

# Avalon Housing

## Our Mission

**We believe that housing is a basic human right. We develop and manage *Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)* for people who are homeless and who have a mental or physical disability. We provide supportive services for adults and children living in PSH, with the goals of helping them maintain housing stability, increase self-sufficiency, and build community.**

## Our Vision for 2020

### ***Avalon's Mission and Culture***

On every level, Avalon operates with a sense of optimism, creativity, and resourcefulness.

As Avalon enters 2020, we have stayed true to our founding vision: to provide permanent supportive housing for those who are not served by the for profit housing market. We place a priority on people who are homeless and disabled, and we seek to prevent homelessness by providing a wide range of individual supports and community programming. This helps individuals and families to achieve stability and become part of a healthy community. We continue to believe that safe, decent, and affordable housing is a basic human right.

Our responsibility and commitment to the community means that we try to fill the gaps in permanent, affordable housing in a sustainable, thoughtful, and responsible manner. This includes projects that are targeted to a range of income levels and tenant populations, while our primary focus remains our ongoing commitment to providing supportive housing for those who are most vulnerable in our community.

We are known locally and nationally for our leadership in permanent supportive housing management and development. We provide fee-based consulting and technical assistance to agencies and individuals throughout the United States. We proudly fulfill our community's expectation by serving as a policy advocate, and we engage in a variety of outreach efforts, including speaking engagements, special events, and staff support for community activities.

### ***Organization and Administration***

Avalon is an excellent place to work, and we enjoy our work. When we have job openings, applications flow in because people know that this is a great place to work. Our regular employee surveys show us that all members of our staff feel they make a significant contribution to Avalon and that working here provides a high degree of satisfaction.

Avalon's staff possesses specialized skill sets that meet the needs of our tenant population as well as the complex organizational work of developing and managing supportive housing. When capacity permits, Avalon shares these skills through the provision of technical support and training for other agencies in

our community on a contractual or fee-for-service basis. All work provided to outside agencies has been determined to be financially beneficial to Avalon and consistent with our mission.

Our talented and committed staff is our most important resource. The structure and environment of Avalon supports and sustains our staff by fairly compensating them and offering them room to grow and advance. We actively encourage all staff members to stretch their abilities and capacities, and to contribute ideas and create solutions to both emerging and historic problems. Staff racial and ethnic diversity reflects that of the larger community, and the organization strives to reflect that of our tenants.

Our salaries are in line with other non-profits and other comparable businesses. We continue to offer access to excellent benefits, including medical insurance, for employees and their families. Over the last few years we have also implemented a range of wellness programs, designed to support and enrich the Avalon experience for all staff, and to promote healthy work-life balances – despite the often intense nature of our work.

As we approach our 30<sup>th</sup> year, we have an innovative and stable senior leadership structure, with a clear succession plan for our organization's future. Our senior leadership team meets regularly and works collaboratively. This team includes department heads that are responsible for their department budgets and annual employee work plans and reviews. We have excellent communication across departments, and staff is comfortable giving and receiving feedback regularly within an organizational culture of honesty and transparency. Department heads help all employees strive to improve performance and contribute to Avalon's goal of continuous quality improvement.

Our staff, in all departments and at all levels, actively participates in the decision making processes that directly impact their work. Management support, training and development opportunities are available to all staff. We utilize dashboards and other information sharing tools throughout the organization, and communication between departments and individual staff has never flowed better. All staff is welcome to attend Board meetings, and the biennial offsite retreat for staff and Board members remains an important long-term strategic planning tool.

We make excellent use of information technology in every department. We developed simple, user-friendly instruments to collect meaningful information on tenant progress, which provide useful guidance in developing the direction of our work. They also provide empirical evidence of the success of our programs. All departments generate monthly dashboards to evaluate and direct organizational performance, and we report outcomes both externally and internally. We use mobile technology to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our property management and services staff. We utilize cloud based technology and data wherever possible and appropriate, giving our staff off-site access to a full range of data and tools. Our contracted IT staff provides excellent support to all departments and the Community Centers, and provides consultation services on projects and developing technology as requested. Our centrally located business office is an attractive and highly functional workplace that accommodates all of our staff, as well as adequate parking for staff and our company vehicles. It is easily accessible to our tenants by major bus routes, and provides excellent meeting space for the organization. As we achieve growth in other communities, we will explore adding satellite offices as cost-saving and efficiency measures.

