

April 2022



A newsletter for LVRHAB members and community partners



What is the LVRHAB?

The Lehigh Valley Regional Homeless Advisory Board is a collaborative, community-based response to homelessness in our community.

Also known as the LVRHAB or RHAB, we are comprised of representatives from City and County governments, social service agencies, veterans support groups, faith-based and other community organizations, advocates, people who have or are currently experiencing homelessness, representatives from legislators, and other interested parties with the mandate of ending homelessness and housing insecurity in the Lehigh Valley.

The LVRHAB is one of five RHABs across 33 counties that make up the Eastern Pennsylvania Continuum of Care (Eastern PA CoC). If you are interested, the CoC is recruiting for committee membership. Apply [HERE](#).

For more information, please contact [Jenna Sentz](#) and [Chris Cassidy](#).



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Join us on Slack
[#lehigh-valley-rhab](#)
[Click Here to Register](#)
Link expires in 11 days.

HUD Secretary Fudge visits Lehigh Valley

You may have read the news that Housing & Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Marcia Fudge visited the Lehigh Valley in February ([Morning Call article](#)). This was an important visit, hosted by Rep. Susan Wild, where the Secretary emphasized the dire need for increased housing options for low-income households across the nation.

What you may not have read about was a follow-up Roundtable Discussion with area residents, LVRHAB and other representatives. This was a private, no-press event of about a dozen people. Alisa Baratta and Marc Rittle were both in attendance. The Secretary wanted to step aside from the spotlight and have a real conversation about the local need. On behalf of the LVRHAB, co-chair Alisa Baratta asked for HUD to broaden the definition of homelessness to allow our organizations to serve more people. She provided the example that persons who are "doubled up" and sharing living space with friends or family do not count as homeless and cannot be recipients of HUD funds to become re-housed. Representatives also asked about increasing the flexibility of available Section 8 vouchers for low-income families, to allow more effective use of the program.

At the roundtable, Secretary Fudge announced a new effort to boost home ownership for low-income families. Many families cannot afford the down payment on a home, even though a home mortgage is (these days) less expensive than paying monthly rent on an apartment. The Secretary proposed making dollars available to offset the cost of a down payment, to help more families into homeownership. Such a program could show up in a future budget, and hopefully in the long-term help to alleviate the crisis.

See page 2 for information on Homeless Children and Youth Act (H.R. 6287), which helps address the challenges of the homelessness definitions.

New CoC Written Standards Released

Go to the Eastern PA Continuum of Care website to view the new written standards [HERE](#).

Homeless Children and Youth Act (H.R. 6287)

One potential tool to address the challenges of the current definitions of homelessness discussed in the article about Secretary Fudge's visit on page one is the Homeless Children and Youth Act (H.R. 6287). A recent Schoolhouse Connections.org [newsletter](#) had an excellent summary of the Bill:

Millions of children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness are shut out of HUD's homeless assistance programs because they do not meet HUD's restrictive definition of homelessness. While they are considered homeless by several federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Education, they are not considered homeless by HUD. As a result, they are not eligible to be assessed for and receive HUD homeless assistance – despite their vulnerability.

The Homeless Children and Youth Act (HCYA) fixes this problem. This bipartisan legislation allows homeless children, youth and families to be seen and served by aligning federal definitions of homelessness for children and youth, streamlining assistance, leveraging resources, and bringing greater visibility to the reality of family and youth homelessness.

On December 14, 2021, the Homeless Children and Youth Act (H.R. 6287) was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ) and Congressman Van Taylor (R-TX), along with nine other Members of Congress. The Homeless Children and Youth Act was introduced in the U.S. Senate on April 29, 2021 (S. 1469) by U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Rob Portman (R-OH), and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI).

Congresswoman Susan Wild recently signed on as a co-sponsor. You can learn more [here](#).

Rise-Home Stories build “collective power through creative process”

By Marielle Miller, United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley AmeriCorps VISTA 211 & Housing



[Rise-Home Stories](#) is a collection of stories for children and young adults that challenge our relationship to “land, home, and race, by transforming the stories we tell about them.” Currently, there are five multimedia stories that address various societal issues from the climate crisis to eviction.

Although the topics explored by Rise-Home can be difficult, each story is told with a delicacy that is child- and school-friendly that helps children and young adults understand what is happening in today's world. Each story is told through a different digital medium, making them accessible to any type of learner: [Alejandria Fights Back!](#) is a bilingual children's book; [Dot's Home](#) is a narrative-driven video game; [But Next Time](#) is a nonfiction podcast; [MINE](#) is an animated web series; and [Steal-Estate](#) is an interactive online experience.

Written by a team of multimedia artists and activists from across the United States, Rise-Home focuses on underrepresented groups in media and literature to give children and young adults a chance to see themselves in the main character role and partake in learning about diverse perspectives while still making it relatable to almost any audience. By combining the work of both activists and artists, Rise-Home puts their stories to practice by working together to produce something great, showing that anyone and everyone can have a role in making the world a better place.

