



# **Temporary Relocation, Permanent Choice: Serving Families With Rent Vouchers During the Chicago Housing Authority Plan for Transformation**

*Commissioned by the Metropolitan Planning Council  
for the Chicago Housing Authority*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	<b>Introduction</b>
3	<b>Summary of Recommendations</b>
5	<b>Comments and Concerns</b>
6	<b>Considerations Affecting Return</b>
8	<b>Specific Recommendations</b>
8	<b>1. Coordination of Services to Residents</b>
11	■ CHART Proposed Communications with Relocated Housing Choice Voucher Families
12	■ CHART Current vs. Proposed Relocation Activities, Timing & Actors
13	■ CHART Proposed Accountability
14	<b>2. Resident Involvement in the Plan for Transformation</b>
16	<b>3. Support for the Plan for Transformation</b>
18	<b>Key Actors and their Roles</b>
24	<b>Summary</b>
25	<b>Appendix</b>
28	<b>Endnotes</b>
29	<b>Acknowledgements</b>



## INTRODUCTION

This report was commissioned by the Metropolitan Planning Council at the request of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA). It investigates a critical issue in the CHA Plan for Transformation: maintaining contact with residents who move into private housing using temporary Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) with a right to return to CHA housing. The challenges faced by these residents are related to the broader CHA relocation and service delivery strategy. As such, the findings of this report have implications beyond the original assignment. Effective communication can complement the other services CHA provides to ensure residents make good housing choices.

Residents who lived in CHA units on October 1, 1999 and remain lease compliant are guaranteed by a Relocation Rights Contract the right to return to CHA housing when new or rehabilitated units are completed. (The Relocation Rights Contract distinguishes between properties that are to be revitalized in conjunction with private partners and those that will be rehabilitated as traditional public housing.) For most, the period between leaving CHA housing with a HCV and returning to public housing will be several years, raising the risk of loss of contact and information essential to their final decision to return to public housing or remain in the HCV program. Although there is strong interest in encouraging families with HCVs to return to CHA housing, success in this aspect of the Plan for Transformation should be measured not by numbers returning, but by the extent to which families have received all information necessary to make informed decisions and all services needed to remain in compliance with a CHA lease. Levels of informed choice and lease compliance are the appropriate yardsticks of goals met.

The aim of this report is to recommend procedures to insure that residents have regular access to full information from the CHA on: the progress of the Plan for Transformation, how to make an informed choice about their long-term housing prospects and all services essential to remaining lease compliant.

In preparing this report, two of the authors, Paul Fischer and Kale Williams, met with CHA and CHAC, Inc. (CHAC) staff, reviewed relevant documents, and interviewed representatives of community-based organizations, advocate organizations, developers, leaders of Local Advisory Councils (LACs), marketing specialists, and CHA contractors that provide relocation assistance and social services. Two focus groups were conducted with residents; one with those who were renting in the private market with HCVs, the second with residents who had relocated with HCVs and then returned to public housing in a new mixed-income development. This report summarizes information from these interviews and focus groups without attribution to specific informants. A list of these sources is in the Appendix. A third investigator, Mary Ann Russ, surveyed similar efforts in public housing authorities in three other cities to obtain information on procedures and outcomes in programs elsewhere.

The authors report comments from these sources as they heard them. They base their conclusions and recommendations in large part on comments made by more than one informant. Although the interviewees were often critical of aspects of the relocation process, they were unanimous in believing that the successful transformation of CHA is essential to the thousands of CHA residents and the city of Chicago. The interviewees, too, were united in their willingness to



take part in the process. This recognition is a significant change from initial reactions to the Plan. This is attributable to the current CHA administration's steps to make the process more accessible and transparent.

The authors recognize fully the challenge facing the current leadership of the Plan for Transformation, especially in overcoming the negative perceptions of CHA from decades of inadequate funding and poor management. This legacy has affected its long-term resident families, some of whom live in very difficult situations and have experienced generations of dependency. This report and its recommendations seek to respond to those challenges as they affect residents who have chosen HCVs with a right to return to CHA housing.



**Old Town Village East under construction**

*Courtesy of CHAC, Inc.*



**New CHA units at Cabrini Green**

*Courtesy of CHAC, Inc.*



## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations outlined in this report focus on three areas of concern.

- Coordination of services to residents
- Resident involvement in the Plan for Transformation
- Support for the Plan for Transformation

### 1. Coordination of Services to Residents

The current system of providing services, in which families with Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) are referred to Good Neighbor orientation, CHAC, Inc. (CHAC) a relocation counselor, a service connector or a developer – all with some responsibility for social services and all requiring separate interviews and multiple screening for lease compliance – is fragmented and burdensome for families. Repeated screening interviews waste contractor resources that could be spent on direct service.

An alternative is proposed: contracted vendors at each development would employ counselors, called “Contact Counselors,” to maintain regular contact with each family, beginning when the family first moves to private housing with a HCV. These Contact Counselors would provide development-based, ongoing counseling and services until the family makes its final choice to return to Chicago Housing Authority’s housing or remain in private housing.

The development by CHA of an electronic tracking system with the history and current status of each resident in the relocation process makes it possible to constantly track each family’s progress and sta-

tus. It also tracks each significant interaction the family has with CHA or its vendors, as defined by the Relocation Rights Contract or as determined appropriate for service connections.

Relocation Department staff have made progress in engaging other parts of CHA in issues related to relocation. CHA should continue to build on this inter-departmental coordination.

### 2. Resident Involvement in the Plan for Transformation

There are several U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requirements related to resident involvement in housing authority activities: residents have the right to participate in new plans, policies and procedures, improvements and modernization, programs and services, and all aspects of public housing operation.<sup>1</sup> In an activity as far-reaching as the CHA’s Plan for Transformation, there are multiple opportunities to strengthen resident participation. Accordingly, CHA should expand the range of resident participation in this process.

This essential but challenging transformation should be seen as an opportunity to replace decades of negativity and cynicism through positive involvement of residents. This report proposes new roles for residents in planning and carrying out the redevelopment of the properties in which they now live. This process would augment, not replace, the roles of LACs and the Central Advisory Council (CAC).



### 3. Support for the Plan for Transformation

The skepticism of many residents and city-wide and community-based organizations concerning CHA's intentions and capabilities is a continuing impediment to families making sound decisions on their permanent housing choices. The inherited reputation of CHA is a barrier to residents' confidence and support from key actors.

