

**Public Housing in the Public Interest  
Examining the Chicago Housing Authority's  
Relocation Efforts  
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MPC Fact Sheet #3**

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## Introduction

The terrorist attack that shook our country on Sept. 11, 2001 continues to resonate on many levels. Neighbors look to each other for strength and reassurance, gathering around the television for news, or the kitchen table for some semblance of safety and normalcy. As the Chicago Housing Authority continues its dramatic transformation in the midst of our nation's new struggle, we learn anew the value of a stable home base. Our challenge now is to help CHA residents achieve that stability.

"We all know the stresses and strains related to moving from one home to another, but I can't overstate the impact of forced relocation on a family's future," said residents' attorney Richard Wheelock. "Due to the renovation or demolition of their current apartments, the Transformation Plan requires existing CHA households to face many tough decisions, including where they will move either permanently or temporarily. And each of these decisions requires an understanding of an array of consequences and responsibilities."

By 2010, each of CHA's 25,000 households will have moved at least once. No more than 6,000 households are expected to make temporary or permanent moves into the private rental market by 2007 using Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs). The timeline for these moves has been fluid, even changing substantially between Sept. 1, 2001, when the CHA's Year 3 Plan – Draft for Public Comment was released, and Oct. 16, 2001, when the final Year 3 publication was released. This final Year 3 plan stated that 806 families would relocate into the private rental market in 2001, and 1,858 families would relocate into the private rental market in 2002. Another 606 families were expected to make permanent moves into new or rehabbed CHA units. Additionally, 550 seniors moved into rehabilitated apartments in 2001, and 3,976 seniors are scheduled to move into rehabbed units in 2002. Even since the publication of the Year 3 plan, these numbers have shifted. Senior CHA staff now estimate that 1,389 families will move into the private rental market in 2002.

On one hand, the fluidity of the relocation process and the variance of these numbers cause concern. Is the timetable for the Transformation Plan already behind schedule? Is the data reliable? On the other hand, it is clear that the CHA appropriately slowed the process of moving families while developing the needed infrastructure for support services and monitoring programs. Still, previously published relocation data is under question by senior CHA staff now developing tracking procedures.

"We've been aware of the need for coordinated relocation activities for years," points out Al Polikoff of Business and Professional People in the Public Interest (BPI), "yet we still lack the basic information needed to understand how the relocation process is progressing incrementally, where people are going, and with what level of information and support they are getting there." MPC's research has shown that current CHA tracking systems make it very difficult to answer these most basic questions.



Here are a few telling **facts about CHA's relocation process and progress**, all of which will be explored in this fact sheet:

- Since the advent of the Transformation Plan in fall 1999 through the first quarter of 2001, 801 households have been relocated – 491 using the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) in the private rental market and 310 moving to other public housing units.<sup>2</sup>
- More households moved into the private rental market using HCVs before the Transformation Plan than have moved since. Prior to Oct. 1, 1999, approximately 1,300 families not covered under the Relocation Contract (see pages 5-7) moved out of CHA units using HCVs. Between Oct. 1, 1999 and Dec. 31, 2001, 1,091 households relocated into the private rental market using HCVs. Each of these households benefited from the Transformation Plan's Relocation Contract, which guarantees the Right of Return to redeveloped public housing for all lease compliant residents as of October of 1999. It also guarantees counseling and support services through outside providers.
- Of the 2,384 relocatees who leased housing in the private rental market, all of whom came from CHA properties in high poverty areas, 26.6 percent (or 634) have chosen to move to low poverty or "opportunity" areas. Among the HCV population at large (only 9.4 percent of whom are former CHA residents), 39 percent selected apartments in low poverty areas.
- CHA's current goal for 2002 is to relocate 1,358 families from buildings that are being consolidated or demolished. The Plan further calls for 3,976 seniors to be relocated into rehabilitated apartments. This number of families is slightly fewer than CHA's original Year 3 projections, which estimated that 791 families would move to the private rental market using HCVs (with an additional 200 families moving into the private market due to administrative emergencies), 527 to other public housing, 340 to scattered site units and 606 to new or rehabbed units.

While plans are underway to launch a new system in 2002, it is troublesome that **fundamental information is not readily available from the CHA regarding:**

- The number of people who have left CHA residency prior to being recertified and signing the Relocation Rights Contract.
- A reliable breakdown of relocatees per month, sorted by the development they moved from, with information on where they moved.
- A centralized system for tracking and monitoring information and services provided to relocating households.
- Assessment of CHA families' abilities to access housing in low poverty, non-segregated communities.

Relocation activities present a range of challenges for the CHA and the Chicago metropolitan area. Are financial resources sufficient and does CHA have the organizational capacity to deliver, and then analyze, the services residents need? Can the metropolitan area's rental market absorb the influx of CHA residents without reconcentrating poverty? Is the information necessary to promote informed relocation options reaching residents in an understandable, uniform, accurate and timely manner?

