

# Housing Choices

*A Newsletter for Mental Health Professionals*

January 2001

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

## **Deshon Place Helps Homeless Individuals Transition Into The Mainstream**

*Special Thanks to Beth Yost, Butler County Housing Authority and Kelly B. Garrett, Eagle Staff Writer*

On Friday, October 27, 2000 the Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Butler, PA held a groundbreaking ceremony for Deshon Place. This new facility will serve veterans who need transitional housing after hospitalization as well as other homeless single adults aged 18 - 62. Affordable transitional housing with supportive services will be provided for up to two years in a coordinated, comprehensive approach.

The facility is being developed with over \$700,000 of funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the PA Department of Community and Economic Development. The Housing Authority of the County of Butler, in conjunction with Catholic Charities of Butler County and the Butler County Department of Veterans Affairs, will utilize the funds for adaptive reuse of a building located on the VA Medical Center Complex and develop ten apartments.

Eligible program participants will receive a full range of supportive services including outreach, education, and referrals for supportive services. The goal is to address problems that result from homelessness such as loss of employment, insufficient life skills, or health problems. Through participation in the Butler County Transitional Housing Program, residents will also gain skills critical to attaining self-sufficiency and successful reintegration into community living.

Max Viatori, Manager of Behavioral Health Science at the VA facility, said the project is the result of



*Deshon Place Transitional Living for the Homeless*

community need and the joint effort of several agencies. About three years ago, Viatori said, VA officials asked Butler county residents and human services agencies about what needs the VA could help with. Transitional housing for the homeless was one of the critical needs identified. Viatori said this kind of housing is something the VA needed, too.

“We have a continuum of care for veterans, but we also knew that we have a gap in that care,” Viatori said. “That gap is in transitional housing for veterans who have to be treated in the medical center and who need a little help getting back on their feet and back into the community after that care. This is the next level of care needed for veterans, and we found that the community needs the same thing,” he added.

Perry O’Malley, Executive Director of the Butler County Housing Authority, said a former VA nurses’ dormitory will be renovated into ten efficiency apartments for the program. “There is no other transitional housing program in the county for people who have been homeless and who are attempting to get back into mainstream living. In this program, the housing authority will act as

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landlord for the apartments,” O’Malley said.

Catholic Charities will run the day-to-day operations of the housing program. Currently, Butler Catholic Charities works with about 300 homeless people a year. Lisa Costello, Director of Catholic Charities, said Deshon Place will be open to men and women, veterans and non-veterans, who are homeless for a variety of reasons. Residents selected for the program will be older than age 18 and single with no children living with them. They will have been referred by a county agency or the VA. Costello said, “The program will help residents set goals and learn life and job skills. Residents will be able to stay in the transitional housing for up to 24 months, as long as they meet their goals and work within the program’s rules. The majority of people won’t be here that long. But if they need to be, the program will be available.”

Deshon Place will be a secure building and each apartment will have locks, a private bathroom and kitchen area. Catholic Charities staffers will be on-site 24 hours a day. Costello said plans call for the building to have a computer and meeting room for training and counseling sessions. Residents also may be sent to other agencies for specific training or help.

O’Malley said the Housing Authority has gotten about \$750,000 in federal grants to renovate the building and run the



*Left to right: Richard A. Cotter, Acting Director Dept. of VA Medical Center, Representative Guy Travaglio, Joan T. Chew, Butler County Commissioner, Sister Patricial Cairns, CSJ Executive Director, Catholic Charities, Mayor Richard J. Schontz, Mayor of the City of Butler, Robert J. Hartnett, Chairman of Butler County Housing Authority, Perry O’Malley, Executive Director of Butler County Housing Authority, Lawrence A. Biro, Network Director, Dept. of VA Medical Center, Jessica Forsythe, 4-Most Group.*

program for two years. Add another \$250,000 the VA is using to remove asbestos and renovate the exterior of the building, and the project’s cost for the first two years reaches \$1 million. This housing program is one of a handful of VA-community agency cooperative programs the national VA is working on.