## ***Tenant Programs***

Tenants are our number one constituency. Avalon's program of individual and community support is nationally recognized as a model program. It is fully funded, effective, and efficient. We serve our tenants in a variety of ways and settings, including at community centers that have been established at as many properties as possible.

Avalon has been a fully accredited agency with the Council on Accreditation since 2015, which has helped raise our service standards and increase organizational effectiveness and professionalism. We have dynamic performance and quality improvement processes throughout the organization, which is integrated into our regular work, rather than being perceived as an additional burden. Accreditation has enabled us to work with the County to invoice Medicaid directly, thereby increasing revenues for the services we provide.

Avalon oversees multiple service teams that provide supports to tenants living not only in PSH at Avalon, but also tenants of other third party housing providers, including the Ann Arbor Housing Commission. Avalon has increased its profile as a national leader in best practices for housing-first providers. Our staff regularly conducts training sessions and workshops on this topic, with specialties in the toughest areas most agencies struggle with: how to serve the most challenging highest risk tenants; how to coordinate property management and support services efforts to enhance housing stability; and how to develop tenant leadership and peer support.

Our tenant services staff each have an active case ratio of 1:20 or less. Our services team is highly motivated, well trained, and committed to Avalon's Mission. We provide individualized supports and advocacy to help tenants achieve housing success and enhance their quality of life. Our services team has increased its focus on employment support, including job readiness, job development, placement and training opportunities. We also facilitate a broad array of community organizing activities, which encourage tenant leadership and community integration. Avalon utilizes the principles of Critical Time Intervention (CTI) methodology to help tenants with high intensity needs connect with mainstream support. We assist in the development of informal support networks and rely less on a formal services program. We have a strong Peer Support program among our tenants.

Avalon dedicates resources annually to tenant organizing and leadership development activities, and we seek to maximize tenants' voices in agency operations and planning. The Avalon Tenant Council meets regularly with Avalon staff and Board to provide input, evaluation, and leadership training opportunities for tenants. Tenant satisfaction surveys are conducted annually. The tenant newsletter is published monthly and tenant organizations are encouraged at all properties.

Our initial approach to elder services focused on the seniors who were already in our tenant population. We are committed to helping them stay in their homes as long as possible, while recognizing that our mission does not include assisted-living, nursing, or end-of-life care. We have been able to assist many of our existing elderly tenants simply by making minor physical adaptations to their apartments. Our services staff has a liaison who works with local senior support agencies to help us gain skills and expertise in serving older adults, and to help us locate services as needed to keep them in their homes or assist with a dignified transition to a more appropriate setting. We continue to explore the possibility of creating dedicated elder housing as funding, opportunities, and partnerships become available.

We continue our commitment to provide supported employment opportunities to Avalon tenants whenever possible. Avalon tenant employees have clear expectations and agreements that recognize their unique status as both employee and tenant, and feel supported with specialized training and development in their roles as both Avalon tenants and staff members. Currently, two tenants hold positions on the Board and act as liaisons to the Tenant Council.

## ***Real Estate Development***

Avalon and its affiliated companies now own and / or operate 500 units of affordable supportive housing, and we have 50 additional units in development. The need for affordable housing continues to grow, and we are working hard to achieve our goal of 1,000 units by 2027, through a mix of acquisition and rehabilitation and new construction projects.

When rehabbing newly purchased properties we work to a high standard that helps us to minimize annual maintenance costs. In all projects, our development team works closely with a number of trusted contractors who deliver work on schedule, pursuant to clearly established expectations, incentives, and performance measures. Our contractors appreciate our open process, and we work as a team while holding each other accountable.

Avalon has expanded our expertise and utilization of green technologies, materials, and practices in our real estate development projects. This is consistent with our mission to be community leaders in utilization of green technology, and these improvements also provide lower ongoing operating costs for properties.

Avalon's real estate development activities are closely coordinated with property management, maintenance and services staff to ensure that all organizational and tenant needs are considered. We continue to build our expertise in construction and facilities management and we provide cross training for maintenance, housing rehabilitation, and real estate development staff.

In 2013, we made a commitment to exploring development opportunities more broadly throughout the county and the region, with an initial focus on the City of Ypsilanti due to the huge need and the proximity to our current stock. We established ties with members of governing bodies in the greater Ypsilanti area, and our Board membership now reflects our commitment to expand our geographical service area. As we seek to expand beyond Ann Arbor, we are mindful that expansion must be consistent with our mission, and logistical problems must be thoroughly addressed.

