

The Rebecca R. Gibbs Memorial Charitable Fund (RRG Fund) Third Annual Ipswich Community Service Award – 2023



We, members of The RRG Fund Board, are pleased to announce that on Sunday, October 22, 2023, at Ascension Memorial Church, during the 10:15 a.m. service, we will present our third annual *Ipswich Community Service Award* to **Coreen Howland**, in recognition of her exemplary efforts in assisting residents of Ipswich's public housing.

After working in social services on the North Shore for more than a dozen years, Coreen was hired by the Ipswich Housing Authority (IHA) in September of 2022 to serve as its Resident Services Coordinator. The IHA provides 238 affordable public housing units for families, seniors, and disabled individuals in the Ipswich community. As its Services Coordinator, Coreen's primary task is to enable residents to preserve their tenancy -- in the face of challenging circumstances in their lives -- by helping them through the difficulties of the moment, thus giving them the opportunity to thrive and grow.

One way Coreen achieves this is by connecting residents to a variety of local service agencies, such as the YMCA, Ipswich Caring, and the Open Door. These services -- typically free or sharply discounted -- ease the burden of managing household needs with limited resources. A less obvious, but equally important responsibility, is for Coreen to identify ways to improve the quality of life and sense of community among IHA residents.

According to IHA Executive Director Kate Maguire, Coreen excels in both of these roles. Coreen, she says, "takes her natural warmth and endearing nature and matches it with her drive and 'out of the box' thinking to provide a unique ... service to her community." And, Kate adds, other than get "discouraged by the

many setbacks and challenges that are typical in her field of work the trickier the situation the harder Coreen will work to find a resolution."

Coreen knows first-hand both the challenges that face IHA residents and the opportunities for affordable housing and community the IHA can provide. Ten years ago, as a young single mother with four children, she found herself in the vulnerable and fearful situation of possibly not being able to provide for the basic needs of her family. Coreen obtained assistance from Action Inc. (where she now serves a board member representing the residents of Ipswich), and successfully applied for emergency housing at the IHA, where she continues to reside with family. The IHA gave Coreen a safe haven that enabled her to stabilize her household and grow personally and professionally. She now looks forward to one day becoming a first-time homebuyer, so another family can benefit from all the IHA has to offer.

Among the impressive number of services that Coreen has established or facilitated during her employment with the IHA are: a "community closet" that provides free seasonal clothing to tenants; free afternoon snacks ("snack basket") and a "homework club" for children whose parents are still at work when they arrive home from school; a Narcan Box outside the Open Door Pantry; programming to enhance the relationship between both young and old IHA residents and first-responders, called "cocoa (or 'coffee' for the older folks) with a cop;" and scheduled health services for tenants that include blood pressure checks, Narcan training and vaccination clinics. She has also initiated various community building efforts, including a popular pumpkin painting event, and tenant cooking groups provided through the local food pantries.

We commend Coreen's initiative, ingenuity and empathy, which have enabled her to provide the notable service being recognized by this award. In doing this essential work -- with grace and grit -- she has set an outstanding example of how to be a caring and compassionate member of our community.

RRG Fund Board*

Glenn Gibbs, Brad Clark, Kitty Bartholomew,
Ellen Kallman, Anna Gibbs

*The RRG Fund was established in 2021 by Ascension Memorial Church (AMC) of Ipswich in memory of Rebecca Gibbs, an active member of both the AMC and the Ipswich community until her death in 2010. The RRG Fund has two stated purposes: to provide aid to families and individuals of the Ipswich community in financial need, and to annually recognize an individual, group, or nonprofit organization who has done exemplary work to improve the lives of persons in the Ipswich community. The intent of the annual recognition is to raise awareness of needs in the community, and acknowledge those who are addressing them.

October 12, 2023