Pete Dougherty, director of Homeless Veterans Programs in Washington, D.C., said, “The purpose of the VA is to help veterans move from military to civilian life. Part of that process is making sure veterans have a decent, safe place to live while they make that transition.”

About five years ago, the VA did a national study on homeless veterans and found transitional

housing was among their top unmet needs. While working to meet this need across the country, Dougherty said Veterans Affairs facilities found non-veteran homeless were also in need of these types of housing programs. Dougherty commented, “We began working with community agencies to provide housing for veterans and non-veterans alike.”

“These programs use VA land and facilities in a good way for the benefit of all, and I compliment (former Butler VA director) Mike Moreland, the Butler VA and members of the Butler community for getting together for the benefit of the entire community,” Dougherty said.

Another positive step has been taken to help reintegrate homeless individuals into community living.

## Technical Assistance A Must

*Special thanks to The Technical Assistance Collaborative, Inc. and the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Housing Task Force*

Two recent publications from the Technical Assistance Collaborative, Inc. (TAC) and the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Housing Task Force have reported on the difficulty people with disabilities have finding affordable housing that meets their needs. Their findings are the results of surveys sent out across the nation.

Although a grim picture has been painted, a conclusion is drawn that housing-related technical assistance and training are ways to help increase the affordable housing stock for people with disabilities.

### ***Affordable Housing System Fails Disability Community***

The following is a summary of the September 2000 issue of *Opening Doors*, a housing publication for the disability community, which discusses how the affordable housing system has failed the disability community.

Surveys sent out by the TAC/CCD Housing Task force found that: 1) state and local housing officials do not make the housing needs of people with disabilities a high priority; 2) most public housing authorities (PHAs) are not seeking available resources to expand housing opportunities for people with disabilities; and 3) when given the opportunity, non-profit disability organizations are very successful at expanding affordable housing opportunities for people with disabilities. However, this

opportunity is often hard to come by because the affordable housing system controls most of the available funding resources and has not learned how to partner successfully with the disability community.

The housing crisis is perpetuated by several factors:

- It is virtually impossible for a low-income person with a disability to afford a modest apartment without government assistance
- Federal funding for housing has become more difficult to obtain because HUD's budget was cut
- Since 1992, the federal government policy has reduced the number of federally subsidized apartments available to people with disabilities under age 62 by permitting federally subsidized housing providers to implement "elderly only" housing policies

Three surveys were conducted to explore the level of involvement of the affordable housing system in expanding housing opportunities for people with disabilities and to evaluate the knowledge, capacity, and level of participation among non-profit disability organizations.

TAC received information from about 600 PHAs that administer Section 8 vouchers, 96 non-profit disability organizations that are CCD Housing Task Force members and 38 members of Fannie Mae HomeChoice and Home of Your Own homeownership coalitions. The major finding of all three surveys is that the affordable housing system has failed to help people with disabilities.

Summarized, the data indicated that:

- Very few state and local housing officials, PHAs and state and local housing finance agencies have made housing for people with disabilities a high priority for funding in their communities
- Over 45% of PHAs were unaware of Section 8 funding opportunities targeted to people with disabilities and only 10% apply for these vouchers
- Thousands of Section 8 vouchers given to PHAs are not being used because PHAs are unable to assist people with disabilities

The report states that the non-profit disability community needs to play a more active role in the affordable housing system.

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*(Technical Assistance continued from page 3)*

According to a HUD study this is because non-profit disability organizations excel at helping people with disabilities access and keep housing; tenants who live in housing administered by non-profit disability organizations are highly satisfied; and non-profit disability organizations are effective at implementing supportive housing programs quickly and efficiently. The study concluded that HUD should rely on these highly capable sponsors in the administration of housing for people with disabilities.

