



SPOTLIGHT

Holiday Edition

www.dignityhousing.org

Fall 2008, Volume 27

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Future Homes tenant Ms. Puckett buys home! Read more about Ms. Puckett and Future Homes on page 2.



BEYOND STRUGGLE THERE IS HOPE



Now the trumpet summons us again, not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need, not as a call to battle, though embattled we are, but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle year in and year out, 'rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation', a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself. –

[John Fitzgerald Kennedy](#)

The year 2008 has been indeed tumultuous and marked by intense political campaigning for the presidency, escalating unemployment, record-level mortgage foreclosures, and concerns about violent crimes in urban centers. The impact of the national and international economic downturn and schism led to a Wall Street bailout of monumental proportions, yet agencies like Dignity Housing continue to struggle to help families and individuals escape poverty. Through it all, we remain steadfast in our work and commitment to restore hope and end homelessness.

Despite discouraging developments and trends, the Dignity program has yielded a number of victories that truly sustain hope. Since 1988, two thousand formerly homeless Dignity families have moved beyond our program to homeownership, private market rentals, or other subsidized permanent housing options with a reduced dependency on supportive services.

Nearly half of our adult tenant population is employed and a significant percentage are enrolled in vocational and education programs—from GED preparation to trade schools, and Associate and Bachelor degree programs.

With adequate resources and supports, mentoring, case management, advocacy, structure, and a fighting spirit, these families can and do move from despair and homelessness to hope, self-sufficiency, and dignity.

Some of our victories are featured in this issue of **Spotlight**. These include Ms.

Puckett's successful completion of our *Future Homes Program*. She purchased her home in August 2008. Puckett is well employed, saved diligently for her down payment, passed the scrutiny of an increasingly tight mortgage credit market and passed on hope to her children.

Children in Dignity's After-School Program progressed academically. Also, Dignity's Drumline engaged our children in an exciting array of practice and performance opportunities in Brazilian percussion music.

Our organization continues to collaborate with a number of other agencies to strengthen service supports and better leverage modest resources.

However, doing more with less and sustaining program efforts has grown increasingly difficult. We can and will move beyond struggle, but only with consistent help from our supporters. Even as economic conditions force all of us to individually tighten our belts, we must not tighten our hearts or give short shrift to important, charitable commitments. Your contributions to Dignity, no matter the size or amount, make a difference in the lives of needy families and individuals.

Alicia Christian
Executive Director

The Spotlight is on...

K. Puckett

Khadijah Puckett never had anything in life handed to her on a silver platter, but that has not stopped her yet. Growing up in Philadelphia Housing Authority Developments, Ms. Puckett witnessed firsthand the effects alcohol, drugs, and an abusive relationship had on her family. "My mom always took care of us and wanted to give us something better, sometimes she just didn't know how," said Ms. Puckett.

Without the presence of a father in her home, Ms. Puckett says she developed low expectations for other men involved in her life. After a series of unhealthy relationships, Ms. Puckett realized something had to change. "I had put up with enough abuse, both physical and mental. I was afraid for my kids and most importantly I realized I wanted them to have a better life than I did." She left the relationship and went to an emergency shelter. "I was only in that first shelter for four months, but during that time I got my mind and my sanity back. I learned how to really

"This is the first house I've ever lived in. I want this house!"



receive peace from God," said Puckett.

Committed to reclaiming her life, after a few short months in the emergency shelter Ms. Puckett was accepted into Sojourner House, a transitional housing organization providing support to domestic violence victims and their families. At Sojourner House, Ms. Puckett recalls that for the first time in her life she finally felt like someone was looking out for her. "We had 9 pm curfews at first and a lot of the other women would complain about it, but I kept thinking this isn't so bad- I don't have anywhere else to be -that I really should be, anyways," said Puckett. She also credits weekly women's meetings as a huge part of her success, "every week we would share our stories, we'd cry together, but mostly we grew together." While there Ms. Puckett continued saving, as she had begun to do for the first time after entering the shelter, and obtained her CDL license through her Welfare to Work program.

As her two years at Sojourner House began to come to a close, Ms. Puckett and her case worker searched diligently for further housing options. They came upon Dignity Housing's Future Homes Program, into which Puckett was accepted in October 2006. The Future Homes Program is a joint effort established in 2006 between Dignity Housing and the Philadelphia Office of Supportive Housing with the goal of placing formerly homeless families in homes that they will purchase from Dignity Housing at the end of the 18-24 month program.

