

HOME AT LAST

THE JOURNEY TO PERMANENT HOUSING

It was love at first sight when Karen saw her charming new apartment for the first time. It was the perfect place to call home, and she was delighted by the large closets which the apartment had to offer.

She signed the paperwork, moved her belongings, and began to settle into her new home. Before long, Karen received a startling notice from the apartment complex, an eviction notice. In complete disbelief, Karen learned that she had been a victim of Section 8 fraud. Her "landlord", to whom she had been paying rent, was actually the tenant of record on the lease.

Section VII of Title 24 of the Code of Federal Regulations is a voucher program operated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, commonly known as section 8 assistance. The voucher program is designed to help low-income, elderly, and disabled people afford safe and sanitary housing. Karen had unknowingly been subleasing the apartment of a tenant receiving Section 8 assistance, therefore disqualifying the tenant from the program, and making her an unauthorized guest on the property.

"When the authorities found out, they gave me a deadline to move out. I applied to remain there, but I didn't make enough money. My lawyer gave me the name of ACCESS. I slept in my car for two days and then I came to the shelter," said Karen.

Karen arrived at ACCESS scared and unsure of where to turn.

"It was just a place to stay because I didn't have one, but then I met Denise, my case manager, and she began giving me apartments to look at," said Karen.

Due to poor credit history, Karen was turned down by numerous landlords before finding success with Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA). AMHA provides quality, affordable housing and serves as a platform to develop people, property, and community. Therefore, there are three requirements all applicants must meet to be eligible, for housing: pass a criminal background screening, pay all previous balances owed to AMHA, and meet HUD-established income limits. Those in need of housing can apply online and are placed on a waiting list. The wait for housing can take up to 3 years, but due to Karen's status as a shelter resident, she was able to advance through the list within months.

"The feeling I had when I learned I was getting an apartment," Karen stated, "I can't describe it. It was just a happy, happy moment. The first people I wanted to tell were the people at ACCESS. I told them before I told my own family. 'I've got an apartment, it's mine!'"

During her stay at ACCESS, Karen was eager to participate in the programming available to residents, including a financial literacy class where she learned how to budget and take control of her finances.

"To make a long story short, the people I met here, the staff, were the most wonderful people I have ever met. They were good to me, they never disrespected me. They were all extremely helpful, and I appreciate the treatment I got here," said Karen. "It was a humbling experience. I don't want to come back here to live here, but anything ACCESS ever needs or wants me to do, I'll do it."



A paper key, decorated on Karen's last day, hangs in the shelter. Each key represents a resident that has moved into permanent housing this year.

"The feeling I had when I learned I was getting an apartment, I can't describe it. It was just a happy, happy moment."




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Jackie's Corner

Our local community is very lucky to have a strong network of organizations that work together to provide services for people experiencing homelessness. The lead agency heading the charge is the Summit County Continuum of Care (SCCOC). Since the mid-90s, many housing, community, and government related agencies with the SCCOC have worked together to plan and deliver housing and related services by securing federal housing dollars for our community. The SCCOC was responsible for initiating the centralized intake system, which is now thriving in our community.

In 2021, the SCCOC became its own 501(c)(3). It continues to strategize and work with partner organizations to bring more than 5 million dollars for homelessness services into our community each year. ACCESS is proud to sit on multiple committees of the SCCOC and contribute to their mission of engaging organizations in a community-based process that works to end homelessness by addressing the underlying causes of homelessness, and lessening the negative impact of homelessness on individuals, families and communities for all individuals and families throughout Greater Akron.

COMING TOGETHER FOR GOOD

YOUTH IMPACT DAY & ANNUAL BREAKFAST

By Mary Williams, Director of Engagement

We are so pleased with the support that our community has shown for events this year!

