

## **SPOTLIGHT: In Pittsburgh's Approach, Housing Stability is a Central Component of Case Management**

The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP) and the City of Pittsburgh received a \$30 million Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant in 2014 for the Larimer/East Liberty neighborhood. Since that time a great deal of progress has been achieved, including completing Phase 1 of the housing and starting construction on Phase 2. Throughout the Choice Neighborhoods redevelopment and relocation process, the Pittsburgh People Team, led by Urban Strategies with the Kingsley Association as the local service provider, has integrated housing stability strategies as a central component of their case management. Through their experience with Pittsburgh and other Choice Neighborhoods, Urban Strategies has found that ensuring residents maintain stable housing takes an intensive, proactive approach, and that improving higher order outcomes in employment, education, and health is predicated on families first achieving housing stability.

Based on data from Pittsburgh and several other Choice Neighborhoods, Urban Strategies found that about one third of residents experiencing relocation require an intensive level of support to help them make the transition. Relocation can be a difficult and sometimes destabilizing process. A focus on housing stability as part of case management is critical to help at-risk residents avoid adverse outcomes such as eviction. While some residents were able to navigate the process mostly independently, others required hands-on assistance and frequent communication to stay on track during the process. To ensure a successful transition, case managers in Pittsburgh reached out to their highest need residents on a daily basis or at least every couple of days, accompanied residents on appointments and meetings with the Housing Authority and their new landlords, became directly involved in problem solving on behalf of the resident with the landlord or Housing Authority when needed, and sometimes were required to provide intensive support to help the household get into good standing with the Housing Authority (such as finding assistance to pay down outstanding rent, addressing household members living onsite who are not on the lease, etc.).

The Pittsburgh People Team also found that it was more effective to proactively check in with residents and see how they can help. While looking for housing, case management staff helped residents expunge criminal records, replace lost documentation needed to apply for housing, and assist with transportation to see prospective housing options. Some residents are less comfortable asking for help, so case managers also developed close relationships with landlords who could identify red flags indicating a family needed a higher level of support. Missed or late rent payment, utility shut-offs, or other concerns that landlords observe during a routine inspection may indicate that a family needs support. Pittsburgh's People Team approached landlords with Section 8 units through their own research or by referral from the PHA. When residents went to view apartments, the People Team sent staff along to introduce themselves to landlords to help establish a working relationship. Staff explained the Choice Neighborhoods project and their role, offering to be considered a resource if challenges arose. Staff found that landlords can be a crucial partner to maintain housing stability, especially if a relationship is built early on and the focus is on preventing circumstances that would lead to eviction.

During and after relocation, the case managers continue to work with residents on creating and implementing individual and family development plans, focused on topics such as child educational improvement, adult educational advancement, family health improvement, etc. Maintaining stable housing is a key factor for residents to be able to complete their development plans. Housing

stability also has a critical impact on child development, as evidenced by a number of [research studies](#).

So far, the Pittsburgh People Team’s approach has been successful in supporting residents’ housing stability. During Phase 1 relocation, not a single family was forcibly evicted, and each family received customized support to find a unit they can afford that is located conveniently for school and work commutes. Families with children who wanted to stay in the same school were accommodated through a partnership with the school system. With construction complete, thirty-four target housing families have moved into the newly finished development at Cornerstone Village, including Ms. Jumay W. In describing her feelings on moving to Cornerstone Village, she shared that it’s a new beginning, stating *“I’m not stuck anymore! I go to church now, I quit smoking... My kids love their home!”*



*Figure 1: Ms. Jumay is a proud resident of Cornerstone Village in Pittsburgh.*

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