



# Choice Neighborhoods

e-news about transforming housing, people and neighborhoods

Issue 88 | January 2020

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **\$79 Million in Family Self-Sufficiency Funding**

On December 31, 2019 the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Ben Carson announced the award of more than \$79 million in Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Funding to nearly 700 public housing authorities (PHAs) across the country. These funds will help residents of public housing and voucher-assisted housing increase their earned income and reduce their dependency on public assistance and rental subsidies. The award amounts by PHA are provided [here](#).

## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

### **Funding for Out-of-School (OST) Time**

The New York Life Foundation will award \$1.35 million to a total of 26 OST programs nationwide serving youth through their *Aim High* local grant program. The [Aim High](#) program is part of the New York Life Foundation's ongoing investment in middle school OST programs to help eighth-graders reach ninth grade on time. The grant amounts will range between \$15,000 to \$100,000. The application period will close on Friday, January 24, 2020.

### **Housing Affordability Breakthrough Challenge**

Enterprise Community Partners and Wells Fargo have created a competitive grant program to spark innovation in three areas of housing affordability: housing construction, financing and resident services and support. They will award six grants of up to \$2 million each, that also include two years of technical assistance and the opportunity to work with a dedicated support team of Enterprise staff other industry leaders. It is a [three-stage competitive process](#), with the first-round RFP being released January 16, 2020 and award announcements July 31, 2020. A webinar about the grant is also available to learn more.

### **Funding for Equitable Creative Placemaking**

The Kresge Foundation Arts & Culture Program is accepting letters of inquiry for "[creative placemaking](#)" activities in neighborhoods and field building initiatives that position culture and creativity as drivers in communities. The proposed activities must align closely with the Kresge Program focus areas. Non-profits and governments are eligible to apply. Applications are due by January 31, 2020.

### **Creative Approaches to Healthier Neighborhoods Funding.**

The Kresge Foundation Arts & Culture Program is also currently accepting letter-of-intent applications to increase [creative capacity to shape healthier neighborhoods](#). This program area

works to advance creative approaches that empower residents to drive change and restore wellness in their neighborhoods. Requests that do not align with the Program's funding priorities are less likely to be funded. Non-profits and governments are eligible to apply. Applications are due by January 31, 2020.

## EVENTS AND TOOLS

### **Housing Affordability and Access Symposium Registration Opens**

NeighborWorks America has opened registration for its upcoming [symposium](#) for community development organizations, cities and counties, lenders, and other affordable housing partners. The symposium is May 20, 2020 in Los Angeles (CA). It will take place during the NeighborWorks America Training Institute from May 18-22.

### **Tools and Resources for Building State Medicaid-Housing Agency Partnerships**

Last year, the Medicaid Innovation Accelerator Program (IAP) hosted a [webinar](#) entitled Tools and Resources for Building State Medicaid-Housing Agency Partnerships. The IAP State Medicaid-Housing Agency Partnerships Toolkit is designed to assist states as they consider systems-level changes that further community integration, including the intersection between health care and housing. This toolkit is based on the tools used to provide program support to 16 states that participated in the IAP State Medicaid-Housing Agency Partnerships Tracks between 2016 and 2018.

## RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

### **Jobs Plus Pilot Program Implementation Experiences Report**

HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) just published a [report](#) on the on-going implementation experiences of public housing residents and authorities participating in the Jobs Plus Pilot Program. The study documents the lessons learned and challenges experienced by the nine FY15 funded participating PHAs. It also describes the activities and partnerships that the grantees undertook in the implementation of the program and how they overcame some of the problems encountered.

### **The Geography of Mixed-Income Neighborhoods**

An [essay](#), entitled, *What Works to Promote Inclusive, Equitable Mixed-Income Communities*, contained analysis of the demographic, economic and policy dynamics that create "naturally occurring" mixed-income neighborhoods. This analysis is an attempt to offer possible solutions and policies to foster more mixed-income neighborhoods through the U.S. The essay is part of the What Works series compiled by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco.

### **Evaluation of the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD): Final Report**

HUD published The Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) Final Report on October 22, 2019. The evaluation analyzed the impact of the program on the preservation and improvement of public housing, the amount of private investment and leveraging and the effect on tenants. It documented that as of October 2018, 100,000 units of public housing have been converted, \$12.6 billion of financing has been raised and more than 80% of tenants remained in the property and expressed satisfaction with their units and the conversion. The report can be downloaded [here](#).

## **The Rent Reform Demonstration Interim Report**

HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) just published [interim findings](#) on the Rent Reform Demonstration. This demonstration is designed to test an alternative to the current rent-setting system for families using housing choice vouchers (HCV). It is testing a different rent system to determine if it better incentivizes employment and reduces the complexity and burden (and, thus, the cost) of administering the rent policy, while not causing unnecessary hardship for HCV households. The demonstration began in 2015 in four Moving-to-Work PHAs: District of Columbia Housing Authority, Lexington Housing Authority, Louisville Metropolitan Housing Authority, and San Antonio Housing Authority.

