

Housing Choices

A Newsletter for Mental Health Professionals

Summer 2001

Sponsored by the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

Horizon House Creates an Inclusive World For People With Disabilities

An in-depth look at how two Horizon House Divisions make this happen

By Peggy Robertson

Kristine Mancini an Asset to the Real Estate Division

Commitment and dedication are two words that come to mind when Kristine Mancini, Director of Real Estate at Horizon House, Inc., talks about her past 13 years working with the agency. Ms. Mancini had been a Realtor for many years prior to working at Horizon House, and when she first came she was conscious of herself as a real estate person operating in a social service agency. Now, after 13 years at Horizon House, Ms. Mancini commented, "I now feel like a social service person working in real estate. I have grown to really understand the needs and to advocate for the individuals I work with."

Horizon House, Inc. is an innovative non-profit social service agency that works in partnership with disabled individuals and their families. They assist adults with mental health needs, substance abuse problems, homelessness or developmental disabilities in acquiring a sense of confidence and independence so that they can participate in, and contribute to the community fabric. Their services recognize that housing is a crucial element in helping individuals successfully integrate into the community. Ms. Mancini's responsibilities include not only oversight of real estate for housing developments, but also assistance in meeting the housing needs of individual clients. For individuals with

Kristine Mancini in her 30th Street Office

disabilities, this often means making sure that the housing is accessible.

Horizon House headquarters, where Ms. Mancini works, are located at 120 South 30th Street in Philadelphia. The offices are in an accessible, convenient location with five floors consisting of classrooms, a cafeteria, conference rooms, offices and a pleasant, comfortable atmosphere.

Ms. Mancini described the services that Horizon House offers. "Horizon House has in place a wide array of behavioral health services that include targeted case management, vocational training, educational programming, partial hospitalization, substance abuse, residential services, out-patient and homeless outreach. Horizon House also has a division specifically for individuals with developmental disabilities. Horizon House serves approximately 3,029 consumers in Pennsylvania

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and Delaware and approximately 589 consumers have access to the residential services.”

Residential service needs cover two states and six counties. Ms. Mancini oversees 103 different locations with 166 types of real estate. This ranges from efficiency apartments, to a single rancher, to a 12-unit apartment building, to a 79,000 square foot building and everything in between. In addition to funding and developing good housing, the Real Estate Division is responsible for emergencies, maintenance, capital improvements, modifications and construction on all the real estate owned or managed by Horizon House.

Ms. Mancini stressed that since the primary business of Horizon House is social service, it has made sense in some cases to collaborate with other agencies that specialize in housing. However, Horizon House also provides housing for their consumers with disabilities and special needs. In such cases they are committed to pursuing only acceptable, affordable, and appropriate living and learning environments, which has some times meant making home modifications to ensure that a home accessible. Ms. Mancini added, “I will only place people in housing that meets our high standards. That means that the housing must be geographically desirable, well maintained and the landlords are suitable.”

When asked if Horizon House has had any difficulties with their housing program, Ms. Mancini explained that one of the issues she has had to deal with is discrimination. She noted, “Sometimes when the community learns that our consumers will be moving into their neighborhood they have tried to stop us. In two cases, we have placed consumers in homes where the neighbors and townships filed lawsuits to prohibit them from moving in. However, discrimination is not as bad now as it once was. Part of the reason is because we have laws such as the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act and because we have taken the time to educate the landlords and the community. What we have found is that, through our efforts, the neighbors do a complete turn around and come to feel good about our consumers.”

Miss Mancini continued, “We provide letters of introduction with letters of recommendation and references to landlords that we would like to work with. We try to develop a rapport with the office management and landlords of the units where we have consumers. We’ll bring donuts to the office or send out movie tickets or coupons for pizza as a thank you for the job they do. We have done a lot of public relations and advocacy with our landlords and we are very careful to maintain all of our properties and our landlord relationships. We have sites all over the Delaware Valley, but

most of our housing is in Philadelphia. The locations are desirable and we uphold high standards for the homes. We work hard at maintaining and improving our properties. In fact we are well known for keeping our places very well maintained.”

