

POVERTY & RACE RESEARCH ACTION COUNCIL

# *Keeping* the *Promise:*

## Preserving and Enhancing Housing Mobility in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program

### Conference Report of the Third National Conference on Housing Mobility

Philip Tegeler,  
Mary Cunningham,  
& Margery Austin Turner, Editors

**December 2005**

*Supported by a grant from  
the Taconic Foundation*





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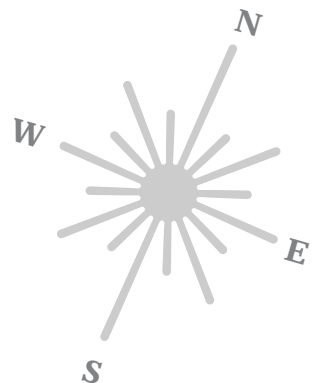
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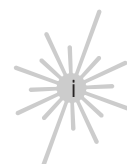


We are grateful to the Urban Institute, the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the National Fair Housing Alliance, the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, and the Inclusive Communities Project, for their assistance in the printing and distribution of this report.

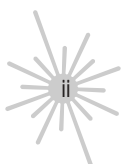
Layout and design by Mary Pettigrew / ampersand graphic design; special thanks to the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity for donating GIS images for the cover graphic.

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# Introduction and Acknowledgments

Philip Tegeler\*

**T**his report is an attempt to capture—and update—the best insights of the Third National Conference on Housing Mobility, hosted by the Poverty & Race Research Action Council and held at the Urban Institute in December 2004.

The authors represented in this report are a cross-section of scholars and activists working to improve housing choices for low-income families. Although the details are often complex, the basic messages of the report are simple: housing mobility works; it is feasible to implement; and it is now at great risk of being dismantled as a federal policy.

We are at a crucial juncture in housing mobility policy. We know more about what is needed to make housing mobility programs work well, and more about the benefits of mobility for families who choose to move to lower-poverty neighborhoods and communities. Yet over the past three years, we have seen funding for many mobility programs terminated, and we have also seen the housing voucher policies that make mobility possible stripped away one at a time. This is why we titled the conference “Keeping the Promise.” America holds out the promise of opportunity to poor families, many of whom are living close to the edge yet still reaching for a better life. Residential mobility is one of the ways that we have offered opportunity in a deeply segregated society, with access to safer neighborhoods, stronger schools, and more job-rich environments. We cannot afford to go back to a time when such communities are “off-limits” to poor people of color—this cannot become our new federal housing policy.

There are many people to thank for putting on last winter’s conference. First thanks go to PRRAC staff Rebekah Park, Nisha Agarwal, Brenda Fleet, and Chester Hartman. Rebekah Park, our research fellow in 2004, took the lead role in organizing the conference, surveying existing mobility programs, and designing the conference materials. Nisha

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\* Philip Tegeler is Executive Director of the Poverty & Race Research Action Council



Agarwal, our law and policy intern, assisted Rebekah with the surveys, in pulling together all of the current research on housing mobility, and in helping out with conference logistics. Brenda Fleet, PRRAC's office manager in 2004, worked hard to keep us organized, managing much of the logistical detail of the conference. Chester Hartman, PRRAC's Director of Research, oversaw the survey of housing mobility programs and also helped extend our discussion of housing mobility with a continuing symposium series on housing mobility in our bimonthly publication *Poverty & Race*. PRRAC volunteers Shayna Strom and Hans Friedhoff also generously gave of their time during the conference.

We are grateful to the Urban Institute, which extended the use of its excellent conference facility for the two-day conference, and to staff and volunteers at the Urban Institute for all of their help before, during, and after the conference—including especially my coeditors Marge Turner and Mary Cunningham, along with Kadija Ferryman, Julie Fenderson, and June Ross.

We were also fortunate to have a very active and involved conference planning committee, each of whom contributed in many ways: Xavier de Souza Briggs, associate professor at M.I.T.; Mary Davis, former executive director of the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities and immediate past president of the National Fair Housing Alliance; Elizabeth Julian, a civil rights attorney in Dallas, Texas, who recently established the Inclusive Communities Project in Dallas; Alex Polikoff of Business and Professional People for the Public Interest in Chicago; Florence Roisman, a professor at Indiana University School of Law; Mary Ann Russ of Abt Associates; Barbara Sard, director of Housing Policy at the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities; and Margery Turner of the Urban Institute. Cosponsoring organizations included PRRAC, the National Fair Housing Alliance, The National Low Income Housing Coalition, the Urban Institute, the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities, and the National Council of La Raza.

Finally, we are grateful to the Taconic Foundation for its financial support of the conference and our Housing Mobility Initiative, without which we could not have moved forward. General support from some of our key foundation partners in 2004–05—including the Ford, Kellogg, and Fannie Mae Foundations and the Open Society Institute—also gave us the freedom to focus major attention on housing mobility research and policy both before and after the conference.





# Where We Live: Race, Class, and the American Dream

Sheryll Cashin\*

**H**ousing integration was the last plank in the civil rights movement, and it is the realm in which we have experienced the fewest gains. When it comes to integration, housing is also the area in which Americans most seem to agree that separation is okay. We may accept, even desire, integrated workplaces and integrated public space. But when it comes to our neighborhoods, more visceral personal needs of comfort and security take precedence—especially for families with children. For many then, race and class integration of neighborhoods is simply irrelevant or perceived as a threat to more fundamental concerns. Yet segregated residential housing contributes to pervasive inequality in this country and to social gulfs of misunderstanding. Where you live largely defines what type of people you will be exposed to on a daily basis and hence how well you relate to different types. It often defines what schools you will attend, what employers you have access to, and whether you will be exposed to positive role models. We seem to ignore the obvious when it comes to race relations and inequality in this country. From civil rights leaders to the average Joe, the issues of *where* we live and *why* often go unexamined, even as they have seminal consequences for society.

The conference report of the Third National Conference on Housing Mobility, therefore, could not be more important or timely. “Housing mobility” has become a standard moniker in public policy discourse for a revolutionary, elusive idea: everyone should have the opportunity to live in a safe, stable neighborhood, regardless of their race or socioeconomic status. The report reflects recent research on housing mobility: the impact it has on family outcomes, the detrimental effects of current federal policy, best practices, and emerging new constituencies for mobility. Most importantly the

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\* Sheryll Cashin is Professor of Law, Georgetown Law School and author of the *Failures of Integration, How Race and Class are Undermining the American Dream* (2004)



report underscores how housing mobility changes lives. For example, Juanita Moody, 52, describes to *New York Times* journalist Helen Epstein what it was like living in “the projects” on Nepperhan Avenue in an inner-city neighborhood of Yonkers, New York, where she lived for 30 years with her husband until they were able, with the help of a special program, to move to a middle-class area of the city: “[I]t was stressful just to walk out of that place. You were always scared for the kids. ... You wake up stressed, go to sleep stressed, you see all the garbage and dealers. That is depressing. In a bad environment like that you say, ‘What’s the use of doing anything?’” After she moved, her blood pressure fell from high to near normal. Her liver no longer shows signs of a hepatitis that had been rapidly progressing. Removed from the all-consuming daily grind of worry about her safety and property she stopped eating at McDonald’s and became health conscious in her food choices. In her new, decidedly non-luxurious but safe surroundings—an apartment with leafy views on a busy street near two gas stations and a mall—she has a new attitude: “It inspires you to do all you can—spiritually, health-wise, any kind of way.”<sup>1</sup> Other families who were lucky beneficiaries of the “Enhanced Section 8 Outreach Program,” or ESOP, a locally run effort to help poor families living in dangerous ghetto neighborhoods of Yonkers to move into middle-class areas, display similar transformations. The so-called “ghetto mentality” does not move with the resident. It is not even inherent in the resident. It stays back where it thrives, a foul, mysterious miasma, that falls on the ghetto and its inhabitants, making them, literally and figuratively, sick.<sup>2</sup>

Offering individuals like Juanita Moody the life-changing opportunity of a decent place to live is justification enough for advancing the cause of housing mobility. But there is a second, fundamental justification. Our separation into starkly different figurative and actual “life spaces” contributes mightily to a social gulf—in opportunities as well as the ability of the races to connect. It fuels misunderstanding in several ways. Ghetto life and culture contribute to racial stereotyping and fear, especially of low-income black people. It allows the suburbanite to rationalize a move to a homogeneous neighborhood, although the mover may not consciously admit this to herself. The stark physical separation from concentrated poverty also contributes to a gap of understanding. For those who do not see, regularly or ever, the effects of concentrated poverty, such effects do not exist.

This stark separation also contributes to the seemingly eternal challenge of creating social and economic parity between whites and communities of color. White voters, for example, typically show great antipathy to any spending that is perceived as helping the

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1 Helen Epstein, “The New Ghetto Miasma, Enough to Make You Sick?,” *New York Times Magazine*, October 12, 2003, p. 98.

2 Ibid.



“welfare poor,” which, in their lexicon means poor black people.<sup>3</sup> Usually they are well-buffered from “those people.”

Had we chosen a different path in the 20th century and not created high-poverty black ghettos, I do not believe we would have such stark political and social divisions in the United States. Perhaps African-Americans are the group all other races are most resistant to integrating with *because* they are the ones most confined to and associated with ghetto neighborhoods and everything they represent. There was and is an alternative course. As Alex Polikoff eloquently observes in part V of the report, the *Gautreaux* case in metropolitan Chicago bears witness to the alternative possibilities for the entire nation. When the Chicago Housing Authority and the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) were found by a federal court to have intentionally discriminated against black people in the location of public housing, plaintiffs in the *Gautreaux* case were given an option. They could take an affordable housing voucher and move to predominately white suburbs, neighborhoods they could not afford previously. HUD was charged with helping these residents of the worst of Chicago public housing to find affordable, market rate units elsewhere. Social science researchers followed these families for many years, comparing the outcomes of the suburban movers to those of families that chose to remain in Chicago public housing.

By every indicator of well-being the lives of suburban movers improved. The parents, mostly single former welfare mothers, found jobs. The children, who initially struggled in suburban schools with higher standards, had dramatically higher rates of high school graduation and college attendance. The children spoke of suburban teachers who took more time to help them with their school work and set higher expectations for them. The parents spoke of being motivated to go out and work and of no longer being worried about their children getting caught up in street violence. The children said they initially struggled but ultimately made friends in the new suburban neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup>

When poor people are empowered to get out from under the ghetto, small miracles occur. They feel better. Severe asthma attacks give way to boundless energy. Children do not want to go to sleep because for the first time they are free to play outside, surrounded by grass, trees, and fresh air that does not make them sick. They can now play without fear of bullets. Parents feel calmer; they have a new sense of peace. They eat better. They are living, exuberant at having escaped the constant daily grind of “us versus

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3 Mark Rom, "Health and Welfare in the American States," in *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis*, 3rd ed., ed. Virginia Gray and Herbert Jacob, 399, 407–08 (Washington DC, CQ Press, 1996) (discussing the differing public perceptions between AFDC welfare mothers and Social Security recipients).

4 James F. Rosenbaum et al., "Can the Kerner Commission's Housing Strategy Improve Employment, Education, and Social Integration for Low-Income Blacks?," 71 *N.C.L.Rev.* 1519 (1993).

them.” The police are no longer there to harass them. These lucky movers have experienced a transforming personal makeover without winning the lottery or a reality television show. They simply were given the chance to live somewhere that offers a modicum of peace, dignity, and opportunity. It is not much to ask for, yet a modest apartment on a busy street with a view of trees and no menacing presences is a queen’s castle for those who have endured ghetto conditions.<sup>5</sup> Still, the opportunities most whites have in this country—to live outside a high-poverty neighborhood—will continue to elude millions of people of color if we continue with our present course of accepting ghetto poverty as inevitable, rather than enabling all who are poor to live in a low- or even moderate-poverty neighborhood.

We are all losing under the status quo. In a society that sets up “winner” and “loser” communities and schools based upon race and class, everyone, especially the middle class, has to work harder to get in the “winner” column. With the expensive price tag attached to “winner” communities, middle-class whites struggle to afford homes in good neighborhoods with acceptable schools. Or they are stuck in traffic, on the segregated suburban frontier, with a withering quality of life. In a fully integrated society fundamentally committed to bringing all communities and all people along there would not be so much daily anxiety in American life.

