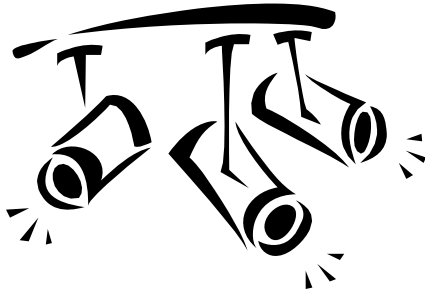


# Homewards



A publication of the Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania

August 2008



## Spotlight on SDHP's RHC Program

### You Have a Friend in Your PA RHC

By Peggy Robertson

Communication - that is the critical, first step in working toward systems change to bridge the gap and create linkages between service and housing providers. The Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania (SDHP) Regional Housing Coordinator (RHC) program is charged with the important job of building bridges and making connections. Ten Regional Housing Coordinators representing every county in the state are responsible for the following:

- To serve as a single point of contact for technical assistance and information related to housing and services for waiver-eligible consumers in the region
- To educate program administrators and service providers and assist them in identifying housing resources in their region and provide regional information related to housing,



*Jim Meehan, Regional Housing Coordinator for Region 3*

services, and other resources for people with disabilities

- To provide outreach by developing collaborative relationships with groups and agencies in their region who have contact with people with disabilities
- To provide training and technical assistance and conduct training to groups and agencies about the housing needs of, and resources available to, people with disabilities on topics related to housing for people with disabilities

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The RHCs understand the big picture of their role, but they are also working in the trenches everyday and address some very specific needs that people with disabilities have related to their housing. At the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) 2008 Housing Services Conference in Gettysburg, the RHCs participated in a session entitled *You Have A Friend in Your PA RHC*. They shared their experiences on how they have been able to help stabilize housing for people with disabilities. Across the state, the RHCs have learned that there is a need for home modifications, for more housing options for specific populations, for best practices in landlord protocol, for ensuring that accessible units are housed by people with disabilities, the list goes on.

Assisting consumers on how to be good tenants is one of the most significant needs that RHCs have identified. This is why PREP, the Prepared Renters Education Program, developed by SDHP and PHFA, has been so popular. RHCs train agencies on how to help their consumers with all of the steps necessary to become a good tenant.

PREP II is another training program being developed that focuses on helping tenants to avoid eviction. At the conference, two of the RHCs shared similar experiences that the agencies they were working with had with consumers in jeopardy of eviction from their apartment. In one instance, the consumer had an ongoing incontinence problem that resulted in the apartment becoming soiled. Another consumer was not able to keep the apartment clean. The RHCs were able to work with the agencies and help them resolve the issues with their consumers. In the first case, the RHC brought in a person from the Nursing Home Transition program to train service providers on the different incontinence products that are available. The service provider was then able to help the consumer, who subsequently avoided eviction. Tenants also need to understand that it is their responsibility to keep their apartment clean, or they can risk eviction. Therefore, another RHC who received complaints from the housing provider is going to standardize a best practice for house keeping for agencies working with consumers.

