



Wesley Housing

the door to brighter futures



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eNEWS

Join Us in Service to Our Neighbors in Need



On Saturday, September 10th, join in the **Acacia Federal Rock & Stroll**, a community service and fundraising event to end homelessness.

For the first time, Wesley Housing will partner with five other homeless service providers—Alive!, The Arlington-Alexandria Coalition for the Homeless (AACH), Carpenter’s Shelter, Community Lodgings, and New Hope Housing—to host the event on Service Saturday, a time of national service.

Held at Cameron Run Park in Alexandria, this 12:30pm event will include a **Help the Homeless Mini-Walk**, a BBQ lunch, music by the local bluegrass sensation “Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen (listen)”, fun games for kids of all ages, and prizes.

Bring your family, friends, youth group, faith community, and co-workers to join this afternoon of volunteerism and fun. The easy stroll to the lake is just right for all ages and is wheelchair accessible.

Thank you to Acacia Federal for their support of this event.

For more information of how your company can get involved, please contact Virginia at vpatton@whdc.org or call 703.642.3830 ext. 222.

Join with millions of Americans who will be honoring the 9/11 heroes, victims, and survivors with a time of service and hope. Make a difference—help us end homelessness.

Registration—\$20 for youth to age 24; \$30 for adults—includes picnic lunch, entertainment, Walk registration, and T-shirt.

We appreciate it if you will register in advance so we know how many folks to expect.

To Register for Rock & Stroll and the Mini-Walk, go to www.wesleyhousing.org/rockstrollWesleyRegistration.htm

One in Five Renters Pay Over Half Their Income for Rent

Findings from the 2011 Rental Housing Report from the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies

The dream of financial peace of mind for many families is crumbling amidst the storm of escalating rents and utilities, stagnant wages, and spiraling costs for transportation, food, and healthcare. One in five renters in the DC metro area is paying more than half of their pre-tax income on rent and utilities and nearly half are paying more than 30%. As a result, fewer resources are left over for necessities and education that can improve the family’s opportunities. Quality childcare, nutritious meals, and required healthcare are often abandoned in order to avoid homelessness.

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Findings from the 2011 Rental Housing Report from the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies

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The facts are disheartening. One in five renters in the Washington DC metro area is paying more than half of their pre-tax income on rent and utilities, according to America's Rental Housing: Meeting Challenges, Building on Opportunities, a 2011 report from the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies. That's a 35% increase since 2000. The number of renters increased locally by 12% between 2007 and 2009 and as demand for rental units swelled, rents climbed 5 percent in this region.

47%
renters in
Northern Virginia
are paying
more than 30%
of their pre-
tax household
income for
rent and utilities

need is for wage earners including single parent families and frontline service workers, craftsmen, health workers, administrative professionals, gardeners, and educators.

Middle income families are also burdened with rising housing costs. "The affordability problem are increasingly affecting Americans of more than just modest means," said Eric Blesky, author of the study. The number of middle-income renters paying 30-50 percent of

their income for rent and utilities has increased 23 percent in just two years.

Adding to the dilemma, little new supply of affordable housing units and an increase in new renters from foreclosed homeowners and 20-somethings entering the market are pushing vacancy rates lower and rents even higher. The study asserts, "The shortage of affordable, adequate rental units for low-income households is increasingly acute."

As President Obama said, "Without a safe, affordable place to live, it is much tougher to maintain good health, get a good education, or reach your full potential."

We are diminished as a community when we fail to provide safe, affordable housing. Wesley Housing Development Corporation is working to develop, preserve, and maintain affordable housing in Northern Virginia.

Marika is just one example of someone who has benefited from Wesley Housing's affordable housing and no-cost community services. As a high school dropout, she knew she and her baby had limited prospects. After months waiting on the housing list, she moved into an apartment at Whitefield Commons. With the skills and confidence she gained in a

21%
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free computer class provided by Wesley Housing, Marika completed her GED and went on to earn a nursing degree. "I couldn't have done it without a community

where I could afford to live while studying and working towards a new life," Marika thankfully explained. "I could not have done it without the stepping stone of affordable housing, plain and simple."

Resident Story: From Fear of Technology to Computer Competence—Janet's Story

A simple announcement on the bulletin board opened a door that has changed the path for a Wesley Housing resident from Cameroon.

Janet, a vivacious mother of a nine-year old, worked as a home health aide. Her patients were often elderly, but occasionally, she cared for a special needs child. She loved the feeling of bringing a smile to the face of the boy with autism and she knew she could do more. Janet often dreamed of learning about childhood development and working full-time with children. She imagined herself as a teacher in the Head Start program, the education program for low-income children and their families. She would always envision creating and presenting developmentally appropriate learning activities for infants and toddlers. *continued on page three*



From Fear of Technology to Computer Competence—Janet's Story (continued)

But there was an obstacle to her dream. She was terrified of computers. Janet knew that she must be able to competently use a computer to complete the coursework necessary to get the credential required by Head Start but she didn't even know how to type, let alone copy, paste, or create a lesson plan document.

And that's when a flyer on the bulletin board in Janet's community made all the difference. The flyer announced a free computer training class at Wexford Manor open to all Wesley Housing residents. Janet signed up for the Falls Church class and was thrilled by the training she received. "I couldn't

believe the class was free. I could not have afforded to pay for a class," Janet recounted. "God knew I needed to start from scratch and I needed lots of attention. I was scared just to touch the keys."

