

The History of RCHP-Affordable Housing Corporation: Irayna Court and Beyond

By Lori Freedman, MSW – AHC Tenant Services Director

In the summer of 2005, as Pastors Seth and Stephanie and the congregation of the Reformed Church of Highland Park gave support to church members who became a foster family to medically fragile babies, they sought to learn more about foster care and the hardships faced by youth “aging out.” A search for real answers – not platitudes – was embarked upon and **in the Fall of 2005, a steering committee was formed to explore the possibility of creating affordable housing for youth on top of the church’s administrative building.**



In March 2006, the RCHP Affordable Housing Corporation was born and the first Board of Trustees was formed. The church sold the “air rights” over the administration building to RCHP-AHC for \$1.00, and AHC applied for funds to create six units of housing for young women who were, or were about to be, homeless.



Irayna Court – our first housing project – is named for the Greek goddess of peace. It is a shared “supportive housing” community in which each young woman has their own bedroom and bathroom and shares the kitchen, living room, library and laundry area. **The majority of residents come to Irayna Court either from foster care or after having been kicked out of their family home and spending time in a shelter, motel, couch surfing or**

living in their car or in a park. They are between 18 and 21 years old when they first arrive and, on average, stay two to five years.

Although there is a great sense of relief at finally having a stable place to stay, living in a community with others and learning to be fully independent is not easy. **A Resident Assistant lives at Irayna Court and provides support and structure,** as needed, to make sure residents get along, take care of the housing and become integrated into the

wider community. And residents have access to a range of other supports from AHC and RCHP staff as they make decisions about work, going to school, buying a car and other major life decisions.

Since opening, Irayna Court has provided a stable home to about 40 young women. **Fast forward to 2023 and three young women who had each lived at Irayna Court for five years, on average, left for bigger and better things.** One graduated college and is working full time helping vulnerable people access health care, and two, having graduated from community college, are now enrolled in four-year colleges pursuing their bachelors degrees. Their time at Irayna Court allowed them to become who they were meant to be without homelessness destroying their lives.



While the bulk of our housing work now falls under a lease-sublease model, we have slowly and steadily increased the number of properties that we own, providing “permanent supportive housing” to homeless youth, Veterans, families, and people with disabilities such as chronic mental illness. The majority of these units have housing vouchers and supportive services attached to them, making them truly affordable for people who live on extremely limited incomes. But whether we own a property or rent it and sublease to those in need, we are motivated by the knowledge that **having a stable place to call home is not only a fundamental human need, it’s a basic human right.**