

Starting over by creating pathways to
homeownership.

A small program with a large impact.

MaineHousing

Homeownership: Empowering New Buyers

HFA Staff Contact

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Starting over by creating pathways to home ownership. A small program with a large impact.

When Jen Szandzik first joined MaineHousing's ReStart Program she didn't believe homeownership would ever be in her future.

"I was unemployed, my credit score was terrible," Szandzik said, "I had no money saved up for emergencies, and I had a car that was very unreliable. I can definitely say that my confidence in myself was at an extreme low."

ReStart is MaineHousing's program that helps families with housing vouchers become self-sufficient through coaching, financial management and connections to educational and employment resources. MaineHousing's ReStart Program is not the biggest program the agency runs, but it certainly has an outsized and positive impact on the people it helps, truly achieving the mission of Family Self-Sufficiency. Equally important, MaineHousing's ReStart program has empowered home ownership for many, who, like Szandzik use the savings and financial acumen they gain from the program to purchase their first home.

Back to Szandzik's story:

"It is four years later and I am graduating from the ReStart program," she said. "I have a full-time job with a company I love, my credit score is amazing, I have money in my saving account, a reliable car for my family and I am buying a house. The ReStart Program has helped me gain my confidence back and completely changed my life."

Through ReStart, Szandzik saved over \$18,000 by upgrading her work skills, increasing her earnings, saving money, and gaining the discipline and confidence to become fully financially independent. Meanwhile, her mortgage payment is \$200 less than what the payment on her former apartment was. Her daughter has a home her family will own and is seeing first-hand the results of sticking to a plan, underscoring the generational impact of first-time home ownership.

MaineHousing's ReStart team – a two-person, dynamic duo -- truly empowers home ownership by helping their clients build real financial wherewithal. One-on-one counseling and mentorship by ReStart staff consistently boosts participants to full homeownership. There's vested ownership in the outcomes, said ReStart Program coordinator Laurie Glidden.

In a word, Glidden said, "proud," is how she feels when a client can become a homeowner, especially in today's economy.

"Those I work with have been putting all they have into taking care of their families, going to school or advancing within their jobs or both," Glidden said, "all while being at an income level that makes supporting a family difficult. They are doing all these things with the goal of reaching their dreams. When they get there I am so proud of them."

In 2021 Glidden and her colleague Brianna Martin, worked with 75 people. Their results are outstanding with 52 of their clients increasing their earnings by an average of \$16,626 – while their average personal savings climbed to more than \$2,000 a year and dependence on monthly Housing Assistance Program vouchers decreased by \$331 a month on average.



“I love connecting with each and every one of them on a personal level and building trust,” Martin says of ReStart participants. “To me that is extremely important. As a coach, I am asking these participants to share their life stories and future dreams with me and trust that the ReStart program can help guide them there. There is something so powerful that a participant will have a meaningful moment such as landing a new job, or paying off a debt, or reaching a specific amount in their savings account ... and I am someone they share that exciting news with.”

ReStart has achieved many measurable results. Nine 2021 program graduates collectively saved close to \$44,000, with 89 percent of the group also increasing their earnings, and 100 percent of the group gaining independence from the Housing Choice Voucher program. ReStart participants also saw their earnings triple by the time they graduated from the program. In addition, since 2018, six ReStart participants have achieved home ownership.

MaineHousing’s ReStart program is funded with a modest federal Family Self Sufficiency grant of just under \$90,000 annually. The agency also provides funding for an additional full-time staff member, broadening partner collaboration and increasing the program’s reach.

While program replication would be customized to each state or region, Maine’s model is easily transferable. The key ingredients are a vested staff, flexible program limits and ongoing client communication.

The program is also essential in linking participants with other key supports, resources, and opportunities. These include ongoing education, community volunteer opportunities, and career and professional network building. Key partners include the State of Maine’s departments of labor and education, the state’s regional workforce boards, and the Maine Community College System

ReStart’s affiliation with dozens of other area, state, and national organizations provides elements for individual pathways to financial security through home ownership. These resources are inventoried for ReStart participants and the public on the program’s web page (see appendix c).

