

The RHA

# IN FOCUS



Newsletter 2023

NOVEMBER

## National Homeless Youth Awareness Month

"In 2021, the Senate designated November to be Youth Homelessness Awareness Month. Since then, every November we bring together our whole community to confront this crisis head-on. We urge everyone to get loud, act, and shed light on the issue of youth homelessness." Covenant House is the largest, primarily privately funded charity in North and Central America providing immediate and long-term support for young people facing homelessness and survivors of trafficking.

November has been a time to acknowledge those children and families experiencing homelessness since 2021. As many as 2.5 million youth per year experience homelessness. Along with losing their home, community, friends, and routines as well as their sense of stability and safety, many homeless youths are also victims of trauma. While trying to survive on the streets, youth are exposed to countless dangers, with an increased likelihood of substance abuse, early parenthood, impulsivity, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and a vulnerability to being trafficked.



November  
is  
**NATIONAL**  
*Homeless*  
**YOUTH**  
Awareness Month



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and Accountability**  
*Laura Snyder, CEO, Page 9*

The cornerstone of The Rockford Housing Authority is “A Quality Home Is The Foundation Of Society & Community” and we stand by that not only in November, but every day for the past 71 years. Within those years we have grown and adapted to the ever-changing world of public housing adding programs, initiatives, and incentives to make sure the people of Rockford have access to the fundamental right to have a home.

With those programs and initiatives, we strive for our residents and their families to not settle for public housing resources, but to break the glass ceiling of the housing market. We build in programs to not only get residents off the streets, but to also create life long goals and investments in their home, career, and overall life.



One of those programs is the Housing Choice Voucher Program. In the Greater Rockford Area, low-income individuals and families use vouchers to help pay for privately owned housing, which has historically been referenced, and commonly known as ‘Section 8 Housing.’ Unfortunately, today, many of us have fallen victim to erroneous information without questioning its accuracy or scrutinizing the motives and reliability of the sources.

Misunderstanding, misinformation, and a slew of false or content inaccuracies have provided disinformation to people who simply want to navigate the real opportunities that the Housing Choice Voucher Program provides. The underlining purpose of the HCV program is to provide rental assistance to eligible individuals and families. The rules and regulations of the HCV program are determined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, commonly referred to as HUD. The Rockford Housing Authority, like all the other Public Housing Authorities throughout the US, is afforded choices in the operation of the program, which is included in the RHA’s administrative plan, a document approved by the RHA Board of Commissioners of the municipality. When an individual or a family is determined to be eligible for program participation and funding is available, the RHA issues a housing voucher to that person or head of household.

RHA Public housing comes in all sizes and types, from scattered single-family houses to Highrise apartments for Seniors and elderly families. The RHA owns 291 Scattered Site units throughout the City of Rockford. These residences are divided into 2 sections with The Rock River as the dividing point – Scattered Sites East and Scattered Sites West.





The units are single family or duplex residences blended into the surrounding community. Transfers from a development to a Scattered Site unit have specific requirements based upon “good tenancy”.

Bringing us to the FSS Home Ownership Program; FSS makes it possible for participants to accumulate substantial sums of money; therefore, giving the family a down payment on a home of their own if they choose that option. Presently we have 175 families in the program with a capacity of 210. The program can be a very good experience for families that are transitioning into the home buying market or families that have the desire to gain employment or education to improve their living options. An incentive of the FSS program is an escrow (savings) account.



As the family rent increases due to increased earned income (30% of adjusted gross income), the increase of rent is deposited in an escrow account that they may access once their goals are completed. FSS is a wonderful program that is making a difference for those that are successful in achieving their goals. Participants have been able to obtain GED or higher education. Employment and training has become a priority. The desire to move on from housing becomes evident as goals are obtained. Three families have started their own business and a few have sent their children to college or gone back to school themselves.

To learn more about The Rockford Housing Authority please visit: <https://rockfordha.org/>





# Halloween at Rockford Housing Authority

On October 31st, RHA Leadership Team held an Octoberfest staff party to kick off a day of Halloween fun! There was amazing food, a costume contest, chili cook off, pumpkin decorating, and a candy donation contest! As the day ended, RHA held a Trunk or Treat - the event was open to RHA residents and the community as a whole. We are thrilled to share that we were able to serve a total of 816 people – 413 children and 403 adults. It was a Spooktacular evening filled with laughter and treats!



