



Housing Authority  
City of Pittsburgh

# **A Shot in the Arm: Innovating and Adapting During the Pandemic**



#### HACP by the Numbers

**Families (all members) = 16,057**

**Adults = 9,340**

**Children = 6,717**

**Active vouchers = 5,478**

**Public housing units = 2,436**

**Landlords = 1,377**

**Mixed-income units = 642**

**Employees = 312**

**Managed communities = 16**

#### Mission Statement

To bring a higher quality of life to City of Pittsburgh residents by creating safe, affordable housing in conjunction with comprehensive support services, attentive property management and forward-thinking real estate development strategies.

## A Message from the Executive Director

The reasoning behind the mission to the moon was: ‘because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we’re willing to accept. One we are unwilling to postpone.’

Throughout my military career, I was taught that you must seize the moment. When other people go into shock, that’s my opportunity to seize what I need to seize.

When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged worldwide in 2020, my talented team at the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP) and I refused to lie in wait as an “invisible enemy” threatened each of us and our 20,000 residents.

My number one priority as executive director was to keep everyone safe and informed, while keeping the organization running smoothly. We accepted the challenge and refused to postpone our response.

Whether it was switching to a Work From Home model, adapting our digital literacy initiatives, ramping up our crucial community partnerships, or arming our staff and residents with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and educational resources needed to stay safe and connected, we were ready.

We initiated critical community collaborations throughout the pandemic to continue to serve every resident in every HACP community, including partnering with Pittsburgh Public Schools to provide our youth with laptops and WiFi access, continuing to partner with 412 Food Rescue to eradicate hunger in our communities, and partnering with the Northside Christian Health Center, Center for Victims, Highmark Wholecare, and UPMC to deliver up-to-date facts surrounding the pandemic and residents’ health, along with the COVID-19 vaccines, once available.

I’m lucky to have talented people working at the Housing Authority to push my aggressive agenda and to get things done. I am also grateful to the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development for supplying us with roughly \$11 million in emergency funding to help us continue our operations and rental assistance programs.

While the COVID-19 pandemic was extremely tragic for millions across the globe, it served as a catalyst to spring the HACP into the future of technology and preparedness, and poised us to continue to be a place to live and a path to launch for every person we serve.

Thank you to HUD, to the HACP board and staff, community partners and stakeholders, and our residents for your work, support, and patience during these unprecedented times.

I have no doubt the HACP is in a position to face any challenge that comes our way, now and onward into the future.

#### Caster D. Binion

Executive Director



**In March 2020, the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh was preparing to face an invisible enemy with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Thanks to countless brainstorming sessions, valued community partnerships, and the dedication of HACP staff, the Housing Authority was able to develop innovative projects, particularly within our Digital Literacy Initiatives and Resident Self-Sufficiency programs, that continue today.

“We approached every scenario with, ‘What if it happens,’ not, ‘When it happens,’” HACP Chief Community Affairs Officer Michelle Sandidge said. “We’re serving close to 20,000 people between our Low-Income Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher communities; we are a city within a city. We had to safely and efficiently continue to do what we were doing.”

This publication serves to show our staff, residents, and stakeholders our gratitude for their patience and hard work during the most unprecedented times in recent history.

Read on to learn how the HACP adapted its services involving Digital Literacy Initiatives, Resident and Family Self-Sufficiency programs, eviction prevention, administration, and asset management while navigating the global pandemic, all while continuing to keep the HACP **a place to live and a path to launch.**

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# Digital Literacy Initiatives



Though our organization has strived to bridge the digital divide for the last decade, the pandemic proved to be catastrophic for remote learners who lacked access to devices and reliable internet.



**TOP:** Former HACP Digital Literacy Initiatives Manager Byron Wright poses with one of the tablets that HACP gave to area school children during the pandemic.



**BOTTOM:** The HACP CyberBus team hosts Michael Polsinelli, HUD Detroit Field Office Director, and children from Detroit's Boys & Girls Club chapters during the NFL Draft in April 2024.

With generous support from federal CARES Act funding, we were able to expand upon and expedite our long-standing digital literacy initiative goals.

In 2020, our agency invested \$275,000 to provide Chromebooks to 872 Pittsburgh Public School students currently residing in HACP households. We also invested more than \$150,000 to provide every resident access to Comcast Internet Essentials and a device.

“This represents so much more than a donation or an inter-agency commitment,” said Chief Sandidge during the pandemic. “This is the partial realization of a long-term effort to ensure that HACP students aren’t left behind due to the digital divide. It’s an investment in the future of these kids and an investment that we are proud to make.”

Students are not the only ones who needed reliable access to the internet during COVID. Everything from banking to job applications to government services moved online.

Lacking internet access put communities at a disadvantage before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the global health crisis caused a major hurdle to stability and self-sufficiency among underserved populations.

“This is an opportunity that we’re very grateful for,” said HACP Executive Director Caster D. Binion during the pandemic. “We set out to bridge the digital divide in 2017 when we formally launched ConnectHomePgh with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the City of Pittsburgh. However, 2020 has further reinforced the critical need for households of all income levels to have Internet access, and this support will allow us to scale up our programs and bring us closer to that goal.”



# 872

Number of Pittsburgh Public School students who received Chromebooks in 2020.



## WIFI ON WHEELS (W.O.W.) CYBERBUS

Computer Program Assistants Steve Kohr and Jordan Owens switched the majority of their Mobile Computer Lab courses to a virtual format. Computer labs were also accessible to one person at a time in the beginning of the pandemic.

They also helped to teach HACP's residents, particularly seniors, how to use Zoom to reach their families and attend meetings, like the Resident Advisory Board meetings, while continuing to teach them computer basics.

Computer Program Assistant Brandon Hamilton came on board in the middle of the pandemic, in April 2021.

Mr. Kohr said they kept everyone's health in mind with restrictions at the onset of the pandemic, and learned to continue pushing forward through the unknowns.

"Sometimes things in life change drastically and unexpectedly, but I believe that the HACP can find new ways to deal with and overcome those things," he added.

Chief Sandidge said prior to launching the WiFi On Wheels (W.O.W.) CyberBus initiative, the HACP was using an old van to transport computers to residents that had spotty connections.

"We talked about doing an improved mobile unit before anyone was doing anything like this," she said. "I wanted to have WiFi connected right there on site; before, we had bad connections. We needed a robust source to connect with people."

The CyberBus — in partnership with Jerome Bettis' The Bus Stops Here Foundation and the STEM Coding Lab — is one of the many initiatives the HACP has introduced to public housing that is paving the way for other Housing Authorities to continue bridging the digital divide in their communities.

The CyberBus was ready to roll out in September 2022 after experiencing some supply chain delays.

The bus is stationed at various HACP communities throughout the week, and numerous community events throughout the year. The mobile classroom is equipped with computers and internet access that allows for remote instruction in STEM education, computer science, financial literacy, and business development for students and parents.

