

The RHA

# IN FOCUS

Newsletter 2023  
APRIL/MAY



## Women Who Lead Gala

Odessa Walker, Human Services Director, and Angel Mackey, Executive Assistant, attended the Women Who Lead Gala, presented by Women and Wealth on Friday, March 31st. The Gala was about “promoting women in leadership. The night was a celebration for the women who lead in our community and included a guest speaker, a formal dinner, and the presentation of awards honoring strong women in the community who advance women’s leadership and exemplify leadership.” RHA was honored and delighted to attend and sponsor an amazing gala.



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# LDI Spring Graduation

On March 30th, the first LDI class of 2023 walked the stage and received their certificates! The graduation ceremony featured multiple guest speakers including former LDI Graduate, Breanna Bailey and words of encouragement from Mr. Elias Soria.

The Keynote Speaker of the afternoon was RHA's own, Odessa Walker, Director of Human Services. She read a powerful speech filled with guidance on moving forward and reminded the students that you are your own person and to never compare yourself and your journey to anyone else's.

RHA and the LDI instructors are so proud of the Spring 2023 Graduates! Congratulations to Janae Brown, Maranda Boolman, Margie Curtiss, Elena Hernandez, Marwan Hamza, Quintin Banks, Hezekiah Childress, Robert Porter, Giovanni Parks, and FSS Graduate, Erica Glover!

The LDI curriculum includes help with the foundational skill gap in the workforce with a 12-week hands-on learning program that covers job/career readiness skills to meet the community's workforce goals. The LDI instructors strive to help better every students personal, professional, and financial lives.

For more information about the program and to hear past LDI graduates journey through the program, please visit <https://launchmyfuture.com/ldi/>





# Financial Literacy Month

Financial Literacy Month is celebrated in April, giving people a reminder to check and promote financial situations and skills. The conversation about money, and knowing how to handle it can be uncomfortable for some, especially if you are confused about the subject, but you're not alone, it doesn't matter if you have been earning and saving for a long while or if you are starting the saving and earning journey today; everyday is a chance to improve.

Financial Literacy Month is a celebration, but also a challenge. This month is an opportunity for individuals to review their finances and gradually improve them. The first Financial Literacy Month was in April of 2004. It was instated to highlight the importance of being financially literate and to educate people on the importance of knowing about their finances. Financial Literacy Month was started based on the Youth Literacy Day, which came into existence through the National Endowment for Financial Education (NEFE). The NEFE was an activity that was a part of the High School Financial Program. Then in 2003, Congress showed support for the month after the Senate and House Resolution requested President George W. Bush to declare April as Financial Literacy Month. Then, a bill was passed supporting the goals that the month brought and implementing it into Federal Governments, schools, localities, and non-profit organizations.

## Financial Literacy Month FAQ

1. What are the components of financial literacy?
  - a. There are seven components that make up financial literacy including; earning, spending, saving, investing, borrowing, and protecting.
2. What does financial literacy mean?
  - a. It means "the ability to effectively use financial skills including personal financial management, investing, and budgeting."
3. What are the variables of financial literacy?
  - a. Some of the variables of financial literacy are gender, age, occupation, marital status, education level of an individual, and income.

## RHA's Financial Literacy programs

If you are an RHA resident and are interested in learning about financial literacy and how to create a strong foundation for yourself, please visit the Launch My Future website a learn more about our financial services. From Jobs Plus and Homeownership Programs, where we offer assistance on getting to financial freedom, to our Lifeforce Development Institute, where you can learn to be job ready and get started in the work force!

<https://launchmyfuture.com/>



# Fair Housing Month 2023

Each year in April we observe Fair Housing Month. This year, we commemorate the 55th anniversary of the passage. The representation of the federal Fair Housing Act on April 11, 1968 came only after a long and difficult journey. From 1966-1967, Congress regularly considered the fair housing bill, but failed to garner a strong enough majority for its passage. However, when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968, President Lyndon Johnson utilized this national tragedy to urge for the bill's speedy Congressional approval.

