



Over-the-Rhine Community Housing Fall 2013 Newsletter

WE CARRY ON

Sometimes I get discouraged. But I don't lose hope. It feels like the general public and those in power don't appreciate the deep need for affordable housing. Many understand that affordable housing is important, but that understanding seems to be mostly abstract. The deeper appreciation and the impact on people, moms and dads, aunts and uncles, children, and grandparents, is missing. Providing quality affordable housing isn't avante garde. It's not hip. It's not innovative. It is a basic need that has a very basic solution.

It is simple, Ms. Jones can afford to pay \$400 per month given the wages she earns (30% of her income), but the market provides housing at \$600 per month. We can either encourage her employer to pay her more, or we can provide housing she can afford. We work for the latter.

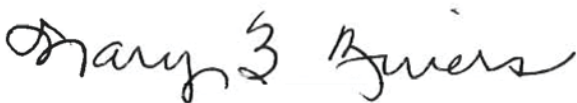
Like many of the people we come to know through our work, we keep plugging away. We experience defeats; a project isn't funded, another OTR building is lost to up-scale conversion or is too expensive for us to develop, a resident loses her job and can't pay rent, another resident relapses and is incapable of getting sober today. We don't give up.

Our failures teach us much. They teach us empathy. We know from experience that a loss today does not mean we are lost forever. We know that through friendship and support we can keep going and we have hope that tomorrow there will be success. We rarely give up, especially when it comes to another human being. When someone falls we offer a hand up and walk with them.

In this newsletter you will read about some of our successes and our challenges. We offer second, third and fourth chances. We love when the first chance proves to be the right chance, and we support each other when one more chance is needed.

Ultimately, affordable housing is not trendy nor is it a fad. There will be a need for good quality affordable housing through good times and bad. I am so grateful for our current friends who appreciate affordable housing like we do, who understand the need, and who have supported us through 30 years of change and challenges.

I know there are many more people who share this dream of making affordable housing available to low-income residents of Over-the-Rhine. It is hard, and deeply rewarding work. We welcome your support.



MARY BURKE RIVERS
Executive Director



THE COMMUNITY LIFTS UP MARY IN GRATITUDE AND CELEBRATION

Mary Burke Rivers was lifted up with gratitude and celebration on September 5th in honor of her 20 years in the field of affordable housing in Over-the-Rhine. Over-the-Rhine Community Housing (OTRCH), along with her community of friends, organized this event hosted at Peaslee Neighborhood Center. It was a beautiful evening seeing Mary's family, friends, OTRCH Board, Staff and Residents, partners, funders, neighborhood organizations, and a wide array of citywide friends gather to show appreciation for Mary's determination and long standing work. Creating and maintaining affordable housing is often making a way out of no way. The celebration was held in a room full of pictures of Mary's long haul and delicious snacks prepared by Power Inspires Progress. The gift of the evening was hearing words of praise from many who love and support Mary and her work.



Mary was hired as Director of Over-the-Rhine Housing Network (OTRHN) September 6th of 1993. She continued in that role until the merger of Race Street Tenant Organization Cooperative (ReSTOC) and OTRHN in April of 2006. Mary was hired as Executive Director of the merged organization, now known as Over-the-Rhine Community Housing. She came to this field of work as a social worker with Jobs and Family Services trying to find housing for families she served. Mary also served for a time as Co-Chair of the Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition, which sensitized her to the plight of our sisters and brothers on the streets. Mary has the passion for this work, compassion for the people needing housing, and the drive and energy to learn all the skills necessary to develop and advocate for affordable housing.



We showered Mary with our words of appreciation, and Mary blessed us with stories and teachable moments she experienced on this journey. It was rather humorous when folks tried claiming who knew Mary the longest. That was proof that when you get to know Mary, it's like you've known her a lifetime. That's the kind of impact she has on us. Her team at OTRCH said she was a boss they could trust, a person who can give a worker a second chance, she's not afraid to intervene where necessary and, by example, teaches how to put residents first. She can be thick into the details of a development project, and move to take time to greet a neighbor on the street. It was expressed that Mary leads with integrity, she's a team player, net worker and collaborator, she's humble, and has developed excellent skills that gets practical results, all the while holding on to the mission of affordable housing.

She is revered in the field of community development corporations, locally and statewide. Her colleagues want to know what Mary thinks, seeks her out for guidance, and she always lends an ear. Mary is an example to all of us how to live and value the concept that we are all part of a Beloved Community.

The spirit of gratitude filled the air that night. We are all the richer for having experienced this communal time together celebrating Mary's commitment and compassion. We missed those who couldn't come. If you want to still honor Mary for her anniversary, donations in her honor for OTRCH's project at 49 E. Clifton are much appreciated.