## **Equity Counts: Tracking Opportunity Youth Outcomes**

Equity Counts is a new project of the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions Opportunity Youth that began in 2018. As a result of the Equity Counts Data Collection Pilot from which they developed four community-level OYF Common Measures, the OYF developed a [guide](#) that can be used by other communities. The measures described in this guide are a new way of segmenting the opportunity youth population based on their progress in attaining a high school degree, a postsecondary credential, and getting a job.

## **GRANTEES IN THE NEWS**

### **Louisville Keeps CN Program Activities in the Spotlight**

Louisville has added four [murals](#) to a Russell neighborhood railroad overpass, as part of a Choice Neighborhoods funded beautification project. The murals focus on local figures and neighborhood history. The Russell neighborhood and other CN funded activities are part of an on-going series on [Matter of Fact with Soledad O'Brien](#), looking at their unique neighborhood revitalization approach for and from within the neighborhood. This episode focuses on the Sponsor4Success partner that is helping to renovation existing homes for rent and ultimately sale to local residents.

### **Philadelphia Housing Authority Highlights Choice Neighborhoods' Success**

On December 30, 2019, the PHA published a summary of [notable achievements](#) on its website, including a summary of recognition granted to the Norris Apartments Phase II project, part of the Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Plan in the North Central neighborhood. The project received awards from: the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO); the Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Redevelopment Agencies (PAHRA); 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania; and, the Pennsylvania Apartment Association which recognized Plymouth Hall and Queen Lane Apartments for Maintenance Excellence in their "Best in Apartment Living" awards.

## **SPOTLIGHT**

### **Neighborhood-Based Approach to Increase Income in San Francisco**

The San Francisco Housing Authority received \$30.6 million in Choice Neighborhoods Planning and Implementation Grants in 2010 for the Alice Griffith Public Housing Development located in the Bayview area. At the completion of the redevelopment, a total of 1,210 units will be constructed, which will maintain the 256 units of previous public housing plus an additional of 248 affordable apartments units, 367 market rent units, 42 inclusionary units, and 237 workforce units.

The Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan included a robust supportive services strategy dedicated to improvements in employment, income, and health outcomes. Through the Choice Neighborhoods (CN) Team's People strategies, the number of public housing residents who were employed increased by nearly 30 percentage points and average household income doubled from \$12,196 to \$24,464. The workforce development strategy was based on best practices developed by Urban Strategies, Inc., the People Lead partner, and its experience in other CN cities around the country. The strategy used intensive job skills training, locally hired mentors, case managers, and outreach coordinators, and wrap around health, mobility, and family supportive services.

Isaac Dozier, the former Urban Strategies team lead and now the Director of Community Development for the City of Fort Myers, Florida, credits the success of the CN Team to an emphasis on "intentionality," which he defines as embracing the needs of residents and "reaching them where they were." The following spotlights outlines some of the key elements of this intentional strategy to meet resident needs.

### **Set clear goals and track progress**

The team began by setting specific measurable goals for the program. Target goals were set not only around the number of residents employed and in training, but also targets for increased income. Once these targets were set, the People Team monitored and reported them out regularly and adjusted strategies as necessary. These regular evaluations help the team redirect programming when needed. Dozier stressed "the importance of always keeping your eye on your report card."

### **Hire and train supportive services staff from the community**

Urban Strategies, Inc. also focused, where possible, on hiring their staff from the neighborhood. Hiring staff from the neighborhood enabled the People Lead to "place-base" their approaches, focus the programming directly to the needs of the individuals and the neighborhood, and establish the trust needed for a population that was highly distrustful of the government and outsiders. Recognizing that these local mentors, case managers, and outreach coordinators might not be entirely equipped for the position, the CN Team put in place a comprehensive leadership development training curriculum, which included public speaking, conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques, critical thinking, and strategic planning. This training, combined with a micro-understanding of the community, was crucial to the success of the program.

### **Multi-pronged approach to "meet people where they are"**

The CN Team and partners tackled economic mobility by acknowledging that each resident would need multiple points of entry into the job market to ensure employability in the following industries: hospitality, transportation, information technology, health, and construction. To grow a skilled workforce in the community, they provided each resident with a case manager to create a development plan that included support with job searches and referrals to job training programs.

The job readiness program took into account that some of the key barriers to employment for the resident/neighborhood population included: Mental health; Lack of employment soft skills; Cultural biases of both potential employees as well as employers; Understanding the skill needs of the job versus those needed to get the job; Criminal records; and Childcare.