Upon her acceptance into the

Dignity Housing program, Ms. Puckett began taking huge steps toward becoming a first-time homeowner. She started paying utility bills for the first time, opened a credit card account, and applied for direct deposit with her employer. Ms. Puckett said, "Before I came to Dignity, I always thought that having a credit card or getting direct deposit was only for people with a lot of money. The staff really uplifted me and made me realize I too can do any of those things." Throughout this period, Ms. Puckett continued to work at Avis Car Rental at the Philadelphia Airport and received a promotion that resulted in daytime shifts. She saved diligently as part of her monthly savings plan, and accumulated over \$5,000 during her year and a half in the program. "I'm one of those people that if I need to do more just tell me and I'll certainly try as hard as I can to get there." said Ms. Puckett.

On Friday, August 29th, while many of us were headed away for the Labor Day Holiday weekend, Ms. Puckett achieved her goal of coming home. With Dignity staff members by her side, Puckett signed the mortgage on a three bedroom home in a quiet alcove in Northwest Philadelphia. Always looking toward the future, Ms. Puckett hopes to enroll in adult education classes to help obtain her GED. She continues to work at Avis Car Rental, and is also looking forward to learning how to garden and decorate her new home. "I want to keep this stability up for my family. We've moved around so much before it's just nice for my kids to have a real home this time."

"The Future Homes Program is a joint effort established in 2006 between Dignity Housing and the Philadelphia Office of Supportive Housing with the goal of placing formerly homeless families in homes that they will purchase from Dignity Housing at the end of the 18-24 month program."

Back to School

Fall is a time of transition for everyone, and Dignity Housing is no exception. When summer ends, we must adjust to many changes and going “back to school” is a part of this. For Dignity, it meant new developments for our After School Program and its students as well as new developments for adult tenants involved in furthering their education.



Deile and students from the ASP.
When we visited the ASP to check in with Lea, the students were eager to introduce their new teacher...and to try out our camera. This photo was taken by an ASP student during our visit.

Willkommen

For the second year, Dignity’s After School Program will have the help of an intern from the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (ARSP). This year’s intern, Lea Deile, will spend a year in Philadelphia working as an assistant with Dignity’s After School Program.

Along with the valuable daily support to the ASP provided by the intern, Lea will pick up where last year’s intern left off by teaching the students German. The ARSP program sends German volunteers to the United States to work in projects for peace and social justice for reconciliation with the Jewish and other minority communities.



Ivyn Garner was one of several students recognized for being on their school’s honor roll in the 2007-08 school year during Dignity Housing’s Tenant Recognition Reception. Read more about the reception as well as the tenants who were recognized on page 7.

Zoo Picnic

Dignity families wrapped up summer 2008 activities with the annual Tenant Summer Picnic held at the Philadelphia Zoo on August 9th. Tenants enjoyed box lunches, admission to the zoo, face painting and door prizes at the Family Fun Picnic.



GED Classes Begin

As required in our grant from the Pew Foundation, Dignity began to offer on-site GED classes this fall. For tenants interested in pursuing their GED, classes led by Dignity’s Michael Stevens meet Tuesdays and Thursdays at Dignity’s main office. The session that began in late September will end the week of Thanksgiving. In February 2009, classes will resume for a new cohort of students.

Need for Incentives...

Dignity is currently seeking your support to gather items that can be used to develop an “Incentive Store” for those participating in our GED classes and workforce development program. Items might include gift cards or gift certificates to hair salons, nail salons or restaurants, new household items, new urban-themed books for adults, or tickets to sporting events, museums, or plays. If you would like to donate such an item or have information about how they can be obtained, please contact Jordan Butler at jbutler@dignityhousing.org or 215-713-0960 ext 204.

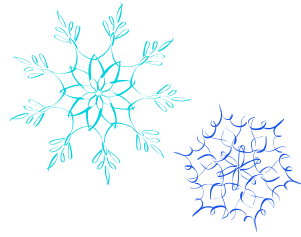


In honor of her birthday, members of Deputy Director Beverly Roberts’ Girlfriends Club donated backpacks to students in Dignity’s After School Program.

Dear Donors,

As 2008 draws to a close, we would like to extend a special thank you to all of our supporters for your continuing generosity. Over the last twenty years, more than 2,000 low-income individuals and families have been helped by the Dignity Housing program.

The Holiday season is generally marked by compassion, the spirit of giving and recognition of the importance of friends and family. Though these are economically challenging times, we hope that each and every supporter will make Dignity Housing your charitable priority this year.