My fear is that it will take more direct, concrete losses to the white masses to scare us into action or at least a willingness to consider a more enlightened course. The Gautreaux experiment offers a hopeful vision of what race and class integration could achieve were we to have the courage to pursue an integrationist course. The report that follows offers concrete suggestions for better public policies, practices, and program models. The critical prerequisite for realizing this alternative vision, however, is insistent advocacy by strong, multi-racial, multi-class coalitions that form political majorities in any policymaking arena.<sup>6</sup> As with the civil rights movement itself, only deliberate, grass-roots organizing and advocacy will create a context in which ideal visions ultimately become actual political consensus.

5 Epstein, "Ghetto Miasma."

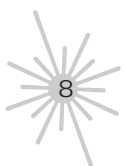
6 Sheryll Cashin, 2005, "Shall We Overcome?", 79 St. Johns Law Rev. 79 (2); Sheryll Cashin, *The Failures of Integration, How Race and Class are Undermining the American Dream* 307-17 (PublicAffairs 2004).





# Housing Mobility and Family Outcomes: A Growing Body of Research





# The Benefits of Housing Mobility: A Review of the Research Evidence

By Margery Austin Turner and  
Dolores Acevedo-Garcia\*

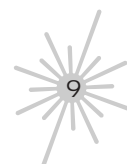
**H**istorically, federally subsidized rental housing has exacerbated the concentration of poor people—especially minorities—in distressed inner-city neighborhoods. The vast majority of federally subsidized housing developments are located in central cities. And often, subsidized rental housing is clustered in the poorest and most distressed neighborhoods. The overconcentration of poverty that results from clustering subsidized housing undermines the economic and social viability of urban communities, and a growing body of social science research indicates that growing up in these high-poverty neighborhoods also undermines a child’s life chances.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, housing mobility emerged as an explicit goal of federal housing policy, and efforts were launched in as many as 33 metro areas to help low-income families move from poor and predominantly minority neighborhoods to more affluent and racially integrated communities. Many of these efforts were inspired by research on the Gautreaux demonstration, part of the remedy achieved by a landmark desegregation lawsuit in Chicago.

This chapter summarizes the current research evidence on the effects of neighborhood distress and the benefits of interventions that enable low-income families to live in healthier and more opportunity-rich neighborhoods. More specifically, we discuss research exploring the reasons why neighborhood conditions play an important role in the well-being and life chances of adults and children. Next, we review evidence that living in a distressed, high-poverty neighborhood undermines people’s well-being and limits their longer term life chances. And finally, we present findings from research showing

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\* Margery Austin Turner is Director of the Metropolitan Housing & Communities Policy Center at The Urban Institute; Dolores Acevedo-Garcia is an Assistant Professor at the Harvard School of Public Health.



that moving to lower-poverty neighborhoods can yield significant benefits for low-income families.

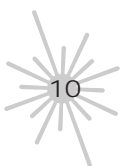
## Neighborhood conditions play an important role in the health, well-being, and life chances of both adults and children.

Social science suggests six important *causal mechanisms*—channels through which neighborhoods can shape or constrain opportunities: local service quality, shared norms and social control, peer influences, social networks, crime and violence, and job access (Ellen and Turner 1997).

**Local service quality.** An individual's well-being can be significantly affected by the availability and quality of services that are delivered at the neighborhood level. The most obvious example is public school quality, especially in the elementary grades, when children are most likely to attend schools in the immediate neighborhood. If the local public schools are poor, children are unlikely to receive a solid foundation in reading and math skills, particularly if their parents lack the tools to supplement their education.

Other services and institutions whose availability and quality vary across neighborhoods can also have a significant impact on individual outcomes. A majority of children in the U.S. now attend some form of preschool by age five (U.S. Department of Education 1995), and the neighborhood that a child lives in may constrain the set of child care centers and preschools available. Neighborhoods with safe and well-maintained parks and recreational facilities can provide opportunities for health-enhancing physical activity, and those with decent and affordable grocery stores may make it easier to maintain a healthy diet. Access to quality medical care may also be significant at every stage of life. In communities with fewer health care resources, both children and adults with chronic diseases such as asthma or diabetes may have to forego treatment and thus miss school or work for longer periods (Acevedo-Garcia et al. 2004).

**Shared norms and social control.** Children learn a lot about what behaviors are “normal” or “acceptable” from the adults they encounter around them. In addition, adults serve as role models for what young people can aspire to become, and adults outside the immediate family can help parents care for, teach, and discipline their children. Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) use the term “collective efficacy” to capture the ability of a neighborhood's residents to realize their common values and maintain effective social controls. Examples include a willingness to confront local teenagers who are skipping school, hanging out on street corners, or acting disorderly. Wilson (1991) argues that children and teenagers growing up in areas with few working adults learn less about planning ahead and managing their time. Moreover, if the vast majority of





the adults that a teenager knows either are not working or have been unsuccessful in finding and retaining good jobs, the teenager is likely to conclude that there is no real payoff to be expected from responsible behavior. In particular, Wilson (1987) argues that youths living in isolated, high-poverty communities are likely to underestimate the return on education.

**Peer influences.** Researchers have found that adolescents spend roughly twice as much time with peers as they spend with their parents or other adults (Connell and Halpern-Felsher 1997). Thus, young people can be profoundly influenced by their immediate peer groups (Berndt 1996; Steinberg and Silverberg 1986), which are often composed primarily of neighbors and school mates. Peer pressure can lure young people into dangerous or criminal behavior, or it can challenge them to reach new levels of athletic or academic achievement (Berndt 1996). Youths' peer groups are not determined solely by the neighborhood in which they currently live. Indeed, evidence from the court-ordered desegregation program in Yonkers suggests that teenagers who move often return to their original neighborhoods to hang out with old friends (Briggs 1997). However, neighborhood is likely to have a significant impact on the choice of peer group. If many teenagers in a community are uninterested in school, engaging in crime and other dangerous behaviors, and having babies out of wedlock, teenagers will be more apt to see these activities as acceptable, even fashionable, behavior.

**Social networks.** Who we know (and who we get to know because of where we live) can be an important source of job leads, parenting support, or health advice and referrals. A person's knowledge about and access to social supports and economic opportunities may depend on his or her network of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. And many of these networks may be geographically based. Thus, people living in a neighborhood in which few people have decent-paying jobs are less likely to hear about available job openings. They are also less likely to know employed people who can vouch for their reliability and character to an employer. Such recommendations, especially from in-house workers, have been shown to be critical to finding jobs (Ioannides and Loury 2004; Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; Sullivan 1989; Wial 1991).

The importance of neighborhood-based networks depends in part on a person's connection to networks outside the neighborhood boundaries. Individuals who have strong family, friendship, or collegial networks that extend beyond the neighborhood in which they live are less likely to be influenced by their immediate surroundings. But some researchers have found evidence that poor people's social ties are more localized than those of middle-class people (Briggs 1998), making them more dependent on networks within the neighborhood. Briggs also concludes that social networks in poor neighborhoods may provide families with day-to-day "coping" resources, but not "attainment" resources.

Finally Braddock (1980) suggests that patterns of social interactions at a young age may shape a child's patterns of behavior and interactions over the long-term. In particular, he argues that minority students who attend racially segregated schools and who have not interacted with students of different races tend to overestimate the degree of hostility they will experience in interracial situations. These students will thus tend to make choices and maintain their separation from whites when they become adults, potentially limiting their access to economic and social opportunities.

**Crime and violence.** Living in a high crime area increases risks for both adults and children, including the risk of being a victim of burglary or assault. But research increasingly suggests that exposure to crime and violence has more far-reaching consequences, including persistent anxiety and emotional trauma. It almost goes without saying that people who live in high-crime neighborhoods face higher risks of being victimized, injured, or possibly even killed than residents of safer neighborhoods. In addition, young children (and possibly adolescents and adults as well) who witness violent crime firsthand may suffer significant and even lasting emotional trauma (Garbarino et al. 1992; Martinez and Richters 1993). Other research has shown that exposure to violence results in chronic stress, which in turn may increase susceptibility to developing health conditions such as asthma (Wright et al. 2004). As children get older, living in a neighborhood where crime is commonplace may lead them to believe that it is acceptable, or even “normal.” Indeed, Anderson (1994, p. 94) reports that in some inner-city communities the “toughening up” one experiences in prison can actually enhance one’s reputation on the street.”

**Job access.** The most straightforward impact of neighborhood is its physical proximity and accessibility to economic opportunities, particularly jobs. As jobs become increasingly decentralized in most metropolitan areas, some inner-city neighborhoods have become physically isolated from economic opportunity. Kain, in his seminal 1968 article, argued that housing discrimination and segregation confine blacks to a few central city neighborhoods where jobs have become increasingly scarce, as employers have relocated to the suburbs. A recent review of research on this “spatial mismatch” hypothesis confirms that distance from areas of employment growth and opportunity helps explain lower employment rates among black men (Ihlanfeldt and Sjoquist 1998).

## **Living in a distressed, high-poverty neighborhood undermines people’s health and well-being and limits their longer term life chances.**

A considerable body of social science research finds evidence that living in profoundly poor or distressed neighborhoods can undermine people’s well-being and longer term life chances. The well-being of children and families clearly varies across types of neigh-



borhoods. There is ample evidence that residents of poor, inner-city neighborhoods are less likely to complete high school and go on to college, more likely to be involved in crime (either as victims or as perpetrators), more likely to be teenage parents, and less likely to hold decent-paying jobs (Coulton et al. 1995; Ricketts and Sawhill 1988). But actually quantifying the independent effect of neighborhood conditions on outcomes for individual residents is more challenging. In general, well-designed empirical research that controls statistically for individual and family attributes finds that neighborhood environment has a significant influence on important life outcomes for both children and adults (Ellen and Turner 1997). There is also a growing body of evidence that, after taking into account individual and family level factors, disadvantaged neighborhood environments have a detrimental effect on health outcomes, including mortality, child and adult physical and mental health, and health behaviors (Ellen, Mijanovich, et al. 2001; Ellen and Turner 2002; Kawachi and Berkman 2003; Macintyre and Ellaway 2000; Macintyre and Ellaway 2003; Macintyre, Ellaway, et al. 2002).

Below, findings from the existing empirical literature on the effects of neighborhood environment are organized according to major life stages—infancy and childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Ellen and Turner 2002). Much of the existing literature on neighborhood effects focuses on neighborhood poverty rates or other indicators of economic status rather than racial composition. It is important to note, however, that most high-poverty and economically distressed neighborhoods are predominantly minority as well (Jargowsky 2003; Massey and Denton 1993).

**Infants and young children.** Relatively little empirical research has focused on how neighborhood distress affects infants and young children. A group of multidisciplinary researchers who have analyzed data that follow a sample of low birth-weight, pre-term infants during their first years of life provide evidence that neighborhood pays a role, particularly in children’s intellectual development. More specifically, the presence of affluent neighbors appears to be associated with higher IQ for preschool children (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Chase-Lansdale, Lindsay, and Gordon 1996; Chase-Lansdale et al. 1997). These studies, however, reach mixed conclusions about neighborhood effects on young children’s emotional and behavior development. In addition, elementary school children living in low-income neighborhoods exhibit more aggressive behavior when interacting with others (Kupersmidt et al. 1995), and are less likely to succeed in school (Halpern-Felsher et al. 1997).

**Adolescents.** Most of the research on neighborhood effects has focused on teenagers and young adults. The literature on adolescent educational attainment provides general support for the notion that neighborhoods play an important role (Aaronson 1997; Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Case and Katz 1991; Clark 1992; Crane 1991; Datcher 1982; Dornbusch, Ritter, and Steinberg 1991; Duncan 1994; Duncan, Connell, and Klebanov 1997; Garner and Raudenbush 1991; Haveman and Wolfe 1994). Young people from

high-poverty and distressed neighborhoods are less successful in school than their counterparts from more affluent communities; they earn lower grades, are more likely to drop out, and are less likely to go on to college. Kids from poor neighborhoods are also less likely to get jobs during and immediately after high school. Studies have also documented that neighborhood environment influences teens' sexual activity and the likelihood that girls will become pregnant during their teen years (Brewster 1994; Brewster, Billy, and Grady 1993; Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Crane 1991; Hogan and Kitagawa 1985; Hogan, Astone, and Kitagawa 1985; Ku, Sonenstein, and Pleck 1993; Plotnick and Hoffman 1996). And finally, young people who live in high crime areas have been found to be more likely to commit crimes themselves (Case and Katz 1991).

