

FOUNDATION-LED INITIATIVES:
FOCUSED ON SYSTEMIC CHANGE

ICAN Housing

Stable Home, Stable Life

We've all heard the adage about walking a mile in someone else's shoes, but for ICAN Housing's Workforce Development Manager Keith Bialota, success is achieved by walking "shoulder to shoulder" with program participants. That includes participants like Vicky,¹ who came to ICAN at a very low time in her life. Keith's support is helping her reach her full potential. Vicky had nothing: she'd lost her kids, her home, and her vehicle. ICAN housed her and helped her get everything she needed to settle in. For the first three years, Vicky found herself unable to leave her apartment at all, except to go to necessary appointments. Agoraphobia and anxiety had made her life very small.

Systemic change starts with identifying the big challenges—and then creating and refining solutions.

Keith never gave up on Vicky. He stayed alongside her, shoulder to shoulder, encouraging and supporting her. While he never pushed her to do anything she wasn't comfortable with, he made sure to let her know that if she ever decided to make her life just a bit larger, he would be right beside her to help.

Keith and Workforce Development Coordinator Dionna Stokes-Ellis are the dynamic duo working alongside Vicky and the other participants in ICAN's *Stable Home, Stable Life* program. The Foundation has provided funding for the program; it's part of ICAN's permanent supportive housing programs, which have proven to be effective solutions for people experiencing major life challenges, including chronic homelessness, mental illness, and substance use disorders. Permanent supportive housing combines affordable housing with voluntary supportive services that help individuals live independently and seek their full potential. Those supportive services can make all the difference in cultivating long-term stability.



Keith feels the key to success is actively listening to determine which supports will help, so he takes the time to learn about each participant's work history, skills, and life challenges. They then collaborate to create a plan that's tailor-made to fit the individual's unique situation.

Whenever we promote innovative strategies for systemic change, we are realizing the Sisters' vision of impacting the root causes of poverty.

As for Vicky, she woke up one day and just knew that she could suddenly move forward. She went right to Keith and said, "I can't do this anymore. I want a job."

Keith was surprised and impressed. He took Vicky to Dunkin' Donuts, where he helped her fill out job applications. And after Vicky secured a job at a dollar store, Keith made sure she had the bus passes she would need to keep that job.

Those bus passes, and other retention services intended to help participants maintain employment, are sometimes provided for many months, or even longer than a year. That longer-term support is a uniquely effective feature of this program. Job retention can be a significant challenge for vulnerable individuals. Continued employment is key for fostering confidence, structure, and self-esteem, which are all necessary components of the main goal: the kind of long-term stability cultivated by the hands-on, caring approach of potential-seekers like Keith and Dionna.

Four months in, Vicky likes the job, is happy in her apartment, and loves spending time with her dog, a Chihuahua mix

ICAN's Stable Home, Stable Life program has three phases:

1. Stable Home (finding stable housing),
2. Income Gains (becoming employed), and
3. Stable Life (setting long-term goals and accessing the supports needed to achieve them).

To learn about ICAN Housing's programs and services, visit ican-inc.org/services/

To read about the research and philosophy behind supportive housing, visit bit.ly/pshinfo

named Elgin. She's transitioned into what looks like a pretty stable life indeed. She strongly feels none of this would have happened without Keith and ICAN.

When asked if she has advice for others experiencing similar challenges, she's quick to answer: "Don't give up. If it wasn't for ICAN, I don't see me being here. I would still be homeless."

Next, Vicky plans to earn her GED, in order to reach her full potential. She knows Keith and ICAN will be beside her, every step of the way.

¹ Vicky's name has been changed to protect her privacy.

Stark County Mental Health and Addiction Recovery Workforce Development Program

Between 2013 and 2019, demand for behavioral health services increased by 353% in Ohio, but the behavioral health workforce only grew by 174%. By 2019, nearly 2.4 million Ohioans were living in communities without enough behavioral health professionals.² Stark County is one of those communities. Since the pandemic began, the need has increased even further.

Since 2018, the Foundation has collaborated with Stark County Mental Health and Addiction Recovery (StarkMHAR) to increase the number of behavioral health professionals available to serve our community.

One goal is to increase the number of advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) serving Stark County. Behavioral health APRNs are in great demand. They can prescribe medication, which decreases the need for psychiatrists. Unfortunately, behavioral health agencies often find themselves competing with large hospital systems and physicians' offices when recruiting APRNs.



In collaboration with Kent State University, StarkMHAR recruited APRN students, offered them stipends to choose clinical rotations at StarkMHAR-affiliated agencies, and offered stipends to the agencies providing the required supervision services. Continued Foundation funding over the next two years will extend this effort.

Erin Morabito is an APRN at CommQuest Services. Even before participating in this program, she was highly qualified, with bachelor's and master's degrees in nursing and board certification as a primary care nurse practitioner specializing in adults and gerontology. Once she worked in a detox facility, she knew she'd found her calling. So she decided to pursue board certification as a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner.

Between 2019 and 2021, Erin took classes at Kent State University. The stipend the program provided paid for her books, which are very specialized and therefore very expensive. The stipend also helped with the cost of living. The certification has been life changing for Erin—and also for the patients she serves, because not a lot of nurse practitioners are dual certified. It has enabled CommQuest to treat "dual diagnosis" patients—those in need of help for both mental illness and substance use disorders.

Erin feels she's found her niche; she finds the work highly rewarding. Her goal is to increase CommQuest's capacity even further, in order to meet the growing community demand for dual diagnosis services.

PRECEPTORS: THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Erin Morabito could not have earned her psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner credential without a *preceptor*: an

experienced licensed prescriber who teaches, supervises, and mentors the APRN student while the student completes the clinical hours required to earn the credential. Each intern must be supervised by a preceptor for hundreds of hours over multiple semesters.

While the preceptor is conducting their own work, they are shadowed by the intern and must pause repeatedly throughout the day to teach. This significantly increases the preceptor's workload and requires a great deal of time. Thus, preceptors are in woefully short supply.

The skills gained under preceptor supervision are critical, especially in behavioral health. While the classroom provides a solid foundation, there are numerous skills that can only be developed during patient encounters, like strategies for helping patients who are taking multiple medications for multiple conditions. Interns also learn soft skills: bedside manner, diplomacy and tact, developing a rapport, and trauma-informed care techniques (including ways to avoid triggering traumatized patients). Preceptors impart career path strategies they've developed after spending years in the profession, like methods of assessing whether a job that's been offered will be a good fit.

Tara Davis is a nurse practitioner who served as a preceptor for some of the interns in the program. She feels the preceptor stipends were very effective at convincing more of her colleagues to make the commitment.

Tara herself was very thankful for the stipend, saying, "The grant was just fabulous—very helpful—you feel more valued."

² bit.ly/mhas933