

Piloting Change

NWPP Values in Action: Housing with Dignity

For those of us reading and listening to news about the housing crisis in our communities, we come across a lot of terminology: “Permanent Supportive Housing,” “Emergency Shelter,” “Chronically Homeless,” and dozens of other specialized phrases. We also see new projects popping up in our cities that promise innovative ways to end homelessness for our neighbors and fellow residents. Some of these are visible—clusters of tiny homes built on empty lots, brand new buildings funded by affordable housing bonds—and some are invisible, like housing vouchers and wraparound services.

Here at Northwest Pilot Project, we rely on years of first-hand experience providing housing assistance to navigate the growing conversation about how to solve the housing crisis. As part of the network of agencies and community groups that are working hard to end homelessness, we know that it’s our role to provide the best quality services and resources we can to seniors who are experiencing homelessness or housing instability, and this requires an in-depth understanding of the many tools and solutions available to do this work.

For us, doing this work means moving beyond jargon, and instead focusing on how to put our core values into action. While we face a growing challenge, we stay grounded in the belief that everyone in our community deserves access to housing that is not only affordable, but also dignified.

Against a rising tide of homelessness, and within a context of urgency and limited resources, we run the risk of shortchanging our valued community members by over-simplifying our purpose and defining this work as simply ensuring “a roof over everyone’s head.” It’s much more complex than that.

Tough questions

Grappling with how to do right by our community is embedded in NWPP’s 50-year history. When we started our housing program, we were on the front lines of a crisis that few were talking about: as Portland’s downtown core



"I love living here. I feel more confident here now that I have space to take care of my private stuff in private." Mr. Jackson, age 61, shares how life has improved since moving from a single room occupancy (SRO) to a studio apartment.

developed into a bustling center for jobs and commerce, dozens of vulnerable older adults were rapidly losing the only housing they could afford as their buildings were sold and redeveloped. Our agency became known for expertise in the art of “relocation,” an innocuous name for a complex process of finding housing for an entire buildings’ worth of low-income residents facing eviction.

Relocation work requires wading through the emotional and physical toll on each resident, coordinating the logistics of each individual’s move, and most importantly, identifying a new place for them to live safely and affordably. Even before homelessness and housing affordability became a daily topic of conversation in Portland, the task of re-housing displaced seniors is a sizable challenge. As supply of deeply affordable housing for elderly and disabled Portlanders continued to shrink, NWPP waged a preservation and replacement campaign, demanding that elected officials prevent further net loss of affordable units that our seniors so desperately needed.

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From the
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
 Laura Golino de Lovato

Bobby Weinstock's Next Act

Ah, change. It seems that change truly is the only constant in life. But it's not always a bad thing.

NWPP's advocacy activities have been very robust over our 50 year history, culminating with the successful pilot of the Long-Term Rent Assistance program in June 2019. This program was the brainchild of NWPP Housing Advocate Bobby Weinstock. (Find more information about our advocacy work at www.nwpilotproject.org. Now, Bobby's moving on to his next project. But fortunately, he's not leaving NWPP.

For those of you who don't know Bobby Weinstock, let me give you a bit of background. He has been at NWPP for 30 years. That, in and of itself, is amazing! He started his career with



Maria Espinoza with Bobby Weinstock

us as a housing specialist, arriving at NWPP after six years of direct service with the Burnside Projects, working with Portland's homeless, disabled, elderly and low-income neighbors. A few years after starting at NWPP, Bobby was promoted to Housing Program Manager, developing a housing placement and eviction prevention program, and bringing into NWPP some truly amazing and compassionate housing staff, many of whom are still affiliated with us.

Bobby's deep commitment to and compassion for seniors, the homeless, and those with limited resources and many barriers is so genuine and so heartfelt that it has infused all of NWPP's work. For the last 10 years Bobby's been NWPP's Housing Advocate and he's applied his direct service experience to advocacy efforts to bring more resources into NWPP for low-income seniors. His big thinking – as with the Long-Term Rent Assistance Program – works for NWPP clients *and* for our entire community.

Now Bobby is on to his next act, and no, it's not retirement. Whew!! With heartfelt thanks to Meyer Memorial Trust for their funding support, all of Bobby's time and energy will be spent advocating for and helping to lead the effort to create a statewide rent voucher program in partnership with other organizations.

So who will take on the leadership

of NWPP's advocacy work? We're happy to announce that Marisa Espinoza is now NWPP's Public Policy Coordinator and took the advocacy "driver's seat" here at NWPP's on January 1. She and Bobby continue to work closely together, and will greatly amplify NWPP's impact. See page 7 for more information about Marisa.