The project received generous support from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, CNX Foundation, the City of Pittsburgh Mayor's Office, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"COVID restrictions were still somewhat in place when we were rolling out the bus," Mr. Hamilton said. "We held an event at Northview Heights with Jerome Bettis there. That was a great way to bring us out of the pandemic where people were finally starting to gather together."

CYBERBUS/MOBILE  
COMPUTER LAB

1,400+

Clients served 2022–24

500+

Clients achieved  
proficiency 2022–23

500+

Internet referral codes  
requested 2022–23



The former WiFi On Wheels minivan travels to HACP communities prior to the launch of the W.O.W. CyberBus.

“We’re known as pioneers. We have talent here at the Housing Authority that no one else has, and we have the drive to get things done.”

Caster D. Binion  
Executive Director



HACP Computer Program Assistants Jordan Owens, middle, and Brandon Hamilton, right, pose with Michael Horvath, HUD Pittsburgh Field Office Director, on the W.O.W. CyberBus during a recent event.

“I had more people coming to my classes that knew the consequences of COVID. The pandemic didn’t just open the eyes of our residents; it opened our eyes, as well, to the fact that you have to have some level of digital literacy to survive in today’s world.”

Jordan Owens  
HACP Computer Program Assistant



# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The HACP Resident Employment Program/Section 3 offers a variety of training and employment opportunities, including an on-site technology and learning center, job search and training, and monthly employment seminars.

The program helps to connect families to information and opportunities leading to life-enhancing skills; and, to connect skilled workers with potential employers.

Lloyd C. Wilson Jr., Resident Employment Program Manager/Section 3 Coordinator, said when the pandemic emerged, he had to figure out how to connect residents looking for employment with employers.

“The Resident Employment Program contracted with EasyVirtualFair,” he explained. “This company allowed us to host more than 20 employers online at once. All of the employers were able to meet potential employees individually. This platform also allowed me to meet and help with employment needs.”

Virtual employment workshops were also held to teach clients how to search for jobs, write a resume, and ace an interview.

In 2021, the Resident Employment Program/Section 3 held more than 10 virtual job recruitment events and employment workshops. The Resident Employment and Family Self-Sufficiency departments also participated in joint efforts to help minimize employment and economic disparities.

In 2022, the Resident Employment Program partnered with Community Empowerment Association (CEA) and Community College Of Allegheny County (CCAC) to host its first in-person Job Fair since before the pandemic.

“The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the workforce development landscape, accelerating the adoption of virtual tools and online engagement. The HACP, in response to these changes, expanded its workforce development initiatives through virtual offices and job fairs.”

Moving forward, the HACP plans to continue its partnership with CVS Pharmacy and Ebenezer Outreach Ministries for the free pharmacy tech training program. A Carpentry Co-Op Program, in partnership with Pittsburgh Public Schools, also began in March 2024, led by Misty Clark, Senior Project Manager in HACP’s Central Facilities Management.

In 2025, the HACP will launch the Workforce on Wheels (W.O.W.) CyberBus 2.0, in partnership with CCAC, the Master Builders’ Association of Western Pennsylvania, First National Bank, and other community partners, aimed at bringing current workforce development opportunities among the 16 building trades unions in the Greater Pittsburgh Region, directly to HACP residents ages 18 and older and leading to well-paying union positions in trades such as plumbing, bricklaying, roofing, and much more.



TOP: CVS Pharmacy Tech Program students pose for a photo during a recent cohort. The program is held in partnership with the HACP Resident Employment/Section 3 Program and Ebenezer Outreach Ministries.

BOTTOM: Careers in construction are just one of the many fields our residents can receive training in through the Resident Employment Program.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The HACP Workforce Development Program successfully helped the following number of clients find employment, and prepare them to enter the workforce during and after the pandemic:

600+

Clients served  
2020-present



“The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the workforce development landscape, accelerating the adoption of virtual tools and online engagement. The HACP, in response to these changes, expanded its workforce development initiatives through virtual offices and job fairs. By leveraging digital platforms, HACP was able to broaden its reach, providing more accessible and flexible services to residents.”

**Lloyd C. Wilson Jr.**

Resident Employment Program Manager/Section 3 Coordinator



LEFT: Caleb Bush installs floor tiles in a Bedford Dwellings unit during the first cohort of the HACP Carpentry Co-Op in April 2024.



RIGHT: Mason Maxwell learns to cut wood during the Carpentry Co-Op cohort. The co-op is held in partnership with Pittsburgh Public Schools.



CREATIVE ARTS CORNER

The HACP’s Creative Arts Corner offers an audio/visual training program that’s free for all HACP Residents. CAC students are provided with a unique opportunity to cultivate their creative strengths in a state-of-the-art studio environment.

Participants compose and contribute to broadcast quality productions using professional techniques and equipment; take and develop high-quality digital photographs using SLR cameras and software like Photoshop; understand the ins and outs of the music and film industries from marketing to distribution; write and produce their own music CD; and capture and edit a wide range of video projects.

The CAC has two locations — the Bedford EnVision Center in the Hill District and Northview Heights in the Northside.

Nathan Williams, HACP’s Digital Literacy Initiatives Manager, served as the Creative Arts Corner Studio Coordinator during the pandemic.

“We canceled all in-person classes and moved to remote learning,” he said of navigating the pandemic. “We issued tablets to students that had audio/video production apps installed on them, and we used Zoom for virtual classes twice a week — an adult class and a youth class. We averaged about five youths and four adults per session.”

Since the pandemic, Mr. Williams noted both Creative Arts Corner studios received upgraded audio/visual equipment, including new computers with more external storage, and more music production hardware.

A plan to integrate the Creative Arts Corner program at any site is also in the works.