BONNIE NEUMEIER

Friend and OTRCH Resident Board Member





PRIDE IN OUR PLACES

OVER-THE-RHINE COMMUNITY HOUSING
INVITES YOU TO JOIN US FOR AN EVENING OF

Celebrating Our Beloved Community

OUR ANNUAL FUNDRAISING EVENT

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17TH
5:30 PM TO 7:30 PM - MUSIC HALL CORBETT TOWER

PRESENTED BY OVER-THE-RHINE COMMUNITY HOUSING

"HONORING CONNECTIONS: OLD FRIENDS, NEW FRIENDS AND COMING HOME"

FEATURING VIDEOGRAPHY BY BARBARA WOLF

WWW.OTRCH.ORG

PRESERVATION OF OUR PEOPLE

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE



Celebrating Our Beloved Community

Thursday, October 17th, 2013
5:30 - 7:30 pm - Music Hall - Corbett Tower

____ RSVP @ \$50 per person = \$ _____

Please list names of attendees _____

____ I am unable to attend, please accept my donation for \$ _____

- Check
- Pay Online
(please go to
www.otrch.org)
- Discover
- MasterCard
- Visa

Name	_____	Credit Card #	_____
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Phone	_____	eMail	_____

for additional information please contact Mary Rivers at 513-381-1171 or mburke@otrchorg

A LITTLE ENCOURAGEMENT GOES A LONG WAY

A day at OTRCH can be very rewarding when trying to help an individual obtain housing. Mr. Ralph R stopped in our office inquiring about how to qualify for an apartment. He had no source of income and was staying at the Catholic Worker House, with an exit day of August 24. He had been to several housing providers, and had been turned down for subsidized housing because there were no apartments available.

While talking to Ralph, he shared his life experience and some of the bad choices he had made that landed him in prison. He explained that he was changing his way of life and making more positive choices. Mr. R had become frustrated due to unavailable housing. Facing being homeless he stated, "maybe I should go back to my old ways". After hearing this comment I began to encourage Ralph to hold on, keep the faith for a second chance would come his way. I asked him to stand firm in making positive choices and believe that a job and an apartment was in his near future. I encouraged him to share his life story to our youth to keep a child from going down the path of self destruction.

The next week Mr. R came back to the office to share with me he had found a job, with a local food vendor, and had been interviewed by the news about preparing hamburgers for one of the events in Washington Park. By August 24 Ralph had found his own apartment in the community. I regard this as a success story because we were able to encourage Ralph so that he could stay and remain focused.

CYNTHIA CAMPBELL BELL

Leasing Manager



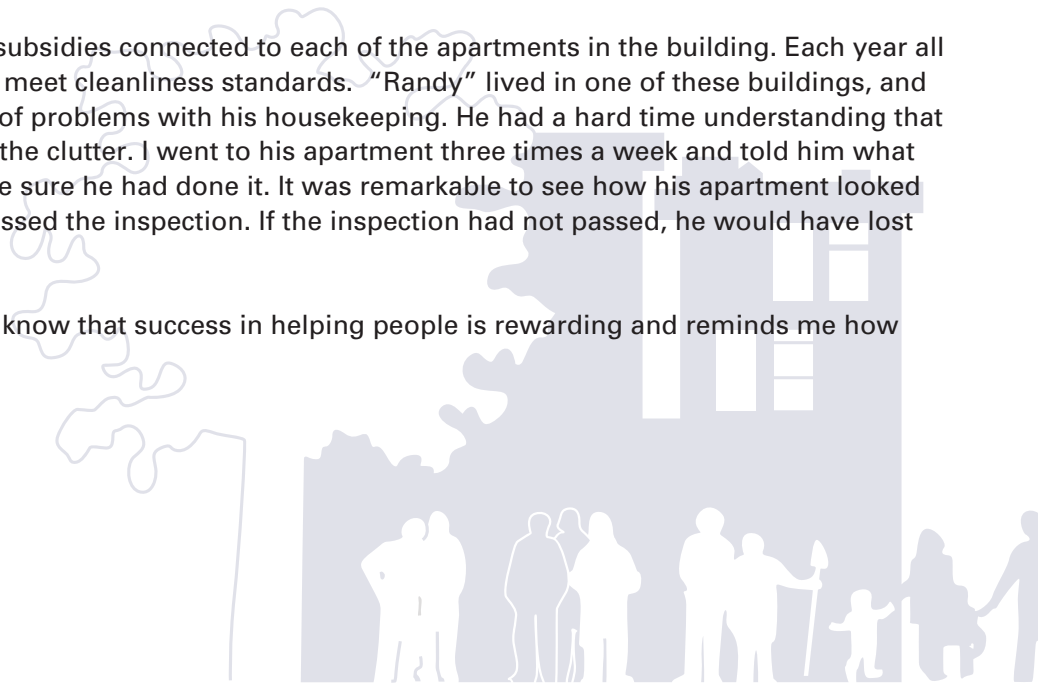
As an OTRCH property manager it is my responsibility to work with residents who have rent subsidies to make sure that they meet their requirements and keep their subsidy. It is hard work. It is also work that I love because I know that I make a real difference in people's lives every day. That is not to say that all my work is successful, but most often it is.