Janet credits the skill of computer instructor Charles Dean and Jennifer from the computer center for helping her become competent and confident on the computer. "Wesley Housing has helped me in so many ways. It's not just a safe, affordable place to live." Janet goes on with great enthusiasm, "The staff and my neighbors are great. Wesley Housing's Shereena Rodney helped me to get registered for school

and she always listened and answered my questions. My neighbor Michael has also been a huge help." When her very first class assignment called for a powerpoint presentation, she knew she was up for the task.

Janet just completed her first semester towards the Infant and Toddler Care Career Studies Certificate at Northern Virginia Community College. With one "B," and four "A"s, Janet's grades prove she is on the road to achieving her dream. In December, she expects to finish the coursework that will meet the HeadStart credentialing requirements and she will take the final step toward realizing her dream.

Property Update: A New Life for an Old House Brings Second Chances for Women

Women represent more than 46 percent of compulsive gamblers, 15 times more than just ten years ago. Lives deteriorate as a result and many land in jail. This is the story of Lisa, a lawyer who found herself with no place to live following 18 months in jail and the completion of the Guest House re-entry program. Wesley Housing's newest community fills the missing link with affordable rental housing. That gives women non-violent ex-offenders like Lisa the opportunity to take the next step in re-establishing their lives.

Lisa grew up reading and studying. It was her strategy for coping with a mother who battled mental illness, a father who was addicted to gambling, and the challenge of a developmentally delayed brother.

Following the completion of her undergraduate and masters degrees, she went on to study law. After graduation she worked as a clerk for a federal judge and then served in

the general counsel's office for the Securities and Exchange Commission. Lisa's love for antiques had grown over the years and she ultimately left the practice of law in order to open her own business buying and selling antiques.

As success came in her professional life, her personal life deteriorated as she battled depression and, like her father, started to gamble. She soon found herself at the casinos at least once a month and began shoplifting from other antique vendors. As her life spiraled downward, she landed in jail after being convicted of shoplifting \$30,000 in merchandise.

During Lisa's 18-month stay in jail, she thought a lot about how she wanted to turn her life around. Upon her release, she was accepted into the Friends of

"Friends of Guest House provides you with a place to land while you're trying to get your feet back on the ground"

Guest House re-entry program and lived there for the next six months.

Friends of Guest House provides temporary housing and services to women recently released from jail or prison who need support to successfully transition back into their communities. "The Friends of Guest House provides you with a place to land while you're trying to get your feet back on the ground," says Lisa. Residents have the opportunity to learn life skills, access social services, look for jobs, and search for housing—

what many say is the hardest part of their re-entry experience. "Finding a job and housing are the two most difficult things when you get out of jail." Lisa goes on to say, "When I applied for apartments, I was rejected because I had come out of jail." The leasing market tends to screen out potential tenants with criminal backgrounds.

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New Life for Old House Brings Second Chances for Women (continued)

Because the program is limited to six-months, Lisa graduated from Guest House but was still without an apartment. She lived with a friend for a few months and then moved into a shelter. Her circumstances improved with the opening of the Guest House satellite house.

The North Trenton Street house in Arlington is owned by Wesley Housing and had been vacant pending re-

development. With \$27,000 in assistance from Arlington County Community Development Block Grant funds, and rental assistance to qualified tenants from Arlington County's Housing Grant Program, the renovated home can accommodate up to four Guest House graduates. Wesley Housing makes financial contributions to the repair and maintenance costs of the home and Guest House links the women to

community resources, employment, training, and other necessary services for further self-sufficiency.

Lisa was the first woman to move into the house and recognizes she is blessed to have a safe, quiet place to live. "This house is desperately needed. It gives me the opportunity to work on references for renting in the future. I am so grateful," she says with a contented smile.

Kids in Action



Boys and girls at the [Lincolnia Community Center](#) got their hands dirty planting seeds and plant starts during a recent after school program.

Summer camp is a rite of passage for many boys and girls. But some kids will not be able to enjoy day camp this summer without your help.

Read camper profiles [online](#) and learn how as little as \$75 will underwrite Wesley Housing's six-week day camp experience for one child. When you donate online check the button for "on behalf of" and put code CAMP in the box below.

Or make your check payable to Wesley Housing, reference CAMP on the memo line and mail to 5515 Cherokee Ave., Suite #200, Alexandria, VA 22312.

[We Appreciate Your Help!](#)



Wesley Housing in the News

Wesley Housing Featured in the Arlington County Ten Year Plan Success Stories Newsletter

The headline on the cover of the May issue of [Arlington County's Ten Year Plan Success Stories newsletter](#) reads "Wesley Housing and Guest House Partner for Housing Program". The article recognizes the innovative partnership between Wesley Housing and Friends of Guest House, Inc. that offers women re-entering the community from incarceration with a new resource that helps them overcome one of their biggest challenges: finding stable housing while they work to put their lives back together.

Wesley Housing Featured in American Builders Quarterly Magazine

The May/June 2011 edition of the [American Builders Quarterly](#) featured Wesley Housing and included pictures of Strawbridge Square Apartments. The publication, distributed to 50,000 readers, offers an industry-specific look at companies spanning all aspects of the building trade.