

# THE HRHA NEWSLETTER

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



Nurses with the Blue Ridge Chapter of the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACCN) delivering gifts for the Giving Tree. December 2020

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Interested in subscribing? Questions?  
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## Finding Home



It is difficult to summarize the past year; incredible challenges, new opportunities, tremendous loss. The pandemic and resulting sharpening of our housing challenges have forced us in many ways to examine what it means to have a safe, affordable, and stable housing. What does a stay at home order mean if you are houseless? Or if the place you call home is not safe, large enough, or have the resources you need to work from home or attend virtual classes?

In this issue we hear from a former Franklin Heights resident who recently moved into a home of her own. We highlight the successes of the Homebuyer Assistance Program, that provides tangible financial assistance to qualifying first time homebuyers. Finally, we look at the housing efforts of the Western Virginia Continuum of Care (COC) this past year and their commitment to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-reoccurring.

We recognize that the challenges of 2020 did not disappear on the first of the month. There is much work to do to address our collective health, trauma, and economy. But we do look to 2021 with hope; whether expanding housing opportunities or planting seeds in a new community garden. Let's continue this important work.

# From a Housing Voucher to Home Ownership

This piece is written by former Franklin Heights resident and FSS participant Michelle K. Michelle graduated from FSS in November 2020. Story and picture used with permission.

I moved into Franklin Heights in June, 2019 when I was about to be homeless from family issues. I was working full time and only making minimum wage, falling short to take care of me and my son. From the very beginning, I utilized all that the FSS program had to offer. First, I started with a budget that was the biggest help. I signed up for computer classes and then took the pre-employment class at the FSS office. They helped me with my resume and kept me motivated when I wanted to give up. They helped me prepare for my interview down to the clothes to wear. In March 2020 I landed my dream job and was able to save and follow my strict budget.

In October of 2020 I found a house that was in the area that I wanted to be in and in a price range I could afford. I closed on my house November 2, 2020, I was told that I would never own a home without my ex, nor make anything of myself. Today I am that single mom that owns her own home, working my dream job, able to support my child alone with no help. I owe this all to the team at FSS for their dedication and knowledge, if you take advantage of what they have to offer your dreams can come true too.



Ornament on the tree in Michelle's new home. December 2020.

## A Year of Secure and Affordable Transportation



FSS Participant Julie with the van she received through Way to Go. December 2020.

It is difficult to miss the significance of secure and affordable transportation in achieving self-sufficiency. This past year, the FSS program referred dozens of participants to local non-profit Way to Go. The Way to Go team connected our participants with gas vouchers, covered oil changes & repairs, provided shuttle service to work, and even awarded a few of our participants with vehicles of their own. Julie (left) was awarded a van in anticipation of a growing family and a reliable vehicle to get to and from work. Thank you, Way to Go!

## Executive Director's Corner



2020, what was that all about! Summed up, a year of uncertainty, challenges, changes and more changes. Being healthy and safe in 2020 also reaffirmed the critical need for stable housing for all. Did I mention exhaustion?

The year also brought new program enhancements which improved housing access, expanded partnerships to address homelessness and the affordable housing crisis, and exciting opportunities to develop local policies to address local needs. Successfully navigating “turbulent” times requires a commitment to housing and a dedicated team of individuals collectively responding positively, proactively, and in a solution focused manner. I am extremely grateful and appreciative to be part of a team that is committed to housing the most vulnerable in our community.

Please join me in thanking John Hall, Chairman and Scott Gallagher Commissioner for their public service as they depart the board at the end of 2020. A few of the many achievements during their tenure include the development of Commerce Village, installation of solar panels at JR Polly Lineweaver, award of 98 mainstream nonelderly vouchers to house the most vulnerable, and inclusion in HUD’s Moving to Work expansion. These are significant accomplishments which are recognized nationally. Achievement would not have been possible without their leadership, support, and commitment to addressing the needs of the community we serve. Wishing everyone a Happy New Year!