Laura

A sad note: Nick Fish, an 11-year member of the Portland City Council and friend and partner to NWPP, passed away from cancer on January 2, 2020. Nick will always have a place in NWPP's heart and history. We are grateful for all he did for housing and seniors.

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2019

Holiday Luncheon

A favorite event at NWPP is the Client Holiday Luncheon! Clients of NWPP and their guests enjoyed a traditional turkey dinner and were entertained with holiday music by the CBD (Clark, Bill and Dave) Trio. The guests' favorite activity is photos with Santa Claus. Each guest receives a photo card in the mail commemorating the yearly luncheon. Some clients have seven or eight photos that they proudly display in their homes.



Special thanks to the 50 volunteers who made this event a success: **St. Mary's Academy** students served the lunch; **Judith Heath** donated the table centerpieces; **Vicki Schmall**, **Roxanne Stewart** and friends gave gifts to each client who attended. Vicki also made a generous donation of gift cards for clients in memory of her father, **Grant Flagan**.

CELEBRATING 50 ANNIVERSARY



2019 was a huge year for Northwest Pilot Project. We celebrated our 50th anniversary! Looking back on the last fifty years and seeing what we've done has been truly astonishing.

Thanks

to everyone who came and celebrated with us on October 4, 2019.
to all of you who sent in donations in honor of our anniversary.
to all our former and current staff, board members, volunteers, donors and clients.

Without ALL of you, Northwest Pilot Project would not be here today celebrating 50 years of housing seniors, creating hope and piloting change.



Cheers
to 50
Years!



Housing with Dignity

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Decades later, we continue to articulate an urgent need for more units of deeply affordable housing, which refers to housing for those with the lowest incomes. Within this subgroup, we can clearly see the effects of institutional racism: as Justice in Aging reports, “by even the most conservative measures, black older adults experience over twice the rate of poverty as their white counterparts” and women of color are generally over-represented among seniors living in poverty. Through a combination of housing discrimination, redlining, predatory lending, and other contributors to the racial wealth gap, “racism has left a lasting imprint on the state of housing,” as stated by our partners at Oregon Center for Public Policy.

Given that we do our housing work in the shadow of racial exclusion and racially unjust housing policy, we are obligated to move beyond the question of “what” we do to house our community. We must think deeply about “how.” When we leverage public support and funding to house more people, we should also consider if the units we create are places where our neighbors can heal, grow, and thrive. This question doesn’t just apply to housing older adults; families with children, young people exiting foster care, domestic violence survivors, and people with severely disabling conditions are in need of more than just affordable rent.

What do we mean by “housing with dignity”

In the world of housing and homeless services, we often grapple with themes around dignity, respect, and worth. Many of us believe that housing itself

is a human right, and that services should reflect the inherent worth of each person by meeting them where they are (both literally and figuratively) to ensure they can access help. We have learned, through firsthand experience, that in order to do this work well, we have to recognize the trauma of homelessness and use the power of relationships to connect with people and build stability in their lives. And doing so requires careful attention to process.

With this in mind, we view the current effort to create more affordable units in our region with a combination of both enthusiasm and careful consideration. If we are prioritizing the *how* of what we do, it’s crucial to consider whether the *housing itself* we have worked so hard to produce for the most vulnerable reflects these same values of inherent worth and respect, and when we can, hold ourselves to a principle of dignified housing.

The three components of NWPP’s definition of dignified housing are **permanence**, **affordability**, and **quality**.

Permanence refers to long-term housing; though temporary housing situations can be a component of a long-term housing plan, we know from experience that permanent housing must be the end goal. We recognize that for our clients, many of whom have experienced multiple periods of homelessness, the security of a home that has no time limit can be life-changing.

Most of our partner agencies would agree that **affordability** is the cornerstone of dignified housing. For many individuals, lack of affordability was the key factor that led to their homelessness. There are different definitions of affordability, one of the most common being the rent standard of 30% of a resident’s overall income. And

there are various ways to ensure affordability in new housing developments: public assistance for each resident through housing vouchers, or public assistance to developers and landlords through low income tax credits and other incentives to keep the rents low.

Quality, aside from affordability, may be one of the most challenging aspects of dignified housing to achieve. However, it might be the most crucial. Our staff continues to see rising rates of chronic health conditions and disability among the clients we serve, and in many cases their previous housing has not met their health and accessibility needs. For this and many vulnerable populations, an appropriate physical environment is an essential component of quality housing.