On April 11, 1968, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which was meant as a follow-up to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The 1968 Act expanded on previous acts and prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, sex, and handicap and family status. Title VIII of the Act is also known as the Fair Housing Act of 1968. "The Fair Housing Act protects people from discrimination when they are renting or buying a home, getting a mortgage, seeking housing assistance, or engaging in other housing-related activities." States HUD.

## RHA & Fair Housing Month

On Friday, April 28th, RHA convened an important a panel discussion with our Community Partners to have an open and transparent discussion about discrimination in the housing market and to shed light on, as well as to commemorate, the 55th Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act signed into legislation.

Our Community Partner Presenters and Panelists included:

- Tessa Skogh, Fair Housing Attorney, Prairie State Legal Services
- Michael Hedrick, Director of Outreach Services, Rockford Rescue Mission
- Caitlyn Baylor, Grants & Special Initiatives Director, Habitat for Humanity

This event was a great opportunity to celebrate the progress that has been made in advancing civil rights and to continue the important work of promoting fair housing for all. It is important for organizations and individuals to actively work toward creating inclusive and diverse communities. One of the many ways that this can be achieved, is through policies that promote fair housing practices. Other ways include creating accessible housing options for people with disabilities, and increasing diversity in neighborhoods and communities. During the question-and-answer period Tessa Skogh stated that, "having a diverse work place has many benefits including that we all grew up with different experiences and now can help others in the same experience on a personal level."

Understanding the history of the Fair Housing Act is crucial to recognizing the progress that has been made and the challenges that still exist. While progress has been made in combating these practices, discrimination and inequality still exist in the housing market today. Caitlyn Baylor made a point of stating, "becoming a homeowner as a person of color is a very drawn-out experience. With people of color paying more for homes and when it comes time to sell the home, many people do





not get the same sale value of the home.” We want to thank our panelists for joining us in providing an insightful presentation and subsequent discussion. Thank you to all of the individuals who were in attendance. Your continued support assists the sustained vision of the Rockford Housing Authority to provide quality affordable housing for all in our community.

The Rockford Housing Authority has historically served the housing needs of persons whose income is low and very low in the City of Rockford through HUD funded public and HCV housing. RHA has provided “decent, safe, and sanitary” low-income public housing to Rockford’s citizens for decades. Throughout the decades the needs of our community have changed, and our agency needs a strategic plan to meet the changing needs proactively.

The Rockford Housing Authority is in transition from a provider of decent safe and sanitary housing to the leading provider of housing that meets a higher community vision. This transition involves the disposition, demolition, redevelopment, or conversion of obsolete developments that no longer meet the RHA and City of Rockford viability and community standards.

The staff and leadership at RHA are always striving to make our community better than best. RHA has implemented many services and programs to do just that. Through our Human Services Department for our Residents, we foster collaborative community relationships that promote creativity, innovation, and teamwork for our residents and the community.

The Rockford Housing Authority’s Human Services provides various programs and services focused on supporting families and individuals in increasing their opportunities, promoting well-being, and community workforce connections. Through the Launch My Future Website, we coordinate our programs and initiatives to ensure that we meet exacting standards of service and care.

In collaboration with community partner resources, our services include such areas as education, job training, subsidized housing support, community food subsidies, direction to health care, and skill training. In addition, the Human Services Department act as mediators for our residents or directly intervene with community social services organizations or governmental agencies on behalf of individuals and families.



