

Happy End of Summer from Virginia Supportive Housing!

This summer looked very different from summers past. The COVID-19 pandemic has required us to make changes to our daily routines in order to keep our communities healthy and safe. The ongoing Black Lives Matter movement is requiring reflection and action in moving towards racial justice for all. Your support has ensured that our residents and program participants receive the level of care they need consistently and safely.

Thank you for your generosity - we could not do this work without you.

COVID-19 Update

A few team members in Hampton Roads and Richmond have tested positive for COVID-19. We are relieved and glad that all have recovered fully or are recovering well.

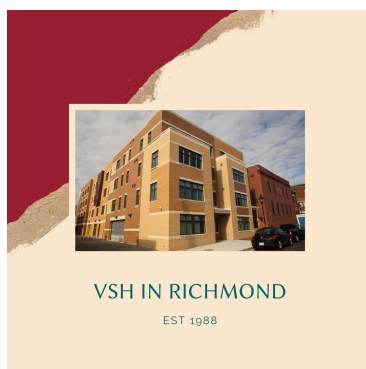
All team members who may have been exposed entered quarantine for two weeks at home and many have returned to work.

Since June, VSH's COVID-19 response plan has been updated. The following has been implemented at all properties:

- Floor markings have been placed in various places in buildings.
- Hand sanitizer stations have been mounted on the wall in various places in building.
- The management team has begun working in the office an average of 1-2 days per week.
- The plan to begin non-urgent/non-priority repairs inside of the apartments is in progress.

ICYMI: Summer social media series wraps up!

Recently, we finished a **multi-week re-introduction to VSH** on our social media platforms. The series included definitions of key terms, important statistics, overviews of each of the three regions we serve, and a quick look at five of our programs. Make sure to follow us on social media if you aren't already to stay up to date on all things VSH!



[Link to VSH Facebook](#)



[Link to VSH Instagram](#)



[Link to VSH Twitter](#)

Special Feature: Meet the Homelink team!

In the midst of a pandemic, taking care of our most vulnerable neighbors remains our priority.

For Megan, each day usually looks different. Mainly, she's "zipping around the city" working with five to ten individuals a week. Some program participants need transport to and from appointments - medical, social service, job interviews - and she uses the time in the waiting room with them to go over paperwork. For others, what they need most is help getting to the grocery store and back with their purchases. "A big focus of mine is knowing when I'm doing something for a client that they can do themselves and when I'm doing something they can't do themselves. I want to be empowering them."

Megan is a Supportive Services Specialist in our Homelink program. Virginia Supportive Housing's approach to ending homelessness through **permanent supportive housing** (PSH) is usually associated with the properties that VSH develops and operates. But VSH also provides PSH through programs that serve individuals in **scattered site apartments** in the community: we take mobile case management services to the participants. Each program serves a specific subset of housing-unstable individuals through a combination of housing support and supportive

Permanent supportive housing:

The combination of affordable housing and supportive services that assists those experiencing chronic homelessness.

Scattered site apartments:

Apartments leased to VSH program participants through partnerships with private landlords.

services that address the specific needs of that group.

Homelink provides two things for its participants:
Affordable housing: assistance finding an apartment in the community and a rental subsidy to afford it.
Case management services.

Participant profile:
Single adults with a **documented disability** (chronic medical condition, mental illness, developmental disability, HIV/AIDS, physical disability, and/or substance use disorder), who have experienced **long or repeated episodes of homelessness**. Homelink also specializes in serving individuals with a history of incarcerations.

As Megan says, in the world of homeless services: “the folks that we serve are identified as the most vulnerable.”

How does Homelink work?

Step One: “We work with folks who are eligible to receive long term rental assistance for permanent supportive housing. They are prioritized with this special type of funding because the word permanent is exactly what it means: this is rental assistance for the rest of their lives,” Megan says. Participants work with partnering agencies to secure the necessary documentation who then refer the individual to VSH.

The rental assistance program requires participants to pay just **30%** of their income towards rent, keeping housing affordable and accessible.

Step Two: Upon entry into Homelink, they are assigned a case manager who will “help them with their day to day needs to be able to maintain housing,” explains Housing Specialist Richelle. She continues, “my job is to find housing and to inspect the housing yearly.” While the largest consideration for housing options is willingness to accept long term rental assistance, “it depends on the landlords and housing available at the time,” Richelle says.

