

CHFA (CT) Housing Authority Small Improvement Program

Connecticut Housing Finance Authority
Special Achievement: COVID-19 Response

HFA Staff Contact

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Preamble

“The COVID-19 pandemic has paralyzed several tenants to a point of despair. Having someone show care and concern for individuals during this tumultuous time was greatly appreciated. Thanks for putting words into action!”

- Preston Housing Authority Executive Director, Carol Onderdonk

Introduction

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization classified the COVID-19 virus as a worldwide pandemic. On March 13, 2020, the United States declared a national emergency. The State of Connecticut was more proactive. Three days earlier, on March 10, 2020, Governor Ned Lamont, declared a public health emergency and civil preparedness emergency throughout our state. Effective March 20, 2020, the Governor issued a Stay-at-home order and directed all non-essential businesses and not-for-profit entities to prohibit all in-person functions. This included requiring all State agencies including the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) to implement work-from-home procedures virtually overnight.

Responding to an Important State Need

As the CHFA IT Department was undertaking heroic measures to equip staff with computer hardware to work from home, others in the agency were evaluating the pandemic effects on our borrowers and the possible need for the forbearance of mortgage payments. Our Multifamily (MF) Division immediately recognized the Governor’s Stay At Home order would have a significant impact on some of the most vulnerable of our State’s population –residents of public housing, elderly, persons with disabilities, and families.

CHFA MF staff reached out to and surveyed the owners of its Housing Authority Portfolio to determine how CHFA could assist their residents during the health crisis. During these conversations, an immediate a need for more facemasks was mentioned. CHFA was able to secure 5,000 free facemasks through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and distribute them to 33 public housing developments. This was a helpful first step, however CHFA recognized that far more was needed to help and assist residents.

Many housing authorities were restricting visitation to their communities by outside visitors including family members and home health aides, and homecare organizations were limiting their services. Furthermore, the pandemic health risk meant that many residents were essentially confined to their homes. With limited access to grocery stores and reduced public transportation, it became obvious that for many residents, basic needs, from food to papers goods and cleaning products would soon be in short supply.

To address the immediate needs of housing authority residents in a timely manner, CHFA’s MF staff reviewed its programs looking for resources that could be tapped to assist housing authority residents. Coincidentally, a housing authority that was hosting a food pantry inquired if their program could be eligible for the Housing Authority Small Improvement Program (HASIP). Taking a closer look at HASIP, we realized there could be an opportunity to convert the program to meet the residents’ needs in a meaningful way and accommodate the both the new social distancing requirements and remote work environment.

Innovative Changes to our Organization Process and a Program Adaptation

The HASIP Program provided a platform that could be built out to meet CHFA's goal of providing assistance to residents. However, it needed to be customized to include specific funding for a basic needs pantry. Community collaboration and outreach would be encouraged, and needed to supplement the HASIP grants and enhance the respective housing authorities' ability to meet the needs of their vulnerable residents, not only for this crisis, but also for ongoing support and additional resources.

Within three days, while navigating the new work-from-home protocols, MF created an initiative team, to administer the program, and edited the HASIP guidelines and requirements by designing a Resident Fund sub-category named "HASIP: Basic Needs Pantry (BNP)." Food safety as well as safety concerns for community gatherings were taken into consideration when establishing the program protocols listed below:

- Based on the dollars CHFA had available in the HASIP and the number of eligible housing authority units (185 housing authorities and 8,887 units), each housing authority was eligible to apply for up to \$30/unit for a maximum of \$5,000.
- The housing authority was allowed to establish their own program protocols including the purchase and distribution methods, keeping in mind the COVID-19 impacts and restrictions.
- Housing authorities were strongly encouraged to partner with their communities to maximize and enhance an existing program or new program. Examples of collaborative efforts :
 - CT Food Bank/Foodshare, local grocery stores, local civic organizations (e.g. Lions Club, Elks, etc.).
 - Local social/human services, senior centers and local religious communities.
- Housing authorities were encouraged to provide onsite availability of items for resident use such as non-perishable food items, cooked meals, grocery gift cards, paper towels, toilet paper, masks, gloves, hand sanitizers and disinfectant wipes.
 - Examples of unacceptable items included all smoking products, any type of medication (including over-the-counter) and all alcoholic beverages.
- Housing authorities were encouraged to reach out to the Connecticut State Department of Public Health for guidance on operating the BNP and to consult with Town/City officials for required protocols.
- Housing authorities were also encouraged to seek legal guidance prior to submitting their application.
- The funding was required to be expended with receipt verification within 120 days.