- Michael Wong

# The Harrisonburg Homebuyer Assistance Program

Update by HRHA's Community Development and Grant Coordinator Emily McCarty

Expanding homeownership has been an goal for HRHA and the City of Harrisonburg for a quite a few years. In the previous Comprehensive Plan (2017/2018 Update), the City established a goal of improving homeownership within the City limits. The goal stated “within the next five year planning cycle, work with HRHA to create a framework for providing down payment assistance through CDBG and/or HRHA for qualified first-time homebuyers.” So, in the fall of 2017, HRHA began working with the City to create this initiative, with HRHA leveraging staff to run and administer the program. HRHA applied for 2018-2019 CDBG grant funds to provide closing cost assistance to individuals who meet the low to moderate income (LMI) criteria and are looking to purchase a home in the city. With the award of CDBG grant funds, the program official kicked off in July 2018.

**Over the past two and a half years, the program has connected with over 100 individuals, working on key homebuyer requirements like improving credit score, budgeting, and more.** Individuals who meet credit and income qualifications, complete an online homebuyer course, and submit required materials are eligible for program funding. To date, three individuals and families have completed the program and HRHA staff continue to work with more in reaching this goal.

Financial assistance available includes two loans: Down Payment assistance of up to \$10,000 on a 1.5% interest 5-year loan and Closing Cost assistance up to \$4,000 on a forgivable 5-year loan. Participants can utilize one or both options. Are you or someone you know interested in pursuing home ownership? Check eligibility requirements, program details, and apply at [www.harrisonburghrha.com/home-ownership](http://www.harrisonburghrha.com/home-ownership)

*"There are so many details and confusing elements to buying a home, especially for a first-timer like me, but for the most part I was able to make it through without too many mistakes. 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!"*

- Katie T, 2019 Homebuyer Program Recipient

## Housing Chronically Homeless Individuals and Veterans

Update by Western Virginia Continuum of Care Coordinator Isaiah Mejah

A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a federal program that provides funds to nonprofit providers who seek to end homelessness. The Western Virginia CoC, which covers six counties and the cities of Harrisonburg and Winchester, is tasked with coordinating nonprofit partner agencies that support the needs of homeless individuals and families. These agencies offer services including street outreach, emergency shelter operations, prevention, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and the centralized housing intake hot line.

With collaboration from Community Solutions, the CoC and partner agencies seek to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-reoccurring through a data-driven and community-wide approach and commitment. In July 2019, the CoC initiated monthly case conferencing focused on addressing the needs of those most vulnerable through a by-name list. **The CoC housed 84 chronically homeless individuals and veterans in our community in 2020.**

Many thanks to all the CoC's regional partner agencies for the hard work and resiliency in a year like no other. The Western Virginia Continuum of Care continues to refine our community-based processes by working to clear structural and systemic barriers that lead to chronic homelessness. For more information, visit [www.continuumofcare513.com](http://www.continuumofcare513.com)

### Continuum of Care Programs







# Harrisonburg Redevelopment & Housing Authority

## Contact Us

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## Website



[www.harrisonburgrha.com](http://www.harrisonburgrha.com)

## Facebook



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

## HRHA Board of Commissioners

HRHA is governed by a seven-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.

Meeting location/access will be posted prior to meetings and in line with local health guidelines.

+ Michael Wong, (Not a commissioner)

Executive Director/Secretary-Treasurer

+ John Hall – Chair

Term Expires: November 29, 2021

+ Costella Forney – Vice Chair

Term Expires: November 29, 2022

+ Scott Gallagher – Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2020

+ Christine Fasching Maphis - Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2022

+ Dany Fleming - Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2023

+ Kevin Coffman - Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2023

+ Luciano Benjamin - Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2024

## 14th Annual Giving Tree - Thank You!

We are incredibly grateful for the community's support in providing gifts for 39 families and close to 100 children as part of this year's Giving Tree. A special thanks to:

- Agora Downtown Market and the Valley Mall for hosting trees
- WHSV for covering the initiative
- ColorQuest Printing for donating tree tags and materials
- F&M Bank, Lacey Neff, and Melissa Michelsen for supporting financially
- Chris Mason and the Blue Ridge Chapter of the American Association of Critical Care Nurses for donating gifts for 15 children
- Every community member who donated gifts, spread the word, and supported our families