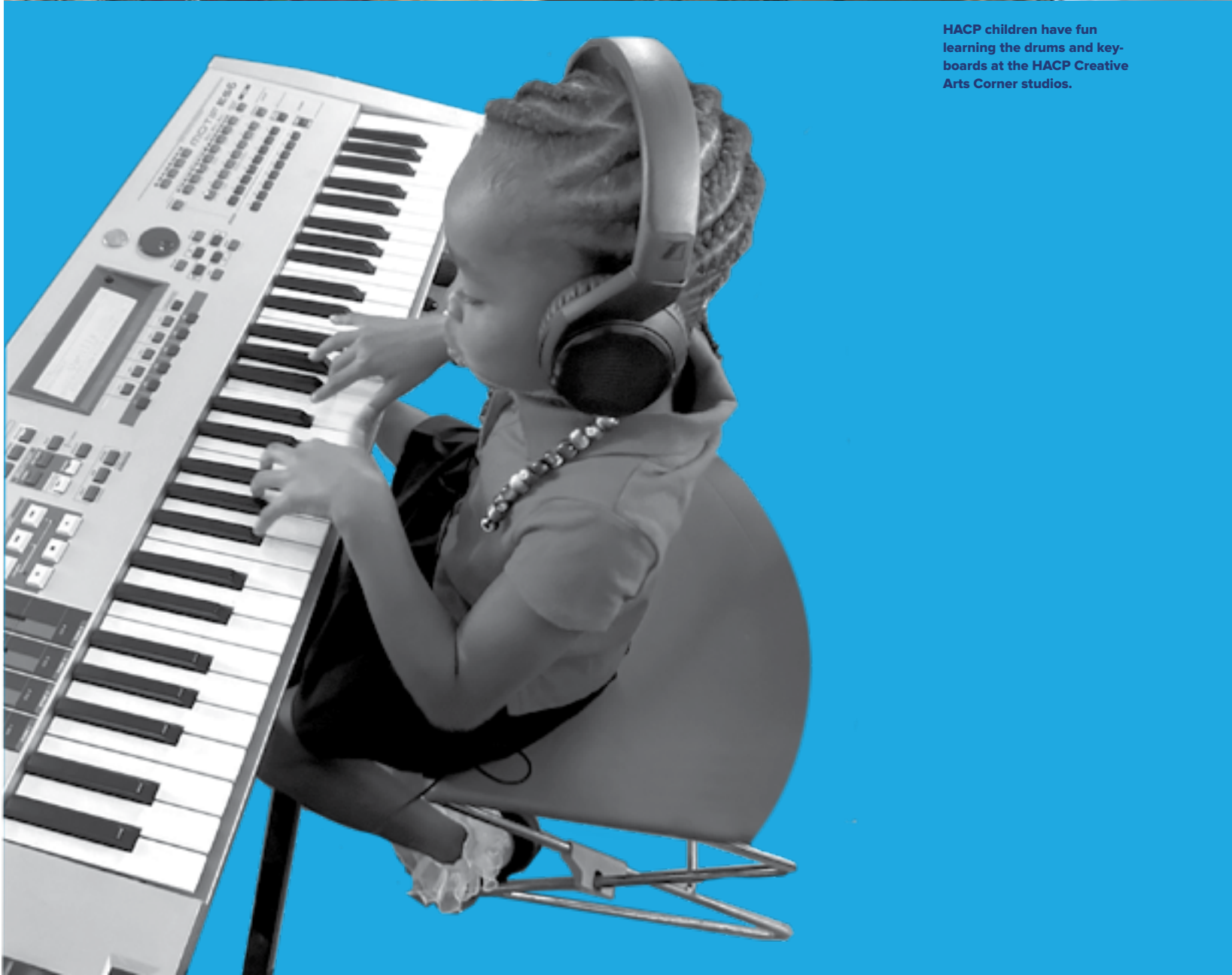
“With this plan, the CAC program can run on the CyberBus and the computer labs and Digital Literacy program can run in the studios,” he said.



At right, Nathan Williams, HACP Digital Literacy Initiatives Manager, explains the Creative Arts Corner program to various stakeholders, including Michael Horvath, HUD Pittsburgh Field Office Director, middle.



HACP children have fun learning the drums and key-boards at the HACP Creative Arts Corner studios.





# Social Services & Community Supports



The pandemic also tasked the HACP with creating solutions to continue providing its many programs that help residents gain self-sufficiency, as well as its social services. These include food distribution, behavioral and physical health resources, safe access to vaccines, and programs such as financial literacy and parenting classes.



TOP: 412 Food Rescue staff pose with HACP Executive Director Caster D. Binion, middle, and HACP Chief Community Affairs Officer Michelle Sandidge, right.

BOTTOM: 412 Food Rescue and HACP staff hand out food at the Bedford EnVision Center in early 2024.



We adapted to the world we were in,” Chief Sandidge said. “We formed a group of staff internally called the One Voice Committee where we sat on Zoom every day to figure out how to respond to different scenarios with one voice. We approached the pandemic by asking, ‘What if this happens,’ not ‘When it happens.’”

## FOOD DISTRIBUTION

The HACP has partnered with 412 Food Rescue since 2016 to help address food insecurity in public housing.

During the pandemic alone, they delivered more than 1.2 million pounds of food to HACP communities.

The total amount of delivered food since 2016 has an approximate retail value of more than \$3.4 million. During 2020, despite the substantial challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, 412 Food Rescue provided HACP communities with approximately 1,391 food deliveries — the equivalent of 300,000+ meals.

Jennifer England, 412 Food Rescue’s Vice President of External Affairs, said when the pandemic hit, one of the biggest questions was: What was going to happen to our relationship with the HACP and the food distributions there?

“Before the pandemic, populations that were really vulnerable, particularly seniors, would come into the community rooms and pick up their food,” she said. “With the shutdowns, we had to find a solution to still get food to them. We know these residents; we talk to them every week. What are they going to do if they can’t get their groceries delivered? That kept us all up at night.”

Chief Sandidge said the HACP held many virtual community meetings to figure out the grab-n-go meal distribution method.

“When COVID first broke out, people were afraid to be around others and to touch things,” she said. “Before, residents would get their food in the community rooms, and they weren’t pre-packaged. This method allowed them to grab a paper bag of food and take it home with minimal to no contact, and we still use this method today.”



1.2+  
Million

Pounds of food to HACP communities during the pandemic



412 FOOD RESCUE

From 2020–present

65,000

Meals per year

5,820

Rescues and counting

3.1m+

Pounds of carbon mitigation



412 Food Rescue staff happily delivers food to HACP communities throughout the pandemic.

“I really want to give the HACP credit because their leadership helped to brainstorm the Home Delivery and Grocery Bagging Programs,” Ms. England added. “They stepped up to the plate, and said: How do we serve residents without putting them in jeopardy? Let’s figure this out!”

Prior to the pandemic, 412 Food Rescue was only able to provide regular service to about half of HACP’s communities. An expanded partnership with the HACP that emerged during the pandemic allowed for regular service at all HACP communities with drop-off/delivery services held on a rotating basis.

The innovative Grocery Bagging Program distributes more than 1,500 pounds of surplus groceries to Low-Income Public Housing communities. That is equivalent to 65,000 meals a year that would otherwise be thrown away.

Ms. England said 412 Food Rescue is grateful for the donations that continued to come in despite the pandemic’s strain on supply chains. Though restaurants, schools, and other food donation facilities shut down, they relied heavily on grocery stores, such as Giant Eagle, Trader Joe’s, and Whole Foods, and distributors like Gordon Food Service, CISCO, and U.S. Foods, as well as the USDA Food Box Distribution Program.

“I think the pandemic taught us how resilient communities are, and how critical partnerships are,” Ms. England said. “We can’t serve people if we don’t have people that will take it and distribute it. This was true before the pandemic. The pantry system cannot handle the volume of fresh foods we receive. We had to figure out how to distribute fresh food quickly to people.”

