



mbhp UPDATE

Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership • 125 Lincoln Street, 5th Floor • Boston, MA 02111-2503 • (617) 859-0400 www.mbhp.org

SPRING 2014

MBHP Names 2014 Lowell Richards Fellows

In 2013, MBHP established the Lowell Richards Fellowship for Leadership and Public Service in honor of our late long-time board co-chair. The fellowship serves as a way to honor those who personify Lowell's qualities of leadership, integrity, loyalty, commitment, and ambition. Last year was such a success that for this second year, MBHP has expanded the program to name two fellows: a student fellow, which is awarded to an undergraduate or graduate student, and the newly-established participant fellow, which recognizes an MBHP program participant.

This year's student fellow is Stephen Donovan. A portfolio analyst at Boston Community Capital who is currently studying for a Master's of Urban Regional Policy at Northeastern University's School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs, Stephen intends to pursue a career focused on equity and the promotion of economic and social mobility for low-income families. This summer,



Stephen Donovan

he will gain firsthand experience in the field of affordable housing.

"My personal goal is to better understand how things get done," said Donovan. "I hope to develop a solid understanding of the economic planning process in order to become a more effective professional and an asset to the communities I work with throughout my career."

For the second year, the student fellowship will be hosted by the Massachusetts Port Authority in their Economic Planning and Development department where Lowell served as Chief Development Officer for more than ten years.

"Massport welcomes the opportunity to engage with students of public policy who want to know how urban revitalization can make a meaningful difference in the quality of life for individuals and communities," said Massport Chief Executive Officer Thomas P. Glynn. "Emerging professionals bring a new and exciting perspective to our work, an attitude Lowell always encouraged."

Marioly Brito has been named as the first participant fellow. A participant of the HomeBASE and RAFT programs, Marioly was referred by MBHP to the Secure Jobs program in January and has since shown extraordinary promise. As a single mother of four, she has successfully earned her associate's degree from Roxbury Community College and is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Human Services from the University of Massachusetts Boston.

Marioly's ultimate goal is to become a social psychologist, taking her own personal experiences of



Marioly Brito

being homeless and looking for work to help other people experiencing similar challenges. "Being selected makes me feel proud about myself and very thankful for the people that believe in me," she said. "This is a very good first step toward what I am trying to achieve."

This year, the participant fellowship will be hosted by Jewish Vocational Services.

"As a workforce development agency, we understand the value of hands-on professional experience that is directly connected with one's career goals," said Leah Moschella, a manager of the Secure Jobs Partnership. "We are confident that Marioly's diligent work and individual perspective will be a true asset to our agency."

Lowell's wife, Karen, applauds both selections. "It was difficult to pick from so many outstanding candidates," said Karen. "Lowell loved meeting people who were committed to improving their communities. He would have been so impressed by Stephen and Marioly's passion and drive."

MISSION STATEMENT

MBHP's mission is to ensure that the region's low- and moderate-income individuals and families have choice and mobility in finding and retaining decent affordable housing; all of our programs and initiatives are designed to encourage housing stability, increase economic self-sufficiency, and enhance the quality of the lives of those we serve. To achieve our mission and to promote efficient service delivery, we work collaboratively with a broad array of service providers and neighborhood-based organizations.

MBHP'S PROGRAMS

There are three different entry points for accessing our programs and services.

Homeless. We help low- and moderate-income families and individuals find and retain safe, affordable housing through rental assistance programs, including Section 8 and the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program.

On the brink of homelessness. We help families on the brink of homelessness stay in their homes or find other suitable living arrangements, rather than enter the shelter system. One way we do this is through administering the RAFT financial assistance program.

Stably housed. Once a family or individual is living in a safe, affordable home, we help keep it that way. We conduct inspections to ensure apartments meet all health and safety standards and offer education, trainings, and counseling services to tenants and landlords.

For more information on the many programs and services we administer, visit us at www.mbhp.org or call our Housing Consumer Education Center at (617) 425-6700.