# Mental Health Awareness Month

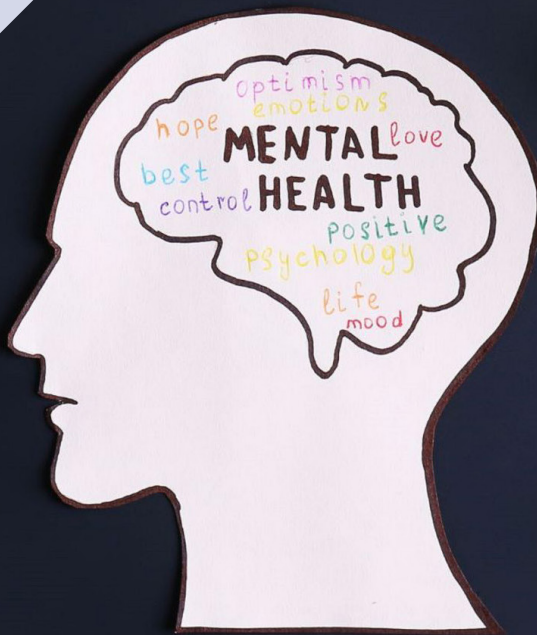
Since 1949, the month of May recognizes National Mental Health Awareness Month. Mental illness is defined as a condition that affects a person's thinking, feeling, or mood. 1 in 5 American adults experiences some form of mental illness in any given year, whether that being; depression, PTSD, anxiety, or many of the other types of mental illnesses. We all have rainy days and some bright days in our lives, but someone with a mental illness can have, what seems like all rainy days. National Mental Health Month is an excellent way to learn more about mental health and the resources that are out there so more people can have those bright, beautiful days.

Every day people overcome their mental illness, by doing things that they enjoy. Every person is different, and that means the way that people deal with their health is different.

Some people don't even want the help sometimes, and either can't bring themselves to do it or genuinely think nothing is wrong.

Friends and family play a considerable part in helping and supporting them; they can be the support the person needs to seek help. Some helpful things you can do if you have a friend or family member dealing with mental illness, provided by NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) is to; be attentive to the family member, sometimes things and emotions change. Learn all that you can about how to help, how to seek help, and learn what that family member needs to be healthy again. Take care of yourself as well as the family member in need; if your health is in jeopardy, then there may be little that you can do.

After the COVID-19 pandemic and seeing the effects of lockdown, people are more understanding of mental health illnesses, but there is still a huge misunderstanding with mental illness in society these days with people either thinking it is not a real thing or thinking that mental illness can just be snapped out of. This negative view of those with mental health conditions is called Stigma. Stigma is when you yourself, or someone else, views you in a negative way because you have a certain condition. Some people describe stigma as a type of shame felt as a form of judgement or blame from someone else, or an internal feeling, that causes confusion between feeling bad and being bad. Stigma can encourage feelings of isolation and make individuals feel as though they must keep their condition a secret. This can create huge challenges to reaching out for help. The importance of mental health treatment and support should not be undervalued or stigmatized.



There isn't, as NAMI states, "one size fits all" treatment, because everyone feels and reacts differently. Some people have found methods that help them ease their mind and breathing, some tools commonly used are; meditation, therapy, exercise, and education. Another thing to keep in mind if you suffer from a mental illness is that, your friends and family love you dearly, and they are always there for support.

Unfortunately, we all know that not every family has that supportive or attentive dynamic, if that's the case there are hundreds of online groups, forums, and friends online that are maybe going through the same or similar situation as you are. If you or anyone you know is battling mental health illnesses, please take a look at these national and local resources:

#### **National Resources:**

- Suicide Prevention Hotline (24 Hour)
  - If you or a loved one are experiencing a mental health crisis, call 1-800-273-8255
- Crisis Text Line (24 Hour)
  - Serving anyone, in any type of crisis. Text HELLO to: 741741
- CARES Line (24 Hour)
  - If your child is having a mental health crisis, call 1-800-345-9049, TTY: 1-773-523-4504.
- National Runaway Safeline (24 Hour)
  - For youth, call 1-800-786-2929 or Text: 66008
- Veterans Crisis Line (24 hour)
  - Call 1-800-273-8255 + press 1 or Text: 838255, Support for deaf and hard of hearing: 1-800-799-4889
- National Eating Disorder Helpline
  - Call 1-800-931-2237 (Monday-Thursday from 10AM to 8PM CST, and Friday from 10AM to 4PM CST)
- Postpartum Support International
  - Call 1-800-944-4773, English and Spanish
- The Trevor Project (24 Hour)
  - Suicide hotline for LGBTQ+ youth, call 1-866-488-7386