MPC is gauging the Transformation Plan's progress against five key principles outlined in the first of a series of fact sheets entitled *Public Housing in the Public Interest: Chicago Housing Authority Transformation Plan Update* available online at [www.metroplanning.org](http://www.metroplanning.org). These principles suggest that the CHA must:

1. Promote and support creative strategies to increase affordable housing options for lower-income individuals.
2. Clearly and consistently communicate with public housing residents and regional stake holders to enable informed choice.
3. Ensure quality supportive services that are accessible to residents.
4. Handle relocation fairly and compassionately and on a realistic timetable.
5. Institute strong accountability mechanisms.

This third Fact Sheet covers the fourth of these principles. After laying out the background and data of relocation, we explore the pertinent governing agreements between the CHA and residents, note modifications to the relocation process, and enumerate MPC's concerns and recommendations.

### **Summary of Primary Concerns**

- Relocation, demolition, and redevelopment activities continue to outpace the services available to support families in transition. The Service Connector Program, for example, has not been fully operational to assist families with lease compliance issues. Procedures now in development to standardize and refine relocation and mobility counseling were not available to households that had already relocated.
- The lack of accurate information surrounding the whereabouts of residents (both former and present) affected by demolition, consolidation and relocation underscores the need for a reliable tracking and monitoring system. This vital piece, scheduled for implementation in 2002, is necessary to identify and assist individuals at risk of falling through the cracks.

A detailed description of concerns is provided on pages 13-15.



## How did we get here?

In 1996, in response to the deterioration of public housing units across the county, Congress mandated that all Public Housing Authorities with over 300 units and higher than a 10 percent vacancy rate conduct "viability tests" to determine whether it would be more cost effective to renovate unsafe existing housing or demolish it and offer tenants vouchers to live elsewhere. The Chicago Housing Authority, which was on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's troubled list since 1979 and "taken over" by HUD from 1995 to 1999, found 19,000 units to be non-viable.

Many housing advocates wondered whether this massive undertaking, though intimidating, posed an opportunity to tackle the very problems that perpetuate poverty by bringing CHA households into more integrated neighborhoods with better schools, employment and housing. And yet, data from 1998 show that the first group of voucher-equipped families relocated to neighborhoods where rates of poverty and racial concentration were no better than their former CHA neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup> It was clear that a more comprehensive strategy was needed.

Consequently, a Section 8 Working Group originally formed by HUD's Fair Housing Division (including Public Housing Authorities, tenant advocacy agencies, fair housing groups, support service organizations and municipal representatives) helped the CHA craft a Request for Proposals. This led the CHA to hire nonprofit agencies to assist CHA families displaced as a result of vacancy consolidation<sup>5</sup> and HUD's viability mandate from Congress.

To assist these contractors, at the request of the leadership of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and Business and Professional People for the Public Interest (BPI), the Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) convened the Section 8 Dialogue, a group that met from June 1998 through February of 1999. Its purpose was to improve the Section 8 program. Other participants included leadership from the Chicago Department of Housing, the local HUD office and the primary administrators and implementers of the Section 8 Program throughout Cook County (Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities,<sup>6</sup> Family Dynamics, Housing Choice Partners, Latinos United, CHA, CHAC, and the Housing Authority of Cook County).

Ultimately, the Dialogue Group reached a policy consensus that balanced the fair housing and human service needs of public housing residents with the physical and financial constraints of the CHA's relocation process. In the spirit of the Housing Choice Voucher (HUD's new name to describe the merging of the former Section 8 voucher and Section 8 certificate), this agreement promoted both a tenant's informed choice and the tools necessary to implement that decision. The Dialogue Group documented the roles and responsibilities required to facilitate a family's smooth transition from public housing to the private rental market, including at least 36 different steps by seven different entities. The Dialogue Group further recommended a parallel set of steps for households choosing to move into "opportunity areas," communities that are both low poverty and racially diverse.

Dialogue participant Paul Fischer, a professor at Lake Forest College, realized that "most participants were daunted by the numbers of steps necessary to facilitate a smooth transition, and the number of parties needing to be on the same page at all times. The fact is, the landscape is even more complicated now. We're not just talking about a few relocation contractors coordinating with CHA property managers and CHAC. Now we also have to think about the new Service Connector and Good Neighbors initiatives. Meanwhile, many families continue to move to high poverty, highly segregated communities."

## Governing Agreements

"You'd think that the Uniform Relocation Act passed by Congress in 1974 would give some guidance to this process," suggested Sharon Legenza of the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, "but the facts are not so simple."

