

# "Housing As Home"

**The need for safe, affordable housing tops the list of priorities for mental health consumers. Thanks to the "Housing as Home" Plan, consumers in Allegheny County will soon have additional housing resources available.**

As part of its commitment to providing evidence based, recovery-oriented services for consumers, The Allegheny County Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) developed a housing plan, called *Housing as Home*. The goal of the plan is to make 220-240 units of permanent supportive housing available for "priority" consumers within two to three years.

Permanent supportive housing (PSH) provides affordable housing *linked* to supportive services that are available, but not required. PSH is safe and secure, affordable to consumers, and permanent, as long as the consumer pays the rent and follows the rules of their lease. Permanent supportive housing is different from residential programs (see page 4).

While creating permanent supportive housing for mental health consumers may be new in Allegheny County, PSH is not a new idea. A growing number of research studies have found that consumers who move to permanent supportive

housing spend less time in hospitals, shelters and jail. They also report a higher quality of life. All of the strategies included in Allegheny County's plan follow examples of other successful programs from around the country.

## Permanent Supportive Housing is...

Safe, secure, affordable, and permanent as long as the consumer pays the rent and follows the rules of the lease.

Support services are flexible and optional. In other words, a person doesn't have to be part of a "program" to keep their housing.

*Housing as Home* includes comprehensive strategies to develop high-quality, affordable housing. This includes building new housing and leasing housing from landlords.

Strategies to keep housing affordable include rent subsidies, help with applying for Section 8, and contingency funds for security deposits and furniture. The plan also includes a support team to help consumers find housing that meets their preferences. The support team also provides assistance and skill-building for consumers to help them keep their housing.

Two agencies, Transitional Services, Inc. (TSI) and the Allegheny County Housing Authority (ACHA) will implement the different strategies in the *Housing as Home* plan. (see pages 2-3).

## Who are the "Priority" Consumers in the County Housing Plan?

An OBH "priority" consumer is defined as an adult resident of Allegheny County with serious mental illness or co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse disorders who currently resides at:

- Mayview State Hospital or Torrance State Hospital,
- an OBH-funded Community Residential Rehabilitation (CRR) program,
- an OBH-funded Long Term Structured Residence (LTSR), or
- Other specialized residential programs as determined by OBH.

## County Chooses TSI and ACHA to Make the *Housing as Home* Plan a Reality

The Allegheny County Office of Behavioral Health began developing a housing plan for people with mental illness and co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse over a year ago. After the state approved the County's Permanent Supportive Housing Plan, the County began a process for choosing agencies to carry out the plan.

In early 2006, through a stakeholder-driven review and selection process, **Transitional Services, Inc. (TSI)** and the **Allegheny County Housing Authority (ACHA)** were selected to put the housing plan into action.

Each of these organizations was chosen because they demonstrated a great deal of experience with housing issues and working with consumers. Both organizations also have shown the ability to work in partnership with others.

The **Allegheny County Housing Authority** will focus on developing new housing by working with builders and developers, and using many different



funding sources. **Transitional Services, Inc.** will manage referrals, waiting lists, and the Housing Support Team. It will also expand housing through funding to make rents affordable. The Office of Behavioral Health will oversee both projects.



### TSI to Manage Day-to-Day Housing Plan Strategies

Transitional Services, Inc. (TSI) is a non-profit organization located in Homestead. TSI serves over 300 individuals per year all across Allegheny County. TSI has provided housing and

supports for adults with mental health and mental retardation for 37 years, and has been providing supportive housing services for 17 years.

By focusing on skill building, individual strengths, empowerment, role recovery and the development of natural supports, TSI assists the people they serve with living independently and successfully in the community.

TSI will manage the following day-to-day strategies:

- **Housing Support Team.** The Housing Support Team will help consumers find housing, sign leases, move into housing, and develop skills they need to keep their housing.
- **Project-Based Leasing Fund.** TSI will find landlords or housing developers who will lease 60 units to TSI for five years. TSI will lease these units to consumers. Consumers will pay about 30% of their income for rent.
- **Bridge Subsidy Program.** TSI will provide rent assistance for about 100 consumers while they wait for Section 8 vouchers. When consumers begin this program they will need to apply for Section 8, all units will need to pass a Section 8

(Continued on page 3)

## Allegheny County Housing Authority to Manage Housing Development Fund

The Allegheny County Housing Authority (ACHA) will manage the OBH Housing Development Fund. As one strategy in the *Housing as Home* Plan, ACHA will work with developers and builders to develop 60-80 new units of permanent, supportive housing for priority consumers.