#### **Local Resources:**

This is a partial list of some Strategic Community Partners that RHA suggests

In Case of Emergency, dial 911

- 211
- NAMI Northern Illinois
- Family Peace Center
- City of Rockford Human Services
- Family Counseling Services
- Restore Rockford
- Stepping Stones of Rockford
- RAMP
- HOPE Child and Family Counseling
- Remedies Renewing Lives
- Riverside Counseling Center
- Youth Services Network
- Oak Street Health
- The Bridge Clinic
- Rockford Rescue Mission
- Carpenter's Place

#### **Alternative Therapies:**

- Meditation: Reduce stress & control anxiety
- Music: Boost your mood & well-being
- Yoga: Improve your overall quality of life
- Get creative: Stimulate your mind & begin healing
- Sleep: Allow your body to repair & mind to process
- Routine: Instill good habits & build self-confidence
- Laugh: Improve your mood & immune system
- Journal: Know yourself better
- Connect Socially: Increase your happiness
- Get active: Build stamina, focus, & better sleep habits
- Eat healthy: Increase your energy levels & mood
- Learn something new: Better yourself





# National Mobility Awareness Month

SUMMIT GREEN APARTMENTS

As we celebrate National Mobility Awareness Month, The Rockford Housing Authority is committed to providing safe and affordable housing to low-income families and individuals in the Rockford community. But beyond our core mission, RHA is also very dedicated to serving residents who face unique challenges, such as those with disabilities or mobility impairments. According to the CDC, 1 in 4 adult Americans lives with a disability. And of those, mobility disabilities are the most common, affecting 1 in 7 adults. Through various accommodations, partnerships, and resources, RHA is working to continuously create a more accessible, inclusive community for all residents.

## Mobility Awareness Within RHA

One of the significant challenges that residents with mobility impairments face is physical barriers. RHA has taken steps to address this challenge by ensuring that its developments are designed with accessibility in mind. RHA offers accommodations, such as bathroom grab bars, ramped entrances, widened doorways, and lowered counters, to help residents with mobility impairments navigate their homes more comfortably. RHA's commitment to serving residents with challenges extends beyond just physical accommodations. We also offer supportive services such as job training and educational programs to help residents achieve self-sufficiency and independence. In addition, RHA works closely with community partners to connect residents with resources and services that can improve their quality of life. It's a testament to the importance of efforts like mobility awareness month that so many live with disabilities and still struggle to have their essential personhood respected. Numerous organizations, like the Muscular Dystrophy Association, do great work to help improve disabled people's quality of life.



BUCKBEE APARTMENTS

## RHA's Efforts to Promote Independence and Accessibility

Transportation is an added challenge that residents with mobility impairments may face. RHA uses its Mobile Van and has partnered with local transportation providers to offer residents with disabilities access to transportation services that meet their needs. RHA also provides information and resources to help residents with disabilities access public transportation services. Health care can be a challenge for residents. RHA has partnered with local health care providers to ensure that residents with disabilities have access to the medical care they need and provides information and resources to help our residents with disabilities access preventative care and other health care services. Social isolation is a trial that residents with mobility impairments may face. RHA recognizes the importance of social connections and offers a variety of activities and events to help residents build social relationships and feel more connected to their community. RHA understands the importance of promoting mobility awareness and takes proactive steps to ensure its housing developments are accessible to our residents.

## Breaking Down Barriers

Following the RHA core values, our resident's quality of life is the most important thing. That means making developments and offices accessible to everyone in the Rockford community. RHA continues to lead by example with caring. We show that by caring about our workers and our residents, anything is possible.



