**July 27, 2021**

**LINK OF HAMPTON ROADS, INC**

**10413 Warwick Blvd., Newport News, VA 23601**

**ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2020 – JUNE 30, 2021**

**LINK’s Mission Statement**

**Linking community resources to provide fast and affordable housing solutions to homeless individuals/families as well as other emergency services to men, women and children who don’t have access to their basic needs and find themselves in a housing crisis or other emergency situation.**

**LINK of Hampton Roads (LINK) focuses on service provision to citizens who are experiencing homelessness and the effects of poverty. Agency customers are individuals (including the elderly,) with physical and/or mental disabilities and other illness ranging from post-operative recovery to terminal illnesses and substance use issues. Additionally, LINK provides basic, life-essential resources to in house clients and the general public. LINK entered its 30th year of existence on December 8, 2020.**

**Fiscal year 2020/2021 continued to present many opportunities of growth, despite COVID 19 shutting the country down for many months. LINK’s interfaith partners and volunteers, who historically have come together to help meet the needs of Virginia Peninsula citizens at risk, were threatened by the possibility and actual infection from Covid 19. Interfaith congregations closed for many months and to date, many are still not fully operational.**

**No matter the challenges we all, were and continue to be, faced with Covid or a variant. However, the LINK staff continued to provide the at-risk and homeless community with housing, shelter, food, clothing, furniture and household items. ALL LINK programs were totally revamped to offer protection to staff and the volunteers who continued to support the day to day operations of LINK. Increased partnership with the city of Newport News utilizing the skills of city experts, in their field, provided LINK with the resources and stability needed to ensure the continuation of urgently needed services. Creating new operating standards and information increased our ability to track, refer, and accomplish our goals, above and beyond the “norm” for the agency.**

**LINK is overseen by a thirteen-person Board of Directors. Personnel include an executive director, program director, finance manager, financial assistant, senior case manager and a case manager, one homeless street case management and homeless outreach case manager, a veteran case manager, administrative manager and operations manager. Support services are delivered via two and a half case managers for permanent housing, one three quarter time case manager for medical respite, and up to two house managers for veterans’ emergency shelter.**

**Cash and other donations are utilized strictly for direct services to programs. LINK remains dedicated to being good stewards of all “gifts”. Grant funded programs are audited annually by the granting agencies. LINK is also independently audited to A133 level to ensure checks and balances are in place and grant funds are utilized strictly for the purposes intended, no issues or findings during the 2020 audit conducted in 2019 and the 2020 audit will commence in November 2020.**

**CANLINK PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAMS (I AND IV and Combined)**

**LINK continues to operate two permanent supportive housing programs. The projects provide subsidized housing and support services to individuals and/or families via HUD funding. Eligible applicants must have a head of household with a disability that meets HUD specifications. The required match monies are donated by the United Way and community donors to support various supportive services that are essential to the success of program participants.**

**During this reporting period, CANLINK programs housed 110 chronically homeless adults and children who are living with mental, physical and/or co-occurring disabilities. Participants are not excluded due to criminal histories, poor credit or lack of income. Clients were initially referred to CANLINK programs through LINK’s PORT winter shelter and other Peninsula community agencies. Currently, all clients enter services through the Housing Crisis Hotline and all referrals are screened at a local meeting of service providers for eligibility and prioritization. Referrals are managed by a waiting list and applicants are housed when a vacancy becomes available.**

**Monthly home visits and quarterly home inspections are conducted to monitor stability and assist with resource linkages and landlord/tenant mediation. Support services include: mental health counseling and referral, substance use interventions and financial, budgeting and employment assistance. Food and furniture delivery are provided as needed, often weekly. 58 CANLINK households were provided with food on an ongoing basis throughout the year. 17 families received assistance from our Share the Spirit initiative which includes Christmas and Thanksgiving dinner fixings plus wish list gifts for program children. CANLINK clients are routinely assisted with transportation services to access appointments and resources. Case managers often accompany to assist with negotiating service delivery systems. As clients develop self-advocacy skills, bus passes are utilized to assist with independently accessing community resources.**

**In March 2020, in response to the onset of the pandemic, LINK staff modified service delivery to address CDC recommended health precautions. In person visits were replaced with telephone and internet communication with clients; when possible. Food and supplies continued to be delivered to and left on doorsteps. Interviews, lease renewals, move in’s, moves to other housing units, all continued to occur thanks to LINK’s Operations staff, case managers and volunteers who ensured essential program functions were not disrupted. Case managers monitored closely to address pandemic panic, isolation, and depression which was prevalent during this fiscal year. All clients and staff are provided with masks and hand sanitizer. When in person contact was unavoidable universal precautions are practiced.**