Under the direction of Frank Aggazio, Executive Director, the Allegheny County Housing Authority has become a leader in the affordable housing community. Currently, the Allegheny County Housing Authority owns and manages over 3,000 public housing units and administers almost 5,000 tenant-based vouchers through the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8).



A major goal of the ACHA is to provide housing similar in quality and service to private, non-assisted rental housing in terms



Allegheny County Housing Authority staff Ed Primm (left) and Walter MacFann (right) will work on the housing project. Ed will serve as the Project Manager and Walter, the Director.

of amenities and services. The ACHA also works to change the negative image of public housing through thinking creatively, using innovative designs, and promoting the positive aspects of public housing. The ACHA involves residents in decisions that affect them, and implements various programs that enable families to progress on the road to self sufficiency.

*(Continued from page 2)*

inspection, and landlords will agree to accept Section 8 vouchers.

- **Housing Contingency Fund.** This Fund will help consumers who are moving into permanent supportive housing with one-time necessary costs like security deposits, utility deposits, furniture and household item purchases.
- **Housing Clearinghouse.** The Housing Clearinghouse staff will track the availability of the bridge subsidy and project-based leasing units, manage the waiting list for these units, and keep a library of housing information and housing resources in the County.

TSI has hired John Cassase as the Project Coordinator to manage the implementation of these strategies. Mr. Cassase holds a Master of Public Policy and Management (MPPM) degree. His career spans 27 years in the nonprofit sector and includes experience in social-service program development and management as well as organizational administration. John identifies himself as a service-user and holds a

deep commitment to the provision of quality, long-term housing opportunities for individuals seriously affected by mental disorders.

TSI has also hired Janniece Ryan as the Housing Clearinghouse Manager and Camille Kalista as the Housing Support

Team Supervisor. Janniece holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Liberal Arts/Psychology. She has 13 years of experience working in drop-in centers and outreach, residential, and social rehabilitation programs. Camille Kalista has a Bachelors of Science in Psychology. She has experience working in a clinical and residential settings providing support services, including working with housing providers and locating/securing community housing for individuals.



John Cassase is TSI's new Project Coordinator for the *Housing as Home* Permanent Supportive Housing initiative.

## Permanent Supportive Housing: A Different Model

When consumers are asked about their housing preferences, most want their own apartment. A lack of choice and control over decision-making, as well as cost concerns, often prevents many consumers from getting their own apartment.

Because the *Housing as Home* Plan includes strategies to provide assistance in finding and keeping affordable housing, more consumers will

now be able to have their own apartments. These strategies have proven to be successful (see page 1).

Permanent supportive housing differs from the residential programs where many mental health consumers currently live. The table below compares PSH to residential programs including community residential rehabilitation (CRR) programs, long-term structured residences (LTSR), and group homes.

	Permanent Supportive Housing	Residential Program/Facility (CRRs, LTSRs, group homes)
<b>Relationship of Housing to Services</b>	People decide <i>when</i> and <i>if</i> they want to participate in services but it is not required.	People must participate in services in order to live in the program or facility.
<b>Choice</b>	People choose their living arrangements. They are not “placed”. They also choose <i>where</i> and <i>with whom</i> they want to live.	People may or may not have a choice of their living arrangement or whether or not they have a roommate.
<b>Permanency</b>	Housing is permanent. Residents have leases or rental agreements, governed by landlord/tenant laws.	Housing may or may not be permanent. Landlord/tenant laws do not apply. Housing may depend on using clinical services.
<b>Control of Housing and Privacy</b>	Resident controls who has access to his/her housing.	Resident usually does not have control over who accesses the program/facility.

## When Will the Housing Units be Available?

Both Transitional Services, Inc. and the Allegheny County Housing Authority have begun start-up activities related to implementing the County’s Housing Plan. Some of the programs, such as Bridge Subsidy, will provide housing opportunities for consumers quickly. Creating new units with developers will take longer.

The OBH Housing Plan calls for most of the 220-240 new housing units to be created within three years. We expect to begin working with consumers to find/secure housing in October 2006. People who fit the criteria for the priority population (page 1), and who are interested in permanent supportive housing, should contact Janniece Ryan, TSI’s Clearinghouse Manager at (412) 461-1322 x 255

**AHCI is a private, not-for-profit organization. Our mission is to assure equitable access to quality, cost-effective behavioral health care that promotes positive clinical outcomes, recovery, and resiliency.**

Allegheny HealthChoices, Inc. (AHCI) is a contract agency for the Allegheny County Department of Human Services’ HealthChoices Program.

444 Liberty Avenue, Suite 240  
Phone: 412-325-1100  
Fax: 412-325-1111  
E-mail: [kprimus@ahci.org](mailto:kprimus@ahci.org)