Home for the Holidays Adopt a Home/Adopt a Family

During this Holiday Season...Help renovate one of Dignity's vacant properties into a home for one of the 5 new tenant applicant families recently accepted into the Dignity Housing program.

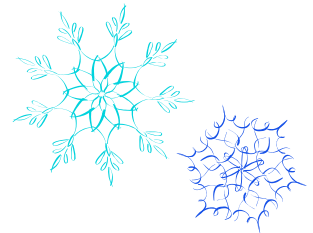
For these families, beginning this new stage of life and moving toward self sufficiency is a dream come true.

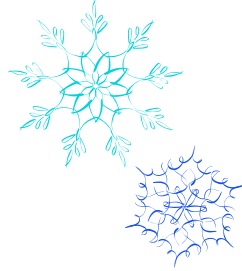
For Dignity Housing, the cost to refurbish a home in these precarious economic times is daunting -- often, taking several months to raise. Typically, preparation of a home or apartment for new tenant families requires painting, new flooring, appliances, repairs to bathrooms and kitchens.

For these reasons, please consider "adopting" one of our homes.

When you "adopt a home" you will be matched with one of the 5 families and your donation will go directly to meet their specific needs.

We estimate the average cost of adopting a home to be \$5,000 (cost of renovation). Please contact Jordan Butler at jbutler@dignityhousing.org, or (215) 713-0960 for more information about this effort, the families involved and their needs.





Board of Directors

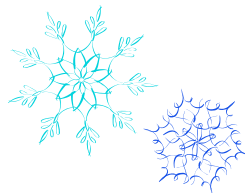
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Mary Klein	Zachariah B. Hughes
Marjorie Shiekman, Esq.	Raymond Wellbank

**Season's Greetings
from Dignity Housing**

We wish you a joyous holiday season and a new year of peace and hope.

Staff

Alicia Christian	Tara Young	Ari Merretazon
Beverly Roberts	Mark Ballard	Karen Motley
Vanessa Tercero	Tiffany Cooper	Celeste Lewis
Sushil Sansal	Casi Scully	Karen Barker
Sarah Janicki	Michael Stevens	Angel Perez
Valerie Peebles	Rachel Caesar	Cleo Greene
Albert Myarick	Robin Walker	Jordan Butler
		SaBrina Whetstone



Advocacy and Action

Each night in the city of Philadelphia more than 3,000 people sleep in shelters and mothers with children constitute half of this population. The numbers of chronically homeless individuals, sleeping on the street have been as low as 100 in recent years, but we are beginning to see an increase as we head into the New Year. Clearly, more resources and initiatives are required to truly achieve the goals of Philadelphia's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness.

Policy and Advocacy Update

Dignity Housing is an active participant in two coalitions that promote equitable supports and resources for homeless families.

- **The Family Services Providers Network (FSPN)** includes about 30 local service providers. The network is currently organizing a Forum on Education for Homeless Children and Youth to be held on Friday, November 4, 2008. The forum will highlight challenges confronting Homeless Children and Youth in Philadelphia, as well as the FSPN Children's Committee efforts to develop best practices in addressing the needs of homeless children and youth. Confirmed Speakers are: Ms. Barbara Duffield, Policy Director for the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, and Mr. Sheldon Winnick, Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Homeless Children's Initiative. Representatives from the State, City and the School District of Philadelphia have also been invited.
- **The Advocacy Coalition for Homeless Families (ACHF)** is a multi-state coalition that includes local, regional and national service providers from Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Washington D.C. ACHF members work on deliberations, appeals, action alerts, and development of position papers to sustain and promote federal and state policies for homeless families.

A key focus of ACHF members is the **HEARTH Bill (H.R. 840) – the reauthorization of McKinney Funds**: The HEARTH Act is a strong legislation that would re-write the rules governing HUD's McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant programs, better enabling urban, suburban, and rural communities to end homelessness. Recently, the House Financial Services Committee amended and approved H.R. 840, **now known as HR 7221** based on the negotiated managers amendment between the U.S. House and Senate. The new bill does not change the definition of homeless to include more families, but it provides 10% discretionary funding for short term aid to families experiencing homelessness. Recent updates indicate that HR 7221 will either be voted on and pass before the November election or it will have to wait until after November 4th or until January 2009.

The Economic Crisis

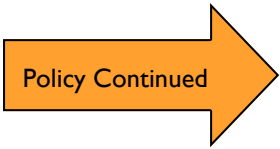
In the midst of our national economic downturn and escalating unemployment, Dignity Housing anticipates an increased volume of inquiries and requests for housing and other assistance as low-income renters lose their jobs and homeowners face foreclosure. Residents currently enrolled in our program who have entry level, new positions are more at-risk for lay-offs and freezes. Losing their jobs would negatively impact the achievement of their goals and movement toward stable and permanent affordable housing. Dignity Social Service Staff will be monitoring the situation and will keep our readers informed of any new developments.