**Adults.** Studies on whether neighborhoods affect adults focus primarily on health and employment outcomes. Several studies document a link between neighborhood socioeconomic status and overall mortality levels (Acevedo-Garcia 2004; Anderson et al. 1997; Haan, Kaplan, and Camacho 1987; Waitzman and Smith 1998). A recent study in Maryland documents that the risk of cancer from air toxics is closely associated with the racial composition and income level of census tracts. Specifically, tracts with the highest share of black residents were three times more likely to pose high cancer risks than those with the lowest share (Apelberg, Buckley, and White 2005). Air toxins may also contribute to the disproportionate burden of asthma in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Larsen, Beskid, et al. 2002). There is also reasonably sound evidence that neighborhood conditions, particularly crime and violence levels, shape health-related behaviors (Diehr et al. 1993; Ganz 2000; Kleinschmidt, Hills, and Elliott 1995; Robert 1999). For example, a study of the association between neighborhood disadvantage and the availability of illegal drugs found that after controlling for age, gender, and race, the odds of being approached by someone selling drugs were 10 times higher among individuals living in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods than among individuals living in the least disadvantaged neighborhoods (Storr, Chen, et al. 2004).

Finally, empirical research generally finds evidence that distance from jobs reduces employment rates, particularly among lower-skilled adults (Ihlanfeldt and Sjoquist 1998), and that adults who live in neighborhoods with low employment rates are less likely to be employed themselves (Weinberg et al. 2000).

## **Moving to lower-poverty neighborhoods can yield significant benefits for low-income families.**

In addition to the research evidence on the generally negative effects of living in a distressed, high-poverty neighborhood, a growing body of evidence is emerging that moving to a healthy, lower-poverty neighborhood can lead to significant improvements in both quality of life and access to opportunities. This evidence is drawn from three major



mobility initiatives—interventions that have enabled low-income families to move from high-poverty communities to lower-poverty neighborhoods:

**Gautreaux demonstration.** Research has been conducted over many years (primarily by scholars at Northwestern University) on low-income minority families who received special-purpose housing vouchers to move from poor, predominantly black neighborhoods in the city of Chicago to racially integrated suburban communities.

**Moving to Opportunity (MTO) demonstration.** Research has been conducted by researchers from a number of different institutions on a carefully controlled experiment to test the impacts of helping low-income families move from high-poverty assisted housing projects (in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles) to low-poverty neighborhoods throughout their metropolitan regions.

**HOPE VI program.** Research is being conducted by the Urban Institute on what is happening to the original residents of five distressed public housing projects that are being demolished and replaced under the HOPE VI initiative.

Research from all of these interventions finds that families who have participated in assisted housing mobility initiatives experience dramatic improvements in their immediate neighborhood environment. The most dramatic impact of moving to a lower-poverty neighborhood is a reduction in crime and violence. The opportunity to escape from crime and violence was the primary reason most MTO participants gave for wanting to move (Goering, Feins, and Richardson 2003). Research on neighborhood outcomes for MTO families finds that moving with a regular voucher—generally to intermediate-poverty neighborhoods—increased families’ perceptions of safety by 15.6 percentage points, while moving with an MTO voucher (to low-poverty neighborhoods) produced a 30.3 percentage point increase (Orr et al. 2003). We see similar gains among HOPE VI relocatees (Buron et al. 2002). And families place tremendous value on these improvements, telling interviewers what a relief it is not to worry every day about possible violence and to have the freedom to let children play outside (Orr et al. 2003).

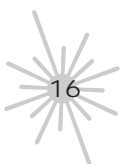
Families who have taken advantage of assisted housing mobility initiatives also live in neighborhoods served by better schools. Gautreaux families who moved to suburban communities appear to have experienced the most dramatic improvements in school quality, and—as discussed further below—in educational achievement. MTO families have moved to neighborhoods with better schools, but—unlike Gautreaux movers—relatively few have left central city school districts. Moreover, some MTO children continue to attend the same schools, despite the fact that their families have moved. HOPE VI relocatees who have moved with vouchers report improvements in the schools their children attend; they see the schools as safer and better quality (Popkin, Eiseman, and Cove 2004).

These improvements in families' neighborhood environments appear to contribute to significant improvements in the well-being of both adults and children. Specifically, research on families participating in the Gautreaux and MTO demonstrations provides evidence of gains in health, educational success, and employment and earnings.

**Adult mental and physical health.** Among the strongest findings to date from the MTO demonstration are results showing substantial improvements in the health of women and girls who moved to lower-poverty neighborhoods. In particular, the most recent follow-up study shows a substantial reduction in adult obesity (Orr et al. 2003). This effect is noteworthy because the prevention of obesity has emerged as a national public health priority. Obesity increases the risk of illness from many serious medical conditions, results in approximately 300,000 premature deaths each year, and is associated with \$117 billion in costs. Most of the cost associated with obesity is due to type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, and hypertension (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2001).

MTO women and adolescent girls also enjoyed significant improvements in mental health, including reductions in psychological distress and depression, and increasing feelings of calm and peacefulness (Orr et al. 2003). The lower prevalence of depression and anxiety may be due to reduced exposure to crime and violence in low-poverty neighborhoods, and to having been able to address concerns about neighborhood safety, the primary motivation individuals expressed for desiring to move out of their original neighborhoods. Improvements in mental health associated with moving from high- to low-poverty neighborhoods may have important implications for physical health, as well as non-health outcomes such as education and employment. Specifically, environmental stressors may induce physiological responses to cope with stress that may eventually result in low birth weight, poor health, early mortality, and impaired cognitive development (Massey 2004). In the long run, improved mental health may translate into improved economic outcomes, as individuals with major depression (compared to individuals without the disorder) may be more likely to experience poor health status, bed days, limitations in physical or job functioning, and high levels of financial strain (Judd, Paulus, et al. 1996).

**Educational success.** The evidence is mixed on how moving to a better neighborhood may affect children's educational achievement. Gautreaux research found striking benefits for children whose families moved to suburban neighborhoods. They were substantially more likely to complete high school, take college-track courses, attend college and enter the work force than children from similar families who moved to neighborhoods within Chicago (Rosenbaum 1995). To date, there is no evidence that MTO moves have led to better educational outcomes, possibly because so few children are attending significantly better schools, or because it may be too soon to see benefits (Orr et al. 2003). HOPE VI movers report that their kids are having fewer problems at



school, including trouble with teachers, disobedience at school and at home, and problems getting along with other children (Popkin, Eiseman, and Cove 2004)

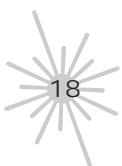
**Delinquency and risky behavior.** Some of the early research on MTO families in individual sites suggested that young people whose families moved to low-poverty neighborhoods were engaging in less risky behavior and committing fewer crimes. In Baltimore, for example, moving to a low-poverty neighborhood was found to cut violent crime arrests among juveniles roughly in half (Ludwig, Duncan, and Ladd 2003). More recent and comprehensive data for all sites suggests that moving to a lower-poverty environment is indeed improving the behavior of teenaged girls, but not boys (Orr et al. 2003). Research is currently under way to better understand what is happening to the boys, and why they do not seem to be enjoying the same benefits from mobility as girls. One possible explanation is that black and Hispanic boys moving to integrated or predominantly white neighborhoods are not engaging in any more criminal behavior, but are being arrested more due to racial profiling. Another possibility is that girls and boys respond differently to the initial loneliness and fears of relocation.

**Employment.** The current evidence on how mobility affects adult employment and earnings is mixed and still somewhat inconclusive. It is important to note that mobility assistance does not directly address employment problems, although it may remove barriers standing in the way of employment. As a consequence, employment effects may take more time to materialize than other outcomes. Long-term research on Gautreaux families has found significant increases in employment and reductions in welfare reciprocity (Rosenbaum and DeLuca 2000). To date, research has not detected statistically significant employment or earnings effects across the total sample of MTO families or among HOPE VI relocatees (Orr et al. 2003). When we look at the MTO sites individually, we do see significant impacts on employment and earnings among MTO families in New York and Los Angeles, but it is not clear why there would be an impact in these sites and not in others (unpublished work in progress by researchers at the Urban Institute and Abt Associates).

Although the research literature provides strong evidence that neighborhood conditions have an important influence on people's lives, it is important to acknowledge that they are not the only influence. Some research on neighborhood effects has failed to show any independent effects (Ellen and Turner 1997). Moreover, both theory and empirical evidence strongly suggest that individual and family characteristics interact with neighborhood environment in complex ways, and play a hugely important role in shaping outcomes over time. Some families and individuals can withstand the disadvantages of even the most distressed environment; while others are likely to encounter serious problems regardless of the neighborhoods in which they live. Thus, programs that combine mobility assistance with other forms of counseling and support (designed both to help families cope with day-to-day challenges, and to help them gain access to oppor-

tunities for upward mobility) may offer the best strategy for helping low-income families overcome the effects of living in high-poverty and distressed neighborhoods and to achieve meaningful employment, earnings, and educational progress over the long-term.

Ongoing research on the MTO demonstration also highlights the importance of the criteria used to identify suitable destination neighborhoods for participating families and the need to help families *remain* in their new neighborhoods over the long term. Specifically, families that received special purpose vouchers and mobility counseling through MTO were required to use their vouchers in census tracts with poverty rates below 10 percent (as reported in the 1990 census). By 2000, however, many of the tracts to which MTO families moved had become poorer and more predominantly minority (Orr et al. 2003). The fact that relatively few MTO families moved to stable, predominantly white neighborhoods in affluent suburban jurisdictions may limit benefits for families over the long term. Moreover, many MTO movers are having difficulty retaining housing in low-poverty neighborhoods, with a substantial share making subsequent moves to higher-poverty areas (analysis in progress by Urban Institute and Abt researchers). Thus, future mobility programs may need to be more explicit about the criteria used to define eligible destination neighborhoods, and would ideally provide ongoing assistance to help families remain in low-poverty neighborhoods over time.





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## Julie\*

### Adjusting to the Suburbs

When asked how her life is different from when she lived in the “projects” Julie pauses and says, “I’m a different person. She’s [her daughter, Michelle] is a different person. I’m not screaming at her from the third floor of the project window. I’m not worried about her. It’s safe to walk around here.” When Julie made the decision to move from Old Colony public housing development on Boston’s South Side, or “Southie” as the locals call it, she was scared to move out of the city. She was born in Old Colony and thought she would die there too, until she got a letter from the housing authority saying that she could move with a voucher as part of the Moving To Opportunity program. Her daughter was seven when she moved to the suburbs. At first, the transition was tough. Julie had liked living in the city, and she knew everyone at Old Colony—all of her friends and some family lived in the same development. At first, Julie didn’t have a car, so getting around the suburbs wasn’t easy. She took a part-time job at a dental office she could take the bus to and focused her energies on making sure Michelle got to school on time, did her homework, and participated in extracurricular activities. Michelle flourished in her new school. She is active in the school government association and recently won an award from the town mayor for her participation in community clean up. There’s a photo of Michelle shaking the mayor’s hand on the wall in their living room. It’s obvious that even after living for seven years in her new neighborhood, Julie still misses the city. But she’ll be the first to admit that where she lives is much better for her daughter. “I moved for her.” Today Michelle is 17, graduating from high school next year, and planning to attend college. She wants to go into politics.

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\* This is the first of several profiles of families participating in housing mobility through one of three programs: Moving to Opportunity, Chicago’s CHAC program, and the Latino Mobility Housing Choice Voucher Program, also in Chicago. In each case, the participants’ names (as well as highly specific, personally identifiable information) have been altered to protect the families’ privacy.



# The Continuing Relevance of the Gautreaux Program For Housing Mobility: Recent Evidence

Stefanie DeLuca\*

## Introduction

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the first major papers showing results from the Gautreaux residential mobility program were published.<sup>1</sup> These findings suggested that low-income black children moving to middle-class white suburbs enjoyed better educational resources, and that some of their mothers benefited from higher levels of employment post-move. This early research was powerful, opening up a new paradigm for policy considerations of social environments. Through this work, we could see that the life chances of low-income people were the result of more than who they were or their cultural dispositions; *where* you lived also mattered a great deal. The early Gautreaux research showed policymakers that larger systemic and social forces were at work in the production of life outcomes. The early Gautreaux papers created a forum about whether neighborhoods matter, and what about them matters for changing people's lives.

