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welcome you



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Dear Friends of Housing on Merit,

Quarter Three has been a time for continued growth for Housing on Merit. As highlighted in our Resident Services Programming Section, our network of collaborative partners has expanded to include the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program, Girls Scouts of Central California, District of Columbia Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Education, and Leveling the Playing Field. These collaborative partners allow HOM to expand its impact on our residents' lives. Internally HOM added two Project Management Assistants and two Resident Service Coordinators to our team. We're excited to have additional team members working to further our mission of creating a bridge to permanent affordable housing for vulnerable populations. Our portfolio is expanding as well. We will be adding several hundred units of affordable housing to our portfolio in the upcoming quarter and look forward to working with residents at our new communities.

With Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Luke'.

**Patrick Luke**  
President  
Housing on Merit Board of Directors

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jennifer Litwak'.

**Jennifer Litwak, Esq.**  
Executive Director  
Housing on Merit

## At HOM

### Housing on Merit's Resident Services Programming

In this newsletter, we highlight summer enrichment programming for youth. Housing on Merit provided over 300 hours of summer programming for youth across our California and Washington D.C. communities. On average, low-income students lose two to three months in reading achievement and math skills during the summer compared to their higher-income peers. According to the National Summer Learning Association, summer learning loss can result in low-income students falling behind academically up to three years by the fifth grade.

Youth also have limited supervision during the summer, leaving them vulnerable to delinquent behavior. Lastly, children are more prone to staying indoors during the summer, which limits their interaction with peers and the likelihood of engaging in physical activity. Below are highlights of summer programming from our four centers.

#### Center for Academic Excellence: *Promotes academic achievement for residents of all ages.*

Housing on Merit recognizes that science is an integral part of our everyday lives and that technology drives most learning outcomes, so our summer academic programming for young residents focused on STEM and STEAM education (which incorporates an art component to the focus areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics). Youth participated in science-related activities and learned to apply the scientific method to concepts related to biology and chemistry. They were also challenged to work collaboratively to build structures out of ordinary items like balloons and tape, using concepts related to engineering and architecture.

#### Center for Employment and Financial Stability: *Tackles issues of unemployment, under employment, and financial instability.*

During the summer, Housing on Merit participated in the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program, which matches youth with summer employment opportunities across the District of Columbia. The program allows youth to gain meaningful work experience, earn money, and acquire the skills necessary to succeed in various industries. HOM recruited four individuals from the program to serve as Summer Camp Counselors and assist in the facilitation of programming at Fort Chaplin Park Apartments.

#### Center for Growth and Empowerment: *Mobilizes residents to create a vibrant community reflective of their communal and personal goals.*

Housing on Merit collaborated with the Girls Scouts of Central California to provide outreach services to youth at our Butterfly Grove Learning Center in Fresno, California. As a result, young girls in our summer program were introduced to the Girl Scouts curriculum, which teaches self-confidence, how to form healthy relationships, how to problem-solve and learn from setbacks.

#### Center for Health and Wellness: *Addresses restrictions of access to quality health and wellness services.*

Housing on Merit collaborated with the District of Columbia SNAP-Education program to provide youth with weekly nutrition education workshops throughout the summer. Youth learned the importance of healthy eating and how to make healthy food choices. Additionally, we received a sponsorship from the Department of Parks and Recreation to provide summer meals for program participants, many of whom would otherwise go hungry when school is not in session. Summer programming



*A Camp Counselor with youth displaying their posters for the Hunger Wall Project in D.C. celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Poor People's Campaign.*



*Youth participate in outdoor games to learn about healthy lifestyle choices.*

concentrated on outdoor playtime for youth to help them engage in physical activity, and taught participants teambuilding, leadership and sportsmanship skills through organized sports. HOM received an in-kind grant from Leveling the Playing Field, a national nonprofit that makes athletic participation a reality for underprivileged children, to obtain sports equipment to further enhance participants' summer program experience.

## Beyond HOM

In this section we highlight the proposed Rent Relief Act, the recently launched Opportunity Starts at Home Campaign, and the interactive *Making Room: Housing for a Changing America* exhibit at the National Building Museum.