Some of our buildings have Section 8 rent subsidies connected to each of the apartments in the building. Each year all apartments in the building are inspected to meet cleanliness standards. "Randy" lived in one of these buildings, and had lived with us for 18 years. He had a lot of problems with his housekeeping. He had a hard time understanding that he had to clean his apartment and take out the clutter. I went to his apartment three times a week and told him what he needed to do, then checked back to make sure he had done it. It was remarkable to see how his apartment looked after he had worked on it. His apartment passed the inspection. If the inspection had not passed, he would have lost the subsidy and the apartment.

I have to take all this as part of the job, and know that success in helping people is rewarding and reminds me how important my (and our!) work at OTRCH is.

CYNTHIA TALBERT

Property Manager



WALKING WITH THOSE WHO NEED HELP

When OTRCH made the commitment to house chronically homeless, and actively using, addicts, it agreed to walk with these individuals through the day-to-day tumult which defines the life of someone addicted to alcohol or drugs. Jimmy Heath House (JHH) addresses this reality by providing housing and supportive services to people for whom homelessness and intoxication are part and parcel of their daily existence. The people who live at JHH are individuals for whom addiction is the driving force, and the one continuity, in their lives.

When we at the JHH are asked about the progress of our program, in all honesty, we are often forced to pause. Our tenants come into housing with serious (and chronic) mental and physical health issues, substance abuse problems, and criminogenic thinking. They usually come to us with only the clothes on their backs. They are people for whom sobriety and abstinence has proven to be an obstacle which has left them homeless time and time again. We try to meet them with hope, openness, and acceptance of their limitations. We openly acknowledge their addiction, and the damage it has done to their lives. We try to accept that, at present, and despite the devastating personal and social consequences, these individuals have experienced, they are unwilling, or unable to consider substance abuse treatment or abstinence from drugs and alcohol.

Our goal then becomes “harm reduction”. We begin by working with residents to decrease the harm they do to themselves and the broader community. Bob is a good example of how the “harm reduction” approach plays out at JHH. Bob is a 47-year old African American man who, before coming to JHH, had been living under the viaduct for about five years. He is somewhat literate and seems, when not intoxicated, to have some social anxiety. He has lived at JHH for almost two and a half years. Despite his tenure at the house, he is very solitary and is connected and verbal with only a couple of the front desk staff persons. He has also formed a close relationship with one particular counselor. Bob is otherwise suspicious of caregivers and other staff, and is also suspicious of the program and our motives.

In the beginning Bob’s behavior was very difficult for staff to manage. While never really violent, he was frequently threatening, and intimidating, and was always bizarre. After drunken blackouts Bob would hide out in his room and avoid contact with staff. When finally able to talk to staff, Bob seemed to have prepared himself to be evicted. Our first breakthrough was not evicting him. Instead, we focused on his behavior while he was drunk, not the drinking itself. Eventually Bob began to open up, and though his behavior when drinking didn’t change, the length of time between drinking bouts began to increase, and the length of time Bob spent isolated after his drinking became shorter. He soon began to realize that he could come to us directly after incidents and we could talk about them. As Bob progressed, he began to acknowledge that he could not successfully drink, but he was not willing to contemplate quitting. We began to discuss “triggers” such social interactions, and money, and Bob began to open up about his social anxieties.

After one drinking bout Bob finally admitted that he could not drink at all and would have to stop, but that he wanted to try to do this on his own terms, without treatment or a twelve-step program. Again, this was progress for us at Jimmy Heath, and after two more bouts of extremely bad behavior, Bob admitted he could not stop on his own, and began to go to AA meetings.

Will Bob remain sober? We don’t know. We know he has come to the conclusion that he needs to for himself, and he has decided to try AA. If he does stay sober, he will have overcome insurmountable odds.

DAVID ELKINS

Jimmy Heath House Director



PERSEVERANCE OF A YOUNG RESIDENT

Derrick Jones is a winner. I can tell you from experience, that he can dribble circles around an opponent on the basketball court and remains undefeated in the ongoing *Scattergories* "battle royale" at the Children's Creative Corner - two skills he's honed over the last several years while coming to CCC. His congenial nature and sense of humor sometimes seem beyond his years. He already appreciates the value of connecting with others and sharing his experiences, doing so with wisdom and ease. Derrick is still like most 14-year-old boys though. He loves listening to music, hanging with friends, and playing video games. But, with five younger siblings to look out for and a scholarship to maintain, I see Derrick take on a multitude of additional roles with incredible grace and strength.



