a seventy-six-acre property in Superior Township under contract and plan to close the purchase this spring if the township approves a rezoning.

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Julie and Scott Halpert founded Garrett’s Space in 2019, two years after losing their young adult son Garrett to suicide. They plan to use the award to help build what they describe as a holistically focused residential center for young adults struggling with depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. |

Photo: [Mark Bialek](#)

ven on earth,” says Julie. “There’s a beautiful stream that surrounds half the property and a beautiful pond,” Scott adds. “And there is an existing house. It’s a Frank Lloyd–era replica house that could be used for office space and administrative space. And it’s got a lot of potential for day programming for sure. It’s wonderful and welcoming and spacious.”

It was the home of the late restaurateur Dennis Serras, his wife Ellie Serras, and their daughters. Julie says Ellie, a longtime civic activist, has been “a blessing to us, truly”—Scott says she is “financing a significant amount of the purchase price.”

They haven’t disclosed the price and probably won’t until they close. After that, Scott says “we plan to

February 27, 2023
Preschool Storytimes:
AADL.

Various times and location

February 27, 2023
“D & D Adventures”: **Sy**
Factory.

Various times.

February 27, 2023
“Playgroups for Babies
AADL.

Various times and location

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begin some in-person day programming at the property.”

Scott says the property is key to their long-term success. Julie stresses that they won't be treating serious psychiatric disorders or people who are actively suicidal—the goal, Scott says, “is to have a place where young people can be with others, a safe space where they can share what they're going through with others who get what they're going through.”

Like almost everything, Garrett's Space was set back by the pandemic. “We had hoped that we would be able to offer an in-person program,” Scott recalls, “and we had to pivot and move to a virtual program.” But clinical director Peggy Galimberti says they've been running groups consistently since September 2021 and have “supported other folks with referrals and phone calls and ancillary support.”

Three virtual wellness programs meet with different groups of people on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. “Last year I had around a hundred inquiries,” Galimberti says. “We have twenty-five young people currently enrolled in the program and then forty that I know of prior to that.

“The virtual groups work really well, surprisingly. These young folks have grown up with computers, and they're really comfortable on the computer ... They share that it's really wonderful to have a place where they can show up and have people that understand.”

Galimberti describes a young person “who had really been struggling and had moved back home because he needed to leave his educational

program. He got a lot of support and ended up finding a job and ending his services because he was just too busy and connected in the world."

They've gotten "a lot of wonderful anecdotal feedback" from the groups, Galimberti says. "Some people have said, 'This is the only time in my life where I feel completely unfiltered, and I don't have to worry.'" But Julie says that residential as well as day programs are needed.

"A lot of young adults are in toxic situations or difficult home situations, or they live by themselves, and we want to take them out of their environment and allow them to just focus on healing in a healing space that is designed for wellness, that allows them to exhale," she says. "When you drive into this property, you just start exhaling."

The Halperts plan to build a 12,000-square-foot center on the property to house their residential programs. "We expect the building to cost probably over twice as much as we got" from the grant, says Julie. They're aiming for a mid-2025 opening and expect to have fifteen to twenty young adults staying for three to four weeks at a time and an additional ten or so for outpatient services or day programming. "We think it would be close to 300 or so young adults a year," says Scott.

Beyond group support, they plan to offer activities like yoga and meditation, journaling, and healthy cooking as well as art and music. "There'll also be some responsibilities which we think can help with self-worth," says Julie, "like gardening or taking care of the animals that we plan to have."

In addition to the \$8 million-dollar-plus building estimate, Scott says "there'll be significant costs involved going forward to maintain the property

and to operate our programming.” To raise it, they’ve recently hired Helen Starman, formerly Food Gatherers’ chief development officer.

“We think it’ll primarily come from private donations [with] some additional grant funding,” Scott says. A much smaller source of funding will be fees from those staying there, with a sliding scale and grants available.

“We’ve already visited either virtually or in person close to a dozen different facilities all over the country,” says Julie. They discovered there’s “no blueprint for something like this ... The short-stay residential center model is pretty hard to find, and not all of them are really holistically focused. A lot of them are intensive medical interventions, and they all look more like hospitals, and we don’t want the stigma of that.”

“We want this to be a new holistically focused model that can be replicated,” Scott says. “We envision the day when there’s a Garrett’s Space East, a Garrett’s Space West, maybe Garrett’s Spaces all across the world.”

Although they may not use that name. “We’re still working on the name,” says Julie. “We’re looking for a name that doesn’t have a medical sound to it or an institutional sound, and it’s harder than we think!”

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