



Moving to Work (MTW) Newsletter

Increasing Cost Efficiency, Self-Sufficiency and Housing Choice

Volume 1, Issue 2

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From the MTW Director's Desk

This summer issue continues the discussion about how MTW agencies are developing creative approaches to providing services to residents in order to encourage self-sufficiency. Home Forward (formerly the Housing Authority of Portland) describes how the agency's 10-year Plan to End Homelessness is fulfilling the MTW statutory objective of providing housing choice. In conjunction with a team of service providers, this is accomplished through a comprehensive approach which includes providing for basic needs, support services and housing at Bud Clark Commons for vulnerable populations who are experiencing homelessness. Also in this issue, the Vancouver Housing Authority explains how they are using community involvement as a bridge to success for residents through their Community Involvement and Employment Program, through which participants are provided listings of community service opportunities and educational courses. The agency has put substantial effort into partnering with local service agencies and non-profits to find volunteer opportunities, educational courses and job leads for residents.

Both of these articles highlight the ways in which partnerships between MTW agencies and local non-profits enable these agencies to provide an increased level of services for their residents to improve their lives. We would like to thank Home Forward and the Vancouver Housing Authority 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.

Sincerely,

Ivan Pour
Director, MTW Demonstration Program

MTW Agency Spotlight: Home Forward's Bud Clark Commons and the Plan to End Homelessness

The Bud Clark Commons is at the heart of Portland's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness by helping people experiencing homelessness to move towards stability. An innovative partnership between the Portland Housing Bureau, Home Forward (the new name for the Housing Authority of Portland), Transition Projects, Inc., and Multnomah County, the Commons provides resources, shelter, housing placement services and apartments for the most vulnerable people living on Portland's streets.

Housed in an eight-story building located between the city's Old Town Chinatown and upscale Pearl District neighborhoods, the Commons brings together — for the first time— services and providers, and short-term and long-term housing in one location. The result is a one-stop center to help folks who are homeless stabilize their lives and if possible, move towards self-sufficiency. The innovative program includes a day center providing restrooms, showers, and a place to store belongings safely, along with resources that include help in finding housing, employment, and mental health and drug counseling. Located above the day center are men's transitional housing and 130 permanent supportive housing apartments.

Home Forward developed the \$47 million project and manages the eight-story, 106,000 square foot building and apartments. Transition Projects, the largest provider of shelter and care for homeless single adults in Portland, manages the shelter and day center. Opened on June 2, the center is named for a former Portland mayor who forged the city's first plan to address homelessness more than 25 years ago. To encourage and support people in the move from the streets to housing, the Commons addresses:

- **Basic Needs:** The day center offers a place for homeless people to go during the day and offers resources to address their basic survival needs. Services available include resource information, ID assistance, birth certificate assistance, mass transit tickets, food boxes, hygiene items, long distance calls, access to case management and shelter waitlists, lockers, showers, clothing rooms, laundry facilities, mail and message service, telephones, internet/computer stations, and bicycle parking. A courtyard provides a safe place for people to be off the streets with a pet area for dogs. A 90-bed men's transitional shelter provides sleeping, living and dining areas, as well as a commercial kitchen for dinner preparation by community volunteers, restrooms, and laundry facilities.
- **Support:** For people ready to move beyond basic needs, community partners provide case management, housing assistance, addiction and mental health support, and a learning center for job and housing searches.
- **Housing:** 130 studio apartments provide housing for very low-income residents, combined with on-site services to help residents be successful in their housing. Operating subsidies include an allocation of public housing units and project-based Section 8 vouchers.

The project accomplishes one of HUD's primary MTW goals: Increase housing choices for low-income families. Residents in the apartment units are people experiencing homelessness who were especially vulnerable on the streets and had few, if any, viable housing options.

Nearly all of them have medical issues. In order to serve this population deemed especially at-risk, Home Forward needed to establish low-intake barriers and used its MTW authority to adjust its public housing and Section 8 screening criteria. Chronically homeless people often have to overcome multiple social, psychological and economic barriers before they can make the transition to housing. Home forward expects to address most of those barriers in this building.

Home Forward is using a “Housing First” model for these apartment units, which makes this project dramatically different from most of its other housing communities. One challenge for Home Forward is that some residents may be in recovery and some may not, although the overall goal is to decrease or eliminate substance abuse for all. While the agency acknowledges risk with this model, Home Forward believes that without this flexibility, many of the residents would soon be back on the street. Staff makes it clear to tenants that the use or sale of illegal drugs in the building’s shared spaces will not be tolerated. Residents are required to adhere to the property’s rules of behavior, and their leases allow monthly inspections. To ensure that all residents are safe, and the success of the building is not endangered, Home Forward is using a combination of its own staff and additional contracted-staff on site to provide services, case management, security and supervision.