The Plan for Transformation is among the most ambitious and important undertakings in Chicago's history. Far more than bricks and mortar, it is a bold effort to transform the living environment and the life prospects of thousands of families who have been isolated from opportunity, some for generations. It deserves and requires the attention and support of the media, major civic institutions, and networks of community building and human service organizations. This requires an enhanced effort to change public perceptions of CHA and build understanding and support for the enormous task the Plan for Transformation represents.

## COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

This section reports comments that recurred throughout the interviews and focus groups. Most observations and concerns related to new, mixed-income developments, even though an almost equal proportion of units will be in rehabilitated buildings where new site-specific requirements are unlikely to be imposed.

### Tenants' attitudes and preferences

Many residents who relocated using HCVs hope to return, but fear they will be unable to do so. The experience of the Lakefront properties is cited as an example of promises from earlier CHA administrations that were not kept.<sup>2</sup>

Some tenants are apprehensive about living in mixed-income developments, fearing they will not be eligible under as yet unknown site-specific requirements, they will be segregated and/or stigmatized in that new environment, or that gangs will follow them and disrupt the new development.

Many relocated families return to their former neighborhoods for social services, church participation, day care or schools. Many want to return to their original neighborhoods with a voucher, but not to CHA.

Many present or prospective HCV tenants fear loss of lease compliance. One fear is inability to pay the higher utility bills common in private housing, or that unpaid utility bills from their CHA apartments will haunt them. Another worry is that they will not remain lease compliant because of the size or composition of their households.

### Communication

Most residents rely on informal networks of present and former public housing occupants for information about the Plan for Transformation and its procedures.

Residents read local newspapers more than metropolitan dailies or the *Residents' Journal*.

Many of those who have moved with vouchers have little contact with the LACs of their former developments or on-site property managers, and are unsure of CHA's role in helping them to return. There are exceptions of buildings where the LAC remains in close contact with relocated residents and advocates on their behalf.

### Limitation of existing support networks

Many advocates and leaders of community-based organizations continue to be skeptical of CHA's plans, and doubt there will be sufficient units to meet Plan for Transformation targets.

In general, churches are not considered potential allies in supporting or providing helpful information to voucher holders. Many of the churches with resources to be helpful are not interested in serving public housing residents.

Many informants report that the Service Connector program reaches only those households that are candidates for employment, and that



families with serious problems are not being served. There is a strong concern that some families will not remain or become lease compliant without significant social services.



Courtesy of CHAC, Inc.

CHA residents attend an Opportunity Moves workshop

## CONSIDERATIONS AFFECTING RETURN

The following summarizes other factors that may affect the decisions of temporary voucher holders to return to CHA housing.

### Factors favoring return to CHA housing

Ninety percent of families chose to return to public housing permanently. Of those families, 46 percent chose to move with a temporary HCV and 54 percent chose to remain within public housing with the guarantee of the right to return.

Many families have maintained ties with their former neighborhoods, returning for church, school and social services or to visit relatives and friends.

Many families express the wish to return to their former neighborhoods, even if they are skeptical about returning to their CHA developments. An effective communications program could reduce that skepticism.

There are financial and other incentives for residents to choose to return to public housing rather than remain in the HCV program: lower maximum rents and greater protection against sharp rent increases; lower utility costs; full grievance procedures; and assurance of long-term, rather than year-to-year tenancy.





## Factors favoring continuance in the HCV program

The length of time between moving with a temporary Housing Choice Voucher and the construction or rehabilitation of housing is an inherent difficulty. Some families will have been renting in the private housing market for up to five years, making it likely that some will have adapted to their new situations, or dropped out of the HCV program, lost contact with CHA or lost interest in returning.

Many residents are affected by their long experience in difficult conditions and dependence on others, with resulting health and psychological problems including depression and asthma, making it more difficult for them to take initiative, stay in touch with CHA and meet the requirements for return.

Residents are not likely to make or even consider their ultimate choices until they see housing units being provided. Real choice requires real housing units.

Lease compliance criteria for the HCV program may be less stringent than site-specific lease requirements.

Residents with temporary HCVs find it easier to share housing with non-authorized persons, whom they may rely on for personal and financial support, and anticipate they will not be able to continue those relationships in new CHA developments. This perception may be a barrier to returning.

Some families may value the flexibility in the HCV program to move from time to time to meet changing housing needs and aspirations.

Many families are skeptical that there will be enough housing for their return, or that they will be allowed to return.

HCV families may not know with whom to keep in touch for information about redevelopment and return.

The development by CHA of an electronic tracking system with the history and current status of each resident in the relocation process makes possible significant improvements in the total relocation process.



# SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. Coordination of Services to Residents

This paper focuses on coordination of services for holders of temporary HCVs beginning when they move to a new unit in the private market. The purpose of these services is to ensure that residents have everything they need to meet the requirements for return to CHA, as well as all of the facts they need to make an informed choice between returning to CHA and remaining in the HCV program.

A simplified process is recommended via service delivery that:

- offers a single point of contact for residents rather than multiple providers;
- is proactive rather than reactive;
- replaces the Service Connector and Relocation Counselors working with families in the private rental market;
- is overseen by staff in CHA's Relocation Department;
- contracts with a vendor at each development to employ, train and supervise counselors who would be in frequent contact with residents, to be called "Contact Counselors." They would be primarily responsible for staying in touch with residents during the relocation and return process. They would be responsible for providing information on progress in each development to residents and providing case management services to approximately 50 resident families;

- involves residents as advisors, participants in planning and design for the new or rehabilitated development, and in communication with other residents concerning access to services and information on progress on the Plan for Transformation.

*“New developments will require a new way of life, and residents will need to adjust. They’ll need help finding jobs, getting out of gangs, staying off drugs ... before they get the benefits of relocation.”*

— Resident

### Contact Counselors

As part of a new program to replace the service connector program, contracts with vendors for each development should include providing continuing contact with and counseling of holders of temporary HCVs. Vendors would employ Contact Counselors to have responsibility for maintaining contact with relocated residents. The number of residents assigned to each such counselor should not exceed 50.

### Contact Counseling Vendors

CHA should contract with a vendor for each development to manage the Contact Counselors Program.



