

New MTW Initiative Launches

The GRHC is one of 18 public housing authorities nationwide to participate in a HUD “Moving to Work” (MTW) initiative designed to help low-income households build assets and progress toward self-sufficiency. Details on page 2!

New Landlord Incentive

The GRHC has launched a new Landlord Incentive program that offers rental property owners and managers an opportunity to earn up to \$1,500 when they rent to a Housing Choice Voucher program participant. Details on page 3!

FSS Program Awarded Grant

Huntington National Bank has awarded the GRHC a \$20,000 grant in support of the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program that helps residents build assets based on increases in earned income. Details on page 5!



GRAND RAPIDS
HOUSING COMMISSION

NEWS

Winter 2023

The GRHC will expand our service area to include Ottawa County this spring! Watch for updates at www.grhousing.org

Housing Commission Expands Service Area to Include Ottawa County

The Grand Rapids Housing Commission (GRHC) governing board recently approved an expansion of the GRHC’s service area; beginning spring 2023, our agency will serve not only Kent County but also Ottawa County, including the cities of:

| | |
|--------------|-------------|
| Allendale | Lamont |
| Conklin | Macatawa |
| Coopersville | Marne |
| Ferrysburg | Nunica |
| Grand Haven | Spring Lake |
| Holland | West Olive |
| Hudsonville | Zeeland |
| Jenison | |

This change is the result of several factors:

- A severe rental housing shortage in Greater Grand Rapids has created an extremely competitive rental market; over the past year only about 35 percent of our Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program clients have been successful in their search for an affordable unit. Expanding our service area expands the pool of available units.
- The Ottawa County Housing Commission does not have HUD funding or authorization to operate an HCV program. The U.S. Department

of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has requested that the GRHC administer vouchers from a HUD-funded Ottawa County property that is “opting out” of its current Housing Assistance Payments contract.

- The GRHC is committed to partnering with HUD, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), local governments and area developers to expand the availability of affordable housing in West Michigan. The service area expansion makes it possible for the GRHC to commit Project-Based Vouchers in support of Ottawa County developers who are pursuing federal tax credits to build affordable housing.

“The service area expansion recognizes the prevalence of commuting between counties for employment as well as the fact that some rental properties overlap county lines,” noted GRHC Executive Director Lindsey S. Reames. “We look forward to serving Ottawa County residents and also to introducing many new landlords and developers to the benefits of supporting low-income households through participation in the Housing Choice or Project-Based Voucher program.”



Graphic courtesy of FreeVectorFlags.com

GRHC to Participate in new HUD Initiative Focused on Helping Households Build Assets

The GRHC is one of 18 public housing authorities nationwide selected to participate in a HUD “Moving to Work” (MTW) Demonstration Program cohort that will help assisted households create and grow personal savings. First authorized by Congress in 1996, MTW gives housing authorities the flexibility to try “outside the box” ideas that address community needs in innovative ways.

Launching during fall 2023, the planned Asset Building initiative will invite a limited number of randomly selected GRHC Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program participants to open a personal savings account into which the Housing Commission will make regular monthly deposits and even match a portion of the participant’s own deposits over a period of two years. The initiative will include a youth component that invites teen children of each participant to open savings accounts, with the GRHC making small monthly deposits and partial matching deposits to help youth experience the benefits of building savings.

The GRHC’s financial commitment is estimated at \$100,000; staff is seeking funding from financial institutions,



private donors and foundations. We will also have the option to use funds from HCV Housing Assistance Payments reserves as well as HUD Operating Fund and Capital Fund program grants to finance the initiative.

“The Housing Commission is designing a sustainable program that increases the number of assisted households that have savings accounts and will also help these families build credit worthiness,” said

GRHC Executive Director Lindsey S. Reames. “The goal is to help households attain housing stability and a stronger financial future for both themselves and their children.”