Since the Dialogue Group's outcome was a procedures manual and the federal Relocation Act did not hold CHA uniformly accountable to the needs of residents, tenant leaders of the CHA Central Advisory Council (CAC) <sup>7</sup> argued that residents needed a binding agreement outlining their rights and responsibilities. On Oct. 17, 2000, after months of negotiations between CHA staff and the CAC, the CHA Leaseholder Housing Choice and Relocation Rights Contract (Relocation Contract) was sanctioned by both parties. The CHA Board of Commissioners subsequently approved it in March 2001. The contract sets forth rights and responsibilities for both residents and the CHA in the event of permanent or temporary relocation and ensures that all lease-compliant residents (as of Oct. 1, 1999) are guaranteed a "Right of Return" to a new or upgraded public housing unit, if (a) they choose to return to public housing, and (b) they meet site-specific screening criteria. Right of Return, while guaranteeing a public housing unit if chosen, does not guarantee that a resident can return to his or her original building or preferred site,<sup>8</sup> because the CHA is not replacing or rehabbing the same number of units at every location. As a result, most families will have to move at least twice before arriving at their final place of residence.

A separate contract was drafted that sets forth the rights and responsibilities of all leaseholders that moved into CHA housing after Oct. 1, 1999. This contract provides that lease compliant residents in occupancy after Oct. 1, 1999 can receive a Housing Choice Voucher and will be given a preference for a public housing unit.

Given the CHA's poor track record in maintaining tenant files, many residents were concerned about the emphasis on "lease compliance." The Relocation Contract thus provides a clear definition of lease compliance, how it will be determined, and its impact on the Right of Return. The contract stipulates that residents are to be reviewed for lease compliance, as part of the annual recertification process, within a year of the approval of the Relocation Contract.<sup>9</sup> According to the Relocation Contract, CHA tenants are lease compliant when they have:



- paid their rent or are current in a repayment agreement
- no unpaid utility bills with the CHA or a utility company or are currently in a repayment plan with either entity
- met all terms of the lease
- no unauthorized occupants in their apartment
- a good housekeeping record, and
- not destroyed, defaced, damaged or removed any part of an apartment or development.

The Relocation Contract further stipulates that notices of lease violations and/or evidence of serious repeat violations must be documented to determine non-compliance. In order to evict a family, the CHA must demonstrate in a court of law that their lease has been violated. Residents have the right to one administrative grievance hearing if CHA's grievance is not criminal in nature.

Furthermore, the Relocation Contract outlines CHA's responsibilities prior to relocation, including the clarification of property specific requirements (screening and occupancy) as determined by site-specific working groups.<sup>10</sup> The CHA is also required to facilitate relocation planning meetings, execute a redevelopment agreement with individual developers, inform residents of different housing options through a Housing Choice Survey, and provide timely and informative notices at each step in the relocation process. Also described is the manner in which housing offers are made, including the number of offers, the order of offers, and the use of a lottery system to determine Right of Return.

The contract also sets forth CHA's responsibilities to provide moving services, transition counseling and mobility counseling where appropriate, and ensure that each unit is safe and sanitary.<sup>11</sup>

Along with the duties of CHA, the Relocation Contract delineates the responsibilities of residents throughout the relocation process. Tenants must attend recertification appointments and provide all relevant information to the CHA in a timely manner. Residents must attend at least one relocation planning meeting and sign for receipt of a Relocation Packet. Failure to do so jeopardizes their lease compliance.

Residents must complete and return a signed Housing Choice Survey and maintain lease compliance regardless of their housing choice. The Housing Choice Survey allows residents to formally express their living preference during and after redevelopment activities take place. Residents can choose to:

1. move into another existing CHA unit during the redevelopment process
2. accept a temporary Housing Choice Voucher during the redevelopment process, or
3. move into the private market permanently with a Housing Choice Voucher.

A comprehensive training program regarding this complex Contract began in December for CHA staff, private property management staff and resident leadership.



"The Relocation Contract is probably the most important document for residents to understand, but it is not the only one," cautions Lisa Schneider, former CHA Director of Management Analysis Planning. "The Admissions and Occupancy Policy, the Grievance Policy and the new Residential Leases are also key guideposts in this Transformation Plan. Each of these formal documents addresses issues related to families' current housing, their future housing and their grievance process."

### **Admission and Occupancy Policy**

In November 2000 the Admissions and Occupancy Policy (A&O Policy) was amended to conform with other CHA policies affecting tenancy (lease, grievance procedures, pet policy), as well as the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998. In addition, the A&O Policy was amended to include income targeting,<sup>12</sup> screening procedures, a senior designation preference, amended procedures for changing income based rent, and a plan for conversion to site-based waiting lists for family developments. Trainings for CHA and property management staff on the A&O Policy began in FY 2000.

### **Residential Lease Agreement and Contract (Lease)**

The lease outlines the rights and obligations of the CHA and the resident during tenancy. It has been amended to include stronger enforcement criteria through "one strike" language<sup>13</sup> and changes in termination procedures.

### **Grievance Procedure**

The CHA Grievance Procedure outlines the steps available to a resident who believes that the CHA has acted improperly. Amendments in the grievance procedure were made to accommodate residents with disabilities. It also provides for a second informal hearing, a process for selecting hearing officers, amended grievance panels, and an allowance for families using temporary Housing Choice Vouchers to access the grievance process.

