



# Serenity House

Short Term Adult Crisis Residential Center

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

OCTOBER 2018



SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH  
**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH  
& RECOVERY SERVICES**



SUPPORTED BY MEASURE K  
**LOCAL FUNDS  
LOCAL NEEDS**  
[WWW.SMCGOV.ORG](http://WWW.SMCGOV.ORG)

# Introduction

Most of us have experienced a mental health challenge in our lives or know someone who has. When people with mental health issues experience extreme stress, they sometimes require time away from home or community to de-stress and recover their balance. If not caught early, these episodes can cause people's mental health to deteriorate, sometimes leading to loss of housing, involvement with the police or psychiatric hospitalization.

Many communities recognize the benefits of providing a structured, supportive, and stabilizing intervention in a safe place for those with mental health issues, who need a respite from the situation that is causing their condition to deteriorate. In San Mateo County, no such place has existed until now.

**Serenity House, a crisis residential center, will offer clients and family members intervention services for those with deteriorating mental health issues and who are in need of short-term 24/7 treatment, respite, and support.**

## What is a mental health crisis residential center?

**A mental health crisis residential center is a place where those living with mental illness and experiencing increasing distress can go before the need for hospitalization emerges.**

Professional staff, including mental health clinicians, provide care, supervision, and guidance to assist clients in reducing stress, refocusing on their long-term goals, and successfully returning to their living situations. Staff members also provide mental health education to family members and other supportive individuals.

## Are crisis residential centers effective?

**Crisis residential centers are very effective.** They have been implemented by Kaiser Permanente, the Veterans Administration, and many other California counties. Studies suggest that more than 80 percent of clients who utilize a crisis residential center do not require hospitalization. The cost of care in crisis residential centers is much less than hospitalization, and clients report that they are happy with the services.

## Who does Serenity House serve?

**The Serenity House program is voluntary and serves San Mateo County adults living with mental illness, who are experiencing extreme stress and are deteriorating in their current situation.** Family members, law enforcement, and mental health providers may refer clients to Serenity House, or clients may refer themselves. Clients are evaluated by professional staff, who determine whether Serenity House is the right fit. The evaluation considers many factors, such as personal history, risk of hospitalization, and medical conditions. If clients qualify for Serenity House, they must agree to follow all program requirements and house rules.

To keep the setting small and home-like, the number of residents at Serenity House is limited to thirteen. Residents must be able to live in the community without posing a threat to themselves or others. The use of alcohol and illegal drugs is not allowed at Serenity House, though clients with a history of substance use may be admitted. Those whose primary issue stems from alcohol or substance use are instead referred to a substance use treatment program.

## How is security handled at Serenity House?

**The safety of residents and neighbors is the top priority at Serenity House.** Individualized plans for supervision and support are implemented for all residents. Individuals who might harm themselves or others are not accepted into Serenity House.

Serenity House is a closed facility where clients remain on site during their stay. Residents may not exit Serenity House without being accompanied by a staff member. Staff or family members accompany residents to all off-site appointments.

Other standard safety measures are in place. All doors are monitored by security cameras and outfitted with chimes that sound when they are opened. Staff are trained in safety and security protocols and de-escalation strategies for clients in crisis. Serenity House also has access to medical staff from the San Mateo Medical Center, located on the same campus.

## How is Serenity House staffed, and what are the staff qualifications?

**Serenity House is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.** Fourteen full-time staff members support clients at Serenity House, and a clinician manages the program. Other key personnel include a nurse practitioner, licensed clinical staff, case managers, a family advocate, and a cook.

## How and when do clients leave Serenity House, and where do they go?

**Clients are ready to leave Serenity House when the issues that led to their need for crisis residential services have been addressed.** On average, clients stay for ten days. Some clients may stay longer if their discharge plan is not ready within ten days. In most cases, clients return to their living situations. If a prior living situation is not suitable, other options will be considered. Clients are assisted with transportation from Serenity House back to their living situation.

## What kind of treatment do clients receive at Serenity House?

**Serenity House clients receive a trauma-informed, recovery-centered treatment plan that focuses on resolving the immediate causes of their current situation, identifying changes to their ongoing treatment plan, and establishing services and support for clients after they leave.** Treatment includes a combination of individual therapy, skill development and groups focused on reducing stress, stabilizing thoughts and emotions, managing medication, learning self-sufficiency, managing anger, improving social relationships, and improving physical condition. The most effective treatment supports clients in improving how they think about and handle difficult situations and helps them develop realistic plans to support their recovery and ongoing stability.

## How are families involved?

**Family and friends are especially important for people experiencing difficult or stressful times, whether they have a mental illness or not.** If Serenity House clients are not referred by family members when entering the program, they are asked to identify at least one family member or friend who will be involved in their treatment during their stay and who will support them upon their return to the community (if clients wish to involve family and/or other support persons). Family and friends are offered support and education about their loved one's situation and progress, and are given tools to help their loved one maintain stability after leaving Serenity House. They are also encouraged to connect with the local chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), a support group for people with loved ones living with mental illness.

## Who oversees Serenity House and how is it managed?

Serenity House is managed by HealthRIGHT 360, a San Francisco-based non-profit provider of medical, mental health, substance use, and reentry services. Under contract from San Mateo County and overseen by Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, HealthRIGHT 360 will operate Serenity House under licenses from the state of California.

## What does Serenity House look like?

**Serenity House occupies a renovated residence owned by San Mateo County and located on the corner of the Health Campus at Hacienda Street and 37th Avenue in San Mateo.** The building has been extensively renovated inside and out, including improved landscaping and fencing on the two sides of the house that face 37th Avenue and Hacienda Street. The entrance to Serenity House can be accessed from the Health Campus' parking lot.



*Renovated exterior: Serenity House at Hacienda Street and 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue*

## Who is eligible, and how do I refer someone to Serenity House?

Adult San Mateo County residents, who are experiencing a mental health crisis and are not an immediate danger to themselves or others, are eligible. You can call **(650) 204-9695**, 24/7, to request services or refer someone.

## Whom do I contact if I have questions about Serenity House?

For questions about the Serenity House program, contact Pernille Gutschick, San Mateo County Health System, at (650) 372-8586 or [pgutschick@smcgov.org](mailto:pgutschick@smcgov.org).

For questions about the facility design and renovation, contact Robert Kalkbrenner, San Mateo County Department of Public Works, at (650) 599-7285 or [rkalkbrenner@smcgov.org](mailto:rkalkbrenner@smcgov.org).

For all press inquiries, contact Diana Rohini LaVigne, San Mateo County Health Communications Officer, at (650) 867-1661 or [press@smchealth.org](mailto:press@smchealth.org).

Serenity House | 3701 Hacienda Street | San Mateo, CA 94026 | (650)204-9695



SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH

**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH  
& RECOVERY SERVICES**



SUPPORTED BY MEASURE K

**LOCAL FUNDS  
LOCAL NEEDS**  
[WWW.SMCGOV.ORG](http://WWW.SMCGOV.ORG)