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August 31, 2009

Mr. John Cressman, Executive Director  
Rockford Housing Authority  
223 S. Winnebago St.  
Rockford, Il. 61102

Dear Mr. Cressman:

Please find enclosed HCP's final report on the Rockford Housing Authority's (RHA) development of a mobility program to serve former residents of Jane Addams Village. The 71 former residents have received comprehensive counseling services and a few larger families are still in need of a unit but we know the RHA is committed to helping these harder to house families as well. Finally, other residents who participate in the regular housing choice voucher program will be able to receive similar services as the program continues forward to provide expanded housing opportunities in the future.

The project was a success with 18 of 67 former Jane Addams families (4 dropped out of the program during the course of the year) living in opportunity areas after the project ended. That's 27% of the total families, a very respectable result for a new program. Families originally lived in a census tract that averaged 34.4% African American and 41.5% poverty population and moved to census tracts that averaged 25% African American and 19.1% poverty population. The poverty rate was cut by more than 50%. Clearly many families took advantage of the program and made a move to improve their lives and the lives of their children.

It was a pleasure working with your staff and our agency learned quite a lot in the process which is always a benefit. We hope you're pleased with the results as well and that Sherri Tracey and Karen Bell remain involved in the program. They both did an excellent job.

If you have any comments or questions after reviewing our report and attachments, please call or email and we'd be happy to discuss anything with you. HCP will submit its final billing in the next couple of weeks and we thank you for your confidence in our ability to assist you in this important endeavor.

Sincerely,  
Christine Klepper, Executive Director

## **Report on Implementation of a Mobility Program for Residents of Jane Addams Village and Housing Choice Voucher Program Participants by the Rockford Housing Authority**

**Submitted by HCP of Illinois, Inc.  
August 31, 2009**

**Introduction and history of the program.** On July 31, 2007, two tenants of Jane Addams Village, a public housing development in Rockford, Illinois, filed a federal lawsuit against HUD and the Rockford Housing Authority (RHA) to challenge the proposed demolition of their homes. Negotiations to settle the legal dispute produced an agreement by the end of 2007. Jane Addams Village was demolished but the RHA proposed to develop 84 units of low-income housing as a replacement. Moreover, the RHA proposed to establish a housing mobility program within its Section 8 voucher program to assist families and better inform their moving process.

This report focuses on the establishment of the mobility program for former residents of Jane Addams Village and eventually for all participants in the Housing Choice Voucher program in Rockford, including any public housing residents who may be relocated in the future.

### **Implementation of the mobility program.**

**Rockford.** The City of Rockford, a small metropolitan area in the north central portion of Illinois, is 17% African American with a 14% poverty rate (based on 2000 census data). Approximately 10% of Rockford residents are Latino. African Americans, poverty level populations and voucher holders are concentrated in the north and west portions of the community (see maps attached). Employment and better schools are located on the east side of the city.

Rockford is the third largest city in Illinois with a population of 150,000 people and is located in Winnebago County. Rockford is surrounded by rural areas and smaller “suburbs” that have very low African American populations (in the 1-2% category). These areas also have very low poverty level populations. As a small, originally industrial city, Rockford has a relatively strong transportation system, a significant employment base and an older housing stock.

**The Rockford Housing Authority.** RHA is a standard performing public housing authority that operates within the City of Rockford. RHA manages over 1900 units of public housing and 2100 housing choice vouchers. RHA employs about 107 employees and has a total operating budget of \$9 million and a capital budget of \$3 million. RHA runs a Family Self-Sufficiency Program with about 150 participants and also has partnerships in the community for learning opportunities, youth and senior services.