TAC and the CCD Housing Task Force made the following recommendations:

- A substantial increase in funding is needed for federal housing programs that can be targeted to meet the housing needs of people with disabilities, such as the Section 811 program
- Reforms need to be made in the Section 811 rental assistance program which are: allow only non-profit disability organizations to apply for tenant based rental assistance funds; eliminate the current policy that converts Section 811 tenant based rental assistance funding to Section 8 Vouchers and; provide one-percent of the Section 811 funding to fund a technical assistance program for organizations administering the Section 811 program

- Better HUD monitoring and enforcement of the Consolidated Plan, PHA Plan, and the PHA Allocation Plan for “elderly only” designated housing is needed
- All PHAs should be required to address the priority housing needs of people with disabilities in their Allocation Plans
- PHAs should also be required to adopt a mandatory preference in the Section 8 program for people with disabilities who receive SSI benefits
- PHAs should be required to work with the disability community to address some of the other major barriers within the Section 8 program such as the “elderly only” designated housing and public housing programs that have a negative impact on people with disabilities

In addition to the above recommendations, the state and local level must learn to become a more active player in the housing system to benefit from the housing programs that are available.

The non-profit disability community must become more involved in the development of state and local affordable housing strategies and build new partnerships with public and private housing agencies.

### ***Nation’s Housing System Inadequate for People With Disabilities***

*“Going It Alone, The Struggle to Expand Housing Opportunities for People with Disabilities”* is a more in-depth document that presents findings that show how inadequate the nation’s housing system is for people with disabilities. The purpose of *Going It Alone* is: 1) to document the barriers which have constrained the housing efforts for people with disabilities; 2) to identify existing examples of communities that have been successful in expanding both homeownership and rental housing options for people with disabilities and; 3) to assess the need for a comprehensive program of housing technical assistance targeted to the disability community.

Survey data showed that a lack of housing knowledge and housing capacity prevents the disability community from successfully accessing government housing programs and from influencing state and local affordable housing policies and strategies. The data leads to a major conclusion – the need for a comprehensive program of housing-related technical assistance and training targeted specifically to the disability community. The survey indicated that most non-profit disability organizations needed help in the following areas:

- Understanding HUD policies and regulations
- Expanding homeownership opportunities

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*(Technical Assistance continued from page 4)*

- Engaging local housing officials and learning how to effectively participate in affordable housing planning processes in their communities, including the HUD mandated Consolidated Plan and the new PHA plan
- Increasing the availability of Section 8 rental subsidies for people with disabilities
- Implementing affordable housing production activities
- Learning more about “best practices” to expand housing for people with disabilities

TAC and the CCD Housing Task Force are seeking funding to create the Housing Center for People with Disabilities, a multi-year program of technical assistance, training, and knowledge dissemination on the affordable housing issues that are critically important to people with disabilities, their families, housing

advocates, and service providers.

The goals of the Housing Center for People with Disabilities will be to:

- Create a technical assistance program framework to bring organizations representing different disability populations together to work collaboratively on community housing strategies;
- Help the disability community develop a better understanding of the complexities of the affordable housing delivery system including all the government housing programs and resources that can benefit people with disabilities;
- Facilitate more dialogue and assist in the development of collaborations and partnerships between the

disability community and key stakeholders in community-based affordable housing (i.e., PHAs, housing coalitions, non-profit groups, affordable housing advocates, housing counseling agencies, and private lenders);

- Build the capacity of the disability community to effectively participate in state and local government housing strategic planning activities, (i.e., the Consolidated Plan and the PHA Plan) and to critically assess the opportunities and barriers to a significant expansion of affordable housing for people with disabilities.

