

2020

ANNUAL REPORT



HEART OF THE CITY NEIGHBORHOODS, INC.

Despite COVID-19, our team at Heart of the City Neighborhoods, Inc. (HOCN) adapted the way we worked to safely provide our community with access to crucial programs and continue essential investment into Buffalo's core neighborhoods. 2020 was a year of loss and hardships for us all. Our work did not slow down, as affordable housing and community care were needed more than ever.

Affordable Housing Opportunities

Through ongoing partnerships with the City of Buffalo and Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, our team assisted fifteen homeowners and three first-time homebuyers; leveraging \$206,412 in home repair funding and \$431,185 in mortgages and homebuyer assistance funding.



\$431,185
leveraged and invested in first-time homebuyer mortgages and grant assistance



\$206,412
leveraged and invested in owner-occupied households through our housing programs

We collaborated with partner housing organizations through the Green and Healthy Homes Initiative and Anti-Displacement Learning Network to provide additional resources to our communities. As the pandemic continues to leave both homeowners and renters vulnerable, stabilizing housing has become one of our dominant focuses.

We provided nine families with access to quality, safe and affordable rental housing at our Cynthia Gardens Apartments. And in the eight years since it's opening, Cynthia Gardens marked the second time a tenant became a first-time homebuyer, successfully transitioning into their new home. This vacancy allowed for our first new family since 2018 to move into the Cynthia Gardens Apartments, referred to HOCN by our partners at Buffalo Prenatal-Perinatal Network.



17
families and individuals provided with quality, safe, affordable rental housing



\$200,000
invested on Grant Street in Buffalo's West Side community

Community Needs

At a time when small businesses were deeply impacted and struggling, we helped five commercial property owners on Grant Street complete their Buffalo Main Streets Initiative projects, improving 12 commercial units and investing almost \$200,000 into our mixed-use corridor. All with the assistance of the NY Housing Trust Fund Corporation and Empire State Development corporation.



395
referrals to residents in need of affordable housing, legal, or general assistance



1,500
groceries and meals distributed to seniors in our communities

While our focus organizationally is on built environments, we needed to quickly adapt and adjust to what the most pressing needs were. Our staff stayed engaged with the people we serve, connecting them to not only housing resources, but legal and human resources, as well.

In our partnership with The Journey Church we looked at the holistic needs of our communities to support the Groceries to Seniors initiative, delivering groceries and hot meals to over 1,500 of our most vulnerable residents in Buffalo's East Side last year, feeding the homebound elders in our community allowing them to safely shelter at home during this pandemic.

Fiscal Management and Partnerships

As with many other non-profits, the threat of fiscal instability was an increasingly challenging concern. Public and private philanthropic institutions, upon which we rely heavily, drastically cut back on their charitable giving. HOCN sought opportunities to highlight our keen project management skills and pursued meaningful partnerships that introduced paid contract work in order to bridge funding gaps.



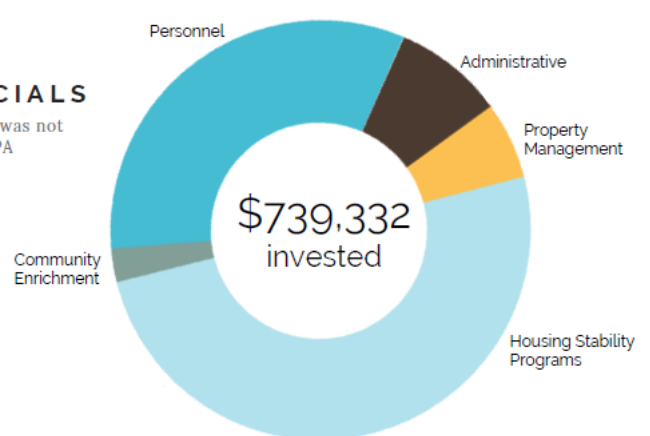
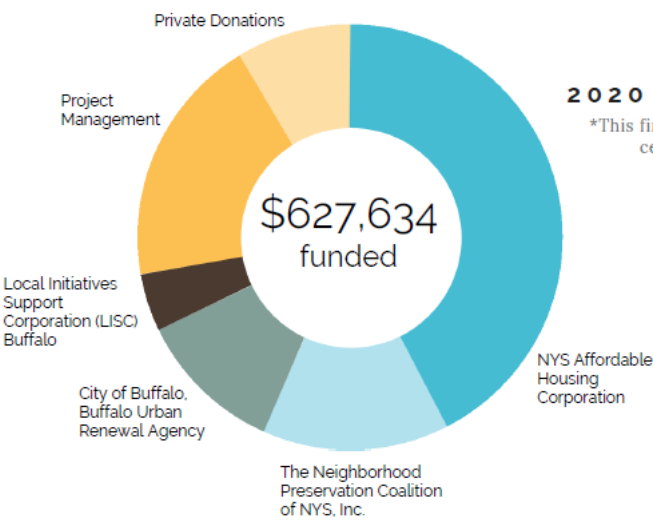
\$2.3M
leveraged and invested in restoring vacant units for affordable rental housing