On March 3, 2008, the RHA issued a Request for Proposals to provide Mobility Counseling Consulting Services. The services to be performed include:

1. Assess the level of mobility counseling services offered to the former Jane Addams residents by the RHA under the existing HCP and LIPH programs.
2. Develop an enhanced mobility program designed to encourage the former Jane Addams residents to relocate to low-poverty, integrated areas in the Rockford, IL metropolitan areas or in other areas of the country.
3. Conduct in-house training to educate staff on the implementation process of the mobility counseling program.
4. Conduct counseling sessions for all former Jane Addams residents within 90 days of the contract award.
5. Assist the RHA with mobility counseling services for the former Jane Addams residents as needed including any follow-up (post-move) services.
6. Advise the RHA on “best practices” for landlord outreach to expand the number of landlords and available HCV units in low-poverty or non-traditional areas of the community.
7. Provide a written report of the mobility services offered to the former residents of Jane Addams including the number of residents served and documentation of their decision to relocate to alternative locations in the Rockford, IL metropolitan area or other areas of the country.

Housing Choice Partners (HCP), a private non-profit organization located in Chicago responded. HCP has 14 years experience in creating and providing mobility counseling to voucher holders in the Chicago metropolitan region. The Board of the RHA resolved to award a contract to HCP for these services and a contract was signed on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

**Workplan.** The outline below is taken from HCP’s proposal to the RHA and implementation of the mobility program followed the original plan closely. The proposed task in the proposal is listed below and on following pages along with a discussion of what activities were actually completed during the year-long effort.

#### **A. Visit to Rockford—Month 1.**

**Task. Learn about the community.** Visit Rockford, tour the community, review maps and stats about various neighborhoods, understand what services have been provided to the target group, where they are now, and how they communicate with the PHA. What is the capacity of the PHA to integrate an on-going mobility program into current operations. Any special programs like FSS? Relationship with social service providers; community organizations and landlords associations, etc.

**Task. Provide overview of mobility in general, HCP specifically and how Rockford might construct its own program.** Why is mobility important and how is it provided? What are opportunity areas and how can Rockford define their own opportunity areas? How successful has mobility been? What is the history over time? Elements to a successful mobility program:

**Material development**—opportunity areas, tenant rights and responsibilities, school choice, housekeeping

**Landlord outreach**—mail, in person, by phone, web-site.

**Tenant education**—briefings/trainings scheduled

**Search assistance**—one-on-one community tours, unit showings, listings given, landlord negotiation, assistance with paperwork etc.

**The move**—schedule move/provide relocation assistance, security deposit loans

**Follow-up**—interview forms, social service provider lists etc.

**Activity.** HCP reviewed a whole host of materials prior to visiting Rockford for the first time including census tract data, community maps and marketing information, school information, employment statistics and other miscellaneous information provided by the RHA staff.

During HCP's first visit to Rockford, a meeting with relevant staff was held including the then executive director, Steve Anderson. Sherri Tracey, Deputy Executive Director of Development, and Carol Washington, Section 8 director participated along with several other relevant staff. All the various elements of a mobility program were discussed, so that the meeting adjourned with RHA staff understanding HCP and its program better and getting a sense of the task at hand which was creating a new mobility program that would work in Rockford.

A very thorough community tour was then provided to HCP by the RHA so that HCP staff left its first visit to Rockford understanding the geography and personality of the community as well as the program context, capacity and personnel involved in the project.

Sherri Tracey was named as the point person for the RHA and HCP staff, Christine Klepper, Director and Catherine Johnson, Senior Housing Counselor, worked with Sherri and her staff during the life of the project.

Assignments were made that day to move the project along so that in between meetings, various activities were completed. The first major initiative was to determine what would constitute an opportunity area for the City of Rockford.

After careful review of area maps, poverty and race data, employment and educational information, rent levels, etc., RHA decided that using the average poverty and African American population figures for Rockford (based on 2000 census data) would work best. An opportunity area was then defined as any census tract that is <14% poverty and <17% African American.

## **B. Second Visit to Rockford—Month 1.**

**Task. Staff Training.** Day-long review of material development and other steps to implement a mobility program including reporting and database development as well as definition of opportunity areas.

**Activity.** Karen Bell was hired to run the mobility program, 30 hours per week initially. Karen worked at the RHA and so was familiar with the population and the public housing/voucher programs. Karen also lived in an opportunity area herself, bringing a particular vision to the program. She understood both the pros and cons of such a move and could communicate and understand clients well as a result.