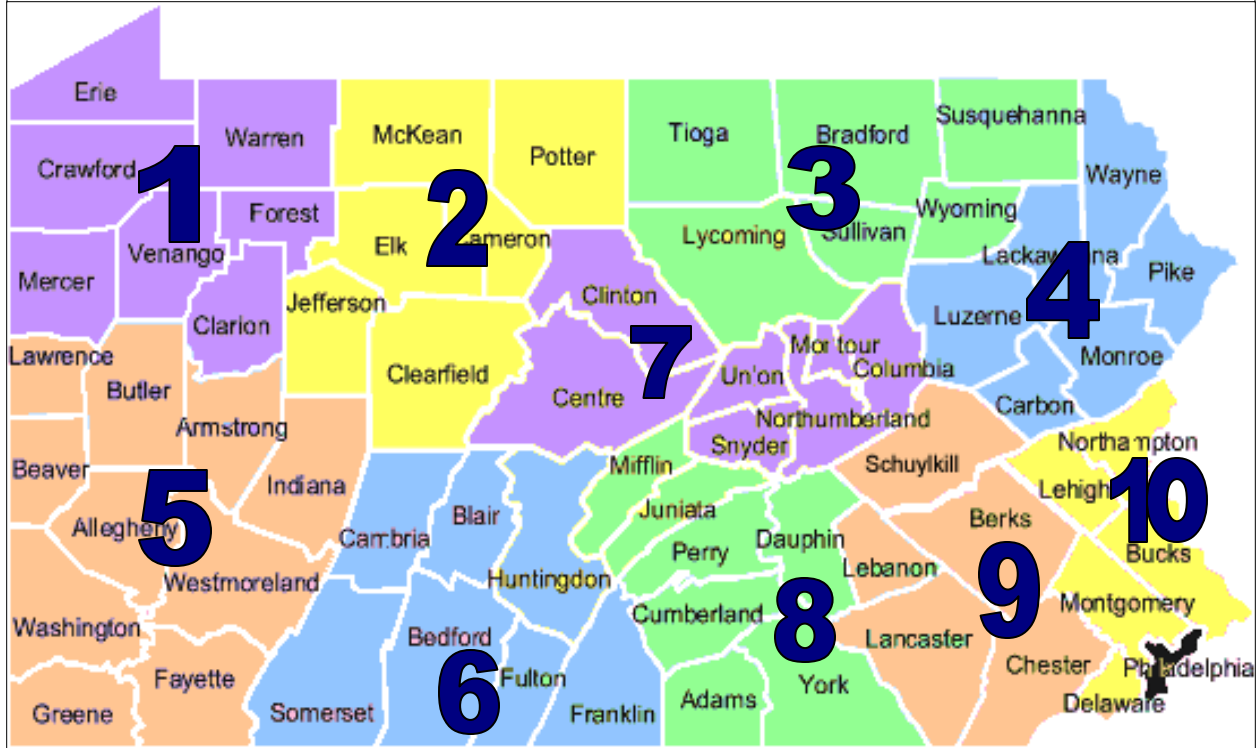
Another concern that the RHCs have encountered is

making sure that accessible units are rented to people that need accessible features. It is important that available accessible units are marketed to people with disabilities and to agencies that serve people with disabilities. One RHC sends out a bi-monthly newsletter that lists all of the vacant, accessible units that are available and makes sure that all service and housing providers in the region get this publication. The RHCs also direct agencies to the Pennsylvania Apartment Locator, developed by PHFA as a tool on their website to link consumers to affordable housing options throughout the Commonwealth. It is intended to be an aid for consumers who are searching for affordable apartments and for property managers and developers who wish to market their affordable vacant units. The listings indicate whether or not the units are mobility and/or hearing/vision accessible. (<http://www.phfa.org/pal/>)

For some people, finding the housing that meets their needs can be one problem. For other people who are tenants, staying in their housing can be yet another issue. Nancy

*(Continued on page 3)*

# SDHP Regional Housing Coordinator Program Map



**The Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania**  
 717 E. Lancaster Avenue Downingtown PA 19335  
 Statewide Housing Coordinator - *Mary Penny*  
 610-873-9595 [Mary@sdhp.org](mailto:Mary@sdhp.org)

*(Friend in PA RHC continued from page 2)*

Perri, the RHC in region 4 described an Eviction Prevention Program that is being established in Lackawanna County. The RHC agency, United Neighborhood Centers (UNC) and agencies in Lackawanna County are reaching out to landlords in an effort to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless due to eviction. Ms. Perri described the program. “If

there is a pending eviction of one of our consumers, UNC has asked the landlords if they will wait seven days before filing the eviction papers. Two staff members are identified from eight member agencies who have agreed to be part of the Eviction Prevention Team. They will go in and work with the tenant and the landlord to try to resolve the situation. As part of the program, the team works with the

tenants on whatever issues the landlords have identified. The team is really trying to avoid having a hearing before the District Justice (DJ). If the hearing can be prevented, this benefits both the tenant and landlord because it spares the expense of court costs as well as the further aggravation involved in eviction. Letters have gone out to landlords asking them to hold off on an eviction

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## Regional Housing Coordinators

