

Connecting EnVision Centers and Housing Counseling Agencies, 9/24/20

Rachael Laurilliard: All right, I'm going to go ahead and get started as the last participants trickling in here. So thank you everyone for joining today. We're really excited for the last session of our virtual conference this year about Connecting EnVision Centers and Housing Counseling Agencies.

Before we get started, we just have a couple of housekeeping items to walk through. So if you have any technical issues throughout the webinar, please go ahead and chat them to the host. That's John Panetti in the chat -- the chat box or else you can chat your questions throughout the session to the entire chat box.

All of the participants have been muted as you'll notice, and we recommend that you do not join via video during this session just to ensure the best connection for everyone, and make sure you can hear all of our presenters clearly. I will be monitoring the chat box throughout the session and taking note of your questions, and then at the end we will have a moderated Q&A. So you can go ahead and chat them throughout the session, and we will mark those down, and that chat icon can be found at the bottom of your screen right in the middle.

We will also have polling questions today via Mentimeter, so those will be throughout the presentation. When you see the time for Mentimeter icon on the right there, that's your cue that we'll be asking a Mentimeter question and respond to those. You can either use your smartphone, or you can open up another browser on your desktop, or another device, and just go to [mentimeter.com](https://www.mentimeter.com), and then you'll type in the code that you see on the screen.

And we're going to go ahead and actually ask that first Mentimeter question now. So I will pull up the presentation, and the code is at the top of the screen. So that's 2570049. Again, that's on the top of your screen, but I'll also chat it out to everyone in just a moment. So we would like to know what your experience with EnVision Centers is.

So maybe you work with EnVision Centers already, which is great, or you know what they are, but you don't work with them yet, or maybe you aren't sure what they are, so we're excited to learn more of that today. I'm chatting out that code now. [Inaudible]. 14 responders so far, but I see a bunch of participants on the call. So we'll give everyone a moment or two to get those answers in.

I see right now, that most people are responding that they don't know what EnVision Centers are. So that's great. You'll find out a lot of great information today during our session, and just learn a little bit more about what they're doing, and what they're all about. I'm going to let everyone keep submitting responses to that question while we roll into our presentation. But for the sake of time, I'm going to go back to our deck now. And I will pass it over to Jerrold Mayer. Jerry?

Jerrold Mayer: Welcome everyone for our last Housing Counseling National Intermediary virtual conference session. But today's presenters are from HUD's Office of Field Policy and

Management, and also from how to prove housing counseling agencies currently working with EnVision Centers in the State of Virginia.

Our program today will inform us about [inaudible] the positive impact they are having in communities in Virginia and nationwide. And we'll also learn how housing counseling agencies can partner with EnVision Centers to help consumers in their communities. On our panel today, we have Ivery Himes and Jill Yu from HUD's office of field policy management, and Terri Francis from the Hampton Roads Community Action Program, and Kelly Gill-Gordon from Virginia Housing. So without further delay, I'll turn the mic over to Ivery.

Ivery Himes: Good afternoon. It is so nice to have you all join us today to learn more about the department's EnVision Centers. Today's overview of EnVision Centers seeks to promote secretary Ben Carson's goal of actually providing families with a holistic approach when it comes to meeting their myriad needs. And his goal is to do this beyond simply providing a roof over their heads.

So let's talk about the specific purpose of EnVision Centers. What you should know is that HUD EnVision Centers are the foundation of again, the secretary's goal, and a number of opportunities are available for families in the areas of economic empowerment, educational advancement, health and wellness, and character in leadership.

Our expectation is that these four pillars will be leveraged to help families move up and out of low-income housing, help them become self-sufficient, and help them become other leaders in their communities to support families that need assistance. You should also know that the target communities are looked at to ensure that there are dynamic leaders in the local areas, close to EnVision Centers.

And we also look for our EnVision Centers to connect to local existing place-based programs, such as ConnectHome and Opportunity Zones. Lastly, we are concerned about federal benefits being utilized with our EnVision Centers to support families. So we are always interested in having direct assistance from not just HUD staff, but other agencies as well, other federal agencies, as well as local government partnerships and entities such as yourself in the housing counseling space.

If we begin to focus on the timeline as to when the agency began onboarding EnVision Centers, you will see on this particular slide that we began this endeavor in 2018. And we designated sites in 2019, we continued expanding the program in 2020, and to date, we are providing COVID-19 specific activities and assistance to families, but we're also up to 57 EnVision Centers that have been designated by the secretary to date.