### *Rent Relief Act*

The Rent Relief Act, introduced by Senator Kamala Harris, proposes a refundable tax credit for low or middle-income households that pay over 30% of their income for rent. Under this act, households could claim a refundable tax credit for a percentage of rent paid above 30%. Federal housing policy currently pools a great deal of the country's wealth for homeowners, who have historically benefited from tax breaks such as the mortgage-interest deduction. Renters, unfortunately, do not benefit from such policies and remain vulnerable to the combination of rising rent and declining wages.

Eligibility for the tax credit would be based on the total amount spent annually on rent, a family's household income, and the rate of the federal government's established fair market rent controls. This tax credit would also extend to residents in government-subsidized rental housing, who could claim the value of one month's rent as a refundable tax credit.

The Rent Relief Act has the potential to affect over 13 million families. Households with an income of \$25,000 or less would receive a dollar for dollar tax credit. In high-cost areas, the tax credit is available for households with an income of up to \$125,000. The total tax credit a household can receive would be limited to the amount of rent paid up to 150% of the fair market rent for an applicable area. The size of the benefit increases for poor families and decreases for families with higher incomes.

Critics of the Rent Relief Act worry that it does not address the root of the affordable housing crisis – supply. They believe that by giving rent-burdened households additional income, it may lead landlords to increase prices. Supporters of the Act believe the tax credit would be much more difficult to abuse than housing choice vouchers. They also believe that if renters are refunded beyond their yearly tax liability, it would be similar to giving low-income renters a raise. An additional concern about the tax credit is that renters at the lowest end of the income scale would continue to experience difficulties using an annually disbursed tax credit to pay for monthly housing costs.

### *Opportunity Starts at Home Campaign*

Opportunity Starts at Home is a national multi-sector housing campaign with a goal to meet the rental housing needs of the nation's low-income populations. Housing on Merit is a member of the Opportunity Roundtable, which raises awareness of how housing stability impacts other sectors.

The Roundtable also aims to expand the multi-sector network to reach a diverse array of stakeholders. The year one goal of the Campaign is to create definitive cross-sector engagement to address housing needs.



*Members of the Opportunity Starts at Home Campaign convened at the first roundtable in September to explore campaign outcomes.*

### *Making Room: Housing for a Changing America*



Housing on Merit staff recently toured the *Making Room: Housing for a Changing America* exhibit at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. The exhibit sheds light on demographic shifts and how design solutions can address changes in housing needs. The exhibit centers around *The Open House*, a flexible layout designed to meet the needs of underserved households, and equipped with movable walls and dynamic furniture that serve multiple functions. We recommend touring this exhibit to those interested in housing innovation and learning more about successful examples of alternative housing solutions across the nation.

## Welcoming Our Heroes HOM

### U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

Housing on Merit is committed to reducing the number of women veterans experiencing homelessness in California. Another organization committed to ending homelessness is the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), which leads the national effort to prevent and end homelessness in America. USICH drives action among 19 federal member agencies to foster the efficient use of resources in support of best practices at every level of government and the private sector. USICH was originally authorized by Title II of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (PL 100-77) to serve as an independent establishment within the executive branch. USICH was most recently reauthorized by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 supported USICH's FY 18 budget request of \$3.6 million and extended the sunset date to October 1, 2020.

USICH leads the interagency implementation of the current federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, [\*Home, Together: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness\*](#). The Plan was released on July 19, 2018, and replaces [\*Opening Doors\*](#). According to USICH there are 64 communities that have ended homelessness among Veterans. In California, the only community to end Veteran homelessness is Riverside.

Welcoming Our Heroes Home is HOM's fundraising initiative to support our Awards of Merit for Housing Assistance Program, which provides funds to women veterans facing homelessness to help them overcome barriers to permanent housing. Over the past several years HOM has helped dozens of women veterans to transition from homelessness to permanent housing. Alongside USICH, HOM will continue to meet the needs of women veterans experiencing homelessness in California.



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