While the advent of these updated documents is important progress, concerns remain about the impact of new policies and procedures on CHA families. It is also difficult to quantify the number of families negatively affected by the lack of such procedures in prior months.



## The Relocation Process: A Work in Progress

"On paper, all these documents create a pretty good structure," says Jamie Calvin, Technical Advisor to the Local Advisory Council at Stateway, of the total relocation process. "In this first year rolling them out into real life, however, I think we all saw their shortcomings."

CHA's core communication strategy with residents was a series of training seminars that explained the new documents and process. Then, in spring of 2001, in response to concerns about how households fared during CHA relocation raised by both by stakeholders and the media, the CHA ceased relocation activities until a better plan was instituted.

Though difficult to monitor, the key components of the redesigned Relocation Process are described below:

### Good Neighbor Counseling

The initial Good Neighbor Counseling Program was introduced to residents after they signed a lease, in August of 1999. It was an attempt to introduce residents to techniques vital to maintaining a home. The curriculum includes housekeeping, accessing neighborhood services, and financial planning.

As of April 2000, enhanced Good Neighbor Counseling includes information regarding the relocation process and the psychological and emotional issues involved. Different housing choices are presented in a video, and visioning exercises help residents to explore their possibilities. The impact of future changes are discussed in group settings, letting residents share their concerns before making any housing choices.

### Recertification

Following Good Neighbor Counseling, residents are directed to property management staff to go through recertification to determine lease eligibility and compliance. If the resident is lease compliant, he or she will sign the lease and relocation contract. If the resident is deemed non-lease compliant, the next step will be to determine if the lease infractions are "curable" or "non-curable."<sup>14</sup> If non-curable, the property manager will begin the eviction process and refer the tenant to homelessness prevention services from the City's Department of Human Services, or, in the case of Stateway Gardens, the CARA program.<sup>15</sup> At Stateway, CARA will also be available to serve households who, though living at the development, are not leaseholders. Currently, the CHA does not know how many people are at risk of homelessness due to not being on the lease, and CARA's findings will inform other properties as well.

Residents whose lease non-compliance is curable are referred to the Service Connector program for assistance and given a 180-day probationary "cure" period. This is a key juncture in the process, as the service connectors and the property managers must learn how to coordinate with each other effectively. Their actions must be respectful of tenant confidentiality, operate within a tight time

frame, and promote housing stability among households facing a variety of challenges. Previously, this entire recertification process was grouped with the Housing Choice Survey, but the volume of information proved to be overwhelming to residents. Now, after signing a lease, residents are enrolled in the Housing Choice Survey Clinic.

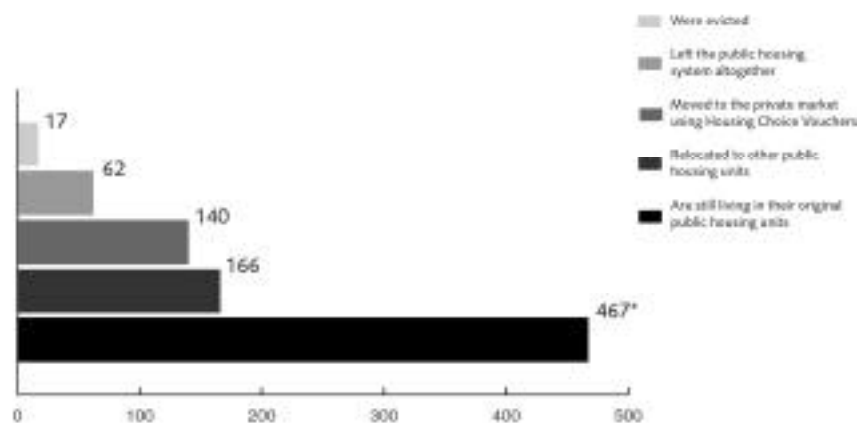
### Housing Choice Survey Clinic

The goal of the Housing Choice Survey Clinic is to provide a supportive learning format that explores available housing choices as well as the emotional issues involved with moving, an important life change. The CHA has developed new materials to simplify the process and address frequently asked questions. These materials also respond to literacy issues. Specifically, clinics explain new housing options, the difference between choosing a temporary or permanent HCV, and some of the pros and cons of each of the choices given a particular situation (i.e., employment opportunities, schools, neighborhood make-up, etc.).

A Housing Choice Survey companion workbook is provided and Chicago Video Project videos illustrate a range of possibilities. Residents are "walked through" the Housing Choice Survey as a group and also provided opportunities for one-on-one assistance.

Since these clinics were started, there has been an increase in the number of households opting for "temporary" rather than "permanent" vouchers. This suggests that many residents who previously thought that choosing a temporary voucher meant that it would expire before a permanent one, now understand that temporary in this case actually means retention of their "Right to Return." This is an example of how accurate information promotes informed choice. The CHA completed clinics for all residents by the end of January 2002. They are now doing additional outreach to residents who chose not to participate in a clinic.