Our day-long discussion with Karen during our second visit to Rockford included all the particulars related to counseling low-income families about using their vouchers not just to pay the rent but to improve their lives and the lives of their children. We went through all the phases of counseling from intake and developing a relationship, to needs assessment, through search assistance, landlord negotiation, the inspection, and the move. We discussed security deposit loans and the need for consistent follow-up after a move. We talked about developing a social services list for referrals for any special needs the family might have. We also discussed the need for problem-solving assistance to the families to make the transition to a new neighborhood as successful as possible.

A large part of the training included how to discuss opportunity areas, how to answer fears or concerns the family might have and what are the most effective and important selling points of moving to an opportunity area. How can the counselor/advocate discuss the program most effectively with landlords in opportunity areas? What's the best response to any neighborhood resistance?

HCP shared its experience, methods and materials related to all these topics and because Karen already lived in an opportunity area, she was well ahead of the curve on many of our discussion points. We ended the day by assigning start-up tasks to move implementation forward.

Developing a clear map of opportunity areas in Rockford was the main challenge since no appropriate map existed. HCP shared its client briefing materials (briefings introduce clients to mobility), maps, PowerPoint presentations, workshop materials on subjects such as tenant rights and responsibilities, internal record-keeping documents etc. with Karen so she could begin developing materials for her own briefings and documentation needs.

### **C. Rockford Program Implementation with HCP review/suggestions—Month 2.**

**Task. Material development.** Review HCP materials and revise to fit the Rockford PHA program and market area.

**Task. Landlord Outreach.** Develop marketing plan to promote participation by landlords in opportunity areas of the Rockford housing market. Create mailing materials, calling protocol, speaking presentation (PowerPoint), user-friendly web-site (if not already developed). Consider incentives for new participation. Create listing sheet and database to track results. Develop a landlord hotline if not in place.

**Activity.** HCP reviewed developing materials coming from the RHA, making suggestions for additional items, other methods for communicating various messages, etc. The goal was to have a PowerPoint presentation and client handout booklet for briefings for former Jane Addams residents by the deadline set by the court (90 days from the signing of the contract which meant the deadline was 8/20/2008). There was quite a lot of back and forth with regard to materials and a fair amount of time that went into their development. In the end, RHA had handouts related to schools, transportation, crime, employment, fair housing, landlords, and exactly where opportunity areas in the community were located.

And of course at the same time, it was important that units be identified so that clients had somewhere to search once they signed up for the mobility program. Therefore, HCP created a landlord outreach plan to be implemented by the RHA as detailed below.

1. Develop brochure, PowerPoint presentation and advertising about the voucher program and its benefits aimed at property owners in opportunity areas.
  - A. Guaranteed rent on the first of the month
  - B. Fewer vacancies
  - C. Tenant training in rights and responsibilities, housekeeping
  - D. Promote web-site listing service
  - E. Incentive to try the voucher program?

2. Identify rental properties and their owners in opportunity areas.
  - A. Current PHA landlords (encourage them to list units in opportunity areas and to tell friends & neighbors)
  - B. Building department/tax records
  - C. Ads in newspapers and on-line for rental properties currently available
  - D. Drive through neighborhoods and get phone numbers/addresses of units currently for rent
  - E. Network with the real estate community, look for investor clubs and any property management organizations
  
3. Complete outreach
  - A. Put a note on current landlord checks to encourage listings in opportunity areas
  - B. Put a PHA ad in various media especially directed to those in opportunity areas (if possible) looking for new rental units throughout the Rockford area
  - C. Call on advertising of available rental units and list new units (develop listing sheet if needed), mail brochure out if requested and call again
  - D. Develop mailing lists from above research
    1. Mail brochure and cover letter to current landlords and as many potential new landlords in opportunity areas as possible (do in phases that are manageable for follow up phone calls)
    2. Do follow up phone calls
    3. List units
  - E. Attend meetings of various organizations identified above and promote the voucher program. Request to make a presentation to various organizations and develop a PowerPoint presentation to use with brochures as a hand-out. Recruit a happy landlord who can speak to his/her peers about the program.
  - F. Do site visits to larger developments and management companies who control a larger number of units. Discuss benefits of the voucher program and leave materials.