**This fiscal year, LINK applied for an additional $98,000 for an extension to CANLINK I, (awarded and named as CANLINK 1 Combined) which proposed to add another 7 single units. The grant was awarded in June 2020 and effective in August, 2020 to upper peninsula households through LINK’s partnership with Williamsburg House of Mercy. The grant was reduced by HUD to just $27,000 for leasing only. Subsequently, only two units of housing can be provided for the awarded amount. Two persons moved into housing and were case managed, overseen by LINK, through a partnership with Williamsburg House of Mercy. Of the initial two clients housed, client successfully transitioned to a mainstream voucher and the second was incarcerated due to untreated mental illness. After discharge, there was a significant lag with the intake of new residents due to a total lack of available housing inventory, both locally and countrywide.**

**CANLINK programs directly provide rental subsidies, case management and support services. Additionally, community service agencies provide an array of individualized, client centered services to address homeless needs and supports to foster housing stabilization. During intake, the Program Director completes a psych-social assessment to evaluate existing supports, strengths, and needs. Based on these identified strengths and needs, a service plan is developed by the client and case manager to establish goals toward housing stability. This plan serves as the tool to monitor client progress and agency responsibilities. The service plan also addresses HUD’s main project goals of increased income and greater self-determination. When a client meets stabilization goals the case manager and client develop an exit strategy that includes linkages to necessary support resources. If a client requires ongoing support to live independently, the housing subsidy and case management are maintained.**

**Case management services also involve working with the children of CANLINK participants. Case managers work with families to teach and monitor parenting skills. Community educational outings are regularly organized for the children. Parental support is provided in negotiating the school system when needed. Contact is** **maintained with teachers, counselors and administrators. Grades and attendance are monitored, and behavioral challenges (if any) are addressed as an essential function of CANLINK family services.**

**Moves were conducted by LINK’s Operations department during the fiscal year. Tenant were asked to exit the home; it was then sanitized prior to moving items. All personal items were then transferred and/or moved into the new home, prior to the tenant entering the new facilities, thus following LINK’s new Covid safety protocols.**

**All in person congregate activities were cancelled for CANLINK clients during this fiscal year due to Covid 19. Case management was conducted in person, by standing with a client outside of their home, via Zoom or phone calls and/or FaceTime.**

**Mainstream vouchers were offered to some CANLINK participants who qualified by age and stabilization. Three households were moved to mainstream vouchers and an additional three transitions are in progress. The move to mainstream vouchers is a positive one, often called a graduation. Move-on placements create vacancies in the CANLINK programs to accept new chronically homeless applicants in need of the intensive support services permanent supportive housing provides.**

**CANLINK IV was developed to support up to 7 chronically homeless veterans and/or ex-offenders providing the same case management and oversite services as the CANLINK I and CANLINK I Combined programs.**

**Many CANLINK participants have either zero income or manage on very limited income. Therefore, LINK’s ongoing support from Emergency Services for food, clothing, furniture and household items is imperative for provision to both situated clients and new clients entering into the program. These resources are made available via the support of the United Way of the Virginia Peninsula, local interfaith congregations and civic and business groups. These groups generously volunteer and donate to LINK. Norfolk State University, Old Dominion University and Thomas Nelson Community College provide annual Bachelor or Masters level interns who provide “boots on the ground” support, much needed by case management staff. Without all of the support received, services would be challenged to complete the daily chores of caring for 66 plus households.**

**Five persons were served in CANLINK IV throughout the year with duplicated food delivery, household items, clothing, etc. Two vacancies exist at fiscal yearend due to the lack of inventory created by the eviction moratorium.**

**CANLINK programs will continue to facilitate quarterly resident forum and support groups once safe for staff and clients to meet again in person. The meetings address landlord/tenant issues and resident concerns/interests to ensure a consumer relevant service delivery system.**

**Unfortunately, there have been several clients diagnosed with significant health issues again this year. There were two client deaths in the CANLINK housing programs. One entered hospice and passed away in August 2020. This in part may be due to the aging populations entering CANLINK services. While it is always a shock for LINK to lose even one client, we, the staff, were most grateful that we were able to provide housing versus the alternative of persons dying unsheltered/on the streets.**