Derrick was born and is being raised in Over-the-Rhine and has been educated through the Cincinnati Public School (CPS) system. CPS monitors and challenges each child's academic abilities and requires that students in grades 3-8 take the Ohio Achievement Assessment (OAA) proficiency test each school year. At the end of third grade, Derrick's scores did not reflect those of a nine-year-old prepared to move on to the fourth grade.

This was a pivotal point in determining the outcome of Derrick's story. Not only did Derrick's mother actively engage with his teachers and the school system to address his academic needs through rigorous after-school tutoring and a mentoring program, she and his mentors also made specific efforts to encourage Derrick to fill up his free time with positive activities like playing on sports teams, appropriate work experiences, and arts programs. Together, these efforts lead him to demonstrate not only an improvement, but the highest academic proficiency scores in his class on the following year's assessment. Talk about turning things around!

Now a freshman in high school, Derrick is on the basketball, baseball, and football teams, plays snare drum in the school marching band. He also makes it to the Children's Creative Corner with his four brothers and one sister. Four of the six kids in Derrick's family went to Camp Ernst's sleep-away camp this past summer through spots provided by OTRCH, and he is one year closer to being a counselor at the camp (a long-term goal that Derrick is still committed to). He's enrolled in a scholarship program that will allow him to attend Ohio State University if he maintains at least a 3.8 GPA during high school. His siblings look to him constantly as an example and a leader, of his own life and in the community.



The way Derrick, his family, his teachers, and his mentors, chose to react to what could be viewed as a "failure" can now be seen as an incredible personal success. Attempting to do what many of us would find challenging with many available supportive resources, Derrick is accomplishing while continuing to overcome life's obstacles and carrying a considerable weight of responsibility. What's more, he's doing it with a smile on his face, an openness to grow, and an unstoppable motivation to succeed.

SOPHIA CUNNINGHAM
Resident Engagement Coordinator



ELM STREET SENIOR HOUSING UPDATE



The Elm Street Senior Housing project is about five months into construction and is on schedule to be completed around May of 2014. At this point, all demolition is complete, the building has received a new roof, structural repairs have been made, and most of the new interior walls have been framed. This point of the construction process is very exciting because you can start to see the unit layouts take shape and visualize how great the apartments are going to be.

Thus far, from the outside, it has been hard to tell that much was happening to the building because most of the work was internal. But recently some major exterior work began. That work includes new flooring, between two portions of the building, which will become the corridor to the new elevator. Also the failing rear brick wall of the small two-story addition located at the rear of the building along 15th Street has been carefully dismantled, brick by brick, and has now been rebuilt.

Exterior changes in the near future include work on the elevator pit and structure at the rear of the building, and new windows throughout the building.

We are also pleased to announce that the sub-basement of the Elm Street Senior Housing project will be featured on the Brewery District walking tours. The building was originally constructed by Christian Moerlein, in part as a place to store beer in the basement. Later, the beer was stored in the brewery's ice house. We are very excited for this opportunity as OTRCH will receive a portion of the funds from every ticket purchased, and we will have an opportunity to spread our mission to many new people.

We are also excited that our project was featured recently in both the Business Courier and Soapbox Media online newspapers.



ASHLEIGH FINKE
Property Development

Over-the-Rhine Community Housing is determined to make Over-the-Rhine a welcoming place - where a diverse group of people live, work and build an engaged and inclusive community. We can't do this alone and we do not want to do this alone. We hope you will join us in our efforts.

Please consider supporting our efforts to build and sustain affordable and comfortable housing for low-income residents of Over-the-Rhine with a tax deductible contribution to Over-the-Rhine Community Housing.

Donate online: www.otrch.org

Donate by mail: **114 West 14th Street**
Cincinnati, OH 45202



Over-the-Rhine Community Housing
114 West 14th Street
Cincinnati, OH 452002

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VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Volunteers from local high schools and colleges participate in service and service-learning projects that enhance and beautify our buildings, and the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood. These projects benefit both OTRCH residents and other residents of the community. Projects include, but are not limited to, landscaping, cleaning up litter and debris from vacant lots, interior painting of common areas such as hallways, and interior and exterior grounds keeping of our buildings. So far this year over 300 volunteers have logged almost 1,000 hours!



Saturday Morning Volunteer Service Crews take place every Saturday morning, 9:00 - 12:00. If you or your group is interested in volunteering please contact Jody Buckmaster, jbuckmaster@otrch.org or call 513-381-1171 x120.

JODY BUCKMASTER
Volunteer Coordinator

