DelawareHousingSearch.org Advisory Group Meeting

June 26, 2014

Welcome and Introductions:

Sheila Roberts (Socialserve.com), Karen Horton (DSHA), Devon Degyansky (DSHA), Christina Hardin (DSHA), Brandy Nauman (Sussex County), Lottie Lee (DHSS), Kyle Hodges (SCPD), Mary Ellen Gray (Kent County), Carrie Casey (New Castle County), Allison Rosenberg (New Castle County), Robert Rizzo (New Castle County), Nailah Gilliam (City of Wilmington)

Growing the Inventory:

- There are (as of June 2014) more than 21,000 rental units listed on *DelawareHousingSearch.org*. Yet as the number of total units has grown, the numbers of vacant units has declined, due to current pressures on the rental market. *DelawareHousingSearch.org* and Socialserve.com have undertaken marketing and outreach efforts to offset this trend, including direct landlord outreach, and forging new partnerships with Dover Air Force Base and others.
- Sheila described a new initiative Socialserve.com has commenced to engage landlords by reworking the website pages for data entry. The new format will be more cohesive, menu-driven,
 and generally user-friendly. Socialserve.com is also building a tool that will allow housing locator
 sites to interface with several existing property management software programs; this will
 reduce duplicative data entry on the part of landlords/property managers.

Statistics and Analytics:

A Google Analytics comparison between January-June 2013 and January-June 2014 shows a
tremendous increase in site activity, with the number of users accessing

DelawareHousingSearch.org almost doubling from one time period to the next. Users are also
conducting more search sessions, and looking at more pages per search session (see report for
more detail).

Serving Special Populations:

More than a third of the units (~7,000) in the inventory have been "flagged" by landlords
displaying a willingness to house referrals from special populations, including persons with
disabilities, re-entering ex-offenders, young people exiting foster care, persons fleeing domestic
violence, and more.

Marketing Initiatives (Completed and Ongoing):

- A DelawareHousingSearch.org "Housing Matters" radio spot, featuring an "ask the expert" format was completed in 2013 and placed into rotation on several local radio stations (WDEL, WAFL, La Exitosa).
- One King- and one Queen-size bus wrap are currently running in Kent and Sussex Counties
 through the end of 2014. Karen shared that New Castle County was not specifically targeted for
 this campaign, as the number of New Castle County rental units on the site is already pretty

robust. These buses will run different routes on a day-to-day basis, so they should reach a wide audience. Sheila also shared that when Georgia Housing ran a similar campaign, they saw a dramatic increase in activity on their housing search site.

- A 10-minute "Window on Wilmington" segment featuring DSHA's Matt Heckles speaking about DelawareHousingSearch.org was aired several times on WITN starting in March 2014. DSHA is currently working to make this segment into a Public Service Announcement.
- In 2013, *DelawareHousingSearch.org* created a new partnership with Dover Air Force base to advertise in their publications "Airlifter" and "Stars and Stripes", and to promote the site as a resource for servicemen and -women seeking housing in Delaware.
- Aardvark Video Works produce a 30-second Public Service Announcement (PSA) highlighting
 DelawareHousingSearch.org in both English and Spanish. Univision will donate airtime for the
 Spanish version, and DSHA is currently exploring options for airing the English version. Both are
 available via YouTube links, which will be distributed to Advisory Group members.

Open Discussion, Suggestions, and Action Items:

- Mary Ellen Gray suggested that DelawareHousingSearch.org be represented at the fall conference for the Delaware Chapter of the American Planning Association. Devon will follow up.
- Lottie Lee suggested attending the series of festivals held in Wilmington: the Italian Festival (June), Greek Festival (June), and August Quarterly Festival (August). She will explore the possibility of setting up a table at these events.
- One of the suggestions from last Advisory Group meeting was to distribute information (posters, rack cards) via the largest employers in Sussex County. This has not been accomplished yet, but Devon and Karen will follow up with Brandy and Brad Whaley.
- Carrie suggested displaying both the "Window on Wilmington" segment and the English/Spanish PSA on the New Castle County building monitors and the New Castle County public television display. Nailah will also explore the possibility of airing these in the Wilmington buildings.
- Lottie Lee had suggested last Advisory Group meeting that information about
 DelawareHousingSearch.org be distributed via the e-blast that goes out to all DHSS employees.
 This has not been accomplished yet, but Karen will follow up with Jay Lynch, who manages the distribution list.
- Nailah suggested pursuing a City Section feature of *DelawareHousingSearch.org* in the free magazine "Out and About", which is circulated throughout Wilmington and the surrounding area. Devon will connect with Nailah to discuss in greater detail.

- Brandy suggested distributing information via "Money Mailers" in Kent and Sussex Counties;
 Amy Walls uses these to notify the public about upcoming events at NCALL Research. Devon will connect with Amy to find out more about this.
- Another suggestion from a previous Advisory Group meeting was to advertise
 DelawareHousingSearch.org in movie theaters throughout the state. Tina shared that in several
 theaters this would be cost prohibitive, but Carmike Theaters (Kent County) are somewhat more
 affordable, at \$450 for production plus \$450 per week to run the ads. Devon will explore the
 feasibility of including this in the 2014-2015 Budget.
- Nailah recommended connecting with the New Castle County Board of Realtors, which meets every other month. Sheila is willing to conduct a webinar presentation for them at one of their upcoming meetings. Devon will follow up with Nailah and Sheila.

Many thanks to those of you who were able to participate in this Advisory Group meeting! We are looking forward to another exciting and productive year of collaborating with you all to make this great resource even more widely available to Delawareans seeking housing.

Have a wonderful summer!