**PORT EMERGENCY WINTER SHELTER PROGRAM**

**PORT continues to be one of the largest and most innovative emergency shelter efforts on the Peninsula, and was greatly challenged for the 20/21 season due to Covid 19.**

**The city of Newport News gathered a team of strong representatives to help LINK staff to plan and implement the program. For the first time in 30 years of providing PORT shelter the costs of the shelter exceeded $750,000 plus, thanks to city of Newport News support, compared to our normal budget of $158,125!**

**PORT provides a continuum of comprehensive services to homeless men, women and children. PORT guests are a diverse population, often experiencing complex challenges and special needs. Guests present with issues of mental illness, substance abuse, health concerns and various educational and financial crises. Sadly, the elderly population is becoming a more frequent guest of the PORT program due to lack of income and resources. As a result, guests are routinely assisted with applying for mainstream benefits such as Social Security Income or Social Security Disability Income, Medicaid, SNAP benefits, WIC, Temporary Aid for Needy Families, or Virginia Initiative for Employment Not Welfare, and employment placement. This year LINK’s statistical data continues to support an increasing trend of elderly, medically fragile, and young adults presenting at the shelter. Shelter staff coordinated with Adult Protective Services, twenty-seven cases of inability to care for themselves. Many of these folks chose to enter into assisted living or nursing home facilities.**

**PORT completes an intake on each client that enters the program and ensures that every person has hygiene items, a minimum of two hot meals, bagged lunches, clothing, and diapers (if needed). If a guest is transitioning into housing, furniture was provided and needed community referrals and linkages were made. PORT clients are “followed” to measure their success and/or challenges throughout the PORT season. The usual supportive services for clients were limited due to the rigidity of the shelter this year. Each guest was assigned a mat and bedding upon entry, apart from seeking bathroom time or intake assessment, guests were required to remain on their mats and sleep. Dinners were served at Temple Baptist Church and the tightest controls were in place to ensure the safety of clients, volunteers and staff. Medical personnel screened the guests nightly and ensured, if they were ill, they went for screening to the hospital where Covid tests were carried out. They were then given a night in a hotel until results were provided to staff. There was a total of eighteen cases of Covid reported during the 20-week PORT season to include: guests, staff and volunteers.**

**Under a contract with the city of Newport News, Hampton-Newport News Community Services Board staff are on-site twice weekly to offer mental health assistance to those who wish to engage. Newport News Department of Human Services (NN-DHS) intake workers are available nightly to conduct emergency, telephone family screening services. Ongoing coordination with Four Oaks Day Support Center was regular. Transportation was provided to guests through 11 p.m. nightly. Each new family with children is offered the opportunity of a next day appointment (except on weekends/holidays) with Newport News Dept. of Human Services, to immediately begin addressing the needs of the family in crisis. Veterans Administration were notified of incoming homeless Veterans and arrangements coordinated for the Veteran to enter into VAMC overseen program support. The Newport News Sheriff’s Department and SOS Security provided on-site security, ensuring that the shelter is properly secured and our guests, staff and volunteers remain safe. Expedite Properties provided daily cleaning, site sanitation and laundry of guest linens.**

**Two shelter sites were run from the end of week 3 of the PORT season. Women were located to a B shelter site and men were assigned to A. Huge thanks to New Beech Grove Baptist Church for providing 17 weeks and Temple Baptist Church for providing 3 weeks of shelter site. Ancillary shelter support was also provided by St. Jerome’s Catholic Church, Denbigh Presbyterian Church, First Baptist Church, Hilton Baptist Church and Warwick United Church of Christ. The Union Mission provided 20 weeks of committed back up to support the shelter overage, that thankfully wasn’t needed, but indeed the partnerships offered by the sites was invaluable. Temple Baptist Church was the host site for meals for 20 weeks! A significant accomplishment by the team at TBC coordinating partner interfaith groups, schools, real estate companies and local businesses who participated and covered the food preparation and distribution during the 20 weeks.**

**Many nights the shelter provides care for up to 87 persons. A total of 6,143 bed nights were provided to 402 unduplicated men, women and children at the above interfaith sites. More than 4,000 volunteers provided meals and transported food and supplies to each site.**

**PORT closed after 20 weeks of providing uninterrupted shelter services to guests during the Covid outbreak. We were able to intercept and care for those with symptoms of Covid and remove them from congregate to non-congregate shelter until well again.**