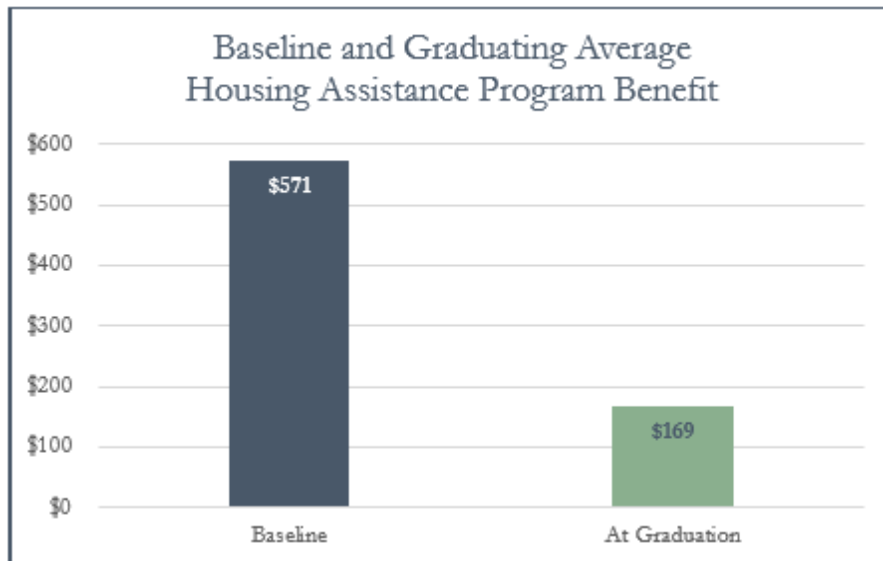
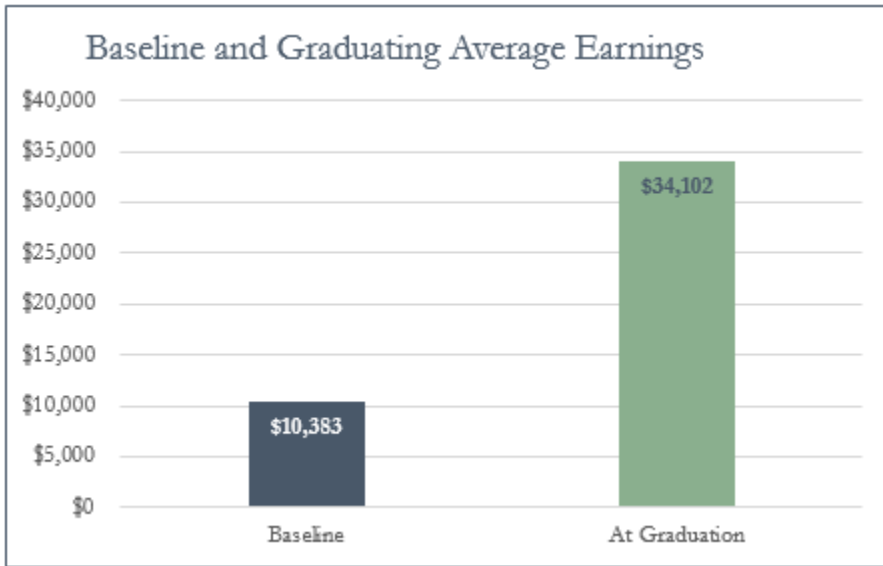
A quarterly newsletter produced all in-house, by ReStart staff and sent electronically to about 100 recipients furthers the lines of communications with participants, partners, and the public (see appendix b).

“I was able to learn how to work on my credit and today have a credit score that is going to allow me to become a homeowner,” said ReStart participant Casey Henderson. “If it wasn’t for the ReStart program and Laurie, I would not be where I am today. The tools I was taught I will use for the rest of my life. I am using my escrow for a down payment on a house and am forever grateful for the opportunity I was given to be part of this program.”



Appendix A

Program Data



Appendix B

Webpage - <https://www.mainehousing.org/restart>

MaineHousing
MAINE STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY

About Us Programs & Services Partners Policy & Resources Contact Us

Start Your Self Sufficiency Journey Today

Let us help you reach your financial goals!

The ReStart Program helps families who have housing vouchers get connected with resources to allow them to reach their financial goals. In addition, ReStart coaches provide employment and education resources to assist families to become self-sufficient.

A Chance To Save Rent Increases

Once enrolled in ReStart, a **ReStart Savings Account** will be established for you. As you earn more money at work and your rent increases, deposits will be made into the account.

Reach Goals With Coaching Support

Your coach will help you to create a plan to reach your goals. They'll provide support to help you work through your plan while providing financial instruction to help you create a better personal financial outlook.

Connections With Resources

ReStart coaches are connected with financial, employment and education resources throughout the state and will provide you the information you need to accomplish your goals.

What are people saying about ReStart?

The ReStart Program is hands down the best program I have ever been involved with!

Jennifer graduated with a ReStart savings account totaling \$38,000. Here's what she had to say:

"When I first started the ReStart Program I was unemployed, my credit score was terrible, I had no money saved up for emergencies, and I had a car that was very unreliable. I can definitely say that my confidence in myself was at an extreme low. Its 4 years later and I am graduating from the ReStart program. I have a full time job with a company I love, my credit score is amazing, I have money in my saving account, a reliable car for my family and I am buying a house. The ReStart Program has helped me gain my confidence back and completely changed my life."

Am I Eligible

If you:

- Have a Housing Choice Voucher
- Want to invest in your future

You may be eligible! Contact a Program Coordinator for more info today.

FAQs

When does the ReStart Savings Account start and how does it work?
The savings account will start when your household wage increases above the household income you have when you join the program. When that happens your rental portion will increase. As a result, an amount will be put into a savings account based upon a formula.

Do I have to be working to join ReStart?
No, you do not have to be working when you enroll in the program. A coach will help you to create a plan to become employed.