MIDVALE APARTMENTS



## Promoting Mobility Awareness

During National Mobility Awareness Month, RHA advocates for policies and initiatives that promote accessibility and mobility awareness. "The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) protects people with disabilities from discrimination. Disability rights are civil rights. From voting to parking, the ADA is a law that protects people with disabilities in many areas of public life.," states the ADA. We work with local and state officials to ensure that laws and regulations support the needs of our residents with disabilities and other challenges. National Mobility Awareness Month encourages people with disabilities to enjoy active, mobile lifestyles. It's also a time to bring attention to our residents who live with mobility limitations, the challenges they face, and how we can all come together to help create a more accommodating and equitable society and community for all. RHA currently provides homes to 1,295 disabled residents. To learn more about some of the RHA low-rise developments that include Buckbee, Midvale, and Summit Green, please visit: <https://rockfordha.org/housing/>

## Memorial Day: Honoring Our Fallen Heroes

Memorial Day is a time for reflection and remembrance of the brave men and women who have given their lives in service to our country. For the Rockford Housing Authority, this day holds a special significance as we honor the sacrifice and service of our nation's heroes.

Throughout history, countless individuals have answered the call of duty to defend our freedoms and protect our way of life. These men and women have put their lives on the line to ensure that our nation remains safe and secure. Their sacrifice has allowed us to live in a country where we can express ourselves freely, worship as we choose, and pursue our dreams without fear.

At the Rockford Housing Authority, we recognize the importance of honoring the service and sacrifice of our nation's heroes. We understand that Memorial Day is not just a day off from work or school, but a day to remember the ultimate sacrifice made by our fallen soldiers.

There are many ways to honor the fallen on Memorial Day. You might attend the parade or ceremony, fly an American flag, or visit a cemetery to pay your respects to a family member. Whatever you choose to do, take a moment to reflect on the sacrifices that have been made on behalf of our country.

As we remember those who have given their lives, we also honor the families and loved ones left behind. We understand that their sacrifice is just as great as those who have served on the front lines. We are grateful for their sacrifice, and we stand in solidarity with them.

This Memorial Day, the Rockford Housing Authority will take time to remember and honor the brave men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice. We will never forget their service, their sacrifice, and their commitment to our great nation. We are forever grateful for their dedication to our country and will always hold them in our hearts.



# Leading Change One Day at a Time



I believe, strategic change starts at the level of the organization's corporate culture. The RHA Leadership Team and I have invested significant time, resources, and energy toward the beliefs and behaviors that govern how our folks act in the organization. We live in an ever-changing world. Both policies and procedures are constantly changing. When the Rockford Housing Authority first came into existence, that was a different time, with other goals, a separate initiative, and a different mission statement. However, one idea that has remained the same over the past seventy-three years is the continued vision to help, assist, and support the needs of individuals in our community by providing them with housing. The RHA Ten Core Values shape our corporate culture. We work with our staff to understand how the Core Values relate to their day-to-day behavior. While times and situations may change, intrinsic ethical values do not.

Creating shared understanding starts with my external awareness, always being acutely agile, and flexible in my critical thinking, which ultimately defines the strategic outcomes and supports my short-term/long-term visions. Over the years, I have developed the ability to remain confident in finding opportunities to experience, even under severe and adverse conditions. I maintain a positive outlook, stay decisive, and encourage others to ensure clear and understood communications.

With change comes new aspects of the job and day to day tasks. The designation of RHA becoming a Move to Work Agency, brings a new aspect of "change" to not only RHA staff, but to the Rockford community. The Move to Work (MTW) designation provides the opportunity for additional partners who will work together to help us increase access to care, boost opportunities for resident employment, and improve the quality of resident services. The policy and programs adopted through MTW include changes to the tenant-based Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program and policies that increase the affordable housing supply within the city of Rockford.