Potential contractors to employ and supervise the Contact Counselors should include LACs, developers, property managers, community-based organizations and, for developments without suitable available contractors, CHA staff.

This vendor should employ the appropriate number of Contact Counselors, oversee their activities – including proper entry of each contact, activity and change of status of the families counseled – and make summary reports to the appropriate staff in the Relocation Department of CHA.

The Contact Counseling Vendors' responsibilities include:


- employing and supervising Contact Counselors;
- implementing CHA communications strategies for the residents and relocatees at each development;
- collaborating with the Working Group for each development to manage and disseminate timely information regarding site specific criteria, design and implement a program of events and communications to report on development progress, and build a sense of continuing community among residents and other actors;
- managing information flow within each development and in entries into the CHA tracking system;
- receiving and acting on telephone comments and requests from residents who are not satisfied with Contact Counselor services.

Criteria for selection should include experience in providing services to low-income households, experience or demonstrated capacity to supervise a case management program, demonstrated ability to achieve and maintain rapport with public housing tenants, and capacity to maintain detailed records in a computerized tracking system.

### On-site Contact Counselors

The Contact Counselor should visit each HCV resident family promptly after their initial move, to inform them of available services and progress on redevelopment. Afterward, they should maintain contact monthly by telephone and at three- to six-month intervals with visits. The goals of these communications are to provide a constant flow of information on progress in that development's transformation, and keep residents fully informed of available services and encouraged to access them as needed. Eighteen months before new or rehabilitated units will be available, these visits and recommendations should intensify to give the families full information on developments and any services that are necessary to ensure that they are lease compliant.

The Contact Counselor should make an assessment of the family's need for services and make referrals to appropriate agencies. The criteria for selection of Contact Counselors should include evidence of good rapport with and trust from tenants, good communication skills, and competence in data entry. They should be seen as the first resort for residents' questions, and as builders of a sense of community among residents that can be carried with them into their next stage – return to CHA or permanence in the private market. The Contact Counselor should invite the participation of residents in defining outreach programs, identifying concerns of tenants and communicating with other residents. In some cases, residents may be more effective than others in encouraging access to needed services.



Where a LAC is the vendor that participation should be automatic. For other contractors in the counseling role, creating advisory committees and conducting regular question-and-answer report meetings should include tenants. Residents should be considered as part-time employees or volunteers to assist the Contact Counselor in scheduling interviews and home visits, maintaining contact with residents and providing another venue for communicating development progress to tenants. The criteria for selection should include sustained lease compliance, evidence of rapport with other residents, access to a telephone and ability to write simple reports.

### Contact Counseling Coordinator

A staff member of the Relocation Department should be assigned as the Contact Counseling Coordinator for one or more developments. This number should be determined by the numbers of relocatees from that development, not to exceed 300 for each staff person. This Coordinator should be the source for responses to relocatees who have not been satisfied with responses from the Contact Counseling Vendor at the development.

Duties for this Contact Counseling Coordinator include:

- selecting the Contact Counseling Vendor for each development;
- designing the forms and procedures for recording contacts with residents (sample forms from the Housing Authority of Los Angeles are included in the appendix);
- supervising the Contact Counseling Vendor through weekly written reports and monthly meetings;
- ensuring the currency and accuracy of data entries in the tracking system;

- working closely with the Information Department of CHA to get information on progress in the development to forward to the Contact Counseling Vendors and Counselors;
- establishing and responding to a telephone number available to all residents from the assigned development(s) for inquiries that have not been addressed or resolved by the Contact Counselor or Vendor. Residents should be encouraged to go first to their assigned Contact Counselor, then to the development Contact Counseling Vendor, but should know of this option.

These recommendations provide a three-tiered set of available staff to ensure that every relocated family has regular contact with CHA, first through a Contact Counselor who will be familiar with the family's status and identified needs, second through the Contact Counseling Vendor and, if necessary, third through a Contact Counseling Coordinator in the central office of CHA. Each resident family should have the telephone numbers of the Counselor, Vendor and CHA Coordinator.

Through regular contact with the Contact Counselor, the family's need for services can be identified and referrals made by the Counselor.

To ensure availability of intensive services for substance abuse, mental or physical health, or severe family dysfunction, CHA should contract with one or more agencies to which the counselor could make referrals.

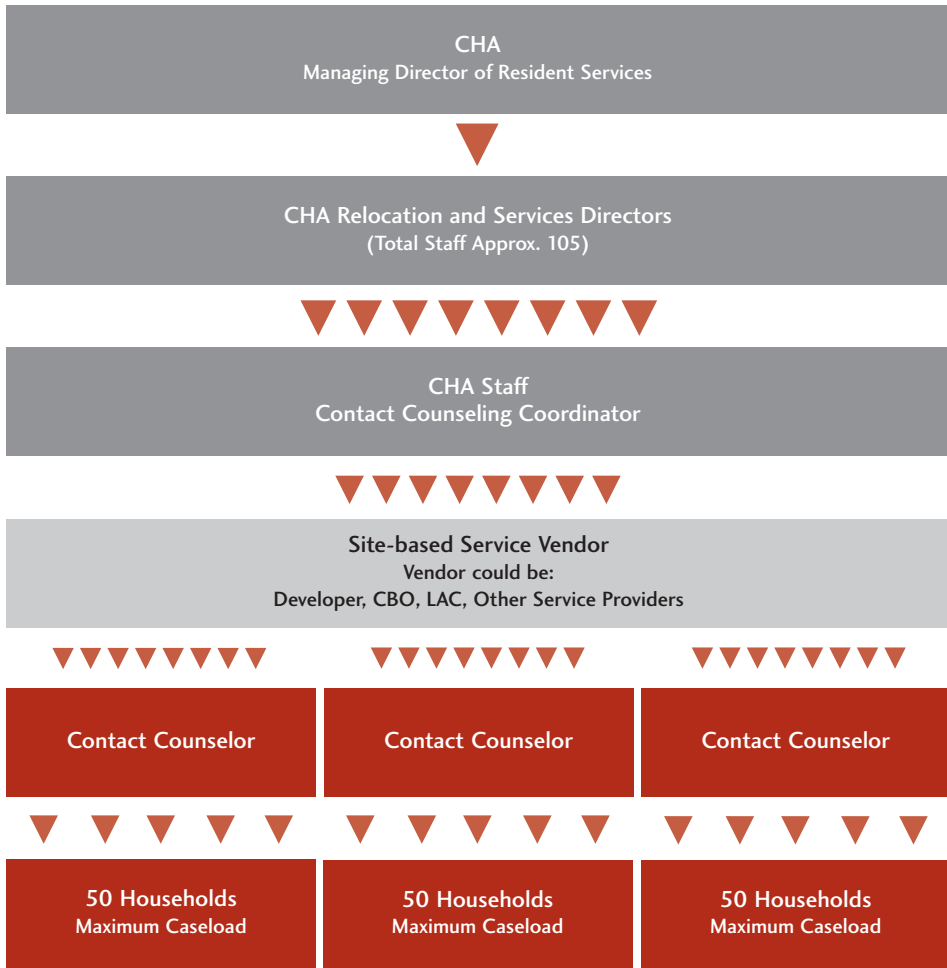
## PROPOSED COMMUNICATIONS WITH RELOCATED HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER FAMILIES

