



Help! This Newsletter Needs a Name...see contest

Community Housing Network - Fall 2003

Community Housing Network, Inc., is a non-profit community organization dedicated to the acquisition, development, and maintenance of safe, affordable and desirable housing for individuals with disabilities.

Name Our Newsletter and Win Fame Forever

Did you notice that the newsletter name was missing from our first edition? We didn't either until your copy was in the mail. We took this omission as a sign that we need to hold a newsletter naming contest. Come up with the winning entry and who knows what honors will be bestowed upon you. Call, fax or e-mail your ideas. Anything goes as long as it is related to our mission of meeting the housing needs of persons with disabilities in Oakland County.

CHN Board Members

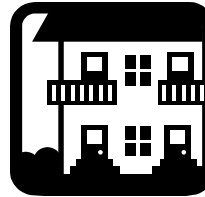
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Group Homes: An Update from Marc Craig

I am frequently asked the question, "What is happening in terms of group homes?" In our first year of operation we focused on putting systems in place to manage group home maintenance. We successfully prioritized maintenance needs within the available budget and we implemented a 24/7 service to handle maintenance emergencies. Now we can proactively plan and prepare to take our services to the next level. As resources become available and as costs come under control, we will start scheduling major maintenance expenditures on a periodic basis. For example, we know that every so many years each group home will need new carpet or will need to be repainted. We can know these updates are going to be performed on a periodic basis and will thus afford more predictable outcomes than we have experienced in the past.



In terms of housing preservation, we have been working with OCCMHA and the core providers in Oakland County to identify the best existing group homes that should remain in the system. We are working vigorously to set up long term, stable leasing arrangements that might include non profit ownership and the utilization of various funding programs to keep costs under control. We also will want to take advantage of any available property tax relief to promote increasingly user friendly ownership models.

At the same time, we are embarking on some long-term housing development activities that will eventually change the practice of how housing resources are being handled. We are planning cooperatively with OCCMHA to develop a housing strategy that involves preserving a number of existing group homes as well as producing surplus housing. This housing might include homes that are owned by consumers and affordable rental housing units throughout the county. Our ultimate goal is to support an array of affordable

housing alternatives that fosters choices between group homes and other sorts of living arrangements.

The subject of group home closings that have been seen in recent months is an issue we also need to address. Given the scarcity of resources available to pay for rental increases in existing group homes, CHN has been successfully working with the owners of current group homes to keep costs under control and to keep as many group homes as possibly available for the short term. We are also working closely with MORC and other core providers, OCCMHA, and with the homeowners to assess the condition of the homes. In addition, MORC and other core providers contribute input regarding whether they want to continue operations at the homes. OCCMHA provides information about the availability of funds to support the ongoing group home leasing costs. In the final analysis, there is no one person or organization that makes the determination as to which homes close and which homes remain open. OCCMHA, MORC, and CHN make a collective determination as to whether we are going to be able to keep a particular residence on line as a licensed group home.

Upcoming lease expirations can provide opportunities to group home residents to assess all desirable housing possibilities through the Person Centered Planning Process. Where could I live? What are the barriers to me living in an apartment or to owning a home? Such planning may take 1 year, 5 years, or even 10 years, but moving toward an alternative outcome can be extremely empowering to persons with disabilities. This is really a change in the way of thinking and in the way of doing planning for people with disabilities. Movement toward expanding housing options is what we are trying to foster and is the purpose of the Housing Resource Center. We want to start looking at what other kinds of housing people are going to want and to start implementing the technology that will make such housing available and affordable for people with disabilities.