Upon executive approval of the BNP Program, the MF team recognized that the process and turn-around time for funding needed to be simplified to meet the urgent need as well as the remote working environment. The team engaged other CHFA divisions including Legal, Business Services, Finance and Executive Leadership to coordinate a streamlined intake, approval and funding process.

Standard internal protocols require program support documents be submitted through the mail to a CHFA portfolio Asset Manager. The process involves many levels of internal review and approvals as well as multiple correspondences with the owner before the applications could be executed and funded. This procedure often takes several weeks to complete.

The goal was to create a new process that would allow for a turnaround time of 24 hours. To get there, the following actions were taken:

- The BNP process was streamlined by limiting the request to a single page application with

certification by the housing authority, thus eliminating program support documents.

- A limited number of staff members were dedicated to review and approve applications; these team members became the BNP experts. Applications were accepted electronically through a designated email mailbox.
- BNP team members were equipped with Adobe Pro software to allow for pdf manipulation and internal electronic signature approvals.
- Applications were tracked from initial intake to final close in a log stored in a community drive used by both the Multifamily and Finance Divisions. This new process allowed for internal turn-around times that were exceptionally swift, and typically met the goal of approvals in *less than 24 hours*.

CHFA staff keenly understood the urgency of each request received; processing and approving these applications became a high priority.

Achieved Intended Results: 7,653 Residents Received Support

The re-launching of HASIP introducing the BNP Program was e-blasted to all the housing authorities in the CHFA portfolio. The launch of the BNP was enthusiastically received, and the expressions of gratitude from the property owners/managers and residents were overwhelming. ***CHFA received and processed 33 applications, providing funding of \$88,960 for critical supplies.*** The program provided support to more than ***3,900 residents in 3,869 units*** in 2020.

CHFA staff were gratified that some larger housing authorities with greater resources in place to meet the needs of their residents graciously declined to apply, leaving more resources for housing authorities with fewer means and resources. With the pandemic not showing signs of slowing, the program was re-opened with modifications in 2021. The program offered an additional flat rate of \$2,000 per housing authority until which time the funds were exhausted. As of March 2021, one year from the declaration of the pandemic, ***CHFA has processed an additional 31 applications in the amount of \$83,850 providing support for 3,753 residents in 3,679 units.***

Provided Benefits Certainly Outweighed the Costs

Many housing authorities who applied for this grant collaborated and partnered with community resources. These newly formed and/or strengthened relationships will benefit their residents beyond the COVID-19 crisis. There was no cost to the grantees to receive the HASIP grant, as there was no application or processing fees. Grants came from the existing HASIP funding program and CHFA processed applications and payments internally.

CHFA is extremely proud of this funding program, which has benefitted many of our most vulnerable residents in the State of Connecticut, our senior population and persons with disabilities. The speed with which this program was conceived and ultimately implemented is remarkable. We have received many thank-yous and heartfelt wishes of appreciation from our housing authorities and their residents for developing such an important program with such speed and efficiency.

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is,
What are you doing for others?”
-Martin Luther King, Jr.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION: CHFA HASIP ENTRY

NOTICE OF FUNDING AVAILABILITY
STATE-SPONSORED HOUSING AUTHORITY
HASIP – Basic Needs Pantry

The Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) is pleased to announce the State-Sponsored (SSHP) Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) under the Housing Authority Small Improvement Program (HASIP) for Housing Authorities to either create or supplement a Basic Needs Pantry (BNP) to benefit their residents.

