

# Notes Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis Resident Services Call 5.11.20

## COVID-19 Response Funds/Donations to Support Residents

### **Ashley Thomas, Capitol Hill Housing (CHH)**

- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, within a week Capitol Hill Housing's (CHH) fundraising team secured \$325,000 from existing donor relationships and Seattle All In, a group of community members formed on March 23<sup>rd</sup> who quickly deploy resources directly to non-profits.
- CHH formed the COVID Resilience Fund with the primary goal of supporting residential residents (80% fund allocation) and the secondary goal of supporting commercial tenants, particularly small and/or People of Color (POC- owned businesses (20% fund allocation).
- CHH developed a low-barrier process for evaluating resident applications to access the assistance. People who don't qualify for unemployment qualify for rental assistance through this fund. In the beginning, CHH decided not to mass market the availability of funds out of fear of running out. CHH owns 1,600 units, but surprisingly has only received 65 applications from residents. Now, they are marketing the program more broadly – resident services staff are posting flyers and calling all residents who are behind on rent directly. CHH expects to see an uptick in applications in the summer as stimulus funds/savings dry up (Additionally, Washington's unemployment benefit office is flooded and some won't be approved until mid-June).
- To verify whether a resident qualifies, CHH will accept a screenshot or email from a former employer. CHH will also consider assistance to residents who have lost resources because they are classified as high risk. CHH has people sign an affidavit saying that they have been truthful, but are pretty much taking people's word for it. For those who have access to sick time or have only partially lost work, CHH will cover 50% of rent, for those with no resources, CHH covers 80 of rent. Residents can apply to renew every month (simply fill out an affidavit stating no change).

### **Sulema Stewart, Montgomery Housing Partnership (MHP)**

- MHP formed an emergency fund to assist residents who don't qualify for other federal/state resources. The State of Maryland has rental assistance available as well. MHP created a team of property managers to do outreach and provide food for people who can't leave their units. Staff are doing direct outreach about the fund, but people are afraid to ask for assistance because of how it might affect their ability to get other resources.
- MHP has formed partnerships with food distributors and 8-10 restaurants funded by private donors. MHP has a large Amharic Ethiopian population and is struggling a bit to provide food that complies with dietary restrictions.

### **Sarah Koschinska, Project for Pride in Living (PPL)**

- PPL is looking into developing a rental assistance fund. In Minneapolis there are a lot of people who haven't gotten stimulus payments yet, so PPL is considering launching the fund in the summer once people are able to focus on rebuilding their finances.

### **Deborah Gable, HDC MidAtlantic**

- HDC owns 58 communities, 3700 units. They formed the Hope and Opportunity fund in December 2016 to help people deal with emergency needs, like car repair or medical bills. To date, HDC has given 137 awards, totaling \$80,000. The average award size is \$650 to help people stay in their homes. 90% of residents remain in their homes 6 months after receiving the assistance, 80% remain after 12 months. It is a delicate balance managing the fund so that HDC is being responsible with resources, while making the assistance accessible and relatively easy to obtain.
- The process to receive funds begins with an application. Community managers and resident services staff provide input throughout the review process. Once approved, HDC and the resident develop an action plan together. In addition, HDC developed an eviction prevention program last year, which adds some structured support for people. Normally the program is voluntary, but with the economic challenges many face as a result of the pandemic, HDC's president felt strongly that it should be mandatory (doesn't guarantee people will engage). HDC has 118 people who were late on rent and referred to the program, 30 people worked with HDC to develop an action plan (though this may increase since HDC has scaled up their capacity).
- Right now, there is an eviction moratorium in place and HDC is focused on residents outreach, being supportive/encouraging residents not to panic, and getting people to pay what they can for rent. Local housing authorities are trying to be responsive, so HDC is waiting to see what other resources will be available for residents before using HDC's Hope and Opportunity Fund.

### **Rose Mabwa, The Community Builders (TCB)**

- In Chicago, TCB is making payment arrangements for residents, using stimulus dollars to pay get ahead on their rent.
- For seniors with food restrictions, TCB has redirected some funding for food/medicine pickup, grocery shopping, and free medical supplies if a person tests positive for COVID-19. They are also supplying shopping gift cards so people with different dietary needs can eat what they're used to.