CHN Housing Resource Center Touches Lives with Information and Technical Assistance

The CHN Housing Resource Center provided over 500 hours of technical assistance to consumers, family members, and supports coordinators during the first six months of 2003. Examples of technical assistance include helping persons with disabilities and their families resolve complex housing issues, providing rental assistance, homeownership, and home modification information and giving referrals to other agencies for a variety of services. The immediate impact technical assistance can make in the lives of our consumers can be demonstrated by the following example. In March of this year, assistance was provided to a woman on social security disability whose home was literally falling apart because she could not care for it. The home was in foreclo-

sure because she could not pay the taxes. CHN Housing Resource Center manager, Kirsten Elliott, contacted Oakland County, explained the woman's desperate situation and averted foreclosure. With continued CHN guidance and support the woman was able to sell her home and to pay the taxes. She used the remaining money to purchase a new HUD home near relatives, out of state, while retaining her social security benefits. According to Kirsten, it is a good possibility this woman would have joined the ranks of the homeless, without the intervention of CHN. Our grateful consumer said, "The people at CHN went the extra mile to help me out of an impossible situation. I was able to maintain my dignity and find a suitable place to live near loved ones. I can't thank Community Housing Network enough."

Where Does the Money Go? How CHN Serves Persons with Disabilities

Community Housing Network is under contract with Community Mental Health to assist with the housing needs of persons with disabilities in Oakland County. OCCMHA awarded CHN \$3.6 million for the 2002/2003 fiscal year to fund specific housing related services. The contract is divided into 3 parts. The first and largest part is geared toward group home leasing and property management. Two million is allocated for the direct leasing of 89 group homes, where CHN writes the checks and pays the rent. The remaining group homes are leased by the State of Michigan. Another 800 thousand is set aside for the property management of all 191 group homes. Under the terms of various leases, CHN takes responsibility for all non-owner, non-routine maintenance such as replacing furnace systems after warrantee expiration or repairing sprinkler systems pumps. Routine repairs, such as grass cutting are the responsibility of the direct service provider. The leasing and property management functions constitute 78% of the CHN budget.

The second area of our contract focuses on creating alternatives to group homes by generating and managing various assets. Our objective is to contain the escalation of rents in group homes and in other independent living settings and to facilitate a broader array of living choices for people with disabilities. In the early days of community placement, when there were thousands of people with disabilities living in State institutions, group homes were the primary vehicle for those people to leave the institutions and to return to their home communities. Now we are trying to reduce dependence on the group home model and to facilitate alternatives to group home living. Alternative choices may include forms

of homeownership or affordable rental housing, varying from apartments to condos to detached single family units. Approximately 12% of the CHN budget is allocated for this portion of our contract.

The final area of our contract focuses on the implementation and maintenance of the highly utilized Housing Resource Center, which serves persons with disabilities, their families, advocates, service providers, and supports coordinators. The Center's goal is to place up to date information directly in the hands of those who need it, enabling them to make informed choices and to lead self-determined lives. Community Housing Network offers "One Stop Shop" access to information about topics such as home ownership, affordable rental housing, and available options for supportive living. The HRC handles numerous inquiries, such as how to find inexpensive furniture for a new residence or how to get on a Section 8 wait list. Approximately 10% of the CHN budget or \$360,000 is allocated for this part of the contract.

It is important to make people aware that our budget does not include any direct Community Mental Health funded leasing assistance or subsidy funds. People cannot seek down payments or security deposit monies from Community Housing Network. Rather we seek outside grants to access non-mental health resources to augment available Community Mental Health services and supports or refer people to other existing programs and services. The eventual goal of CHN is to serve not only persons with disabilities, but to create an all-inclusive community that provides affordable housing for all. Realization of this goal will assure opportunities for people with disabilities to enjoy full citizenship along with others in the community.

Good News! CHN Implements Homeownership and Leasing Assistance Grants

Federal Home Loan Bank Homeownership Program

The dream of owning a home of ones' own is becoming a reality for three consumer participants in the CHN FHLBI Homeownership Project. A home in South Oakland County was identified for a young single mother with mental illness, who is working very hard to get life back on track for herself and for her daughter. With the help of CHN, she has recently moved into her renovated home. HRC Manager, Kirsten Elliott provided homebuyer counseling for another consumer whose home is currently under construction. A third consumer's home renovation has recently been completed. Screening for additional Homeownership program participants is currently underway.