One of Horizon House’s most recent projects is the development of 26 units of housing for formerly homeless people with mental health needs. They received funding from the Federal Home Loan Bank and a McKinney Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that will be matched by funds from the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority and Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development for modifications and construction. Ms. Mancini explained, “We are coming to the end of this project that entailed 5 sites with 26 units of permanent housing for people with special needs. Two units have been made completely accessible for tenants who have mobility issues. Residents will not pay more than 30% of their income for their housing and will receive supportive services from Horizon House. We are expecting to have residents move in this summer. We are excited that this project is coming to fruition and the residents are anxiously awaiting to move into these wonderful apartments.”

For more information about the Horizon House Real Estate Division, call 215-386-3838.

A Closer Look at One of the Services Provided by Horizon House

Horizon House Homeless Services Division Provides a True Continuum of Care

Mr. Phillip Beltz is Director of the Homeless Services Division of Horizon House. Their mission is to try to serve anyone who is homeless in Philadelphia. Due to the success and creativity of this division, they received the Pennsylvania Association of Rehabilitative Facility (PARF) Award in 1998 for providing the most outstanding services in the state of Pennsylvania.

The way in which Horizon House fulfills its mission is through a Continuum of Care that begins with their Outreach, Engagement and Case Management Services. This service unit, funded by the city of Philadelphia's Office of Emergency Shelter & Services and the Coordinating Office of Drug & Alcohol Abuse Programs (CODAAP), provides help to individuals living on the street, including case management to individuals with substance abuse problems.

Mr. Beltz explained, "I am a veteran street outreach person. I believe that you need to work with people where they are and develop their trust. Due to our successful street outreach, we often see people come into our offices for our help. We just like to see that they come in. Once homeless consumers are targeted, Horizon House staff then refers them to appropriate

income and health care benefits, housing, drug and/or psychiatric treatment and vocational/employment programs."

Another part of the Outreach, Engagement & Case Management Unit is the Sidewalk Ordinance Outreach & Case Management team, which targets chronically homeless men and women with primary drug and alcohol dependency in Center City Philadelphia. This unit works to engage individuals in treatment while introducing options of substance use reduction to promote sobriety.

Mr. Beltz added, "Horizon House also has a nighttime outreach team that works from 11:00 pm until 7:00 am. This team, which is funded by the Philadelphia Office of Mental Health (OMH), has become an extremely valuable resource in the winter. We are also very proud of our Mobile Assessment Clinician who goes out to different sites in the community in order to connect homeless people to treatment."

Most of Horizon House's outreach work is done in Center City. However, the West & Southwest Philadelphia Outreach & Community Resource Development Team also targets homeless individuals. This team goes on the streets, to soup kitchens and drop-in centers in an attempt to provide outreach to homeless adults. Horizon House has

fostered linkages in this section of the city with block captains and local businesses to achieve this goal. The West and Southwest unit makes over 500 unduplicated contacts a year, and the center city office makes about 850 – 900 - a total of over 1400 unduplicated contacts a year!

Another unique case management initiative in the division is the Homeless Intervention Program (HIP) which is supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and OMH. HIP provides case management services that will link the individual to healthcare, housing, vocational training, educational and financial support. Individuals who have a primary diagnosis of Severe Mental Illness or a co-occurring drug and alcohol disorder, who have experienced situational or episodic (less than one year) homelessness and who are willing to accept behavioral health treatment are connected to a whole array of services. The goal is to enable individuals to return to living a productive life in the community. Mr. Beltz noted, "76% of these individuals have moved to greater self-sufficiency. Our efforts to integrate individuals into the community-at-large are part of another Horizon House program, Supports to Achieve Self-Sufficiency (SASS), which is also funded by HUD."

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Phillip Beltz in his Chestnut Street Office

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SASS is a short-term (6 to 18 months) transitional housing program that assists consumers in successfully obtaining the skills needed to move into an independent living environment. SASS is also oriented to connecting people with their families and mending fences. The program provides fully furnished apartments and a residential support staff for 20 consumers in Northeast Philadelphia. According to the “Client Assessment of Residential Stability” tool used by SASS staff to evaluate consumers, 50% of the participants have been involved in part-time and full-time employment and 87% of the participants moved into greater self-sufficiency. These individuals are either living independently in the community without subsidies, are renting apartments with Section 8 vouchers or have become homeowners.