To identify potential residents, Home Forward worked with area community health clinics that implemented a Vulnerability Assessment Tool developed by the Downtown Emergency Service Center in Seattle, Wash. This tool was used to evaluate the relative vulnerability of people who are homeless by administering a Vulnerability Index test. The people who scored the highest — or who are determined to be the most vulnerable — were the first to be offered apartments in the building.

Operating subsidies for the apartment units include a combination of public housing and Section 8 funding. Home Forward’s recent MTW plan outlined the development of a local-blended subsidy, which brings together Section 8 and public housing subsidies into a single fund to increase housing choices and provide service-enriched housing in mixed finance properties. Over the long term, the units in the Commons will revert to public housing units under this new funding model.

The Bud Clark Commons is offering people with no other options an opportunity for change. While the project has only recently opened to serve Portland’s homeless population, the concept is many years in the making and involves the participation and cooperation of many agency partners. Success will be measured by a resident’s ability to maintain housing, find stability, tap resources to help them meet their needs and achieve an overall improvement in their quality of life.

For more information contact: Betty Dominguez, Home Forward’s Program Director, Policy & Planning at BettyD@hapdx.org.



MTW Policy Focus: Vancouver Housing Authority's Approach to Community Involvement

Have you ever considered community involvement as a bridge to success for your residents? Bridges are great ways to overcome barriers and span gaps and the Vancouver Housing Authority (VHA) in Vancouver, Washington, is using community involvement and community service to do just that. Community service is being used to overcome the barriers of joblessness, lack of education, lack of experience, and a lack of vision about what could become possible for one's self.

The VHA has taken the HUD community service requirement for Low-Rent Public Housing residents, expanded on it, and using their MTW authority, made it a requirement for all workable residents in both Low-Rent Public Housing and the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program. Under the program, called the Community Involvement and Employment Program, all residents of Section 8 and Low-Rent Public Housing over the age of 18 and under the age 65 who are able to work, but are not working at least 25 hours per week, are required to perform at least 8 hours of community service per month. Educational pursuits also count; in fact, several residents are meeting their community service requirement by going to school, getting a G.E.D., or participating in no- or low-cost classes at Clark College, the local community college.

In planning the program, VHA Executive Director Roy A. Johnson and his staff felt that there is much to recommend community service: it helps get people involved in their communities rather than keeping to themselves, it helps residents see and experience a wider range of activities, gives them a chance to try new tasks and job responsibilities, and in some cases, gain job experience. For many residents, it is an opportunity to make discoveries about themselves and new interests. One gentleman faced with finding a way to perform his community service decided to volunteer to help with the elderly at an assisted living facility. He is from Vietnam and does not get to see his mother. He thought this would be a good way to serve people his mother's age. He became very interested in working with the elderly and decided to pursue training. He joined the VHA's Section 8 Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program and began training courses in care for the elderly as part of his success plan. He has since gotten a job in elder care. His wife is studying to become a Registered Nurse. After one year in the program, they have \$4,000 in escrow.

VHA leadership believes that if they are going to create requirements for residents, it is also important to provide the residents with the tools and resources to be successful in meeting the requirements. The Community Involvement program provides listings of community service opportunities and educational courses available to participants in the program. The program manager, Bridgette Fahnbulleh, spends quite a bit of her time meeting with partner agencies and area nonprofits to find volunteer opportunities, educational resources, and leads for jobs. One example is a partnership with the Northwest College of Construction (NWCC) which offers construction and traffic flagger training for Community Involvement program participants, and as a result, provides job opportunities. Just a few weeks ago, Ms. Fahnbulleh coordinated a job fair with the FSS program that was attended by 25 clients. Clients attending the fair received résumé counseling and information about road construction jobs that soon would be available in the area.

Ms. Fahnbulleh says that one of the secrets to making the program work is maintaining good communication channels with clients. She uses several communications tools, including letters, e-mails, newsletters, and phone broadcasts to keep in touch with the broader group of

clients. Tracking client progress is also important, not only to keep track of hours of community service performed, but also to track the types of volunteer opportunities and job possibilities that would interest a particular client. When opportunities matching those interests are available, clients receive a postcard alerting them to the opportunities. The Community Involvement program has 1,200 participants, more than Ms. Fahnbulleh can track alone. Eligibility specialists note work-able individuals during eligibility reviews and enter the information in the VHA database. Community Involvement pulls reports from the database to find those who must begin reporting community service. The VHA requires quarterly reporting and supplies reporting forms in the quarterly *Community Involvement and Education Program Newsletter*. To assist Ms. Fahnbulleh with recording time worked and sending reminders to those who have missed reporting deadlines, the VHA has hired an assistant for the program, a position that provides opportunities itself. The CIEP Assistant position is filled from among the list of program participants. It is a six-month paid position that gives a qualified individual valuable job experience.

