

## **RHA Core Value: Understanding**

Having worked and been in the public housing industry for over twenty-plus years, we are often described as "Housers." Our business is the housing business. Having a home is something many of us take for granted; however, for the over 2,000 children we serve annually, having a home means so much more than having a roof over their heads. According to our kids, having a home is love, trust, safety, freedom, and a place to dream. It is no different for our seniors or our elderly. While some may interpret this as idealism or even optimism, it is one of the many goals that drive me. My acumen, or street savvy if you will, stems from the ability to learn to make quick (practical) decisions for the sake of resolving a crisis or navigating challenges which are driven by the need to create strategies, practices, and tools proven to be effective in resident-centered approaches to affordable housing.

I have often observed that optimism is contagious, but I have also learned that so is negativity. Therefore, the leadership role I take is a positive frame of mind to show and demonstrate to my Leadership Team that it is necessary to work problems in a time-critical and actual emergency environment with a constructive and positive framework.

I do not take my curator responsibilities lightly. All of the duties of care, loyalty, good faith, and confidentiality when serving the best interests of our residents, are always inherent in my decision-making. As the 'guardian', of our residents I and all my staff are tasked with ensuring that all matters related to the welfare of the residents are dealt with responsibly and in their best interests. This care can include such things as deciding where the residents will live, arranging for health care through one of our community partners, and providing workforce development.

Although, on the surface, one may think curator responsibilities are strictly financial, I am of the firm principle that it is also very people-centric. I have often observed that the duty of loyalty starts and pertains to always acting in the best interest of the 'beneficiary,' who are our residents, at all times, putting their well-being first and foremost. To exemplify and represent this supposition, the agency has reached a point where it will be investing not only to support the growth of affordable housing redevelopment but has developed a "clear path" for the change we're going to achieve over the next five years and beyond with our scattered site initiative. These scattered sites include the acquisition, restoration, and refurbishing of homes that benefit our low- or moderate-income residents and at the same time, help eliminate specific conditions of blight or decay located in neighborhoods in areas of our community.

And yes, understanding is a cornerstone among the ten core values of the Rockford Housing Authority, and it resonates deeply within me as the CEO. My years of experience have solidified my understanding of the profound significance a home holds for our residents. It drives our decision-making, leadership approach, and unwavering commitment to improving lives. Through our understanding, we craft strategies, foster positive mindsets, and deliver resident-centered solutions that address the unique needs and aspirations of those we serve.

Through our commitment to understanding, we foster a culture of empathy and compassion within the Rockford Housing Authority. We recognize that each resident comes with their own

set of circumstances, challenges, and dreams. By truly understanding their individual needs, we can tailor our services and programs to provide the support they require to thrive. Our Jobs Plus Initiative and the Lifeforce Development Institute are prime examples of this kind of thinking and outcome.

Our understanding extends beyond the important immediate needs of our residents. We actively seek to comprehend the broader social, economic, and environmental factors that impact their lives. This holistic approach allows us to address systemic barriers and create sustainable solutions that empower our residents to break free from the cycle of poverty and achieve long-term stability.



Furthermore, our understanding drives us to build strong partnerships with community organizations, local businesses, and government agencies. By collaborating and sharing our knowledge and expertise, we can collectively work toward creating a community where everyone has access to safe, affordable housing and the necessary resources to succeed.

As the CEO, I am dedicated to cultivating a culture of continuous learning and growth within our organization. By encouraging open dialogue, embracing diverse perspectives, and fostering an environment of curiosity, we continually expand our understanding of the evolving needs of our residents and the ever-changing landscape of the public housing industry.

In conclusion, understanding is not just a value we uphold; it is the foundation upon which we build a better future for our residents. With understanding as our guiding principle, we remain steadfast in our commitment to providing more than just housing—we aim to create communities that nurture love, trust, safety, and opportunity for all. Together, with our staff and community stakeholders, we will continue to pave the way for positive change and make a lasting impact in the lives of those we serve.

Regards,

Laura