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HELP BUILD THE BRIDGE TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY

In February, LARS' first Self-Sufficiency Program (SSP) participant celebrated her one year anniversary! *Rebecca has been working closely with LARS' SSP Coordinator, Audrey Vaught, to set goals and take action. She is now 1 of 6 participants, all of whom have set goals in order to bridge the gap from poverty to self-sufficiency. Within the past year, four of our SSP participants have developed a monthly budget, two have started a savings account, and four have begun addressing their debt. In addition to that, two participants have a minimum of \$100 saved and one participant has begun contesting items on his credit score to improve his score.

By partnering with LARS, individuals in the community are working to improve their current financial standing. Thanks to donations from supporters like you, LARS has assisted several participants on their journey to self-sufficiency.

One participant was assisted with the costs associated with obtaining a second job, resulting in an increase in her total monthly income. Another participant was assisted with the cost to renew her vehicle registration after being out of work due to an emergency surgery. LARS covered the cost of an educational certification for a third SSP participant, which has increased her employment opportunities. When another participant was at risk of being caught in a loan cycle, LARS was able to help prevent her from increasing her long-term debt and potentially improve her credit score by paying the remaining outstanding balance. These are just a few instances of assistance over the past 12 months, and they would not have been possible without the generosity of donors like you!

As we look ahead to the next 12 months, LARS is pursuing private grants and community

partnership opportunities in order to grow the self-sufficiency program and increase its impact in our community. You can help these participants build the bridge to self-sufficiency by donating to LARS today. You can also help us increase participation by referring potential program participants and by volunteering to teach a Life-Skills Class. Life-skill classes are opportunities for SSP participants and others in the community to learn essential skills and tools needed to achieve their goals. Class topics range from financial coaching to stress-management, and all things in between. If you are interested in teaching a life-skills class or would like to receive more information about LARS' Self-Sufficiency Program, contact Audrey Vaught at avaught@laureladvocacy.org or 301-776-0442 ext. 28.

*Names changed to protect client's identity

Fighting for LARS' Supportive Housing Program Participants

Tuesday, February 20th was a BIG day for LARS' Executive Director, Leah Paley, and two of our Permanent Supportive Housing Participants, Ellen Hammond and Ross Hughes. They testified in Annapolis before the House Environment and Transportation Committee in support of House Bill 933, which would allow LARS and other Permanent Supportive Housing Program providers across the state to continue to have access to Rental Allowance Program funding for program participants. Without this money, LARS may have to reduce the number of participants in the program, which currently serves 22 chronically homeless and disabled individuals and families. At least one member of each household is living with



a physical health disability; 60% of households also have at least one member living with a mental health diagnosis. The majority of participants entered our program with little to no income. Participants have thrived when afforded the opportunity to reside independently through our subsidized housing program. In this year alone, 60% of participants have increased their total income, and eight participants are actively contributing to savings.

Seventy-five percent of funding (\$433,000) for our program comes from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the remaining program costs are assumed by LARS. We have primarily utilized state Rental Allowance Program funds, which pays a portion of the total rental cost for each household in our program for up to two years, to pay the remaining program costs not covered by HUD. We were recently informed that we are prohibited from applying for future RAP funds for Permanent Supportive Housing participants because these participants do not meet the program's eligibility criteria. Eligible residents are low-income families who are homeless, or in danger of becoming homeless according to state statute. Maryland's Department of Housing and Community Development follows federal regulations to define all homeless programs. Federal regulations define Permanent Supportive Housing as permanent housing with supports, and residents in these programs lose their homeless status once they enter the program.

There is a chance that HB 933 will not pass, thus jeopardizing the future of our supportive housing program. We encourage you to contact your elected state officials to ask them to support HB 933, which will allow programs like ours to continue to serve as a platform from which participants can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life. Use <http://mdelect.net/> to find your state representatives and their contact information.

A special THANK YOU to Delegate Ben Barnes of District 21 for sponsoring this bill. We are grateful to have the support of all the elected officials who represent the district in which LARS is located.



Join us on Saturday, May 5th at 8 AM for LARS' **4th Annual Spring into Summer 5K Run & 1 Mile Walk!**

Whether you're totally new to running or just looking for something fun to do with family and friends this spring, this event is for you! This family-friendly race starts and finishes at McCullough Field in Laurel, and we will have food, post-race activities, and prizes for the top three finishers in each age group (male and female). All finishers will receive a t-shirt. Strollers and leashed pets are welcome!

*Sign up today- Registration is \$30 until April 15th; after April 15th, the cost goes up to \$35!

SIGN UP AT:

REGISTER.CHRONOTRACK.COM/R/35699

Not a runner? That's okay! You can **support LARS by volunteering at our 5K event**. We are in need of individuals and groups to help with registration, food/water stations, course marshaling and more. Additional volunteer opportunities are available on the days leading up to the race, as well as before and after the race on race day!

Contact Angelica Christian at achristian@laureladvocacy.org or 301-776-0442 x32 if you want to volunteer!

Stay Connected Year Round:

