

United States Department of Housing and Urban Development

Moving to Work Demonstration Program

Promising Practices Report for

SAN ANTONIO HOUSING AUTHORITY (SAHA)

June 2008

INTRODUCTION

The San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) joined the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Moving to Work (MTW) Demonstration Program in September of 1999. The SAHA MTW program focuses on the goals of increasing the share of residents that work, increasing resident self-sufficiency, and achieving a greater income mix amongst its residents.

SAHA is located in San Antonio, Texas with a population of 1,202,223, as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2005. The major industries providing employment opportunities include construction, manufacturing, and healthcare and social services.

SAHA currently owns and manages 6,371 Public Housing units and 11,796 Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV). The scope of the MTW program encompasses three of SAHA's Public Housing Developments. The program is designed to emphasize the self-improvement and advancement of the 660 families living in these developments. The MTW Public Housing program at SAHA is offered as an option for applicants when they are offered housing. All residents that choose to live at the designated MTW Sites - Lincoln Courts, Wheatley Courts, or Mission Park Apartments - must participate in the MTW program. For these three Public Housing developments, the SAHA focus is to help residents by:

- developing a graduated rent policy for public housing;
- providing comprehensive resident supportive services;
- implementing income disregards to encourage self-sufficiency;

The San Antonio Housing Authority, like many housing authorities, faces the challenge of an expensive housing market with limited affordable housing units available. Therefore, one major objective of SAHA is to help residents maintain employment and move towards self-sufficiency in the private market.

This report reviews SAHA's MTW program outcomes to date and discusses the agency's progress towards meeting the MTW program objectives. The report is based on interviews with housing authority staff and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) MTW coordinators. It also draws on reports and data on MTW participants collected by SAHA, HUD, Optimal Solutions Group, LLC and Abt. Associates Inc. over the course of the demonstration.

The following report is organized to correspond to the broad goals of the Moving to Work Demonstration Program: (1) providing work incentives to encourage resident self-sufficiency (2) implementing administrative simplicity and program cost reduction (3) increasing housing choice and homeownership. Many of the SAHA MTW program components fall under multiple goals, but will be highlighted in the most relevant section.

SELF SUFFICIENCY INITIATIVES

For residents choosing to live in Lincoln Heights, Mission Park, or Wheatley Courts, participation in the MTW program is mandatory. Before moving into one of these housing sites, families are to sign the *Resident Contract of Participation*, which is enforced by a SAHA Family

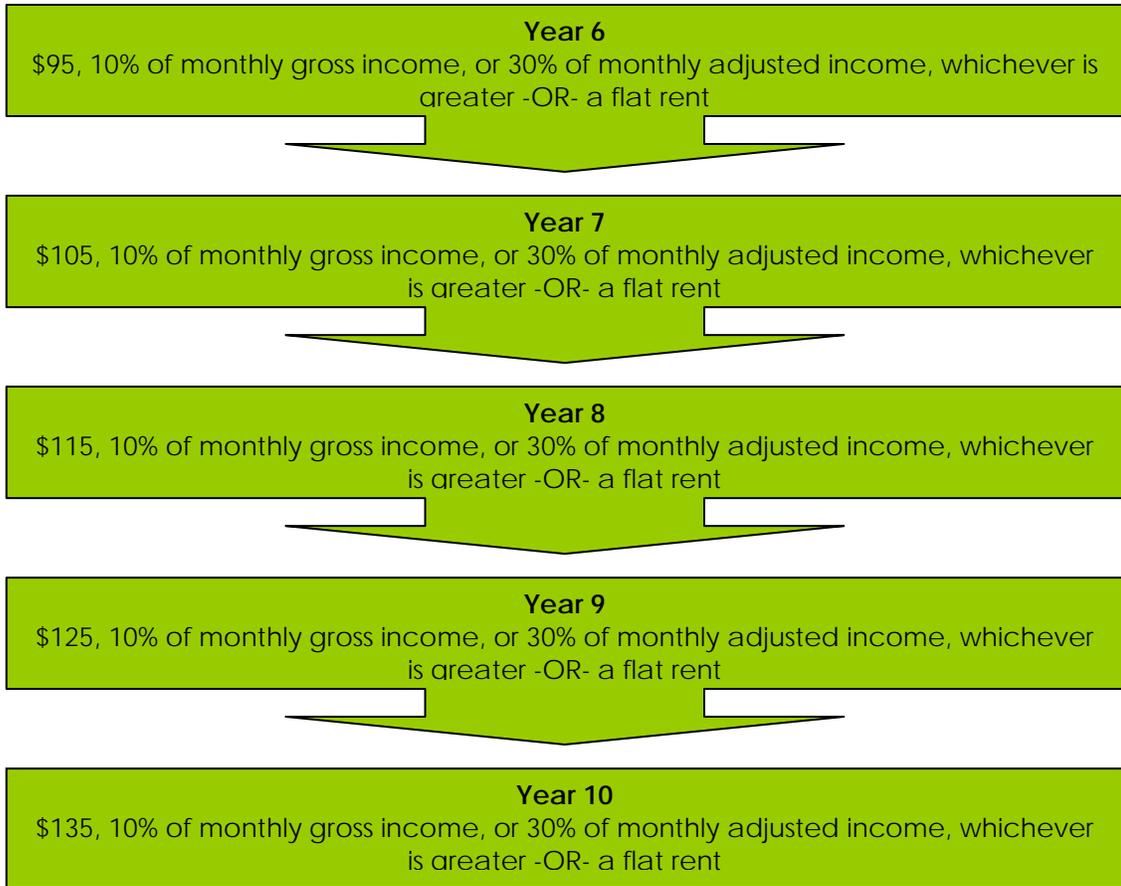
Self-Sufficiency (FSS) coordinator. This contract is valid for up to five years, and MTW families have the option of signing on to an additional five year contract if desired.