So let's delve into something that I think you will find very, very helpful. I am sure that now that you're here with us, you're wondering if there's an EnVision center close to your area of jurisdiction. And so this map is intended to reflect all of the EnVision Centers and their locations.

I would strongly encourage you to take a look at the map to see if there's an area or an EnVision center where you might be interested in partnering with to assist many of the folks in the communities that I know you already assist. But also to provide some to those who may not be aware of the multitude of services you have available.

So, let's talk about successes to date. Already I've indicated that 57 EnVision Centers have been designated, and you should also know that we, again work with myriad partners. And for you, this means that this is just an ample opportunity for you not to just partner with the EnVision Centers, but to also connect with federal partners as well. And we're looking forward to such a connection.

Next slide. So here we talk about our current partnerships, many of them you know, but I wanted to hone in on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has been very helpful with the Hartford EnVision Center particularly, but others could leverage them. ConnectHome USA Department of Agriculture has also been helpful. FDIC in terms of providing Money Smart financial education.

And we want you to be one amongst these as well as we'd like to connect you with our federal partners also. The Veteran Affairs is another big partner of ours, Small Business Administration, Health and Human Services, Department of Labor has been very helpful in helping us identify apprenticeships for a number of families. You may be very well interested in I'm sure the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness.

And so there again are many, many programs and opportunities for you to connect with the EnVision Centers and also have a partnership whereby you assist us, and we work together to help improve the life and the lifestyles of families that are in public housing and also in our communities that have low to moderate income.

So earlier, I've referenced a little bit about the four pillars on which all EnVision Centers stand, economic empowerment, educational advancement, health and wellness, as well as character and leadership. And this slide is just merely a snapshot to just give you an example of some of the activity that our EnVision Centers are engaged in, as it relates to these four pillars.

And of course you see Dr. Carson in each one of these excited about the vision of the EnVision center that he had, actually being implemented. And so you may want to look at this and think about how you as a housing counseling agency can support families, particularly in the economic empowerment and educational space, in terms of helping them to understand how they may be able to purchase a home. Or at least get started on having a clear understanding of what's necessary to purchase a home. This slide will be conducted by my colleague, Jill Yu, and she will share with you a few COVID-19 responses that our EnVision Centers are engaged in. Jill?

Jill Yu: Yeah, thanks so much Ivery, and yeah, thank you to the Office of Housing Counseling for inviting us to do this presentation to all of you. Ivery did a wonderful job of surmising how the EnVision Centers demonstration was developed, where we were on our way to evolving and growing, especially this year. But unfortunately the pandemic like many other organizations and citizens across this nation, it really wrecked the plans for what we were trying to accomplish.

In March of 2020, due to local orders, many of our EnVision center sites had to close their doors unfortunately. Those that were deemed essential though, remained open and really stepped up to the challenge. So this slide shows here that these EnVision center sites really took the responsibility, and took it to heart in how they can serve the community.

So eight of our EnVision center sites at the time, or to this date, volunteer themselves to be COVID-19 testing sites and offered free COVID test, or at least at a very low cost at the time to the residents of low-income housing, as well as the more individuals experiencing homelessness. One in the South took it upon themselves to develop and create personal protective equipment such as masks and other plastic protective guards.

Twenty-four of our EnVision center sites partnered with the USDA Food and Nutrition Services to provide free meals and groceries through their free -- Farmers to Families Food Box Program. Forgive me, that's such a lot of words that I always tend to stumble on those. And then we have 20 other EnVision Centers sites who wanted to make sure that the communities, especially families with children, are still able to access educational resources.

So 20 of them either offered virtual tutoring at the time, and also some summer programming, as well as wellness checks via phone in case our residents did not have access or reliable access to internet connectivity. As well as free tax counseling services, some over the phone or virtually via zoom or TEAMS. And we continue to see them really step up to the challenge as the pandemic continues to grow on.

Next slide, please. Thank you. And this slide shows just, I think a picture really can give much more of a comprehensive look of what's going on. Here on the left, you have a tweet by Secretary Carson really commending our Bowling Green, Kentucky EnVision center site and how they continue to offer free meals. And they're -- and launched a mobile grocery store.