Another program, Shelter Plus Care (S+C), is geared toward moving individuals into permanent housing. Homeless adults with chronic substance abuse problems and their families are taught the skills necessary for living in the community. This program, supported by HUD and CODAAP, began in the early 90’s when Horizon House, in partnership with a local non-profit housing development corporation, was awarded 51 units to serve people with primary substance abuse disorders. Of those served, families occupied about half of the units and single adults occupied the others. In 1999 the program was expanded with an additional 20 units, making a total of 71 scattered sites in the city. 61% of the people participating in the Shelter Plus Care program have moved on to permanent housing and 20% have become homeowners. Horizon House continues to

collaborate with the housing development corporation and together they received a McKinney Grant for an additional 20 S+C units. These units will target sexual minorities – gay, lesbian, and transgendered homeless individuals with primary substance abuse disorders. This new initiative, which was also funded by CODAAP, is expected to be up and running by July 1st, 2001.

Horizon House has begun a new project that is similar to the S+C program, Promoting Readiness to Enable Parents to Achieve Residential Enrichment (PREPARE), which is supported by the Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD). This program will serve 55 families with behavioral health needs in order to move them towards permanent housing within two years. Referrals will come from the Philadelphia Office of Emergency Shelter Services. A housing development corporation will provide the property, while Horizon House will provide the case management services. In addition, Horizon House has a Letter of Agreement with NorthEast Treatment to provide services for children with behavioral health needs.

Mr. Beltz was emphatic about the importance of working with other agencies. “The reason we have been successful in all of our endeavors is because of the

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partnerships that we have forged. HUD, the Philadelphia Behavioral Health System that includes CODAAP and OMH, OHCD, other city agencies and our local housing development corporation have all been instrumental in helping us achieve our goal.”

And that goal of integrating people successfully into the community was eloquently stated by John McKnight in 1991.

“Our goal should be clear. We are seeking nothing less than a life surrounded by the richness and diversity of community. A collective life. A common life.

An Everyday Life. A powerful life that gains its joy from the creativity and connectedness that comes when we join in association as citizens to create an inclusive world.”

(John McKnight, author and community organizer, is co-director of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute of Northwestern University.)

In summary, Horizon House is dedicated to helping people with disabilities to develop the skills necessary to enjoy rewarding lives in the community. And they have been able to accomplish this because they understand that the only way an

individual can be successfully integrated into the community is by ensuring that his/her individual housing and support needs are met.

For more information about the Horizon House Homeless Services Division or to make referrals call 215-636-0606.

Horizon House Mission
Horizon House advocates and provides comprehensive, community based rehabilitation services to create opportunities for those served to manage their lives through environments emphasizing individual strength and choice.

SAVE THE DATE

December 5 - 8, 2001

We Can Do This!

Ending Homelessness for People with Mental Illnesses and/or Substance Use Disorders
A National Training Conference

Omni Shoreham Hotel, Washington, D.C.

Information on training topics and registration will be available in early Fall 2001

For more information contact:

National Resource Center on Homelessness and Mental Illness

(800) 444-7415 or visit our website at <http://prainc.com/nrc/>

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 National Coalition for the Homeless
 And more...

The Disability Odyssey Continues

By Steve Gold

Effective October 12, 2000, HUD issued its final regulation re how Section 8 vouchers can be used to buy a house. This is truly an important federal change and opens up terrific opportunities for people with disabilities. Instead of using a Section 8 voucher to pay rent, you can use it to buy a house.

