



Moving to Work (MTW) Newsletter

Increasing Cost Efficiency, Self-Sufficiency and Housing Choice

Volume 1, Issue 3

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From the MTW Director's Desk

This fall issue includes a discussion on how MTW agencies are engaged in creative and effective activities in pursuit of fulfilling all three of the MTW Statutory Objectives. The San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC) provides an insightful look at their Choice Communities Program, focusing on providing housing choices to residents in lower poverty areas. The San Antonio Housing Authority (SHA) discusses their innovative approaches to assisting residents in becoming self-sufficient through the creation of partnerships. The Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino (HACSB) provides an article describing their Biennial Recertification Rent Reform initiative which aims to increase operational efficiencies in the agency.

All of these articles highlight the ways MTW agencies are fulfilling the statutory objectives of MTW. We would like to thank the San Diego Housing Commission, the San Antonio Housing Authority and the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino for providing the articles for this newsletter and we look forward to other MTW agency contributions for future issues of this newsletter. If you have an idea or article for a future newsletter, please email us at mtw-info@hud.gov.

Finally, we are looking forward to this year's MTW Conference in September which will focus on "Doing More with Less." The MTW Office plans to analyze the outcomes of the conference and pick four subject areas for the FY12 MTW newsletters. This will enable us to continue the policy discussions from the conference throughout the year.

Sincerely,

Ivan Pour
Director, MTW Demonstration Program

MTW Agency Spotlight on Housing Choice: The San Diego Housing Commission's Choice Communities Program

Increasing housing choices for low-income families is a top priority for both HUD and the San Diego Housing Commission. But how do we help Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) families move to areas with better schools and more opportunities?

This is a serious issue. Nearly 76 percent of HCV families in San Diego live in high-poverty communities. They remain because they are comfortable in those neighborhoods and unfamiliar with other parts of the city. In addition, higher rents prevent low-income families from relocating to more prosperous neighborhoods.

The San Diego Housing Commission has created innovative ways to overcome these issues. Developed as part of the Housing Commission's Move to Work (MTW) plan in 2010, the *Choice Communities* program, removes barriers that might prevent participants from finding housing in San Diego's more affluent neighborhoods.

A Comprehensive Program

Using the flexibility provided by MTW, the Housing Commission has provided enhanced resources and simplified procedures to help HCV families move to more prosperous communities. For example, regulations that prohibit a tenant's rent from exceeding 40 percent of their monthly income are waived under *Choice Communities*. Also under the program, payment standards can exceed 110 percent of fair market rents in more affluent areas.

There are four keys to the program's success:

- 1. Security Deposit Loans**

Zero-interest security deposit loans, with affordable payments, are offered to qualified families.

- 2. Families Share Affordability**

Qualifying families can pay a higher share of their income towards rent.

- 3. Increased Payment Standards**

The Housing Commission's maximum assistance is higher in *Choice Communities* areas.

- 4. Resource Packets and Counseling**

Informational packets and counseling are provided to HCV families through the Moving for Opportunities program.

Client education has been an important driver. Materials were distributed, both before and after the program was implemented, to inform families about *Choice Communities*. Flyers and move process packets are currently distributed at initial briefings. The *Choice Communities* Booklet, which lists schools, stores, hospitals, houses of worship and other resources in these neighborhoods, is also available by mail or on the Housing Commission's website (<http://bit.ly/ChoiceCommunities>).

The Housing Commission created a new staff position to manage the *Choice Communities* program, respond to general inquiries, and provide education on the program to help families relocate, which increased accessibility, improved customer service and helped the *Choice Communities* program thrive.

Replicating the Program and Measuring Success

This program would not be difficult to replicate, even for non-MTW agencies. Though block grant authority, made possible by MTW funded security deposit loans, other local funding or grants could be used. Administrative streamlining, also aided by MTW flexibility, freed up the resources to add staff. The *Choice Communities* Booklet was created with agency resources and online access minimizes printing costs.

In Fiscal Year 2011, the Housing Commission provided 52 security deposit loans, totaling more than \$63,000. Overall, the innovative *Choice Communities* program increased the number of families moving into or within more affluent areas by 158 percent over the baseline.

As a result of these efforts, the *Choice Communities* program is successfully increasing housing choices. The combination of enhanced resources, reduced regulations, targeted educational materials and one-on-one counseling has helped more HCV families either move into more prosperous areas or remain in those areas.

For more information contact: Jennifer Kelly, Project Manager, Rental Assistance Department, the San Diego Housing Commission at jennifek@sdhc.org.