While the program is running well, there have been a few challenges. One is helping new participants understand and meet the requirements, especially if there are language barriers. Vancouver has a large Russian-speaking community. It has taken some work, but the Community Involvement staff is finding opportunities within the language-specific communities. Effective, especially for the Russian-speaking community, are community service opportunities in their church communities. Transportation to volunteer sites is one challenge mentioned by some participants, especially with gas prices so high. Another challenge, almost humorous at times, is the occasional irate call from someone who has received a notice that they must participate in the program. The conversation usually starts something like this: "How do you expect me to do community service? I'm already helping out at my children's schools two days a week, where will I find the time!" It is always good news for them to learn that they are already providing community service; all they have to do is track it. The VHA has discovered that a number of individuals are already involved in activities that qualify, from helping with a community garden, to helping an elderly neighbor, or volunteering at a church or school. While the requirement is for eight hours of community service, the majority of participants are doing much more. Ms. Fahnbulleh related one anecdote, which she said with a smile, might indicate a health benefit to volunteering. "At one event a lady was questioning the need to volunteer when a man spoke up and said, 'I have found that not only do I enjoy volunteering, but I found volunteering has helped my depression.'"

Could this program be replicated at your housing authority? According to Ms. Fahnbulleh, most definitely: "Good relationships with the eligibility specialists in Section 8 and Public Housing, an efficient database for tracking clients, and keep the communications with clients going," she says, "that's what keeps people familiar with the program." The number of community service hours per capita indicates that people are finding the Community Involvement program to be a valuable experience for them, not to mention individuals who find employment or better employment as a result of their volunteer experiences. Another consideration is the thousands of valuable hours each month that are contributed to elderly care facilities, next door neighbors, schools, community gardens, churches, nonprofit organizations, and countless other places where these individuals are volunteering their time. All bridges to the community; all bringing residents closer to their communities, and hopefully, closer to their personal success.

For more information contact: Steve Towell, Community Relations Program Manager at stowell@vhausa.com.

MTW Updates

- Attachment B of the Standard MTW Agreement (Form 50900), which contains the reporting requirements for Annual MTW Plans and Reports, will expire in December 2011. The MTW Office circulated a draft of the revised 50900, inclusive of feedback from a working group of MTW agencies, to all MTW agencies for review in March 2011. Thank you to all agencies that submitted comments on the March draft to HUD. The revised Form 50900 was published in the Federal Register on May 16th, with comments due on **July 15**. This timeline will ensure that the revised Form 50900 is on track to be in place before the expiration of the current version at the end of CY2011.
- The final FY2011 Full-Year Continuing Resolution provided that language in the FY2010 Appropriations Bill be carried over for the remainder of the fiscal year. This includes the same language permitting the addition of three more MTW agencies to the demonstration. HUD is planning to conduct a FY2011 competition to fill the three slots made available in 2011 as well as the one slot remaining from 2010.
- The 2011 Annual MTW Conference has been scheduled for September 20 – 21 in Washington, DC. The theme of this year’s conference will be “Doing More with Less” – providing both the MTW agencies and HUD the opportunity to share ideas about developing innovative approaches to serving more families in a difficult budgetary climate. Details regarding registration, location, and number of guests per agency were included in a June 22 email to all MTW agencies, and conference registration is open until August 19.

Agency News

Name Change Embodies Home Forward’s Mission – After 70 years as the largest provider of affordable housing in Oregon, the Housing Authority of Portland found it had outgrown its name. No longer an accurate reflection of the geography it serves, nor an accurate reflection of its mission, the name had become confusing to many in the community. The agency’s new name and identity represent the goals it has always championed – shelter and support for neighbors in need. By providing stability and opportunity through housing, Home Forward enables individuals to move forward in life. The Board of Commissioners adopted the new name to help to strengthen existing partnerships, develop new relationships, and connect with the community in a more meaningful way. For more information on the name change, visit www.homeforward.org.

San Mateo Wins NAHRO Award – The Housing Authority of the County of San Mateo (HACSM) will receive a Merit Award for its innovative Tiered Subsidy Table MTW rent reform from the National Association of Housing Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) in late July. NAHRO Merit Awards give national recognition to innovative housing and community development projects, programs, and services provided by NAHRO agency members throughout the country; provide additional opportunities to inform the public of the best in housing and community development; and create a resource bank of information on significant innovative activities performed by housing and redevelopment agencies and community development departments. Congratulations to HACSM!