

2022/23 PHARE Comprehensive Plan-Rehabilitation Project

Organization Overview

Community Options, Inc. is a nonprofit organization. Our mission is to develop housing and employment supports for persons with disabilities. Community Options has participated in institutional closure and community residential placement for thousands of people in Pennsylvania and across the country.

Community Options established programming in Pennsylvania in 1994. We now support 353 Pennsylvania residents with disabilities through a variety of person-centered programs. Our programs and services include community-based living, employment supports, high school transition, and specialized programs for respite and medically fragile people with disabilities. Our overarching goal is to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the community through natural supports and collaboration with community partners.

Community Options is unique from other providers because our homes are small. Typically, each residence houses between 2-4 people, which we know affords the dignity of personal preference. All homes are well-maintained and located in safe neighborhoods. Families of people with disabilities trust us to care for their loved ones, and we want to make sure that they live in the same conditions that we would want for our own loved ones.

Community Options' model is also successful because our residents are encouraged to be part of their communities. Alongside their neighbors, they volunteer, work, shop and participate in events. For example, a resident of one of the homes we will renovate, Saraya, enjoys getting her nails done at the local salon, likes going out to eat at McDonald's, spends time making cards and writing poetry for friends in her community participation supports program, and wants to become involved in a self-advocacy group.

In Pennsylvania, we own or lease 217 community-based homes throughout the state. Community Options is fully prepared to successfully rehabilitate and manage the properties that PHARE funding will benefit. As these are existing residences, our rehabilitation project will not interfere with local land development plans. All rehabilitation to the homes will be performed by a licensed contractor with experience renovating housing for people with disabilities. The projects will comply with all local zoning ordinances and regulations.

Community Options owns and manages the properties we are requesting funding to rehabilitate. These properties are recognized by the State of Pennsylvania as certified locations for supported affordable housing services. Both homes are each already occupied by two individuals with physical and intellectual disabilities.

Statement of Need

PHARE funds will be used to renovate two properties: one in Whitehall Township, Pennsylvania (Lehigh County), and one in Williamsport, Pennsylvania (Lycoming County). Renovations will

focus on modifications to make the homes more accessible, comfortable, and safe, while maintaining critical affordable housing stock for adults with disabilities.

Like anyone else, our residents take pride in their homes. Many have lived in a Community Options home for years, some close to a decade. As the homes age, and as the people living in them do as well, they come to need repairs and, sometimes, modifications so that they remain pristine and accessible. We want to make these rehabilitations because we want the residents who we support to have dignified surroundings.

The housing we provide is critical. Though the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision gave people with disabilities the right to live in integrated, community-based settings, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are still often inappropriately and unjustly confined. In fact, according to the Case for Inclusion, nearly 2,500 Pennsylvania with intellectual and developmental disabilities are still confined to an institution or a nursing home.

Our homes are integrated, supportive, community-based, and affordable. Properties of this kind are scarce and in-demand in the Lehigh County and Lycoming areas. Need for accessible, supportive and affordable housing for people with disabilities in these regions is demonstrated by the following statistics:

-According to the Pennsylvania Waiting List Campaign, there are 312 Lehigh County residents with disabilities waiting to be placed in a supportive and affordable residence. Lycoming County has another 105 people with disabilities on this waitlist. Most people waiting are categorized as having "critical" or "emergency" placement needs.

-Lycoming County's 2018 Community Needs Assessment cites a "very limited supply of handicapped-accessible housing in Lycoming County" as the preeminent contributing factor to long waiting periods for services through the Medicare Waiver Program for affordable housing.

-The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission sites a shortage of 14,480 housing units for incomes of \$24,999 per year.

Site Control

Community Options has attached deeds that demonstrate ownership of both properties.

Zoning and Local Compliance

Both residences are owned and operated by Community Options and are zoned as residential properties. They are fully licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services to provide Community Home Services.

There are no known un-related development projects near the residences.

Scope of Work

Williamsport, PA:

Both residents of this home use wheelchairs to ambulate. The home needs renovations inside and outside to improve each person's ability to access spaces more independently and comfortably. Interior hallways and doorframes need to be widened to allow a full wheelchair turning radius. Currently, wheelchairs can fit through the hallways and doorways, but cannot be turned a full 360 degrees. These include the main hallway leading to bathrooms and a bedroom, all doorways, and the kitchen access. Walls will be torn down and new flooring, ceilings, and dry wall will be installed, framed, painted and finished.

A bathroom will also be re-configured for wheelchair accessibility by moving the toilet, plumbing and heat vent. A new vanity and cabinet will be installed that can be reached by a wheelchair user.

Any electrical hook-ups that need to be re-installed will be addressed.

The home's exterior will also receive renovations for accessibility. The home currently has sliding glass doors leading to the deck. Wheelchairs need to be lifted to pass over the frame. These doors will be removed, re-framed and replaced so that a wheelchair can be moved by its user from the inside to the outside without being lifted. The stairs that lead from the yard to the deck will be removed and a 40-inch-wide concrete ramp will be installed with handrails and spindles. A concrete pad will be poured and formed at the end of the ramp.