However, despite the excitement, the research received criticism on multiple grounds. Critics questioned the findings, raising doubts about whether suburb and city movers were comparable to each other and whether both differed from other eligible families who did not move. These uncertainties compromised the belief that Gautreaux's research findings could be considered similar to those derived from experimental conditions. In partial response to these concerns, the Moving to Opportunity program was legislated and funded in the 1990s. The MTO program intended to create a rigorous social experiment, so that the early findings of the Gautreaux research could be tested

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1 See Rosenbaum and Rubinowitz (2000) for a comprehensive review of the history of the Gautreaux lawsuit, the implementation of the program, and early research results.

with treatment groups and across multiple cities. It is hoped that these innovations can provide stronger causal inference as well as generalizability—both important ingredients for coming to consensus about the real value of a policy intervention. However, for a variety of reasons, MTO did not fully replicate the Gautreaux program’s design—families were not moved as far, and their moves were not as significant in terms of school and neighborhood change. In some ways, the differences in design have served to further illuminate the original Gautreaux findings—and have inspired some of the newer and more refined Gautreaux research that is presented here. It is clear that the base of knowledge built from the long-term Gautreaux research program can still inform current debates among those interested in the role housing mobility can play to improve the life chances of disadvantaged families.

The continued relevance of Gautreaux research is due in part to its original program design, and in part to the increased methodological rigor of our most recent Gautreaux studies. In a series of current papers (see references for specific paper citations), we have conceptually and empirically supplemented the early Gautreaux research and addressed many of the design weaknesses.<sup>2</sup> In order to accomplish our goal of examining the long-term effects of residential mobility on family outcomes we used: administrative sources of data to provide systematic information on long-term outcomes (instead of self reports), multiple neighborhood-level indicators from census data (instead of a simple city/suburb distinction), a careful examination and accounting of pre-program differences between city and suburb movers (to strengthen empirical claims), appropriate statistical techniques, and qualitative examinations of the mechanisms behind neighborhood effects. In these ways, we have been able to recover the robust long-term effects of placement in various neighborhood contexts on family and child outcomes and begin to understand how these contexts enable families to improve their life chances.

## Brief Description of Gautreaux

The Gautreaux program is the result of a 1976 federal court consent decree in a lawsuit against the CHA and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on behalf of public housing residents. The suit charged “that these agencies had employed racially discriminatory policies in the administration of the Chicago low-rent public housing program.” (Peroff, David, and Jones 1979). Administered by the non-profit Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities in Chicago, the Gautreaux program allowed public housing residents (and those on the waiting list) to

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2 The author would like to acknowledge that this program of research received generous support from the Foundation for Child Development and the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University.





receive Section 8 housing certificates (or vouchers) and move to private-sector apartments either in mostly white suburbs or within revitalizing areas in the city of Chicago. Between 1976 and 1998, over 7,000 families participated, and over half moved to suburbs. Because of its design, the Gautreaux program presents an unusual opportunity to test the effect of helping low-income families move to significantly less disadvantaged neighborhoods with better labor markets and better schools. Socioeconomic and racial integration of neighborhoods is rare in the U.S., so we generally do not know how low-income blacks are affected by living in middle-income white neighborhoods.

The program gave families rent subsidies that allowed them to live in suburban apartments for the same cost as public housing, but did not provide employment or transportation assistance to participating families. Participants moved to more than 115 suburbs throughout the six counties surrounding Chicago. Suburbs with a population that was more than 30 percent black were excluded by the consent decree. The “receiving” suburban communities were from 30 to 90 minutes driving time away from voucher recipients’ former homes.

The program had three selection criteria that were intended to optimize the relationships between landlords and tenants. The program tried to avoid overcrowding, late rent payments, and building damage by not admitting families with more than four children, large debts, or unacceptable housekeeping. Although they were selected, participants were not a “highly creamed” group.<sup>3</sup>

While all participants came from similar low-income black city neighborhoods (usually public housing projects), some moved to mostly white suburbs, while others moved to mostly black neighborhoods in Chicago. In principle, participants had choices about where they moved, but, in actual practice, clients got offered a unit according to their position on the waiting list, regardless of their locational preference. Although clients could refuse an offer, few did so, since they were unlikely to ever get another.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Because 95 percent of AFDC families have four or fewer children, the overcrowding restriction eliminates only a few eligible families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1986). Thus, all three criteria reduced the eligible pool by less than 30 percent. Popkin (1988) found that the Gautreaux participants and the sample of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipients were similar in the length of time (seven years on average) spent on AFDC; however, the welfare group had more women who were second-generation recipients. In terms of marital status, the groups were again similar: 45 percent never married and 10 percent were married at some point. The two groups also differed with respect to levels of education and age. Thirty-nine percent of the Gautreaux women dropped out of high school compared to 50 percent of the AFDC sample. The Gautreaux participants were slightly older (median age of 34 vs. 31).

4 Some critics have mistakenly inferred that the program lost 80 percent of applicants through attrition. Although only about 20 percent of the eligible applicants ended up moving through the program, self-selection appears to have been a small part of the attrition (Peterson and Williams 1995). Rather than self-selecting themselves not to participate in the program, many families were not offered a housing unit and not given the chance to participate. There is no evidence to indicate that housing counselors were selective in making offers among eligible families, and, if they were, they would have violated the consent decree.

As a result, participants' preferences for the city or suburbs had little to do with where they ended up moving, and analyses indicate that the two groups were similar, though not identical.<sup>5</sup>

## Comparing Moving To Opportunity and Gautreaux

Currently, there has been much housing policy attention given to the results from the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) interim reports as well as new qualitative research on MTO. This makes sense, given that the MTO demonstration was implemented more recently and has a multicity experimental design (two distinct advantages of MTO over Gautreaux). However, it is useful to compare these two programs and examine how current MTO research results can be informed by Gautreaux research, since the two programs represent different models of neighborhood effects. First, while the Gautreaux treatment group moved to distant suburbs that limited interaction with former neighbors, the MTO treatment group often moved to city neighborhoods, sometimes clustered together or near poor neighborhoods. Second, while Gautreaux assigned families to specific addresses, MTO assigned them to specific census tracts, and families could live anywhere in those tracts. Maps of MTO placements appear to suggest some moves occur near tract boundaries, perhaps to get affordable rents or to be closer to low-income neighbors (Goering, 1997). Third, while Gautreaux creates both racial and income integration (suburban movers went to areas with populations averaging 90 percent white), MTO is a program for income, not race, integration: 32 percent of MTO movers to low-poverty areas went to areas with a black majority.

Unlike MTO, the Gautreaux program does not employ a randomized design. However, as we show in our recent papers, we can still draw valid lessons from its design, which involves the placement of residents in communities with varying levels of racial integration and resources. Another distinction between the two programs is that MTO focused on income desegregation while the Gautreaux program focused on racial desegregation and had the positive *consequence* of income integration. This racial versus resource distinction is important because of the possible effects that increased black segregation may have on economic independence, even after controlling for measurable resources. Lastly, although MTO's randomized design is superior to the Gautreaux design, the MTO outcomes are taken only four to seven years after the point of random assignment. The unique contribution of our Gautreaux outcome data is that they are taken 15 years, on average, after program placement.

Despite these distinctions, research has found some similar results in the two programs. Prior research on the Gautreaux program has shown significant and positive

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5 Families placed in the suburbs came from slightly more advantaged neighborhoods than the city movers, with the former originating from neighborhoods with higher family incomes, rates of employment, and education (see Keels et al. 2005, table 1 for details).



relationships between placement neighborhoods and subsequent employment and educational attainment, by comparing outcomes for families moving to mostly white suburbs and outcomes for those moving to mostly black city neighborhoods (Rosenbaum 1995, 1997; Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000). The early results of the MTO program suggested that moves to low-poverty neighborhoods led to some important gains in some outcomes, including mothers' and children's feelings of safety, mental and physical health, and children's behavior and education (e.g., Goering et al. 1999; Hanratty, McLanahan, and Pettit 1997; Katz, Kling, and Liebman 2001; Ladd and Ludwig 1997).

The two mobility programs show discrepant findings with respect to employment and welfare outcomes. There are no demonstrated effects on employment and public aid receipt in most MTO studies. As I discuss below, we found that certain kinds of Gautreaux placements led to positive effects on long-term employment outcomes as well as reduced welfare receipt. MTO research finds little difference between experimental and control groups in employment, earnings, or welfare receipt in three of four cities using control-group comparisons (Goering and Feins 2003).<sup>6</sup> It is hard to know whether the discrepancy is due to a different model of residential mobility, a different economy, or a different time span<sup>7</sup>.

The difference in placement-neighborhood assignment and characteristics between the two programs might have led to these different results. It is possible that the placement of families into specific *units* located in opportunity areas is an important component for ensuring that those families actually experience the aspects of neighborhoods rich in resources and likely to improve individual outcomes. We know from previous research on housing vouchers that families will often choose neighborhoods (even within program-designated census tracts) that look similar to the areas they came from (Cronin and Rasmussen 1981). This assignment distinction could be a critical reason for why there appears to be a relationship between receiving communities and family and child outcomes for Gautreaux families and not MTO families to date. It is possible that the counseling and assignment to specific suburban units helped Gautreaux families overcome the landlord discrimination, lack of information about rental markets, or fears about more affluent white areas that might have prevented them from choosing such units in these neighborhoods in the absence of the program.

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6 After the first three years of the MTO program, the initial findings for welfare receipt showed that the treatment group spent less time on welfare (10 percentage points) than the control group (Goering and Feins 2003). However, these findings were no longer evident by the interim evaluation.

7 Possible reasons given for the lack of significant findings include increases in employment levels of welfare recipients and the general population, the aging of children, more rapidly declining employment levels in the experimental movers' neighborhoods, and a lack of substantial change in the movers' neighborhood labor market and access to employment (Kling et al. 2004).

## Where have Gautreaux families moved over time?

One of the pressing questions concerning Gautreaux and other mobility initiatives is whether families will stay in their new neighborhoods long enough for their lives to change. A second question is whether the kinds of improvements in housing quality that accompany mobility also help families make lasting improvements in the conditions of their neighborhoods. In a series of very recent studies, we present evidence that both of these phenomena occurred. In each of the sections below, I summarize the highlights of seven of our most recent studies, which collectively suggest that many of the Gautreaux families enjoyed significant long-term benefits as a result of their placement in safer, affluent white neighborhoods.<sup>8</sup>

To address these long-term questions, we collected information on subsequent residential mobility and the current addresses of Gautreaux families an average of 15 years after placement with the program<sup>9</sup>. In two recent studies (DeLuca and Rosenbaum 2003; Keels et al. 2005), we used Census data to characterize neighborhoods and we compared origin, placement, and current neighborhoods to assess how successful Gautreaux had been in helping families secure housing in better areas and how long these benefits last.

One of the most striking changes some of the Gautreaux families experienced was the difference between the racial composition of their receiving suburban community and the neighborhoods from which they came. The consent decree required that families move to suburban areas that were 30 percent black or less. Critics assumed that such radical changes would lead families to leave their new suburban neighborhoods and return to the racially segregated city neighborhoods. In general, families did make significant residential changes in the years after their initial moves. However, we find that of families placed in the suburbs, less than 30 percent moved back to the city, over 57 percent remained in Chicago suburbs, and the rest moved out of the Chicago metropolitan

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- 8 While the results described above are impressive, it is possible that the current neighborhood outcomes might be a function of specific family characteristics, rather than the Gautreaux program itself. Therefore, we accounted for the kinds of individual family attributes that might also impact the likelihood that a family can secure good housing after initial Gautreaux placement. Family characteristics such as year of move, AFDC use at program entry, number of children, age of mother at move, characteristics of origin community, and whether the origin address was located in public housing are all very likely to affect the ability of households to transition to the new neighborhood and reap its potential benefits. Even after considering subsequent mobility, family characteristics, and the pre-program neighborhoods, results show that variation in placement-neighborhood conditions is a powerful predictor of the kinds of neighborhoods where families currently reside.
- 9 We used credit reporting services, surveys, and addresses from the Illinois Department of Human Services Integrated Client Database to acquire recent addresses for 99 percent of the Gautreaux families.



area<sup>10</sup> (table 1). Of the families placed in the city, over 78 percent stayed in the city, and 12 percent moved into suburbs on their own, and 9 percent moved out of the area.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 1. Current Location of Gautreaux Families by City/Suburb Placement**

		Current Address				Total
		City	Suburbs	Other IL zips	Out of State	
Placement Address						
<b>Suburb</b>	Count	226	438	15	86	765
	Row %	29.45	57.33	1.96	11.26	100
% of Total						50.86
<b>City</b>	Count	579	89	8	63	739
	Row %	78.35	12.04	1.08	8.53	100
% of Total						49.14
<b>Total</b>	Count	805	527	23	149	1,504
	Row %	53.52	35.04	1.53	9.91	100

Source: DeLuca and Rosenbaum 2003

However, city and suburban distinctions can only tell us so much about the relative success of families. Therefore, we use additional Census characteristics and crime data to characterize the neighborhood dynamics of Gautreaux families. Figures 1–4 compare the pre-move, placement, and current addresses on a number of socioeconomic census characteristics and crime levels.<sup>12</sup> When comparing the origin and placement neighborhoods, we can see that the Gautreaux program achieved striking success in moving low-income black families into safer, more resourced, and more racially integrated neighborhoods.<sup>13</sup> Families were placed in areas of much lower poverty, lower crime, higher mean family income, and lower concentrations of black residents.