Reames noted that the GRHC’s participation in the MTW Demonstration Program will support housing access and equity in ways that extend beyond the Asset Building initiative because of the administrative flexibility the program affords. She said the agency is implementing or considering a number of activities designed to help low-income families find housing in our tight rental market, including:

- Incentivizing landlords to participate in the HCV program.
- Encouraging new affordable developments by increasing the number of Section 8 Project-Based Voucher (PBV) units the GRHC supports. The GRHC recently invited affordable housing developers to apply to receive PBVs for rehabilitation or new housing projects.
- Establishing Fair Market Rent payment standards that accurately reflect the rental market.

Read the GRHC’s draft 2023 Agency Plan and Moving To Work Supplement at: www.grhousing.org/pdf/draft23plan.pdf

Public Hearing on 2023 Agency Plan, MTW Supplement

The Grand Rapids Housing Commission has developed its 2023 Annual Agency Plan and 2023 Moving to Work (MTW) Supplement in compliance with applicable HUD regulations. Moving to Work is a demonstration program that allows housing authorities to design and test innovative strategies for providing low-income families with affordable housing and paths to economic independence.

The GRHC will hold a public hearing regarding its 2023 Annual Agency Plan and 2023 MTW Supplement on Monday, March 13, at 6:00 p.m. in the Campau Commons Community Center located at 821 Division Ave. South. The meeting will also be accessible online and via phone.

The draft Plan and Supplement, information about how to offer input regarding these documents and details of the public hearing are available online at www.grhousing.org. Public comments will be accepted through March 14.



Housing Commission Introduces New Landlord Incentive Program

The GRHC hosted a “Landlord Forum” in early November, rolling out a Landlord Incentive program that offers rental property owners and managers the opportunity to earn up to \$1,500 in cash when they rent to a family that participates in our Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program.

There are two levels of Landlord Incentive program participation:

New or Returning Landlord* — \$1,000

One-time payment of \$1,000 to a new landlord who has not participated in the GRHC Housing Choice Voucher program or who left the program in the last 12 months and is now returning.

**Payment received when the Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) contract is signed.*

Participating Landlord — Up to \$1,500**

One-time payment of \$500 to a landlord who currently participates in the GRHC Housing Choice Voucher program and who rents up to three additional units—that’s \$500 per additional unit!

***Payment received when the Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) contract is signed; lease renewals are not eligible.*

How to Receive the Cash Landlord Incentive

Landlords who qualify to receive an incentive program payment should request a Landlord Incentive form that’s available at the GRHC Administrative Office, 1420 Fuller Avenue SE, or online at www.grhousing.org/pdf/LandlordIncentive.pdf and submit the completed form to GRHC staff along with the Request for Tenancy Approval (RFTA). Staff conduct HUD-required due diligence, and when the landlord submits the Residential Lease and Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) contract and rental assistance begins, we process the appropriate incentive payment.

Please note that the Landlord Incentive program is available for units in Kent and Ottawa counties only. The program may be discontinued when available funding is exhausted.

As of early February, three landlords had received a total of \$2,500 in incentive payments.

***Thank you for partnering with the GRHC
to serve West Michigan families!***

Update on Fair Market Rent (FMR) Survey and 2023 GRHC FMRs

Differences between the maximum “Fair Market Rents” (FMRs) set by HUD annually and the actual cost of rental units in West Michigan have made finding an affordable home extremely challenging for participants in the GRHC’s Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program; only about 35 percent of voucher holders looking for housing were able to find a unit this past year, and that was despite the fact that the GRHC had received a waiver that allowed us to set FMRs at 120 percent of the 2022 HUD-established FMRs. The waiver expired on December 31, 2022.

As reported in the fall edition of this newsletter, the GRHC has worked with a research firm to conduct a Kent County rent study, with the goal of obtaining data that would support an appeal to HUD for FMRs that more accurately reflect the highly competitive situation in our rental marketplace. Results from this study indicate that the local 2023 FMRs should be 3 to 5 percent higher than those established by HUD using revised methodology that was intended to resolve the issue of FMRs falling way below actual market rents.

