

Walter tells his story

Page 2



Ability Housing advocates for system changes

Page 3



The Open Door

A PUBLICATION OF ABILITY HOUSING OF NORTHEAST FLORIDA

SPRING 2008

Fulfilling dreams, one new home at a time

Eight new homes on Byrnes and St. Augustine Roads constructed

Ability Housing has completed construction of four new homes on Byrnes Road and an additional four homes on St. Augustine Road.

“We are so excited to be able to offer accessible housing designed specifically for adults with disabilities wishing to live as roommates,” stated executive director Shannon Nazworth.

Each new home has two bedrooms with a private bath; the bedrooms are large enough to include a private sitting area.

“In the past, when we bought homes on the open market, it was very hard to retro-fit the homes to make them suitable for persons with physical disabilities. In addition, at the time the configuration was not ideal for adults living as roommates for an extended period. With these new homes all of our residents will have homes that meet their needs,” continued Nazworth.

These homes reflect the first homes addressing Ability Housing’s expanded mission. Half of the homes constructed will be reserved for Ability Housing’s traditional population, adults with developmental or acquired disabilities. The other half of the homes will be available to adults with other disabilities.

“I enjoy lease signings with residents from our traditional population; however, somehow with these particular new tenants (from the expanded mission), it has been a distinctive experience,” stated operations director Sarah Lagos.



A new home on Byrnes Road

“Perhaps it was because of the multitude of phone calls and walk-ins we have been receiving from people in desperate situations looking for housing as they face homelessness. Knowing how many times we’ve had to refer distressed individuals elsewhere wondering if it was going to work out for them, even with our new homes available. It has made me realize the scope of need right here in our city. It may seem trivial to some but what really impacted me was when a new resident asked at the lease signing if she could move in that day. I said absolutely and got the keys to her new home. Her case worker said she will get a voucher to use towards furniture but she won’t have it today. Our new resident said it didn’t matter because she’d sleep on the floor...anything is better than sleeping on the streets.” concluded Ms. Lagos.

Special thanks to Mark N. Lamoureux of CPH Engineers, Inc. for their donation of engineering services; and to SEMCO (Southeastern Metals Manufacturing Company, Inc.) for their donation of a metal roof.

Ability Housing is so pleased to begin fulfilling its revised mission of creating quality housing options for all low-income adults with a disability.



Wesley and Jan visit the Ability Housing offices to sign their lease



Robert signs his lease in his new home



ABILITY HOUSING
OF NORTHEAST FLORIDA

126 West Adams Street, Suite 502
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

Please note our address and contact information.

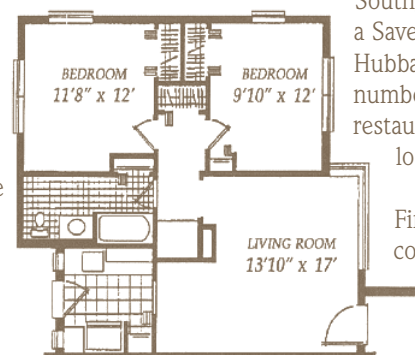
Also, please check out our website at www.abilityhousing.org

Governor Crist Appoints Ability Housing Executive Director to the State's Affordable Housing Study Commission. Due to her efforts advocating for system changes through our community, Gov. Crist has appointed Shannon Nazworth to the state's AHSC.

Mayfair Village now part of Ability Housing

Ability Housing is excited to announce that we have purchased Mayfair Village Apartments, an 83-unit apartment complex on Jacksonville's Southside.

The property was acquired on January 4, 2008 and is located at the intersection of Mayfair Village Road and Beach Boulevard, in the St. Nicholas area. All 83 units are two bedroom, one bath apartments.



“Right in front of the property is a JTA bus stop; across Beach Boulevard, in the Southgate Plaza Shopping Center, is a Save-A-Lot grocery store, the Hubbard House Thrift Store, and a number of other businesses and restaurants. It is a wonderful location.”

Financing for the property was a combination of funding from Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and Bank of America.

Ability Housing thanks LISC, our Real Estate Committee, Jeff Marks of Ryan & Marks Attorneys and Sally Suslak of Atkinson Realty Group for their assistance in this exciting accomplishment.