*To learn more about TAC call 617-742-5657 or visit their website at [www.tacinc.org](http://www.tacinc.org).*

*To learn more about the CCD Housing Task Force call 202-785-3388 or visit their website at [www.c-c-d.org/tf-housing.htm](http://www.c-c-d.org/tf-housing.htm).*

**Calendar of Upcoming Events**  
**Housing Choices '01 Conference**  
**Building Bridges to Better Housing**



March 7 & 8, 2001  
 Hilton Harrisburg & Towers, Harrisburg PA  
*(See page 10 for more information.)*

**OMHSAS Housing Specialist Meeting**  
 June 19 & 20, 2001  
 State College, PA

## Counties Receive Technical Assistance

*Special thanks to Norma Swint and Elaine Callihan*

This past year the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) sponsored an intensive technical assistance program. Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. (DMA) administered the technical assistance program with two major objectives: to produce housing for people with mental illness and to assist counties that have not been active in planning for housing alternatives.

Six counties were selected to receive the technical assistance. The counties (or group of counties) include Butler; Carbon/Monroe/Pike; Northwest Housing Consortium (Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Forest, Jefferson, McKean, Potter, Venango and Warren); Fayette; Franklin/Fulton and Washington/Green. Technical assistance for four of the projects helped counties to conduct a housing needs assessment for people with mental illness and technical assistance for the other two projects helped those counties carry out specific housing projects.

The technical assistance program began with a training session for all of the counties on how to do a needs assessment, how to develop a strategy based on the needs assessment and how to develop surveys.

At the end of the year, OMHSAS announced that DMA would be available to assist additional

counties, including help in editing grant proposals. As a result, two additional counties - Montgomery and Blair - were selected to receive technical assistance.

The following highlights the projects that are taking place in Carbon/Monroe/Pike Counties and Butler County.

### **Carbon/Monroe/Pike**

Carbon/Monroe/Pike had previously conducted a needs assessment and found that their critical need was to work with housing professionals in the industry. They established three goals:

- ⇒ to provide independent housing opportunities which are integrated in the community for persons with mental illness
- ⇒ to maximize the use of mainstream housing resources so that mental health funding could be preserved for the provision of consumer supports in expanded housing opportunities
- ⇒ to begin to address the unmet need of Carbon County consumers who have been significantly underserved in housing

Based on these goals, DMA provided technical assistance to help Carbon/Monroe/Pike develop a project that is designed to be a self-supporting

model. They are proposing to acquire, rehabilitate and operate a seven-unit apartment building in Summit Hill, Carbon County. There are two unique features to this model, both of which may be replicable in other communities.

First, *specialized housing will be offered in an integrated setting.* Most of the seven units are occupied, and no one will be displaced. However, as the units become vacated, up to three will be occupied by consumers with mental illness. In order to maintain an integrated site and to take advantage of public funding resources, the other four units will be rented to families and individuals that meet HUD low and moderate income standards.

Second, a proposal has been sent to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), requesting funds to acquire the building. If awarded, this will mean that there will be no need for a mortgage on the property. Therefore, *with no debt service to pay, the MH/MR Program will be able to use the net income from rents for support services for the residents with mental illness.* This is important because appropriate supportive services are key to successful community integration. It is also possible in this model that consumers will be employed to help with the maintenance of the building.

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A second project, in Nesquehoning, Carbon County, will involve the acquisition and rental of a single-family home to three or four consumers. This home, which will assure access to treatment facilities, the drop-in center, and other activities, will be designed to provide increased structure, supervision and supports for persons not yet able to live independently. This home will become a stepping stone for these consumers to move to more independent living as they become more capable. Funds are being requested from DCED for this project as well.

A third project currently being considered is to newly construct a four-unit building in Monroe County. The purpose is to develop an opportunity for homeownership where two mental health consumers would each own two units, live in one of the units and then be landlords for the other units. The tenants paying rent in the other units would provide a source of income to the mental health consumers. The units on the first floor could be wheelchair accessible.

In order to encourage homeownership among mental health consumers, Carbon/Monroe/Pike is also working with Sue Crossley of Residential Living Options, Inc. in Chester County who provides technical assistance on other homeownership options for individuals.