**What happened to CHA families who started the relocation process after Housing Choice Survey Clinics began in July 2001?**  
(Of 852 participating families)



Source: Chicago Housing Authority, November 2001

\*The CHA estimates that these families will have moved by March 2002.



### **Housing Choice Voucher - Temporary or Permanent**

Before embarking on the relocation process, if a resident chooses to move either temporarily or permanently to the private market, he or she will be contacted by two entities: CHA's HCV Administrator CHAC, Inc. and, depending on where he or she lives, Changing Patterns or E.F. Ghoughan, a seven-year-old social service agency new to providing relocation counseling (two contracted relocation counseling agencies). Staff at the agencies are required to give residents five referrals and three tours of various housing possibilities to prepare households to make informed choices. Although families are initially given 180 days to search for a unit, this timeline can be extended.

Residents interested in making a nontraditional "mobility" move<sup>16</sup> will be assigned to the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities (see Relocation and Mobility Counseling), which offers an expanded level of support, including follow-up counseling for up to a year after the move.

### **Public Housing - Temporary**

Like households opting to move to the private market, residents choosing to remain in public housing will be given 120 or 180 days notice prior to the required move date, depending on what CHA has planned for their buildings. Because these households are simply moving from one CHA apartment to another, they are not referred to a contractor for relocation counseling. Instead, the CHA will work directly with tenants, paying costs associated with moving and utility reconnection.<sup>17</sup>

### **Relocation and Mobility Counseling**

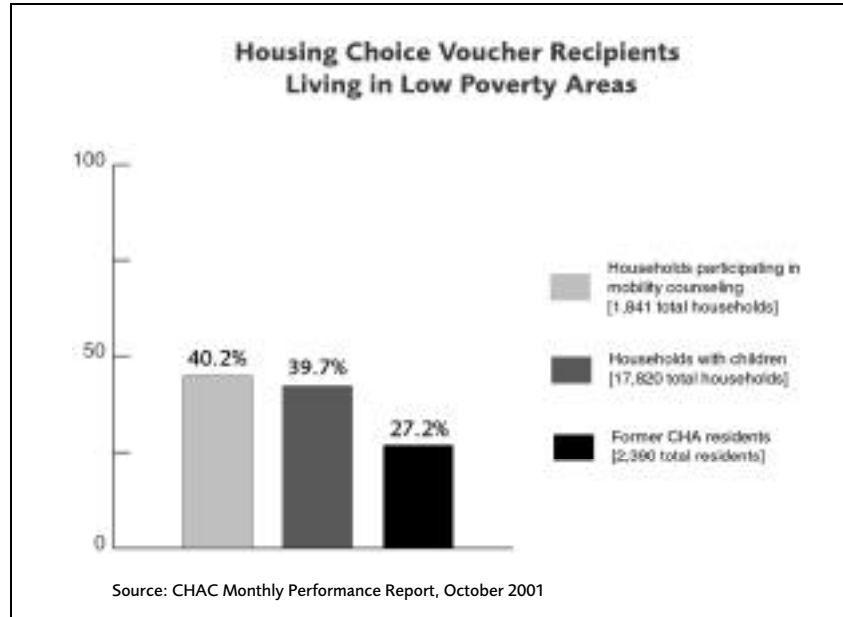
From 1998 through the fall of 1999, based on the first RFP, two vendors provided direct services to assist with "resident movement." One was the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities (Leadership Council) and the other, Family Dynamics, was a service provider new to the housing arena. A third entity, Changing Patterns, also was under contract for emergency relocation services, though not selected through the RFP.

Without the benefit of a Relocation Rights Contract or the above procedures, these contractors operated in a climate in which the rules constantly changed. Families did not get sufficient notice of their need to vacate a building, contractors did not have ample time to serve the families on their caseload, and the CHA did not have the mechanisms in place to monitor and intervene. At Lawndale Gardens, Robert Taylor Homes and other sites, residents were being moved at a faster rate than services could accommodate.

"There is a different level of expectation associated with this round of contracts" says Sharon Glenn, Deputy Chief of Section 8/Relocation at CHA. "For example, the contract spells out the number of places that should be shown each resident, the tracking responsibilities are clearly defined, and the supportive services provision is paid separately from the placement services. Through and through there is an increased level of accountability."

The results of the most recent RFP, announced this summer, changed the composition of the counseling agencies. Family Dynamics was not recontracted. Changing Patterns and E.F. Ghoughan were

awarded full contracts. The Leadership Council was awarded a separate contract for mobility counseling, independent of the RFP.



This new mix of contracts helps to fulfill the final agreement of the Section 8 Dialogue Group from 1998-99, by creating a viable mechanism, through Leadership Council mobility counseling, to support households choosing to relocate to racially and economically diverse areas.