Submittal of Housing Authority Small Improvement Program requests to address improvements to the property or to improve the quality of life for the residents will not be accepted until further notice and based on available funds.

The NOFA and application can be found below.

Applications for funding under this NOFA must be submitted no later than July 1, 2020 at 4:00pm. In order to expedite your request, the Application Packages must be submitted electronically to chfashp-2@chfa.org; however, the two original signed Agreements, the original signed SEEC-10, and the original signed and notarized Statutory Provisions document **must** be mailed to:

CHFA
Attn: Deb Olson
999 West Street
Rocky Hill, CT 06067-3011

Electronic submission of your Application Package will enable us to review it prior to the receipt of the signed/notarized documents and permit us to process your request expeditiously.

Questions can be directed to Deb Olson at 860-571-4307 or via email at debra.olson@chfa.org.

All required forms can be found on our website <https://www.chfa.org/owners-property-managers/hasip/>

Housing Authority Small Improvement Program (HASIP)



Basic Needs Pantry

Program Outline

Purpose:	In response to COVID-19 CHFA is offering the State-Sponsored Housing Authority-owned developments the opportunity to utilize the Housing Authority Small Improvement Program (HASIP) funds for applicants to establish a Basic Needs Pantry or to supplement an existing Housing Authority operated pantry.
Eligible Applicant:	Housing Authority owners who are part of the State-Sponsored Housing Portfolio.
Eligible Use:	To establish a Basic Needs Pantry or to supplement an existing Housing Authority operated pantry. We encourage Housing Authorities to make available for resident use items such as non-perishable food items, cooked meals, grocery gift cards, paper towels, toilet paper, masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, disinfected wipes etc. Examples of unacceptable items include smoking products, any type of medications (including over-the-counter) and alcoholic beverages.
Terms & Conditions:	Applicants may request up to \$30 per SSHP owned unit to a maximum of \$5,000 per Housing Authority. No matching funds are required; however, community partnerships are encouraged.
Deadline:	Applications will be accepted until July 1, 2020
Submissions:	<p>All needed submission items can be found on our website at https://www.chfa.org/owners-property-managers/hasip/.</p> <p>Completed, signed applications and required documents may be submitted to CHFA via email to CHFASHP-2@chfa.org</p> <p>Two (2) Copies of Signed Original Agreements with Notarized Statutory Provisions should be sent via US Mail to:</p> <p>CHFA Attention: Deb Olson 999 West Street Rocky Hill, CT 06067</p> <p>The application must include all items on the Applicant Checklist.</p>
CHFA Contact:	Deb Olson at debra.olson@chfa.org

Housing Authority Small Improvement Program (HASIP)



Resident Fund - Basic Needs Pantry

Application

(Please use one application for all developments)

Applications accepted until ~~July 1, 2020~~ extended through July 31, 2020

Legal Name of Housing Authority

Mailing address of Housing Authority

Contact Name and Title

Contact E-Mail Address

Phone Number

Name of Properties to be Assisted

Number of SSHP Units

Total Amount Requested (\$30 p/u - max \$5,000)

PURPOSE OF FUNDS:

To establish a Basic Needs Pantry or to supplement an existing Housing Authority operated pantry. We encourage Housing Authorities to make available for resident use items such as non-perishable food items, cooked meals, grocery gift cards, paper towels, toilet paper, masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, disinfected wipes etc. Examples of unacceptable items include smoking products, any type of medications (including over-the-counter) and alcoholic beverages.

Who will the Improvement/Activity Serve?

Elderly

Congregate

Number of Residents

Number of Disabled

Moderate Rental

Affordable Housing

Number of Children Served

Number of Units

HOW WILL THE UTILIZATION OF THESE FUNDS ENHANCE THE LIVES OF THE RESIDENTS AT THIS PROPERTY?

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:

DESCRIBE THE PANTRY PROGRAM PROTOCOLS

I understand that the funds awarded as a result of this request are to be expended for the purposes set forth herein and in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations, policies, and procedures of CHFA and the State of Connecticut. I also understand that any changes in the use of funds must be approved by CHFA in writing prior to an expenditure of funds. Funds may be reclaimed at any time for violations of any terms, conditions, and requirements of this agreement. A confirmation of the use of funds and receipt evidence shall be due to CHFA 120 days after the effective date of the Funding Agreement.