“Moving forward, we need to tell the story,” Ms. England added. “Not all communities have figured this out, the fact that you can change what food access looks like for people by creating these partnerships, by taking the food directly into these communities.”

She noted the two organizations will be ready if and when another challenge like the COVID-19 pandemic hits.

“We never expected a pandemic. Who knows what’s around the corner. I trust that HACP and 412 Food Rescue will be together on the front lines of figuring that out!” she said.

“Moving forward, we need to tell the story. Not all communities have figured this out — the fact that you can change what food access looks like for people by creating these partnerships, by taking the food directly into these communities.”

Jennifer England

412 Food Rescue’s Vice President of External Affairs

VACCINATION CLINICS

Once the COVID-19 vaccine was released for emergency use in December 2020, Chief Sandidge said there was a big push to get as many staff and residents vaccinated as possible.

Partnerships with the Northside Christian Health Center, Highmark Wholecare, UPMC, and multiple public health partners allowed the HACP to hold community vaccination clinics for residents.

Dr. Dallas Malzi, Chief Medical Officer at the Northside Christian Health Center, said the center worked with the HACP to administer vaccinations to communities in the Northside, including Northview Heights and the YMCA. The clinic also rents space at Northview Heights to provide care to the community.

“I think the partnership between the HACP and NSCHC is very important to the Northside,” he said. “We provide full primary care to our patients, and they can make appointments to see a board-certified pediatrician, family medicine specialist or Advanced Practice Provider.”

One of the most challenging parts of the pandemic for center staff was making sure patients were engaged and trusted that they had their patients’ best interests at heart.

“We maintained an open and honest conversation with our patients, and taught them that the risks surrounding the vaccine were less than the risks of getting COVID itself,” he added.

The pandemic taught the staff of the Northside Christian Health Center that work needs to be done to build trust in the communities you serve before a natural disaster or community-wide emergency occurs.

“People are very reliant on those who are trusting in the healthcare community,” he said. “It’s much easier to effect a change if they are trusting in the way you are performing, and the way you do that is providing excellent care that embraces the needs of the community.”



TOP: HACP staff poses with Highmark Wholecare staff during an HACP event in 2023.

BOTTOM: A COVID-19 Mobile Response Unit is set up and a resident happily receives his COVID vaccine at one of HACP’s vaccination clinics.





MENTAL HEALTH

CENTER FOR VICTIMS

391

HACP clients served  
from 2020–23

COVID-19/PUBLIC HEALTH  
PARTNERS

- Highmark Wholecare Foundation
- Center for Victims
- Manchester Citizens Corp.
- Hilltop Pharmacy
- Brashear Association
- Minority Emergency Preparedness Task Force
- UPMC
- Hilltop Alliance / Access (Transportation)
- Ursuline Supportive Service (Outreach)
- Macedonia Church
- Duquesne University — School of Pharmacy
- PennDOT
- Northside Christian Health Center
- Allegheny Health Network

The HACP values the mental wellbeing of its residents and staff, and has partnered with organizations such as Center for Victims, Ursuline Support Services, and Familylinks to provide invaluable mental health support, particularly during the COVID-19 shutdowns that isolated many of us from our loved ones.

Center for Victims Community Outreach Intervention Specialist Neoshe Jenkins and Community Outreach and Support Specialist Tara Fleming said they offered supportive services and crisis counseling to residents who had the following: domestic/intimate partner violence, mental health/suicide concerns, and grief/loss during the pandemic.

Safety precautions taken included social distancing, masks, hand sanitizer, rapid COVID test kits and sanitation for in-person sessions. Staff also had to quickly learn technology that enabled them to still connect with their clients.

“HACP serves a large diverse population of individuals within the City of Pittsburgh. In our work with HACP, we have proudly observed HACP assisting individuals with employment opportunities, fair and affordable housing, opportunities to receive healthy food options, and resources for trauma, education and wellness,” they said. “It is with this collaboration that we are able to provide continuous and needed supportive services for all HACP residents and staff who are in need of services.”

Patricia Briggs, HACP Resident Relations Specialist, said the mental health sessions that were held were very enlightening.

“A lot of people opened up,” she said. “It’s so good to be able to open up and be comfortable talking to and with one another.”

Ms. Jenkins and Miss Fleming said to care for their own mental wellbeing, they relied on each other and support of management to debrief, problem solve, and stay solution focused.

“The pandemic taught us that one has to be flexible and creative with change that comes with endless possibilities,” they said. “We need to take care of ourselves and others. COVID also taught us to explore things that may be outside of our comfort zone. It taught us that when we tap into our creative side, we can create meaningful interactions with others.”



Center for Victims staff, from left: Tyrese Canada, Tara Fleming, and Neoshe Jenkins smile for the camera during a 2024 HACP Community Health Awareness Days event.

CLEAN SLATE E3

The HACP’s nonprofit affiliate, Clean Slate E3, has supported HACP youth for 25 years with anti-drug programs and its Clean Slate Scholarship Program, which was incorporated in 2009.

The Scholarship Program continued throughout the pandemic, thanks to HACP leadership and our community partner, NEED, which provides \$1,000 in matching funds for each \$4,000 scholarship, totaling \$5,000 a year for four years per student or \$20,000 total for each awardee.

In 2020, \$60,000 was distributed among 12 HACP residents who were continuing their education. The number of awardees and amount invested in their futures continued to rise each year since the pandemic emerged.

In 2021, \$67,500 was distributed to 14 HACP students; in 2022, \$115,000 was distributed among 23 awardees; in 2023, \$160,000 was distributed among 31 awardees; and in 2024, \$180,000 was distributed to 36 awardees.

“We have hundreds of exceptional students in our communities who depend on scholarship dollars to advance their education, and we are extremely pleased to be able to contribute toward their growth,” said Chief Sandidge.

Since its inception, the HACP and NEED have issued more than \$600,000 in scholarships to more than 160 students.

CLEAN SLATE

\$600,000

Scholarship funds

160+

Students served



LEFT: HACP staff and board members pose with HACP Chief Community Affairs Officer Michelle Sandidge, middle, in November 2024 when she was honored at the ACH Clear Pathways Gala with the 2024 Creative Spark Flame for work with local youth, including the HACP Clean Slate E3 program.



RIGHT: Kemba Smith shares her story with HACP staff and resident leaders during the HACP Clean Slate 25th Anniversary Weekend in August 2024.



MOVIE NIGHTS

Residents of Caliguiri Plaza in Allentown gather outside for an HACP Movie Night during the pandemic. Movie Nights are generously supported by the Highmark Wholecare Foundation and the Manchester Citizens Corp.



Reggie Smith and Dennis Walker of the Manchester Citizens Corporation/Mobile Movie Nights travel to HACP’s 10 senior high rises each month from spring to fall to bring a night of entertainment to HACP residents, which gives them the chance to socialize with one another — another aspect of life that was altered during the pandemic.