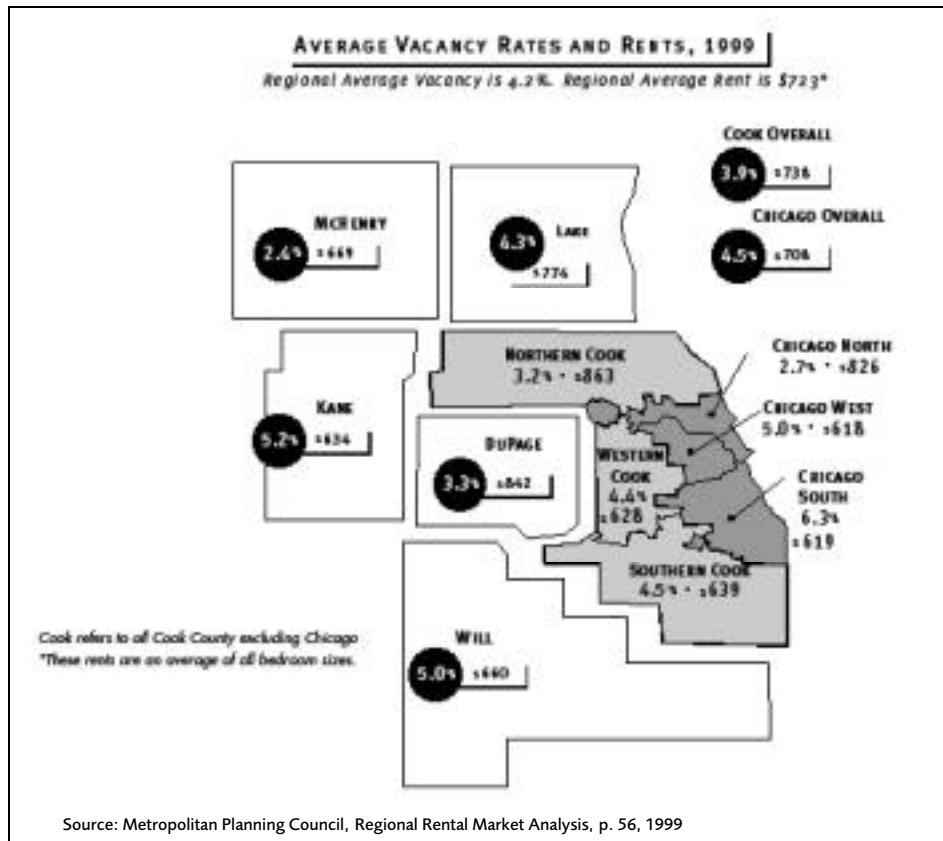
### Project Management

At an October 2001 Stakeholders Update convened by MPC and the MacArthur Foundation, CHA's Managing Director of Resident Services Meghan Harte described another mechanism to improve the existing Relocation Process. To offer residents the full continuum of services and to integrate capital and human service timelines, Harte intends to place a Relocation Project Manager at each site. This individual would be responsible for coordinating the development team, property managers, service connectors, counseling entities and CHA staff as related to relocation activities at that site. "Through the activities of an informed relocation team," Harte explains, "we are confident that residents will be in a better position to make an informed choice about their future housing options."

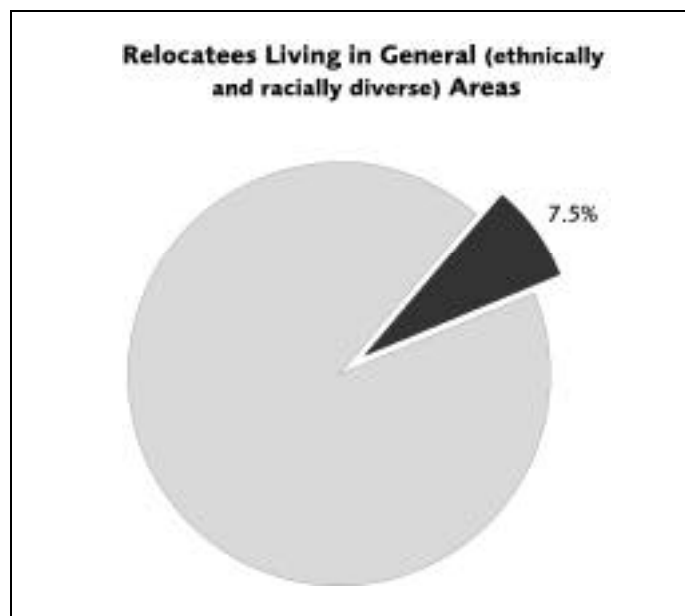
### Environment for Relocation

While informed choice is critical to residents' success in the private market, the fact remains that options are very limited.

The Metropolitan Planning Council's 1999 Regional Rental Market Analysis demonstrated the trends of a tightening rental housing market, especially for individuals who earn less than 30 percent of area median income. The data also shows a particularly tight market outside traditional African-American neighborhoods, which severely limits the housing options for displaced CHA families.



In addition to the limitations of the metropolitan rental market, factors other than economic forces have led to patterns of segregation. Relocatees are most likely to remain in ethnically and racially segregated areas; indeed, only 7.5 percent of relocatees using HCVs are living in ethnically diverse areas.