<p><b>Region One-</b> <b><u>Voices for Independence</u></b> 1107 Payne Avenue Erie, PA 16503 Voice TTY: 814-874-0064 Fax: 814-874-3497 <b>RHC- Suzanne Smith</b> <a href="mailto:ssmith@voicesforindependence.org">ssmith@voicesforindependence.org</a></p>	<p><b>Region Two-</b> <b><u>Life and Independence for Today</u></b> 503 East Arch Street St. Marys, PA 15857-1779 Voice / TTY 814-781-3050 800-341-LIFT (5438) Fax: 814-781-1917 <b>RHC- Kelly L. Valdez</b> <a href="mailto:rhc@liftcil.org">rhc@liftcil.org</a></p>
<p><b>Region Three-</b> <b><u>Futures Community Supports</u></b> 23 Main Street Towanda, PA 18848 570-265-3800 Fax: 570-265-8271 <b>RHC- Jim Meehan</b> <a href="mailto:jmeehanrhc@yahoo.com">jmeehanrhc@yahoo.com</a></p>	<p><b>Region Four-</b> <b><u>United Neighborhood Centers of NE PA</u></b> 425 Adler Street Scranton, PA 18505 570-346-0759 Fax: 570-207-4242 <b>RHC- Nancy Perri</b> <a href="mailto:nperri@uncnepa.org">nperri@uncnepa.org</a></p>
<p><b>Region Five-</b> <b><u>Allegheny Co. Disability Connection</u></b> One Smithfield Street Pittsburgh PA 15222 412-350-2791 Fax: 412-350-5891 <b>RHC- Joe Elliott</b> <a href="mailto:Joseph.Elliott@AlleghenyCounty.US">Joseph.Elliott@AlleghenyCounty.US</a></p>	<p><b>Region Six-</b> <b><u>Center for Independent Living of Central PA</u></b> 207 House Avenue, Suite 107, Camp Hill, PA 17011 717-731-1900 717-737-1335 (TTY) Fax: 717-731-8150 <b>RHC- Howard Ermin</b> <a href="mailto:hermin@cilcp.org">hermin@cilcp.org</a></p>
<p><b>Region Seven-</b> <b><u>Center for Independent Living of Central PA</u></b> 207 House Avenue, Suite 107, Camp Hill, PA 17011 717-731-1900 717-737-1335 (TTY) Fax: 717-731-8150 <b>RHC- David Drezner</b> <a href="mailto:ddrezner@cilcp.org">ddrezner@cilcp.org</a></p>	<p><b>Region Eight-</b> <b><u>Center for Independent Living of Central PA</u></b> 207 House Avenue, Suite 107, Camp Hill, PA 17011 717-731-1900 717-737-1335 (TTY) Fax: 717-731-8150 <b>RHC- Stephen Scanlon</b> <a href="mailto:sscanlon@cilcp.org">sscanlon@cilcp.org</a></p>
<p><b>Region Nine-</b> <b><u>Residential Living Options</u></b> 797 East Lancaster Avenue Downingtown, PA 19335 610-518-6242 Fax: 610-518-6244 <b>RHC- Drew Passic</b> <a href="mailto:dpassic@residentiallivingoptions.org">dpassic@residentiallivingoptions.org</a></p>	<p><b>Region Ten-</b> <b><u>Residential Living Options</u></b> 797 East Lancaster Avenue Downingtown, PA 19335 610-610-518-6242 Fax: 610-518-6244 <b>RHC- Mary Vilter</b> <a href="mailto:mvilter@residentiallivingoptions.org">mvilter@residentiallivingoptions.org</a></p>

## **SDHP: Soaring To New Heights**

By Peggy Robertson

The Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania, Inc. was selected to present at the annual conference of the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD) which will be held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin this coming October. "Taking Flight: Soaring to New Heights," this year's conference theme, was inspired by the symbol of Milwaukee: the wing-like roof of the Art Museum. Soaring to New Heights will take Councils 'above and beyond' current practice.

NACDD's mission is to provide support and assistance to member Councils in order to promote a consumer and family centered system of services and supports for individuals with developmental disabilities.

"Soaring to New Heights by Building a Network of Connectivity" is the title of the presentation to be given by SDHP's Executive Director Gail Hoffmann. SDHP's expertise in building coalitions, sharing resources and bridging the communication gap

through its Regional Housing Coordinator program will be presented as a model, reflective of the purpose of NACDD. Ms. Hoffmann, who provides executive leadership and oversees programs for SDHP, a statewide non-profit organization that promotes self-determination in housing for people with disabilities, will address the following:

- How to identify agencies across the state that will better serve people with disabilities at the grassroots level
- How to provide partners with the tools and resources they need to increase housing options for people with disabilities
- How to deliver a strong, consistent message and raise awareness about the need for affordable, accessible housing to create systemic changes at the state level

The Regional Housing Coordinator (RHC) program was developed by the Pennsylvania

Housing Finance Agency and SDHP as a response to the following questions:

- Where can Pennsylvania agencies that serve people with disabilities turn to get assistance?
- How can these agencies get a better understanding of the barriers that people face trying to find affordable, accessible housing?
- Where can agencies get training to help people with disabilities navigate the system?

