

Q&A with Zoryana

Zoryana Letushko is the Program Manager for Neighbors Housing Neighbors for Cumberland County. Neighbors Housing Neighbors serves clients in Middlesex, Mercer, and Cumberland Counties through a grant provided by the Dept of Community Affairs (DCA). As of 2025, Cumberland County had the highest percentage of residents living below the poverty line in NJ.

When did you start working for I-RISE and what prompted you to apply for the case manager position?

I started with I-RISE in the summer of 2022. As a result of the war in Ukraine many Ukrainians were forced to leave their homes and flee to other countries. Many of them came to the US through the [U4U program](#) seeking refuge. I-RISE had done outreach to faith communities in the Cumberland County area. My brother-in-law, who's a pastor, was one of those who received a call. I was a stay-at-home mom at the time, and it all just kind of fell in my lap. It was an opportunity to help the people from my homeland.



Were you born in Ukraine? Do you still have relatives and friends in Ukraine?

I was born in Ukraine. My family immigrated to the US when I was 8 and I grew up in Philly. I moved to NJ 20+ years ago after getting married. I do have family still in Ukraine, although my immediate family is here in the United States. I do have a few uncles and aunts still living in Ukraine. Some of my cousins are still there. Thankfully, they're in the part of Ukraine that, although it has been impacted by the war, it's closer to Poland, Lviv. And so there, it's somewhat, I don't want to say livable, but it's a little more quiet than it is on the east side of Ukraine.

Switching topics, earlier this year, you transitioned from being a case manager for I-RISE to Program Manager for RCHP-AHC's Neighbors Housing Neighbors. What have you learned since you've started this new position? Is there anything that has surprised you about the housing insecure population that you didn't expect?

I learned that there is a great need in the Cumberland County area for affordable housing. Many people are living paycheck-to-paycheck and one temporary incident - whether illness or change in income - can really impact one's ability to stay current on rent. **Many clients are single parent households that are doing the best they can given their situation**, however due to circumstances often out of their control, find themselves in arrears and facing eviction. The interesting part is that if they are receiving any type of income, they are often not eligible for emergency services through the Board of Social Services, which leaves them in a vicious cycle where they often end up homeless, living in hotels, cars or shelters.

Can you walk our readers through an example of what it might look like from the moment you are contacted, to when a client is given the help that's needed? What types of services does NHN provide to help clients either gain or maintain their housing?



Clients typically contact us by phone or walk-in to our office. We have a flyer out in the community and often get calls and referrals from other agencies. Clients are typically asked to provide identification, show a critical need for assistance such as an eviction notice or warrant of removal.

The program's main focus is homelessness prevention and diversion, so it is critical to ensure that clients have sufficient income to sustain themselves moving forward. We complete a budget

and determine eligibility based on income and expenses. Many times, this process is eye opening to the clients because it helps them to see how and where they are spending their money and often, they are surprised. We also request denial letters from other agencies as we are an "assistance of last resort" organization. Once lease and arrears information are reviewed along with the budget, we make a determination for assistance.

The program supports individuals and households who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, in securing and maintaining stable housing. We assist with rental arrears, security deposits and first month's rent, shared housing, subleasing units and other housing stabilization efforts. We also provide case management services, referrals, and advocacy.

Can you share a success story that sticks out in your mind that demonstrates the benefit of a program like NHN?

There are many success stories in NHN preventing homelessness, but one that sticks out would be a mother of three that was living in a hotel for over a year. **Due to a prior eviction, she had a really hard time finding new housing.** She was working full time and had stable income however, due to high hotel fees and cost of living, she found herself in a vicious cycle of money in, money out and not able to save much. We were able to help her find a unit and sublease it to her. We helped her with the first month's rent, and she was able to move into stable housing where her kids can grow and thrive. Now, she is paying rent and not hotel fees and she is able to save money.

This client was a really good example - that just a little bit of help and a little bit of someone caring enough to sublease to you - kind of willing to take on some of that risk onto themselves - it really helps this person in the long run.

What are your hopes and dreams for this program in Cumberland County?

My hope and dream is that we don't have homelessness in our community, but I know that's a far stretch. **But I think the great thing would be to have more funding so we can help more people.**

I think that the bigger dream for providing services here in Cumberland County is to have more affordable housing, shared housing opportunities, and, you know, kind of working with people through these difficult situations. So they have that hope. and something to look forward to, and even maybe one day owning their own place.

Yeah, but I think funding is the biggest thing that we need right now.

To find out more about the Neighbors Housing Neighbors program, visit <https://rchp-ahc.org/neighbors-housing-neighbors/>

Funding for NHN in Cumberland County is uncertain for the coming fiscal year. If you'd like to keep the momentum going and/or know an individual or organization who would like to contribute, please visit <https://rchp-ahc.org/donate/> and include "NHN" in the memo field.