**PORT check in and intake functions were upgraded to an automated system this season to compensate for the reduced number of volunteers available to help carry out the shelter duties.**

**Veterans Emergency Housing Program (Male Only)**

**The Veterans Emergency Housing Program provides rehabilitative services to veterans. Two house managers and Veterans Administration (VA) staff provide onsite supervision, daily transportation and program oversight. Services provided this year included short-term housing, case management and job assistance to male veterans in need of rehabilitative care that are experiencing homelessness. LINK provides food, transportation and supportive services for each veteran accepted into the housing program. Intensive case management is the cornerstone in assisting these veterans with housing stabilization during their limited stay. Each veteran has an individual care plan and access to resources and supports for reintegration into community living. LINK and the Veterans Administration offer basic life skill development, employment training and placement. Physical fitness programs and ongoing support to ensure successful reentry into civilian life are also available. When veterans transition to the community, LINK’s emergency service programs provide ongoing food, clothing, furniture, and household items to each veteran on an as needed basis. In 20/21 this program successfully served 16 male veterans, with 2,196 bed nights, and all exited to community homes, permanent housing, VA supportive housing programs, or CANLINK I or IV. Covid 19 affected this program and all veterans entering remained in their bedrooms and safety protocols were put in place for them to remain well during their stay with us. One veteran contracted Covid. As with all of LINK’s veteran programs, veterans are provided three full meals, snacks, clothing as needed and furniture if needed upon exit. Thank you to Kirkwood Presbyterian members who continued to cook and donate food for the veterans in both houses. The usual stay for veterans is 90 days, due to Covid many were with us for several months.**

**Grateful thanks to two of LINK’s oldest interfaith member churches who provide volunteers to ensure that veteran house gardens are well kept.**

**Veterans Medical Respite Program (Male only)**

**In 2010, LINK had the honor of being granted and implementing the first east coast pilot project for medical respite in the United States. The second Veterans Medical Respite pilot is located on the west coast in California!**

**LINK runs the Veterans Medical Respite program in close partnership with the Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC), along with Family Centered Resources, a Home Health local business that ensures that CNA/LPN/RNs provide 24/7 care. LINK provides food, personal supplies, transportation and supportive services for each veteran placed with the medical respite project for the duration of their stay. LINK also serves as the VAMC liaison, ensuring that our veterans receive medical care and other services needed. Many veterans entering the program are either pre or post-op. Veterans are provided with supports and services necessary to stabilize from surgical procedures or recover from serious medical conditions. In 2018/2019 this program successfully served 37 male veterans, with 948 bed nights. All veterans were housed, except one, upon discharge from Veterans Medical Respite. Veterans are placed into VA Medical Foster Care, assisted living, and permanent supportive housing through VASH or CANLINK, or private landlord housing as financially able. As with all of LINK’s programs veterans are provided with ongoing food, clothing, furniture, and household items as needed, during the program and when they move into housing.**

**Sadly, due to Covid, the house was closed in August 2020 and the contract was ended prematurely in May 2021 as Covid remains a prevalent concern for everyone’s safety.**

**Emergency Services**

**Food, Furniture, House Hold Items, Clothing, Job Search, Job Placement, Housing Placement, Medication Assistance etc.**

**The Center, located at the LINK building, provides resources for thousands of individuals and families either on a one-time or most often on a revolving basis, depending on the client’s circumstances and vulnerability. Available resources include funds for emergency gas fill ups, medications, transportation in the form of LINK vehicles, HRT bus passes, or Greyhound tickets. These supports are made possible via collaboration with other agencies, interfaith churches and the United Way of the Virginia Peninsula.**

**Food**

**The Pantry provides perishable and non-perishable foods to individuals and families in need. Staff and volunteers have also expanded services to include regular delivery of food to shut-ins. Occasionally, persons who are unable to get to the LINK office due to disabilities, medical fragility or other challenges are also provided with delivery service. LINK has identified the need, and advocated for, development of increased community delivery resources of donated food to indigent, non-elderly, homebound citizens.**

**As a member of the homeless services access network, LINK provides referrals to Newport News DHS for SNAP benefits. The agency also directly distributes foods that are easy to open and eat until food stamps are awarded, or to fill the “gap” when food stamps run out. United Way’s First Call for Help utilizes a database to track the number of citizens in need of food on a monthly basis. Utilization of this free service has assisted many agencies in avoiding duplication and abuse of limited food donation resources. LINK has been affected by the economic downturn and food request demands have continued to increase. The Food Bank, LINK’s main source of purchasing food, has also been affected. Food quantities and choices have frequently been limited to certain items.**