Signature of Housing Authority Executive Director or Designee

Date

Housing Authority Small Improvement Program (HASIP)

BASIC NEEDS PANTRY

Applicant Checklist

Please complete and submit this checklist with your application.

Legal Name of Housing Authority

- Signed Application
- Signatory Authorization
(if documents not signed by Chairperson)
- W-9
- Notarized Statutory Provisions and Signed SEEC-10
- Two (2) Original Signed Agreements - (1 pdf, 2 US Mail)

Amount Requested: _____

New program brings produce from Groton Family Farm to housing authority residents



EUYP JTO
Eunice Sulphen, director of Outreach for Eastern Connecticut Community Gardens Association, begins to put the produce that she and volunteers harvested at Groton Family Farm Wednesday, Aug. 12, 2020, into compostable plastic bags for the Eastern Connecticut Community Gardens program. The program, started by the Groton Housing Authority, provides fresh produce for seniors and residents with disabilities. (Dana Jensen/The Day)

Lee said she anticipates receiving a \$4,000 Connecticut Housing Finance Authority grant to help offset some of the program costs.

Updated August 18, 2020 12:10AM

Groton — As birds chirped and butterflies flitted around the garden at the Groton Family Farm on a sunny morning last week, volunteer Meredith Russell hoisted up a basket she had just filled with freshly harvested carrots.

“I like gardening, I like being out with living things, and with this, it’s a give back,” said Russell, a Groton resident as she stood among rows of vegetables.

Russell is volunteering each Wednesday to harvest an array of produce, such as carrots, cucumbers, zucchini, turnips and leafy greens. She then helps package the vegetables into compostable plastic bags for distribution to her neighbors at the Grasso Gardens housing complex and residents of Pequot Village.

Groton Housing Authority (<https://www.grotonhousingauthority.org/>)

which manages the two housing developments for the elderly or individuals with disabilities, collaborated with the **Eastern Connecticut Community Gardens Association (<https://www.getgrowingct.org/>)** a nonprofit focused on decreasing food insecurity in eastern Connecticut, to start the FreshProduce Program in early July. Each week, residents who sign up for the program receive a free bag of produce.

Jamie Lee, property manager for the Groton Housing Authority and also an ECGG board member, said they wanted to bring local, fresh produce directly to residents. Easy access to fresh produce is especially important during the pandemic, as places where people used to get food may be closed or accessible by appointment only, and people are minimizing their interactions with others and social distancing, she said.

“We thought this was a great way to get the food directly to the residents where they wouldn’t have to go out and about in the public,” Lee said.

The Eastern Connecticut Community Gardens Association builds gardens, including for schools, churches and social service organizations, and for the past three years has funded the assistant garden manager position at The **Giving Garden** (<https://dpnc.org/coogan-farm-garden/>) at Coogan Farm, said Eunice Sutphen, ECCG's director of outreach.

This year, the organization provided the infrastructure, seeds and plants for the garden at the Groton Family Farm on Fort Hill Road and the Whitfield Farm Giving Garden in Pawcatuck. Both gardens are on privately owned land that help provide produce for people facing food insecurity, Sutphen said. The Pawcatuck garden yielded more than 2,000 pounds of food this year that was donated to the Gemma E. Moran United Way/Labor Food Bank, she said.

Since the Fresh Produce Program began in early July, the garden at the Groton Family Farm has yielded nearly 800 pounds of food, with volunteers harvesting about 214 pounds last Wednesday.

The Burrows family, which owns Groton Family Farm, is donating the use of the land, while volunteers are tending the garden, said Sutphen.

Ella T. Grasso Technical High School students, who **refurbished** (<https://www.theday.com/local-news/20190619/groton-familyfarm-to-host-day-of-music-hopes-people-take-interest-in-project>) the garden last year, also volunteered this year until the COVID-19 pandemic.