A big shout-out to the RHA staff who generously donated over 350 pounds of candy for the Trunk or Treat event, making this event even more special. Fun was had by all and we are so grateful that we get these moments of joy with our staff.

Congratulations to the Octoberfest contest winners!

## Chili Cook Off

First Place, Courtney Williams

Second Place, Vern Johnson

Third Place, Tanisha Gray

## Pumpkin Decorating Contest

Winner, Laura Martinez

## Costume Contest

First Place, Angel Mackey

Second Place, Efrain Mayorga

Third Place, Martha DeLuna

## Candy Donation

First Place - an amazing 101 POUNDS, the HCV Department







# RHA EMPLOYEE Halloween Party





# Annual RHA Job Fair Recap

The Rockford Housing Authority hosted our Annual Job Fair for October Employment Empowerment Month on October 27, 2023. The event was held at the RHA central office and had over 20 employers ready to help job seekers!



This event is aimed at empowering residents in our community with the tools and knowledge for success, and had an amazing turn out of job seekers ready to learn, engage, and get into the workplace!

We hope the event informed RHA residents and the public of the many services & jobs available to them throughout the community and create a unified platform of community resources to help families achieve self-sufficiency.

Thank you to our employers for joining us & thank you to Blaz'in Magic BBQ" employees who were on-site, offering delicious food options for purchase!

## Our employers:

Multimedia Marketing Group, Illinois Dept. of Children and Family Services, Northwest Community Center, Workplace Staffing, Milestone, CIT Trucks, Prairie State Legal Services, Dickey Staffing, Comcast, Furst Staffing, Healthcare Plus, Rockford Park District, UPS, Hard Rock Casino, Amazon, YWCA Northwestern Illinois, Aunt Martha's Health and Wellness, Jobs R Us, Dust and Clean, EDDR Corp., 160 Driving Academy, Goodwill of Northern Illinois, The Workforce Connection.



PRAIRIE STATE  
LEGAL SERVICES



**NORTHWEST**  
COMMUNITY CENTER



**ROCKFORD**  
PARK DISTRICT



**FURST STAFFING**

**COMCAST**  
**ywca**  
Northwestern Illinois



**JobsRUs**  
**EDDR**  
CORPORATION

Illinois Department of  
**DCFS**  
Children & Family Services

**Goodwill**  
Northern Illinois



**The Workforce Connection**  
An Illinois workNet Center  
A proud partner of the AmericanJobCenter network

**amazon**

**AUNT MARTHA'S**  
HEALTH & WELLNESS





# LDI Graduation

## Fall 2023

### CONGRATULATIONS TO THE GRADUATES OF THE LIFEFORCE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The Rockford Housing Authority is thrilled and pleased to announce that all Liforce Development Institute 2023 students have successfully completed the 12-week/108-hour program! The LDI Graduation was held at the RHA Central office October 26th, 2023, and was the last LDI graduating class of 2023!

Congratulations to Kierra Hall, Carla Roberston, Tanginique Pemberton, and Destinee Parchmon!

We also want to congratulate our FSS Graduate, Aletta Jordan!

The graduation ceremony featured multiple guest speakers, including Mrs. Odessa Walker, RHA COO, Ms. Keyana Coleman, Former LDI Graduate, and Mr. Carandus Brown, RHA Human Services Manager.

The Keynote Speaker of the afternoon was Ms. Erica Miller, RN-BSN, PACS. She gave a powerful speech filled with guidance on moving forward and reminded the students that they were on the right path and to keep following their goals no matter what life handed them. RHA and the LDI instructors are so proud of the Fall 2023 Graduates!

Registration is now open for the next class starting January 8th, 2024!

<https://launchmyfuture.com/ldi/registration/>



## Veteran's Day

Veterans Day is a day for honoring all military veterans who have served our country. Veterans Day was proclaimed first in 1919 when President Wilson declared November 11 as the first commemoration. The day was originally called "Armistice Day." President Wilson said, "To us in America, the reflections of Armistice Day will be filled with solemn pride in the heroism of those who died in the country's service and with gratitude for the victory, both because of the thing from which it has freed us and because of the opportunity it has given America to show her sympathy with peace and justice in the councils of the nations."



