Significant VHCF A New Lease on Life grant support has allowed the Central Virginia Health Care Project (CVHCP) to begin providing comprehensive and integrated medical and behavioral health care to the uninsured in the region experiencing mental health problems who do not currently have access to such services.

“For the past eleven years, John had been the epitome of who a “typical” homeless person might resemble. John was residing in an abandoned dog house behind a dumpster. He suffered from mental illness, substance abuse, malnutrition, and chronic medical issues. With no knowledge of available resources and no benefits or medical insurance, John had succumbed to the elements and simply accepted his situation. He believed this was to be his life.

“The Richmond Behavioral Health Authority Homeless Services Case Manager found John in May 2011 and was compelled to help him. What John did not recognize at the time was that, by accepting help, his life would change. From the start, he was linked to medical services through RBHA’s A New Lease on Life clinic. Not surprising to the ANLOL Nurse Practitioner Nancy Wallace, it was clear that John had been without regular care for some time and his health was suffering. Following the initial visit, John’s lab work showed evidence of liver disease that was likely secondary to his alcohol use and hepatitis C. He had been dealing with chronic back pain for years. John also had a cyst near his eye that had grown larger over the years and was actually obstructing his vision. With encouragement from the various team members, he cut back on his drinking, and his lab work showed some improvement. The ANLOL Nurse Practitioner also referred John to specialist services for his back pain and hepatitis C. She secured services through a plastic surgeon, who removed the cyst that was so troubling to John.

“Meanwhile, John’s Case Manager assisted him with applying for Supplemental Security Income and provided transportation to numerous appointments. He was successfully linked to the Department of Social Services to obtain food stamps. John was aided in getting a copy of his birth certificate, with the hopes of eventually applying for an identification card. Finally, John was one of more than 200 homeless individuals surveyed through the local 1,000 Homes for 1,000 Virginians – Richmond initiative and, because of his multiple areas of vulnerability, ranked at a high enough level to make him eligible for scarce subsidized housing. He was also awarded disability benefits, largely due to the medical documentation provided by the ANLOL clinic.

“Today, John is a changed man. Through the efforts of these many agencies and the support from the ANLOL initiative, John is now off the streets and receiving mental health services, medical care, and substance abuse treatment from his new provider. John resides in his own apartment, which he keeps exceptionally tidy. He takes his
medications without incident and realizes the benefits of practicing healthy living. He attends substance abuse groups and enjoys the interactions with his peers. John had even been offered a part-time position at Wal-Mart and had begun some volunteer work with the SPCA but had to stop due to his chronic pain.

“John’s success story is a great example of what happens when an integrated and collaborative services system and a motivated client join forces.”