

THE HRHA NEWSLETTER

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



Downtown Harrisonburg
Photo by Joaquin Sosa

In this issue:

Western VA Continuum of Care.....	2
Executive Director's Note.....	2
Understanding Homelessness.....	3
Built for Zero.....	3
50 New Vouchers.....	3
Contact & Board of Commissioners.....	4
Community Support.....	4

Questions? Comments?

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Addressing Homelessness



Homelessness and affordable housing are sometimes discussed in separate spheres, though those who work in both spaces witness the ways these two challenges intersect. Many residents receiving housing assistance were once experiencing homelessness themselves. An expensive rental market can push working families to a space where even a moderate unexpected bill can lead to missed rent payments and even eviction. HRHA plays a unique role in both administering affordable housing vouchers for Harrisonburg and Rockingham, as well as serving as the lead agency for the Western Virginia Continuum of Care's (CoC) state and federal grants targeting homelessness. Our work intersects with a number of community organizations, aiming to identify and address homelessness at both the individual and systemic levels.

This issue of the HRHA newsletter centers around the work of the Western Virginia CoC, whose multi-county and multi-organizational efforts aim to make homelessness "brief, rare, and non-reoccurring." A special thanks to Vine Adowei and Laura Black for contributing to this issue.

Western Virginia Continuum of Care



A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a collaborative funding and planning system mandated by federal and state government. The Western Virginia CoC (VA-513) covers the counties of Clarke, Frederick, Page, Rockingham, Shenandoah, and Warren, the towns within those counties, and the cities of Winchester and Harrisonburg. The Western Virginia CoC receives federal funding to provide homeless services through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The primary goal of the CoC is to make homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring. Under the umbrella of the CoC, nonprofits and government agencies address homelessness with a variety of programs and services. The Western Virginia CoC has received HUD grants for permanent supportive housing, and to oversee the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), a client database system (See page 3 for more on HMIS). Additionally, the Western Virginia CoC receives state funding through the Virginia Homeless Solutions Program (VHSP) grant for prevention, rapid re-housing, Centralized Intake, street outreach, emergency shelter, and Housing Opportunities for Persons with Aids (HOPWA). HRHA is the lead agency for both grants and houses both the Western Virginia CoC Coordinator and the HMIS Coordinator. Learn more at: www.continuumofcare513.com

"I am excited about the innovative and collaborative ways in which our CoC is addressing homelessness and working to improve affordable housing throughout the region. I hope that more agencies and individuals will join our coordinated efforts to make homelessness rare, brief, and nonrecurring in our communities." - Vine Adowei, Western Virginia CoC Coordinator



Western Virginia CoC members at the Built for Zero Conference in Denver, CO. Oct 2019
From left to right:

Oscar Cerrito-Mendoza, Housing Services Manager, AIDS Response Effort, Winchester, VA
Sheila Orndorff, Executive Director, Shenandoah Alliance for Shelter, Woodstock, VA
Vine Adowei, Western Virginia CoC Coordinator, HRHA, Harrisonburg, VA
Shannon Porter, Executive Director, Mercy House, Harrisonburg, VA
Seli Perry, Director of Operations, Mercy House, Harrisonburg, VA

Executive Director's Corner



As the holiday season passes and the new year begins we are reminded about the importance of housing. Housing is at the foundation of all that we call community. It centers our lives, provides safety and refuge, and aids us in accessing upward mobility. Housing has also been used to segregate our neighborhoods, change educational and employment outcomes along class and racial lines, and increase wealth inequality.

Since 2001, the median rent in Virginia has increased 21%, while the median income of renters has increased just 6%. Individuals and families in Harrisonburg are struggling to afford housing more than ever before. One unexpected medical bill or car repair can force people to decide between eating or paying the rent. Housing is a local, regional, statewide and national issue.

HRHA is excited about recently receiving notice of being awarded 50 additional mainstream non elderly vouchers for individuals with disabilities experiencing homelessness or returning back to the community from institutions. The Authority expresses its sincere thanks to community agencies for their assistance in the application and providing lease up and housing retention services for those the grant serves.

We look forward to this new year and the opportunity to continue to work together to address the housing needs in our community. Wishing everyone a happy new year.

- Michael Wong

Understanding homelessness at the individual level

The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Coordinator supports the work of the CoC by managing, ensuring quality, interpreting and reporting on multi-agency data. The database serves to confidentially track homeless and housing services at the individual level and across cities and counties in the region. **Part of this data includes the annual "Point-in-Time Count", a community-wide effort in January to count all persons experiencing homelessness, in both sheltered and unsheltered situations.** The Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) requires this count every year. The year-to-year results help inform federal, state, and local planning decisions and funding; highlighting the impact of homelessness. The HMIS coordinator works out of the HRHA office.

Continuum of Care Programs



Built for Zero

The Built for Zero initiative is a collaborative and innovative problem-solving effort to address homelessness in multiple communities across the United States. Built for Zero utilizes HMIS data to hone in on those persons who are chronically homeless or are homeless veterans. Those experiencing chronic homelessness include persons with a disability who have been homeless for a year or longer, or persons who have been homeless four times in the past three years for a total amount of one year or longer. **While the Point-in-Time count provides a snapshot of homelessness in our communities, the Built for Zero initiative seeks to understand individual experiences and barriers, and move those with the highest barriers towards permanent housing solutions.** In this model, individual service providers can better coordinate on a client-by-client level, avoiding duplication and finding more sustainable outcomes for each client.

The Western Virginia CoC's involvement in Built for Zero is driven by collaboration with area service providers and their close work with clients. These service providers within the CoC meet once a month to engage in case conferencing, bringing all available resources to the table, prioritizing the highest barrier clients, problem-solving, and then implementing the most suitable housing plan, all while protecting client confidentiality. The approach is innovative, holistic, and housing-centered. By knowing all individuals experiencing homelessness by name, creating innovative and specialized housing solutions, and consistently tracking our community progress to ending homelessness, the Western Virginia CoC is working as a collaborative to ensure that homelessness in our communities truly is "rare, brief, and nonrecurring."



HRHA receives 50 new housing vouchers

In 2019, HRHA received 25 Mainstream vouchers. These vouchers are established for non-elderly, disabled individuals/families who experience significant barriers to securing stable housing. These individuals are either experiencing homelessness or returning/reentering into the community from institutions. Last year, 24 of the 25 vouchers HRHA was awarded were utilized. Due to this successful utilization, as well as community stakeholder assistance with both the grant application and support for voucher holders themselves, HRHA was awarded an additional 50 of these vouchers for 2020. Thank you to our community partners, DSS, CSB, and VAIL, whose collaboration made this additional award possible!



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Website



www.harrisonburgrha.com

Facebook



[@harrisonburgrha](https://www.facebook.com/harrisonburgrha)

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



Members of the Blue Ridge Chapter of the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses delivering gifts. December 2019

Thank you!

Since 2007, HRHA has assisted families in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS) with gifts during the holiday season. As budgets tighten at the close of the year, HRHA and community partners work together to make sure that parents can provide gifts for their children. **This year, our community provided gifts for over 90 children in around 40 families.** HRHA and our families express their gratitude to the organizations that hosted a Giving Tree (JCPenney Salon & Valley Mall) and helped spread the word (WHSV). We are also incredibly grateful to all who donated gifts, whether as a group (like the Blue Ridge AACN and Broadway High School FFA Chapter) or as an individual/family. Thank you for your generosity and dedication to this community!