



# 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Stories

## **The Start of HCA's Homelessness Prevention Program**

*Shared by Laura Wiener, HCA current Vice President*

HCA's Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) has been a part of the Town's social safety net for 25 years. It started in 2001, the same year that HCA bought its first 2-family house and converted it to affordable family housing.

I was the Town's Director of Housing at the time. It was the first time Arlington had a housing office, as part of the Department of Planning and Community Development. I worked closely with the Housing Corporation of Arlington, which was the implementation arm of the Town's housing program. In addition to the always-fabulous HCA board, I had a Brain Trust supporting me; a Brain Trust with a heart. There was Select Board member Charlie Lyons, Director of Planning and Community Development Alan McClennen, Director of Health and Human Services Patsy Kraemer, and a consultant, former Select Board member Bob Murray. Each of them was a huge supporter of our effort to launch a housing program in Arlington. Each came to the table with a sense of immediacy, and even panic, about the people being hurt by rising housing values in Arlington.

In the spring of 2001, I was starting to see people come into my office who, because of some disruption in their lives, were behind in their rents. A few lived in affordable housing, but mostly they lived in market rate rental housing with private landlords. For some, the main problem was a rent increase. For others, it was sudden job loss, medical debt, or a divorce. In most cases it was something unexpected, causing them to get behind on their rent. I would also get requests from the Department of Health and Human Services of someone escaping domestic violence, needing to move out fast. These were emergencies, requiring quick cash and quick action.

I mentioned all of this to our consultant, Bob Murray, who had the idea for starting a flexible fund to help people needing a small amount of help, but fast. I thought it was a great idea but didn't know where the money would come from. Bob said, as he so often did: Don't worry about the money. Start doing the work and the money will follow.

It happened pretty quickly! We developed 2 sources of money. First, we sent a letter requesting donations to all Arlington taxpayers, specifically for homelessness prevention. The response was overwhelming. We received about \$25,000 in the first month or so. The second source of money was from the Walk for Affordable Housing. We had a few sponsors, mostly banks, and many individuals who volunteered to walk and collect donations from their friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues. Despite torrential rain, we collected another \$25,000! So the fund was launched with \$50,000.

With funds in hand, a committee of 3 was set up to review requests, and we started to make small grants to Arlington residents at risk of losing their homes. One of the committee members, Mary Deyst, was connected to a Domestic Violence Program operating out of the Town's Health and Human Services Department. The second committee member was Deacon Frank Mandoza of St. Agnes Church, for whom HCA has named a Community Service award. The third was Jan Blodgett, a long-time HCA board member. This was a committee with a lot of compassion.

The Program continues to operate today! HCA's Social Service Manager, Renea Duran conducts a comprehensive intake with applicants, and helps them complete the initial paperwork. She then works with a committee of three other dedicated community members who help make final award decisions: Lourie August from the Council on Aging, Monique Magliozzi, one of HCA's earliest board members, and Carl Flumerfelt, an area banker and former HCA Board member. In 2025 alone, we granted a total of \$84,388 to help 43 Arlington families. **Since the HPP program started, HCA has provided nearly \$1.5 million to assist nearly 1,000 Arlington families in remaining stable and housed in town.**

HCA still solicits funds by request to Arlington residents, and has also received funds from the Community Preservation Act Committee. Last year, for the first time, the Symmes Memorial Fund awarded a grant to support both the HPP fund and our related social services work. The Town and its residents always step up with funds and care.

HCA keeps creating more affordable housing, but the way our larger economy is going right now, it seems there will never be enough affordable housing for everyone who needs it. Even those who live in affordable housing can face financial crises and need this program. The Homelessness Prevention Program allows HCA to help Arlington tenants get through a crisis and maintain stability for their families.

In fact, as this newsletter is going out, we are in the middle of our annual fundraising appeal for the HPP program! A local couple — long-time supporters of the HPP program — have challenged HCA to raise \$25,000 for the program by May 15<sup>th</sup>. When we do, they will match those funds 100%! Just like in the very first year of the HPP program, we will have raised \$50,000 to help Arlington families remain housed. Please donate today!