Policy Corner

By
Vanessa Tercero,
Policy Analyst

Additional information on the initiatives cited here can be found on Dignity's website, www.dignityhousing.org, click on Policy and Advocacy.



Vote for Homes!

This year's "Vote For Homes!" Campaign – 2008 Election activities are focused on training volunteers to help voters address the following issue:

- Voter Protection
- Transportation
- Assistance in the Voting Booth
- ID Issues Impacting Voters

Vote For Homes! is a NONPARTISAN coalition registering and mobilizing thousands of people who are homeless or living on low incomes and helping them get to the polls on Election Day. The Vote For Homes! Coalition has registered 12,800 homeless, ex-offenders, and low-income people since 1999.

Dignity's Social Service staff will help with voter registration, and the Resource Assistant will meet next month with the Voters Coalition to discuss and coordinate transportation assistance. Dignity residents and emergency housing residents who are unable to get to the polls will be transported via Dignity's van.

Tenant Recognition Reception

On Friday, October 17th, Dignity held its annual Tenant Recognition Reception at the University of Pennsylvania. Board members, staff, friends, Dignity tenants and their families attended the event which included a performance by Dignity's Drumline, a dinner and recognition ceremony.

Current tenants were honored for achievements in education, employment/career, income management, and family stability. Recent graduates, alumni and youth were also

honored for their achievements and contributions.

Dignity alum Coretta Heath served as Keynote Speaker. Ms. Heath shared insights from her time as a Dignity resident and employee as well as the career and educational goals she has achieved since.

Each year, the reception is an opportunity for Dignity's staff and tenants to celebrate and recharge, a sentiment reflected in Executive Director Alicia Christian's closing remarks.



Outstanding Achievement in Education recipient Naderah Ensley (left), alumna Esther Bowens, and alumna and Keynote Speaker Coretta Heath. Ensley received her Master's Degree in Behavioral Health in May 2008. Additional Outstanding Achievement Awards went to Radiyah Bankhead (Employment & Career), Arisleida Peguero (Income Management), and Eva Davis-Williams (Family Stability).

Save the Date Dignity Housing's 4th Annual Jazz Buffet March 22, 2009

4-7pm

Commodore Barry Club
6815 Emlen Street
Philadelphia, PA 19119

Help us to make this year's Jazz Buffet bigger and better than ever.



Mary Brown, right, with case manager Casi Scully. Brown and Khadijah Puckett received the Tenant of the Year Award.

The Committee for Dignity and Fairness for
the Homeless Housing Development, Inc.
5221 Germantown Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19144
www.dignityhousing.org
215-713-0960
215-713-0968 (fax)

If you are interested in learning more about Dignity Housing or would like to make a contribution, please contact Beverly Roberts, Deputy Director/Director of Development at 215.713.0960.

Dignity Housing is a member of the United Way of SEPA Donor Choice Program.

Our UWSEPA donation number is 02338.

Remember Dignity Housing in your will.

To make a bequest to Dignity Housing, the following language will be helpful to your lawyer.

I give, devise, and bequeath to the Committee for Dignity and Fairness for the Homeless Housing Development, Inc. (Dignity Housing) the sum of _____ (or otherwise describe the gift or specify a percentage of the estate).

Alicia Christian,
Executive Director

Beverly Roberts,
Deputy Director

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Deborah McMillan, Chair

Directors
Jill Felix Colton
Mary Klein
Marjorie Shiekman, Esq.
Eric L. Scherling, Esq.
Edward Mensah
Zachariah B. Hughes
Raymond Wellbank

About Dignity Housing

Mission: Dignity Housing is a non-profit corporation established by formerly homeless people **to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty confronting low-income and homeless families and individuals in Philadelphia.** Dignity Housing promotes client self-sufficiency by providing affordable rental housing with individualized social services, homeownership opportunities, housing placement services, money management services, workforce development, and assistance in pursuit of educational objectives. Established in 1988, Dignity Housing is unique in that it was founded and guided by homeless and formerly homeless individuals. It was the first such agency in the nation. To date, Dignity Housing has shepherded the acquisition and development of 160 scattered site units throughout Philadelphia, and has helped nearly 2,000 adults and children to attain individual goals for self-improvement and independence.

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