Mayfair Village Apartments
1787 Mayfair Village Road,
Jacksonville, Florida 32207
904.398.6814 – Phone
904.399.8487 – Fax
Catalina Woodin, Property Manager



“We are so excited about Mayfair Village”, stated executive director Shannon Nazworth.

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT # 1773
JACKSONVILLE, FL



"Report to the Community" available

Copies of Ability Housing's "Report to the Community" are available on our website www.abilityhousing.org.

Included in the report is information about Ability Housing programs CASA and Villages, as well as the persons we serve and the savings we provide the community. One (of many) interesting facts is that since 1999 the CASA program is estimated to have saved the state over \$4.5million in Medicaid expenditures.

Providing affordable housing linked with services is cost effective. It also provides better outcomes. According to The Agency for Persons With Disabilities, personal outcomes are 50% greater when services are provided in the community.

Through CASA, Ability Housing now has 29 homes, providing quality housing to 60 adults with disabilities. The average income of the CASA residents is less than \$11,000 annually.

To continue expanding the housing options provided to those we serve we need your support. Please donate to Ability Housing so that we may continue to maintain our homes in such high quality while providing rents to persons with extremely limited incomes.

A resident's story: meet Walter

Walter, 43, was born and raised in Jacksonville, Florida. He is from a large family, almost all of which live in Jacksonville. He has five siblings on his father's side and five siblings on his mother's side. He has nine nephews and one niece, whom he wishes he could spend more time with.

Walter works as a greeter at Alltel Stadium during Jaguar games and other events. "No matter how they come in and look at you, you gotta keep that smile on your face," he says. "I might wave or I might throw 'em a thumb." Walter likes having the opportunity to meet a lot of people. At times though, he wishes people would be more patient with those who have disabilities. "Just being able to talk to me and open themselves up to get to know me," he says, "Don't worry about offending me."

Walter has been a member of the Mayor's Disability Council for the last couple of years. "I just became an honorary member," he states. He works with the council on issues regarding disabilities, recreation, transportation and marketing. He has also been involved as a counselor at the NAS Jax Youth Activities Center. "I want to know I made a difference in the community. Sometimes that's hard to do."

Walter would like to be remembered as fun, outgoing and as someone who tried to love everybody. "My brother and my mama always say, 'Walter you don't see no bad in anybody; you always see the good.'"

When asked if he thought life was fair Walter

states, "No, but you got to live up what you got. As I grew up I found out I had to do more stuff myself. I look in the mirror and say 'What did you do yesterday that you could do better today?'" What he likes most about himself is that he is true. "I'm basically my own loving self," he says. "To me I don't have any limitations. If I got 'em, I don't know where they're at."

Walter has been with Ability Housing since 2000, when he was first referred to the program by Grove House Supportive Services. Before Ability Housing, Walter had always lived with his mother.

The first CASA home Walter lived in was located on the Westside. He had three different roommates while living there. "I'm a friendly person," he says. While Walter has made friends with all of his roommates past and present, he still says, "There are certain things that you tolerate and things you don't tolerate." His advice for anyone living with a roommate is to, "Be patient with people, because you never know what their situation is."

In 2001, Walter left the program because he was getting married and the couple wanted to live together elsewhere. Walter says that his marriage was a big step for him. It's the thing he is most proud of. He had been engaged previously but that particular relationship had ended before marriage. Then he met his future wife. They knew each other for about a year before they were married. The marriage lasted about three and a half years. "I don't regret it 'cause it was just a learning



Walter enjoys the sun outside his home

experience for me. Now I know I can do it," he says.

In March 2005, after he and his wife had separated, Walter applied to the CASA program again. He signed a new lease in August of the same year and moved into a CASA home, this time on the Southside. He currently lives there with one roommate. Walter says the thing he likes most about his current house is all the space. The living room/dining room area has a vaulted ceiling. The house also has a garage, a screened porch and a fenced backyard.

Walter has a supportive living coach who helps him with his banking and other life issues. They have been working together since July/August 2007. "We just clicked," he says. He also has a personal care assistant who takes care of meals and bathing. Walter enjoys reading mysteries and biographies of people with disabilities, such as Helen Keller. "That's something I've always wanted to do," he says, "write my biography."