RHA staff began working on identifying units for the program. A variety of mailings were done to interest new landlords in the voucher program with follow up phone calls and in person visits. Advertising was scanned including that on various web-sites, and landlords with available units were called. Staff drove through opportunity areas noting “for rent” signs and they followed up on that outreach. Landlords already in the voucher program were contacted to see if they had any available units in opportunity areas.

RHA reports that the most successful outreach method was a speaking engagement at the Rockford Landlord Association meeting and follow-up, one-on-one meetings. The program could be “sold” individually, questions asked and answered and a one-on-one service approach was implemented as clients were referred to specific units.

The result of all that outreach is that 31 new landlords were recruited into the program. All the units identified were used by program participants with only one or two families finding units on their own.

Exception rents were requested from HUD and some were granted during the term of the project so that helped get more units into the program. Finally, the State of Illinois tax abatement program (discussed in another part of this report) was expanded to include Rockford so in the future, the RHA will have another tool to entice new landlords into providing units in opportunity areas to voucher holders.

#### **D. Rockford Program Implementation with HCP review/suggestions--Months 3 & 4.**

**Task. Tenant education.** Develop intake sheet and PowerPoint to go along with written materials. Integrate into voucher process. Develop database to track client progress. Schedule briefings for target population. HCP to provide first series of workshops (within 90 days of contract award).

**Task. Search assistance.** Develop a plan to assign tenants to a specific counselor. Develop community tour route with highlights (schools with info on performance, transportation, shopping etc.). Give listings in opportunity areas to tenants and take them to view units. Talk to landlords to encourage participation and knowledge about the voucher program. Advocate for tenant. Assist with paperwork and to facilitate a smooth inspection process and HAP contract. HCP will assist directly by participating with RHA staff with several clients.

**Activity.** Karen developed some clever and innovative outreach and mailing materials for families that certainly got their attention. The first briefing was held August 19, 2008 with 15 participants and conducted jointly by HCP and RHA staff. Two other briefings were subsequently offered in September (both were conducted by the RHA, the first was observed and commented on by HCP and the last was done entirely by RHA staff). Eventually 39 or 55% of 71 eligible former Jane Addams residents signed up for the program. Another 12 indicated an initial interest but never followed through. The final 20 residents received numerous letters and other forms of outreach but never responded. Presumably they were satisfied with their current housing. The agenda and selected materials used for the briefing sessions are attached.

Since Karen Bell was the only counselor all the Jane Addams residents worked directly with her. Her caseload was approximately 39 families, which would normally be considered high but all were not active at one time. Additionally, they had quite a bit of time to look for new housing because of lease termination dates and their enrollment in the program. All Jane Addams residents had previously moved into a private rental unit in the community using a voucher because of the demolition of Jane Addams Village, their original homes.

Karen began working one on one with families, interviewing them to understand their particular and unique circumstance, searching out units for them that matched their needs, taking them to see specific units, continuing outreach to landlords so there was an adequate supply of available units in opportunity areas, and working to conclude moves through the inspection and rent negotiation phase of the voucher program. Karen noted serious barriers for families and reached out to HCP on more than one occasion to try to resolve various issues. A summary of some of the issues raised is attached with suggestions for actions to overcome them.

Issues mentioned such as coordination with the voucher processing departments, lack of affordable units in opportunity areas, prejudice of landlords and neighbors, and unrealistic expectations on the part of residents are common problems as mobility programs begin and they continue to be challenges as the programs move along but they tend to get better over time as the program integrates residents, almost always seamlessly, into areas with more racial and economic diversity.

Issues with landlord recruitment are difficult and probably the most challenging part of any mobility program. To respond to a tight rental market in opportunity areas, HCP recommended and the RHA requested exception rents from HUD to allow higher rent limits in opportunity areas. HUD responded quickly and approved a few of the areas that were requested and denied others. The exception rents helped bring more units into the program in opportunity areas.

HCP also worked with others to expand the State of Illinois Housing Opportunity Area Tax Abatement Program that provides a tax reduction to landlords in opportunity areas that rent to voucher holders. The abatement program was passed in the Illinois legislature and implemented in 2005 as a result of action through the Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance but it didn't originally include Rockford.