Here are some points for your consideration:

1. Local public housing agencies ("PHA") are NOT required to participate; whether or not they use Section 8 vouchers for homeownership may be up to you and your local organization. If your disability community wants to use vouchers for homeownership, you must make sure your PHA is on board and agrees. PHAs must tell HUD they want to participate.
2. Your PHA can choose to make Section 8 homeownership assistance available to ANY qualified application OR can limit or restrict which families will participate. If you want disabled persons to be part of the program, you must make sure your PHA includes them.
3. Either existing or new Section 8 vouchers can be used. Therefore, when an existing voucher (now being used for rental assistance) is returned to the PHA, it can then be used for homeownership (or continued to be used for rental).
4. Persons must meet the general requirements for admission to the PHA's Section 8 program. That is, you must be eligible for Section 8.
5. For disabled people, "employment history" is inapplicable. Disabled people have an income requirement that is modified and not the same as for a non-disabled person.
6. The maximum number of years (i.e., 10) for using the Section 8 homeownership vouchers does NOT apply to disabled persons and families. Similarly, minimum income requirements and employment requirements are different for disabled people than for nondisabled people.
7. Section 8 homeownership vouchers can be used for either existing homes or new ones. These vouchers are also intended for "first-time" homeowners.
8. The person - not the PHA - enters a contract of sale with the seller of the house. The person - not PHA - must put together financing.
9. The family or person with a disability must secure their own financing for the purchase of the home; the Section 8 housing assistance will provide help with the monthly payments. Advocates can put together a package for purchases (including costs related to accessibility features). For example, advocates could use local or state Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to finance the purchase, or could receive other subsidized financing for the purchase. Some local folks have worked with their banks to have financing for people with disabilities at lower than market interest rates.
10. Homes may be purchased by one person or several family members together holding title to the home. Therefore, two folks on SSI can combine their income to purchase a home.

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11. Homes may be purchased by a "cooperative unit" with one or more family members sharing in the cooperative. The "cooperative unit" presents opportunities for non-profit groups becoming involved in accessible housing for people with disabilities.
12. Nothing prevents a person with a disability from using the Section 8 voucher to purchase a duplex and renting the upper floor to a non-disabled person. This could make the purchase much more financially doable.
13. If the homeownership presents problems for the people with disabilities, the Section 8 voucher can be switched back to use as a rental voucher.

There are MANY other technical aspects that are necessary to learn about. The entire regulation can be studied at 65 Federal Register 55133-55168. However, do NOT get bogged down on these points UNTIL you and your disabled community agree to push the PHA to include the disabled community in the homeownership Section 8 voucher program.

Expanding Homeownership

A Memo from the National Low Income Housing Coalition

May 25, 2001

The National Housing Conference released the first volume of its Affordable Housing Policy Review in April 2001. Titled "Expanding the Dream of Homeownership", the issue uses a three-pronged approach in discussing how to make the opportunity of homeownership available to a greater and more diverse population.

First, ideas and proposals encouraging new production of affordable single-family housing are discussed, including homeownership tax credit proposals and vouchers.

Second, approaches to improving affordability for working families are explored on two fronts; employer assisted housing and reduction of regulatory barriers such as streamlining approval processes for new construction.

Third, housing counseling and individual development accounts are reviewed as ways to further reduce the barriers that prevent people who seek to become homeowners from doing so.

The volume also includes an appendix of organizations working on the various homeownership issues discussed in the text. The volume can be found online at www.nhc.org/nhcimages/policyreviewfinal.pdf.

About NLIHC: Established in 1974, the National Low Income Housing Coalition/LIHIS is dedicated solely to ending America's affordable housing crisis. NLIHC educates, organizes, and advocates to ensure decent, affordable housing within healthy neighborhoods for everyone. NLIHC provides up-to-date information, formulates policy, and educates the public on housing needs and the strategies for solutions.

Upcoming OMHSAS Housing Specialist Meeting and Training

September 25, 2001, 10:00 am - 3:30 pm
The Harrisburg Marriott, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Agenda

Path Update - John Ames
Housing Challenges for the Forensic Population - Bill Holt
Lead-Based Paint Regulations - George Klaus