Warren Burrows, who farmed the roughly 6-acre property before **moving to the West Coast four years ago** (<https://www.theday.com/local-news/20180301/owners-considering-selling-groton-family-farm>), said the garden is the beginning piece of **a longer term vision** (<https://www.theday.com/local-news/20190619/groton-family-farm-to-host-day-of-music-hopes-people-take-interest-in-project>) for the property. His family is looking for help to develop the property in some fashion so it would be of value to the town, and local residents would enjoy it as a place of respite and restoration. He said he would like to see the historic house and barn restored and repurposed and to use the property as a source of local, healthy food, as well as an educational resource.

Sutphen said the garden at the Groton Family Farm uses regenerative farming practices that focus on nurturing the soil, without any pesticides, herbicides or artificial fertilizers, to maximize the nutritional quality of the produce.

The Eastern Connecticut Community Gardens Association, which itself is funded through private donations and grants, is supporting the Fresh Produce Program, said Sutphen.

Russell, 70, who also tends a small community garden at Grasso Gardens that ECCG installed, has frozen zucchini to later steam, sauté or boil, baked zucchini bread that she's given to others and brought as a dessert for dinner with friends, and made homemade tomato sauce for the colder months. For Russell, the program makes it possible to have more vegetables without paying any more money — and she enjoys the effort tremendously.

Russell, who believes it's important for people to have fresh food, said she thinks about what she can do for others and enjoys using her talents for gardening and being outdoors. Lee said nearly 50 Groton Housing Authority residents are participating so far in the program. As residents started seeing the produce their neighbors are receiving at no cost and the dishes they are making, more asked to be signed up. "It's been a great success," she said.