SOURCE	TIMING	PURPOSE	CONTENT
CHA Communications	Within 5 days of move-in	CHA welcome	Welcome from CEO to new home, describe Contact Counseling program, identify Counseling Vendor, request that the resident notify CHA of changes in address, using a change of address form.
CHA Communications for Vendor	Within 10 days of move-in	Counseling Vendor welcome	Welcome from Counseling Vendor, identify Contact Counselor, provide telephone numbers for Counselor, Counseling Vendor and Counseling Coordinator. Provide detail on Counseling Program, and form requesting telephone number.
Counselor	Within 5 days of each Counselor visit	Counselor follow-up	Thanks for visit. Summarize any agreements reached on services or information. Report any follow-up required by Counselor or family.
CHA Communications	In CHAC or CHA regular mailings, at least quarterly	Maintain flow of communication on progress	One-page flyer with highlights of transformation progress, upcoming events, human interest stories.
CHA Communications	6-month intervals	Report CHA progress	Detailed report on transformation progress for each development. Pictures, stories of families returned to new or rehabilitated developments, reminders of available services or other newsworthy activities. Accounts of upcoming or completed events, at development or citywide.
CHA Communications for Vendor	18 months before return units available	Notice of return unit availability and timing	Details on progress of unit availability. Notice that counselor will visit to discuss next steps and provide assistance. Invitation to visit site(s). Encouragement to consider their choices and prepare for decision.
CHA Communications	5 days after return move	Welcome return to CHA	Welcome and expectations on return to CHA.
CHA Communications	5 days after decision to remain in HCV program	Confirm decision and note end of eligibility for return	Provide encouragement and good wishes in private housing market.

# CURRENT vs. PROPOSED RELOCATION ACTIVITIES, TIMING & ACTORS

	Current Relocation Activities						Proposed Continuing Contact	Proposed "Return" Activities		Post Return Follow-up
Current Activity	Prepare families for first move	Explain to resident an Opportunity Move	Assist resident with housing choice voucher placement in private rental market	Assist with actual move and adjustments into new home	Assist resident in finding employment	9 month out letter informs resident that responsibilities end per contract				
Current Responsible Actors	●●●●● Good Neighbors CHA Staff Property Manager Relocation Counselor	●●●●● Mobility Counselor Relocation Counselor CHAC Housing Specialist	●●● Relocation Counselor CHAC Housing Specialist	●●●●● Relocation Counselor CHAC Housing Specialist	●●●●● Service Connector United Way 1-800 Service	●●●●● Relocation counselor	[ N o a c t i v i t y ]			
▶▶▶ M o n t h s 1 - 9						Months 12 -24 prior to returning to new CHA Housing			Post Return Follow-up	
Proposed Activities	[ S a m e a c t i v i t y a s a b o v e ]						Check in with family every three to six months until information on new units is available. Offer services or referrals as needed.	Notify families that apartments will be available within 18 months	CC to work with family on identified issues, e.g. referrals for job training, day care, and health care.	Follow-up with resident at three and six months after move in
	▼ ▼ ▼	▼ ▼ ▼	▼ ▼ ▼	▼ ▼ ▼	▼ ▼ ▼	▼ ▼ ▼			Follow-up by telephone with resident on all outstanding issues. CC to make visits with family as needed.	
							Group orientation meeting to discuss role of CHA staff, Vendor, CC, other contractors	Minimal contact during cure period		
								Assist residents on making final housing decision: either continue with HCV or prepare to move into new CHA site.		
Proposed Actors	● Contact Counselor	● Contact Counselor	● Contact Counselor	● Contact Counselor	● Contact Counselor	● Contact Counselor	● Contact Counselor	● Contact Counselor	● Contact Counselor	● Contact Counselor

# PROPOSED ACCOUNTABILITY



*“From our perspective, there are way too many sources of contact for residents relocating. It is ironic that in the beginning of the process there are too many, but later down the road, the money (and contacts) run out. If we had the funds, we would like to continue providing residents services to see them through their final choice.”*

— Relocation Counselor

For a detailed description of this proposed service delivery model, please refer to pages 8-10.



## 2. Resident Involvement in the Plan for Transformation

*“Peer Networks in certain developments are the main communication vehicle for residents to get information about jobs, progress on CHA developments, and other affordable housing options. Even after they have moved away from their developments, many CHA families return to their ‘old’ neighborhoods to get this information from their peers.”*

— Advocate

The persistent skepticism among relocated tenants about CHA’s intent and capabilities is a serious barrier to their returning to CHA or accessing the services most needed for a return. The authors recommend a series of communications to maintain contact with relocated residents and correct possible mistaken impressions.

- In each mailing from CHAC or CHA, provide a one-page communication in simple language, reporting on progress in individual developments and overall changes in personnel, events,

services, etc. If mailings are less frequent than quarterly, make special mailings at least that often.

