STEWARDS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR THE FUTURE

CASE STUDY

TRUE GROUND HOUSING PARTNERS

Residents Thrive with Services Rooted in Stability

Centered on the experiences and goals of residents, True Ground Housing Partners has made a significant commitment to sustaining support for resident services designed to expand access to programs for the whole family and promote long-term stability.

This case study highlights True Ground Housing Partners' journey of growth and impact, demonstrating how the organization achieved long term impact through leveraging:

1

Resident Services Investment & Partnerships to Improve Resident Stability and Outcomes

2

Initiatives Supporting Resident Stability and Cultivating Resident Leadership

3

Data Systems for Accountability, Evidence-Building, and Partnership

Three case studies of True Ground, SCIDpda and Mercy Housing Northwest highlight how community-driven, responsive resident services can help residents maintain housing stability, access opportunities and achieve their long-term goals. These reports were prepared and published by Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future (SAHF) with support from Amazon.

An Organization Growing with Purpose

True Ground Housing Partners (formerly Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH)) was founded by four families nearly 40 years ago to address a critical need for affordable housing in Arlington, Virginia. For the first 10-15 years of operations, the organization grew slowly, property by property, with a clear focus on affordable housing development. In 2018, the organization expanded its focus beyond Arlington County to serve the Washington, D.C., region and since then has experienced continued, rapid growth and expansion.

While developing and sustaining affordable housing communities has long been their primary focus, the organization has always had a deep commitment to leveraging housing as a foundation for improving the stability and wellness of residents. In 2009, the organization added its first fulltime, dedicated resident services staffing function to support this mission.

Today, True Ground owns and operates 26 properties, providing housing and services to over 6,200 low and moderate income (30-80% AMI) residents in the Washington, D.C., region. The average size of a property is around 130 households, but can range from 14 households to as many as 249 households in a property. True Ground Housing Partners has a long history of serving families, but over time has expanded their portfolio to serve properties which include more older adults as well.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Resident services are the programs, services, and referrals that are provided in a housing context through trusted relationships, proactive engagement, and coordination across property operations and with community partners. Resident services are typically provided by dedicated services staff and through robust partnerships to support greater stability and resident wellbeing. Programs and services vary to meet the priorities of each community and can include eviction prevention initiatives, afterschool or other youth programs, food access support, health and wellness programming and navigation, financial and asset building, and more.

Housing stability is a resident's ability to remain stably housed. Threats to a resident's housing stability may include significant late rent and lease non-compliance. SAHF-member properties with resident services have lower rates of rent arrears, and lower rates of eviction-related moveouts.

1. Resident Services Investment & Partnerships to Improve Resident Stability and Outcomes

Deepening Mission and Margin

In 2023 – following the COVID-19 pandemic – True Ground Housing Partners made a catalytic decision to commit to providing and expanding their resident services in a significant way – supported by partners and philanthropic funders. With buy-in from leadership and the board that resident services are not just "nice-to-have," but critical to resident success and the organization's mission, the organization dove deep into their investment in residents services, including staffing, data systems and programs where residents are engaged in the design, implementation, and iteration of services. This work has had a significant return on investment, with reduced arrears and resident turnover, as well as stronger property operations. Since then, engagement between residents and the resident services team have continued to grow. **Eighty-eight percent of residents interacted with resident services in 2025, compared to 72% in 2023.** In 2025, 71% of residents surveyed indicated they were very satisfied with resident services.

FUNDING THE WORK

True Ground Housing Partners has cultivated a rich network of partners and funders to sustain this model – including funding from property operations, public sources, philanthropic partners, annual fundraising campaigns (their Celebrate Home fundraiser), major gifts/ donations, and reserves where possible. In certain instances, they have been able to negotiate for resident services to be included 'above the line' or as priority payments 'below the line,' but before cash flow is distributed. However, this varies by location.

Certain jurisdictions have allowed True Ground Housing Partners to collect a per-unit fee ($200 per door) to support resident services 'below the line' but before cash flow is distributed elsewhere. To make the case for this commitment to resident services programs and staffing, the organization shares data on resident need and priorities with funders in different programmatic areas (i.e., food insecurity) to highlight the potential impact of resident services investment. True Ground Housing Partners has been able to demonstrate strong participation in their programs and highlight resident outcomes through regular resident surveying and review of property stability data.