To expand the tax abatement program, the legislation needed to be amended. The RHA contacted representatives in their city who sponsored legislation that ultimately expanded the tax abatement program to include Rockford (and some additional areas in the City of Chicago). The tax abatement program is a big incentive to landlords to participate in the voucher program and it can provide a tax reduction equal to about one month's rent per unit participating in the program. Ken Oliver of Interfaith Open Communities and the author of the original legislation coordinated the effort to get the expansion enacted. Rockford now has yet another tool to help in attracting good landlords and good landlords to the mobility program.

#### **E. Rockford Program Implementation with HCP review/suggestions--Months 5-8.**

**Task. Moves.** Schedule the move and provide loans or moving payments if required.

**Activity.** Moves began in November 08 and continued through June 2009 due to the timing of yearly lease terminations as discussed previously. Most of the moves were made in the spring of 09 (April and May). Since enrollments into the mobility program were conducted in August and September of 2008, most clients had adequate time to search and find units. The average search time per family, beginning to end, was about 6.5 months. Jane Addams families received move assistance consisting of security deposit loans if needed and actual moving costs.

Not all families have moved yet though. Because it's difficult to find large units for larger families, several of those families continue to be active even after the "end" of the program. To the credit of the RHA, they have pledged to purchase larger units in opportunity areas to house these larger families. Four families are in this category

Of the 39 families who enrolled in the program, 23 ultimately moved, with 15 of those going to or staying in, opportunity areas. All moves were without any negative incidents.

**F. Task. Start Follow-up (to run 12 months post-move).** Provide a list of social service providers in the new area. Develop an interview document and call client every two months for a year to see what challenges they might have and how problems can be solved. Call landlord as well at the six-month period.

**Activity.** Karen Bell moved into the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) coordinator position for RHA on a temporary basis (between the end of the Jane Addams mobility program and the beginning of the permanent mobility program) and she tried to simply take her mobility client load and shift it over to the FSS program. FSS provides an opportunity for families to set goals, it provides resources to help them reach those goals, and over the five year time-frame of the program, families tend to move toward self-

sufficiency even if they don't always achieve it completely, though some certainly do. FSS, as a follow-up program to mobility is a good plan in that families can save money and have it matched by the PHA plus the PHA can keep in touch with its mobility program participants in a regular way over a long period of time.

Only a few of the families signed up and participated in FSS however, so a new plan for follow-up and to track the success of families over time will need to be developed. Contact has been made with most of the families since their moves but there isn't any data on exactly how they're doing--what kinds of referrals they might have needed, whether children are enrolled in their new schools, or what other issues may have come up.

**G. Month 13. Final report on program.** Rockford and HCP to collaborate and report on progress. HCP to write report and submit to RHA. **Submitted 8/31/2009.**

### **Results.**

The original goal for the program (set by the RHA) was that 50% of the 71 Jane Addams families would participate in the mobility program. In the end, 55% or 39 families actually participated so the goal was more than met.

Eleven families of the participating 39 in the program moved from a traditional area (>14% poverty and >17% African American) to an opportunity area and another four families moved from one unit in an opportunity area to another, bringing the total number of opportunity moves to 15. Those numbers mean that 38% of those in the program moved to or stayed in an opportunity area. Further, there were 23 moves altogether out of the 39 participants so 65% of those who moved, went to or stayed in, an opportunity area. Those numbers are impressive, even given the relatively small size of the program.

A chart is attached that shows the move activity of the Jane Addams families from their original location at Jane Addams, to their original voucher unit, to the location where they live today. Program participant moves are noted as are moves by non-program participants. We also note the census tract data for each location so we can see if poverty de-concentration and racial de-segregation have occurred.

What we find is that all families started in a tract that was 41.5% poverty and that had a 34.4% African American population. By the end of the program, mobility program participants lived in census tracts averaging 18.5% poverty and 21% African American. The poverty rate was cut by 55% and the average African American population went down by almost 40%, signaling a more economically and racially diverse environment. These numbers are still above the averages for Rockford, but are much more in line with what a more random population distribution might look like (if discrimination and segregation were not the rule rather than the exception). An additional three program participants went to opportunity areas on their own during their first move from Jane Addams to a voucher unit (and they ultimately stayed there).