The RHC Program, which started out with five part time RHCs, now has ten full time RHCs that work with agencies representing ten regions in the state. The forte of the RHCs is their ability to understand the needs of individuals with disabilities in their region. RHCs share resources among themselves and make connections in their region with local service providers, consumer groups, landlords, developers, realtors, government agencies and others to increase opportunities for people

*(Continued on page 6)*

*(Friend in PA RHC continued from page 3)*  
and just wait seven days. This gives the team the time needed to remediate the problem. If the team can't assist with the problem then they get in touch with the landlord directly. At this point, the landlord can file for eviction with the DJ's office. If the landlord agrees to participate in the program, he or she fills out a form with information about the tenant in jeopardy of eviction. The tenant and the landlord both have to sign a release of information form."

Ms. Perri said that the program has met with success. "UNC has saved people from eviction. One person had not been taking her meds and when UNC was called in they were able to get her back on her medication, therefore

avoiding eviction. One woman could not afford her rent and UNC found her a more affordable unit, thus preventing her from having an eviction on her record."

Unfortunately, if a person has an eviction on their record it is then very difficult to find housing. If a person is facing eviction they can go through an appeal process. If this doesn't work, there are steps that can be taken that will improve a person's chances of obtaining housing, but it takes time. For instance, if a person was evicted because they did not pay rent, the money absolutely must be paid back if they want a reference. The person can make a payment agreement with the previous landlord who may then be willing to provide a character reference in the future. A

person should also build up their credit by paying bills on time and keeping a record of the payments. The great value of the Eviction Prevention Program is that it is proactively assisting people to become better tenants, while at the same time recognizing that most landlords do not want to evict their tenants.

By training service providers and case managers and working with landlords, the RHCs are building a firm foundation for Pennsylvania renters. The RHCs go beyond providing the basic rental skills, they have created a model that gives people with disabilities greater choice in where they want to live and the tools needed to stay in their home.

*(Soaring continued from page 5)*  
with disabilities for inclusion and independence within the community. Their responsibilities are further outlined on page 1 of this newsletter.

RHC agencies are engaged in strategic planning that addresses the needs of the RHC region as a whole, as well as the diverse areas that have different needs

within each region. SDHP and the RHC's are working to advocate for systemic changes at the state level. In fact, the RHC program preceded a lot of the housing activity that is now being coordinated across the state. The RHCs have raised awareness about the barriers that people with disabilities face in Pennsylvania by constantly reinforcing the need for affordable, accessible

housing with a strong and consistent message. SDHP is proud to be chosen to speak at the conference and illustrate the valuable work exemplified by the RHCs in Pennsylvania.

For more information about the conference go to the following website: <http://www.nacdd.org/pages/new.htm#annual>.

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## Steps to Developing a VisitAbility Ordinance for Enactment

*In October 2006 Governor Rendell signed The Residential VisitAbility Design Tax Credit Act. This legislation allows taxing bodies such as counties, municipalities and school districts to authorize tax credits to offset costs for VisitAbility features either in new construction or in home modifications. This enabling legislation has provided incentives to different jurisdictions to create a VisitAbility Ordinance. Pittsburgh passed a voluntary VisitAbility Ordinance and Philadelphia is in the process of creating an Ordinance to introduce to City Council. These VisitAbility Ordinances are asking builders and developers to include VisitAbility features in new construction and home modifications.*

*Please help promote VisitAbility in Pennsylvania, which ensures that everyone has basic access to visit homes with ease and remain in their homes because of greater accessibility. The following are recommendations on how to organize a committee to develop a VisitAbility Ordinance.*

### **Form a Committee of Key Stakeholders**

#### ***Who should be on the committee?***

- Representatives from Disability Agencies; Centers for Independent Living
- Elected Officials or their representatives (city council, county commissioners, mayor's office)
- Attorneys
- Architects
- Representatives from the local government; License & Inspection, Redevelopment Authority; Office of Housing and Community Development
- Representatives from the Builder's Association
- Developers of VISIBLE homes – both non-profit and for profit
- Consumers
- AARP
- Representatives from the housing finance agency
- Realtors

Appoint a chairperson to convene meetings, develop agendas, ensure that notes are taken, and delegate responsibilities

### **Committee Tasks**

#### ***Initial Steps:***

- Define VisitAbility – make sure everyone speaks the same language
  - Determine which features should be included and the criteria for each

*(Continued on page 8)*

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(Visitability Ordinance continued from page 7)