We started strong in April with Youth Impact Day. The outpouring of support through sponsorships was inspiring, and we quickly reached a little over 200% of our modest, original goal! Our Platinum Sponsor, GPD Group, was so amazing to work with – from the original planning phases to the actual event when their volunteers worked with youth ages 8 through 12 to complete service projects around the shelter. Additionally, the youth learned about how to use their time, talents, treasure, and ties to better their community. The grown-ups who accompanied youth also learned more about the mission of ACCESS, and prepared dinners for the residents. It was so exciting to get the feedback that many of the kids have since initiated great conversations about philanthropy and the experience of homelessness with their adults.

On May 17, we gathered, once again, to celebrate the strides that ACCESS has made over the last year, at the Annual Breakfast.

Executive Director, Jackie Hemsworth, set a perfect tone with a quick review of what has come about since the last breakfast and how the organization plans to move forward in the years to come. Our special guest speaker, Dana Zedak of Victim's Assistance, touched on the six puzzle pieces to trauma informed care: collaboration and mutuality, peer support, trust and transparency, safety, empowerment, and diversity. (Trauma informed care, a core value of ACCESS, is such a fundamental understanding for every person and across every field that I would be remiss to not take this opportunity to add a plug to consider Victim's Assistance trainings for your organization.) The best part of the morning was seeing Breanna Wesson receive the Lynn M. Budnick Empowered Woman award! I don't think there was a dry eye in the house after her children ran up to join her on stage.

In conclusion, I offer my heartfelt "thanks". Thank you for the time, talent, treasure, and ties you share with us throughout the year. And mark your calendar for November 3, 4, and 5 when we will present The Jewelry Box.



DONATING TO CHARITY

Saving Money on Your Taxes

By Mark Seward, MBA, AIF
ACCESS Board Member

Are you taking distributions from your IRA? With passage of the Secure Act in 2020, the year you turn age 72 you must begin taking Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) each year from your Traditional IRAs and Employer Retirement Plans. If you are a non-spousal beneficiary of an IRA (after 1/1/2020), you must withdraw the entire amount of your account within 10 years.

Did you know you can reduce the income tax due on your Traditional IRA RMD withdrawals by making a direct contribution to charities like ACCESS.

As an example, if you are required to take an RMD of \$10,000 from your Traditional IRA this year and you are charitably inclined and were planning to give \$2,000 to ACCESS this year, you can avoid taxation on this \$2,000 contribution and only need to pay taxes on the remaining \$8,000. It is important to note that you cannot take ownership of the \$2,000 contribution to receive this tax break, the check must go directly from your financial provider to ACCESS.

This strategy has become even more valuable since recent legislation increased the Standard Deduction considerably, making it more difficult for individuals and households to benefit from Itemized Deductions (including charitable donations).

Please contact your CPA and financial advisor regarding these strategies.

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- Serve a meal
- Assist with childcare
- Sort donations
- Landscape & more!

PLEASE VISIT
access-shelter.org/volunteer

EQUIPPING WOMEN FOR SELF-ADVOCACY

COMMUNITY LEGAL AID & FAIR HOUSING

The mission of ACCESS focuses on three simple words: education, advocacy, and empowerment.

That second word, advocacy, is a hard one for many people. It can be thoroughly overwhelming to know, first, what action you need to fit the moment, and then to have the ability to articulate those needs to someone who can make any of the necessary changes. It can take years of practice.

But it is such an essential ability! That is why ACCESS partners with community organizations who can help provide residents an opportunity to develop and finetune their own inclination for advocacy. One such partner is Community Legal Aid, who lists "preserving the home" as one of their own priorities. Founded in 1952 as the Summit County Legal Aid Society Incorporated, and rechristened Community Legal Aid after

merging Western Reserve Legal Aid and Stark County Legal Aid Societies in 2000, the organization focuses on transforming the lives of those in poverty through legal advocacy to create a stronger community for all.

We also work with Fair Housing Contact Service, Inc., a fellow local, non-profit who addresses issues of housing discrimination. Taking its cues from the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the organization works to educate the public – particularly protected classes – about their rights under the Act and its Amendments.

Each month, residents have an opportunity to meet with representatives from these organizations, a vital service offered at no charge. The result for residents is far-reaching. Armed with the knowledge of how to be their own advocate supports in their housing search, and beyond.

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