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NEWS RELEASE

Zillow-powered technology has helped Housing Connector find homes for 3,700 people experiencing homelessness

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- Launched in 2019 with Zillow, Housing Connector takes a business-to-business approach to leverage existing housing in the private market to address homelessness
- Currently operates in Seattle and Denver, will announce expansion to third market in 2023

SEATTLE, Nov. 14, 2022 /PRNewswire/ -- Housing Connector, which uses Zillow-powered technology to help match people in need of a home with affordable vacant units, has successfully placed 3,754 people in homes during its first three years of operation. Housing Connector launched in Seattle through a collaboration among civic leaders, service providers and Zillow in the fall of 2019. The program expanded regionally in 2021, then into Denver last November. The program will expand again in 2023, with a formal announcement anticipated early next year.

"Our program was designed to make sure that no home sits empty while there are people in need of a roof over their heads," said Shkëlqim Kelmendi, founder and executive director of Housing Connector. "This business-to-business approach is a win for everyone, serving as a bridge for property owners with vacant apartments to connect with case managers and ready-to-rent tenants. Tapping into existing, available homes is an effective and efficient way to remove barriers to housing for people living unsheltered. Being able to afford and maintain rent is a struggle for most people – even more so for vulnerable people already experiencing homelessness."

Housing affordability is a crisis in communities across the country. The typical monthly rent in the U.S. is over $2,000 a month nationally, which is 37% higher than five years ago. Sharp increases in rent have a direct impact on rates of homelessness and are considered by policymakers to be a primary cause of housing instability. These factors more severely impact people of color, who experience homelessness at a higher rate than white people in the United States.

"Thousands of people have a home today because of Housing Connector's incredible work in three short years," said Aldona Clottey, vice president of corporate social responsibility at Zillow. "We were founded on 'Turning on the Lights' for people navigating a complex and often difficult journey when trying to find a home. Our technology has helped achieve that in real estate and we want to offer this expertise for those facing the challenge of finding a way out of homelessness. Housing Connector is a direct outcome of bringing these pieces together, which has 'Turned on the Lights' for people that had been experiencing homelessness and now have an affordable place to call home."

Who has been helped by Housing Connector

Through Housing Connector, 3,754 people – 66% of which are in households of color – have found long-term housing in the Seattle and Denver metro areas. The majority of program participants earn less than $28,000 a year. For perspective, the typical renter in Seattle and Denver will spend around that amount annually on rent alone, paying $27,420 and $24,335 respectively, according to Zillow data.

"I worked in construction for 30 years," said Jeffery Gill, resident at Capella Apartments at Esterra Park in Redmond, Washington and a Housing Connector client. "After I got hurt, I couldn't work enough to make ends meet and I found myself living in a shelter for three years. Thankfully, my case manager stuck with me and was able to find a place that would take my housing voucher. Within a few weeks, I was living in a brand-new apartment, which is helping me get my feet underneath me again. This whole experience has given me hope that I can buy a place of my own again sometime down the road. This program really helped me, and I know it can help others, too."

How it works for property owners

Property owners, managers and landlords are critical to the program's success. In three years, more than 1,300 properties across the Seattle and Denver metros have listed with Housing Connector, representing more than 73,000 homes. Properties enrolled in the program adjust or waive criteria (credit, rental history, etc.) for residents and list their property through Zillow's search tool that is only accessible to case managers and their clients participating in the program.

"Housing Connector's strategy for housing people and keeping them housed is the first one that's worked in a long time – if ever," said Jenny Domoto of Milestone Properties in Washington state. "With affordable housing so scarce, case managers can struggle to find places for their clients. With Housing Connector, a case manager can more easily place a client in one of our properties and then the client gets the support they need to remain housed. It's been a positive experience and we see it as a way for us to be part of the solution to help end homelessness in our community."

"As a leader in affordable housing, with decades of experience managing thousands of rental units across the

western United States, we knew immediately the value Housing Connector would bring to Denver's affordable housing landscape," Brooke Parra, executive vice president of Ross-Envolve Communities. "Through this partnership, once a vacancy comes up, our community managers list the vacancy and Housing Connector's partners can find the unit and begin placing a tenant. It's a win for our properties, the community, and our tenants."

Once a client is matched to an available affordable home, Housing Connector provides them with two years of guaranteed housing stability support. In exchange, property owners receive access to financial and mitigation support, opening up housing that was previously out of reach for people experiencing homelessness.

"Thanks to our strong partnership with Housing Connector, we are proud to have assisted with finding housing for more than a dozen households in just four months in Redmond, as well as in Kirkland and Bellevue," said Angela Birney, mayor of Redmond. "This is a great example of what working together and leveraging connections can do for the betterment of our community."

How the tool works for community service providers

Community providers, such as the city of Redmond and Volunteers of America in Denver, use Housing Connector to place clients in participating properties. In total, 162 community providers partner with Housing Connector to access listings and find homes for their clients.

"I work with individuals who could have moved into housing years ago -- many of them living in their cars while also working -- if there had been available affordable housing for them," said Tisza Rutherford, Homeless Outreach Administrator for the city of Redmond. "Without this opportunity, they would probably be continuing to do that, while whittling away at their credit and paying off past debt. This program is launching people into housing much faster, and sets them up for success."

The search tool directly addresses one of the biggest challenges for case managers: finding available long-term housing that is accessible to their clients. With the tool, case managers no longer have to manually review or contact properties to see if clients are eligible; available units are now at their fingertips through the online listing platform.

"Housing Connector has been incredible since coming to Denver," said Nicole Brown, Case Manager for Volunteers of America Colorado. "I've been able to use the search tool with clients to find affordable units in the Denver area that can work for them, and then Housing Connector steps in to either help take care of deposits or troubleshoot with property managers to make sure everyone can stay housed. It's really helpful for people facing multiple barriers. I hope more property managers and case managers take advantage of this opportunity; it helps everyone in the community."

Zillow's Social Impact program leverages our products and platform to help advance housing security and economic opportunity for underserved communities. This work includes partnerships like Housing Connector and product features such as displaying down payment assistance programs for prospective home-buyers and including fair housing resources and local legal protections on home listings.

About Housing Connector

Housing Connector is a nonprofit organization that helps private property owners and landlords easily and successfully rent to people experiencing homelessness. Housing Connector takes a business-to-business approach based on the belief that leveraging existing housing in the private market can meaningfully reduce homelessness. Housing Connector's partnerships offer a cost-effective model for housing, costing roughly $3,900 to place and support a household in a property for two years.

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