Tenants can choose from more than 1,000 movie titles, dating as far back as the 1970s.

The program is generously supported by the Highmark Wholecare Foundation.

“Social interaction is important for a person’s mental health and vitality,” said Karen Rollins-Fitch, director of corporate social responsibility for Highmark Wholecare. “This is one of the reasons why we find it important to work with the HACP in bringing Mobile Movie Nights to residents in their community.”

Mr. Smith said they have been providing this service to the HACP for several years, under the former Cash for Kids Movie Nights program, a service they also previously provided to the Allegheny County Housing Authority.

He added the HACP continued the program when the Allegheny County program ceased, and even through the pandemic.

“When COVID hit, HACP’s Michelle Sandidge refused to let the program shut down,” Mr. Smith said. “She said we would continue programming outside in the community parking lots or wherever we saw fit on the HACP properties, as long as it was outside. She requested that we provide masks, hand sanitizer, and snacks. The program was a resounding success with the seniors!”

Mr. Smith said the residents were happy to see the Movie Nights program continue as it gave them a chance to get outside of their apartments and socialize with each other.

“What we are most proud of is that we get to make residents happy and show them that we do care about them in their daily lives as evidenced by the turnouts for the movies. We are also proud of the relationships we have created throughout all the communities that we serve; now they look forward to seeing us,” he noted.

“Social interaction is important for a person’s mental health and vitality. This is one of the reasons why we find it important to work with the HACP in bringing Mobile Movie Nights to residents in their community.”

**Karen Rollins-Fitch**  
Director of Corporate Social Responsibility for Highmark Wholecare

VIRTUAL PARENTING CLASSES

The HACP has offered a six-week virtual parenting class to Low-Income Public Housing residents since August 2022, and also operates with generous support from the Highmark Wholecare Foundation.

Classes include: Initial digital literacy class (HACP Mobile Lab), Positive Parenting (Center for Victims), Mental Health Awareness (Center for Victims), Financial Literacy (Dollar Bank, Urban League, Ursuline Support Services), Nutrition — Healthy Eating — cooking class or resources (412 Food Rescue), and Childcare (ABK Learning & Development Center).

The HACP hopes to grow this program with additional topics that our residents are hoping to learn about. Additional topics to pursue include Housekeeping, CPR, and First Aid.

The program is open to all parents, grandparents, guardians and caregivers of children under age 18. At least one parent, guardian, or caregiver must be listed on an HACP lease in order to enroll.

Participating LIPH residents are also given a stipend, books on parenting and other goodies for completing the course, such as Giant Eagle gift cards for purchasing healthy foods.

Participants are also encouraged to share feedback to let HACP know which topics they are most interested in learning more about. They have expressed interest in learning ways to respond to their children without yelling and budgeting as a single parent, among other topics.

“A proposal to create a parenting program was discussed prior to the pandemic,” Chief Sandidge said. “When the pandemic hit, we switched it to a virtual model for our Resident Self-Sufficiency program. We asked: How can we make this user friendly in the world we were in? Each participant was given a tablet and incentives. Once completed, they are recognized during a graduation ceremony at the Bedford EnVision Center.”

Karen Rollins-Fitch, Highmark’s Director of Corporate Social Responsibility, said Highmark Wholecare is proud to support HACP’s Virtual Parenting Program.

“Highmark Wholecare is happy to support initiatives like the parenting classes that are provided at HACP. When looking at whole person care, well-informed parents make a difference in the lives of well cared for children, which results in an improved community. Highmark Wholecare focuses on physical health, but the wellbeing of the needs in mental, and financial health, are just as important,” she said.



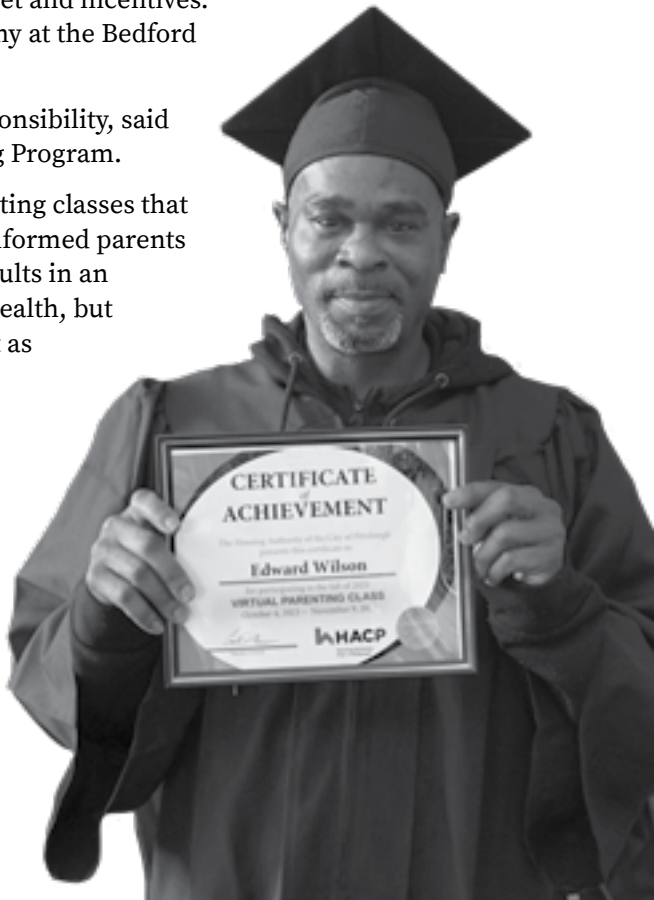
**VIRTUAL PARENTING**  
From 2022-present

**98+**  
Graduated Participants

**5**  
Cohorts

**TOP:** HACP Virtual Parenting Class graduates and their children proudly listen to speeches during their graduation ceremony in the Bedford EnVision Center.

**RIGHT:** Virtual Parenting Class graduate Edward Wilson shows off his certification at his graduation.



# Administrative Innovations



As the HACP navigated the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that our operations needed to be more client-centric and efficient. As new ways of conducting business were being developed, the Finance, Human Resources, Public Safety, Information Technology, and Operations departments were also hard at work implementing the new processes and policies, including Work From Home guidelines.

Despite the seemingly endless challenges ahead, the HACP continued to move forward with plans to relocate its central offices to 412 Blvd. of the Allies, which opened in July 2023.

A One-Stop Shop was added in the lobby of the new building as a convenient way for our staff to provide tenants, applicants, and landlords with the pertinent information necessary to thrive in our various Occupancy and Housing Choice Voucher programs. Prior to our relocation to 412 Boulevard of the Allies, our Occupancy and Housing Choice Voucher programs were housed in separate buildings — 100 and 200 Ross St.