On the right, you can see here an example of how our Family Scholar House in Louisville, Kentucky -- this is back in March, they offered free meals and groceries, and they continue to do so with their residents. I think with that -- next slide please. And I'll pass it back to Ivery to share a little bit more about our EnVision Centers demonstration.

Ivery Himes: Thank you, Jill. So this map here is just a map, so you will have an idea of the number of regional administrators that serve the country and support the department in its endeavors related to not just EnVision Centers, but all programs. And so these are the senior political leaders under this administration currently, and the map is showing you the region that they each serve.

Next slide. So I know that at this juncture, you're wondering, okay, how do I partner with a HUD EnVision Center? So the first thing you can do is using the email address you can -- or the website, rather you can click on that website and see any EnVision center that has been designated. But more importantly, what I wanted you to know is that each one of the regional administrators that I referred to earlier has designated a specific point of contact for EnVision Centers.

And these individuals are referred to as regional coordinators for EnVision Centers. And so once you decide that you want to maybe just visit a regional EnVision center or local EnVision center near you, I would ask that you reach out to these folks. And so number two provides a website where you can go and click on it to find out who that coordinator is in your region.

And I would encourage you to do that because I know that the number of families would be happy to utilize your services. So I want to thank you for coming today, and I also want to pass some more information on to you through our colleagues in Virginia. Ms. Kelly Gill-Gordon, as well as Ms. Terri Francis.

Terri Francis: All right. Can everyone hear me okay?

Jerrold Mayer: [Inaudible].

Terri Francis: Okay. All right. Well, good afternoon. Thank you so much. Ivery, I'm so excited to be here. I hope that everyone is enjoying today's session. As Ivery said, my name is Terri Francis. I am the Director of Family Services and Housing with the Hampton Roads Community Action Program here in Newport News.

Joining me for this portion is Kelly Gill-Gordon with Virginia Housing. Virginia Housing serves as HRCAPs intermediary agency to HUD, and Kelly's going to jump in a little bit later. Right now I just want to tell you a little bit about the Lift & Connect EnVision Center that the Hampton Roads Community Action Program has in Newport News.

So our program is actually a part of the Marshall-Ridley Choice Neighborhood Initiative for the City of Newport News. It's located right in the heart of the South East Newport News community, and it's right on one of our public housing complex locations. Our center is a partnership between HRCAP and the Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

And we received our designation in early 2019, and we've been extremely busy since then. Under the Marshall-Ridley Choice Neighborhood Initiative, we're aligned with the sole purpose of increasing opportunities and housing employment and economic capacity. And ours is actually surrounded around the 256 residents in the Ridley place and their surrounding neighbors in the Marshall-Ridley footprint.

Next slide, please. The HRCAP Housing Department has two HUD certified housing counselors. We also have five family services specialists. We have two housing specialists and also a financial literacy coach. We offer one-on-one housing counseling and education services on a variety of housing related topics and financial literacy as well.

To date, we've conducted over a dozen sessions at our Lift & Connect Envision Center, and no session is dull. Everything is so new and so exciting for our residents, and especially during this time during COVID-19. So our housing counselors have been very busy administering rental counseling, education courses, homeownership education, and budgeting classes, right on site at the Lift & Connect EnVision Center.

This past April, we actually launched a fair housing outreach campaign from the Lift & Connect EnVision Center in partnership with one of our meal distributions, where it helped us to be able to reach some of our hardest to reach families. Those that we -- were not able to get in contact with, or those that just were not sure what we were doing on their property.

So in this slide, you'll actually see pictures from the very first home buyer education session that we hosted on site at the Lift & Connect EnVision center, and we had partners such as the Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority, the vice mayor, and also Habitat for Humanity to just come in and talk to our families about home ownership, and how we can help them at the center to get the tools and resources they need to make successful housing choices, whether it's home ownership or renting.

So from that workshop, we were actually able to gain good foot traffic with a lot of our residents and 15 percent of the enrollees in our past Credit Improvement Incentive Program, where customers from that Marshall-Ridley community that received services onsite at our Lift & Connect EnVision Center.

So we were so excited to be able to meet them where they're at physically and mentally, and then offer the services of up to \$2,000 in an incentive towards negative debt payment. So with that came a lot of housing counseling and discussions of budgeting and counseling. And if we can switch to the next slide, I can tell you a little bit more about some of the other sessions that we've done, and how they've helped us with the residents onsite.