Veterans Day is always observed on November 11, no matter what day of the week, as it is the anniversary of the Armistice signing that ended World War I. The day of November 11, 1918, is regarded as the end of "the wars to end all wars." In 1954 the holiday was changed to "Veterans Day" to account for and recognize all veterans in all wars.

Since Veterans Day is a federal holiday, many American workers and students have the day off. However, people often take this day to thank the veterans in their life, give back to veterans for their service, and spread awareness on the challenges many veterans face.

In whatever way you observe Veterans Day this year, remember to thank the veterans in your life. RHA would like to take the time to thank all active duty and fallen veterans who have courageously fought and still fight for our freedom.

## Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a time for family, friends, and expressing gratitude. Thanksgiving started in 1621 when the Plymouth colonist's and Wampanoag Native Americans shared an autumn harvest dinner that is acknowledged today as one of the first Thanksgiving celebrations. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a national Thanksgiving Day to be held each November.

Thanksgiving celebrations include cooking, football, and parades. Thankfully, we can now gather with friends and family to share turkey and sides together. Turkey has become a staple of any Thanksgiving meal. Did you know today nearly 90 percent of Americans eat Turkey on Thanksgiving Day, whether you deep fry, bake, or roast it?

Many families and individuals take the time on Thanksgiving Day to give thanks for all they have in their life. While doing this practice some of those individuals volunteer their day to help those in need- food drives, free turkeys, and hosting free dinners at a shelter. The Rockford Housing Authority would like to take this time to express our gratitude to our staff members, our community partners, and of course our residents. We are wishing everyone a great Thanksgiving Day!





# "A Season of Gratitude and Giving The RHA's Commitment to Caring and Accountability"

As the autumn leaves painted our town in vibrant hues of red, orange, and gold, I found myself walking through the grounds of the Rockford Housing Authority taking in the beauty of the season. The air was crisp, and a sense of gratitude filled my heart. Thanksgiving was just around the corner, and I couldn't help but reflect on its significance, not only as a time for personal gratitude but also as a cornerstone of the RHA's mission and values.



Thanksgiving, to me, represents a powerful reminder of the importance of thankfulness, gratitude, and service to others, values that are deeply embedded in the core of the RHA's mission. It is a time when we come together as a community, not just as staff and residents, but as an extended family, to celebrate abundance, share warmth, and express our appreciation for one another. The core values of the RHA, which include caring and accountability, are not mere words on paper; they are the very essence of our organization. These values extend to our staff, our residents, and our broader community. This Thanksgiving season, I want to take a moment to reflect on what these values mean to me, our team, and the RHA family we have created.

## **Caring**

To me, caring is more than just a word or an action; it's a mindset that should guide everything we do. Within RHA, caring means seeing the humanity in every person we encounter. It means understanding that our residents are not just beneficiaries of our services; they are individuals with dreams, hopes, and stories. Caring is about listening to their needs, empathizing with their struggles, and working together to create a supportive and nurturing environment. When we care, we are not only doing our jobs, but we are actively working to improve the lives of those we serve.

## **Accountability**

As a CEO, I've always believed that accountability starts at the top. It means taking responsibility for our actions and decisions, both individually and collectively. We are entrusted with a vital mission, and we must be accountable to the community that relies on us. When we make a promise to our residents, whether it's about safety, maintenance, or support, we must honor that commitment. It's about keeping our word and delivering on our mission with integrity and transparency. Accountability is the bedrock of trust, and it's something I hold dear in all aspects of my role.

This Thanksgiving, I'm especially grateful for the incredible team that makes up RHA. Our staff members are the heart and soul of our organization. They work to ensure the well-being of our residents, maintaining our properties, offering support, and building a sense of community. Their dedication is inspiring, and it's a reflection of the caring and accountability that underpin our core values. But it's not just our team that I'm thankful for; it's the RHA residents themselves.



They are resilient and determined, facing challenges with courage and strength. Many of these folks have overcome adversity that most of us can only imagine. Their stories are a testament to the human spirit, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve them and make their lives a little better these past twenty years at RHA.