An Evolving Staffing Model

Between 2009 and 2026, True Ground grew their resident services team from four fulltime staff to 24 staff and additional MSW interns – not just adding frontline staffing capacity, but building out organizational supports for:

1. **Strategy, program development, and fundraising**
2. **Housing stability initiatives**
3. **Partnership development**
4. **Volunteer-led programs**
5. **Data and evaluation**

As part of this growth, True Ground Housing Partners has built out a regional model for their staffing and identified targeted staffing ratios:

- **Resident Services Staffing Ratios** — While there is some variation at properties depending on the population being served, availability of local partners and funding, the organization typically aims for each Resident Services Coordiantor (RS) to serve 200-250 households at a property but may serve as many as 500 households across 2 or more properties when there are less intensive service needs. At some properties where residents have higher service needs (such as a 100% project-based voucher and senior (55+) sites), this ratio is more robust - closer to 1 full-time employee (FTE) serving 80-90 households.
- **Pod Teams** — As the organization has grown its portfolio across the Washington, D.C., region, they structured their team into geographic pods or hubs. This allowed teams to deepen their partnerships and local networks, and site-based staff to provide support and coverage for one another (rather than operating in isolation). These teams evolve frequently as the portfolio grows but are currently broken out by jurisdictions of Arlington County, Fairfax County, Loudoun County, DC, and Montgomery County.
- **Resident Services Manager Role** — Each 'pod' is overseen by a Resident Services Manager who typically supports 4-6 frontline resident services coordinators. As the resident services team grew, the Resident Services Manager role was an important addition in order to provide oversight of pod staff and partners, as well as a create a promotional and professional growth opportunity for staff.

2. Initiatives Supporting Resident Stability and Cultivating Resident Leadership

A Systemic Approach to Prevent Evictions, Reduce Arrears, and Support Stability

Recognizing the profound challenges the pandemic created for residents' housing stability and overall well-being, True Ground Housing Partners strengthened its commitment to supporting residents in maintaining housing stability while also pursuing opportunities to thrive.

To help residents remain stably housed, they prioritize programming that focuses on:

- **Housing Stability** (including eviction prevention and rental assistance)
- **Children, Youth, & Families** (such as education / afterschool programs and parent support)
- **Health, Wellness, & Senior support** (including food security, mental health, and other programming to help residents age in place)
- **Upward Mobility** (including asset-building, financial education, and digital access support)

Leveraging Data Systems for Whole Family Stability

During the COVID-19 pandemic, True Ground Housing Partners' rent relief program was a massive effort coordinated through weekly calls between resident services, property management, asset management, and data & evaluation teams to review which households needed rental assistance and were in the application process. This work led to an investment in new, streamlined systems to support the stability of residents and families that call their buildings home. True Ground's primary system to track resident services data is in Bonterra's Apricot 360 SAAS product.

However, they pull data from multiple systems and tools, including: Apricot, Starta (asset management software), various third-party property management systems, and other resident assessments and surveys.

They have built agreements so that resident services staff can access third-party property management data, which is manually uploaded by property management staff into Starta, which is then accessed by resident services staff to show 'real-time' updates (reviewed monthly by asset management). Resident services staff use this information to coordinate with third-party property management and work with residents very early in their delinquencies. Additionally, the staff have conducted rent burden analyses to evaluate which residents may be rent-burdened and at risk of housing instability.

True Ground Housing Partners connect residents to a network of rental relief sources including emergency rental assistance through nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and localities. They have relied heavily on county-level rent relief resources, maintaining strong relationships with Department of Human Services staff to stay ahead of the curve on policy changes and advocate for residents. **True Ground's resident services staff currently track when external rental assistance dollars become available (monthly, etc.) and encourage residents to apply for these funds immediately and before they run out, resulting in significantly reduced evictions (1% eviction rate in 2025) and turnover (2% in 2025).**

TRUE GROUND HOUSING PARTNERS' EXTRACURRICULAR SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM — Promoting dignity and choice for children & families

True Ground Housing Partners launched an extracurricular scholarship program that provides flexible financial support (or scholarships) to help residents cover the cost of enrichment and developmental opportunities for their children. The program reimburses families or directly pays for approved expenses. These may include extracurricular activities, summer camps (oftentimes covering gaps in childcare), and supplies to participate in programming. Families can access up to $150 per child twice per year. The program is intentionally designed to promote dignity and resident choice by enabling children to participate in activities alongside their peers outside their immediate housing community. The program supports housing stability by helping families manage childcare and activity costs while helping children access opportunities that can lead to long-term interests and engagement.