2013 was also the beginning of our exploration of services to elders and youth. Building on our successful partnership with Ozone House as a housing provider for youth, we have successfully opened three new youth supportive housing buildings and continue to explore partnerships around housing and serving at-risk youth.

## ***Asset Management***

Each Avalon property is an asset to its local neighborhood and the community as a whole. Avalon properties are well maintained inside and out, thanks to our top notch maintenance staff and pool of dedicated volunteers. We provide a visual example that affordable housing can include some of the nicest homes on the block. We place a heavy emphasis on maintaining strong positive relationships with our neighbors, encourage tenants to participate in the upkeep of our properties, and expect our tenants to be good neighbors themselves. We actively solicit open and frequent feedback with our neighbors, and we take our role as a great neighbor very seriously.

Avalon's enhanced property management model continues to define our work; it is at the core of our success. Property managers have the technological resources and software capabilities necessary to facilitate their administrative work, and they have excellent working relationships with the maintenance and housing rehabilitation staff to help minimize the impact of their work on the quality of life of our tenants. Property managers and support services staff have clearly distinct roles and they work together to minimize evictions and make appropriate accommodations to tenants as needed. The combination of traditional property management responsibilities, subsidized housing regulatory requirements and enhanced management responses to tenant problems creates a challenging, dynamic, and successful model for helping tenants achieve housing stability.

We have created crucial links to a wide community base through our property sponsorship program. Each property has a sponsoring group that participates with on-site tenant or maintenance activities and also contributes financially to the ongoing needs of the property.

Avalon has an updated comprehensive Capital Needs Assessment (CNA) for every property, which guide our activities with regard to preventative maintenance, renovations, and capital improvement activities. The CNA is reviewed at least twice a year for budgeting and planning purposes. It is administered by our highly skilled Director of Asset Management, who knows each of our buildings and its systems inside and out. We have a replacement reserve for each property that is adequately funded to meet our anticipated capital needs.

Since 2014, we have made significant improvements in our management of data and regulatory compliance work. We have identified, acquired, and implemented the best software solutions available to help in this effort, and we regularly produce valuable reports for funders, as well as our own planning and evaluation processes. In addition we meet all regulatory reporting requirements with ease and as part of our regular daily work. This data is a cornerstone of our fundraising and public awareness efforts – we are able to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of supportive housing in Washtenaw County.

## ***Financial Management***

Avalon practices open book management, meaning that all staff are educated about the financial and organizational operations of the organization. All departments maintain financial metrics on their dashboards – in addition to other key data tracked – and is responsible for meeting budget projections. Avalon seeks to keep all staff members engaged in and knowledgeable about our financial operations through regular communication and education about how to be good stewards of our resources. Leadership staff have worked extensively to train and educate staff at all levels on how to understand

and analyze the data we collect, using it to increase Avalon's efficiency and innovation. There is a deep organizational understanding that stable finances allow us to continue to expand our work, ever increasing the number of lives we can change. The power of the whole team working in a shared language toward a common goal is impressive.

Avalon's financial management team is top notch, and it includes individuals with the expertise necessary to handle a wide range of complex accounting, including real estate finance, tax credit syndications, and management of Federal grants. This knowledge and experience enables Avalon to act as a fiduciary with regard to grants to other community based nonprofits working on the issue of homelessness in the county. This contributes to Avalon's leadership on ending homelessness in our community and beyond.

The Treasurer of the Board, the Finance Director, and the Finance Committee meet monthly to review financial statements, and the Board of Trustees receives a monthly finance report. Avalon maintains a number of dedicated reserve funds, including an appropriately sized operating reserve and a development reserve to support the timely exploration of new projects. All annual financial and compliance audits are clean and routinely issued "without qualification".

Avalon's business model provides a solid foundation for growth and expansion of our mission. Our budgeting process is based on realistic revenue projections, and we regularly review budgets and operating forecasts that anticipate foreseeable financial events and challenges multiple years into the future.

### ***Fund Development, Communications, Volunteers, and Community Relations***

We have achieved our previous goals of creating excellent relationships with a wide base of donors throughout Washtenaw County and beyond. We now have close ties to the business community as well as to local philanthropists and foundations.

People are proud of their donations and can see for themselves the results of their generosity. People give to Avalon because they see concrete, tangible results, presented both as data and the human stories behind the numbers. We use compelling snapshots of information that quickly demonstrate how Avalon's work, in addition to being the just and ethical thing to do, is the most cost effective response to the crisis of homelessness. We can demonstrate that every dollar invested in our work will save the community far more in other service costs.