## FINANCE

During the pandemic, the HACP faced significant financial challenges, particularly due to a decline in rental income as many tenants suspended payments due to issues such as job loss and economic instability.

HACP Controller Andrew Tenney said, “In order to address these challenges, the HACP secured approximately \$11 million in COVID funding from HUD. This was crucial for maintaining operations and supporting rental assistance programs.”

Mr. Tenney added the HACP also enhanced its partnerships with local organizations to help tenants navigate available financial aid while implementing strategic cost-saving measures, such as streamlining operations and expanding virtual services.

“These proactive financial strategies not only allowed the HACP to manage its budget effectively during the pandemic, but also ensured our commitment to providing affordable housing to each community,” he said.



Pittsburgh City Councilman Anthony Coghill celebrates the opening of the HACP One-Stop Shop at 412 Blvd. of the Allies with HACP staff.



11  
Million

in CARES Act funding  
through HUD



## HUMAN RESOURCES

At the height of the pandemic, more than 30 million U.S. workers were unemployed.

In 2021, more than 47 million Americans voluntarily quit their jobs, a trend known as “The Great Resignation.”

Marian Woods, HACP’s Chief Human Resources Officer, said, “We had to come up with creative ways to attract and retain the best and the brightest. We went from a country of workaholics to people who wanted to stay home and spend time with their families.”

Chief Woods said when she assumed her role with the HACP in August 2021, the HACP was hiring two employees per month, on average.

“The pandemic didn’t stop us from hiring people. During COVID, our staff was at 80%, and we rapidly replenished our workforce to 100%,” she added. “We have now doubled those numbers and we are still at double or more than double capacity.”

The HACP’s time to fill (how long it takes to fill a position, on average) was 750 days out for some positions during the pandemic because of the lack of applicants. The organization is now filling positions within 60 to 90 days.

“Agencies are asking us how we are able to attract and retain so many employees,” Chief Woods said.



HACP Chief Human Resources Officer Marian Woods, left, and Shivani Vichare, HACP Talent Acquisition Manager, wait to meet students during a job fair at the University of Pittsburgh during the pandemic.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

Coordinating public safety measures across the HACP portfolio was challenging and stressful at times during the pandemic.

HACP Director of Public Safety Joy Pekar said more silent complaints were fielded by her staff because one-on-one meetings were paused due to the shutdowns.

Though Pittsburgh Police were strained with resources during the pandemic, they were still able to assist Public Safety in emergency situations, such as efforts to control large street parties held along Chauncey Street in Bedford Dwellings. She said people who were tired of the lockdowns would organize the parties that were held each night for weeks, even though attempts to stop the gatherings were made.

“There would be 1,000 people out in the street,” she recalled. “We had police, the SWAT Team, Cares REACH, and crisis intervention there every night to make sure nothing happened. We built those relationships during COVID, and we continue those partnerships today.”

Ms. Pekar added the HACP always goes above and beyond when it comes to helping its residents.

“Not only did we make sure our buildings were sanitized, we helped educate our residents throughout the pandemic,” she said. “I feel we worked around the clock to make sure everyone was safe.”



The Pittsburgh Bureau of Police, in collaboration with the HACP and the Buhl Foundation's One Northside Initiative, celebrates the opening of the Northview Heights Calvin M. Hall Public Safety Center.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

As the country and globe began switching to Work From Home models, the HACP had to transform its entire system at the start of the pandemic.

Sherrone Dillard, HACP IT Manager, said the IT Department worked with HACP’s Computer Program Assistants to successfully implement this system.

At the time, only 5% of HACP employees had laptops, and there was a shortage across the nation.

Mr. Dillard said they gathered as many laptops as they could from the company. Staff members also drove to Ohio to buy laptops in stores.

“Another step we took was beefing up our VPN because it wasn’t used regularly by every employee back then. We had to redo it completely to allow users to securely connect to our network while at home.”

Mr. Dillard said they had no idea if this system was going to work.

“We were very constrained as far as time, plus you’re worried about your own health and safety, as well as your family’s,” he added.

Once employees were set up to work remotely, the IT team had to troubleshoot any issues with a brand new system — also remotely.

“We had to answer the question: ‘How do you assist someone when you’re not right next to them?’” he said. “We had to refine our customer service because people were frustrated, and you’re their only lifeline to start work.”

Mr. Dillard credited Mr. Binion and his executive team for getting the department the equipment needed to redo their entire landscape in a timely manner.



Sherrone Dillard, HACP IT Manager, smiles for the camera while troubleshooting network issues from his office.

“The biggest takeaway from the pandemic was being able to adjust on the fly. You can prepare all you want, but you can never prepare for the unknown. You have to say, ‘OK. Here’s what we have, here’s what we need to do.’”

**Sherrone Dillard**  
HACP IT Manager



OPERATIONS

Chief Operations Officer Marsha Grayson said when the pandemic emerged, the initial thoughts of the HACP were to keep everyone safe while continuing the integrity of the HACP’s programming.

Prior to the addition of the One-Stop Shop in the lobby of 412 Blvd. of the Allies, Chief Grayson noted the HACP opened a “Zoom Room” that allowed landlords and tenants to use computers on-site during the pandemic.

The introduction of fillable online forms also helped to keep necessary paperwork flowing within the Housing Choice Voucher Program, and across the organization, without the need for residents and landlords to meet in person.

Grievance hearings could also be held via a virtual platform, which helped prevent tenants from taking time off of work to attend them in person.

Chief Grayson added HUD instituted a number of waivers pertaining to HCV property inspections that allowed for Public Housing Authorities to ensure properties were safe while keeping the health and safety of all involved at the forefront.

Separate email accounts dedicated to receiving necessary HCV paperwork, such as change of income forms, were also created during the pandemic.

She noted providing employees with the equipment needed to effectively work from home, along with free parking or bus passes for returning to an in-person environment post-pandemic, were innovative approaches to keeping operations running smoothly, and incentivizing employees to stay with the organization amid unprecedented times.

“I believe the Housing Authority met the challenges the pandemic brought very well. We had been tracking the situation, and we had been anticipating that something was going to happen. I was happy and proud that we didn’t wait until the last minute; we were getting ready before the announcement that things were shutting down,” she said.



LEFT: The HACP moved its central offices to one location at 412 Blvd. of the Allies in Downtown Pittsburgh during the pandemic.

RIGHT: Pictured at a Pittsburgh City Council meeting honoring Executive Director Caster D. Binion in September 2024 are, from left: Chief Operations Officer Marsha Grayson; Della Binion, Mr. Binion’s wife; Mr. Binion; and Chief Human Resources Officer Marian Woods.

NAHRO AWARDS

The National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) has honored the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP) with 19 Awards of Merit and Excellence since 2020 in the following categories: Administrative Innovation, Community Revitalization, Project Design, and Resident & Client Services.