With the goal of seeking a more permanent solution to the problem of annual FMRs falling well below actual market rents, the GRHC has provided the Kent County rent study data to



HUD and has received assurances that the agency will analyze our findings and determine whether 2023 FMRs should be adjusted; any increase in FMRs would be finalized in April 2023. To ensure that client households are not at a competitive disadvantage in the meantime, the GRHC has set the FMRs that went into effect January 1 at 110 percent of the HUD-established FMRs—the maximum allowed by HUD.

The current Voucher Payment Standard schedule for the GRHC’s voucher programs by unit size:

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 0 Bedrooms: \$1,049 | 4 Bedrooms: \$1,937 |
| 1 Bedroom: \$1,106 | 5 Bedrooms: \$2,228 |
| 2 Bedrooms: \$1,332 | 6 Bedrooms: \$2,518 |
| 3 Bedrooms: \$1,734 | |

COLLEGE PAYS.

FACTS FROM THE U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment, 2021

| | Median usual weekly earnings | Unemployment rate |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Master's degree | \$1,574 | 2.6% |
| Bachelor's degree | \$1,334 | 3.5% |
| Associate's degree | \$963 | 4.6% |
| Some college, no degree | \$899 | 5.5% |
| High school diploma | \$809 | 6.2% |
| Less than a high school diploma | \$626 | 8.3% |

2023 Jean McKee Resident Scholarship Program Offers \$2,000 College Scholarships

The 2023 Jean McKee Resident Scholarship competition is underway! Established in 2000 in memory of longtime Housing Commissioner Jean McKee, the Resident Scholarship program offers college scholarships to eligible residents of GRHC housing programs. Scholarship winners receive \$500 per year for up to four years, for a total scholarship award of up to \$2,000.

Since the program's inception, the GRHC has awarded scholarships totaling \$43,000, helping 39 residents pursue higher education.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Must have been a resident of a GRHC housing program for the past year.
- Household must be in good standing with the GRHC in accordance with our Housing Choice Voucher Administrative Plan and Admissions & Continued Occupancy Policies.
- Open to graduating high school seniors, current college or vocational school students, and adult residents seeking to begin or return to college or vocational school. Graduating high school seniors, Family Self-Sufficiency Program participants and undergraduate students will receive priority status.
- Graduating high school seniors and those currently attending college must have a cumulative GPA of at least 2.5 (C+ letter grade).

- Applicants seeking to return to college or vocational school must provide an official high school or college transcript which demonstrates that the applicant is a high school graduate and had a cumulative high school or college GPA of at least 2.5.
- Must attend an accredited vocational school, community college, college or university as a full-time student.
- Scholarship winners are eligible to renew the scholarship annually for up to four years. Continuing requirements:
 - Maintain a cumulative 2.5 GPA.
 - Maintain full-time enrollment.

Application Requirements by Applicant Status:

ALL APPLICANTS:

- Completed Jean McKee Resident Scholarship Application Form.
- Short essay (300 words) on the topic "My career goals and how the educational program I am pursuing will help me reach these goals."

GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS:

- High school transcript that shows graduation and minimum GPA of 2.5.
- Letter or email of recommendation from a teacher or administrator at the applicant's high school; email recommendation must be from the teacher's school email account. Copy of letter of acceptance from an accredited vocational school, college or university.

CURRENT COLLEGE OR VOCATIONAL SCHOOL STUDENT:

- Letter or email of recommendation from an instructor or counselor at applicant's school; email must be from the instructor's school email account.
- Official school transcript that shows:
 - A cumulative GPA of at least 2.5.
 - Enrolled full-time during the term preceding application.
 - Enrolled full-time for the upcoming fall term.

