

NONPROFITS & PHILANTHROPY

Haven for Hope CEO Kim Jefferies is leaving Texas to lead a new nonprofit



by **Iris Dimmick**
January 22, 2025



Haven for Hope President and CEO Kim Jefferies during a discussion led by St. Mary's University on how the community can help people who are experiencing homelessness in February. Credit: Brenda Bazán / San Antonio Report

After more than three years serving as head of San Antonio's largest homeless shelter and resources hub, Kim Jefferies will be leaving Haven for Hope later this year to lead a new, out-of-state nonprofit with a similar mission.

"It's bittersweet," Jefferies told the San Antonio Report on Wednesday. She declined to share the location or name of the nonprofit she'll be leading, but said that she plans on replicating much of what Haven does in San Antonio.

"There's still a tether to Haven, even though I'm leaving," she said, "because I get to take the spirit and the heart and the love and the radical compassion that's here with me to a new place and try to recreate that in another community."

Her last day as president and CEO of Haven is March 14. The nonprofit's board has formed a search committee to find an executive to lead Haven's roughly 300 employees and \$30 million operating budget.

Since opening in 2010, Haven has served thousands of individuals and families, connecting them to housing and other services.

The bitter cold snap this week triggered emergency overflow shelters for people experiencing homelessness across the city, highlighting the critical work that Haven for Hope does every day, she said.

Jefferies and other Haven staff spent much of Monday night working with clients. She slept in her office on an inflatable mattress.

The next CEO needs to bring that same energy and dedication, Jefferies said. She likened the job to being mayor of a small town with a population of roughly 1,700.

"Haven is larger than 50% of the towns in this country," she said, "but it's people with the most complex issues and challenges and barriers in their lives. So the work isn't easy, but it's incredibly rewarding."



Haven has been praised nationally for its holistic approach to homelessness response and prevention. There are **75 partner nonprofits** that operate on and off the 22-acre campus that provide a host of services, including housing, food, clothing, medical care, identification recovery and dental work. With beds in dorms, low barrier shelter and overflow facilities, Haven's preliminarily 2024 report shows it sheltered more than 9,800 individuals last year — that's up by 4% over 2023. The number of children sheltered by Haven increased by 28% to 1,388.

Jefferies's departure is "sad news," said Barbara Gentry, who chairs Haven's board, "but I would never try and talk someone out of a really good opportunity. And if there's going to be someone that is going to recreate the concept of Haven for Hope in another community, I can't think of anyone better than Kim."

Gentry sees it as "a huge compliment" that Jefferies was sought out to lead this new nonprofit, "not just for Kim, but for Haven."

Under Jefferies' leadership, Gentry said, the nonprofit has expanded its funder base, expanded programs, launched a pilot program in Leon Valley, provided more opportunities for employees to grow their professional skillsets and added **data collection and analysis resources** to better inform Haven's programming.



Haven for Hope opened in 2010 and has provided services for the homeless population. Credit: Brenda Bazán / San Antonio Report

“She is very data-driven,” Gentry said. “She can back up everything that everybody claims or says about Haven. She’s got the information.”

Jefferies will leave Haven “better than she found it,” said Erika Borrego, president and CEO of Corazón Ministries. “She has risen to the occasion in every challenge and opportunity that was put in front of her as a leader for the organization, as a leader in our community and as a peer.”

Jefferies, who has two adult children, is a native San Antonian who earned a bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies with a minor in business administration from the University of Texas at San Antonio and a master’s degree in nonprofit management from Our Lady of the Lake University.

“I am relocating to this other community for a period of time, but keeping my home, my residence in San Antonio,” she said. “It will always be home.”

Prior to joining Haven in 2021, Jefferies served as the CEO for 15 years of Brighton Center San Antonio, which provides education, therapy, and daycare for children with and without disabilities.

“She’s shown passion and compassion and respect for everyone that comes to Haven, and that’s critical,” Gentry said. “She will be hard to replace.”

It’s still unclear if Haven’s search committee will first need to select an internal interim leader while it carries out a wider search for its next leader, she said.

“We’re going to ensure that our next leader is engaged and passionate and committed and is going to continue the work that Kim and others have started,” she said.

Jefferies is the sixth leader of the nonprofit: Kenny Wilson, Jefferies’s predecessor, served for five years; Mark Carmona served three years; George Block served two years and founding president Robert Marbut Jr. departed shortly after Haven’s campus opened in 2010.

While she is incredibly proud of the work Haven’s staff does every day, one of her “biggest regrets” is not finding a way to make the broader San Antonio community feel the same way.

Haven isn’t perfect and it can’t solve all the systemic failures that lead to homelessness, Jefferies said, but few seem to understand “how magical and wonderful this thing is, and we kind of take it for granted.”

She recalled a Haven resident who was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. Staff knew that he was reaching his final hours and called for an ambulance three times to take him to the hospital. And three times he refused to go.

When asked why, she recalled that he responded: “Because I want to die in a place where I know people care about me and I don’t want to die alone.”

“We gave that to somebody,” she said. “We gave them dignity and love and care in their final moments. That’s the beauty and the tragedy of Haven.”