Our partnership with Mt. Olive Baptist Church expanded access to affordable rental housing while also helping restore a vacant building on East Delavan into eight quality, safe, affordable rental units. Upon completion of the project a total of \$2,348,168 was invested in the Delavan Grider community.

Leadership and Employee Retention

During these turbulent times, securing HOCN's leadership was necessary in order to provide reliable and critical services to our community. This was accomplished by implementing paid self care for all employees, reducing the work week by one day and offering flexible working arrangements when needed.

We also partnered with the Fruit Belt Community Land Trust after the disruption of their leadership structure. We know that securing capable leadership and program service continuity is paramount to an agency's ability to survive and even flourish during these trying times.



FORGING AHEAD TO 2021

While the pandemic may still be adjusting the way we work in 2021, we continue to provide needed resources to our communities and grow both our programming and partnerships.

Welcome our Newest Team Members

Deirdre Wright will lead our Green Infrastructure Stewardship Program to develop talent from the City of Buffalo's most underserved communities in order to meet the growing needs for green infrastructure maintenance in partnership with PowerCorps PHL and the Buffalo Sewer Authority.

Anthony Williams will lead our Healthy Homes project in partnership with the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, Lead Safe Task Force, and Community Health Workers Network to engage tenants and families in reducing lead paint exposure.

Adebare Ogunleye will join our Board of Directors as its newest member bringing his experience as an attorney representing non-profit developers in structuring complex real estate transactions, and his passion for affordable housing as well as community and economic development.

Investment in Mixed-Use Communities

2021 will see the conclusion of our Buffalo Main Streets Initiative on Grant Street, assisting two more small businesses with valuable building upgrades; investing an additional \$75,000 into the thriving commercial corridor.

Increase Affordable Housing Opportunities to Homeowners, First-Time Homebuyers, and Tenants

Our partnership with the City of Buffalo and Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency focuses our outreach and application intake efforts in West Side communities in 2021. Thanks to CDBG-CV funding, we are pleased to introduce expanded home repair programs to include small landlord-owned properties occupied by low-to-moderate income tenants with the aim of mitigating the effects COVID-19 has on city residents' ability to remain in their homes. Additionally we launched a Lead Hazard Reduction Program that will target at-risk Upper West Side homes with young children from the dangers of lead poisoning.

In collaboration with Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) WNY, we have developed a virtual training program focused on planning and implementing affordable housing development projects. The curriculum provides an overview of the affordable housing development process, including pre-development and financing and assists organizations to start site-specific analyses in order to assess the viability of potential development projects. This curriculum aims to educate participants on the process of selecting development team members and partners, including joint venture partners for affordable housing development.

A new partnership in 2021 will see us working in the Masten Park and Fruit Belt Neighborhoods with various housing organizations across Buffalo, administering a Rental Assistance Fund and Housing Rehab Assistance, thanks to the Anti-Displacement Learning Network (ADLN) Grant provided by Enterprise Community Partners.