As the holiday season approaches, I'm reminded of the importance of giving back to our community. Thanksgiving, after all, is not just about a single meal but a spirit of generosity and service. At RHA, we take this spirit to heart, and it's not confined to a single day. Throughout the year, we engage in various initiatives and programs to give back to our residents and the wider community.

The program that embodies our commitment to resident services is our "winter initiatives". As Thanksgiving and the holiday season approach, our team works diligently to ensure that our residents have a safe, warm, and welcoming place to celebrate with their loved ones. We organize RHA events, decorate our facilities, and provide, through the help of our community partners, meals to those who may not have a place to go. It's a way to show our community residents that they are not alone, that they are part of the RHA family, and that we are here to support them.

This year, as we prepare for Thanksgiving and the upcoming holiday season, our Leadership team is planning an array of activities to bring a touch of holiday magic for our RHA staff and residents. We want to create a sense of warmth and togetherness. It's our way of saying, "We care, and we're here for you."

Caring and accountability are principles we embody every day, even outside of our formal roles. Many of our staff members volunteer their time and resources to support local charities, schools, and community organizations. Whether it's coaching a youth sports team, participating in a food drive, or mentoring a young person in need, our staff goes far above and beyond, demonstrating their commitment to making a positive impact.

As we gather around the Thanksgiving table with our own families and loved ones, I'm reminded of the RHA family that we've built over the years. It's a diverse and vibrant community, filled with unique stories and experiences.



Our residents are not just beneficiaries of our services; they are our neighbors, friends, and fellow community members. Their well-being is at the center of what we do, and their voices and perspectives matter.

As the holidays approach, we also aim to celebrate the cultural diversity within our RHA family. Our community is a rich tapestry of backgrounds, traditions, and experiences. We encourage residents to share their cultural heritage with one another, deepening their connections and fostering mutual respect. This cultural exchange not only builds a sense of community but also educates us all about the world's many different traditions and perspectives.

One of the most heartwarming aspects of Thanksgiving for me is seeing the generosity of our wider community and our community partners. Local businesses, organizations, and individuals step up to support our residents during this time. Whether it's through donations of food, clothing, or financial assistance, their kindness makes our resident initiatives even more meaningful.

As Thanksgiving nears, I'm filled with a sense of pride for RHA, its staff, and its residents. Our commitment to caring and accountability is not just an ideal; it's a way of life. It's the foundation of our mission, the spirit of our community, and the heartbeat of our organization.

To our RHA family, our staff, our residents, and our broader community, I extend my warmest wishes for a safe, healthy, and joyful Thanksgiving. May this season be a reminder of the values we hold dear and the difference we can make when we come together with caring hearts and accountable actions.

Happy Holidays!  
Laura Snyder, CEO



## Stroll on State 2023

It is that time of year again where Holiday cheer is around every corner. The annual Stroll on State event in downtown Rockford is coming up on SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2023.

GoRockford states "Stroll on State is held annually on the Saturday after Thanksgiving--Small Business Saturday--and is the Rockford region's kick-off to the holiday season.

### STROLL ON STATE 2023 TIMELINE

- 12 p.m. - Dasher Dash
- 2 p.m. - Parade Kick-Off
- 2 p.m.- Stroll Opens
- 6 p.m. - Tree Lighting
- 8:30 p.m. - Fireworks
- 9 p.m. - Event Closes

### TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY

One of the event's biggest moments – the lighting of the city tree – will take place at 6 p.m. at the Main Stage at Main and Elm streets. View the full list of events:

<https://www.gorockford.com/stroll-on-state/events-attractions/>





Rockford Housing Authority  
223 S Winnebago Street  
Rockford, IL 61102

## RHA HOLIDAY HOURS



# RHA'S *Holiday Hours*

**THANKSGIVING**  
THURSDAY, NOV. 23RD 2023

**DAY AFTER THANKSGIVING**  
FRIDAY, NOV. 24TH 2023

**CHRISTMAS**  
MONDAY, DEC. 25TH, 2023  
TUESDAY DEC. 26TH 2023

**NEW YEAR'S DAY**  
MONDAY, JAN. 1ST 2024  
TUESDAY, JAN. 2ND 2024