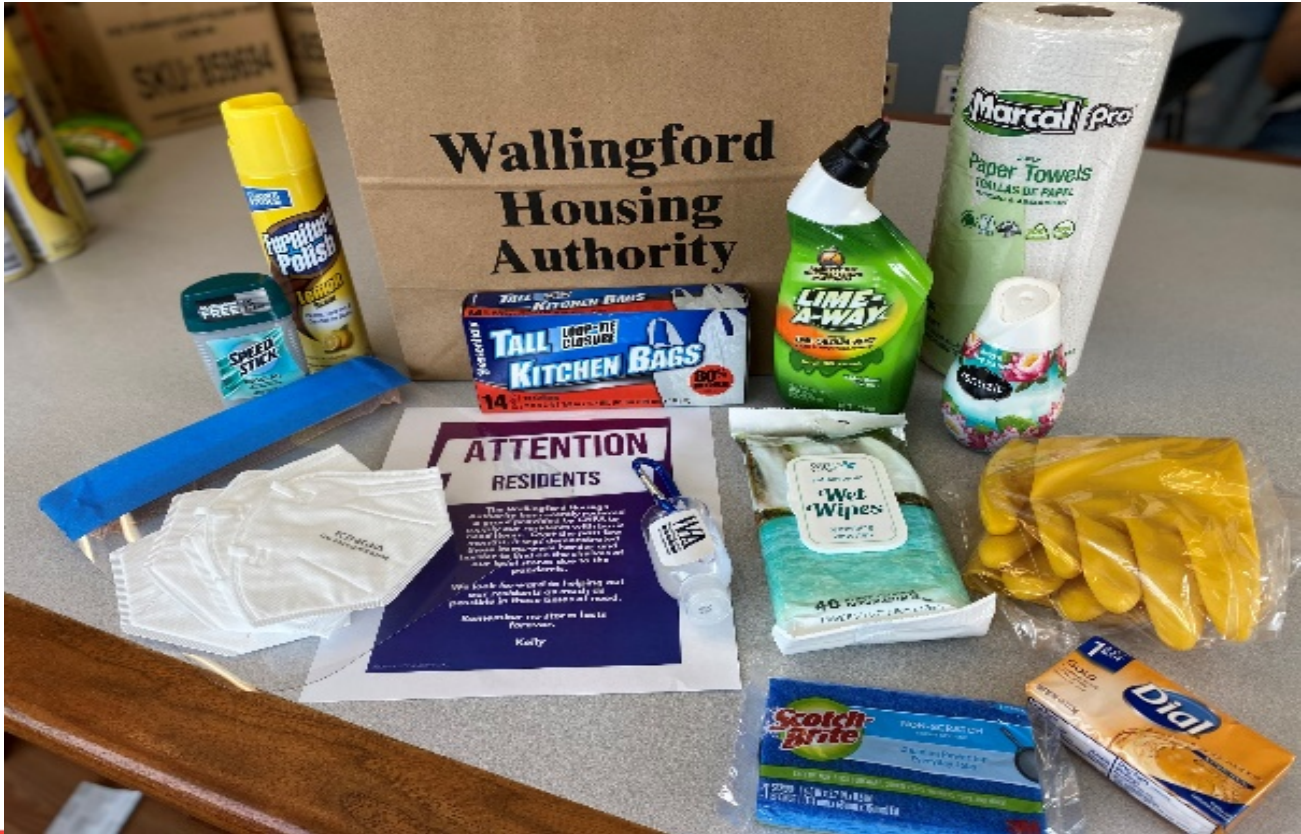


CONNECTICUT
HOUSING FINANCE
AUTHORITY

HOUSING AUTHORITY SMALL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (HASIP): BASIC NEEDS PANTRY



Examples of basic needs items available to housing authority residents as part of CHFA's Basic Needs Pantry. Residents who were unable to shop or have visitors bring them supplies due to the pandemic shut down were able to meet basic household needs through these grants.





Some items included in Basic Needs Pantry

In 2020, 33 housing authorities applied for HASIP Basic Needs Pantry A total of \$88,960 in funds, combined with community resources provided support for 3,900 residents in 2020. In the first quarter of 2021, 31 housing authorities applied. A total of \$83,850 was awarded and 3,753 residents were served.



Email from the Litchfield Housing Authority (LHA)

I wanted to follow up with CHFA regarding the funding received by the Litchfield Housing Authority (LHA) from the HASIP Basic Needs Pantry during the national pandemic. The Litchfield Housing Authority received \$1980 (Morris Housing Authority received \$600) to help support the Food Pantry at the LHA & MHA.

The Food Pantry was able to operate from March 20, 2020 through August 28, 2020 where a group of Certified Emergency Response Team (CERT) members made 37 food deliveries to the 66 units in Litchfield and 20 units in Morris. 2277 bags of food were distributed over that time period. Residents ordered their food from an order ticket (different each week) and the group of volunteers individually packed the food orders and brought the food bags to their doors.

The HASIP funding was used to purchase many non-perishable items along with sanitary items (toilet paper, paper towels, hand sanitizer, etc) that really helped residents get through one of the toughest times in their lifetime. The most important goal with the food pantry and receiving grant money, like the HASIP funds, was to do everything we could to keep the residents home and away from public settings.

Jim Simoncelli Jr.
Executive Director
Litchfield Housing Authority

*“Giving is not just about making a donation.
It is about making a difference.”
Kathy Calvin, CEO & President, United Nations Foundation*



Excerpt from the Deep River Housing Authority (Winter Newsletter, 2021)

Since the beginning of the pandemic, residents have been offered a weekly meal to be delivered to their apartment. They've received a wide variety of options whether it be takeout from Pasta Vita, pizza delivery, or a home cooked meal; everyone looks forward to Wednesday afternoons!

The weekly meal program has been funded by a grant from CHFA. This program will continue as we were just awarded a second grant from CHFA for this purpose.