### **Acknowledge and address trauma**

The team worked closely with the San Francisco Department of Public Health (DPH) to place a Family Services Center at each site and to assign a DPH Coordinator for each site. An earlier study by the city's Department of Human Services had already identified that one of the key barriers to employment for the target population was caused by trauma. Daily exposure to the stresses of poverty, violence, crime, and drug abuse in turn depleted social trust, caused

cognitive overload, and generated a sense of hopelessness. It was then determined that the typical case management and counseling supplied at local Family Service Centers was insufficient to address the social and psychological needs of this population. The key to residents' long-term success was the need for intensive mental health services and trained community-based mentors to educate potential employees and build trust with residents.

### **Educate employers on cultural competency**

On the flip side, the CN Team worked to help bridge the cultural divide by helping employers understand the world from where residents and potential employees were coming from, by changing perceptions based on appearance and language. The team also worked directly with employers to better assess the skill needs in the position rather than the skills needed to apply to the position, i.e. the need to read at a fourth-grade level to complete an application is not necessarily required to handle baggage at the airport or drive a forklift at a warehouse.

### **Reconcile prior offenses to open doors**

Using Clean Slate, a program of the San Francisco Public Defender's Office, the CN staff helped residents clear up their criminal records, obtain driver's licenses, and enable residents to overcome some of the screening barriers experienced when companies conduct criminal background checks. Many city agencies were already comfortable with the Mayor's mandate of hiring and supporting the target populations and therefore loosened hiring restrictions based on criminal history. In addition, property manager/development partner McCormack Baron Salazar established the Alice Griffith Beautification Job Training Program for residents with criminal backgrounds to teach job readiness and soft skills, practice job readiness in a supportive and safe environment, establish an actual job reference, and complete beautification tasks around the property.

### **City and Workforce Development Board alignment and coordination**

The city's Office of Economic and Workforce Development was instrumental in connecting residents with the construction industry and the San Francisco International Airport through brokered agreements with the city. The Mayor set a mandate and goals for specific local hiring and employment of public housing residents/vulnerable populations of the city, which helped open access to these and other employers across the city. Urban Strategies, Inc. sought philanthropic contributions to help pay union membership fees for 24 residents who completed job training programs but found those fees prohibitive to their ability to compete for the better paying union jobs. Urban Strategies, Inc. also made use of other policy approaches to addressing barriers to employment by working with the City of San Francisco to expand the application of Section 3 of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 beyond direct employment of residents by the housing authority to include other employers and city agencies. These workforce development strategies culminated in the enrollment of 647 Alice Griffith residents in training and employment of 422 between 2012 and 2018.

### **Plan and prepare for the benefits cliff**

For residents who reached higher incomes and therefore were no longer eligible for assistance, case managers provided lists of local food banks and personal finance education to help them sustain that higher level of income while losing access to certain programs. In addition, the housing authority established an income disregard of 18 months to allow residents to phase in changes of income and its impact on other available services. Each site also supports a childcare center for residents of the development and the neighborhood, thereby providing easy access to affordable childcare.

### **Youth development partnerships**

While the CN Team worked closely with the adult population of the Alice Griffith neighborhood, another side of the People Team worked closely with the youth population to begin job training from an early age and to focus on the family as a unit. The San Francisco Unified School District's Board of Education had similar mandates to that of the Mayor regarding a focus on public housing residents and the city's most vulnerable populations. The principals of neighborhood schools work closely with the families and children as well as with the CN Team case managers, jointly identifying resources needed for the children to thrive in school and emerge more job ready. This community- and family-based approach has resulted in a total of 62 percent of residents involved in the local parent teacher association or other school support organizations, and 82 percent of youth residents involved in positive youth development activities. In addition, all neighborhood schools have seen at least a 50-percent decrease in out-of-school suspensions, which tend to disproportionately affect boys of color.

### **Sustainability beyond Choice Neighborhoods**

The Alice Griffith Choice project benefited from the commitment of former Mayors Newsome and Lee and their personal and civic commitment to public housing and its residents, as well as a strong job market and longstanding policies toward local hiring. A preexisting system of institutionalized interdepartmental coordination provided a strong foundation upon which the CN Team could establish greater coordination and more enriched and targeted service delivery. The coordination functioned at two levels. Department heads provided strategic direction and established systemic linkages, while the deputy department level oversaw the more day-to-day ground-level service coordination. In this way, the CN project could weather future changes in mayors and department heads with limited impact on operational coordination.

The recently retired Executive Director of the San Francisco Housing Authority said, "The most remarkable outcome from the Choice Neighborhoods grant is that it presented an opportunity for all the city agencies that serve our City's most vulnerable populations to come together and create a collaboration that will continue on into the future for this community and act as a model for other communities to come."

[Previous Newsletters](#)

[Subscribe](#)