

September 2020

COVID-19 HOUSING SUCCESS

Public Defender AmeriCorps Housing Coordinator Housing Stories



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INTRODUCTION

The global pandemic brought new and unexpected challenges to the work that AmeriCorps members do on a daily basis. COVID-19 has affected our communities and those experiencing homelessness more harshly than most. In addition to many basic support services shutting their doors, shelter was even harder to come by.

Many clients were lined up to enter the Depot Residences in April, but the pandemic pushed back the opening date for the new housing complex. Individuals on the waiting list were then left trying to find shelter with virtually no options available because of the pandemic. With the shelters being closed to new intakes and the emergency shelter on Stowell filling quickly and shutting down, many of those experiencing homelessness were left with no shelter and forced to sleep on the streets or in their cars.

Given the circumstances many clients

have had to overcome a lot of obstacles to get to where they are now. Between September 11 and September 18, six clients were informed that their number on the Depot Residences had been pulled. Six individuals now have a place to call home and have permanent housing.

MOTHER AND CHILD

The first housed was a woman and her one year old baby. Since a young age, she had struggled with housing because of her mother's addiction issues. She was in and out of group homes and never had a sense of stability. Once she was old enough she chose to live with her mother and at that point she began to struggle with addiction and mental health issues of her own and losing her children.

Throughout her struggles she slept in her car, in parks and the shelter with her children until they were taken away. I began working with her in June 2019. It was then that she became



serious about her recovery and entered the TC House. In working with her I was able to get her on the list for the Depot Residences. She successfully completed the program in 2019 and graduated from the treatment courts in January 2020.

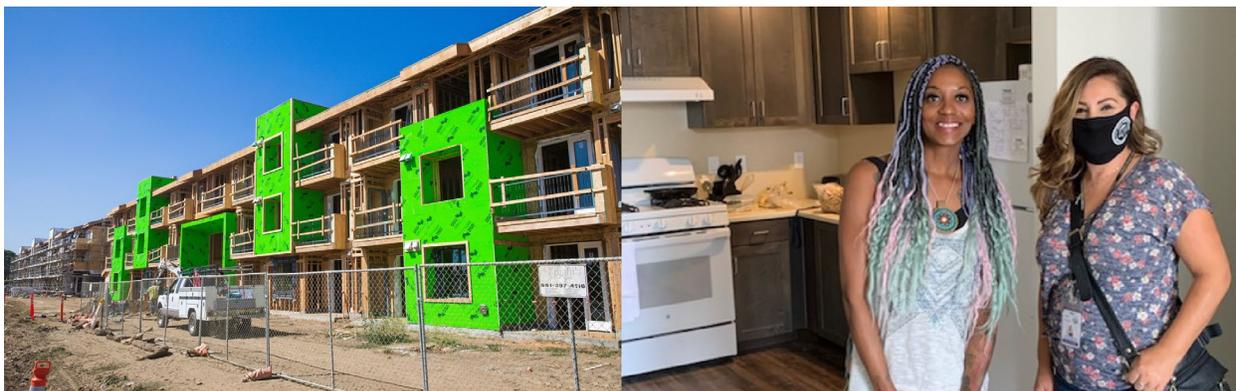
The pandemic caused a lot of stress on her due to Behavioral Wellness not seeing clients. Additionally, the idea of getting stable housing seemed unattainable because of the continued delay of construction on the Depot Residences.

At the beginning the pandemic she stayed with her in-laws which did not work out. At that point she wanted to give up, but I was able to get her into a motel after removing her from a less than ideal living situation. With my support and encouragement she continued to wait and hope for the best. After a few weeks in the motel she was provided with a trailer at the Good Samaritan for a few weeks and

eventually moved into the family shelter. When she finally got the call for the Depot Residences it was nothing short of a miracle. After experiencing homelessness for the past five years, and facing potential prison time, she and her baby finally have a place to call their own.

SINGLE MOM

The next individual housed is a single mother just wanting a home for herself and her child. For the past three years she has experienced housing instability due to separating from her child's father. With only having one income, she could not afford stable housing and was forced to live in her vehicle and motel rooms when she could afford it. She commuted daily back and forth from Santa Barbara to continue working, but it was not enough to afford the expenses of getting housing. After sending her daughter to stay with a friend she encountered legal troubles that only created more hurdles. After



losing her job she could no longer afford to stay in her car and hopped around from house to house.