So you'll see in this slide that we have a community resource bus onsite. This bus is actually staffed by our financial literacy coach. Families are able to receive array -- an array of comprehensive services in so many different areas. On the bus alone, a lot of our residents are coming for one-on-one counseling with finding the right property. There are in a relocation right now, and many receiving section eight vouchers.

So we're working on housing searches, job searches, and we're also offering budgeting tools. Some of our customers have opened their first bank account or credit union account right onsite at the Lift & Connect EnVision Center. And we also offer free tax preparation and internet access. One of the biggest things that we're working on right now is working with our customers on the census.

As housing counselors, we are taking every opportunity right now to make sure that all of the residents on the Marshall-Ridley property and the surrounding community are aware of how the census impacts their finances, and their employment, and educational opportunities. Many of the residents have students right now, and they're looking for, what's going to be the right school once our Choice Neighborhood Initiative is all said and done, and we're moved off of this property?

So those are some of the areas that our housing counselors have been able to fill in the gaps with the residents. So then I would just like to take a few moments before we hand it off to Ms. Kelly Gill-Gordon, to talk about the pillars that we set for our Lift & Connect EnVision Center in

Newport News, and specifically how housing counseling has helped us to move those along. One of our first goals of course was to improve access to quality health services and connect residents to health insurance.

So thanks to our healthy service provider network and a partnership with our federally qualified health clinic. We have been able to position a wellness clinic on right onsite for the residents to have easy access to affordable and quality non-emergency services and also resources. So some of the examples of the services that are offered at the clinic are free blood pressure checks, health screenings, STD testing, and we've also done a COVID-19 screening as well.

This past quarter, we were able to assist 80 individuals that are essential workers onsite at the Lift & Connect EnVision Center with free COVID-19 testing. So with the wellness center onsite, of course you can know there are a lot of questions about healthcare costs, prescription fees, and our housing counselors love to come out to these events and support the residents. Because that's when we're able to show those linkages between their budgets and what those costs may be, and hopefully help them to make the most successful decision for their budget, and make sure that they are maintaining healthcare services.

So that's one goal is the quality of healthcare services and health insurance. We also work with our families on reducing food insecurities and assisting them with getting fresh and affordable food. You all know, as a result of COVID-19, food has been very scarce for a lot of our families. So what we've been able to do is we've offered 115 meals per week, I mean, I'm sorry per day onsite at the Lift & Connect EnVision Center.

But with the meals, we're also offering education. We know that many of our families have suffered from income loss. But the majority of them have also received stimulus payments and unemployment benefits and some tax refunds as well. So needless to say, the pandemic has been a really interesting time to help our customers work with budgets.

It's pushed our staff to be very creative, but also really intentional in the approach and making sure that our customers know that when you get additional income, here's some things that you can do with it to help yourself in the future. Or when finances are scarce and you're receiving food assistance, here are some other things that you can use that money for that you would not have been able to do previously.

So with that, within the past month, and collaboration with our financial literacy coach and our community resource bus, our housing counselors have launched budgeting and credit workshops. We've also assisted customers with tips on building financial capacity, increasing their credit scores, and saving funds for emergencies. Of course, no one was prepared for the pandemic. So we have a special workshop that we do on preparing for the rainy days and preparing in the midst of a pandemic, how do you financially budget?

And then we look at those other unexpected expenses. So our third goal, and then I have one more goal after this, but our third goal is, in job readiness. We focus a lot on job readiness, increased employment opportunities, and also increasing the average annual income of our

households. So as you can see, the community resource bus has been a really good vessel and a really good tool to be able to do that.

Sometimes when you have a nice big, shiny building and you're trying to offer so many different resources, people tend to get scared away and they're not sure. But the community resource bus, fortunately the residents were very receptive to it and excited about such a different initiative that we have had a lot of traction on the bus. And this past week, we had a 19-year-old gentleman that had been coming to the bus twice each week, and he is now employed with one of our partners in the area.

So he did a job search and now he's searching for an apartment on the bus and working with our financial literacy coach to be able to do that. So we're excited to be able to off this -- offer this service. And then our last and our final goal is that, 100 percent of the children in the Ridley area will enter kindergarten, ready to learn. We try to keep with the theme of the whole family, so our financial literacy coach, our housing counselor, and our family self-sufficiency specialist collaborate with a group of individuals that we call our service provider network to connect the families to early childhood education.