- Consider consistency with other pertinent visitability/accessibility requirements
- Determine the purpose of the committee
- Identify overall issues to address
- Determine who will be responsible for enforcing the ordinance
- Identify likely proponents and opponents
- Identify local examples - designs and budgets

### ***Developing an Ordinance:***

- Review other ordinances
- Set up a timeline with the goal of introducing the ordinance to the local governing body
- Identify and meet with a government official who will sponsor the ordinance
- Identify the opposition to Visitability legislation and articulate their concerns
- Determine the following:
  - What should be included in the ordinance
  - Whether or not visitability should be mandatory
  - Whether or not it should only be for new construction and/or for rehab
  - A process to allow for waivers and variances
  - Who will be the administering body, etc.
  - Again, look at other ordinances, don't reinvent the wheel
  - Develop incentives for developers that are realistic and meaningful
  - Draft the ordinance

### **Promoting the Ordinance**

- Develop an education and advocacy strategy along with a timeline
  - Develop an action plan: list specific tasks, the strategy to complete each task, assign to the responsible party and determine the date the task should be completed
  - Gather and/or develop informational materials – brochures, video, power point presentations, cost data, benefits, examples of visitable homes, architectural renderings, sample designs, etc. – there is a lot of information already out there
  - Get sponsors on board; inform and solicit support
  - Plan meetings with possible opponents; find out and address their objections
  - Plan meetings with people on the fence
  - Plan meetings with supporters and obtain their commitment to attend meetings, hearings and other events related to the passage of the ordinance

(Continued on page 9)

*(Visitability Ordinance continued from page 8)*

### **Preparing to Introduce the Ordinance**

- Determine timeline to meet with the sponsor who will introduce the ordinance to the governing body
- Learn what the enactment procedure is (see below)
- After the ordinance is introduced, be prepared to present views verbally and/or in writing in support of the ordinance during the designated time
- After the ordinance is acted upon, whether it is adopted or not, thank the sponsor and other supporters for their efforts


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## **How an Ordinance Gets Introduced**

### **PA Code § 35.6-603 Enactment Procedure**

*An ordinance shall be introduced by a sponsor at any regular or special public meeting. Except where specifically provided otherwise in the charter, an ordinance shall be processed in the following manner:*

- 1. The proposed ordinance shall be placed on the meeting agenda of the council for introduction and initial consideration.*
  - 2. If the proposed ordinance is approved initially by the council, a concise summary of the proposed ordinance shall be advertised at least seven (7) days, but not more than fourteen (14) days, before the meeting at which the ordinance will receive further action by the council. The summary shall contain sufficient information to identify the nature of the ordinance as it would affect any resident, property owner or geographical area in the township. The summary shall also specify the date on which the council proposes to act on the ordinance.*
  - 3. Copies of the proposed ordinance shall be available at cost at the township office.*
  - 4. After the preceding procedures have been followed and interested persons have had an opportunity to be heard or to present their views in writing, the council may adopt the proposed ordinance at the advertised meeting or it may postpone action until a later meeting, the date which shall be stated at the advertised meeting. The council may amend a proposed ordinance before final adoption, but if any amendment makes any substantive changes from the ordinance originally advertised, no final action may be taken until the amended ordinance has been advertised as required for the original ordinance.*
  - 5. An ordinance finally adopted by the council adopting by reference standard codes or technical regulations as provided in this charter, will not require publication of said codes or technical regulations.*
  - 6. Every ordinance adopted by the council, with exceptions noted hereinafter, shall become effective not less than five (5) days after the date of adoption. Exceptions to this requirement are emergencies or as otherwise provided in this charter.*
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**4<sup>th</sup> Annual John Omelko  
Memorial Golf Outing**  
**Friday, September 12, 2008**  
 Spring Hollow Golf Club  
 Route 724 Spring City, PA

**Registration/Lunch 11am – Noon**  
**Shotgun Start - Noon**  
**Silent Auction**  
**Dinner – Prizes – Raffles – 5:30 – 7 pm**

Proceeds support a Scholarship Fund for the Omelko Family Children, scholarships to the Spring-Ford High School and Self Determination Housing Project of PA programs.

For more information contact: Gail Hoffmann 610-873-9595

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Executive Director: Gail Hoffmann

Newsletter Editor: Peggy Robertson

For more information, contact SDHP at: **SDHP**, 717 E. Lancaster Avenue, Downingtown, PA 19335

Telephone: 610-873-9595

Fax: 610-873-9597

Toll free: 877-550-7347

Website: [www.sdhp.org](http://www.sdhp.org)

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