Helping Residents Stay Housed and Healthy

As we move into the second year of COVID-19, AHC Inc. continues to do all we can to help our residents stay housed and healthy in the face of the pandemic’s ongoing economic and equity challenges.

Accessing $2.96 million for Rental Relief

“If you don’t have secure housing, it’s really difficult to maintain everything else,” says Jennifer Crittenden, Senior Resident Services Manager. “Housing is hugely important. Everyone needs to know they have a roof overhead. After that they can take care of their families. It’s a huge, huge relief.”

To help residents weather the storm, AHC’s Resident Services team has prioritized rental relief to provide housing stability – and to reduce residents’ stress. Because each local area has its own rules and requirements, staff members work one-on-one with residents. Each application requires multiple steps and can take several meetings to complete.

The team’s personal attention is making a difference. So far, AHC has helped residents access nearly $3 million in rental assistance since the pandemic began. “We’ve reached nearly all of the households that are struggling, which is huge,” says Susan Davidson, Resident Services Director.

As long as the pandemic is impacting our residents, AHC will continue to call, email, and knock on the doors of those who need help. Thank YOU for helping us do this critical work.

Helping Residents Get Vaccinated

“AHC is working closely with local communities to reduce the inequities surrounding COVID-19 vaccinations,” says Stefanie Bass, Resident Services Assistant Director. “Along with distributing information to residents, we are also working with our many valuable community partners to figure out ways to connect our eligible residents as vaccines become available.”

Some of these efforts include pop-up vaccination registrations, calling seniors to notify them about registering, and helping residents navigate the sign-up process.

We are also scheduling onsite vaccination clinics with local jurisdictions through the federal Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program.

Our first onsite clinic kicked off in Baltimore City last month. MonteVerde is home to nearly 350 residents, mostly lower-income seniors. To encourage participation, Resident Services worked with residents individually to help them register and to combat misinformation and distrust. So far, about 40% of MonteVerde’s residents have been vaccinated.
Changing Lives

Hats Off to AHC’s College and Career Readiness Program – Five Years of Changing Lives

In a few months, Bilguun Soronzonbold will enter Tufts University on a Questbridge Scholarship, which provides full four-year scholarships to high-achieving, low-income students. The oldest son of Mongolian immigrants, Bill began his education as a non-English speaking first grader. His determination – and AHC’s College and Career Readiness Program (CCR) – have shaped his future.

Today, Bill is a full International Baccalaureate (IB) student at Washington-Liberty with a passion for computer science and helping others.

“Bill, like so many of AHC’s students, is the first in his family to attend college,” says Milenka Coronel, Resident Services Assistant Director, who helped build the CCR program. “Our students’ commitment to building a successful life for themselves and their families is truly inspiring.”

100% Graduation Rate

AHC’s CCR program is currently celebrating its five-year anniversary. The intensive program provides one-on-one mentors, trips to colleges, resume building and job interview workshops, and other resources to help high school juniors and seniors graduate with tools for successful futures.

The individualized support is helping youth beat the odds. AHC’s students are not only ALL graduating from high school, but are also succeeding in college at rates far above their peers. A whopping 84% of our teens are thriving in college, surpassing the nationwide college persistence rate for first-generation students of 56%!

Outstanding Class of 2021

AHC’s class of 2021 includes 31 outstanding students, including Abel Geleta who will attend Yale this fall. Despite the pandemic, Abel has maintained a nearly perfect GPA while participating in several community, academic, and cultural activities.

Other students, such as Elena Ogbe, are still weighing college options but have a committed career path. Determined to serve her community, Elena’s dream is to become a nurse. She is dedicated to setting an example for her younger brother and inspiring him to focus on the importance of preparing for college.

First-Time Baltimore Homebuyer

Being first is nothing new for Jeremy DeJesus. He was the first in his family to go to college, first to become a nurse, and the first to own a home, purchasing a home in MonteVerde Rowe two years ago.

“It’s a wonderful block. I love my neighbors. I feel safe,” says DeJesus, a nurse in the COVID-19 ward at the Veterans Affairs Medical Hospital in Baltimore.

AHC Inc. purchased the block of 12 abandoned rowhouses to fill two priorities – to revitalize the neighborhood next to our senior property, MonteVerde Apartments and to provide affordable homes for first-time homeowners. The last renovated home on the block recently sold.

Of his purchase, DeJesus says, “I feel empowered – especially as a person of color. It’s changed my life.”

DeJesus continues to build on his firsts. Currently in graduate school earning a Masters of Nursing Science with an emphasis on administration, DeJesus aims to become a chief nursing officer. Not surprisingly, he plans to be a “pioneer to the nursing staff.”
Sharing Local Prosperity with AHC Residents

Thanks to a generous Arlington Community Foundation (ACF) initiative, 20 AHC families have newfound financial breathing room. The program, part of ACF’s Shared Prosperity Program, is reducing rental costs to bridge the affordability gap that vulnerable families face when stretching hard-earned dollars to cover rent.