We connect them to Head Start, early Head Start, our four-year-old initiative program, and we know that our early learners are ready learners, and we know how that translates into the household. So we try to look at the whole family approach. We try to help families find the most costly childcare for them, if it is childcare that they need, but also our families are struggling with what's the best opportunity for me?

What is this good school area? How do I find what school my child will be going to if I move to a specific city? So those are some of the things that our housing counselors are able to do is, basically help our customers juggle through those tough choices, find the right property for them, identify the best option. And then also budget that into their current finances that they have at home.

It's a lot of great work that we've been able to do from our Lift & Connect EnVision Center. I am definitely really excited to hear about what the other centers have in store, and none of this work would be possible without HUD or without Virginia Housing. So right now, I would like to pass it over to Ms. Kelly Gill-Gordon with Virginia Housing.

Kelly Gill-Gordon: Terri, thank you so much.

Terri Francis: Thank you.

Kelly Gill-Gordon: It's so exciting to hear what you guys are accomplishing in Newport News. And I think Terri has really set the stage and really provided so many opportunities for the community. But for everyone on the phone, listening to what they're able to do with the EnVision Center, I think it is really what this whole presentation is about, is why does a housing counseling agency want to partner with an EnVision Center or in HR, and Hampton Roads, community actions case they are [inaudible] that EnVision Center.

So before it gets too much further, I'll just say Kelly Gill-Gordon, Terri introduced me and I'm with Virginia Housing. We're the state housing finance agency in Virginia and H Hampton Roads, community action is one of our 30 sub grantees. When HUD asked me to be part of the panel for EnVision Centers, I will be honest. I did not know that much about EnVision Centers.

And so I started -- I knew that we had four in Virginia, but I wasn't sure everything that they were doing. And as you can hear from what Terri talked about, they're doing a lot. And I really think what Terri has laid out for us, and what the other panelists have really talked about is, why it is important for a HUD housing counseling agency to partner. Because it really becomes a wonderful opportunity to be able to expand counseling services.

So Terri and I have had a couple of conversations about what they're doing in Newport News. And when I hear about what they're doing, it really helps to see how that EnVision center can expand services. And I think housing counseling agencies are always looking at, what is the best way to reach people? How can people know about what you do sometimes when we say housing counseling, that word counseling people don't like that word.

So it can become, and great avenue to make sure people understand the service, and they don't have perceived ideas about what housing counseling is. So I -- I only picked up three different focus points from learning more about the EnVision Centers. And I think being able to think about what your outreach looks like is very important. So being a neighborhood-based entity is so important.

And I think that is what's allowing Hampton Roads Community Action to reach more people. They're in the neighborhood. They particularly started this EnVision center from a revitalization effort, and so because they're in the neighborhoods, they can get buy in from the residents, which is hugely important. The residents are then learning about the different services that they're able to link with.

So they then can link with job readiness. They're learning more about budgets. They -- I mean, you listened to Terri list all of the services, if you're coming in for services for your child, but you have -- you're able to access food, and you're able to access financial literacy that makes it so much more comfortable. So being in that community is a huge way to reach the individuals that we want to serve.

And sometimes individuals that are harder to serve because they may have not felt as comfortable with what we were providing. One of the other things that I think is very interesting is the different individuals working through the EnVision center, and the HUD Housing Counseling Agency. So they do have family service specialists, and I think Terri mentioned that they have five specialists and they have two housing counselors.

This is a great opportunity for cross-training. This is a wonderful opportunity to build your housing counselors. I think we got a little bit of a reprieve when we decided -- when HUD decided to hold off on the certification, but this is a huge opportunity. We -- in Hampton Roads, they have an opportunity to cross-train, and maybe some of those family service specialists can become HUD certified counselors, and that is a big resource.

It's a big resource for Terri and her other housing counselor to have additional people at the organization that can provide such a quality service. And the family service specialists are able to provide knowledge and information for the HUD housing counselors as well, so they're able to really work together. And I think that building the capacity of the organization is really critical, and it's as important as providing that resource.

So we know if the housing counseling agency or the EnVision center doesn't have capacity, it's going to be hard to deliver a service. So I love the idea of thinking that they can cross-train, and that others can understand what housing counseling is, and then also get certified. That's so exciting.