Step Three: Once the Housing Specialists identify and secure housing, the Supportive Services Specialists work with the participant to maintain it. Megan says, “that can look different for every client. This can be simply transitioning into living inside of a home where you’re managing space, and keeping your items clean - what a lot of people may think are very basic living skills that some folks haven’t had the opportunity to do for a while. Or it could be something as intensive as trying to help someone into addiction treatment.”

Denise, the Program Manager, is responsible for making sure the team is running smoothly and cost-effectively. With a budget of over a million dollars, she stays on top of spending - that Homelink’s funding is used appropriately and completely. She also oversees the intake of referrals. “Basically, overseeing the ins and outs of what is going on every day.”

How have things changed due to COVID-19?

Richelle says her work has continued at a rate similar to pre-pandemic: **she has housed 18 program participants since transitioning to working remotely**. “I was wondering how working at home would be, but it has really been easier than what I thought,” she says. “It has its moments where it’s trying, but I’m finding a way to make it happen.” With context, it’s clear how impressive this number is - especially with most of the work now taking place over the phone. “I have over a hundred clients in the program, and I work with numerous landlords as well,” she says. “It’s been the same workload through COVID-19. The only difference is I’m not making in-person contact with the clients as much.”

Housing a participant is a multi-step process:

1. Identify available housing options
2. Turn in an application
3. Pay the security deposit
4. Personally inspect the unit
5. Prepare the participant for their move-in

SOAR:

SSI/SSDI
Outreach,
Access, and
Recovery

With the pandemic reducing in-person meetings to only absolute necessity, **Megan** is primarily working remotely. Many appointments are not happening - if they are, they’re over the phone. “It’s made me realize how much time I spend driving. Without that component I have a lot more time in my day.” That extra time has allowed her to do more of her “favorite thing”: **SOAR applications**. While extremely time-consuming (often over forty hours to complete), an approved SOAR application extends SSI/SSDI funding to a Homelink participant. This income reduces the amount of money VSH must spend on their rent. In the long term, the saved money means VSH can afford to house more folks. “It’s a ripple effect.”

Denise explains, “things that were a lot simpler are now more difficult.” Without the use of the office, “we’ve had to rethink our technology to make sure our staff have what they need to do their job.” For example, she had to buy her entire team printers for their homes. But even that had an additional complication: “Before, I could walk down the hall and ask Finance for a check, but now they’re only able to cut them once a week. It involves a lot of planning ahead.” With many agencies and providers now working remotely, previously simple processes are more complicated. “What used to be a quick call has now turned into calling, emailing. The turnaround time is much longer.” But the team has worked creatively to ensure participants are still served efficiently and carefully. For example, in the first few months they divided the city based on where team members lived, so team members have been working with folks who aren’t their clients. “You’re taking care of the folks closest to you.”

The Homelink team is a hugely important part of VSH’s work and success. **Last year, 97% of our Homelink program participants remained stably housed and did not return to homelessness.**

It’s not just the mission that makes Richelle proud to be part of VSH. She participated in the June roundtables VSH held on nationwide racial injustice. "As a person of color, it made me very proud to be a part of that

And the team's commitment to the work is evident. As Richelle says, **“My everything is housing homeless people. And I am really proud to be a part of VSH.”**

roundtable discussion and to go from that discussion to Allison deciding to make Juneteenth a paid holiday. I'm very proud to be at VSH.”



Richelle Richardson
Housing Specialist



Denise Bavaro
Program Manager



Megan Hanson
Supportive Services Specialist

Teammate shout-outs!

New certifications!



Tiffany Royall
Licensed Professional Counselor



Kamico Tracy
*IREM Residential Property
Manager Certification*



Artika Mourning
*IREM Residential Property
Manager Certification*



Aaron Alexander
*Selected to Leadership Metro Richmond's
Leadership Quest Class of 2021*



Elle Porfilio
Mission Advancement Summer Intern
Good luck with senior year, Elle!

[Donate Now!](#)

Virginia Supportive Housing | 804-788-6825 | www.virginiasupportivehousing.org

STAY CONNECTED