**MTW Policy Focus on Self Sufficiency:
San Antonio Housing Authority's Innovative Approaches to
Increasing Self-Sufficiency through Partnerships**

The San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) is located in the nation's fifth largest growing city in the United States and like most heavily-populated and growing urban centers, SAHA operates to alleviate socioeconomic needs in San Antonio. The caveat to this challenge is today's uncertain economic climate. To combat this challenge, SAHA is able to use its Moving to Work (MTW) flexibility to develop innovative ways to increase self-sufficiency through partnerships during this economic downturn. Since 2009 SAHA has enhanced its collaboration with residents, stakeholders, service providers, businesses, schools and Section 3 contractors. These partnerships, along with matching grant funds and leveraged resources, allow SAHA to be on the cutting-edge of educational, job training and supportive services to assist Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher participants achieve self-sufficiency.

SAHA's educational partnership with Area Alamo Community Colleges (ACCD) and the Gateway to College program, offers youth in public housing communities the opportunity to obtain a high school diploma and a two-year associates degree. A partnership with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) for job-training and employment afforded 17 public housing and Section 8 residents the opportunity to gain work experience in highway construction. As a bonus, they were able to obtain a commercial driver's license that will make them more marketable in today's volatile employment market.

SAHA also established a partnership with the national Center for Disease Control (CDC)

Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW). This initiative promotes health and wellness programs to improve the quality of life of residents. SAHA is the only housing authority across the nation participating in this initiative, which targets city communities at reducing obesity rates. SAHA received funding to implement a Farmers' Market next to Hemisview Village, a downtown mixed-income community. The Farmers' Market will open on September 2, 2011. SAHA has also received funding for 1,000 bicycles to implement a "Ride to Own" program, as well as funding to build walking and bike trails at some of SAHA's Public Housing communities.

SAHA's collaborative efforts have also yielded programs such as Child Care Development training program. Ten residents received a Child Development Associates Degree in June 2011, and 14 more have started the second cohort. SAHA partnered with a Landscaping contractor to implement a Section 3 Pilot Landscaping, and has employed 4 Public Housing residents. Plans to expand the program SAHA wide are underway. A Medical Records Representative training job-training program has been implemented with the local community college, and has 20 public housing residents actively attending. SAHA has also partnered with Palo Alto College and Time Warner Cable (TWC) to implement a Cable Installer training program (7 residents have graduated and are now employed). Through its holistic case management approach, SAHA ensures public housing residents and Housing Choice Voucher participants attend classes and obtain certificates, on the job training and job search assistance with the ultimate goal of self-sufficiency.

During this first year of full MTW implementation, SAHA has received positive feedback from residents and has seen how working in partnership can have a positive impact in the lives of the families we serve. Working in collaboration with the many community partners has resulted in leveraged resources, thus reducing Agency costs associated with implementing the myriad of self-sufficiency initiatives. SAHA's MTW horizon has a bright future as we continue to focus alternate funding sources, as well as maintaining and expanding MTW self-sufficiency efforts.

For more information contact: Isaac Carreon Director Community Development Initiatives San Antonio Housing Authority at Isaac_Carreon@SAHA.org.

MTW Policy Focus on Cost Effectiveness: The Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino's Biennial Recertification Rent Reform Initiative

In March 2008, the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino (HACSB) was designated as a Moving to Work (MTW) agency. This designation came just after the agency had developed a comprehensive 30 year strategic plan which included eleven strategic goals. The strategic plan laid the foundation to meet our mission of empowering all individuals and families in need to achieve an enriched quality of life by providing housing opportunities and resources throughout San Bernardino County. The MTW statutory objectives aligned perfectly with the strategic goals and serve as a beacon to achieve our mission and vision. HACSB currently has twenty approved activities – ten to promote operational efficiency, seven to promote self-sufficiency and three to expand housing opportunities.

Biennial Recertifications was an activity approved in our Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 MTW Annual Plan. It allows us to conduct recertification's every two years for elderly and disabled

households instead of the current annual regulation. To be eligible for a biennial recertification, the household must have no other adult members or sources of earned income. The activity was implemented in both our Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) portfolio. HACSB has no limits on the number of interim recertifications processed annually and families were reminded that all changes need to be reported to HACSB within the timeframe specified.

The metrics for the activity were the total number of staff hours to complete recertifications and the actual number of families that were eligible for biennial recertifications. The eligible families were spread out over two years to balance the work load for our staff. The metrics for this activity are analyzed quarterly to ensure that the intended benchmarks are being met. Quarterly metrics measurements are a great mechanism to track activities and implement required changes if activities are not progressing as planned. We have also developed a quarterly metrics report that is shared with the activity owners and staff for recommendations and input.