Permanent Supported Housing Leasing Assistance

CHN received final approval for a HUD funded SHP Leasing Assistance Program in April. The grant allows CHN to provide rental assistance to twenty-seven individuals and/or families who have a disability and who are homeless. As part of the grant, Easter Seals of Southeastern Michigan will provide intake and referral services through a Supportive Housing Navigator. CHN has assumed primary responsibility for administering and overseeing the two-year program. Consumers began receiving leasing assistance and supportive services in August, 2003.

A 2nd Leasing Assistance Grant, providing subsidies for twenty-two rental units and concurrent supportive services has been submitted as part of the HUD Super Nofa application.

Get Rid of that Old Vehicle and Help Persons with Disabilities Find a Home



Many persons with disabilities are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless. Did you know you can help someone with a disability find safe, secure and affordable housing today! How? By donating that old Car, Boat, Motorcycle, Truck, SUV or Motor home. Ready to get rid of your old car? Donate it to Charity Motors and select COMMUNITY HOUSING NETWORK, INC. as the beneficiary. 70% of the proceeds is contributed directly to CHN. Vehicles need not run....Free timely pick-up.....IRS forms provided.....100% deductible. Please call Charity Motors at (313) 255-1000 and designate COMMUNITY HOUSING NETWORK as your charity of choice.

Upcoming Events: 4th Annual HOMES Coalition Dinner and Auction

The HOMES Coalition is an all volunteer committee formed to raise public awareness of the desperate need for accessible housing for persons with disabilities. The Coalition works to support 501(C)3, tax exempt housing providers whose organizations are devoted to the development of housing built to meet the "special needs" of persons with physical or mental disabilities.

In the last three years the Coalition has raised nearly \$90,000 through your generosity. Each year the Coalition will show you which projects they helped fund, and the faces of those that have benefited from their considerable efforts. CHN has been honored to receive assistance from the HOMES Coalition in the past.

Come and enjoy a wonderful evening for great cause. Who knows what treasures you may acquire at the auction. The 2003 dinner and auction will be

Thursday, October 9th

6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Andiamo Restorante

14 Mile Road in Warren

Individual banquet tickets are \$100 per patron and are cost deductible. Additional sponsorship opportunities are available, including advertising in the event program. You may contact the HOMES Coalition at (248) 770-1950 or at homescoalition.org.

COMMUNITY HOUSING NETWORK, INC.
MEETING AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS FOR PERSONS
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*Creating Affordable Housing
Opportunities for People with Disabilities*

*Find us Online at:
www.communityhousingnetwork.org*

This newsletter has been made possible with the support of the Oakland County Community Mental Health Authority.



A Special Thanks to Special Folks

We at Community Housing Network, Inc. are greatly appreciative of the support and assistance provided by "The Friends of CHN." Your dedication and steadfastness in helping persons with disabilities secure the safe, affordable housing they very much deserve is compassionate and outstanding. In this edition and in future editions, we want to acknowledge the persons and organizations that have contributed toward making the CHN mission a reality for persons with disabilities. Our special thanks go to the following generous individuals and organizations :

Patricia Dudek	Thomas Landry
Annie Lehmann	Dawn Pischel
Morene Rehbine	Century 21
Michigan Youth Golf Foundation	
Sisters IHM, Barbara Cardinal	
Women's Council of Realtors	

In addition, CHN has been fortunate to receive the volunteer services of two generous young women.

Nina D. volunteered to utilize her data base skills and computer expertise to improve the functionality of the Housing Resource Center database. She also willingly lent a hand to assist the CHN staff with a variety of tasks, ranging from data entry to answering phones.

In addition, CHN welcomed Rohini P., who graciously donated her time. She is a senior majoring in accounting at Grand Valley State College. Rohini selflessly chose to use her break from school to help with our endless filing and to input data from our Customer Satisfaction Survey.

We very much appreciate both women's efforts and are open to utilizing additional volunteers as our organization expands and grows to meet the housing needs of consumers in our community.