Wraparound Supports and Investment in Families

Even with subsidized rent, low-income residents may still struggle to make rent payments. When residents have access to resources including food, childcare, and employment, they are better able to afford to pay their rent and remain stably housed. True Ground Housing Partners have established pantries to address food insecurity, have coordinators focused on facilitating mental health supports, help residents access childcare subsidies, and position residents to use technology that can further their education and careers.

Cultivating Resident Leadership, Building Lasting Trust

Engaging residents in leadership roles and building trust with residents not only helps residents feel a stronger sense of belonging in their communities, but can also lead to more meaningful engagement in programs and services that further support housing stability initiatives and other positive outcomes. True Ground Housing Partners have a strong commitment to elevating resident voice and agency in their work through several strategies including:

- **Creating opportunities for resident choice and agency in how programs and services are delivered** — such as the Children's Saving Program, which lets residents choose how to spend scholarship dollars.
- **Supporting resident leadership opportunities** — including resident leadership in programs and an organization-wide resident council that acts as the guiding body for resident voice in resident services, across departments and with organizational leadership and the board.
- **Responsiveness to resident feedback** — allow residents to shape programming, advocate for changes, and lead community initiatives. A portfolio-wide needs assessment is also conducted annually.

3. Data Systems for Accountability, Evidence-Building, and Partnership

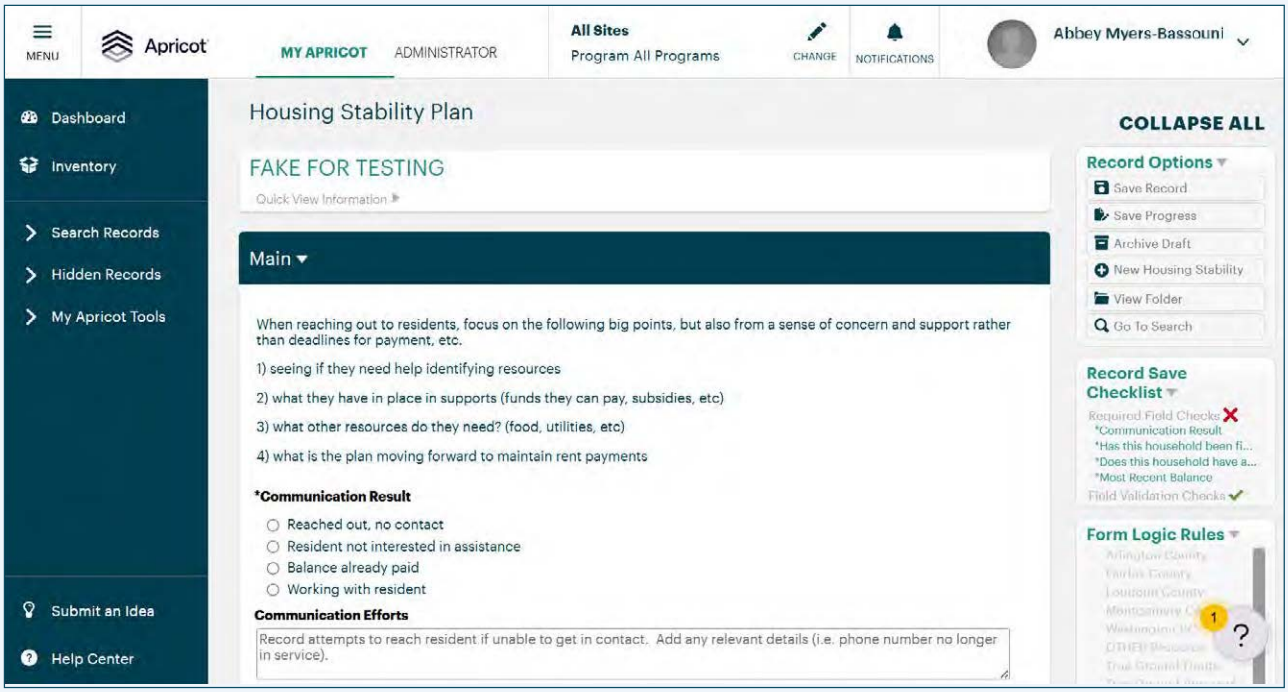
True Ground Housing Partners have invested in the staff to manage and analyze resident data on an ongoing basis – including a Senior Manager of Data, Evaluation, and Strategy that is responsible for aggregating data quarterly across these systems into a **centralized tracking matrix and 'scorecard'** to understand year-over-year progress towards resident services goals, trends, outcomes, and housing stability (updated monthly) at each property and across the portfolio.