At the end of the first year of implementation (October 1, 2010), the activity decreased staff hours by 195 hours in the Public Housing Program and 1,560 hours in the HCV program, equating to almost one full time staff person. An unanticipated impact was the relief expressed by our elderly and disabled families that were on a biennial schedule. The reporting requirements for the recertification were very cumbersome and the families were thankful to learn that the process would only occur once every two years.

In our FY 2012 MTW Plan, we propose to extend biennial recertifications to all families. This will allow us to conduct biennial recertifications for all families and individuals on the program regardless of sources of income. As with our initial activity, all changes in family composition, income, etc. are still required to be reported by the family within Administrative policy timeframes. With the amended activity, there continues to be no restrictions on the number of interim recertifications. Our time study revealed that the time spent conducting an interim is at least 25% less than an annual recertification. We anticipate that this activity will result in a savings of around 4,000 hours in the HCV Program and 700 hours in the Public Housing Program. The implementation of the activity will be spread over two years.

Activities like the biennial recertifications align with the MTW objective of reducing costs and achieving greater cost effectiveness in federal expenditures. The staff time saved will allow our agency to offset funding cuts as well as to focus on other aspects of the program like program integrity and in providing assistance for families to move towards becoming financially independent (self-sufficient). In 2010, due to hours saved from this activity and others, we were able to shift resources to develop a new Program Integrity Unit. The Program Integrity Unit provides training, education and prevention tools to maintain compliance in all aspects of housing programs. In 2011, we created a new agency division, Community Development Initiatives, which will aid in developing and promoting economic and social development opportunities within our communities. Our efforts renew our commitment to our vision of creating a world in which all people have a stable and enriched quality of life.

For more information contact: Suket Dayal, Planning & Policy Analyst, Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino, sdayal@hacsb.com.

MTW Updates

1. A revised version of Attachment B of the Standard MTW Agreement (Form 50900), inclusive of feedback from MTW Agencies was published in the Federal Register on May 16th, with comments due on July 15. HUD is currently reviewing the comments received and making additional revisions to the form. The 50900 is on track to be in place before the expiration of the current version at the end of CY 2011.
2. The 2011 Annual MTW Conference has been scheduled for September 20 – 21 in Washington, DC. The theme of the conference is “Doing More with less.” We are currently working on finalizing presenters for sessions, and will be reaching out to presenters and facilitators at the end of August to discuss session logistics and materials.
3. The MTW Office has drafted an initial methodology in order to accurately determine if MTW Agencies are continuing to serve the same number of families, as required by the MTW authorizing statute. The MTW Office is in the process of sharing the methodology and preliminary figures with each agency. The MTW Office will discuss the calculation with each MTW Agency via conference calls throughout August and September of 2011.
4. HUD has finalized the policy notice PIH-2011-45 (HA) to identify the parameters for MTW agencies when developing local, non-traditional uses of funds for activities outside of Sections 8 & 9. The Notice is not designed to create new guidelines, but is intended to restate and clarify what existing rules and regulations continue to apply to these activities. The notice is posted on the MTW website under MTW Policy Guidance.

Agency News

Baltimore Housing Receives Award for Public Housing Excellence

The Housing Authority of Baltimore City exceeds HUD's highest standard with a 99.7% occupancy rate

BALTIMORE, MD (July 29, 2011) — The Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) received the prestigious National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) Merit Award. HABC was honored for achieving a 99.7% occupancy rate. The average occupancy rate for the year was 98.9%, almost 1% greater than the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) highest standard. This year 33 properties, including some of the biggest family sites, had 100% occupancy. HABC was also recognized for its innovative efforts to reduce the response times for maintenance requests. The award was presented during NAHRO's National Conference in Louisville, KY.

“Achieving these accomplishments is remarkable given that our Housing Operations staff are also given the age of housing stock and chronic underfunding for capital improvements,” said Baltimore Housing Commissioner Paul T. Graziano. “Despite these obstacles, we have established a vision that includes providing the highest quality customer service possible with limited resources.”

Other achievements recognized by NAHRO include record-high rates of completion and timeliness for annual rent recertifications and high rent collection rates. The Agency now collects almost 50% more in rent than it did six years ago. HABC has drastically increased the percentage of recertification, rent collection and occupancy due to Sequel reporting, a type of quantitative analysis providing accurate and real time rates.