### **Butler**

Butler County received technical assistance in order to develop and analyze a survey for consumers to describe their current housing situation and to define what type of housing they would prefer. A housing work group under FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) was formed and they then conducted a needs assessment on housing for people with mental illness. Over 500 hours were spent conducting the survey, which involved meeting with 124 consumers and many providers.

The results are as follows:

- **Demographics of Respondents:**  
52% - men; 48% - women; 49% - ages 36 – 55; 92% single; 6% had spouses; 2% had children under 18
- **Current Housing:**  
40% in CRRs; 36% in own apartments; 7% with family; 5% sharing apartment with roommate; 12% hospitalized; 0% homeless
- **Level of Satisfaction:**  
57% wanted to stay in current living situation; 39% dissatisfied with situation because of restrictions and rules of group housing; 75% want a place of their own
- **Financial Needs:**  
52% who have place of their own receive rental assistance; 65% receive

assistance from Butler County; 4% receive assistance from provider; 12% receive assistance from family; 4% have a roommate; 14% receive other support

- **Conclusions:**

The most outstanding concern was the need for secure clean, safe, drug free housing. Affordability was paramount since 69% of the respondents have incomes below \$600 per month and the average rent in Butler is not affordable.

Major obstacles to housing are: the long waiting period to get rental assistance vouchers; lack of income; the need for budget management, daily living skills, and transportation; and rejection from society. Concerns that consumers have include: losing benefits if they find work; the high cost of medication and; finding compatible roommates.

### **Recommendations from the FEMA Work Group:**

It was recommended that Butler County explore the possibility of securing funds for the development of a Section 811 building and that they also apply for additional Section 8 Mainstream Housing Vouchers.

Future publications of the **Housing Choices** Newsletter will highlight technical assistance projects being done in other counties.

## Community Opposes Housing for People with Mental Disabilities

*The following article was received as a memo from the National Low Income Housing Coalition on Monday January 8, 2001*

Greenwich, Connecticut

Following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.* holding that it is a form of discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to keep people with disabilities institutionalized when they have been determined to be capable of living in the community, all 50 states must now develop effective working plans to ensure that there is sufficient housing for people returning to their communities. The *Olmstead* decision says that people with disabilities have a right to interact to the maximum extent possible with people who do not have disabilities. In that spirit, Pathways, a Connecticut non-profit mental health and housing provider, purchased a large home in Greenwich and proposed to develop independent housing for ten people with mental illness. Because of the cost of development, Greenwich has virtually no housing for low-income people with disabilities.

In a blatant case of "NIMBY" housing discrimination, a few wealthy and influential neighbors have reportedly invested over \$250,000 thus far in legal fees to keep individuals with mental disabilities out of their neighborhood. Since their initial unsuccessful attempt to enjoin the sale of the home to Pathways, neighbors have effectively prevented operation of the housing program for three years. They used their influence with the town planning and zoning commission, and when the town settled Pathways' zoning appeal in state court, they moved to intervene to oppose any settlement. Though this motion was denied, they have appealed to the state appellate court and successfully prevented any work on the house from starting. (The State Supreme Court has just decided to hear this appeal directly).

In July 2000, Pathways filed a housing discrimination action in the Connecticut federal court (*Pathways v. Brookridge*) with claims under the Fair Housing Act, the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act. The defendant neighbors have just filed a motion to dismiss. Pathways is represented by the firm of Jacques & Moger, P.C. The Connecticut Legal Rights Project will represent potential residents as well as various organizations as friends of the court in the Connecticut Supreme Court.