The NAHRO Awards of Merit program was created more than 20 years ago to recognize agencies who found innovative ways of making a difference in their communities and in the lives of the people they serve by creating affordable housing, revitalizing their neighborhoods, and developing initiatives such as job readiness programs, public-private partnerships, disaster prevention projects, and more.



The HACP was recognized with NAHRO Awards of Merit and Excellence for the following pictured developments and innovations: At left, the One-Stop Shop in 412 Blvd. of the Allies. From top, right: New Granada Square Apartments in the Hill District; ABK Learning Center’s playground at the Bedford EnVision Center; The Carina in East Liberty; the Lemington in Lincoln-Lemington-Belmar; and Cornerstone Village in Larimer and East Liberty.

- 2020**
- Community Revitalization: Cornerstone Village — Phase II (Award of Excellence)
  - Project Design: Sandstone Quarry — Phase I (Award of Excellence)
  - Resident & Client Services: Northview Heights Public Safety Center (with Pittsburgh Bureau of Police)
  - Resident & Client Services: Mobile Computer Lab 2.0
  - Resident & Client Services: Eliminating Food Insecurity in Public Housing (with 412 Food Rescue)
- 2021**
- Administrative Innovation: Lockdown Lockboxes: Repurposing Old Methods in the Time of COVID-19
  - Project Design: A Space of Their Own: Integrating Research in Nature-Based Play Design
  - Resident & Client Services: Creating Partnerships to Bridge Health Disparities and Combat Isolation (Award of Excellence)
  - Resident & Client Services: Virtual Job Fair: Overcoming Hurdles to Connect Residents to Employment
- 2022**
- Administrative Innovation: Eviction Prevention in the Age of COVID-19
  - Resident & Client Services: Free Pharmacy Technician Program (with Ebenezer Outreach Ministries and CVS Health)
  - Resident & Client Services: HACP and 412 Food Rescue Expand Deliveries and Eradicate Hunger

- 2023**
- Project Design: Lemington Senior Housing
  - Project Design: New Granada Square Apartments
  - Resident & Client Services: Virtual Parenting Classes
- 2024**
- Administrative Innovation: One-Stop Shop
  - Project Design: Cornerstone Village Phases 3 & 4 (Choice Neighborhoods)
  - Project Design: The Carina
  - Resident & Client Services: WiFi on Wheels (W.O.W.) CyberBus





# Asset Management



**The HACP manages 16 Low-Income Public Housing communities — six family communities and 10 senior high rises. In response to the pandemic, HACP’s Asset Management and Facility Services teams had quite a few pieces of the puzzle to put together to keep things running efficiently.**



**TOP:** KaBloom flowers blossom outside of Morse Gardens in the South Side.

**BOTTOM:** The Asset Management team has a blast during a gathering at Pressley Street High Rise in the North Side.

Our immediate response was setting up a process so site managers could work efficiently from home,” Anthony Ceoffe, HACP’s Senior Director of Asset Management, said. “We also had to set up a communication plan with residents and a cleaning plan so each property’s common areas were disinfected and cleaned on a regular basis.”

The HACP installed Lockdown Lockboxes at each of the communities for the deposit of secure documents. Lockdown Lockboxes enabled site management to continue their work during the pandemic, keeping our residents safe and healthy despite the challenges of social distancing. This initiative is one of many that earned the HACP an Award of Merit from the National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO).

Forms could also be filled out online and submitted electronically.

Mr. Ceoffe said they had to implement many processes internally to monitor resident needs and agency response.

“We created processes that ensured staff and residents were safe, and we were still providing the quality of service they expected and deserved,” he added. “We took advantage of technology to make sure residents were still able to meet their commitments, as well.”

Mr. Binion said while the majority of staff was able to work from home, Facility Services staff was working on the front lines doing maintenance in people’s homes.

“We had a volunteer force of staff that continued to service work orders for our residents,” he said. “We made sure they were equipped with Personal Protective Equipment, and followed CDC guidelines to keep everyone safe, and once the vaccine came out, every employee was either vaccinated or tested weekly to keep the spread at a minimum.”

Mr. Ceoffe said through the pandemic, they learned the importance of systems as a customer service tool.

“It gave us the opportunity to develop more professional yet personal understandings of the challenges our residents face,” he added. “It created an open dialogue so both sides could understand perspectives, challenges, and needs.”



# EVICITION PREVENTION

Devin Shirey, HACP's Mediation Specialist and Asset Management Administrative Assistant, said when the pandemic began, there were federal and county bans on evictions.

“HUD issued COVID-relief funds to help us continue operations,” she said. “The federal ban ended in 2021, but Mr. Binion extended ours because he didn’t want to displace any families. We didn’t resume legal action for past due rent until April 2024, and administrative fees for past due rent were resumed in September 2024.”

HACP participated in more than 700 mediations in 2023 and 2024 and distributed \$891,516.11 in rental assistance to families in 2024 through this process. In total, HACP has distributed \$3.9 million in rental assistance since 2021 through our partnership with Just Mediation Pittsburgh and RentHelpPGH. HACP continues to participate in an average of 25 mediations per month.

Prior to resuming eviction activity for rent collection, HACP distributed personalized repayment agreements to all qualifying LIPH families and extended the term options from 12 months to 36 months. HACP is currently managing 238 active repayment plans (11% of the population).

The HACP continues to participate in the Allegheny County Eviction Prevent Cohort and works closely with the Community Justice Project, RentHelpPGH, and Neighborhood Legal Services to support the Lawyer for the Day Program.

HACP also worked closely with Just Mediation Pittsburgh, RentHelpPGH, and ACTION Housing to streamline the application process for rental assistance, reduce difficulty related to the application, and provide Eviction Prevention services in each of our family communities and high rises by utilizing contracted services from Ursuline Support Services.

# SITE MANAGER REFLECTIONS

HACP Site Manager Jacki Thomas said despite the challenges the HACP faced when the pandemic emerged, the Asset Management Department “maintained their high standards, customer service, and business processes.”

“During this time, HACP worked diligently to establish and implement safety protocols to enhance safety for both internal and external customers, improve resident contact, and manage on-site office visits,” she said.

Site Management offices were reopened with modified hours after six months, with specific times and locations within the buildings designated for external customers to meet with HACP employees to improve safety, health, nutrition, mental health, warmth, in-home needs, and shelter for residents.

“Upon reopening, HACP successfully reduced resident fears and feelings of isolation and loneliness,” she added. “Administrative processes became streamlined, effective, and efficient, pleasing both residents and administrative teams.”

She said since these modifications were made there has been an increase in safety protocols, community relations, and departmental collaborations.

“Although we want to move past the pandemic as a difficult time in our lives, we must always remember and honor the lives lost within our community, families, residential properties, and around the world. We must never forget the lessons learned from this tragedy and continue to build upon them to improve the quality of life for each other, HACP, and the world every day.”