**1674 unduplicated persons were provided with food throughout the year, either through onsite shopping at LINK or received home deliveries. During Covid, all clients who came to LINK for emergency services were provided food, clothing or other items, with or without referral, and continue to be served on the same basis. Deliveries of food items increased, especially to shut in’s and those persons medically fragile. A total of 12,105 duplicated persons were served via the food pantry in 20/21. (duplicated = people who returned for food support)**

**Clothing**

**LINK’s clothing closet provides attire to adults, children and infants. Clothing is provided for various purposes such as seasonal appropriateness, professional presentation and to persons who are homeless and have no other resource to clean clothing. The PORT shelter distributes an inordinate number of coats, jeans, sweaters, t-shirts, underwear, socks, boots, etc. PORT guests oftentimes will also access LINK’s clothing closet to supplement their clothing in order to stay warm by layering, during the coldest parts of the winter.**

**Thanks to close ties with the interfaith communities and civic and business groups, donations of clothing and other items are often in abundance. LINK also helps to “spread the wealth” of clothing donations to other agencies that have the ability to distribute free clothing. Community agencies and the Veterans Administration are aware of LINK’s clothing resources. Social workers frequently bring whole families or individuals to LINK to “shop” for clothing needs. Local elementary schools, middle schools, and Newport News Dept. of Human Services also receive clothing specifically for distribution to children. LINK also helps distribute clothing not accessed by the public to churches who send clothing to other countries, thus the wealth in the “clothing” world is spread far and wide; 3,947 unduplicated persons received direct clothing from LINK throughout the year, this does NOT include clothing distributed at the PORT winter shelter. A total of 6,547 persons were served.**

**Furniture and Household Distribution**

**LINK’s storage is conveniently located near the LINK building. The storage contains household items and furniture for distribution to community households transitioning from homelessness. Local churches and other donors provide LINK with a complete array of household necessities. At any one time, LINK has enough furniture and household items to fully equip twelve (12) homes. LINK works directly with multiple agencies to address community furniture and household needs. Some of those agencies are the Veterans Administration, Departments of Human Services, the Red Cross, and various citizens referred by United Way First Call for Help, Mission United, etc. Many who lose furniture due to fires, floods, evictions, etc., also benefit from the wealth of donations stored at the LINK warehouse. Donations are picked up three to four times a week from community donors. Inventory is then documented and distributed freely; 674 persons received furniture from LINK which was either picked up from the LINK warehouse or was delivered by LINK staff. A total of 2,170 persons were served with household/furniture items.**

**Emergency Services/Share the Spirit**

**The Share the Spirit Program began 26 years ago and continues today to provide families experiencing the effects of poverty with gifts of food, clothing and toys during the Thanksgiving and Christmas Season. LINK’s donors “adopt” a LINK known family and provide some of the things on the child (ren’s) wish list. LINK, with the donors, ensures that each family has a Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner with all the fixings! A total of 9 families were supported in 20/21.**

**Volunteer Program**

**LINK could not survive without the thousands of volunteers who work within our programs. Volunteers are the “backbone” of this agency. Without volunteers, LINK would not be able to provide the myriad of services that are donated free of charge, particularly the PORT winter shelter!**

**Volunteers come in the form of interns from ODU, Norfolk State and Christopher Newport Universities. Additionally, local colleges such as Centura and Thomas Nelson, who also provide volunteer support. The Federal Half Way House, Probation and Parole, the Newport News Dept. of Human Services TANF and VIEW workers are invaluable in keeping LINK offices and operations functioning smoothly. AARP volunteers also assist with the day to day running of the agency! LINK’s main volunteer “heartbeat” is the interfaith congregations of the Peninsula!**

**In particular, during this fiscal year, Kirkwood Presbyterian and Temple Baptist have provided outings, socialization opportunities, delivered home cooked meals and companionship to our Veterans Emergency Shelter and Medical Respite Programs, and our veteran clients are so appreciative of the special attention they have received through these avenues of wonderful extras!**

**The Board of Directors and the interfaith-based community are the AXIS upon which LINK revolves and survives. The generosity of all persons who represent the faith-based community and other public agencies come together in order to ensure that LINK’s clients – men, women and children are provided with the support and assistance necessary for stabilization of their life situations.**

**We celebrate another year of service to the Hampton Roads community.**