I am only able to work part time due to a disability, Am I still eligible to join the program?
Yes. Persons with disabilities may apply for a reasonable accommodation to reduce the amount of hours they are required to work to participate in the program.

How long does the program last?
When you join ReStart you will enter into a contract that has a term of five years. However, if you reach your goals successfully before five years you are able to graduate. Many people do!

Will I lose my voucher if I don't reach all of my goals or drop out of the program?
You will not lose your voucher if you decide you do not want to continue with the program or don't graduate from the program.

Resources

- ▶ Career Planning
- ▶ Childcare
- ▶ Education Info
- ▶ Employment Information
- ▶ Financial Education
- ▶ Financial Support
- ▶ General Info

EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

26 Edison Drive, Augusta ME 04330
(800) 452-4668 | (207) 626-4660
Fax (207) 626-4678 | Maine Relay 711

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Appendix C

Newsletter Examples

RE START

A FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM FROM MAINEHOUSING

Spring 2022

Congratulations

to **Krystal & Kristy** who successfully graduated from ReStart. Together they received over \$17,000 in escrow savings. They are both planning on using the funds towards buying a home. Their hard work has paid off!

Total escrow released in 2021: **\$44,000!**
Average escrow: \$7,700



Join me in welcoming
**Teena, Penny, Jessica, Kim, Jasmine,
Naomi, Sarah and Craig**
to the ReStart program!

The three largest credit bureaus in the U.S. announced Friday they would begin removing most medical debt from their reporting process starting in July. Click on the image for more information.



UMaine announces tuition free summer courses for high school students. Click on the image for more information.



Breaking down your CREDIT SCORE

Your Credit Score is determined by 5 factors of differing importance:

- 35% PAYMENT HISTORY** - How often do you pay your accounts on time? Late payments may lead to a lower score.
- 30% LENGTH OF HISTORY** - How long have you had credit history? A longer history of responsible credit use will likely lead to a higher score.
- 15% TYPES OF CREDIT USED** - Do you have more than one credit type? Having experience with different types of credit (e.g., a car loan and a credit card) can help your score.
- 10% AMOUNTS OWED** - How much of your credit credit have you used? Less is more! Lowering debt can be the key to a higher credit score.
- 10% NEW CREDIT** - How new credit have you opened? Opening several accounts in a short time can lower your credit score.

Questions: Contact your ReStart coach

Resources

What is a Family Development Account (FDA)?

An FDA is a matched savings account where the funds are used towards:
- First-time home or vehicle purchase - Vehicle repair - Unexpected expenses
Matched savings can be as much as 4 to 1. **Savings of \$2,000 would be matched \$8,000!**
That's free money and it's really easy to sign up!

Check it out [here](#)

MCCS FREE NO COST TRAINING

Maine's community colleges are offering a streamlined, convenient workforce development program that will train 24,000 Maine people over the next four years. That work will flow through the new, virtual, Harold Alfond Center for the Advancement of Maine's Workforce.

You can get more information here: [E-see Training](#)



The Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP) provides funding and support services for eligible Maine residents. If you are eligible, you can receive up to \$6,000 per year for a full-time student or \$3,000 per year for a part-time student each year you remain in your training program.

HOPE

Text us at our new numbers
Bri 207-624-5778
Laurie 207-626-4660



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353 Water Street
Augusta, ME 04330-4633
(207) 626-4600 • (800) 452-4066 • Maine Relay 711

RE START

A FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM FROM MAINEHOUSING

Winter 21/22

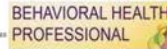
Things to Celebrate!



Savannah graduated in December with a Bachelors degree in Psychology and Community Studies. She has been hired full time in her chosen field supporting parents and hopes to purchase a house and graduate from ReStart in 2022.

Congratulations Savannah!

Kaylin earned her BHP certification as a result of attending a free course offered through the Maine Community College System (MCCS). Kaylin regards this as a first step towards earning her BA in Substance Abuse Counseling. **Congratulations Kaylin!**



We'd love to celebrate with you!!

Just let your coach know what you'd like to celebrate and we'll include it in the next newsletter

Financial Tips

Credit Building Helps Reduce Expenses

Good credit scores can affect the costs of many regular expenses such as insurance, deposits required for utilities, cell phone plans and rental housing.

\$10,000 Auto Loan 5 year term			
Score	Interest Rate	Monthly Payment	Total Interest Paid
500	17.21%	\$250.00	\$4,981.00
620	11.34%	\$219.00	\$3,197.00
720	4.78%	\$188.00	\$1,263.00
760+	Even lower rates may be available for excellent credit scores		

COMPASS COACH SHARES: CREDIT CARD TIPS



Questions: Contact your ReStart coach

Resources



Free Tax Help

Stop paying to get your taxes prepared!
CASH Maine volunteers will prepare and file your taxes for free so that you can get 100% of your refund! Volunteers receive rigorous IRS standards of conduct training and utilize secure and encrypted online software. Find a tax site [here](#)

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