For further information contact: Tom Behrendt, Legal Director,  
Connecticut Legal Rights Project, 860/344-2576 or mail to: narpa@connix.com

*The December 2000 edition of **Opening Doors** covers in-depth The Olmstead Decision and its impact on housing. This publication can be downloaded from the following website: [www.c-c-d.org/od-decoo.htm](http://www.c-c-d.org/od-decoo.htm). **Opening Doors** is a housing initiative designed to provide information and technical assistance on affordable housing issues to people with disabilities, their families, advocates, and service providers across the United States. It is a publication of the Technical Assistance Collaborative and the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Housing Task Force. For more information, TAC and CCD can be contacted at:*

***Technical Assistance Collaborative, Inc.***

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***The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities***

1730 K Street, NW, Suite 1212, Washington, DC 20006  
Phone: 202-785-3388 / Fax: 202-467-4179; Email: [Info@c-c-d.org](mailto:Info@c-c-d.org).

## 2000 Pennsylvania Regional Homeless Assistance Process

*Congratulations to everyone who participated in the 2000 Pennsylvania Regional Homeless Assistance Process! A combined total of \$4,916,928 was awarded to 16 agencies to provide housing and services for homeless persons in four rural regions of the state. Three of the projects that provide programs for people with mental illness received a total of \$1,217,444.*

The following is a list by region of the funded agencies that participated in the 2000 Pennsylvania Regional Homeless Assistance Process that covers the rural parts of the state.

### **Central/Harrisburg Region**

The six organizations in the Central Harrisburg Region that were awarded a total of \$1,333,921 are the Housing Authority of Franklin County, Union-Snyder Office of Human Services, Housing Transitions, Inc., Cumberland County Housing Authority, Cumberland County Coalition for Shelter, Inc., and Blair County Community Action Agency.

### **Northeast Region**

A total of \$1,043,204 was awarded for two projects to Valley Housing Development Corporation within the Northeast Region.

### **Northwest Region**

The YWCA of Bradford, Lawrence County Social Services Inc. and Women's Shelter/Rape Crisis Center are the three organizations that received a total of \$1,317,483 in the Northwest Region.

### **Southwest Region**

Five organizations in the Southwest Region, Gallatin School Living Centre, Fayette County Community Action Agency, City Mission – Living Stones, Inc., Community Action Southwest and the Armstrong County Community Action Agency received a total of \$1,222,320.

The following are the three funded programs for people with mental illness that are being provided by agencies that participated in the in the 2000 Pennsylvania Regional Homeless Assistance Process.

- ***Valley Housing Development Corporation*** received a renewal of \$647,892 for its Supportive Housing Program which is Permanent Housing for People with Disabilities. This project will provide rental assistance and supportive services to at least 50 homeless people with mental illness in Lehigh and Northampton Counties.
- ***Valley Housing Development Corporation*** also received a renewal of \$395,312 for its Supportive Housing Program which is Permanent Housing for People with Disabilities. This project will provide rental assistance and supportive services to at least 19 homeless people with mental illness in Lehigh and Northampton Counties.
- The ***Housing Authority of Franklin County*** received \$174,240 for a Shelter Plus Care Program for 8 households with chronic mental illness. Supportive services will be provided by New Visions, a non-profit service provider.

# Housing Choices '01 Conference: Building Bridges to Better Housing

**March 7 & 8, 2001**

Hilton Harrisburg & Towers, Harrisburg PA

This Conference is sponsored by the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, the Office of Mental Retardation and the Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania.



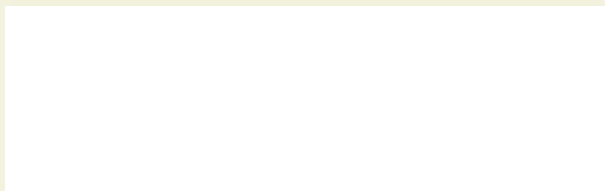
This conference will focus on one of today's most critical issues - the need for affordable, accessible housing in integrated settings for people with disabilities, and will provide an opportunity for human service professionals to learn the "nuts and bolts" of housing and for housing professionals to learn about mental illness and mental retardation and how they impact on an individual's housing need.

*For more information about this conference regarding registration, lodging, accessibility or logistical concerns, or if you have not received a brochure, call 215-576-1558.*

**Housing Choices** is published by: Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. and sponsored by the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS).

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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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