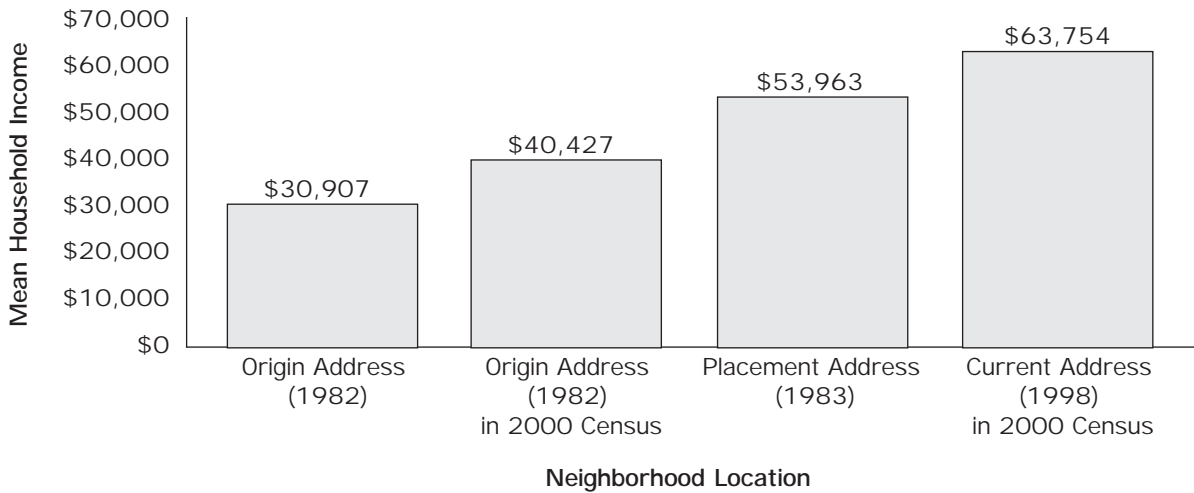
10 See DeLuca and Rosenbaum (2003) for more details.

11 Excluding the small portion of families who could not be categorized as city or suburb (because they moved out of state [10 percent] or outside the six-county area of the study [1.5 percent]), 66 percent of suburb movers remained in suburbs.

12 The crime data come from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports for the suburban areas and the Chicago Police Department district-level crime rates for the city neighborhoods.

13 It is also important to note that there is more variability in the characteristics of city than of suburban placement neighborhoods. More details on these differences are discussed in Keels et al. 2005.

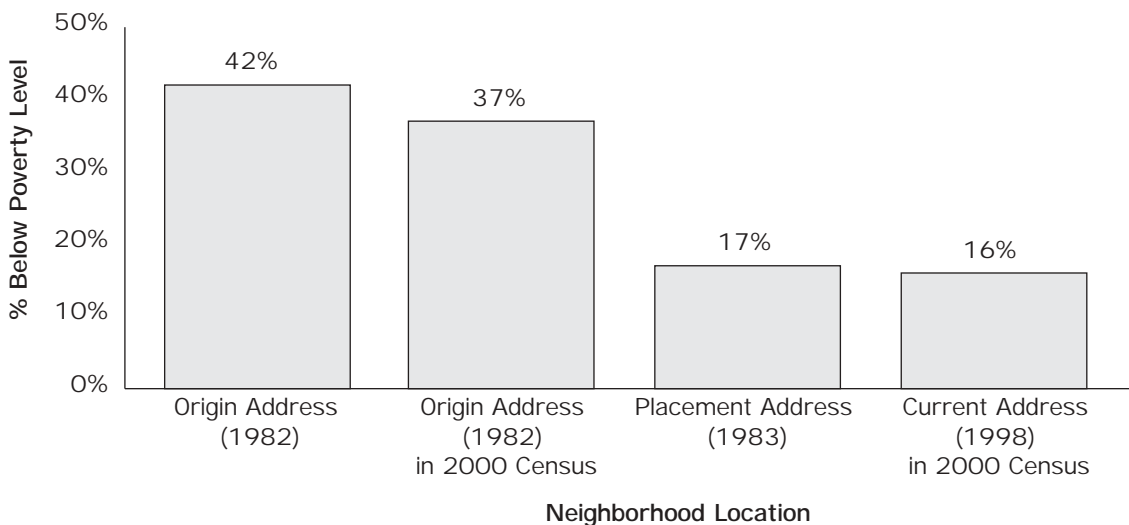
**Figure 1. Mean Household Income in Origin, Placement and Current Neighborhoods**



Note: Chicago and the surrounding suburban counties had an average household income of \$66,940 in the 2000 Census. The calendar years in parentheses are sample averages for the year in which the given address was geocoded. All dollar amounts are converted to 2000 dollar values.

Source: Keels et al. 2005

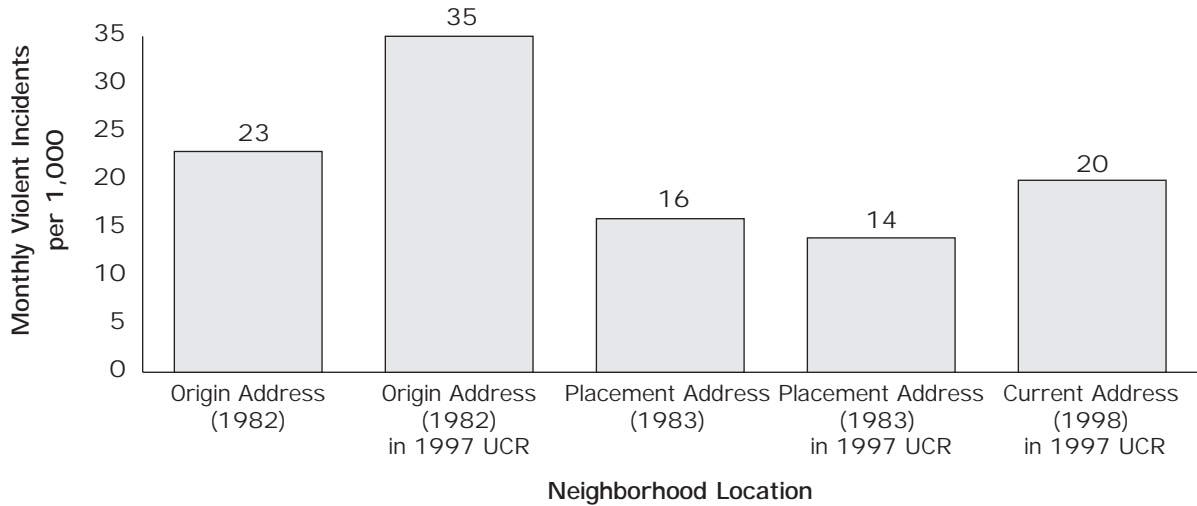
**Figure 2. Non-Elderly Poverty Rate in Origin, Placement and Current Neighborhoods**



Note: Chicago and the surrounding suburban counties had an average poverty rate of 10.7 percent in the 2000 Census. The calendar years in parentheses are sample averages for the year in which the given address was geocoded.

Source: Keels et al. 2005

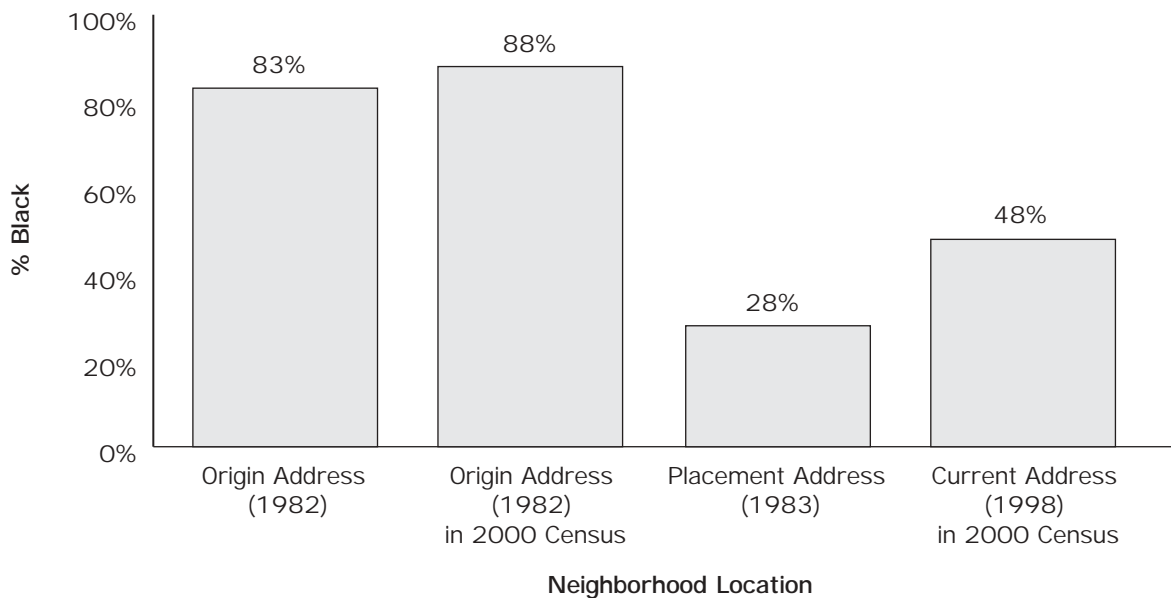
**Figure 3. Violent Crime in Origin, Placement, and Current Neighborhoods**



Note: Chicago and the surrounding suburban counties had an average of 14 monthly violent incidents per 1,000 in 1997. The calendar years in parentheses are sample averages for the year in which the given address was geocoded.

Source: Keels et al. 2005

**Figure 4. Percent Black In Origin, Placement, and Current Neighborhoods**



Note: Chicago and the surrounding suburban counties had an average of 18.8 percent black residents in the 2000 Census. The calendar years in parentheses are sample averages for the year in which the given address was geocoded.

Source: Keels et al. 2005

Comparing placement and current neighborhoods, we see that families remained in neighborhoods that are relatively comparable to placement neighborhoods.<sup>14</sup> Surprisingly, there is no overall regression to the mean in neighborhood incomes after participants moved from their placement addresses, with current neighborhood household income (also in 2000 dollars) about \$9,800 higher than placement-neighborhood incomes.<sup>15</sup> Current neighborhoods are also very similar to placement neighborhoods in terms of tract percent in poverty (17 percent vs. 16 percent) and crime (16 violent incidents per month vs. 20 violent incidents per month).

The only characteristic that differs substantially between placement and current address is the mean percent black of each neighborhood (28 percent at placement vs. 48 percent at current). Given the program's consent decree, families that were placed in suburban neighborhoods had to be placed in areas with no more than 30 percent black residents (mean black percent was actually 10 percent in suburban placements). City movers went to places of a much higher black percent (mean city black percent 56 percent). In the current period, although the mean percent black of neighborhoods increases from placement, it is still only about *half* what it was at the original address. So while there is some evidence that post-placement families moved to areas of slightly higher black composition, these areas are still far more integrated than their pre-move areas.<sup>16</sup>

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14 An interesting finding is that there exists a possible "threshold" pattern in the relationship between placement and current neighborhood characteristics. For example, it is not until families are placed in the third most affluent quintile of neighborhoods (census-tract household income greater than \$48,367) that we see a significant difference in current neighborhood affluence, relative to placement in the neighborhoods with the lowest household incomes. We find another marked increase for families placed in the most affluent neighborhoods (household income greater than \$69,855). Participants placed in the most affluent neighborhoods enjoy the largest long-term gain in neighborhood affluence; their current neighborhoods average \$15,200 more income per household than the current neighborhoods of participants initially moving to the poorest fifth of placement neighborhoods. Similarly, we do not see lower crime rates in current neighborhoods unless families were placed into neighborhoods falling into the third or higher quintile of crime at placement (less than 14.5 violent crime incidents per month). Additionally, placement in all but the most minority-segregated neighborhoods was associated with an average of a half a standard deviation drop in current neighborhood violent crime rates.