I began working with her in April 2019 and provided her with a bus pass to get from Lompoc to Santa Maria for her court hearings and meetings. I was able to get her a bed at the shelter, but right before the pandemic hit she was exited. At that time I was trying to get a hold of her because the shelter had contacted me to tell me that she had received her Depot Residences packet in the mail. By the time she received the packet the deadline for submission had already passed. We were able to call the Housing Authority to explain the situation and get an extended deadline.

Months had gone by with no word on the Depot packet, but out of the blue I received a call from the main worker at the Housing Authority informing me that she was getting a place at the

Depot Residences. She was in disbelief that it was finally happening and I am so grateful to have been able to help her with the transition.

Since moving in I have arranged weekly food pick ups with Coast Valley for her and now she has a place for her daughter to come and stay.

FAMILY OF THREE

A couple and their child were moved in to the Depot Residence with their child after experiencing homelessness. He had been chronically homeless since he was a juvenile and had been in and out of the court system many times since reaching adulthood. I initially met him through my outreach at Cornerstone Church and learned that his homelessness was a result of addiction and an unstable home life.

He formally became my client through the Public Defender's Office in December 2018. In that time I was able to work with him in getting a new



social security card and identification, assist him with a resume and job searches and filling out the housing applications. He graduated from the treatment court in July 2019 and still continued to work with me on finding more stable housing.

She had been homeless since 2015 as a result of addiction. She has been in and out of the criminal justice system many times and lost her two other children because of unstable housing and addiction. She graduated from the treatment court in January 2020.

The couple welcomed their baby in May 2019 and had been staying with her mother in a small apartment. During the pandemic they were struggling with staying at her mother's house and were on the verge of being kicked out almost daily. Just days before getting the call for the Depot Residences they were beginning to get worried that it never happen and that they would end up on the streets with their child.

Since getting together they have been able to be a strong system of support for one another to maintain sobriety for themselves and their baby boy. Moving into the Depot Residences has given them the ability to have stable housing to raise their child and grow as a family.

COUPLE

This couple has successfully moved into the Depot Residences after years of experiencing homelessness. He has been homeless for the past twelve years since his mom passed away. Living in his car and on the streets was a struggle for him because of his medical issues. While living in his car he was constantly harassed by police.

She has been struggling addiction and has been homeless for the past five years. I met her at outreach and began working with her. She formally became my client at the beginning of 2020. At the time she was staying in and out of the shelter. After being denied a bed at the shelter she has



been living on the streets and occasionally staying with family. I provided her with bus tokens for her appointments and gift cards so she could get the things that she needed to survive on the streets.

Throughout her life there had been a lot of family drama and tragedy that lead to her addiction. Since being in recovery she connected with her partner and have been surviving on the streets together.

Moving into the Depot Residences is a shock for both of them. They are beyond thrilled to have a safe place to sleep and for him to have stable housing to take care of his medial issues,

CLOSING REMARKS

In working with each of these clients many challenges were faced. I was often times the only support they had and their biggest advocate in getting the right kind of assistance they needed. I know first hand the effects

the pandemic has had on these individuals. I was the person they would call when things got difficult and I would do everything that I could to reassure them that their time will come.

Through the closure of Behavioral Wellness, Social Services and other providers, things were not easy. But together we were able to navigate the systems and get each of them set up for success. I am beyond proud of the work that my clients have put in with me to make the goal of permanent housing a reality for them. I am excited to continue supporting each of them in their journey and will be there with them every step of the way.

The construction of the Depot Residences was long awaited not only for the community but for myself, my clients and the treatment courts. Giving veterans, people experiencing mental health issues, and those experiencing chronic homelessness the



chance to move into a fully furnished apartment is such a huge opportunity. Many of my clients never thought that something like this would ever be possible and they are very grateful for the housing and a chance to start a new, stable and healthy chapter of their lives. There were thousands of applications submitted with only select few receiving a packet. Given the fact that there are only 93 units, receiving an apartment is like winning the lottery.

The anticipated opening of the Depot Residences created large amount of stress and hope for my clients. The waiting and hoping for their name being called after many delays in construction and move in dates was difficult for them to deal with especially during a global pandemic.

But the wait was worth it! It was extremely rewarding getting the call

from each client telling me that they have officially received a move in date for the Depot Residences. Witnessing the pure joy, excitement and relief on my clients faces when I saw them during their move in process was so heart warming and reassured me that I am doing the kind of work I am meant to do.

When I begin working with any client, the ultimate goal is permanent housing and to see them go through so many obstacles to get there makes it all worth it in the end.

The opening of the Depot Residences has paved the way for many people to obtain permanent housing. I know that this is only just the beginning and I am so proud of all of these individuals for holding on through a pandemic and making it this far.



We are
Stronger
TOGETHER