Another example of change is the RHA Five Year Strategic Plan, the whole plan encompasses change. A lot can and will change in only five years. If we take a look back to 2020, we had ongoing changes every day, in our personal and professional lives. Leading my staff through the COVID-19 pandemic was an ever-changing cycle, we worked from home, we worked half in office half at home, we did Zoom meetings and even virtual lessons with our LifeForce Development Institute Students. Within the Strategic Plan, you will see how we as an agency, as a community, and as individuals, changed. If we are fortunate, change is sometimes a choice we can make, but I have learned, many times over, that change is thrust upon us. Change is the only thing in life one can count on. My leadership philosophy is simple, embrace change. I look at the problem from as many angles as possible and involve the RHA Leadership team by communicating issues and asking for their input. When I am in the throes of change, I look for the best payoff with an acceptable level of risk. Being flexible empowers me to address the age-old adages that we all have heard, "we have always done it that way," or "It's just not worth the risk?"

Leading in the times of change is a daily reminder to create shared understanding, as it is vital to our ongoing success, trust, empowerment, and cohesion that are paramount requirements of our organizational mission.

No matter what size your level or organization is, strategic change typically starts at the level of an organization's corporate culture because culture is a powerful force that influences how people behave, make decisions, and approach their work. When an organization wants to make a significant change to its strategy, it often needs to change its culture to support and sustain that change.



Here are eleven ways in which you can implement strategic change and start at the level of your organization's corporate culture:

**1. Define the desired culture:** The first step in changing an organization's culture is to define





the desired culture that aligns with the new strategic direction. This involves identifying the behaviors, values, and attitudes that will support the new strategy.

**2. Communicate the vision:** Once the desired culture has been defined, it's important to communicate the vision for the new culture to all employees. Leaders should explain why the change is necessary and how it will benefit the organization.

**3. Lead by example:** Leaders must model the behavior they want to see in others. They should demonstrate the desired values and behaviors and hold themselves accountable for living up to them.

**4. Align systems and processes:** To reinforce the new culture, organizations may need

to make changes to their systems and processes. For example, if the desired culture is one of innovation, the organization may need to create a process for soliciting and implementing new ideas.

**5. Provide training and development:** Employees may need training and development to acquire the skills and knowledge required to support the new culture. This may involve providing training on new processes or technologies, as well as training on the desired behaviors and values.

**6. Measure progress:** Organizations should measure progress in changing the culture and adjust their approach as needed. This may involve conducting surveys or focus groups to gather feedback on the culture change initiative.

**7. Empower employees:** To make the culture change sustainable, employees need to feel empowered to make decisions and take actions that align with the new culture. Leaders should delegate authority and encourage employees to take ownership of their work.

**8. Recognize and reward desired behaviors:** Organizations should recognize and reward employees who demonstrate the desired behaviors and values. This can help reinforce the new culture and encourage others to adopt the same behaviors.

**9. Address resistance:** Change is often met with resistance, and culture change is no exception. Leaders should anticipate resistance and have a plan in place to address it. This may involve addressing concerns and fears, providing additional training, or involving employees in the change process.

**10. Foster collaboration:** Collaboration and teamwork are often important aspects of a new culture. Leaders should encourage collaboration and create opportunities for employees to work together to achieve common goals.

**11. Be patient:** Changing an organization's culture is a long-term process that requires patience and persistence. It's important to recognize that culture change is not a quick fix and may take several years to fully take hold.



In conclusion, strategic change often starts with a change in an organization's culture, but it requires a multi-faceted approach that includes defining the desired culture, communicating the vision, modeling the desired behavior, aligning systems and processes, providing training and development, measuring progress, empowering employees, recognizing, and rewarding desired behaviors, addressing resistance, fostering collaboration, and being patient. By taking these steps, organizations can successfully shift their culture to support a new strategic direction.



ROCKFORD HOUSING AUTHORITY  
FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN 2023 - 2028

Regards,

Laura

View the RHA 5-Year  
Plan here



View the Housing Choice  
Voucher Program, News  
Series Here





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## Did you know?

**RHA Offices are closed on Monday  
May 29th 2023, and will open on  
Tuesday, May 30th.**

**Memorial Day: Honoring Our Fallen  
Heroes**

To learn more about the  
importance of Memorial Day, please  
see page 9.