15 This average masks substantial changes among participants placed in the lowest and highest fifth of neighborhood affluence. Participants placed in the lowest-income neighborhoods experienced an increase of \$24,700 in moving from placement to current residence, while subsequent moves for participants placed in the highest-income communities resulted in an \$11,100 decrease in neighborhood affluence.

16 Relative to those families placed in the lowest percent black neighborhoods (0–2 percent), families placed in areas with more than 5 percent black residents are all less likely to reside in integrated neighborhoods at most recent address. However, there appear to be threshold effects here as well. The shift from placement in neighborhoods from 2–5 percent to 5–15 percent black leads to a significant decrease in the odds of the current address being located in a low-minority community, but the shift from 5.1–15 percent to 15.1–50 percent does not make an additional difference. However, families placed in neighborhoods that are 15.1–50 percent black are three times less likely to currently reside in segregated neighborhoods, relative to families who were placed in areas that were 50.1–97 percent black.





## The Long-Term Effects of Gautreaux on Family Economic Independence

It appears that the substantial changes in neighborhood quality made by the participating Gautreaux families had long-lasting impacts on their permanent relocation to better communities. The assumption behind mobility programs is that such important changes in the conditions of one's neighborhood should also lead to better economic outcomes for individual families and children. For example, a vast body of research has linked urban poverty to welfare receipt and unemployment. Specifically, previous work has demonstrated that neighborhood-level racial segregation and the spatial mismatch between the location of jobs and the low-income minority families who need them contribute to diminished chances for economic independence among these families. Therefore, in another recent study (Mendenhall, DeLuca, and Duncan forthcoming) we examined whether the moves that families made with Gautreaux from segregated inner-city neighborhoods to more advantaged suburban areas reduced welfare participation among families and increased employment rates in the years following program participation.

Previous research had suggested that some aspects of placement neighborhoods reduced the likelihood that Gautreaux families would still be receiving welfare several years after placement (Rosenbaum and DeLuca 2000). To extend this work, we looked more closely at combinations of neighborhood attributes and at longer-term welfare receipt data, and adjusted our analyses to account for time eligible for income subsidies under AFDC. We also wanted to look at whether long-term employment outcomes, as signs of economic independence, were affected by placement. To carry out these analyses, we used AFDC receipt data and unemployment insurance earnings records from the Illinois Department of Human Services Integrated Client Database. We looked at whether there was a relationship between the characteristics of the placement neighborhoods and time spent on welfare or time spent employed in the mid- to late 1990s. When comparing participants in tracts with the highest level of black residents and the lowest level of resources as the reference group, significant differences in AFDC receipt appear for participants placed in census tracts with low black (0–10 percent) populations and high levels of resources. The women in mostly white and more affluent areas spent 7 percent less time on AFDC.

When comparing participants in tracts with the lowest level of resources and high levels of blacks as the reference group, participants experience significantly more time employed (6 percent to 9 percent more time with earnings) in virtually all other types of communities. We also found that as the level of black segregation decreases and the amount of resources in a neighborhood increases, the participants earn significantly higher wages more per quarter. There appears to be a combination of race and resources that produces effects on employment and welfare receipt. Again, we see threshold effects. For employment, any placement other than a highly segregated and

low-resourced community yielded positive results. For welfare receipt, only women placed in mostly white, high resources areas spent less time receiving public assistance.

## The Next Generation: Children of Gautreaux

While we have demonstrated that the female heads of household experienced long-term benefits from placements in more advantaged neighborhoods, an additional test of the lasting power of a mobility program is whether these positive changes conferred the same improvements on the children in these families when they reached adulthood. Two very recent studies (Keels 2005a and Keels 2005b) indicate that some of these benefits were powerful enough to produce a second generation of neighborhood effects. Though there was substantial regression to the mean in terms of current neighborhood race and poverty levels, the Gautreaux children currently reside in more integrated neighborhoods than they did when their families entered the program. Improved neighborhood socioeconomic status was also preserved for those children placed into areas of moderate poverty. The move to suburban neighborhoods was related to children's subsequent residence in much safer neighborhoods as adults. Some of the permanent escapes from concentrated poverty made by mothers have persisted as the children of Gautreaux grew up and made moves of their own. It appears that on average neither the mothers nor the adult children who moved to better neighborhoods returned to areas that were similar to their origin neighborhoods.

Beyond neighborhood quality, recent research has found that the conditions of placement communities affected whether children would have an experience with the juvenile justice system (Keels 2005b). Male youth placed in more affluent suburban neighborhoods were less likely to get arrested and be found guilty of an offense, particularly for drug-related crimes. This effect is especially strong for those male children who moved at younger ages (7 years old or younger at time of move). However, female children who moved as young adolescents had a tougher time adjusting to suburban neighborhoods and were more likely to be arrested and found guilty for violent, theft, and drug offenses.

## How Did Gautreaux “Work”?

The findings described above focus on the advances made in our recent quantitative work. We had employed techniques to assess Gautreaux as a “treatment”—a social intervention with effects we might measure with statistical corrections and design comparisons. However, there is also a great deal of validity in the stories that Gautreaux participants tell about their experiences. No researcher can “control” or “randomize” what families say about the impact of the program in their lives.



The long-term family outcomes we observed appear to be significantly linked to the mobility program and the characteristics of the placement neighborhoods. However, administrative data cannot tell us *how* these outcomes occurred, or the mechanisms through which neighborhoods have their impact. This is a problem common to neighborhood research, and one that makes improving mobility programs especially difficult. However, in two recent qualitative studies (Rosenbaum, Reynolds, and DeLuca 2002; Rosenbaum, DeLuca, and Tuck 2005) using interviews with mothers who moved their families with Gautreaux, we start to get sense of how better neighborhoods helped these women improve their lives and the lives of their children. Is it a matter of just increasing access to better resources, or is it necessary to interact with neighbors to obtain the full benefit of these resources?

To understand how the new social contexts of suburban neighborhoods helped change outcomes for families, we analyzed interviews with 150 Gautreaux mothers. We found that the Gautreaux mothers derived a sense of efficacy and control over their lives and that the major changes that these women made in their environments allowed them to see that they have the ability to make improvements in their lives. There were specific features of the new suburban neighborhoods that changed their perception of what was possible. Specifically, the women reported that they felt better about having an address in the suburbs, and not having to put down a public housing address on job applications. Other women noted that by moving to areas with more white residents, they got to know more white people, and racial stereotypes were debunked. Social interactions with whites allowed some of these women to feel more confident in their social and cultural know-how and feel much less intimidated by future contexts in which they might have to interact with whites. Additionally, working through some of the initial difficulties of the transitions to the suburbs allowed these women to realize that they could handle manageable challenges along the way to better jobs and more schooling. In their old city neighborhoods, the drugs or gang violence seemed to be forces too big for them to control and therefore permanent impediments to the advancements they were trying to make in their lives. These findings suggest to us that one's repertoire of capabilities can vary depending on the type of neighborhood one lives and works in.

In addition to increased self-efficacy, many of the mothers we interviewed noted that they had to change their way of behaving to comply with the social norms of the new neighborhoods. Several mothers noted difficulties initially in adjusting to suburban norms, which were unfamiliar and intolerant of some of their prior behaviors. These mothers, who have lived all their lives in housing projects where these norms did not exist, saw benefits to complying with these expectations, and they decided to adopt them and to behave accordingly. Ironically, these normative constraints were liberating. The constraining norms meant that mothers did not have to spend all their time watching their children, and these norms allowed mothers to give their children more free-

dom. Normative constraints are a form of social capital—they allowed mothers and children to take actions that they could not do otherwise.

Similarly, the mothers reported social responsiveness from their neighbors who provided resources to them. They received the benefits of reciprocal relations related to childcare, and neighbor concern and watchfulness promoting the safety of their children, their property, and themselves. They were also given favors in terms of transportation and some acts of charity. It is remarkable that these new residents, who generally differed in race and class from their neighbors, were awarded this collective generosity, and the interviews suggest that it may have been conditional on their showing a willingness to abide by community norms.

Most important, the new suburban social contexts provided a form of capital that enhanced people's capabilities. Some mothers reported that they could count on neighbors if a child misbehaved or seemed at risk of getting into trouble, if a child was sick and couldn't attend school, or if there was some threat to their children, apartments, or themselves. This was not just interpersonal support, it was systemic, and enabled these mothers to take actions and make commitments that otherwise would be difficult or risky. It is through some of these mechanisms—some social, some psychological—that we believe the Gautreaux families were able to permanently escape the contexts and consequences of segregated poverty and unsafe inner-city neighborhoods.<sup>17</sup>

Many people assume that residential mobility experiments have their effects because they provide an affluent context and greater material resources. We found that some of these effects come from gifts, support, and transportation help received from neighbors that helped families overcome some minor barriers on the road to better jobs and allowed moms and kids to engage in activities they might not otherwise have been able to do.

More recent interviews with Gautreaux mothers suggest that some aspects of the city-suburban divide were also important for shaping how the placement community affected their children's behavior (Keels 2005b). City movers placed in both moderate- and low-poverty neighborhood found that although their immediate neighborhood was safe, the larger community to which their children had easy access continued to be dangerous. In comparison, children placed in the suburbs had less direct neighborhood

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17 However, it is important to remember that social networks can be exclusionary, and that the social norms and values in the suburban neighborhoods were radically different from the inner-city areas these families came from. Therefore, that social capital would be exchanged between the new neighbors and these families is not evident. That these women would change their behaviors and attitudes to match the norms of their receiving communities is even less evident. That these new beliefs and interactions with neighbors would translate into newfound capabilities seems even less likely. However, all of these things occurred in our interview samples.

exposure to drugs and illegal activities and attended higher-performing public schools with greater financial and teacher resources. Interviews revealed that low-poverty suburban neighborhoods also had substantially fewer opportunities for involvement in delinquent criminal activities and gangs.

## Conclusions and Implications

The recent findings from the Gautreaux program contain important insights for current housing mobility programs today. While the fact that most Gautreaux moves occurred in the 1980s might make it seem as though the program is an obsolete example of the effects of housing mobility, there are elements of the Gautreaux program that make it worth paying attention to, even relative to more recent mobility programs. For example:

1. The effects of social context and processes on individual actions can often take years to develop. Given the length of time elapsed since Gautreaux mobility, we can demonstrate neighborhood effects on long-term family and child outcomes.
2. Gautreaux placements provide us with ample variation in the income and race of destination neighborhoods. Because of this variation, we can see how the combinations of different neighborhood dimensions contribute to family outcomes.
3. Our studies provide robust findings across many outcomes and model specifications.
4. Gautreaux still provides the best evidence to date on the outcomes of families who receive “intensive treatment” due to the fact that they were assigned to specific units in geographically distant, affluent white neighborhoods.
5. Read in tandem with the recent MTO studies, these results also suggest that moderate reductions in neighborhood poverty may not have the same dramatic impacts on families as more radical reductions in neighborhood poverty, racial segregation, and crime levels.
6. There is some evidence that the effects of Gautreaux are intergenerational.

While these factors demonstrate the continuing relevance of the Gautreaux program, some limitations must also be noted. Despite demographic similarities, Gautreaux families clearly differ from other public housing families because they volunteered for the program. Thus, our findings generalize most readily to families voluntarily choosing

to participate in residential mobility programs in which the decision to move to a new, more integrated, higher-income community is left up to the family. As the transformation of distressed public housing projects continues, families are often involuntarily moved to new (usually segregated) communities; involuntarily relocating families may not result in the same outcomes as those we found for Gautreaux participants.

Additionally, it is important to consider the rental market of the receiving communities and the quality of the housing that can be acquired with a housing voucher. During the period of Gautreaux mobility, there was a great deal of suburban development, and landlords had demands for tenants in some of these remote communities. If the opportunity areas of some current mobility programs are experiencing rent increases or a shortage of available adequate housing, results such as those we found with Gautreaux might not be replicated.