- Issue regular press releases to geographically appropriate community newspapers and the *Residents’ Journal* providing similar information.
- At least annually, preferably at six-month intervals, host an event for voucher holders at the development site with food, entertainment, progress reports and a raffle. The invitation letter should contain the raffle ticket, to be entered in the raffle only for those who return it with a current address. Raffle prizes should be solicited from city-wide or local merchants. Update the master record with each change of address. Follow up with families that did not return to be sure of their current status and address. (This recommendation addresses the need for updated addresses from any families that have lost contact with their Contact Counselor.) Relevant community-based organizations, school leaders, church leaders, employers and public officials should be urged to attend as part of the intention to incorporate the development into the larger community.
- As early as possible, the developer should prepare a model unit or an information building (or trailer) on-site, outfitted with donated furniture, that makes available site plans and drawings of new or rehabilitated buildings and apartments. At the completion of the model or information building, there should be an open house for relocated residents and community-based organizations, with refreshments and brochures for the family to take away and distribute to others.



- In neighborhoods where relocated families are clustered, hold meetings of residents with a successful family and the developer's staff to describe progress on new or rehabilitated developments.
- Provide the semi-annual report described below in quantity to community-based organizations, each CHA development, libraries, welfare offices, clinics, city and aldermanic offices, and churches in both receiving and sending neighborhoods.

### Participation of CHA families

An increased sense of accountability to tenants should be fostered among all CHA staff, particularly those who interact with residents. Additionally, all CHA staff and vendors should be evaluated on their responsiveness to residents and relocatees.

Residents should plan and assist with many aspects of the process, including but not limited to:

- providing feedback on CHA procedures and those of CHA contractors;
- participating on the working group that develops the Redevelopment Plan;
- helping maintain contact with residents who are temporarily relocated;
- helping with site and building design;
- identifying essential social services and potential providers.

Ideally, resident involvement should target as broad a group of families as possible, to avoid wearing out a few willing volunteers and obtain the widest possible input. This will not occur unless people believe that their time will be well spent – that someone will hear what they are saying and their comments can make a difference.

CHA, in its own hiring, should seek out and employ qualified residents and require similar efforts by contracted vendors. At the very least, CHA should ensure that residents have an opportunity to apply for appropriate positions. In positions in which confidentiality of tenant information is involved and tenants are being considered, tenants should work in developments other than their own.



Residents participate in a planning charette.

Courtesy of CHA

### 3. Support for the Plan for Transformation

CHA should continue to invest in creating a new identity for itself as a caring, efficient, open public servant, supporting families and revitalizing neighborhoods, as a counter to prevailing skepticism and negativity, using the following steps:

- Publish a brochure, with data on each development that lists the number, type and designated income levels of housing units to be available when development is completed, target dates for completion, and current status.
- Feature residents who have returned to new or rehabilitated developments in all publications.
- Provide this brochure to community-based organizations in both receiving and sending neighborhoods, and to on-site residents and voucher holders through one of the mailings recommended in the previous section.
- Publish semi-annually and distribute widely a report on progress of the Plan for Transformation, with full data on goals and progress on each development and on modifications in the Plan; provide in quantity to community-based organizations, each CHA development, libraries, welfare offices, clinics, city and aldermanic offices and churches in both receiving and sending neighborhoods.
- If feasible, produce the report in video form and provide tapes to developments and public libraries. An alternative would be

to present the information on public access television and provide copies to libraries and each development.

- Schedule presentations by CHA CEO Terry Peterson at major civic institutions – Commercial Club, Chicago Metropolis 2020, City Club, Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, and service clubs such as Rotary International and Kiwanis.
- Seek appearances by CHA CEO on appropriate radio and television programs.
- Arrange annual meetings between the CHA Board Chair and Executive Director and newspaper editorial boards and broadcast managers.
- Recruit successful graduates of public housing as spokespersons in broadcast and print media communications campaigns.
- If initial audience response justifies, continue public access television program on Channel 28.
- Use more African-Americans as communicators.
- Seek media coverage of significant events – groundbreakings, model homes, first completed or rehabilitated units, first-returned residents and completion of developments.



### Site-specific Criteria

Site-specific criteria, as yet undetermined for most new mixed-income developments, pose a potential barrier to return for many families. The specific criteria may be difficult for some families to meet and the delay in defining the criteria makes it difficult for families to know what steps they should be taking to meet them.

The recently revised CHA standard lease is comprehensive and sufficient for use in new developments, without additional criteria. If site-specific criteria must be used in addition to the lease, they should be standard for all developments and announced as early as possible. Families must prepare to meet them, or to assess their ability to meet them, as part of their decision to return to CHA or to remain in the HCV program.

### Community-Based Organizations

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are a largely untapped resource for support of the Plan for Transformation. They have strong roots and respected programs in communities near developments and a stake in serving those residents who will return. In communities in which residents are relocating, there is as yet relatively small response to, or communication with, those families by CBOs. Contact Counseling Vendors should access the resources of CBOs and encourage families to use them.

New and strengthened efforts to work with those agencies and organizations must be made. This should address the skepticism that enough units will be provided for returning residents and enlist the organization to participate in events and other return-readiness activ-

ities, such as providing current information in their offices. Particularly strong and concerned agencies should be invited to serve on working groups, wherever that is not already the case.



## KEY ACTORS AND THEIR ROLES

This section describes the current roles of other actors in the relocation and return process and comments on any proposed changes based on the recommendations of this report.

### Good Neighbor Workshops

The first stage in relocation is attendance at a Good Neighbor Workshop, an all-day session conducted by a vendor contracted by CHA to provide an initial orientation to renting in the private market generally and the HCV program specifically. The workshop provides information about being a good neighbor, goal-setting, parenting, housekeeping, money management and HCV regulations – all designed to help families who may have only known public housing until this point succeed in the private market.

This role is not affected by the proposed recommendations, although a full-scale implementation of this proposed model might lead to a reduced role for the Good Neighbors program within the service delivery program.

### CHAC, Inc.

CHAC, Inc. (CHAC), a private agency, has been contracted by CHA to administer all aspects of the HCV program in Chicago. CHA refers to CHAC those residents who have chosen either a temporary or permanent HCV. CHAC does a criminal background check on members of the household aged 17 and above, conducts an eligibility interview, determines eligibility and number of bedrooms, sets the tenant's minimum portion of the rent, and holds a briefing session with a full

explanation of the program and advice on searching for housing in the private rental market. A housing specialist is available for advice during the search process.

Although some residents criticized CHAC (for difficulties in reaching a staff person by telephone or in person), the organization is well respected by tenants. Many have positive comments, some suggest that CHAC should coordinate the relocation and return processes. However, we note that CHAC does not now have continuing contact with families beyond the annual re-certification, except when families are required or choose to make a second move. In these cases, CHAC provides mobility counseling.

