

HEALTH HOPE OPPORTUNITY

SUMMER 2024

Improving our Communities in New and Different Ways



Conceptual rendering of Shea Ravines

Tasha Blackmon, CEO and President of Cherry Health, thinks outside the box when it comes to improving lives in our community. And that means we have exciting news to share!

We know that affordable housing is a component of healthy living. We also know there is a shortage of affordable housing. Cherry Health sees this first-hand with our own patients. In 2023, we served more than 13,000 unstably housed people, including more than 1,200 children.

For that reason, Cherry Health will be working with Woda Cooper Companies, Inc. to develop a new affordable housing option called Shea Ravines. Shea Ravines honors Chris Shea, Cherry Health's founding CEO. This 56-unit building will be built on the property of our Wyoming Community Health Center. Having housing located right next to comprehensive healthcare will give residents barrier-free access to essential care and services.

What is stable housing and why does it matter? Children are considered to live in stable housing if they move fewer than four times. According to the National Institutes of Health, there is a 75% increase in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) for children who have unstable housing. This makes them more likely to develop anxiety and depression symptoms from childhood, often leading to depression symptoms as adults.

"We know that children in unstable housing do not do as well in school," said Eric Hufnagel, executive director of Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness. "They also have poorer health outcomes."

By some estimates, housing instability can reduce a person's life expectancy by an average of more than 27 years. Research shows that people facing housing instability are more likely to skip annual physicals and other routine preventive care. This means health conditions are often diagnosed later and need more expensive treatment. We can improve health outcomes and decrease healthcare costs through affordable housing. In one study, stable housing decreased Medicaid expenditures by 12%. Emergency department use declined by 18%.

These numbers get attention from policy makers. Their interest is paying off in this new development. Thanks to investors and low-income housing credits from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, Cherry Health will receive financial benefits from this project for years to come. The project will require minimal financial contribution from us, while providing invaluable benefit to our community.

Shea Ravines will allow Cherry Health to further our engagement with the community and provide much-needed resources. We are excited about and humbled by this opportunity. Affordable housing is essential. This project will serve some of the most vulnerable and cost-burdened people in our community.



“As a real estate broker, I see a lot. I recently worked with a man who faced complicated barriers to finding resources and safe, affordable housing. I was able to connect him with basic needs. But making sure he didn’t become homeless was a very frustrating process. When I heard that Cherry Health is moving into that space, I knew I wanted to help.”

- Tanya Powell-May

Ongoing Appreciation

Tanya Powell-May is a successful real estate broker and proud mother of five. She is also a former basketball standout at Ottawa Hills High School and the University of Michigan. Most recently, she is a new monthly supporter of Cherry Health.

Tanya gave her first gift after attending *Prescription: Strength*, Cherry Health Foundation’s spring fundraiser. However, she was already aware of Cherry Health’s impact in the community.

After working as an accountant for several West Michigan businesses, Tanya became the Chief Financial Officer at Network180, a community mental health referral agency in Kent County. “I first became aware of Cherry Health at that point because they were an important provider in our (behavioral health) network,” she shared.

Fast forward, Tanya decided to go into real estate full-time. She made this move to provide a more flexible schedule for her busy family. In making that choice, she then sought health insurance through

the Health Insurance Marketplace and became a Cherry Health patient.

“I chose a Cherry Health provider and I have been extremely happy. When I go there, I feel that I am being heard, and they address my concerns. I first went there for financial reasons. I stayed there because of the service and care I receive,” Tanya shared.

“I was super excited to come to the Cherry Health event! I had never been to one before. I listened to the program, and my heart was so touched when I saw all that Cherry Health was doing for students in their schools. I’m a board trustee at Kentwood Public Schools, and I realized that Cherry Health is directly impacting the kids I serve.”

Tanya also loved hearing that Cherry Health was helping to address the need for affordable, safe housing in our community, and wanted to support Cherry Health's work.



From Inspiration to Investment



We are thrilled to share that donors gave more than \$100,000 to Cherry Health Foundation during *Prescription: Strength*, our spring event.

The nearly 300 guests, like Tanya (story on the preceding page), clearly recognized that healthy kids learn better. Our school-based, traveling, and mobile teams reach K-12 students in 50+ schools. We shared the positive health impacts of receiving medical, dental, vision, and behavioral health services in their school settings.

Here are some examples of why our guests were moved to give:

“I am dedicating my donation to the little girl who finally saw a crisp, clear, starry night thanks to a friend of my father’s who sponsored my first pair of eyeglasses at low cost or no cost. I know Cherry Health will help ensure other children have the same opportunity.”

– Debra Sikanas
eldest of 8 children whose family received food stamp benefits while growing up

“I remember in elementary school how frightening and embarrassing it was to let anyone know I couldn’t read the board. I was filled with sheer delight when I was fitted with glasses and saw the individual leaves of a tree. I recognize that there are thousands of children in our community for whom access to corrective eyewear may not be as readily accessible without the efforts of organizations like Cherry Health.”

– Ruth Skidmore

“Our church sponsored Afghan refugees, including a single mom and her 4-year-old son. Housing, transportation, work, and acclimation to our culture have been major challenges. However, health care has been much less difficult as we were able to access medical and dental care through Cherry Health – so helpful.”

– Norm Thomasma

“I am personally passionate about education. I understand how social determinants play a role in outcomes. Cherry Health understands the systems which impact health and I appreciate knowing that there are efforts underway in what I would call *early intervention*.”

– Ovell Barbee

 **Thank you for your continued support!**



Pacesetter Sponsor Support

Thank you to our 2024 Comprehensive Sponsors who are champions of community health. Their annual commitment sustains critical programs and services! We thank the following for their compassionate support:

- Acrisure Benefits Group
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For information on sponsorship opportunities, email katmacdonald@cherryhealth.com or call (616) 965-8267.

Save the Date

Cherry Health *Celebration*

This event will feature our Clubhouse Programs: supporting the wellness, connection, employment, and education needs of those on their journey from mental illness to mental wellness.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2024 • 6-8 p.m.

FREDERIK MEIJER GARDENS & SCULPTURE PARK

TICKETS \$125

To purchase, scan the QR code or go to bit.ly/celeb24tix



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