Non-program participants moved from a tract that was 41.5% poverty and 34.4% African American to tracts that averaged 22.7% poverty and 34.3% African American. These families improved their circumstances but not as much as program participants did. The racial statistics were virtually the same for this group while the poverty level population in the new location went down by about 45%

compared to 55% for program participants. Some non-program participants moved on their own to opportunity areas directly from Jane Addams (7) and during a second move, from their original voucher unit (1).

More detail can be seen on the chart and maps attached. The maps show opportunity area moves for program participants and non-program participants. Opportunity area moves generally shifted east into areas with more employment and better schools with both groups, but the program participants had a greater number of such moves.

Overall, though this initial mobility program was small, the results are very good. In Chicago, we generally consider that if 25-35% of movers go to an opportunity area, that we've done a good job. In this case, though again the numbers are small, the Rockford program produced 65% of movers that moved to an opportunity area. Of course the Rockford area is very different from Chicago and a good number of Jane Addams families moved on their own to opportunity areas (15 or 21%), probably signifying a more diverse housing market in general and this is a plaintiff class group as well, maybe more motivated by their experience.

I also spoke with several participants. One resident, who made an opportunity move, thought the entire experience was excellent. She loved her counselor, she looked at many units, and she feels very satisfied with where she lives now. Another resident, who didn't make a move through the program, felt that she was offered the choice but she just wasn't interested in making a move. She went into the office and talked with Karen Bell but said she felt that the security deposit required to move just wasn't affordable for her at the time. She indicated that her current residence is "decent". She very much appreciated the opportunity offered to her however.

RHA reported spending \$63,390 from the beginning of the program through June, 2009. This figure includes salary, benefits, supplies, travel and related expenses for staff required to run the program. Since this was a brand new effort, start up required significant time and resources but as the program continues, there will be an economy of scale with more clients enrolled and more time devoted to counseling rather than administrative tasks and material development.

The staff of the Rockford Housing Authority approached this task with enthusiasm, a spirit of cooperation and a willingness to really work with families to promote opportunity areas. They expedited inspections, were fair in their rent negotiations, and provided good staff support to get the job done. We've worked with other housing authorities who don't exhibit these qualities and the difference can be seen in the results. Hiring a staffer who lives in an opportunity area and really believes in the benefits it affords while understanding the sacrifices that sometimes come along with it, made for a great program result. RHA did most of what we asked of them and did it with an attitude that promoted success. Sherri Tracey and Karen Bell should be commended for their good work.

The next task for the RHA is to carry over the Jane Addams success to their general Section 8 program. The new effort will start September 1, 2009 and Karen Bell will stay with the program.

**Recommendations.** HCP would recommend the following as the program continues.

1. Work on the opportunity map. A larger, more detailed map that is easily read should be produced. The one produced for the briefings is hard to read.
2. Other hand-outs could be improved. Time was short as we began this effort and with a little more time (before outreach materials go out to the general voucher population), materials should be modified to better focus on opportunity areas and their benefits. For example,

comparisons on crime, schools, jobs, etc., can be done showing how opportunity areas score better than traditional areas.

3. Monthly reporting on all aspects of program activity should be instituted to fully document the work as it progresses, with regular supervisory review.
4. We understand mobility program staff will also do voucher work as well to integrate the program for even better efficiency but staff should have sufficient time and resources to work with families on their move so that the incentive is for more families not fewer families because the work load is just too great.
5. RHA should assess mobility program participants who move to opportunity areas over time to see how they do. A regular path of communication should be set up to provide data and to be sure that families are accessing any social services they need to attain success.
6. Helping families stay in opportunity areas should be one focus of the new effort (obviously along with assisting those who live in traditional areas). Families can and do move back to traditional areas sometimes because they don't have the knowledge or resources to stay in an area where it may be harder to find a unit in the time they might have to do it. Advocates can't underestimate how important this task is for ultimate success of the family and the program.

We thank the Rockford Housing Authority for a rewarding experience that helped our agency learn more too.