Based on our most recent program of Gautreaux research, we can see that mothers and children enjoyed impressive and sustained improvements in the quality of their subsequent neighborhoods and some of their economic outcomes. The Gautreaux families who moved to safer, more advantaged and less segregated communities in the early to mid-1980s were still in such neighborhoods 15 years later. While some of these women eventually moved to neighborhoods with higher percentages of black residents, these moves did not return them to highly segregated black city neighborhoods. In terms of economic self-sufficiency, we can see that the racial and income compositions of their placement neighborhoods were related to increased employment, wages, and transitions off welfare. The interviews conducted with these women suggest that some of these gains were due in part to the leverage they utilized within their new social connections, and in part to their own changes in behaviors and attitudes. It appears however, that individual-level improvements require that families move to neighborhoods that are significantly more resourced and less racially segregated than their origin communities.



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# The Power and Limits of Place: New Directions for Housing Mobility and Research on Neighborhoods

Xavier de Souza Briggs\*

In recent issues of *Poverty & Race*, some of the nation's leading practitioners and scholars have offered a compelling, well-updated case for housing mobility and related strategies, with the aim of “dismantling ghettos” and expanding housing choice and opportunity for the urban poor. They rightly understand segregation by race and income to be a linchpin of inequality in America, a problem that makes it vastly harder to make progress on school failure, violent crime, and a host of other problems that get more attention from the public and the media. Some recent commentaries have made the case for targeting disadvantaged blacks, others for targeting residents of high poverty or high risk neighborhoods generally. In this essay, I outline some new directions for policy and research, and I review emerging evidence that takes us beyond studies of housing mobility programs old and new. What's at stake, I think, is a clearer picture of the power and limits of place—not one to dissuade the mobility advocates whose commitments I share but a picture, I hope, to make us more effective. Here I build, in particular, on the excellent research review by Marge Turner and Dolores Acevedo-Garcia (in this volume), and I present ideas from a new book, *The Geography of Opportunity: Race and Housing Choice in Metropolitan America* (Brookings Institution Press 2005), a volume I edited with support from the Civil Rights Project at Harvard, which includes thoughtful contributions from a range of researchers, policy analysts, and advocates.

Let me outline and explore three key ideas. First, most discussions of housing mobility—and of “locational opportunity” (access to better places) generally—focus far too little on the *repeat* mobility of American families and, in particular, the high degree

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of “bad mobility” by poor and minority renters. In plain terms, the debate tends to center (understandably) on helping people move *out*, overlooking how they move *on*—again and again, often from poor neighborhood to poor neighborhood or from non-poor ones back to poor ones—in a difficult housing market, with too few formal and informal supports. As a matter of problem-solving, one cannot empty a bath tub merely by bailing out water (i.e., moving people out)—not if something is constantly refilling the vessel. I want to sharpen our exchange on the issue of where and when the minority poor move, which several of the earlier commentaries briefly mentioned.

Second, as Turner and Acevedo-Garcia note, the effort to understand which families benefit from particular locations (and why) is in its infancy. I will outline a more dynamic view of what determines the benefits and burdens of living in particular places. It is a view that respects Sudhir Venkatesh’s advice about designing policy to reflect certain realities of poor people’s lives and preferences (Venkatesh 2005). I think this perspective has fairly clear implications for housing mobility, community development, and other fields.

Third and finally, there is the question of how to improve racial attitudes to support the sharing of neighborhoods (or tax-and-spend jurisdictions), across lines of race and class, to a degree that is unprecedented in America’s history. America’s local communities are changing fast, thanks in particular to immigration and continued economic restructuring, and this means that no conversation about ending the ghetto as we know it can proceed very far without considering the often segregative preferences of all Americans, including the immigrant groups (Hispanic and Asian) that tend, like whites, to place blacks on the bottom of their totem pole of racial others. It behooves any diverse coalition, particularly one eager to broaden its tent, to understand these attitudes. They are closely tied to white prejudice and discrimination, granted, but they will exert a force all their own as immigrants become more important in the nation’s housing markets as well its political life.

## 1. Moving on (and on)

Americans are famously mobile. Every five years, about half the nation’s population has moved, and this census-measured rate has not changed much in the past half century. What has changed is who moves often. About a third of the nation’s renters move each year, and low-skill minority renters move more often still, with the poorest neighborhood choices. Sociologist Claude Fischer, analyzing census data over decades, found that low-skill workers are the only major demographic group for whom mobility has increased in the past few decades, and the most likely culprit is tighter housing markets and less-affordable supply, alongside stagnant wages. Some moves, as argued in these pages, are hugely beneficial: nonlocal moves, in particular, tend to be moves to opportunity, whether low-skill or high-skill workers make them (e.g., moving out of state for more



education or to take a new job). But other moves—in particular frequent, local, “involuntary” moves—tend to reflect the conditions that are both cause and effect of persistent poverty: Substandard housing units, difficult or exploitative landlords, fractured relationships, the need to isolate kids from gang violence at school and in the neighborhood, being unable to stay on the job (or get a new one in time to pay the bills), given child-rearing responsibilities, illness, and other problems. Local managers of HUD’s Section 8 program tell me that repeat mobility by low-income renters is a major pattern, not to mention a burdensome one, and we desperately need good national and region-specific evidence on this. Clearly, moving frequently makes it harder for families to leverage the value of a positive new location. I see ample evidence of this in the ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviewing we have done—colleagues Susan Popkin, John Goering, and I—among very low-income, mostly minority renters in the Moving to Opportunity experiment in metro Boston, Los Angeles, and New York over the past year.

But the nature of the sender and receiver neighborhoods is at issue as well, and to date, there has been surprisingly little evidence on what kinds of neighborhoods families are exposed to *over time*, as they move about and neighborhoods change around them. Using a nationally representative sample of blacks and whites in the 1980s, sociologist Lincoln Quillian found that exposure to poor neighborhoods over time is more closely associated with race than with income or household type (in general, female-headed families are at greatest “locational risk”). Quillian found that most blacks, but only 10 percent of whites, lived in a poor neighborhood at some point in the decade and that little of the difference was accounted for by racial differences in poverty rate or family structure. For example, when blacks in female-headed households with income below the poverty level were compared with whites in comparable households, 57 percent of blacks, but only 27 percent of whites, spent at least half of the 10-year period in a poor neighborhood. By this measure, even blacks in male-headed households with income *above* the poverty level face more risk (39 percent) than whites in female-headed, poor households (27 percent)—and far more than whites in comparable households (3 percent). Blacks leave poor neighborhoods often, but they fall back into such neighborhoods much more often than whites, leading Quillian to conclude, “For African-Americans, the most difficult part of escape from a poor neighborhood is not moving out but staying out.” Notably, mobility patterns contributed much more than neighborhood change to increases and decreases in families’ neighborhood poverty exposure. That is, it’s where one moves more than what happens when one gets there, that predicts exposure to neighborhood poverty, and with it associated risks, over time. In a new study, I am checking to see whether these patterns continued into the 1990s, when the geographic concentration of poverty dropped markedly in many regions, and also analyzing patterns for Hispanics for the first time.<sup>1</sup> I find, using a simulation model,

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1 Data limitations make it hard to measure representative, long-run Hispanic patterns and, for now, essentially impossible to measure comparable Asian ones.

that even dramatic changes in the 1980 patterns uncovered by Quillian—for example, doubling the rates of exiting poor places and halving the rate of reentry (“falling back”) into them—would leave many families exposed to poor neighborhoods for long periods of time. This leads to the second main idea—about rethinking the power of place, and what we really owe families, in the context of such barriers.

## 2. Leveraging the Power of Place: A More Dynamic View

Prior research has emphasized the kinds of mechanisms that *may* affect *some families* once they are living in particular neighborhoods. But in general, three dynamics shape the consequences of place in our lives: The *life course* (because our needs change from cradle to childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and so on); *neighborhood change* (“churning” through exits and entries, as well as in-place gains and losses by those who stay put); and *family-managed exposure and adaptation* to risks and resources. Turner and Acevedo-Garcia implicated the latter in distinguishing families that seem remarkably resilient even in the riskiest places (often because they buffer or bound family members to isolate them from risks in the immediate environment) from those families, say, who are overwhelmed regardless of where they live. Notwithstanding the well-founded assertion that we should shrink and, in time, eliminate ghettos because of the intolerable costs they impose, it is also true that the value of wider housing choices for disadvantaged families seems *extremely* variable, so variable that we need much more attention to what the Annie E. Casey Foundation and other innovative institutions have termed “family-strengthening” strategies. In this view of what it takes to enable families to *leverage the value* of a place, not merely to get there, our task is helping families cope, buffer, connect, and adapt wherever they live—this *at least as much* as helping them to relocate. Yes, pre- and post-move counseling are part of the answer, but as other commentators have suggested, so are health and human service linkages, school choice counseling, and transportation aid to help families “source” aid widely, across a metropolitan area (e.g. with car ownership promotion programs, also known as “car vouchers,” linked to housing vouchers).

## 3. Choosing Neighbors in a Rainbow Nation

Accounts of segregation’s costs, and of what produces and reproduces it, rightly emphasize the impact of white attitudes and behaviors, from direct acts of discrimination in the marketplace to the perfectly legal “self-steering” through which whites avoid certain communities, at least as places to live. But with the society fast becoming the most racially and ethnically diverse in history, our discussions of housing choice and the geography of opportunity must evolve—and soon. Not only is the white/black paradigm



terribly incomplete, but the hopes for a new, majority-minority-led coalition powerful enough to change the rules of the housing game may be naïve. Simply posed, what if fast-growing immigrant groups learn and adopt prejudice and avoidance faster than the nation can act to undo our long color-coded geography, which reinforces itself? This is more than an alarmist hypothetical. In our new book, sociologist Camille Charles offers the best-available evidence on evolving racial attitudes and neighborhood racial preferences—who we would prefer to share neighborhoods with and who we’d just as soon avoid— in a multiethnic America, and she reminds us that preferences, according to recent economic analyses, are not just what-if’s offered to survey researchers but actually predict residential outcomes. The evidence is sobering: blacks are on the bottom of every other group’s hierarchy of preferred neighbors, and immigrant Hispanics and Asians report many stereotypes of black people similar to those held by whites, albeit to a more modest degree (groups report certain stereotypes, including flattering ones, of all other groups, but blacks suffer the most consistently negative and widely held ones).

This is not a portrait cut in stone, of course, and as Paul Wachtel recently argued, shaping attitudes is a crucial part of social change (Wachtel 2005). Sometimes, bold policy has to lead, not follow, a breakthrough in attitudes. But this evidence should disabuse us of the simple notion that immigration-led diversity will produce communities that are generally more inclusive. It should remind us to place well-informed discussions of desegregation, mobility, and inclusive housing in a rapidly evolving racial context that brings with it new hope, new risks, and much uncharted terrain.

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## Beverly

### Using housing mobility to stay on course

**B**everly Knox is a spirited person who loves to bowl, roller skate, and live life to its fullest. She is also an amazing mom. Her 14-year-old daughter, Tatianna, is a high achiever who has a four-year scholarship to a private school. Beverly's son, 9-year-old Romel, is very bright and also attends private school. Things are going well for the Knox family now. But it wasn't always the case. Two years ago, Beverly made what she called a "desperate move" away from a tenuous landlord situation to a home in Englewood, a community with a very high poverty rate. The situation went from okay to unlivable.

"My bathroom ceiling caved in weekly and the landlord got this drunk to fix it without much success. Our rodent problem was so bad that I hated to cook in my own kitchen, and at night my children were afraid to get up to go to the bathroom. My neighbors stole my phone service. I was the only person working in my building and the children living upstairs were up all night—every night," she said. "It was always something."

One day, gunfire and gang warfare erupted as she walked toward her home. Coupled with all of her maintenance problems and the daily challenges dealing with inconsiderate neighbors, Beverly knew that it was time to move. With two fantastic children, some college courses under her belt, and a career in accounting, nothing was going to prevent Beverly from escaping her poor living condition.

"I feared for my children. I feared for my son getting caught up in the gangs or introduced to drugs and street life. I feared for Tatianna. She loves to read, she has a 3.2 GPA and all she has to do is keep up her grades to maintain her scholarship. She's always been very smart and I needed to do what was best for both my children."

Realizing the importance of making the right decision and considering her "desperate move" earlier, Beverly took a proactive role in defining her destiny. She enrolled in CHAC's Housing Opportunity Program (HOP). She made sure she attended the HOP workshops on landlord/tenant law and budgeting, and took the time to investigate all the program had to offer.