Recognizing our donors

Ability Housing wishes to express its gratitude to the following individuals and organizations that have contributed to the support of our mission since the beginning of fiscal year 2007:

Principal Benefactors (\$50,000+)
Department of Children and Families,
Office on Homelessness
LISC Jacksonville
Matovina & Company

Major Benefactors (\$25,000-\$49,999)
Wachovia Foundation
Washington Mutual

Major Sponsors (\$2,500-\$9,999)
Bank of America
EverBank of Florida
Jacksonville Light Bulb Delivery
JaxREIA
Mr. & Mrs. Thomas May
Mr. & Mrs. Davis McCarty

Sponsors (\$1,000-\$2,499)
Boeing Corporation
Michael & Pepi Kahn Family Foundation,
donated in memory of Mr. Bill Sommers
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Jacobs
Mr. & Mrs. Frank Williams

Members (\$500-\$999)
Rhino Harbor LLC
Mr. & Mrs. George Parandes
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Roach
Ms. Sally Suslak
Ms. Leila Vance

Contributor (\$250-\$499)
Mr. & Mrs. Paul Moore

Donors (\$100-\$249)
Mr. Michael Cochran
Mr. & Mrs. Hal Lamm
Mr. & Mrs. Leon Peavy
Ms. Victoria Rath
Mr. Duncan Stout
Mr. Max Zahn

By investing in Ability Housing these donors have:

- Provided 20 CASA residents with reduced rent for the entire year
- Helped us build 8 homes
- Helped us prepare to acquire an 83-unit apartment complex
- Increased Ability Housing's capacity to provide quality affordable housing. Since 2004 we have increased the number of housing units we provide by 750%!

Ability Housing advocates for state & national system changes

No matter how hard our staff and volunteers work, Ability Housing will never be able to address all of the housing needs of low income adults with disabilities.

Therefore, Ability Housing continues advocating for systems changes which will benefit adults with disabilities wishing to live independently in the community.

Ability Housing executive director Shannon Nazworth has been re-elected to chair the Florida Supportive Housing Coalition. Supportive Housing is affordable housing linked with support services of the resident's choice.

In 2007 Ms. Nazworth chaired a statewide committee which developed a five-year strategic plan to increase the production of supportive housing. The plan is titled Common Sense.

Among the committee members were numerous stakeholders and representatives

of many state agencies. Among the state agencies participating on the committee were individuals from Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Department of Children and Families, Department of Health, and Florida Housing Finance Corporation.

The goals of Common Sense are:

- Develop supportive housing units commensurate with need
- Create a statewide rental assistance program
- Modify service delivery systems to be person-centered
- Effectively coordinate service delivery and housing systems
- Increase the public's understanding of the benefits of supportive housing.

Copies of the plan are available on Ability Housing's website, www.abilityhousing.org

Meeting the need

The Emergency Services and Homeless Coalition of Jacksonville has recently released information on homelessness in our community. Since 2000, Duval and Clay Counties have seen an 82% increase in the rate of homelessness. There are now over 17,000 homeless persons in our community. The percentage of those that remain homeless for more than a year has increased 73% since 2004, to nearly half of all homeless individuals surveyed.

Fifty percent of the homeless have a job, 24% have served in the active military and nearly three-quarters have lived in the Jacksonville community for over a year.

The majority of the homeless have a disability. Of those with a disability, 8.7% have HIV or AIDS, 22.5% are developmentally disabled, 46.9% have a substance abuse, 34.9% have a mental illness and 55.8% have a physical disability.

The primary cause for homelessness is a lack of affordable housing.

"The perception is that people who are homeless are drug and alcohol abusers. It's not so much a matter of abuse, mental illness or disability. The great majority of persons with such conditions do not become homeless," states Ability Housing board member Michael Cochran.

"Homelessness is about not having the resources or income to pay for housing," he continues. Mr. Cochran speaks with personal knowledge; he is the Vice President of Healthcare Services at the IM Sulzbacher Center for the Homeless.

Ability Housing is the only housing agency in our community with the focus of providing permanent housing solutions to these individuals and families in need.