Arlington is one of eight cities joining the nationwide initiative, which is led by the Kresge Foundation, the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, the Urban Institute, and Living Cities.

The program brings together private businesses, nonprofits, and local government to improve the affordability of housing, healthcare, and childcare, as well as to build employment pathways.

The initiative subsidizes five apartments for 30 years at the Gates of Ballston to help very low-income residents reduce their rent from the 60% Area Median Income level ($1,701 for a two-bedroom apartment) to the 30% AMI amount ($850). This is a huge help for hardworking families who primarily have entry-level, low-wage jobs in such fields as construction, retail, and restaurants.

ACF is also sponsoring a two-year rental subsidy for families whose income did not adequately match their rent. Currently, 15 families in four apartment communities along Columbia Pike are enrolled. Families were thrilled when community managers told them they were eligible, and their rent would go down.

We Love Our Community Partners!

So many community partners are generously supporting our residents through the pandemic, stepping up with one-time initiatives or expanding existing programs. We are immeasurably grateful!

Food continues to be a challenge for our residents. Long-time partner Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) recently opened a fifth food distribution site at The Apex. Another partner, Real Food for Kids is now distributing fresh nutritious meals once a week at The Serrano.

Other partners have stepped up to support our students. Hundreds of generous community members created more than 4,000 study-break snack bags for our students as part of Volunteer Arlington’s MLK Day of Service, including corporate partners Amazon and Harkins Builders. And Art with a Heart is coordinating an eight-week series for teens that focuses on goal setting and career exploration through artwork.

Other initiatives provided much-welcomed comfort, including Arlington Rotary Club volunteers, who created 135 snuggly blankets, and Operation Warm, which donated 600 brand new winter coats for children and teens.

Targeting Digital Equity

The pandemic has underscored the issue of digital inequity – particularly for low-income residents.

Thanks to a new grant from Virginia Housing, AHC is working with Arlington County, Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH) and CTC Technology & Energy to identify practical and affordable ways to bring free or low-cost internet connectivity to affordable housing residents in Arlington. The study is part of the Arlington Digital Inclusion initiative.
AHC Partners with Fairfax County and Virginia Housing to Preserve 292 Affordable Homes

AHC Inc. has acquired two prime properties in Fairfax County that will preserve 292 affordable homes on 16 acres in the Fort Belvoir/Route 1 Corridor. The acquisition was made in partnership with Virginia Housing and Fairfax County to fulfill their goal of providing safe, affordable homes for the residents of Fairfax County.

The properties, Haven Mount Vernon and Haven Fort Belvoir, have been renamed Landings I and Landings II, respectively. The apartment communities will provide homes for residents earning between 50% and 80% of the Area Median Income ($63,000 to $79,600 for a family of four). Affordability will be implemented in a phased approach upon turnover.

Both communities offer a variety of amenities. Landings I includes a business center, fitness room, clubhouse, pool, children’s playground and picnic area. Landings II has an on-site dog park, playground and fitness center.

AHC Inc. financed the properties with loans from both Virginia Housing and Fairfax County, as well as an AHC Loan. Project financing also included Virginia Housing REACH, including funding specifically for affordable housing near Amazon’s new headquarters.

AHC Awarded Virginia Housing Trust Fund Loan

AHC’s Arlington View Terrace East (AVT) has been selected for a $900,000 loan from the Virginia Housing Trust Fund, which awarded more than $24 million in Affordable and Special Needs Housing loans to 28 projects in early March.

The project is a partial redevelopment of an existing garden-style apartment community and will replace an aging 30-unit building with an EarthCraft Gold structure with 77 homes.

St. James Plaza Wins Excellence in Housing Affordability Award

St. James Plaza was recognized by Urban Land Institute (ULI) Washington with the 2020 Excellence in Housing Affordability award. The award highlights projects that embody excellence and creativity across a number of categories, including developmental approach, land use economics, access and mobility, sustainability, and community and culture.
Dear Friends,

AHC’s success stories far exceed the available room in this newsletter. And none of them would be possible without the generosity and dedication from our many community partners, financial supporters, volunteers, and dedicated staff. On behalf of the 18,000+ residents we serve, and the AHC Board of Directors, thank you.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, keeping our low-income families and seniors housed and making sure they have access to supports is our #1 priority. As an affordable housing organization, we are in a unique position to provide services to neighbors in need where they live. Together, we can provide not only safe roofs overhead, but also access to emergency funding, meals, and critical emergency services and supplies.

All of us at AHC wish you and your family the very best of good health. We are truly grateful for the many caring people who continue to help build a diverse and inclusive community.

Warmly,

From the Desk of
Walter D. Webdale, President & CEO

AHC Inc. is deeply appreciative to our many friends and committed donors for supporting social services and educational programs for families and individuals living in AHC’s affordable housing communities. This list acknowledges gifts $50+ made between January 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020.

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Ann Marie Tarapchak
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