

## Housing Superheroes: Meet Maryland's Power-HOUSING Trio



PowerHOUSE Trio left to right: **Rebecca Raggio** (Maryland Department of Health), **Christina Bolyard** (Maryland Department of Disabilities) and **Shalonda Manuel** (Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development)

*The Maryland Partnership for Affordable Housing (MPAH) is an association of cross disability and cross sector service professionals creating real housing opportunities for low income Marylanders. The Maryland Department of Disabilities is proud to participate in this unique partnership and have the opportunity to work toward change along with the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development and the Maryland Department of Health.*

*The MPAH partnership administers several housing programs in Maryland and serves as a national model illustrating the success which can be achieved when government agencies combine expertise and resources to meet a common goal. But just like every collaboration there are real people behind the agencies who do the work. This partnership among State agencies is also a partnership among professionals. We had the chance to talk with these professionals and ask the tough questions about what works and what still needs to be done to realize improvement in affordable and accessible housing in our state. Meet this trio of Power-*

*HOUSING professionals who agreed to take their superhero capes off for a few minutes and let us behind the scenes of this successful collaboration.*

**1. In your opinion, what is the biggest housing challenge people with disabilities face in Maryland?**

**RR:** Whether it's buying a home or locating a rental property, finding accessible housing in Maryland is extremely difficult. Many older rental properties have external steps or split-level entries making even ground-floor apartments inaccessible. Finding a place that is both accessible to a person's needs and affordable to their budget, is extremely challenging.

**CB:** Finding accessible and affordable housing in an area that the individual wants to live in. Many people who already have family, friends, and/or supports and services in place are not always willing or able to relocate to a new area.

**2. How is the collaboration between agencies (MPAH) changing Maryland for the better?**

**RR:** The collaboration has enabled Maryland to successfully create and implement innovative affordable housing programs for individuals with disabilities such as the HUD Section 811 Project Rental Assistance Demonstration, Weinberg Initiative, and Bridge Subsidy programs.

**CB:** We continue to work together to make programs successful at each participating property as well as determine what we need to put in place to make sure the next property is a success. Creating this track record helps ensure that more developers and property owners will want to participate in the programs and initiate additional housing opportunities for even more Marylanders.

**SM:** MPAH is changing Maryland for the better because the collaboration allows groups with the same ultimate goal to serve the citizens of Maryland in a more diverse and complete way.

**3. What is the biggest challenge when attempting multi-agency collaboration within State government?**

**RR:** The success of multi-agency collaboration hinges on building strong, trusting relationships with your colleagues in other agencies. It takes time to establish the relationship, understand what each partner's agency does or can do, learn the language of each agency, and establish communication that works best for the team.

**SM:** Time and organization. Each agency has its own mission and individual goals. It is difficult to get everyone in the same room at the same table.

**4. What has been the most positive surprise that has come from the collaboration?**

**CB:** How well we all work together. Of course there are lots of different personalities and that is to be expected. Each person has unique qualities to help the group see things from a different perspective and that helps us work well together.

**SM:** The most positive surprise is the effectiveness of the various programs being supported by the collaboration. I also did not expect to gain a support system (personal and professional) of like-minded individuals who truly understand the benefits and challenges of housing professionals.

### **5. What do you like best about working as a group?**

**RR:** I've learned more in such a short period of time than I ever expected. I truly enjoy working with my colleagues across agencies. I love that we can laugh together, celebrate successes and problem-solve challenges openly.

**CB:** Knowing that I can pick up the phone or send an email to anyone in our group and get their help no matter what the topic or situation. We have a lot of people with lots of experience in different areas and that proves to be more helpful than most will ever know.

*To learn more about the Maryland Partnership for Affordable Housing and housing programs in Maryland, see our website at [www.mdod.maryland.gov](http://www.mdod.maryland.gov).*