CHAC's functions are not affected by the proposed recommendations, though caseworker responsibilities may be less intense once this proposed program is implemented. CHAC may also be considered as a vendor where appropriate.

### Relocation Counselors

Two private agencies are currently contracted by CHA to assist families who chose HCV to find an appropriate rental unit. They also help residents find homes that meet Housing Quality Standards, do not exceed defined rent prices and whose owner agrees to accept the HCV.

CHA provides the relocation counselor with lists of families who have chosen HCVs and are ready to move. Each family is contacted by let-



ter and typically by telephone, and invited, with all family members, to meet with a counselor. At that session, the family's desires and housing needs are explored and the agency's services are described. The agency has the obligation to provide at least five housing choices and escort the head of household to inspect at least three units. A large part of the agency's function is recruiting housing owners to make units available and checking that the units will meet CHAC's inspection for Housing Quality Standards. The agency's other responsibility is to assist families: helping them choose among available units the one that best serves their needs, arranging for move-in after a unit is chosen and approved, contacting the family at 30 and 60 days to inquire of any other needs, and contacting the family at nine months to remind them of the need to prepare for lease expiration and recertification.

The relocation counselor makes an initial assessment of family needs for social or other services and makes an appropriate referral if the family requests it. Not many families use the relocation counselor for this purpose.

Two current relocation counselor vendors have developed ongoing relationships with a group of owners, mostly in the south and west community areas of Chicago, who rely on referrals of HCV holders for all or most of their rental business. Clearly, this is a factor in the concentration of relocating CHA families in those areas. One of the relocation vendors reports that it continues serving families after placement with counseling and referral services.

In July 2002, CHA added four new relocation counseling agencies, increasing the total number of such agencies to seven. A significant change added to the new contract requires counselors to show residents at least one apartment in a low poverty area, promoting opportunity moves.


With the full scale implementation of Contact Counselors, the role of the Relocation Counselor will no longer be needed.

### Service Connectors

Service connectors are social service agencies contracted by CHA to provide tenants with employment counseling and placement and referrals to address problems of physical and mental health, substance abuse or family dysfunction. Theirs is a critical role in helping families to become and remain compliant with their leases in order to remain eligible for CHA housing or a HCV. There are six clusters of service connectors, defined geographically to serve specific CHA developments, each with a lead agency.

Service Connector agencies focus on employment readiness and placement; this is the defined priority. Funding is inadequate for intensive services to families that need greater assistance before being ready for employment. At this time, contractors are primarily serving families living in CHA developments.

HCV holders may access these services from the United Way, a contractor of CHA, through an 800 number. United Way informs those residents of this service by mail each month. A staff of three take the calls, listen to the family's needs and refer the family to an appropriate service provider. United Way's contract provides for the referral



and telephone follow-up. Neither the on-site contractors nor United Way pay the referred agency for its services.

Service connectors currently serve families who initiate contact. This fails to meet the needs of other families who may be reluctant to seek help, but still need it in order to remain lease compliant and meet site-specific criteria.

Among interviewees, the perceived inadequacy of the current Service Connector program was the most frequent concern. The prevailing opinion is that significant numbers of families need intensive services over extended periods to address issues of physical or mental health, substance abuse or family violence, often in combination, and that the present Service Connector program is insufficient to meet those needs. There are fears that large numbers of families will not remain lease compliant or be able to meet site-specific requirements to return to CHA developments. A recent study of families being relocated from Robert Taylor Homes notes that the last families to be relocated show high levels of non-lease compliance.<sup>3</sup> This finding may be generalized to other developments.

Employment has been CHA's chosen priority for the first phase of relocation.

With the full implementation of Contact Counselors, Service Connectors will not be needed. The proposed counseling program would replace the Service Connector program. CHA should contract with a limited number of vendors with competence to serve residents with the most severe problems, and counselors should refer such resi-

dents to those vendors. This would help ensure that the most needy families receive intense casework services that might not be available otherwise. For less demanding needs, it is recommended that counselors refer residents to the appropriate services nearest to the development or the family's current residence.

### Local Advisory Councils

Local Advisory Councils (LACs) are advisory bodies elected by residents in each CHA development. Representatives of the LAC serve on the Working Group for their development, and LAC presidents serve on the Central Advisory Council.

LACs vary in the services they provide for residents and the influence they have with other actors. Some LACs have maintained contact with most families relocated from their development, while others have little contact. Participation in the Working Group for some developments provides an opportunity for the LAC to influence development plans and to receive and pass on information useful to relocated residents. Some LACs, among other entities, should be considered as contractors for Contact Counselor services.

The eventual role of tenant organizations in mixed-income developments has not been determined. In those developments, a residents' council, including residents in all types of units in that development – market rate, affordable and public housing – would be useful.

### Central Advisory Council

The Central Advisory Council (CAC), made up of the presidents of Local Advisory Councils, played a role in developing the Plan for



Transformation and Relocation Rights Contract. It continues to monitor compliance with those and other agreements. The future role and constitution of a Central Advisory Council is beyond the scope of this report.

### Working Groups

Working Groups exist for each CHA site undergoing redevelopment, and are the primary decision makers driving the redevelopment process. They meet regularly, and each group includes representatives of the LAC and the surrounding community; the developer's team; CHA staff; representatives of Chicago departments of Planning and Development, Health, Human Services and Transportation; and the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development; and representatives of the Habitat Company and the Gautreaux plaintiffs. Some include participation from nearby community-based organizations.

At present, Working Groups have roles in defining site-specific criteria and notifying residents of marketing events and orientation for the new development. Many interviewees were concerned that delays in determining site-specific criteria for return would disadvantage some families who needed extended time to meet those criteria. Although the Relocation Rights Contract states clearly that an "adult member of the family who is engaged in activities to meet the criteria" is eligible to return, there is no uniformity in how site-specific criteria are applied. In some cases, the criteria are a condition of acceptance to the new development, in others they must be met after at least one year of tenancy.

All Working Groups should include representatives of community-based organizations. Working Groups should also make presentations to community groups to gather comments and communicate plans. This will help ensure Working Groups remain as productive as possible.