And then one of the other pieces that I think I've been able to see through Hampton Roads Community Action, and through their EnVision center is the way that they can provide resources to the community. So as a state housing finance agency, we try to provide training to our network. We try to provide other grant resources outside of the HUD Housing Counseling Grant, but we are trying to provide different resources.

Terri mentioned a grant that we have that is our credit focus grant. This is a really -- it's a small grant, but we partner just with our HUD housing counseling agencies, and there is a counseling and an education requirement. And what we find a lot of times when we release a new idea or a new program, is that it's hard for a counseling agency to immediately take that, get clients, start a program. You know, it could take six months to a year to ramp up a new program.

In this case, when they're in the neighborhood, and they have connections with so many people, it's allowing them to implement a program successfully and probably a little bit quicker than some of our other housing counseling agencies. We've -- we provide home-buyer education and you heard Terri talk about their home-buyer education class, and some of the other resources like the rental education which -- home-buyer education has always been that big piece that housing counselors have provided.

But rental education, as we all know, is it's a -- it's different. You need to provide it in a different manner. It might not be every renter doesn't need the exact same information, but they need to be able to be flexible, and learn about finding a new property, understanding their rights and responsibilities. So the EnVision Center and Hampton Roads Community Action is able to take a resource that we have, that we want to get out into the community.

We can provide the resource as the intermediary, but we can't always provide the direct contact with the individuals. And that's what HUD Housing Counseling has always been great at. And now through the EnVision Center it's offering another opportunity for these resources to get to the people that we created them for. So it's really exciting to see why a housing counseling agency would want to have this connection.

I really think really being part of that community is so important. It's exciting to hear what Hampton Roads is doing with their EnVision Center. And I really encourage, and saw in the chat box the contact for getting in touch with the EnVision Center, regional directors. So I really

encourage you to do that outreach, and see what centers are in your area, see if there is a partnership that you can create. So with that, I believe I am probably handing it off to the next individual.

Rachael Laurilliard: Yeah. Thank you so much, Kelly and Terri, that was a great, super informative presentation. And I know that there's a lot of good information and some contact info in the slides, and I did put that slide deck link in the chat. So that's all available on the HUD Exchange.

So just want to make sure everyone has that link, who needs it, and that has the email to get in touch with EnVision Centers. But I also wanted to highlight the contact information of all of our presenters. So we did want to provide this to all of you folks listening today. If you have any questions for any of the presenters, you can go ahead and email them here and we will -- we've been recording this webinar, and we will have a transcript available and all of that coming soon on the HUD Exchange.

So you can even go back and listen to this after the webinar, if you'd like and Jerry will send out -- we'll start off when those materials are available, so you can keep an eye out for that. So I do want to get into the Q&A, and I know we've had a couple of questions in the chat before, but please go ahead and chat out your questions, so we make sure we got those answered.

And while you're chatting your questions, we wanted to ask another Mentimeter question. So we'd love to know what types of services could your agency partner with EnVision Centers to deliver in your community. So this is open-ended, so you can type in whatever you'd like here. If you have any ideas about what fits the services would be good to partner with an EnVision Center forum. We'd love to hear from you.

And I know Terri gave us some fabulous plethora of examples on how they're providing services in conjunction with EnVision Centers. So again, the Menti code is 2570049. And just go to menti.com. You can do that either on your laptop or on your phone. Someone said they're launching a new housing counseling agency, so this is all new information, but that's great to hear that you're becoming a HUD approved housing counseling agency. That's really exciting.

Budgeting workshops and seeing a lot of education, food delivery, coordination of the many services available, one-stop shop. I think that's a great response and that resonates with what Kelly was saying about cross-training, the staff members on different services. I think it's super important, especially in terms of the certification exam. Employment services, disability services, domestic violence services, some more financial education and coaching, financial capacity, helping connect folks to internet access, SPA Veteran's Affairs, the census.

So we'd love for you to keep on entering these responses. I'm going to go back to the slide deck so we can get into our Q&A, but if you just keep -- you can definitely keep responding to these, we'd love to collect the information this way, and I can come back to reading some of your responses if we have time after the question and answer session.