## **Other Approaches to Service Delivery and Addressing Resident Needs**

### **Deborah Gable, HDC MidAtlantic**

- Many of HDC's programs are temporarily shut down (e.g. jobs programs) or altered (e.g. mental health programs are now being provided over the phone). HDC's food program is continuing and staff are doing wellness checks on residents. Residents are responding positively to staff outreach. The crisis has allowed for people to be a bit more open; coming out the other end there will be a stronger connection.
- Internally, staff has gotten better at communicating between property management and resident services. Additionally, staff and residents are really seeing the value of eviction prevention programs and assisting people before they hit the point of crisis.

**Rose Mabwa, The Community Builders (TCB)**

- TCB – Chicago has a skeleton resident services crew on-site, and is doing daily wellness calls and fill out a questionnaire to identify resident needs. TCB is reaching out to local schools and partnering with them to deliver books. For families with IEPs, TCB staff get on Zoom calls to advocate for the families. They have bought some Chromebooks for families who have not gotten them from schools and are loaning them out for 30 day intervals with options for renewal. TCB also offers free virtual learning services and supplies educational/entertaining materials, like books and puzzles.
- TCB is slowly opening common areas and labs; currently 1 family at a time can use the computer labs for 30 minute intervals. Programs like tumbling or teen cooking, are difficult to customize virtually, TCB is trying to get a partner to record lessons and send them to youth. Other programs like mentorship and homework help and health wellbeing are easier to convert to virtual. Telehealth is growing since TCB partners with a clinic of hospital at most sites in Chicago.

**Bernadine Martin, Eden Housing**

- Eden is currently conducting wellness checks on a daily basis. Many residents were concerned about rent for May and June. Food was also a primary concern for many who are home all day with children.
- Schools were responsive in providing laptops, Chromebooks, and hot spots. Eden provides weekly bags of snacks for kids and virtual tutoring and reading (via SeeSaw and Lexia technologies).

**Jana Zawadski, Community HousingWorks (CHW)**

- CHW is tracking Wi-Fi and technology access in households because companies want to donate laptops. CHW is trying to get these laptops donated privately and then leverage a CA state grant to fund community Wi-Fi for residents.

**Tara McCarthy, Jamboree**

- Jamboree is also making sure residents have access to Wifi and tablets. They are continuing to tutor as before, but the biggest challenge has been getting residents able to use Zoom to communicate with each other and take part in programming. Jamboree is sending crafts kits to individual units and doing videos where people can follow along. Their afterschool programming is very different, it's hard to keep kids entertained on a video. Staff have to provide slower directions, repeat themselves more often, and run shorter programming because it's harder to keep kids engaged.
- Community Action Partnership has been helpful in the Orange County and Inland Empire for rental assistance, utility assistance, and food security.

## Residents' Refusal to Social Distance

### Jana Zawadski, Community HousingWorks (CHW)

- CHW had a confirmed case at a property and now resident services staff are proactively reaching out to all people at the property to manage the anxiety. Are people running into situations where residents are saying they're tested positive but aren't social distancing?
  - TCB - Some seniors were refusing to quarantine after testing positive, TCB tried to reach out to health department but received no clear answer, so they worked with the community manager to develop a friendly letter saying the resident needs to quarantine for 14 days or else TCB will build up a case and evict the resident after COVID since they are endangering the health of others. When a resident tests positive, TCB needs to bring in a special team to clean up, so when they aren't isolating the cleaning's purpose is defeated.

## Census

- **Eden Housing**, asking residents to complete the census when doing resident outreach/wellness checks, and most residents are responding.
- **National Housing Trust** is also doing census outreach in their DC and FL properties.
- **HDC MidAtlantic** has a strong partnership with the census.

## Future Topics

- Hybrid, universal, and in-person programming
- Data/evaluations - how people are measuring their program delivery
- Preparing for a potential second wave of the virus
- Innovative food prep/distribution partnerships
- Innovative summer programming for kids (holding their attention virtually)