Through our direct appeals and events, we raise more than \$400,000 each year for our general operating expenses. Our Board of Trustees is active and committed to helping Avalon reach our annual goals. They are some of our best promoters, and they consistently provide new connections and fundraising opportunities. We have an active Fund Development Committee that is comprised of community volunteers and Board members that coordinates major gifts, donor solicitation, and endowment oversight. This group also serves to groom volunteers for the Board.

Avalon volunteers provide valuable services and support to staff that is essential. Our volunteer program includes a wide range of individuals and groups, and regularly engages with them, encouraging them to become part of the Avalon family. We have strong relationships with University of Michigan,

Eastern Michigan University, and Washtenaw Community College. Our intern opportunities are highly respected and mutually beneficial. Rather than just focusing on housing, our connections with volunteers branch into many specialized areas - such as gardening, food, youth development, and sustainable, healthy living. This allows us to utilize the framework of housing to connect with a wider volunteer and support base. Due to the success of our outreach efforts, Avalon's name and work is widely known throughout the community. People really do know what we do, and they want to be a part of our success. We have been "adopted" by a broad range of service groups, who sponsor a variety of grassroots fundraisers for our benefit.

Our Gardening Volunteers work with tenants and staff to add beauty and spirit to our properties. Our volunteer efforts, which include organic community gardens, native plantings, rain barrels, and rain gardens, are recognized throughout the community for their aesthetics and environmental ingenuity.

The Edible Avalon program is celebrating its twelfth year in 2020, and we now have gardens at every Avalon property. This special program provides several tons of fresh, organic produce every year, and, just as importantly, provides a sense of community with tenants and neighbors alike.

All volunteers are supported with a clearly defined program of training, development, and recognition for their efforts. Our one-time and group volunteering opportunities are fun and engaging, but we also place an emphasis on the small, core group of long-term volunteers that have been with Avalon for years.

We communicate with existing and potential supporters through multiple media sources, using different approaches to reach different groups. While we maintain many traditional forms of communication, we also understand that younger generations have different expectations about the nature and content of information they receive. We actively cultivate the volunteers and donors of tomorrow by reaching out in the formats they use, with content they appreciate. Our messages are engaging and educational - they inspire action and trigger a desire in the viewer to get involved in furthering our cause and philosophy of Permanent Supportive Housing. We are no longer just a grass-roots organization, but established leaders in our field – the look and feel of our promotional materials reflect that.

Avalon has created tools and information, supported by training, that allow all staff, Board, and volunteers to easily and quickly communicate the core of our work and why it is so successful. We have stayed engaged in, and at times led, the community level conversation about what Permanent Supportive Housing is, how it differs from affordable housing, and why our community needs both to thrive.

### ***Board of Trustees***

We have a committed and hard-working Board of Trustees, and attendance averages 90% for all Board meetings. The members of our Board are actively engaged with Avalon's mission, and as community ambassadors, they represent us in a variety of ways, especially on our Fund Development committee. The biennial retreat of Board and staff is eagerly anticipated as a rare opportunity to gather our collective talents and skills for the greater good of Avalon.

The Board of Trustees is a diverse group, representing all the areas of Avalon activities. Many also have strong connections to key institutions in our community. There are at least two tenants on the Board

and there are many opportunities for Board, staff and tenant interaction and community building as a result of this integration.

The agency emphasis on the collection, analysis, and reporting of data has meant that our Board has a deeper understanding of our operations and successes than ever before. This has allowed the Board to focus on long-term and strategic issues, guiding the agency from a fully informed perspective of Avalon's work. They are passionate about Permanent Supportive Housing, as they frequently see the proven results of our efforts.

The Board conducts annual reviews of the Executive Director, and serves as a valuable support to that position. The Board also works with other leadership staff through committees and special projects. They provide insight, specialized knowledge, and community connections to improve our work and bring us closer to our shared goals. There is a strong mutual respect between the Board and Avalon staff members.

### ***In Closing...***

Avalon's years of hard work, advocacy and strong commitment to our mission has paid off as we made the transition from a grassroots organization to a respected community institution. We have made a lasting difference in the lives of thousands of formerly homeless individuals and families. This success enables us to increase our policy and community education efforts and to help Washtenaw County become a leader in the fight against poverty and homelessness. We continue to demonstrate the power of community.



***Opening Doors. Ending Homelessness.***