So the first question I have, I think came in the chat a little bit ago for Jill and Ivery. So someone said, we serve nine very rural counties in Southern Illinois, and there are no EnVision Centers near us. So this person's wondering if there are any online services associated with EnVision Centers, and how they can use those, or if there's any chance an EnVision center might be opening in [inaudible].

Jill Yu: Yeah, I can step in here. Their role, so I would say for Sandy, thank you for the question. If you can let me know where you're located. If you go onto -- excuse me, let me put this on hud.gov/envisioncenters, there is a map, an interactive map, in fact of all the EnVision Centers located across the nation. And you can hover over each blue dot and see where they're precisely located.

And so hopefully, there is an EnVision Center site located close to you, but I guess it would just be dependent on that. And if you are interested in learning more about what those services are at that vision center site close to your location, you can contact the executive director or the staff member whose contact information is listed on our website. I can't just speak too quickly, so first of all, I want to give kudos to Terri.

You're like one of our rising stars, like in our EnVision Center network. I knew -- I saw your name and I was like, I know that name. We haven't met personally, but my field staff speaks very highly of you. So like your name, you have a positive reputation within HUD. So I'll just share like, so within the pandemic, as we, a lot of our EnVision Centers size, I'm sure Terri can attest as well as Kelly.

We had to -- our EnVision Center sites had to pivot to providing their services online and really get create in that way. So I would not be surprised if a lot of the services that you're looking for would be listed on their website and it's online and available, whatever [inaudible] contact number.

Rachael Laurilliard: Thanks, Jill. I have a couple of more questions and I think some of these might be for you Jill or Jerry might also be able to jump in on some. So another question is, can a housing counseling agency become an EnVision Center?

Jill Yu: Very good question. So I would say potentially yes, it will be dependent on your application materials. Just to give you a little highlight of like what that looks like, but two main requirements for a first active site to apply for an EnVision Center designation is completing an action plan, and then a commitment letter essentially indicating that you are providing services that fall under the four pillars, and commit to working with HUD to enhance your services.

And then of course in your action plan, just identifying who are your clients that you serve, what is the zip code of area that you are reaching, as well as because HUD, we commit to enhancing your services listing what other community needs, you have identified that you still need support with. And it's not -- it's definitely not just like a got you moment. It's really for us to figure out, well, how can we make you make your services much more effective and help -- let us help you in that way.

The best way, as I briefly mentioned earlier is to go to that website, connect with your regional office, though, wherever you're located, whatever state, connect with that contact, and have that initial phone call to just learn a little bit more what the process is, and they can definitely provide some technical assistance and help you -- and help walk you through the application from beginning to end.

Rachael Laurilliard: That's great. Thanks, Jill. So it sounds like yeah, that community -- the regional officer was a great resource for people with questions, and that's in the slide deck as well. So folks should definitely go back and look at that. I'll put this -- the website back at the chat as well.

So follow-up questions to that that are coming in in the chat, folks are wondering about any financial assistance or grant assistance available from HUD in terms of EnVision Centers, and also if there's a next round for applications [inaudible] associated with that?

Jill Yu: Yeah. And unfortunately this is an unfunded secretarial initiative. However, what we do like to promote is the value added when you receive designation. And so although you, as an EnVision Center site, it doesn't give you preference points. Doesn't give you any added bonus for grant applications.

As a designated EnVision Center site, you are given a federal employee who can help you navigate federal resources. Though we like to call them site leads, and we have a field staffer who is literally your new federal government, best friend, if you allow. So they will help you identify what are the community needs that you continue to see and what federal existing federal programming can help meet those needs.

A perfect example is we had folks complete their action plans and literally requested I need help bringing in more jobs to my community. And it was such a broad topic when we engage with them, when our site leads, talked with them, they discovered, okay, it's really more about providing job training and employment opportunities through department of labor.

So we introduced them to the department of labor's office of apprenticeship really, just hook them up with those partners as well as Job Corps to see if we can bring more of those opportunities. So it's unfunded, but there are so many existing federal programs right now. It's really just figuring out which one fits your needs.

Rachael Laurilliard: Okay, great. Thanks, Jill. And then someone else had a question about if EnVision Centers are located on housing authority properties, or in the general community, or is it both?

