



Asyod Boyd sits on the stoop of his new home in Southwest Philadelphia. —HYHY PHOTO/EMMA LEE

Unique Way Home program offers housing

Short-term rental aid helps fight homelessness

Michaela Winberg
BILLY PENN

Asyod Boyd's personality spilled out all over his second-floor Southwest Philly apartment. There's a set of weights in the bedroom, since he's trying to "bulk up," and the pantry is filled with Uncrustables, his favorite snack.

He's even got a pet. One of few his lease would allow, it's a tiny iguana named Sir TD who munches on cucumber slices in the living room. Boyd loves the place — the first he's been able to call home after living in his car for almost two years.

It's all thanks to a new, one-of-a-kind rapid rehousing program called Way Home that's designed specifically for LGBTQ people.

To launch the program in March 2020, nonprofit partners SELF, Inc. and the William Way LGBT Center received a \$400,000 grant through Philly's Office of Homeless Services, funded by the CARES Act. For one year, the program pays a portion of rent for 40 Philadelphians who've been experiencing homelessness.

Boyd's been doing well since he moved into his one-bedroom place in April. He puts up \$500 of the rent each month, and Way Home covers the remaining \$300.

"When it came to finding my own apartment, it was just saving up the bread for the first, last and security and all that," said Boyd, who's trans. "So for them to actually be able to do that for me, that was a blessing."

By providing short-term rental assistance for a private apartment, rapid rehousing is considered a standard, effective, low-cost solution to homelessness. Larry Cohen, executive director of the housing nonprofit Point Source Youth, said it's used nationwide by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, as well as by other cities, states, and nonprofits.

Way Home is one of the first in the country specifically for LGBTQ adults,

according to Office of Homeless Services (OHS) spokesperson Sarah Peterson. She cited an 85% success rate for rapid rehousing in general, and said Philadelphia "hopes to continue and expand this program and others like it."

If this program delivers on its promise, it would be a pretty big deal. Almost 6,000 people are experiencing homelessness in Philly, with nearly 1,000 of them completely unsheltered.

LGBTQ people are even more likely to be homeless, and stable housing can have a ripple effect: reducing the likelihood that they need to rely on sex work, that they'll be a victim of violence, or that they'll suffer an early death — a threat that continues to grow each year, especially for Black trans women.

"I get calls or emails every week from people saying they need housing," said Cara Tratner, housing assistance manager at SELF. "Unfortunately, it has shown me that the issue of homelessness in the city is even bigger than what was already documented, because a lot of folks in this community aren't currently in shelter."

A long wait list and nervous landlords

The program isn't perfect. Right now, Way Home's waitlist is more than three times capacity. There are no wrap-around services, and there's a hard limit of one year of rental assistance. These are weaknesses experts say cut down on a program's effectiveness.

One major hurdle: For so-called "rapid" rehousing, it can take a while. Boyd slept in his car every night for six months from when he applied to when he moved in.

It was an expensive way to live. Boyd's car ran out of gas regularly when he'd fall asleep with the heat on. He incurred thousands of dollars in parking violations. The worst part was when he learned a close friend had

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Top local political stories



Mayor Jim Kenney says, "I am heartbroken and outraged that we've lost 500 Philadelphians including many children and teenagers to needless violence this year." —AP PHOTO/MATT ROURKE

City logs deadliest year; officials face critiques

Brian Saunders
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Philadelphia had quite the year. Whether it was community leaders advocating for gun violence changes as the city saw its deadliest year since 1990 or landmark legislation passed to improve the relationship between police and civilians. In addition, a councilmember was convicted of federal corruption. Here are some of the top local political stories.

Philly reaches 500 homicides

On Nov. 26, Philadelphia reached 500 homicides tying its deadliest homicide total since 1990 and the most in the city's history.

As nothing substantial was done to help curb the shooting throughout Philadelphia, as of Monday the city has 555 homicides (476 by gunfire) and 1,827 non-fatal shootings this year, according to statistics from the City Controller's office.

Inquiry: Outlaw OK'd use of tear gas on protesters

During 2020 unrest in Philadelphia following the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, a report from City Controller Rebecca Rhynhart revealed Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw approved the deployment of tear gas.

The report faulted city leaders such as Outlaw and Mayor Jim Kenney for failing to prepare for massive unrest adequately.



"We see how things are in the world without a space to talk about the issues that plague our communities and our society," said Cayla Waddington, a 10th-grader at the Mathematics, Civics and Sciences Charter School. —TRIBUNE PHOTO/ABDUL R. SULAYMAN

"The investigation shows that the root cause of the lack of planning was a lack of leadership at the highest levels," Rhynhart said.

Leaders call for end to state ban on local gun regulations

In February, local leaders gathered after the Olney Transportation Center mass shooting.

Sen. Sharif Street called on the GOP to consider changes to the pre-emption law or take up a series of gun control proposals considered by state Democrats.

Eliminating that law would allow Philadelphia to enact gun laws.

"The Pennsylvania General Assem-

bly has not only refused to enact sensible gun regulations at the state level, but it also continues to block cities from enacting their own local gun laws," Mayor Jim Kenney said.

Dougherty, Henon convicted on federal charges

Councilmember Bobby Henon and electricians union boss John "Johnny Doc" Dougherty were found guilty of conspiracy.

Dougherty was convicted of eight of the 11 charges he faced and Henon 10 of 18 counts.

POLITICAL » 3A

PHA looks at its 2021 accomplishments

Agency hopeful Build Back Better will provide aid

Stephen Williams
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

The Philadelphia Housing Authority had several major accomplishments this year, but the top executive said he is most proud of the 6,441 units the agency built or renovated in 2021, along with its partners.

These new units were part of PHA's "six-in-five" plan launched in 2014, which referred to developing or preserving 6,000 units of housing in a five-year period. The progress was delayed for two years, as a result of the pandemic.

"We feel a deep sense of



The Philadelphia Housing Authority has completed the Norris Apartments on 11th Street near Norris and Berks. They replaced the Norris Homes. —SUBMITTED PHOTO

accomplishments in meeting our goals, but we live in a city with such tremendous need that it feels as though our work has really only just begun," said PHA President and CEO Kelvin A. Jeremiah.

"What makes our program so successful is that, in addi-

tion to the construction and neighborhood rebuilding we have done, we have funded and worked with extremely committed non-profit housing organization whose mission matched our own."

According to PHA, a major area for renovation

has been its scattered site inventory, or individual properties that have fallen into disrepair and have been vacant and uninhabitable for decades. Under the plan, PHA renovated 1,745 of these units, many in neighborhoods being gentrified, thereby preserving affordability in some of these communities.

Other major PHA accomplishments are the redevelopment of the former Norris Homes complex near Temple University and the continued revitalization of the Sharswood neighborhood, which includes a \$52 million shopping center and a 98-unit apartment complex. About half of the apartments will include below-market rate units.

PHA » 3A



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