A note from a grateful resident:

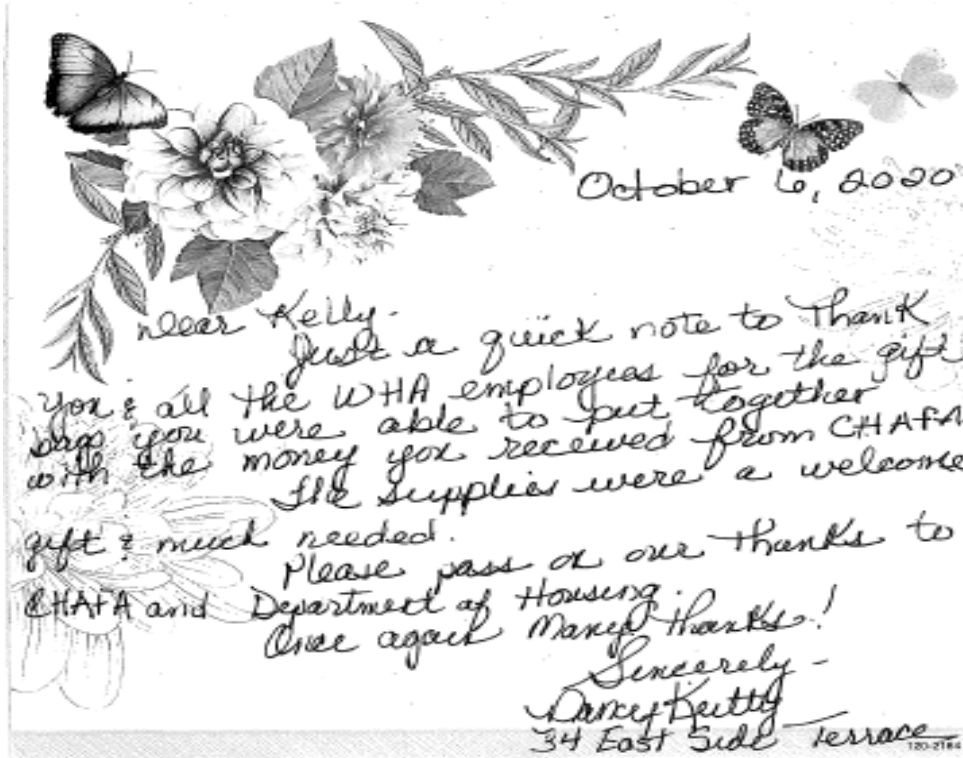


Chafa Thank You
Just can't say it enough
for the "Goody Bag" that I
have receiving each month.
All the items that I have
been receiving have been put
to go use.

Thank You So Much
Happy Holidays and
Be Safe
Jean Sireno



A note from a grateful resident:



Dear Mr. Perry,

On behalf of the tenants of Lincoln Park Housing, we are most grateful to have been given the opportunity to participate in the Housing Authority Small Improvement Program (HASIP).

We developed a registration process and delivery receipt form for all participants to sign. (copy attached). Our participation level was good with tenants eagerly anticipating our door-to-door delivery service. The grant monies provided a wide variety of food stuffs including small canned ham, packaged chicken, Spam, pasta & pasta sauce, pancake mix, syrup, peaches to name a few. A flashlight/lantern with batteries was a big hit followed by hand sanitizer and paper towels.

The COVID-19 pandemic has paralyzed several tenants to a point of despair. Having someone show care and concern for the individuals during this tumultuous time was greatly appreciated.

Thanks for putting words into action!

Sincerely,

Carol Onderdonk, Executive Director
Fran Minor, Resident Services Coordinator
And Tenants

Kathleen W. [unclear]

PERRY DUTTA
from [unclear]

[Handwritten signature]

[Handwritten signature]

[unclear]

Joel Salvo Sr.
Thanks you, Kelly Duncan
Thanks! Linton Norton
Ken SPARGO

Remy Worcester Macfarlane, TY
Ruby Talbot
Susan Hendleton
Should you so much!

Thank you!
Beth Mylenko
Deborah Shree
Joyce Pace

Dal [unclear]



An Affirmative Action/ Equal Opportunity Employer



[Handwritten signatures]



Local businesses supported the program, too!



Support Stern Village!

For the month of July, Stern Village will receive \$1.00 from each purchase of the \$2.50 reusable Community Bag.

Bags available at Stop and Shop 100 Quality Street Trumbull CT	Donations will go to the new Food and Essentials Pantry in the new Community room.
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