Jill Yu: It's a little bit of both, I would say. So in the beginning of the demonstration, when we did a call out to see which candidates or organizations who are willing to receive designation, we did prioritize public housing authorities who have a JobsPlus or an FSS, or, some initiative where they've demonstrated that they have a connection with the federal government. But also demonstrate their willingness to perform in this program.

We've since grown in popularity and we've expanded the pool and outreach to nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, some are Department of Labor American Job Centers. I believe we have two that are qualified health centers, and maybe two or three that are organizations [distorted audio] merely serve homeless populations, so kind of runs the gamut. But it's also, the commitment still stands, if you receive designation, HUD will do the best as we can to enhance and make your services much more effective as an EnVision Center site.

Rachael Laurilliard: Okay, great. Thanks Jill. And I did want to note that Terri wrote in the chat about how their regional coordinator has been a great resource for them, some a technical guidance. So they have monthly individual calls and meetings, and they've discussed [inaudible].

Jill Yu: Wonderful.

Rachael Laurilliard: All right. People can definitely continue to write in their questions. I do want to pivot back to the Mentimeter for a moment to see any other responses came in. It looks like we have 24; someone mentioned protecting community members from scams is a good resource that EnVision Centers can help with. I think that's great, especially during COVID-19, we're seeing a lot of specific scams pop up.

Helping the homeless. I think Jill was just speaking to that. EnVision Centers that are working specifically with those groups, and then working with other HUD programs like CHIP and CDBG, so that's great.

Rachael Laurilliard: And Rachael, do you mind if I just react to that for a second?

Jill Yu: Yes, please do.

Jill Yu: When we receive applications from our EnVision Center sites, we also compile all of the needs that they've identified in their action plans. And so, several of them about, I would say -- I'm just looking at my data on my spreadsheet on my end, about 14 or 15 of them so far have identified a need to partner with a housing counseling agency.

They've identified service gaps as in, they're looking for a housing counseling programming that can teach their clients about home ownership housing for those who just recently -- it's a homeless problem, sorry, homeless prevention of affordable housing, and those who are recently incarcerated, or who just left prison.

So there's, again, they've explicitly requested partnering with programming that your services. And if there is an EnVision Center near you, I do recommend just reaching out to them and just seeing, and letting them know that you exist, and that you are in close proximity, and you're willing to explore some partnership.

Because at the end of the day, Secretary Carson wants to help our most vulnerable populations achieve self-sufficiency. And of course the core part of that also is housing stability, whether that's financial, whether that's just learning about what are my options to become a home owner, the path to that goal, like it's really important to many of our clients that we serve.

Rachael Laurilliard: Okay. Great. Thanks so much, Jill. And yeah, Terri echoed in the chat as a result of the Hampton Roads Community Action has conducted a mobile shower program for their homeless customers as part of their EnVision Center. So people are able to get a free meal, a decent shower space, change of clothes, community connections, so that sounds amazing.

All right. I haven't seen any other specific questions come into the chat, but thank you everyone for responding to the Mentimeter question. And again, the contact information of all of our panelists is inside deck that I chatted out, and again, it'll be available on HUD Exchange. So please do reach out to folks if you have additional questions. And I will hand it back to Jerry for our closing remarks.

Jerrold Mayer: Well, thank you, Rachael. And before we conclude our program, we have one little programming note for you. On October 15th, HUD's Opportunity Initiative Office and the Office of Housing Counseling are hosting a webinar on facing eviction with facts, not fear. Participants will learn how to help tenants in their communities that are facing eviction. Panelists from the real estate industry, faith-based organization, and HUD's Office of Housing Counseling will share practical information on what you and your organization can do to assist clients who are facing eviction.

You can register today on the HUD Exchange training digest. Also if you think of any questions after today's program ends, or want some assistance, please send us an email at housing.counseling@hud.gov, and we'll be sure to respond to you right away. Thank you for attending our EnVision Center presentation. This is the last session of our 2020 virtual intermediary conference.

Thank you to Ivery, Jill, Kelly, and Terri, and of course Rachael and all the good folks at ICF for supporting HUD'S National Intermediary Virtual Conference series, and of course special, thanks to all of the housing counselors for participating today. We know you're all rising to the challenge of serving clients during the COVID-19 national emergency, so we deeply appreciate you spending this time with us.

We hope that next year, we can resume our intermediary conference in Washington, DC in person with you all, and thank you again to everyone. Stay safe, healthy, and this will conclude today's program.

(END)