

Healthy Homes: Bath Housing Pilots Aging-in-Place Program

It's a simple idea really. Spend a small amount of money to make low-income seniors' homes safer and it will help them stay in their homes longer.

Bath Housing developed this idea into a new program called Community Aging in Place (CAP), which provides home safety checks, minor maintenance repairs, and adaptability enhancements to low-income elderly households in the greater Bath area. For more extensive accessibility modifications, such as building a wheelchair ramp or widening doorways, Bath Housing partners with Habitat for Humanity 7 Rivers.

Although the concept is simple, Bath Housing is deploying CAP with great care and intention. The nonprofit received funding for the pilot program from the John T. Gorman Foundation in the summer of 2015 and spent three months laying the groundwork and creating partnerships.

Bath Housing executive director Debora Keller explained that the CAP concept evolved with the understanding that it's unlikely Maine will be able to build its way out of the senior housing crisis. According to a recent report from the Maine Affordable Housing Coalition, in 2012 there was a shortage of nearly 9,000 units of affordable housing available to low-income older people that will increase to more than 15,000 by 2022 unless apartments are added. By creating a new model for home repair, the program aims to minimize the pressure on existing housing resources.



Debbie, 91, is one of the first CAP participants. The program helped with some basic work on her home, including lighting upgrades, grab bars in the bathroom, and new smoke detectors.

A unique aspect of the program is the level of collaboration with organizations that have different capabilities. Bath Housing, for example, is a property management company, and maintaining homes and making them safe is what they do best. For bigger projects, Habitat for Humanity 7 Rivers was a natural partner; their core strength is their team of trained volunteers.

CHANS Home Health Care at Mid Coast-Parkview Health is the healthcare partner for the CAP program. In addition to donating Occupational Therapy visits for program participants who need it, CHANS staff is providing consulting and resources to ensure the Bath Housing team are doing things according to best practices.

HOW IT WORKS

To be eligible for the CAP program, participants must meet age, income,



Bath Housing's Maintenance Technician Joshua Dubois at work. Said one CAP participant: "Josh is personable and did a good job. It's hard to find an affordable repair person who is friendly and fixes things correctly."

and geographic requirements. Then, program coordinator Amy Liechty and a technician from the Bath Housing maintenance team meet with the resident in his/her home. In addition to an owner-led tour and safety check, Liechty asks lots of questions.

"The key to the CAP model is that it's really driven by homeowners," said Liechty. "They tell us what would make them feel safer; what would make their home easier to use."

Once the assessment is done, Bath Housing develops a work plan and then reviews it with the homeowner. Participants can choose one-time safety modifications, seek maintenance assistance, or both.

In its first three months the CAP program served 13 residents, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. One participant who is now mostly confined to a wheel-

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In the Next Issue of *Returns*

We explore Historic Tax Credits—the facts, the nuances, and how they work with Housing Credits.

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If I were a bank wanting to invest in ‘deals’ for return purposes, I would want to know how the syndicator vets a deal, because at the end of the day, it’s still a real estate transaction. Income and expenses, market location and characteristics, developer experience and capacity—all get evaluated consistent with underwriting any real estate transaction. Concurrent to that would be investment analysis,

performance expectations, risk assessment and return calculations.

I think it is important that the investor have a comfort level that the syndicator has the experience and knowledge to perform this types of analysis.

— Tom MacDonald, Vice President, Acquisitions at NNEHIF

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chair called the CAP team “his angels” and thanked them for helping him “to move around and live in my own house.”

MOVING FORWARD

Seed funding from the John T. Gorman Foundation will allow the CAP program to serve 100 participants in the first year. In that time, Bath Housing believes it will demonstrate that small investments in home safety will not only extend the time low-income seniors can live safely at home, but will also reduce healthcare expenses.

Deferred maintenance costs lead to unsafe homes, and the medical

community is beginning to confirm that stable housing is critical to good health, especially for older people whose health conditions may already be vulnerable.

Bath Housing hopes CAP will continue to evolve as it serves more households. The organization plans to question, assess, and document everything it does, with the goal of long-term sustainability and possible replication in other communities.

Six months into the pilot, Sagadahoc County Sheriff Joel Merry called the program benefits “immeasurable.”

“We know that at a certain age, one thing leads to another. The medical costs of a fall, including all of the required follow-up and rehab, are costly.” he said. “There is no way to measure the depth of prevention you can achieve with these simple modifications.” ♦

RESOURCES

CAP Program: <http://tinyurl.com/zktpj42>

John T. Gorman Foundation report: <http://tinyurl.com/z4pgahr>

Maine Affordable Housing Coalition report: <http://tinyurl.com/zm4kq5m>

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