New Colocation at Somerville Homeless Coalition

Once a week, MBHP Housing Supports Outreach Specialist Sigourney Norman travels to Davis Square, to the office of the Somerville Homeless Coalition, where she administers the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program to residents of Somerville and Cambridge. This colocation, one of eight partnerships in which MBHP staff work directly in the communities we serve, is one way MBHP works to make sure families get the housing help they need.

"The colocation at Somerville Homeless Coalition is a huge benefit to the local community," says Sigourney. "I've met with working families that have faced a sudden loss of income due to cut hours or job loss, families with extreme medical bills due to the head of household suffering from life threatening illness, and mothers who have left households where they were experiencing domestic violence and have been able to access RAFT to resettle their families with safe and stable housing."

Offering services outside of the downtown office means that MBHP can be more responsive to our program participants and their

housing needs, helping families overcome barriers, such as lack of adequate transportation or childcare, or limited ability to take time off from work, to access MBHP's services.

"It made perfect sense for us to support this partnership with MBHP," said Mark Alston-Follansbee, executive director of the Somerville Homeless Coalition. "We appreciate all the work MBHP does and are happy to help in any way we can."

The colocation has been so successful that the agencies are planning to expand the services offered. They are currently working out the logistics to have MBHP staff conduct re-examinations for Section 8 participants at the Somerville colocation.

This colocation is made possible by a grant from the Bank of America Foundation.

"People who are homeless or at risk of becoming so need access to financial assistance to help them climb back toward self-sufficiency," said Bob Gallery, Massachusetts president, Bank of America. "This colocation effort by MBHP and the Somerville Homeless Coalition helps connect vital support to those who need it most."



MBHP staff member Sigourney Norman meets with Medford resident Claudel Chevry at the Somerville Homeless Coalition colocation

Twelve Participants Graduate from Family Self-Sufficiency Program

On March 20, MBHP celebrated as 12 dedicated individuals graduated from the Family Self-Sufficiency Program. Boston City Councilor Aynna Pressley spoke at the event, telling the graduates, “You are more than dreamers. In fact, you are visionaries, because you had a plan, and you worked hard to see that plan manifest and actualized.”

FSS is a federal program designed to help those receiving certain forms of assistance to increase their incomes and become self-sufficient. MBHP’s program focuses specifically on recipients of Section 8 vouchers. Participants are enrolled in an escrow savings account to automatically save as their income increases. For this year’s graduates, the total savings in these accounts came to \$107,000, with an average distribution of \$9,000 per participant. Those who complete the program can use these savings to further pursue their life goals, such as continuing their education or putting it toward the purchase of a home.

Councilor Pressley also thanked the graduates for being partners in building a healthy community. “Healthy communities don’t happen by accident, we have to be very intentional about how we build a healthy community.” Noting the importance of having a safe, affordable place to live, she said, “I don’t just care about people having shelter,” she said. “Everyone deserves to have a home.”

Throughout the five-year program, FSS participants work with an MBHP staff member to set goals and formulate plans for achieving those goals. This year’s group made impressive strides over the course of the program. Two graduates completed degrees. One increased her credit score by more than 100 points.

MBHP’s FSS program has seen great growth in the past year, in part thanks to our collaboration with The Boston Foundation to expand the program to families living in neigh-



Some of this year’s FSS graduates



Boston City Councilor Aynna Pressley

borhoods along the Fairmount Corridor. Currently, there are 362 participants enrolled across our region.

FSS graduate Nickisha Gales, who recently completed a certificate program to be an Emergency Medical Technician, spoke at the celebration. “Completing this course was a huge accomplishment for me,” she said. “I did it. It was a struggle, but I made it.” Noting that it was a



Rep. Russell Holmes with FSS graduate Nickisha Gales

challenge to work a full-time job, complete her coursework and be a single mother to her two boys, Nickiha said it may not have been possible without the help and encouragement of her FSS adviser and her family.