ADULT SEEKING TO BEGIN OR RETURN TO COLLEGE:

- Official high school or college transcript which demonstrates that the applicant is a high school graduate and had a cumulative high school or college GPA of at least 2.5.
- Copy of letter of acceptance from an accredited vocational school, college or university.
- Proof of full-time enrollment for the upcoming fall term.

Jean McKee Resident Scholarship program application materials are available at all GRHC offices and online at www.grhousing.org

Application deadline:

May 10, 2023

Huntington Bank Awards \$20,000 Grant in Support of Family Self-Sufficiency Program

Huntington National Bank has awarded the GRHC a \$20,000 grant in support of the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program that helps GRHC program participants increase financial stability and move toward economic independence and well-being.

The FSS Program is a voluntary initiative that empowers participants to build a financial “nest egg” when an increase in earned income increases the household’s share of monthly rent; an amount roughly equal to the rental payment adjustment is deposited into an escrow account to benefit the family each month. Escrow can accrue for up to five years and is disbursed when the participant graduates from the program.

To successfully complete the program, a family must be free of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance for at least the last 12 months of the FSS contract, the head of household must have income from gainful employment for the last 12 months of the contract and the family must have fulfilled all training and service plans. During 2022 the FSS Program disbursed a total of \$240,973 to



GRHC HCV Program Manager Wanda Couch and Executive Director Lindsey S. Reames (center) accept the grant award from Huntington Bank Community Development Manager Greg Rios and Regional President Lauren Davis during a presentation at the Grand Rapids EnVision Center. The grant will make a huge difference in the GRHC’s ability to grow our Family Self-Sufficiency Program, and our staff and board are truly thankful for Huntington’s support!

34 program graduates; one graduate used her \$27,000 award to purchase a home!

“The Housing Commission is grateful to Huntington for supporting our efforts to help assisted families work toward self-sufficiency,” said GRHC Executive Director Lindsey S. Reames. Reames noted that the Huntington grant funds will be used specifically for activities designed to increase FSS Program

enrollment by an additional 100 households.

GRHC residents can discover the benefits of participation in the FSS Program by attending one of many orientation meetings scheduled throughout the year. More information and a link to an FSS Self-Referral and Orientation Meeting Registration Form is available online at: www.grhousing.org/fssSelfReferral.html

Please Take a Two-Question Survey

We value your opinion and would appreciate hearing about your experience working with us!

Survey available online at QR code or link



<https://survey.sogolytics.com/r/grhc>

HCV Homeownership Program Orientation Meetings

The HCV Homeownership program offers Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher recipients the opportunity to use their Housing Assistance Payment toward a home mortgage payment rather than rental housing expenses. **GRHC Family Self-Sufficiency Program participants have a preference for this program.**

The GRHC will offer several free HCV Homeownership Program Orientation Meetings this year—all will be held at Wyoming Public Library, 3350 Michael Ave. SW in Wyoming.

Meeting Dates/Time

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| March 21, 2023, 2:00 p.m. | September 19, 2023, 2:00 p.m. |
| June 20, 2023, 2:00 p.m. | December 12, 2023, 2:00 p.m. |

For program information and a link to the Orientation Meeting Registration Form:

www.grhousing.org/home-ownership-program.php

Housing Choice Voucher Program Now Offers Client Households a Dedicated Staff Contact

The GRHC's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program has undergone restructuring in order to more effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the families we serve. Each voucher program participant has been assigned a specific staff member who will assist the household with all administrative needs, including annual and interim reexaminations, moves, rent adjustments and end-of-program paperwork. Staff assignments are by program type, with family assignments made alphabetically by last name. **Look for the program in which you participate in the tables at the right, then check the alphabetically arranged "Client Last Name" column to get the name of your Coordinator. Coordinators can be reached via email at ic@grhousing.org or by phone at (616) 235-2600.**

Please note that the Coordinator assignments listed at the right are for currently participating voucher program clients. **Program applicants who have a question concerning their application should contact GRHC Intake/New Admissions staff by emailing ic@grhousing.org or by phone at (616) 235-2600; office hours are weekdays 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.**