[Alejandria Fights Back!](#) particularly hit close to home for me, as a young renter in Allentown. As rent and utility prices increase and wages stay the same, Alejandria and her family are challenged with the possibility that they could be evicted from their apartment. Alejandria gathers her community to fight for their homes and the community that has been there for generations. Much like the characters in the story, being a renter can be challenging. Especially since wages at most jobs have stayed the same while the cost of living has gone up, it is a good reminder that many of us are a lot closer to losing our homes than we are being able to buy a home. The heart of many communities lies with the people in it. Investing more money and resources into these communities can help ensure a future where no one must go without a roof over their heads.

Rise-Home challenges the dominant, harmful narratives that keep BIPOC communities divided, disempowered, and fighting for survival, while conjuring a long-term vision of the world that is livable and just for all.

To learn more visit <https://risehomestories.com/> or visit [Free Books for Teachers](#) to get free educator's copies.

ATTENTION UGI GAS CUSTOMERS



The Public Utility Commission is holding two telephonic public input hearings regarding UGI Gas's proposal to increase rates charged to consumers.

Date and Times:
Wednesday, April 13 - 1:00 PM & 6:00 PM

If you wish to participate, pre-register by calling the Office of Consumer Advocate toll-free at 1-800-684-6560 and provide your name, telephone number, and the topic of your testimony by **Friday, April 8 at 3:00 PM**. There is no need to pre-register if you only wish to listen.

Art Therapy Sparks Resilience at Allentown Rescue Mission

Excerpts taken from the Allentown Rescue Mission's 11/2021 press release & 3/29/22 social media post

Since last October, The Allentown Rescue Mission has offered bi-monthly art classes to the men in its Transformation Program. The course provides therapeutic benefits and has profoundly affected the men in ways the Mission never imagined. Art therapy improves self-awareness, nurtures resilience, strengthens social skills, supplies healthy self-expression, and reduces symptoms of mental health conditions. The benefits are abundant, as both Mission staff and residents now recognize.



"Don't be scared to try something new that could bring good to your life."

Initially, members of the 8-week Transformation Program were apprehensive. Many were not confident in their abilities. "I didn't have any art skills at first, I didn't know if I could succeed," admitted one of the students, Hunter. Another student, Antoine said, "I didn't think art was macho enough, but it becomes macho. Don't be scared to try something new that could bring good to your life."

Employees Erik Fuqua and Wendy Navarre teach the class. They educate the men on basic painting techniques and color theory.

Once the brush hits canvas, the men discover that creative expression reduces their stress and anxiety. The classes allow the men to experience a sense of normalcy, as well as pride in the work they produce. Recently, the Mission began displaying Paintings of the Week in their lobby.

Some men have had intense emotional reactions to seeing their artwork displayed; the men are sincerely appreciative of the recognition. "Some of these guys may have never gotten any recognition in their lives, and something as simple as hanging their painting on the wall can be a turning point for them," explained Fuqua, Development Director of the Allentown Rescue Mission.

The Allentown Rescue Mission would like to invite LVRHAB members to check out the Paintings of the Week in the lobby of its Hamilton Street building. The men are working hard to become productive members of our community, and building their confidence is a key part to their success.

LVRHAB Website Updates

The LVRHAB website has minor updates that need to be made. If you have Word Press experience and would like to lend a hand to help the Communications Team, please email [Chris Cassidy](#) and [Jenna Sentz](#). Thank you!

Reading Resources

Article Links

[Reducing Affordable Housing Barriers Will Be Critical to Addressing the Mounting Rental Crisis](#)

[Slipping through the cracks: Differing federal policies keep homeless students from getting help](#)

[Proposal would limit how L.A. landlords can screen potential renters](#)

[The Disturbing Realities of Homelessness and Violence](#)

[The Dangerous Gap in The Violence Against Women Act](#)

[Experts fear crisis of 'aged homelessness'](#)

Upcoming Meetings

Coming soon: A shared calendar of LVRHAB events!

Eastern PA CoC Spring Full Membership (virtual)

Monday, April 25, 10AM-2PM

Click to register [HERE](#)

Meeting Attendance Reminder:

For all LVRHAB related meetings, please mark your attendance [HERE](#)

LVRHAB Quarterly Meeting Schedule

2nd Tuesday of the Month (June 14 , September 13, and December 13), 10:00-11:30AM

[Click Here to Register](#)

Advocacy & Communications Team

2nd Wednesday of every 2 months, 3-4PM

Contact [Erin Connelly](#) and [Marc Rittle](#) for more information

Affordable Housing Team

April 27, 4-5PM

[Click Here to Register](#)

Landlord Engagement Team

Next meeting TBD

Contact [Michelle Wagner](#) for more information

Prevention Action Team

First Thursday of every month at noon

Next meeting May 5, join [HERE](#)

allentown

LANDLORD + TENANT



COMMUNITY
WORKSHOP



Tuesday
May 10th 2022

6pm to 8pm

St. Luke's Hospital Auditorium

421 W. Chew Street

Allentown, PA 18102

This workshop will provide pertinent information on tenants rights, conflict resolutions, the limitation and utilization of APD, department of Building Standards, legal advice from North Penn Legal Service, District Courts and community involvement as neighbors.