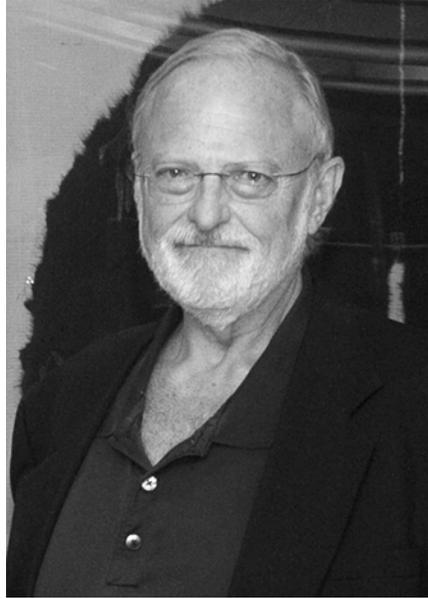
She concluded by reminding her fellow graduates, “This is just the beginning of better things to come. Never give up.”

DONOR SPOTLIGHT: Steven J. Rioff, Co-Chair of MBHP's Board of Directors

A native of Chicago, Steven Rioff was exposed to the reality of poverty from an early age. “I remember my father taking me to football games as a child,” he says, “We’d go through the streets of the Southside of Chicago. You would see real poverty. In the midst of winter you’d see broken windows, kids who weren’t dressed for the cold.” It clearly made an impression.

From these childhood experiences, Steven’s path to affordable housing takes a few twists and turns. A job with the Organization for Social and Technical Innovation brought Steven to Boston and began a trajectory that focused his career on the affordable housing sector. In reflecting on his career, it becomes clear that Steven has been repeatedly sought out to step up and fill leadership voids. He always said yes, because “I wanted to do it,” he says. “And I loved doing it.”

In 1989, Amy Anthony, then secretary of the Commonwealth’s Executive Office of Communities and Development, decided that the state of Massachusetts should step away from the day-to-day administration of rental assistance vouchers. When she could not find a suitable substitute to take on the task, she turned to Steven and asked him to consider



creating a new nonprofit and submitting a proposal to administer federal and state rental subsidies in the Boston region. This became Metropolitan Housing, Inc., whose proposal was reviewed and approved. Metropolitan Housing began administering the rental assistance program the following year.

During this time, Steven reached out to Bill Edgerly of the Boston Housing Partnership, a nonprofit focused on the preservation and re-development of affordable housing by community development corporations, and suggested a merger. In

1991, BHP and Metropolitan Housing merged to form Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership. To this day, Steven remains an active and engaged board member, serving as co-chair of the board of directors.

Despite the amount of time and energy Steven has contributed to MBHP, including six months in which he served as interim Executive Director, he finds it important to contribute financially. His decision to give is so automatic, he finds it hard to put into words.

“It’s obvious,” he says. Given his connection to the organization, “it was natural” that MBHP would also be a part of his charitable giving. “All I’m interested in is doing the little things I can do to help anti-poverty efforts,” he says.

Steven also takes great pride in MBHP’s position among other housing agencies. He lauds the organization’s willingness and flexibility to take on new programs that haven’t been tried before, such as the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing pilot program in 2009. He also credits the hard work of the staff who regularly go above and beyond to assist the people who come to MBHP for help.

Simply put, “we do great work,” he says. “We help people.”

MANY THANKS TO OUR RECENT GRANT FUNDERS

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Team MBHP Raises More Than \$30,000

They started training in December, braving blisters, muscle cramps, and the cold New England winter. Like all marathon hopefuls, they were inspired by the challenge of the race itself. But for these four competitors, inspiration also comes from knowing that they are in another race, one more challenging than even the 26.2 miles: Team MBHP is racing to end homelessness.