Whitehall, PA:

This residence will have its malfunctioning air conditioning system replaced with a 13 SEER conditioner. The new system's air handler will be connected to existing duct work. The feed and return will be retrofitted to the new system. A low voltage wiring kit and removal of existing units from the home are included. Manufacturers warranties are also included.

The new air conditioning system will improve air flow and reduce the risk of viral spread for residents and for staff. Each person in the home needs one-on-one support around the clock and is in close contact with staff. Both residents also have medical conditions that put them at high risk for virus related complications, like pneumonia and death. Air conditioning will not only make the home more comfortable, but will increase safety and health.

Target Population

The people who will live in the housing impacted by PHARE funding are underserved. All have intellectual and developmental disabilities. Each person requires supervision and support around the clock. Each person needs assistance with certain activities of daily living such as eating, meal preparation, bathing, changing, toileting, and medication management.

100% of the four individuals who live in the homes where PHARE funding will be applied are very low-income, as demonstrated by their receipt of Medicaid and Social Security Income (SSI) vouchers which detail the monthly funds designated for housing and supported services. One individual is a senior citizen. One of the individuals currently living in the housing is Black and another is a Hispanic immigrant. Three of the four use a wheelchair to ambulate. One has a visual impairment, and another has deafness. Three of the four have co-occurring mental health challenges including anxiety, intermittent explosive disorder, insomnia, and seizure disorder.

Impact

Safe, stable, and affordable housing is prior to the realization of all other goals and needs. Access to housing enables residents with disabilities to stabilize their lives, so they can pursue jobs, access needed services, and deal effectively with any problems they may have. The Community Options supported affordable housing program is a source of empowerment –participants choose where and how they want to live based on the comprehensive information that they are provided. They learn self-advocacy and how to make choices in the community. They attain goals for independence and achieve a high quality of life.

Two years ago, the Commissioner of one of our funding agencies visited one of our homes. She had a difficult time identifying the home. Our homes blend so well with others in the neighborhood and are so well-kept, that the Commissioner could not believe that the home she was driving past was a provider-run and government-funded home. This anecdote demonstrates Community Options' commitment to providing an environment of high therapeutic quality, designed to support treatment, dignity, stability, and integration. This would not be possible without the support of philanthropic partners like PHARE.

The people Community Options supports thrive once given the opportunity to live in their community. Rehabilitating and modifying their homes is important, especially because many have lived large parts of their lives in institutions where they were not treated like human beings. For example, Rachel H. received electric shock and aversive conditioning inside an institution for children called Rotenberg Center. Prior to her transition to a Community Options' home, Rachel had challenging and complex behaviors including disrobing and elopement. Rotenberg Center staff did not believe she could live in the community. In 2017, we moved Rachel out of the institution and into a small Community Options home. Rachel's behavior gradually improved. In June 2021, Rachel graduated from high school, with honors. Part of the treatment for Rachel's behaviors included establishing a therapeutic living environment for her with a home library and spaces that felt safe and personal.

Management

Community Options is a 501(c)(3) governed by a Board of Directors and led by the President and CEO. The Board of Directors provides financial and business oversight to Community Options as it relates to compliance, risk management, ethical standards, and best practices.

Community Options has a national leadership team that oversees operations, clinical services, human resources, finance and quality improvement. With a centralized administrative structure, Pennsylvania staff can focus on providing quality services and community-based supports to individuals with disabilities. Community Options' administrative cost is 10%.

Community Options has received the Platinum Seal of Transparency from GuideStar, a leading symbol of transparency and accountability.

Staff Involved in Project

Svetlana Repic-Qira, Executive Vice President, oversees operations and development in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Maryland. Svetlana holds an M.A. in Psychology and a B.A. from the University of Connecticut. Svetlana has been with Community Options for more than 20 years and has held multiple management positions including executive director. Previously, Svetlana was a social worker and patient discharge planner at Summit Hospital.

Lacie Parker, Pennsylvania State Director, oversees operations throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Lacie holds a B.A. in Psychology from Shippensburg University and an M.A. in Organization Development & Change from The Pennsylvania State University. Lacie began her career at Community Options as a Direct Support Professional in 2012 and went on to hold several leadership positions throughout her years with the organization. Previously, Lacie worked as a Family Based Mental Health Therapist and teacher's aide for a private school for children with autism.

Allyson Pors-Boitz, Executive Director, Allentown Region, oversees programming, residential services, and residential growth throughout the Allentown and Lehigh County region of Pennsylvania. Allyson has extensive connections and leadership experience within the local disability community. Prior to joining Community Options, she worked as a Transitional Employment Coordinator and Program Specialist at Via of the Lehigh Valley for four years and then as the Associate Director of LifePath, Inc. for 13 years.

Jamie Lyons, Executive Director, Columbia Office, oversees programming, residential services and residential growth throughout the Columbia and Lycoming County regions of Pennsylvania. She has a Bachelor's in Psychology from Lycoming College and was a certified First Aid and CPR and Mandt (workplace violence reduction) trainer. Ms. Lyons has more than 13 years of experience supporting people with disabilities and leading programs to meet their needs.