

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Carol Luna-Anderson, Ph.D.

X Title Slide Lifetime Achievement

To say that MFA and our lifetime achievement award recipient go back a long way, is a big understatement. She was there when MFA took over homelessness assistance programs from the state in 1997 and was one of the first to put the program funds to use. She was also one of the first organizations to receive tax credits through MFA as well as Primero and HOME funding.

When you learn more about this remarkable woman and the amazing work she's done for people experiencing homelessness who are mentally ill, you will understand why X Carol Luna-Anderson is the recipient of this year's Housing Hero award.

X In 1987, with just a single contract for case management services, Carol set up shop in an old motel in Santa Fe with two employees and three volunteers and called it The Life Link. Ten formerly homeless families were housed in the hotel, and, X as a registered nurse with a Ph.D. in counseling, Carol provided them with supportive services that included addiction and mental health treatment services.

X Establishing The Life Link was a very personal endeavor for Carol because she had seen firsthand how homelessness and mental illness could destroy lives. X Carol has two sisters and a nephew with mental illness and a brother who died as a result of his substance abuse disorder.

Fast forward 10 years. X Carol and her little staff decided it was all-or-nothing time. They applied to HUD for permanent supportive housing funding, and simultaneously, they came to MFA with a request for tax credits to build a new facility. They reasoned that, if they got one or the other of them, they would move forward. If they got neither, they would close their doors. They got both.

X The funding allowed Carol to raze the old motel and build a beautiful 24-unit facility, which The Life Link still occupies. X By this time, MFA had several funding programs to assist the homeless, and Carol took advantage of all of them. And as new programs came along, she incorporated those, too.

What Carol has accomplished in the last 31 years is staggering. Here are some highlights:

- X Built a psychosocial rehabilitation and wellness center for people with chronic mental illness and substance abuse called the Santa Fe Clubhouse. X “Members” help each other build skills to function within the community.
- X Developed three outreach programs for homeless individuals with mental illness.
- X Expanded Life Link’s licensed mental health outpatient program into several area hospitals and clinics.
- X Expanded services from Santa Fe into Albuquerque and Rio Arriba County.

More recent additions to Lifelink’s programs include:

- X Aftercare and restoration for victims of human trafficking.
- X A women and families drop-in center called the Sojourners Advocacy Café.

And in her **spare** time, Carol built the X Life Link Training Institute, which provides training and consultation nationwide. X It was the first agency to introduce the Mental Health First Aide program into New Mexico.

X In the last 31 years, The Life Link’s budget has gone from \$55,000 to \$6.7 million. The number of employees has grown from two to 89.

But with all of these remarkable accomplishments and all of the care that she provides to a needy population, Carol knows that housing is the key. She puts it

very clearly: “People can’t do squat without a place to live.” X So on top of everything else she’s done, Carol has provided permanent supportive housing opportunities to hundreds of people who would otherwise be homeless.

X The 10 families who were housed at that rundown hotel in 1987 have now grown to 170 families who live in supportive housing in various locations. Carol is about to X “retire” from The Life Link. But she’s not anywhere close to stopping. She’s now turned her sights to developing affordable housing and appropriate housing for the homeless because, as she says in her to-the-point way: “All these years later, and we still don’t have enough housing.”

X And we have no doubt that she will make it happen. Just like she has for the last 31 years.

X Ladies and gentlemen, please help me welcome to the stage Dr. Carol Luna-Anderson.