*"I am unsure of whether there will be enough units for residents to return to, so I try to find them a good place where they can stay. That way, they won't need to move back to CHA."*

— Relocation Counselor

Site-specific criteria should be standard for all developments, should not include a credit check, and should be announced promptly.

### Developers

Developers are private entities under contract to CHA to construct housing on some CHA sites and adjoining neighborhoods with a mix of market-rate, affordable and public housing units, typically one-third of each. They are responsible for marketing the development and retaining contact with former residents. As members of Working Groups, in developing site-specific criteria for entry into the new



development, they may develop criteria for returning CHA families beyond being lease compliant by CHA standards. Those developments funded by HOPE VI are required to provide a portion of total funding – to be determined by the Working Group – for community and social services. Levels of compliance with this requirement are unknown.

The Holsten development near Cabrini Green has a rent-up program that entails receiving names of eligible families from CHA, three attempts to contact the family (phone, mail, visit), home visit and assessment, an open house to show units, drug test, criminal background check, and references. (Whether the drug test is legal has not been conclusively determined.) The decision to accept a family is made by a selection committee that includes LAC members. When households need to be split, counseling and assistance are provided. Some tenants may receive help from the developer's counseling staff, which has a fund to meet special needs. This is the only early example of a developer providing social services to help families comply with lease requirements.

It is recommended that, as soon as possible in each development, model units or a temporary structure (trailer) be placed on-site – with full details, drawings and specifications of new or rehabilitated units – and introduced through an open house for all residents relocated from that development. Developers may also be considered contractors for Contact Counselor services. Holsten Company's program provides a good example.

### Property Managers

Property Managers are employed by private property management companies that have competed successfully for management contracts with CHA. They have responsibility under CHA rules for all aspects of management for the development to which they are assigned. If they have been in position during relocation and are trusted by tenants, property managers could be key actors in maintaining contact with relocated families. As participants in Working Groups, they could be instrumental in ongoing communication strategies. However, turnover in this position during development may create the loss of relationships with former residents. The likelihood of turnover is high, as all property management contracts are subject to competitive bidding.

Property managers should also be considered as contractors for Contact Counselor services.

### Community-Based Organizations

There is an opportunity for community-based organizations, in both sending and receiving neighborhoods, to be of assistance to families using HCVs. Currently there is no formal role for these organizations, unless they hold service connector contracts. Other agencies may be contacted by the Service Connector program to provide services, and may do so as resources permit. However, several community-based organizations contacted for this report had no knowledge of the Service Connector program.

These organizations are often in communication with current and relocated residents. Several leaders of community-based organiza-





tions remain skeptical that CHA can produce enough new or rehabilitated housing units to serve all those who wish to return. Few interviewees were able to cite community-based organizations in receiving communities serving residents who had moved there. Among relocation counselors and service connector contractors interviewed, only one relocation counselor vendor, Changing Patterns, has been successful in enlisting churches to assist relocating families.

CBOs should have a larger role in the Plan for Transformation. After receiving full information on the Plan in meetings arranged for that purpose, community-based organizations should be sources of information for relocated residents, potential resources for providing needed services, and potential members of Working Groups. CBOs may also serve as vendors where appropriate.



## SUMMARY

The Plan for Transformation is a remarkable opportunity to make public housing an asset to the city and its lower-income residents, and restore neighborhoods that were blighted by the concentration of that housing. Most importantly, it is an opportunity to help the families who endured – many for decades – the dreadful conditions of much of Chicago’s public housing, to have the advantages of decent housing in good neighborhoods.

The Plan for Transformation must be more than new bricks and firmer mortar. It must provide the services that can help families thrive in those new settings.

These recommendations are intended to support that process. They emphasize the need for a new approach to identifying both the services needed and access to those services. They also propose a new program of counseling for families who are temporarily relocated into private housing.

With those goals and programs in place to achieve them, the new Chicago Housing Authority will deserve and must obtain the full support of Chicago citizens and their institutions, business and civic, regionwide and in neighborhoods.



# APPENDIX

## 1. Data on Relocation and Return

Most CHA families with HCVs are relocating to neighborhoods that are predominantly African-American and relatively close to the developments they have left.

Preliminary data from other public housing authorities with relocation and redevelopment programs indicate that the average rate of turnover of residents in public housing authorities is about 15 percent per year for all of residents' causes, voluntary or involuntary.

### Seattle Housing Authority (SHA)

Experience from the Seattle Housing Authority's Holly Park HOPE VI program, a relocation program much smaller than Chicago's, reported that 44 percent of relocated families chose to return to New Holly, 32 percent chose HCVs; 18 percent moved to other housing and six percent were "lost" to eviction, failure to maintain contact or death. Of the families that chose to return to New Holly, 89 percent were able to do so. These results were attributed to the involvement of residents in all phases of the relocation. According to SHA, "without the redevelopment process, only about 50 percent of the residents in Holly Park in 1996 would most likely be there five years later."<sup>4</sup>

With six full-time relocation/case management staff, SHA began the process with a private counseling session with each family (conducted in their native language) regarding their relocation rights and opportunities. The relocation choices were exactly those offered to CHA residents.

In Seattle, the first families to be relocated were those that chose to leave public housing. Then, to the extent possible, those who wished to return were relocated on site as work progressed in stages. This approach both limited moving costs and trauma and helped the work move faster, since there were few vacant units in other properties.

SHA is now engaged in a revitalization of its Rainier Vista property, using the lessons learned at Holly Park. Staff cite the following imperatives:

1. Residents should retain access to their former management staff and resident leaders;
2. Community and Supportive Service (CSS) funding through HOPE VI should be used for activities to support the return of relocatees, including the following:
  - Relocatees who move to other public housing sites are tracked through the new housing management staff. If there are problems with lease compliance, CSS staff intervene. They see eviction prevention as a prime responsibility.
  - If the problems at the new public housing site cannot be resolved, the family is moved back to a remaining unit at Rainier Vista for intensive counseling.
  - A language-appropriate quarterly mailing goes to all temporarily relocated families (HCV and public housing) to inform them of exactly what is happening at the site. The



mailing includes a postcard to be returned to enter a new address or telephone number, and a checklist of potential problems or needs requiring assistance. The list includes utility payment, rent payment, other lease-compliance issues and problems with neighbors. Returned postcards are the basis for response by staff, who follow up on every request.