For the eighth year running, MBHP will have four runners competing in the Boston Marathon. This year's team includes two MBHP staff members—Project Based Coordinator Anna Mitkevicius and Director of Communications, Development, and Policy Steve Farrell—along with Joe Kriesberg, president of the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations, and Rus Lodi, director of public affairs for the Massachusetts Housing Partnership Fund of Boston. The slots are made possible through the generosity of the John Hancock Boston Marathon Nonprofit Program.

This year, Team MBHP will be joined by all four runners from last year's MBHP team, which included MBHP staff members Katharine Kaplan, Hannah Lodi, and Jesse Edsell-Vetter, as well as Jesse's wife Carolyn. None of the runners of Team MBHP 2013 were able to finish the race due to last year's tragedy, and all are looking forward to making it to the finish line this year.

The runners will also be joined by Hector Cruz, who ran for MBHP in 2009, and was also stopped before the finish line last year.

Each member of Team MBHP 2014 has surpassed their goal of raising \$5,000 for the organization. Some past team members have continued to raise funds, contributing more than \$2,000 to the team total. All funds raised will go toward supporting MBHP's efforts to ensure that families across our region have a safe, stable place to call home.



Team MBHP 2014 (left to right): Joe Kreisberg, Steve Farrell, Anna Mitkevicius, and Rus Lodi with coach Jesse Edsell-Vetter

YOU CAN SUPPORT TEAM MBHP!

To donate, visit the Support Us section of www.mbhp.org.

You can also learn about opportunities to sponsor the team by contacting Development Manager Mary Jo Kane at (617) 425-6705 or maryjo.kane@mbhp.org.

CALLING ALL HOUSING HEROES!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR THE MBHP MARATHON CELEBRATION

May 8, 2014, 6–8 p.m.

Hotel 140, 140 Clarendon St., Boston

After the race is run and the funds are raised, we want to celebrate our runners and all the donors who helped them reach their fundraising goals.

All MBHP donors are invited to come congratulate the runners and celebrate their support of MBHP's work to help families and individuals in Greater Boston find safe, affordable homes.



TAKING THE STATE HOUSE BY STORM



Seventeen MBHP staff members joined the Citizens' Housing and Planning Association for its first Lobby Day at the Massachusetts State House on Jan. 29.



MBHP Executive Director Chris Norris with MRVP recipient Naromie Occeus and her daughter, Rep. Marjorie Decker, and Rep. Kevin Honan (left to right) at the State House briefing on March 7.

MBHP Staff Take Part in CHAPA's First Lobby Day

On Jan. 29, MBHP was proud to join the Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) for its first Lobby Day at the Massachusetts State House. More than 150 housing advocates, including 17 MBHP staff members, visited 70 legislators to advocate for increased support of affordable housing initiatives. Volunteers also visited 73 additional legislative offices to deliver important information on housing issues affecting Massachusetts.

MBHP staff also participated in MRVP Cookie Day, organized by Homes for Families, on Feb. 24 and in Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless' Legislative Action Day on Feb. 27.

Regional Housing Network White Paper

A new white paper from MBHP and nine other housing agencies offers 18 recommendations for addressing the homelessness crisis plaguing the state. Entitled "Moving from Rhetoric to Results: Recommendations for

reducing family homelessness in Massachusetts," the white paper proposes solutions including increasing the state minimum wage, making public transportation accessible and affordable, and increasing the amount of affordable housing available to families who struggle to make ends meet.

"One thing we know for sure is that addressing housing alone is not enough to effectively end homelessness," said MBHP Executive Director Chris Norris. "We need a multifaceted approach that takes the whole person, the whole family into account. These 18 recommendations do just that."

The white paper is available on the Advocacy and Public Policy section of www.mbhp.org.

Briefing at State House

On March 7, Executive Director Chris Norris and other MBHP staff spoke at a briefing aimed at educating legislators in our region about the state of homelessness in Massachusetts, updating them on MBHP's progress, and proposing solutions to address the housing crisis.

