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Home, at last

When the new residents of the Verde Gardens housing development turn the key and walk into their new home, they will be opening the door to a brighter future — and closing that door on a less hopeful past.

Verde Gardens is providing four walls and a roof to formerly homeless residents. The project is the result of a collaboration between the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust and Carrfour Supportive Housing. The Homeless Trust made the \$20 million investment to build the 145 townhome units in Homestead. Carrfour served as the project's construction manager and operator.

Verde Gardens has been built upon a foundation of results-oriented teamwork and innovation. The Miami-Dade County Commission contributed funding from general-obligation bonds.

The project is called "permanent supportive housing." That means that families can occupy the townhomes for as long as they desire. In addition, there is help on site, such as employment services and AA sessions, to help keep residents from falling back into substance abuse or homelessness. All of the families have at least one member who has a physical disability, lives with mental illness or has a history of substance abuse. A permanent home, rented for no more than 30 percent of a household's income, is the best chance yet for residents to continue to progress along the rocky road from living on the streets onto firmer footing of employment and self-sufficiency.

And here's where the innovation comes in — there really is a garden at Verde Gardens. Residents will help work a 22-acre organic garden that yields produce for a weekly farmers market and encourages microenterprises. In the future, the market will accept food stamps, giving low-income families from Verde Gardens and the surrounding community access to affordable and nutritious fresh fruits and vegetables.

That's truly value added.

Commend all the partners in this endeavor. They are helping formerly homeless residents put down roots in more ways than one.

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