

THE HRHA NEWSLETTER

News, announcements, and more from the
Harrisonburg Redevelopment & Housing Authority



Photo by Kara Ardron
Winter 2015

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Questions? Comments?

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In Review: 2019



Homelessness and affordable housing continue to gain the local, state, and national attention needed to overcome these issues. From community grassroots efforts to state and federal policy changes, we look to 2020 with a sense of hope. This final newsletter of the year will highlight a few notable initiatives and successes from 2019, including the first year of the Homebuyer Assistance program, some HRHA organizational changes, and successes from the FSS program.

At the 2019 Virginia Governor's Housing Conference in November, Governor Northam noted a number of state level accomplishments over the past few years, including an increase in the Virginia Housing Trust Fund to \$11 million and a 36% decrease in state-wide homelessness since 2010. Locally, community conversations and initiatives have foregrounded homelessness and affordable housing challenges, and our community members who are struggling to connect low wage paychecks with ever-rising costs of living. While our community has done incredible work over the past year, there is much left to do. We are well positioned moving forward.

Toward Home Ownership

A partnership between the City of Harrisonburg and HRHA, the Homebuyer Assistance Program was established to help low to moderate income, first-time home buyers purchase a home in the city of Harrisonburg.



Katie and her husband Said
in front of their new home
November 2019

A dedicated HRHA staff member assists eligible individuals and families with improving their credit score, taking a Homebuyer Education Course, connecting with local lenders and realtors, and overall home buying readiness. Funds were established to offer both down payment and closing cost financial assistance to successful program participants. This past year, two Harrisonburg families successfully completed the program, purchasing homes in Harrisonburg City limits for the first time.

"I am very grateful for the Homebuyer Assistance Program because without it, I would not be a home owner now. There are so many details and confusing elements to buying a home, especially for a first-timer like me. I am so thankful this program exists and I just want to shout it from the rooftops in case more people qualify and don't know about it! I cannot wait to see what the future holds for my family in our new home and in this great community. Thank you to everyone who played a part in helping me through this."

- Katie T.

Homebuyer Assistance Program Participant October 2019

Interested in the Homebuyer Assistance program or know someone who might be? Learn more and apply at:

www.harrisonburgrha.com/home-ownership or by calling (540)-437-9545



Photo of the Month

Kim with her new couch
from the FSS & Schewel
Furniture Program
November 2019

Executive Director's Corner



2019 was an exciting year of transitions, filled with challenges and opportunities for the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority. These included staff changes with four new staff joining the Authority team; revisions and updates to policies and procedures to increase program effectiveness and improve outcomes; partnering with community stakeholders to address the housing crisis in Harrisonburg including the Mayor and City officials, faith based organizations, veteran services agencies, builders, realtors, and homeless service providers; and application to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development to become a Move to Work organization, which will allow the Authority local flexibility in developing policies and procedures which promote self-sufficiency.

HRHA received grant awards to provide rental assistance for 25 individuals/families that are experiencing homelessness, funding for the management of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and grant awards to provide supportive services and link residents to community based services. HRHA became federal and state lead applicant for the Western Virginia CoC, coordinating homeless services within the region.

HRHA recognizes that any of our success is directly related to our partnerships, and the ability of us as a community to work together. We look forward to continuing these collaborations in 2020 and beyond.

- Michael Wong

Successes from the Family Self-Sufficiency Program

The goal of the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program is to assist individuals receiving housing assistance in seeking and maintaining meaningful employment, pursuing goals, developing skills, building a savings account, and moving toward self-sufficiency. This effort is driven by HRHA's FSS Coordinator in partnership with each resident in the program. There have been many successes this past year worth celebrating, ranging from educational accomplishments to home ownership.

- + **\$60,000.00 was earned by participants through the FSS Escrow Savings account in 2019.** Since rent payment is directly tied to income, as participants increase their earned income, their rent increases as well (capped at 30% of income). When rent increases due to a raise, job promotion, or other earned income source, HRHA directs that difference in rent towards a savings account for program participants. Participants can access part of this savings for job related expenses throughout the 5-year program, and receive the amount in full upon program graduation.
- + **Established a furniture program for working participants.**
- + **Dozens of participants gained new employment or increased their earned income over the year.**
- + **12 participants graduated this past year with escrow savings,** setting them up for increased financial security, home ownership, purchase of a new car, and more.
- + **9 participants were enrolled throughout the year in English Language Classes.**
- + **2 young adults received scholarships** through the Virginia Association of Housing and Community Development Officials (VAHCDO).
- + **Zoe Parakuo started as the new FSS Coordinator in October,** taking over for Shirley Sheets who has been with HRHA and FSS for the past 12 years.

HRHA Applies to Become 'Moving To Work' Organization

Moving to Work (MTW) is a demonstration program for public housing authorities (PHAs). The program provides PHAs the opportunity to design and test innovative, locally designed strategies that use federal dollars more efficiently, help residents find employment and become self-sufficient, and increase housing choices for low-income families. MTW allows PHAs exemptions from many existing public housing and voucher rules and provides funding flexibility with how they use their Federal funds. PHAs in the MTW demonstration have pioneered a number of innovative policy interventions that have been proven to be successful at the local level, and subsequently rolled out to the rest of the country's PHAs. Currently, there are 39 MTW PHAs nationwide and HUD plans to expand the program to an additional 100 PHAs by 2022. HRHA submitted its application in January 2019 and has been determined eligible by HUD. HUD plans to conduct a lottery process in late 2019 to determine who will be selected in the next cohort.



Megan with a chair
from her table set
November 2019

New FSS Furniture Program

When HRHA resident and Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) participant Julie got a job at Schewel Furniture, she joined conversations about what to do with slightly damaged or returned furniture at the local store. Julie immediately thought of participants in the FSS program. The first shipment of donated furniture came through our Reservoir St office in October 2019 and was distributed to FSS participants who are working, meeting their goals, and in need of furniture. Schewel Furniture has generously offered monthly deliveries to our office, including couches, tables, dressers, and more. We are incredibly thankful for Julie and the Schewel Team!



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Waiting List & Applications

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HRHA Board of Commissioners

The Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority is governed by a five-member Board of Commissioners appointed by the Harrisonburg City Council. The Board establishes the Authority's policies and procedures and appoints the Executive Director.

Board of Commissioner meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 4:00PM, at the Authority's administrative office located at 286 Kelley St., Harrisonburg, VA.

+ Timothy Smith – Chair

Term Expires: November 29, 2019

+ John Hall – Vice Chair

Term Expires: November 29, 2021

+ Scott Gallagher – Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2020

+ Benjamin Fuller – Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2022

+ Costella Forney – Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2022

Website & Facebook

This year, HRHA launched a **redesigned website and new Facebook page**. Our new website offers a cleaner and more engaging platform for residents, landlords, and the community. Our Facebook page provides regular updates and news for the community. Follow us on Facebook!



@harrisonburgrha

Giving Tree Initiative Ends December 13!

The Holiday season can be stressful on families, particularly as parents wrestle with the cost of providing gifts for their children. Since 2007, HRHA has provided Holiday Gift Assistance for parents in our Family Self-Sufficiency Program. Dozens of community members take a child's name each year, donating toys, clothes, and gift cards to children living in affordable housing. You can receive a child's name and donate gifts until December 13 at Santa's Workshop at the Valley Mall, The Salon at JCPenny, or by calling 540-437-9545. To donate directly to this program, you can visit our website at www.harrisonburgrha.com/donate. Thank you for your support! (All donations are submitted to the non-profit branch of HRHA, Shenandoah Housing Corporation (501 c3), and are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.)

