

Revere Bank Award Nomination for Innovative Programs

The Anne Arundel County Department of Social Services Street Outreach Team was created in 2016 to provide resources and assistance to individuals and families living unsheltered throughout Anne Arundel County. The Street Outreach Team partners with the County's Coordinated Entry for Permanent Supportive Housing and the housing programs that provide voucher based rental assistance to individuals and families meeting the chronic definition of homelessness. The Anne Arundel County Department of Social Services Housing Specialist meets with Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) voucher recipients and assists them through the process of receiving the voucher to the move-in of a new unit.

The Housing Specialist program was created to help meet the needs of chronically homeless individuals receiving PSH vouchers in Anne Arundel County. This innovative new program started in 2019 in response to the County's need of engaging and building relationships with landlords providing housing for a challenging population. Individuals that are chronically homeless have disabilities, fixed to zero income, addiction issues, criminal backgrounds, poor credit history and social disadvantages that have resulted in difficulty finding places to live and landlords to rent to them. The Housing Specialist meets the individual when they receive their housing voucher at the Housing Commission of Anne Arundel County and completes a housing intake assessment. This assessment helps the Housing Specialist to learn more about the individual's needs and interest to successfully match them up with a landlord and on-going supportive case management services. The Housing Specialist works closely with the Street Outreach Team and other agencies to provide the resources necessary to find and rent a new unit with the voucher, as quickly as possible, including identifying new partnerships and landlords that were previously not available.

Since the inception of the project in 2019 the Street Outreach Team and Housing Specialist have successfully placed 48 individuals in voucher based housing. The success of the program has been about the collaboration and partnerships that have been created during this time. Critical to this success is the relationship forged between the Team and the individual by establishing trust and cooperation to reach the person's goals. Statistically, it saves State dollars to house homeless individuals, keeping them from frequent hospitalizations, arrests leading to confinement, and relief to Police and Crisis units.

The Housing Specialist Program focuses on reducing barriers to housing and has identified rental application fees, back BGE bills and security deposits as potential barriers to finding a rental unit. Individuals experiencing chronic homelessness have difficulty saving money to pay for basic needs along with the expenses related to finding a housing unit. The Housing Specialist offers transportation to potential units, provides payment for any application fee associated with applying for a housing unit, accompanies the individual to DSS for the "Hope for All" program that provides furniture and any other services the individual lacks such as food stamps and medicaid to further assure success. The program then pays the client's security deposit. The voucher subsidizes the rent for the individual, however, due to criminal backgrounds, poor rental history, or poor credit history, the security deposits can be well over \$1,000 for an individual with zero income or limited income. The financial assistance is critical to the success of each individual case as landlords require the application fee to hold a unit for the individual and if they are unable to provide the application fee immediately they risk losing that unit. The security deposit assistance is just as critical as a person is required to pay the deposit prior to moving into the unit. Without this financial assistance individuals would have a much more difficult time finding housing units.

The Housing Specialist evaluates each client to identify the perceived and actual barriers for housing. A case plan is developed to address the needs of personal record retention, criminal background, mental health services, financial assistance, substance use treatment, furniture, move-in assistance, transportation needs, renters insurance and a three month follow up. This service includes a sustained relationship with the individual until all barriers have been eliminated; the individual is housed and then transitioned to targeted case management. In short, the Housing Specialist does whatever is necessary over the period of engagement with the individual to house them. Many do not have email addresses and some don't have a telephone so it is necessary to identify where they are on the streets in order to meet with them.

The Street Outreach Team and Housing Specialist have a unique relationship with Legal Aid. The team completes referrals for expungement assistance with the local Legal Aid Bureau who prioritizes and assists the individuals with the housing voucher get their criminal background expunged. Reducing the barrier of a criminal background has provided opportunities for individuals to get into housing units they would not have otherwise qualified for. Legal Aid will write a letter outlining what charges are expungeable if expungement is not possible before the individual moves in, reassuring the landlord or housing complex that the history of the criminal background will not impede their ability to live independently or be at risk of incarceration.

The Housing Specialist collaborates with the Housing Commission of Anne Arundel County during the voucher process to assist HCAAC and the landlord in the undertaking and to update the individual on progress. In addition, the Housing Specialist is responsible for collecting and submitting all pertinent paperwork to ensure that all agencies in the County are able to update records regarding the previously homeless individual.

The Team also meets with the City of Annapolis Police Department on a monthly basis to discuss potential housing clients so the police are aware of who the team is working with to help reduce their impact on the streets of the City of Annapolis. The City Police have worked with the team to ensure criminal activity is reduced while a housing application is being pursued.

Mental health has impacted a large majority of individuals applying and receiving housing assistance. The team has built strong relationships with the county Mental Health Agency and mental health providers for successful referrals and collaborative services, including SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach Access and Recovery) for those with a serious mental illness without SSI. The team is responsible with connecting individuals to targeted case management, med management, and therapy ensuring the individual stays active in their treatment and have transportation and reminders to get to their appointments. In the past, case managers had great difficulty connecting with individuals that were unsheltered due to their inability to keep appointments or have an address to meet with their provider. With the outreach team's involvement the individual is able to transition from the Team and meet with case managers to stay connected with their mental health treatment. The Housing Specialist can reassure the potential landlord that if issues do occur related to mental health the team will act as a liaison to reach out and connect the individual back to their provider to provide crisis management and care that will reduce their impact on the community they are living.

The Housing Specialist Program has become a success because literally all of the individuals' needs are identified and addressed in a relationship that establishes trust and hope for a successful future. Since inception, recidivism back to the street has not occurred with any of our clients.