HACP Site Manager Rebecca Kuchta has worked for the HACP for nearly 12 years, and served as Site Manager within the Scattered Sites/Manchester Commons portfolio during the pandemic.

“We have people whose safety and comfort depend on us daily,” she said. “We are essential; our roles are very important to the people who look to us to maintain their housing needs.”

The pandemic posed many challenges for Scattered Sites staff because of its different locations spread across miles with lots of grass to cut and sidewalks to shovel, and it became increasingly difficult to meet residents’ needs.

“Our residents remained our primary concern,” she said. “I worried about residents who I knew were already ill or elderly. I worried about their employment and income.”

She added that a pandemic doesn’t stop everyone’s day-to-day life.

“We started working closer as a team. In my opinion, it brought us closer together trying to best serve the Housing Authority, and, more importantly, our residents, while still dealing with our own stressors of a global pandemic. We got into a groove of reporting differently, and leaning into each other. I was lucky to have a good team who responded well to the understanding that our residents still needed services regardless of the world around us,” she said.

She noted she feels the pandemic gave the HACP the ability and time to change some processes for the better.

## EVICITION PREVENTION

\$3.9m

Rental assistance since 2021

700+

Mediations in 2023–24

25

Mediations per month



TOP: Devin Shirey, HACP Mediation Specialist (middle), is pictured with Aaron Erb, Executive Director of Just Mediation Pittsburgh, and Abby Rae LaCombe, Executive Director of RentHelpPGH in the HACP central offices.

BOTTOM: The HACP Asset Management team poses with some residents outside the Giant Eagle Mobile Market at Glen Hazel High Rise in Hazelwood.



RIGHT: Flowers bloom outside of the Bedford EnVision Center in the Hill District.

BOTTOM LEFT: HACP Executive Director Caster D. Binion visits our goat friends with Allegheny GoatScape. The animals help clear vegetation at various HACP properties each spring.

BOTTOM RIGHT: HACP staff plants trees at Northview Heights with Tree Pittsburgh representatives as part of One Tree Per Child Pittsburgh.





“Upon reopening, HACP successfully reduced resident fears and feelings of isolation and loneliness. Administrative processes became streamlined, effective, and efficient, pleasing both residents and administrative teams.”

**Jacki Thomas**  
HACP Site Manager



## RESIDENT REFLECTIONS

Winnie Evans, a resident of Northview Heights since 1969 who serves as Northview's Tenant Council Treasurer, said while the pandemic was a trying time, the HACP made sure its residents were taken care of.

“The HACP gave us everything we needed from masks, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies, to paper towels and toilet paper. Donations also came from elected officials, organizations, community churches. We are very grateful for that,” she said.

Rochell Preston, a Northview Heights resident since 2008 who serves as Tenant Council President, said the pandemic was like a movie where time stood still.

To combat the toll the pandemic had on mental health, Ms. Evans, Ms. Preston and Patricia Briggs, HACP Resident Relations Specialist since 2000, would call each other, as well as other residents, to check in and make sure they were alright and see if they needed anything.

They also volunteered to distribute food to residents while adhering to CDC guidelines.

“The HACP needed people to step up on the front line to help,” Ms. Briggs said. “People’s hearts were so open and everyone was so kind. I couldn’t believe how many people were willing to donate food.”

Though the pandemic isolated everyone, they said it drew everyone closer in a way no one had looked for in the past.

“We recognized that we were all in this together,” Ms. Preston said. “Everyone was facing the same situation at the same time. I’m thankful and grateful that I was here to help, both inside and outside the community. I’ll do anything to help anyone.”

Ms. Briggs added site management and community residents worked with the Somali Bantu population at Northview Heights.

“They had their own resources to help them specifically, and were always included,” she explained. “We always let them know what was going on.”

The ladies thanked the residents who also volunteered their time to help where they could during the pandemic.

Ms. Preston said the pandemic taught her to be extra loving and not take anything for granted.

Ms. Briggs said it taught her to not put off until tomorrow what you can do today.



**TOP:** HACP Executive Director Caster D. Binion and HACP Site Manager Jacki Thomas celebrate Ms. Emma Alper's 100th birthday in May 2024 at Murray Towers.

**BOTTOM:** Patricia Briggs, HACP Resident Relations Specialist, Winnie Evans, and Rochell Preston pause for a photo after lunch inside the Northview Heights Community Room.

### OPPOSITE PAGE

**TOP:** Children enjoy crafts during a Choice Neighborhoods Initiative Summer Sundae Popup at Allegheny Dwellings in May 2023.

**BOTTOM LEFT:** The HACP Housing Choice Voucher team shows off Giant Eagle reusable grocery bags for food distribution during Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** At right, Lisa Epps-Cuda, Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire's Public Education Fire Instructor, shares information on smoke detectors with Michelle King, Policy Coordinator, Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, City of Pittsburgh, during a Northview Heights Resource Fair in April 2023.





## WITH SINCERE THANKS

The HACP is immensely grateful to its staff, Board of Commissioners, the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, the City of Pittsburgh, community partners, and, especially, its residents for their patience, dedication, and support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

If it weren't for your steadfast efforts and tenacious drive, the HACP would not have been able to operate as smoothly as it did during those unprecedented times.

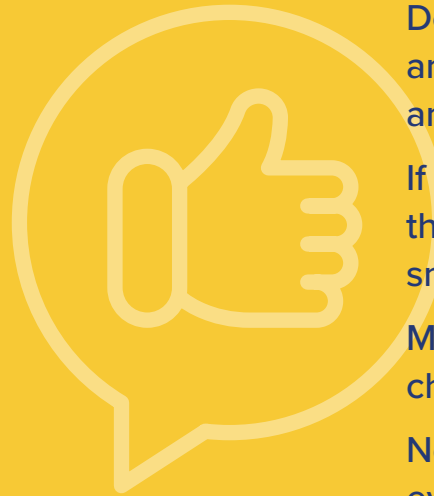
Moving forward, the HACP is poised to tackle any challenge that comes its way head on, without wavering.

No matter what comes our way, we will continue to serve every resident who calls the HACP home.

You are the reason we work so hard to give you and your families a safe place to live, food on your table, educational and employment opportunities, and so much more. You are the reason we are here.

We will continue to follow the road less traveled in order to offer affordable housing for all, and further fulfill our mission of being **a place to live and a path to launch**.

HACP Commissioner Janet Evans is pictured with HACP Executive Director Caster D. Binion in September 2024 during a Pittsburgh City Council meeting honoring Mr. Binion for his service to the City of Pittsburgh and our country.



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The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh practices inclusion and equity in all phases of its operations. As an Equal Opportunity Employer, all qualified applicants receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, sex, gender identification, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military service, national origin, age, veteran status, disability, or any other legally-protected characteristic.

All HACP housing is accessible to persons with disabilities.





[www.HACP.org](http://www.HACP.org)