Source: CHAC Monthly Performance Report, October 2001

"There's no question," says Aurie Pennick of Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities, "that just the prospect of discrimination deters people of color from even looking at or considering certain neighborhoods. Of current CHA households, 90 percent are African-American. No matter how excellent a resident's tenant records, many property owners will be afraid to rent to anyone who has lived at the CHA. Add to this the race-related discrimination faced by any African-American in the region and their limited incomes, and CHA tenants obviously face triple the challenges."

In fact, many relocatees say that they would prefer to stay in the same neighborhoods where they have lived all of their lives, close to friends and family and the comforts of familiar surroundings.

Although some residents have moved to other city and suburban communities, parents continue to go to church, shop and send their children to school in the neighborhoods that in many cases residents were unable to stay in.<sup>18</sup>

## Concerns

The CHA is under pressure from HUD and Congress to relocate households, demolish deteriorated projects and redevelop quality housing options, all on a tight timeline with a limited budget. This pressure raises the stakes of an already ambitious Plan for Transformation.

To promote the best possible environment for residents, MPC urges stakeholders to pay close attention to the following core elements of CHA's relocation process:

- Pacing continues to be a primary concern, not only in terms of relocation, demolition and redevelopment timing, but also related to the support services available to affected households. It is encouraging to see relocation processes revamped by the CHA, but many families had gone through the relocation process prior to these innovations. One concrete example relates to the households whose former relocation counselors now have expired contracts. It is important for the CHA to provide a smooth transition to families served by Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities and Family Dynamics, now that these organizations have been replaced with different vendors. Additionally, the CHA must regularly evaluate the factors of a successful relocation effort and be willing to adjust the redevelopment schedule if needed.
- An interdepartmental effort is underway to produce a Web-based data system that will be used to consistently and accurately track resident movement and all of the relocation process components (Housing Choice Voucher survey results, lease recertification, notice delivery, counseling activities, etc). The CHA is also working with BPI, the Legal Assistance Foundation, the Central Advisory Council and MPC to update its step-by-step relocation procedures manual so that an outside monitor can independently track relocation progress. Both these efforts for tracking and monitoring are scheduled to be up and running in 2002,



and will be critical not only for promoting the success of the Transformation Plan, but also for flagging and correcting errors along the way.

- Although the CHA is directly responsible only for the 25,000 households who were CHA leaseholders as of Oct. 1, 1999, and projects that an estimated 6,000 households will temporarily or permanently relocate into the private rental market, it is likely that a number of people currently living in the CHA will end up in the private rental market without any support. This expectation is fueled by the fact that some tenants do not exercise their rights according to the Relocation Contract and are "lost" in the system. Perhaps most significantly, many people who have been living in the CHA are not leaseholders, and thus will be relocated without access to support services, raising the risk of increased homelessness. In addition to its concerns for people "falling through the cracks," MPC is wary of the rental market's ability to provide quality housing options to all those affected above and beyond the 6,000 anticipated. Solutions will require sound tracking and monitoring and excellent coordination between CHA and other private government and nonprofit agencies.
- While it is unrealistic to expect the Housing Choice Voucher Program to resolve racial segregation trends in the region, it is critical to overcome their worst effects by promoting informed choice, and supporting mobility options with meaningful resources. While the Relocation Rights Contract works toward this goal by including both race and poverty in the definition of "opportunity area," counseling contracts only look at poverty rates, not segregation statistics. As buildings are demolished, residents are forced to make difficult decisions about their living situations. When anxieties run high and uncertainties abound, it is difficult to make constructive life-changing decisions. The success of counseling programs is contingent upon their coordination with the other relocation efforts underway. Similarly, the success of all programs depends on the ability of policymakers to ensure front line staff are well-informed.
- While any relocation effort requires intense tenant counseling, studies have shown that CHA families require more coordinated and comprehensive support services. The Urban Institute conducted a study<sup>19</sup> sampling approximately 190 "harder to serve" CHA residents who indicated on their Housing Choice Survey that they wanted to move into the private market. A little more than a year later, surveyors found that 75 percent of the 152 families they were able to contact were still living in public housing. This was attributed in most cases to personal barriers that limited their ability to search for replacement housing, such as depression, substance abuse, domestic violence, and a general fear of leaving public housing.
- These same personal barriers also affect residents' lease compliance. Even though the Relocation Contract allows six months for residents to "cure" lease infractions, the Service Connector system that is supposed to help lease non-compliant tenants during this period is not fully operational, and services are not yet in place to fully support residents in crisis. Without this crucial safety net in place, many families are in jeopardy of forfeiting their Right of Return.