Rep. Kevin Honan, co-chair of the Joint Housing Committee, welcomed the attendees. He referred to more than 4,000 families currently homeless in Massachusetts as "a serious crisis" affecting all districts. "The cost of housing has gone through the roof, and homelessness is only continuing to grow."

Another speaker at the event was Naromie Occeus, an MBHP participant who receives rental assistance through the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program. She and her daughter had lived in emergency shelter for 27 months before receiving her voucher. "Receiving this MRVP voucher means so much to my daughter and me," said Occeus. "This is a fresh start for the both of us in a place we can now call home."

Joining Chairman Honan at the briefing were Reps. Paul Donato; John L. Lawn, Jr.; and Marjorie Decker. The briefing was cohosted by Chairman Honan and Reps. Lawn and Decker, along with Reps. Gloria Fox; Russell E. Holmes; John L. Lawn, Jr.; Marjorie Decker; David M. Rogers; and Jay Livingstone; and Sens. Patricia D. Jehlen and Linda Dorcena Forry.

MBHP's Twelfth Annual Property Owner Appreciation Evening

On March 12, MBHP held a reception to celebrate property owners. Hosted by Bank of America, the twelfth annual Property Owner Appreciation Evening was held to recognize the contributions property owners and managers make in providing safe, affordable housing for families who are homeless or on the brink of homelessness.

The event was also a chance for MBHP to honor the exceptional commitment of three landlords: Maria Barros; Robert Nakashian; and David Rufo, owner of Clifton Management.

“Property owners and managers play an integral role in ensuring that the homes our families and individuals rent are safe and affordable,” said Chris Norris, executive director of MBHP. “We thank them for their efforts and especially recognize our three award winners for going above and beyond our expectations to help meet their tenants’ needs.”

Joining MBHP in thanking these owners was keynote speaker Barry Bluestone, founding director of Northeastern University’s Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy. In his keynote address, Bluestone spoke at length about the changing demographics of the Boston area and the effect it has and will continue to have on the housing market. Namely, the increased,



Property owners Robert Nakashian, Maria Barros, and David Rufo were honored at this year's event

unmet demand for rental units created by both an aging Baby Boomer generation that want to stay in their home communities, but not in their three-story single-family homes, and younger Millennials who are putting off home ownership in the suburbs in favor of renting apartments near city centers.

“We need more rental units,” said Bluestone. “We need to free up rental homes for low- and moderate-income families.” Referring to the traditional triple-deckers, he said, “Quite frankly, the kind of housing we have for

working families is the only housing they are going to be able to afford.”

Bluestone also called for zoning reform and regulatory relief to make it possible to build more housing for the growing population.

Calling on property owners to be a part of the solution, he said, “We have a lot to do in Boston, a lot to do in Massachusetts, with your help, to fulfill what I would like to call the moral obligation to house all our people in decent, affordable housing. And, at the same time, in doing it, fulfill the economic necessity of providing affordable housing that can help maintain young people in our community without kicking out the working families in our community, thus maintain our economic prosperity.”

MBHP provides rental assistance to 8,866 households, 5,051 of which are elderly or living with disabilities. In addition to working with tenants and prospective tenants, we also provide training and support to 4,300 local property owners and managers to provide education on rules and regulations, connect them with resources in the community, and offer guidance on best practices.



MBHP Executive Director Chris Norris with keynote speaker Barry Bluestone



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Have You Been to www.mbhp.org Lately?

If so, you know we've made a few changes. The website has a new look and new features to make it more efficient than ever to help those people in the Greater Boston area who are looking for safe, affordable housing. Upgrades include:

- **Online registration** for workshops and special events. In just a few clicks a spot can be reserved at an upcoming MBHP event.
- **Translation** powered by Google offering translation in 80 languages and new online forms that can be translated, filled out, and translated back to English before submitting.
- **Streamlined navigation** to help users find what they are looking for, fast.
- **Mobile site** for smartphones and tablets.
- **Accessibility** to ensure the website can be viewed easily by all users.



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