MTW Rent Policy

SAHA utilized its MTW flexibilities to create a graduated rent policy that addresses the differing needs of its Public Housing residents. Such a policy is not allowed for non-MTW agencies. The long term implementation of this policy depends on the length of time SAHA remains in MTW. As shown in **Figure A**, all MTW participant rents anticipate continuing through the year 2010.

Figure A: MTW Program Rent Calculation





Child-Care Allowance

In order to encourage family members in the MTW program to pursue an education, employment, or job training, SAHA has implemented an additional annual child-care allowance of \$480 per minor child (under 13 years old). This allowance is in addition to the allowable child-care expense deduction permitted under standard HUD regulations.

Hardship Provision

Families experiencing financial hardships as a result of serious physical injury of a family member or the death of a family member may apply for the hardship provision with SAHA. If approved, families are eligible to pay rent in the amount of the family's monthly rent payment established in the first year of the MTW program. The hardship rent payment schedule may be maintained for no more than a year.

INITIATIVES TO INCREASE ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY

As part of the MTW program, SAHA has altered regular HUD rent calculation provisions to increase administrative efficiency. These changes have been made based on responses from the residents and site administrator observations on the financial situation of tenants.

Income Disregards

SAHA's MTW program adjusts tenant rent on an annual basis, in accordance with HUD regulations. However, there have been numerous deductions that SAHA added utilizing its MTW flexibilities. For the three MTW Public Housing developments, the following sources of income increase will be disregarded in making rent determinations:

- interest income from bank assets, such as checking and savings accounts and CD investments;
- income of resident, whether dependent or head of household, aged 19-25, enrolled in a minimum of six college hours or its equivalent in an institution of higher learning; and
- income of family members who become employed after having been unemployed for a period of three months will have their earned income excluded from the rent determination up to 18 months after the date of initial employment.

Lessons Learned: SAHA has realized that a vast majority of its tenants in the three MTW Public Housing sites do not have massive bank assets and investments. SAHA has discovered from past experience that the cost of having to calculate and verify bank assets far exceeds the benefit to the housing authority of having information about such small amounts of bank assets.

Promising Practices: SAHA staff has found that the income deduction for residents enrolled in higher learning programs has been very effective in removing a disincentive for pursuing educational goals rather than immediate employment. Many Public Housing tenants have taken advantage of local education and training programs to increase their chances for permanent employment. Due to the success of this program, SAHA is considering expanding this program to include residents outside of the 19-25 age range.

HOUSING CHOICE AND HOMEOWNERSHIP INITIATIVES

Upon completion of the five year MTW program at Lincoln Heights, Mission Park, or Wheatley Courts, families have several unique housing opportunities offered to them. SAHA grants families that have participated in the MTW program an admission preference into the HCV Program, and the Lease-Purchase Program.

Housing Choice Voucher Program Preference

MTW Public Housing residents that have achieved their program goals and complied with the MTW Resident Contract of Participation terms will be granted preference for the issuance of a HCV, provided they have:

- demonstrated a good rent-paying record;
- had no lease violations of a serious nature; and

- kept their children in school.

MTW program participants wishing to apply for the HCV Program may apply at any time (providing the HCV Waiting List is open). When the family is offered a HCV, they must provide information to document their participation in the MTW Program. Thereafter, families will meet with their MTW FSS coordinator to assess their progress in the MTW program and develop a plan to move to a HCV unit.

Homeownership Program Preference

MTW Public Housing residents that have achieved their program goals and complied with the MTW Resident Contract of Participation also can be granted preference for SAHA's Homeownership Lease-Purchase Program. This program provides families with homeownership assistance and counseling at no cost to the family.

When a MTW family applies for and is accepted into the Homeownership Lease-Purchase Program, they are required to meet with their MTW FSS coordinator to assess their progress in the MTW program and develop a plan to move towards homeownership. In addition, these families must also meet the education, income, and credit score requirements of the homeownership program.