For more information contact Zada Leon at 215-576-1558

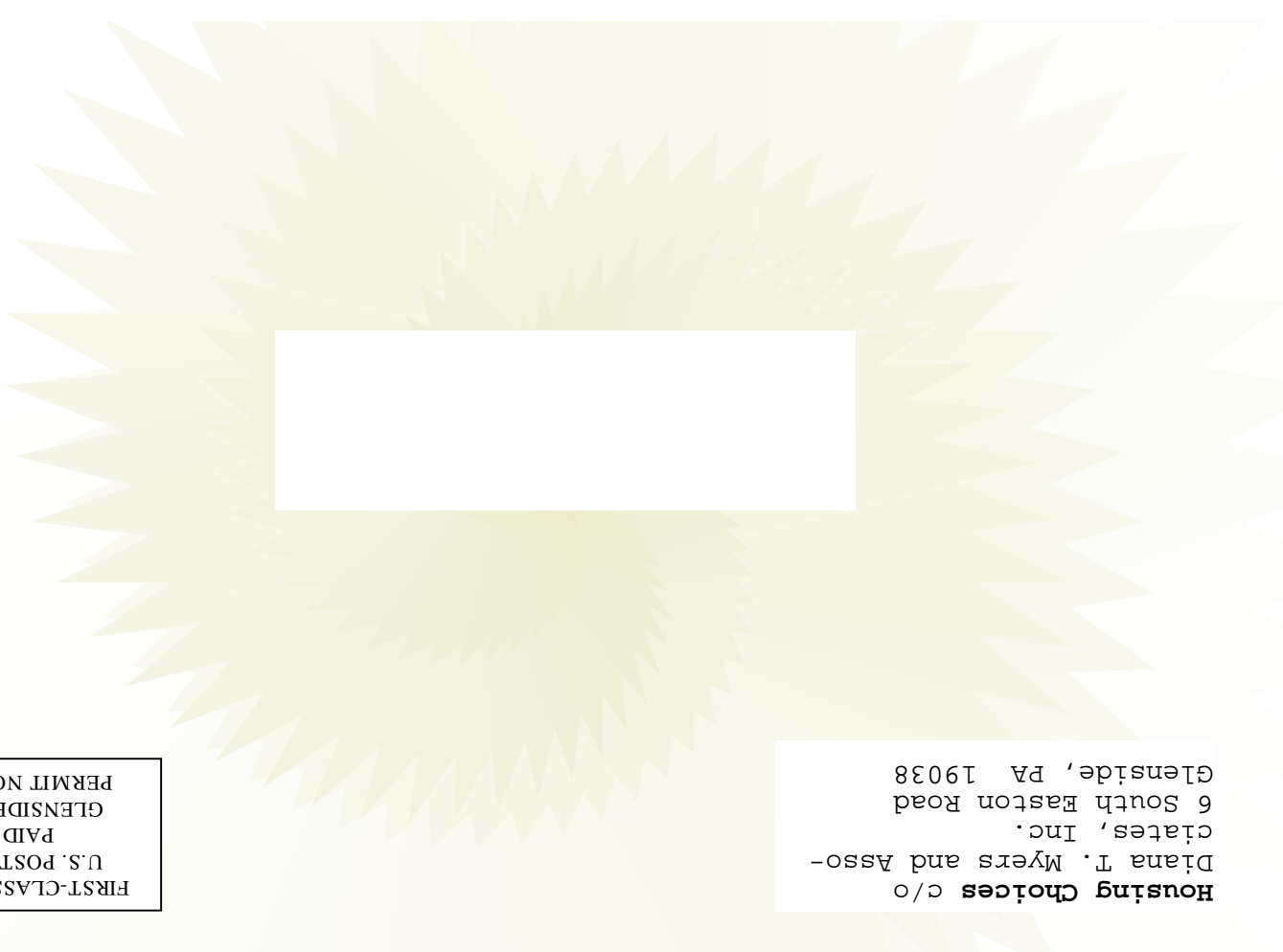
Check out the new website for the Housing Assistance and Resource Program - **HARP** - Pennsylvania's Mental Health Housing Coordination Project. **It's up and running!**

www.harpofofpa.org

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We welcome your submissions, ideas for articles, and information on related housing efforts and projects. If you have information about a related project or would like more information about a project described here, please contact us at the following address: Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc., 6 South Easton Road, Glenside, PA 19038 (215) 576-7270 Fax: (215) 576-8650



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