- Given that the CHA's goal for relocation in 2001 was 1,356 households (including families and seniors), and that its goal for relocation in 2002 is now 1,389 families (approximately 800 of whom are expected to move using an HCV) and 3,976 seniors, the fundamental question is whether concerns can be addressed within a sufficient time frame to meet the needs of the families targeted. Is there the staff and contractor capacity to handle this caseload? Is there an adequate financial investment? (See *Public Housing in the Public Interest: Examining the Chicago Housing Authority's Proposed Service Connector Model*, CHA Fact Sheet No. 2, available online at [www.metroplanning.org](http://www.metroplanning.org).) And if CHA does not meet its goals, what are the ramifications in terms of their contract with HUD for the overall Transformation Plan?

## **Conclusion**

As CHA transforms its public housing stock, each resident of the existing developments will have to move at least once, and many will move twice. This mass relocation effort is not just about individuals and families; it's about whole communities on the move. Although CHA's senior staff is dedicated to making the transformation plan and relocation process work, the landscape for public housing residents remains unstable.

More than ever, Americans are seeking stability within their own homes and their neighborhoods. A secure home base is of utmost importance, as is the hope for better opportunities. Locally, perhaps no policy issue more speaks to both of these issues than the CHA's Transformation Plan. The Metropolitan Planning Council remains dedicated to promoting public housing in the public interest, particularly as it relates to fair and compassionate relocation.



## Endnotes

- 1 The Housing Choice Voucher program is a federally funded, tenant-based subsidy program administered by local housing authorities to increase tenant access to the private rental market. Previously referred to as "Section 8," the program was restructured in October 1999 to allow greater opportunity for apartment seekers through improved service coordination and more flexible policies.
- 2 CHA Year 2 Plan (Chicago: Chicago Housing Authority, 2000) and CHA Year 2 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Report (Chicago: Chicago Housing Authority, 2001). The numbers given are added from these two reports. The CHA has not yet released any other quarterly reports. They are scheduled to release an annual report for 2001 in Feb. of 2002.
- 3 According to Jennifer O'Neil of CHAC, Inc., CHA's contracted administrator for the HCV program, dating as far back as 1995, demolition of "non-viable" units required that some residents of CHA had to relocate to other CHA buildings or into the private market. This means that families moved out of public housing without any of the supportive services the Transformation Plan established.
- 4 Paul B. Fischer, *Section 8 and the Public Housing Revolution: Where Will Families Go?* (Chicago: Woods Fund of Chicago, 1999).
- 5 When units were found to be non-viable (unlivable), residents in buildings with many vacancies were forced to move into buildings that were viable, or they were offered HCVs to move into the private market.
- 6 The Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities is a nonprofit group established in 1966 to eliminate discrimination and segregation in metropolitan Chicago housing markets via legal action, housing counseling, education and advocacy. The Council was allocated vouchers through the landmark Gautreaux case to help public housing residents move into private housing in low-poverty areas in the city and suburbs. Between November 1976 and August 1998, the Leadership Council helped more than 7,000 families find housing in more than 100 communities in the Chicago region.
- 7 The CAC is a council of elected tenant leaders representing elected Local Advisory Council (LAC) presidents at each CHA development and is recognized by HUD as the official voice of public housing residents in CHA.
- 8 According to the Relocation Rights Contract, to the maximum extent possible, CHA will house each lease-holder in the lease-holder's preferred housing.
- 9 CHA Leaseholder Housing Choice and Relocation Rights Contract, 1999.
- 10 Working groups are comprised of representatives from CHA, the Local Advisory Council, the City of Chicago, community partners and the Habitat Company (where appropriate). They consider proposals for both rehabilitation and the construction of new units, and determine residency eligibility requirements.
- 11 CHA Leaseholder Housing Choice and Relocation Rights Contract, 1999.
- 12 The Public Housing Reform Act states that 40 percent of new admissions to public housing must be extremely low-income (at or below 30 percent of the area median income).
- 13 One strike is a federally mandated lease compliance policy in which tenants who are found to have committed serious criminal offenses on or near CHA property are at risk of losing their housing privileges.
- 14 According to Kathryn Greenberg, "curable" lease violations include nonpayment of rent, excessive noise, etc. "Non-curable" lease infractions are associated with criminal activity (usually felonies) that can lead to eviction.
- 15 The nonprofit CARA program is a comprehensive homelessness service organization working on a demonstration project that documents the number of unauthorized occupants of public housing, assesses their needs and proposes policy recommendations for future implementation.
- 16 Mobility moves are those in which households move to "opportunity areas," which are defined as city census tracts where less than 23.49 percent of the population lives below the poverty level and where less than 30 percent of the population is African-American. In a suburb, they are tracts where the percentages of residents who are African-American or who live below the poverty level are no more than 10 percent.
- 17 Residents are given 120 days notice in cases of planned building consolidation, and 180 days notice in cases of building demolition, rehabilitation or conversion to tenant-based assistance.
- 18 Sudhir Venkatesh, *The Robert Taylor Relocation Study*, not yet published draft, 2001.
- 19 Sue Popkin and Mary Cunningham, *CHA Relocation Counseling Assessment Interim Report*, (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2001).