Some of the metrics being tracked include:

- ☑ Resident demographics and household characteristics
- ☑ Program participation, referrals, and interactions with resident services staff
- ☑ Economic mobility measures – includes Esusu rent reporting, employment status, banked households, and income
- ☑ Children's savings program, scholarships, and supply drive metrics
- ☑ Housing stability measures – includes turnover rates, evictions and evictions prevented, rent relief referrals and payments, and more
- ☑ Housing stability outcomes (move-out status)
- ☑ Food insecurity and food distributions
- ☑ Routine healthcare access

True Ground Housing Partners use this data not only for reporting, but for:

- Strategic decision making with input from leadership, board, and resident council
- Program evaluation
- Staff performance reviews and accountability, including bonuses
- Case making with funders and partners, including impact on residents and return on investment

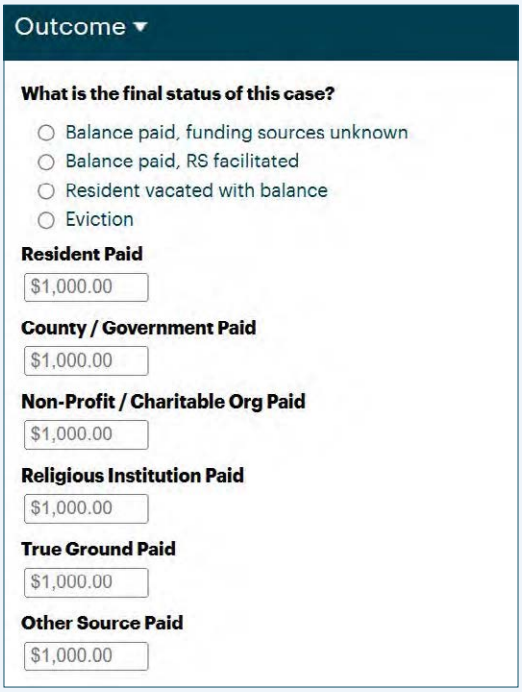


USING DATA TO STRATEGICALLY TRACK RENT RELIEF DOLLARS

In 2026, True Ground Housing Partners developed a new tool in Apricot (their resident services data system) to better evaluate and understand housing stability by tracking:

- **Eviction filings**
- **Rent relief resources/partners** in different jurisdictions
- **Status of rent relief dollars** - including if a resident in is the process of receiving relief, if a resident refused to accept support, or if rent relief was accepted, denied, or no longer available (dollars maxed out)

Staff can use this information to understand where philanthropic, government, and other rent relief dollars have already been expended, or where there is still funding available for residents to access. This information encourages staff to explore all potential sources of assistance and be strategic in how they pursue sources of assistance to help residents remain stably housed.



Within Apricot, resident services staff can track resident housing stability challenges and stability outcomes including rent relief dollars by source.

CONCLUSION

True Ground Housing Partners' significant expansion and restructuring of resident services staffing and systems and their effective data collaboration with third party property management companies and other partners supports the immediate housing stability of residents. Through expansive data tracking in real-time, True Ground Housing Partners can identify gaps in services and needs for interventions while tracking the impact of ongoing programs and services. They also have deeply engaged both residents and community partnerships to leverage funding and financial support for residents and programming. All these efforts support longer term success through tailored programs that have be scaled to serve whole families.