For the wellbeing of our community members we must ensure that quality permanent housing includes the minimum amenities that each of us wants, not just basic habitability and ADA compliance. To NWPP, permanent, dignified housing includes hygiene and cooking facilities within each unit, for both privacy and ease of access. Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units – very small apartments without kitchens or bathrooms in each unit – provide ideal transitional housing options. Asking our clients, many of whom have chronic health conditions as well as physical and mental disabilities, to live permanently in housing where they must leave their apartment to use the restroom or cook a meal can be detrimental to both their health and sense of worth. We’ll continue to advocate for new, permanent housing that incorporates the flexibility, privacy, and dignity that each of us expects for ourselves.

Get to Know Marisa Espinoza, NWPP's Public Policy Coordinator

Marisa is an experienced social service provider who's been with NWPP for five years as a Housing Specialist and Bilingual Housing Case Manager. She became the Public Policy Coordinator in October 2019. Before joining NWPP, Marisa worked at Providence ElderPlace providing program information to seniors and caregivers, and assisting and supporting clients with Medicaid eligibility screening, application and enrollment processes; at McKenzie River Gathering Foundation, Marisa served as communication manager coordinating organization-wide communications from fundraising content to social media; and Marisa was the volunteer coordinator and development assistant at Sisters of the Road for nearly three years. She has also volunteered with OPAL Environmental Justice and Volunteers of America Oregon. Her focus has been on issues of housing and economic justice, as well as anti-racism and racial equity work.

What inspired you to get involved in social services?

I grew up in a family that deeply values community advocacy and fighting injustice. Both of my parents grew up in the same small town in California as I did, and in their youth they encountered a lot of racial discrimination and reduced access to education, employment, and health care based on being Mexican-American and coming from a low-income background.

Their story is in large part what taught me that access to resources and economic opportunity can be transformative. My dad joined the US Marine Corps to have better work opportunities than farm labor and he served in Vietnam. His veterans' educational



benefits put my mom through higher education so that she could become a teacher, and later a school administrator and proponent of bilingual education. That was her path out of agriculture and food processing work, and she had a deeply meaningful and impactful career.

In the beautiful valley that I grew up in, there continues to be a lack of resources and economic stability, especially for families and children of color. I think my parents taught me to look at the bigger picture and notice that all the people working in the fields, like they and their parents did, are generating so much wealth for the region and yet they don't have access to the full benefit of their labor. Understanding how inequality works and persists is what inspires me to do my part to make changes in our systems.

What's at the top of your list as you take on the lead advocacy role at NWPP?

My biggest priority is to center racial justice in our advocacy work, because I believe that stable housing for low income seniors and people with disabilities is inextricable from the work of undoing the legacy of institutional

racism that still impacts housing today. I think it's essential to weave this analysis into all of our work and ensure that when we develop new resources and pursue better policies at the local and state level, that we understand the context we are working in and how our actions have the power to reduce, maintain, or perpetuate inequalities.

What do you see as the most significant issue facing housing and homeless service organizations like NWPP?

I think one of our challenges is to continue building and growing relationships across the agencies and the specific populations we work with. This can lead to more collaboration and creativity, and also help us remember that we are a part of a collective with a shared commitment and investment in this work.

I think most of us want to see homelessness end for everyone, not just specific groups like seniors or families or veterans, but it can be challenging to find the opportunities to come together and coordinate our work across the many groups working hard to solve the crisis. When any vulnerable individual or family loses their housing, it impacts all of us, and the reverse is also true. The impacts are practical and they are also symbolic of the community we want to live in and be a part of.

CORRECTION: In our 2019 Summer newsletter we inadvertently omitted Rose Villa, Senior Living Retirement Community on our list of Bronze level Walk-A-Thon sponsors. We apologize for the error and wish to thank Rose Villa for their ongoing support.

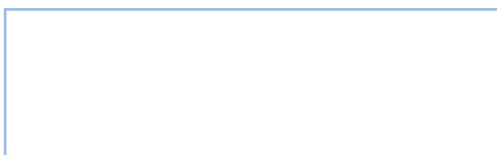


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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



*“Northwest Pilot
Project saved me.”*

– Sharon, age 74

Consider a Contribution to our Emergency Fund

More seniors than ever are requesting help from our Housing Program. On average we receive about 160 inquiries each week from men and women 55 years or older seeking relief from their housing crisis. The team at NWPP works tirelessly to address all of these requests. But we need your help.

This year we have a goal to raise \$200,000 for our Emergency Fund, which covers things like deposits, rent, application fees and moving expenses. We need your support so that we can continue to respond to the need in our community. Please use the envelope inside this newsletter to make a gift to NWPP's Emergency Fund or give online at nwpilotproject.org/donate.

Please support our work and help us continue to change lives.