GRHC agency-owned housing is operated under the Low-Income Public Housing (LIPH), Rapid Re-Housing or Section 8 Project-Based programs and includes Adams Park Apartments, Antoine Court Apartments, Campau Commons Apartments, Creston Plaza Apartments, Hope Community, Leonard Terrace Apartments, Mount Mercy Apartments, Ransom Tower Apartments and Sheldon Apartments. **Residents of these developments will be assisted by their Asset Management staff, with the exception that all Family Self-Sufficiency Program clients will be assisted by the HCV Special Programs team (see second table in right column).**

Use this table if you currently participate in:

Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program, including Non-Elderly Disabled (NED) clients, clients using a Tenant Protection Voucher

| Coordinator, phone (616) 235-2600 | Client Last Name |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Janae Couch, extension 1120 | A - BRO |
| Jacob Varela, extension 1106 | BRP - DAW |
| Leah Paauwe, extension 1107 | DAX - HAR |
| Keisha Hills, extension 1126 | HAS - LEW |
| Jameila McDonald, extension 1127 | LEV - PEN |
| Vickie LaGrone, extension 1124 | PEO - SWA |
| Shawanna Thompson, extension 1117 | SWB - Z |

Use this table if you currently participate in HCV Special Programs, including:

Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program, Mainstream Program, HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH), Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) Program, Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Voucher Program, vouchers administered for partners at 415 Franklin, 501 Eastern, Calumet Flats, Garfield Park Lofts, Harrison Park Apartments, Heron Court, Heron Manor, Oroquis Apartments, Pine Avenue Apartments, St. James Apartments, Stockbridge Apartments, Verne Barry Place

| Coordinator, phone (616) 235-2600 | Client Last Name |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Rufus Granderson, extension 1134 | A - DIV |
| Lauri Parks, extension 1137 | DIW - KIR |
| Kim Brown, extension 1190 | KIS - RIE |
| Erica Kurban, extension 1132 | RIF - ZEE |

GRHC Human Resources Update

Staff Promotion

Shakerah McRae has been promoted from HCV Admissions & Leasing Supervisor to HCV Manager. Shakerah hired on as a Section 8 Coordinator with the GRHC in 2019 and was promoted to HCV Admissions and Leasing Supervisor in 2020. She has served as Acting HCV Manager for the past several months. In her new role she will oversee the operations of the Housing Choice Voucher program, including leasing, reporting, system integrity, updating documents and staff training.

Staff Transfer

Toni Coristine has transferred from a position as Asset Manager for Mount Mercy Apartments, Sheldon Apartments and Hope Community Rapid Re-Housing Program to a position as a Quality Assurance/Quality Control Coordinator. Toni has been with the GRHC for 33 years. In addition to her longtime service as an Asset Manager, her career with us includes a position as Director of Leased Housing for the HCV program. She will use her extensive program knowledge to help ensure that GRHC files and procedures comply with HUD regulations and conform to housing program best practices.

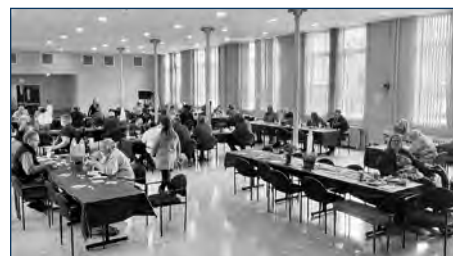
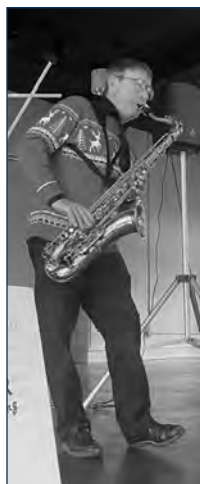
Staff Transfer

Margo Gatling has transferred from a position as an HCV Coordinator with our Special Programs division to a position as a Quality Assurance/Quality Control Coordinator. Margo started with the GRHC as a housing site Receptionist in 2009, was promoted to an Assistant Asset Manager position in 2013 and joined the HCV team as a Section 8 Coordinator in 2017. In her new role she will use her broad program knowledge to help ensure that GRHC files and procedures comply with HUD regulations and conform to housing program best practices.