3. A short summary of every community meeting is prepared and mailed to relocatees. Future meetings are announced and SHA provides transportation to meetings as needed.

#### Newark Housing Authority

The Newark Housing Authority was the first agency in the country to conclude that every family high-rise building in its inventory was determined to be not viable or suitable for occupation. After varied and problematic experience with relocation in similar high-rise properties, a HOPE VI program of the Newark Housing Authority began relocating from the remaining high-rise properties in 1998. Staff were shifted from state agencies to oversee the process. A detailed relocation plan was negotiated for all families – including those receiving Section 8 vouchers – which included payment of security deposits and realtor fees. Contractors provided mobility counseling and case management services for relocating families. A tracking system was established. Staff was hired to keep in touch with the families. A quarterly newsletter was produced.

Of the 790 families in occupancy when the property was declared non-viable, 105 were not relocated due to legal eviction or voluntary

departure and seven heads of household died. Of the 678 still eligible for assisted housing, 188 have been relocated to townhouses of the Authority, 237 are living in private housing with Housing Choice Vouchers, 42 are in senior buildings, 182 are in low-rise public housing, and 29 families are in temporary housing.<sup>5</sup>

#### Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles

This housing authority has developed procedures for enrollment and initial assessment, and for evaluation and assessment for community services. They identify seven areas for assessment: adult employment; child development; adult education; family relations and support; social and emotional health; health and safety; and housing. Within each category, they identify five levels of need: in-crisis, at-risk, stable, safe and thriving. These assessment documents could be templates for reporting forms for Contact Counselors.<sup>6</sup>

#### National Data

According to HUD figures for fiscal years 1993 to 1999, only 11.4 percent of the total 22,500 relocated public housing residents were scheduled for “re-occupancy” in HOPE VI sites.

## 2. CHA Relocation Procedures

As part of the Plan for Transformation, all residents were informed of their rights and responsibilities under the Relocation Rights Contract and the moving process was described to them. After a check to be sure that residents were in compliance with their current leases, CHA



conducted a Housing Choice Survey of all residents. After explanation, residents were given these choices:

- relocation in CHA developments during the demolition and construction period;
- a temporary HCV with a right to return to a CHA development when new or rehabilitated units for which they qualified are available;
- a permanent HCV that does not include a right to return to CHA.

Each head of household has one opportunity to change her or his choice before accepting a permanent choice.

CHA conducted a lottery for all lease-compliant households in residence on Oct. 1, 1999. The lottery defined the priority and conditions with which residents will be offered the opportunity to return to new or rehabilitated CHA housing.

Residents receive a notice of the impending closing of their present building 120 to 180 days in advance. Residents attend a relocation planning meeting to learn from Service Connectors about redevelopment plans, relocation process, neighborhoods with greater job and education opportunities, Good Neighbor and transition workshops, and social services.

Attendance at a Good Neighbor Workshop helps prepare tenants for a successful move and, if needed, provides advice on lease compliance

and money management. The goal of the workshop is to help CHA residents who may have no other rental housing experience make a successful transition to the private market.

Ninety days before their building closes, residents receive a second notice of the closing date and the necessity to make moving plans. Those who choose to remain in public housing are moved to another part of their development. Those who choose temporary or permanent vouchers are referred to a relocation counselor and then to CHAC to receive an explanation of Section 8, practical suggestions for finding a unit in the private market, a voucher to present to a landlord, and referral to an agency (relocation counselor) contracted by CHA to assist the family in finding suitable rental housing. For those who choose a permanent HCV, the relocation process ends when they execute a lease for a rental unit in the private market and move. At this point, these families no longer have the right to return to CHA.

As public housing is rehabilitated or redeveloped, residents who have chosen to return will receive notice that an apartment is available.

Those with the highest priority status for return to a new unit in a mixed-income development will receive notice of site-specific admission requirements for that development. Only families with an adult who can either meet the site-specific requirements or is engaged in activities to meet those requirements can be offered housing in these properties. Families admitted because an adult is engaged in activities to meet site-specific requirements have one year in which to meet those requirements.



Others, whose priority status makes them eligible for return to a rehabilitated unit in existing CHA housing, will need to meet only the standard requirements of lease compliance and family size appropriate for that development.

Service Connectors are available to help families meet basic lease requirements and any site-specific requirements.

A final Right of Return Recertification conducted by the property manager determines whether the family is still lease compliant, and advises the resident of any site-specific requirements. Families then receive a 90-day notice of the possible availability of the housing and the timing of the lottery to be conducted for the available units. At that time, the manager of the new or rehabilitated housing receives a list of families, in priority order, who are eligible to move to that development. The lottery (with the numbers generated by a contractor outside CHA and the developer) ranks the families within each priority category. Then, depending on the number, type and size of available units, the manager knows to whom offers should be made.

The manager then contacts the family, assists as needed in resolving any issue of lease compliance, and invites them to inspect the unit. If the family's lease compliance issues are resolved and they accept the unit, they move into the new or rehabilitated housing and their relocation process is complete.

## ENDNOTES

1. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Rule 24 CFR Part 964, 1994.
2. Residents were relocated from four high-rise developments in Kenwood in 1986 with the promise that they would return to redeveloped housing on the same site. Years passed in which no replacement housing was built; CHA lost contact with many of the families. In 2002, contracts for construction, in part on that site, were made. Only a small number of original families still in contact with CHA will return.
3. Communication of Sudhir Venkatesh, assistant professor of sociology at Columbia University, with Paul Fischer, July 3, 2002.
4. SHA has determined that property-specific requirements must not bar the return of relocated families. Their interpretation of the Uniform Relocation Act is that if property-specific requirements did not permit families to return and then meet the standards, the relocates could legitimately claim that they had not received "comparable housing" as required by the Act. Community and Supportive Service funds are used to ensure that returning families are able to achieve timely compliance with property specific requirements.
5. Communication of Karen M. Torian, assistant executive director, Housing Authority of the City of Newark, with MaryAnn Russ, October 2002.
6. Correspondence of Eric Johnson, assistant director-Resident Relations, Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, with Kale Williams, Oct. 2, 2002.



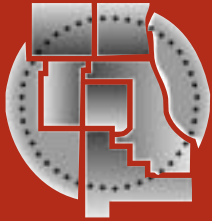
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