Community Partners Bring Holiday Happiness to GRHC Housing Communities

Many thanks to all of the partner organizations and volunteers who brightened the winter holidays for GRHC residents:

- The New Hope Baptist Church congregation donated Thanksgiving meal baskets to Hope Community residents.
- Boston Square Christian Reformed Church supported a “Get Fancy Day” at Adams Park Apartments, providing free clothes to residents seeking to dress up for the holidays.
- Calvin University nursing students donated holiday decor and treats to Hope Community residents.
- South East Market donated fresh food to Hope Community residents.
- Amplify GR treated Adams Park residents to a Thanksgiving feast that also included music and a resident fashion show.
- Beckwith Hills Church hosted a Pizza Party and Christmas caroling at Leonard Terrace Apartments.
- Multitude Ministries donated holiday food baskets to residents of GRHC developments.
- Hurst Mechanical hosted and served a holiday feast for residents of Mount Mercy Apartments.
- The Home Instead “Be a Santa to a Senior” program donated hundreds of holiday gifts to GRHC seniors.
- Humana donated \$700 in support of White Elephant Gifting events at Antoine Court and Sheldon Apartments.
- United Church Outreach Ministry offered a “Holidays on a Budget” workshop at Campau Commons.



Pictured clockwise from top right:

~ Amplify GR volunteers serve a Thanksgiving feast to Adams Park Apartments residents.

~ Hurst Mechanical employee volunteers host a holiday buffet at Mount Mercy Apartments.

~ Mount Mercy residents enjoy the festivities.

~ “Be a Santa to a Senior” elves, back row, from left: Michelle from Home Instead, Home Instead General Manager Amber Kinnell, GRHC Resident Services Specialist Maria Lara; front row, from left: GRHC Resident Services Specialists Rachel Siebert, Latasha Maberry and Erin Shibley.

~ Senior Sing-A-Long musician Gary McCourry entertains during the Mount Mercy holiday feast.



Hope Community Update

Hope Community Rapid Re-Housing Program has amended its operating standards to extend service to all families experiencing homelessness.

Referral to this program is through The Salvation Army.

More: www.grhousing.org/hope-community.php



GRAND RAPIDS
HOUSING COMMISSION
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Grand Rapids, MI 49507

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

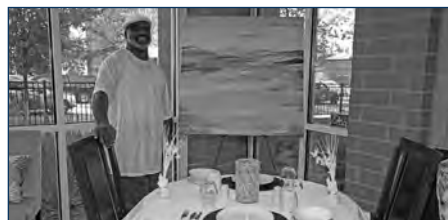


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Antoine Court Celebrates Resident Artists with Fall Reception and Exhibition

Paintings, drawings, interior design displays, poetry readings and musical performances showcased the incredible talents of GRHC residents during a late-October “Artists of Antoine” exhibition at Antoine Court Apartments. The festive special event was organized by GRHC Resident Services Manager Joyce Williams who also displayed and read some of her poetry.

Many thanks to all of the artists who shared their work with our community!



Pictured clockwise from top: Lowell Reynolds with some of the paintings he exhibited at the “Artists of Antoine” event; a graphite drawing by Maurice Scott and another wonderful Lowell Reynolds work; Darron Ewing with a lovely dining area design; Barbara Scroggins sings Amazing Grace; Christy Shellman shows her collection of Native American artifacts.

Grand Rapids Housing Commissioners:

Monica Steimle-App, President; Betty Zylstra, Vice President; Jamon Alexander, Michael Bernier, Patrick Miles Sr.; Executive Director: Lindsey S. Reames

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