Beverly carefully began searching for a new home. She was picky, but she was not unrealistic. Important to her were easy access to her job, where she worked as a billing clerk, and close and convenient transportation to her children's schools. Also important was gaining a landlord who was both accessible and professional.

Because of HOP's and Beverly's diligence, the process was easier than anticipated. She found her new home—a listing provided by HOP—in under a month. Beverly's pursuit for a comfortable lifestyle was within reach, with one hurdle remaining. "As a single parent, it's hard to come up with the money for a security deposit. HOP helped a lot because they loaned me half of my security deposit."

To the Knox family, the move to a low-poverty neighborhood has meant everything. "I like it here because everything is in order," said Tatianna. Romel likes hanging out in the front room playing with his toys while Tatianna enjoys teenage activities in her bedroom. Beverly enjoys cooking again and appreciates her landlord's diligence in seeking professional contractors to deal with minor household issues. But most of all, Beverly and her children enjoy living in a clean home in a safer neighborhood with nice neighbors.

(Virginia Bailey—CHAC)





# Housing Mobility as a Civil Right

By Elizabeth Julian\*

The notion that low-income minority families moving to better housing in better communities, with safe streets, good schools, and job opportunities is something that enhances both the lives of those families and of society is generally supported by both the research, and, frankly, common sense. However, there is also a compelling case to be made that the right to make that choice, and conversely, the denial of the right to make that choice based upon race, involves fundamental civil rights that need no more basis than the Constitution.

The notion of “housing mobility” as a piece of housing policy first derived from federal civil rights litigation seeking to vindicate the fair housing rights of minority families who were being denied housing opportunities based upon their race. Cases like *Gautreaux v. HUD* (Chicago), *NAACP v. HUD* (Boston), and *Walker v. HUD* (Dallas) successfully argued that the historical segregation of public housing demanded remedies that would provide families with access to housing opportunities outside of the low-income, racially isolated, and often deteriorated housing into which the government had effectively steered them by desire and design.

Certainly, the record in many of those cases demonstrated unequivocally that the separate housing was also unequal. Certainly, the social science research documents the negative effects of such separate and unequal conditions on the well-being and life chances of the families subjected to them, further supporting the position that the unlawful segregation is indeed harmful.

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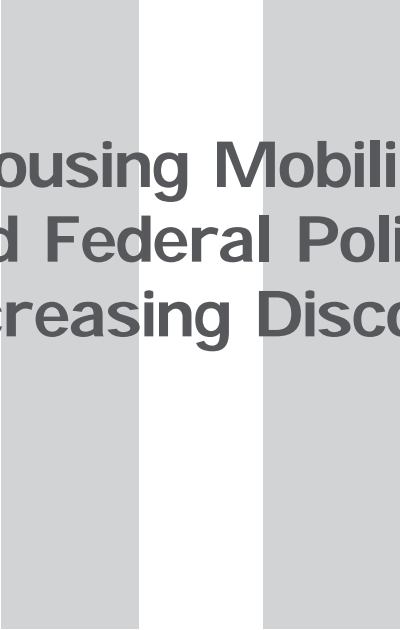
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But, as in *Brown v. Board*, the fundamental proposition in those cases was that the policy of racial segregation that was imposed and perpetuated by official conduct was itself a violation of rights guaranteed by the Constitution and Laws of the United States. Denying an African American the opportunity to live where whites were afforded an opportunity to live, caused actionable injury and gave rise to entitlement to relief. Separate was inherently unequal.

Housing mobility, at its most basic, provides that relief. Good housing mobility policy ensures that minority families are given the full range of choices and opportunities that are and have been available to low-income white families. Regardless of what they choose, vindicating that right is a itself legitimate goal of litigation and social policy.

Of course, the research suggests that there are very real, concrete, and practical benefits from exercising that choice a particular way, both for individuals, communities, and society. And it is the power of that research that drives much of the policy work in this area. We truly believe that a case can be made that children are more likely to thrive and succeed, by any number of measures, in lower-poverty, less racially isolated environments. And we believe that true choice is one that is informed by this growing body of research. But, before we get to those arguments, we should remind ourselves that guaranteeing and securing equal opportunity under the law is itself worth the struggle.





# **Housing Mobility and Federal Policy: An Increasing Disconnect**



## Introduction

**D**uring the 1990s, a number of regulatory enhancements were made to the housing voucher program to help it live up to its potential as program to help families move out of poverty. These enhancements included higher payment standards, deconcentration scoring for public housing agencies (PHAs), a new system of Fair Market Rents in highly concentrated areas, and a reimbursement system that did not discourage PHAs from paying slightly more for families seeking to move to a more opportunity-rich community. The results of these and other HUD efforts may have contributed to the drop in severely concentrated poverty neighborhoods between 1990 and 2000.

In light of the growing evidence of the benefits of housing mobility, and the knowledge we now have about how to make mobility work to its full potential, it is difficult to fathom why the new HUD is seemingly intent on dismantling those aspects of the program that make mobility possible.

HUD began restricting housing choice in the fall of 2003 by cutting back on the use of Section 8 “exception payment standards,” which permit families to move to lower-poverty areas that have higher rents, and requiring that all requests go through the HUD headquarters. Previously, requests for payment standard increases could be submitted to the regional HUD office with a simple demographic analysis to justify higher rents in all or part of the PHA jurisdiction area.

In the same way, HUD’s decision in April of 2004 to retroactively cut voucher funding in PIH Notice 2004-7 increased incentives for PHAs to adopt policies that discourage or prohibit families from moving to higher-rent areas, including across-the-board reductions in payment standards that restrict the choice of available neighborhoods. This was followed by changes in Fair Market Rents that lowered allowable rents in many parts of the country.

HUD further restricted mobility in a guidance issued in July of 2004 that would permit PHAs to restrict voucher holders' portability rights, where PHAs make a showing of financial hardship. In spite of evidence that these restrictions were taking choice away from families,<sup>1</sup> HUD reissued this guidance in early 2005.

Finally, the agencies working in the field to promote housing mobility are losing funding. HUD has chosen not to seek funding for renewal of contracts under the Regional Housing Opportunity Counseling program, and has not renewed funding for several agencies running litigation settlement programs. The predictable result is a loss of housing choice for poor families, and an ongoing erosion in the organizational capacity to support housing mobility in the future.

In the next section, we will examine the role of "portability" in housing mobility, including a proposal to strengthen the right of portability for housing vouchers across city and town lines, with the use of a central reserve fund to reimburse housing agencies for portable voucher moves. We will also look closely at the proposed State and Local Housing Flexibility Act of 2005, which would further undermine housing mobility and choice and which has drawn sharp criticism from civil rights and fair housing advocates.

— *Philip Tegeler*

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1 Initial surveys by NAHRO and the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities showed that, because of these new restrictions, PHAs around the country were denying families the right to move.



# Portability and Housing Choice: Preserving the Right to Inter-Jurisdictional Portability Using a Central Reserve Fund

Mary K. Cunningham and Philip Tegeler\*

**I**n principle, participants in the Housing Choice Voucher Program have a wide range of choices when deciding where to rent a unit. Under program regulations, voucher holders can move to any jurisdiction in the United States where an authority administers a voucher program, and there are about 2,500 such housing agencies nationwide. In practice, portability procedures are significantly more complicated than the name of the program suggests. Further, if Congress adopts the administration's reform proposals, moving across jurisdictions will be more complicated for voucher holders (see "Barriers to Portability" below). This essay outlines what we know about portability, identifies major barriers that thwart portability, and provides suggestions for improving portability practices and procedures among housing agencies.

## What is Portability?

The terms mobility and portability have distinct definitions, but are often used interchangeably. A move from one jurisdiction to another jurisdiction is referred to as *portability* or porting. When a voucher holder moves from a high-poverty neighborhood to a low-poverty neighborhood, the term *mobility* is used to describe this type of move. If the move is from a high-poverty to low-poverty neighborhood and is from one jurisdiction to another jurisdiction, then it counts as a mobility *and* portability move (Basolo 2003; Feins et al. 1996). Portability is important for mobility because many voucher holders may want to take their vouchers to lower-poverty neighborhoods across jurisdiction lines (for example, if a voucher household moves from a high-poverty inner-city neighborhood to a low-poverty suburban neighborhood).

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Housing choice, mobility, and the deconcentration of poverty are a part of the original goals of the Housing Choice Voucher Program (originally the Section 8 certificate program), but portability options, as they are now called, did not always exist.<sup>1</sup> During the 1970s and 1980s HUD began experimenting with programs that allowed families to move across jurisdictional lines. Portability was extended to the entire Section 8 program by statute in 1987, beginning with the right to move within metropolitan regions.<sup>2</sup> Today portability is an enforceable right that permits voucher holders, like any other Americans, to move to any city or town of their choice.

Portability procedures are and have always been more complicated than necessary. Although the voucher program is governed by a set of national rules put forth by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the program is operated by local housing agencies (usually referred to as PHAs, or public housing agencies). There are about 2,500 housing agencies that administer the housing voucher program nationwide, each representing a jurisdiction (e.g., region, state, county, city, or town). Housing agencies have discretion in some aspects of program management. For example, housing agencies maintain their own waiting lists and adopt local preferences for eligibility. Similarly, housing agencies policies and procedures on portability vary greatly.

The housing agency where the voucher household started is the initiating agency and the housing agency where the voucher household is porting is the receiving agency. Under current portability procedures, when a voucher household “ports out” of one jurisdiction the receiving housing agency either “absorbs” the voucher into the agency’s portfolio or bills the initiating housing agency for the cost of the voucher and a portion of the voucher administrative fee.<sup>3</sup> To avoid creating billing systems of Byzantine complexity, housing agencies usually absorb the voucher. However, under current portability policies, this means that the housing agency would be required to use a voucher from their pool for a voucher holder who came from outside the agency’s area, rather than serving families living within their jurisdiction.

Little is known about the total number of portable moves over the history of the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Although HUD collects detailed information on family and neighborhood characteristics of voucher holders who move under portability, there is no published national data on how many voucher holders use portability options to move from lower- to higher-cost jurisdictions, or from higher- to lower-

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- 1 See the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, which established the Section 8 program.
  - 2 Although Congress amended the Section 8 statute in 1987 to permit certificate holders to use their subsidies throughout their own metropolitan area, HUD did not begin to enforce the portability rights of voucher and certificate tenants until 1990, and later that same year, the Section 8 statute was again amended to permit statewide portability for certificate holders. In 1998–99, the program was again expanded to allow nationwide portability.
  - 3 See Basolo (2003) for an excellent diagram of the portability process.



poverty neighborhoods. According to HUD's Public and Indian Housing Information Center (PIC) data, currently about 44,000 vouchers have "ported" to another jurisdiction, but were not absorbed by the receiving jurisdiction.<sup>4</sup> This number does not include households who moved through portability and were then "absorbed" into a receiving housing agency's program in prior years (thus, the cumulative total for portability may be significantly higher over time).

## Barriers to Portability

The barriers to portability fall into several categories: fragmentation of program administration, lack of cooperation between housing agencies, burdensome billing and bureaucracy, and cost.

- **Fragmentation of Program Administration.** The sheer number of program administrators can make it difficult for voucher households to exercise the portability options under the program. Katz and Turner (2001) argue that the "fragmentation of local program administration is one of several factors undermining the potential of the Section 8 program as a mechanism for deconcentrating urban poverty." Every time a voucher moves from one jurisdiction to another, the jurisdictions have to work together. Many housing agencies, especially those that are not in the same region, do not have written agreements on how to handle portability.
- **Lack of Cooperation Among Housing Agencies.** There is a lack of cooperation between housing agencies, which have independent interests and are not accountable to each other (Feins et al 1996). Further, there is also some anecdotal evidence that some housing agencies make it difficult for families to port into their jurisdiction (Sard 2001; Tegeler, Hanley, and Liben 1995) and that many housing agencies do not inform voucher holders of their portability options (Cunningham, Sylvester, and Turner 1999).
- **Burdensome Billing and Bureaucracy.** Housing agencies report "spending substantial resources, and experiencing a significant level of frustration, in administering portable Section 8 subsidies" (Feins et al. 1996). Even housing agencies that implement portability agreements report that billing can be burdensome and can put smaller housing agencies at a financial disadvantage because they may have to pay a receiving housing agency higher rents (Basolo 2003).
- **Cost.** Changes in the voucher funding allocation system and recent administration proposals to make the program more "flexible" seriously threaten current portability options available to voucher households. Rules put forth in 2004 that changed

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4 See <http://pic.hud.gov/pic/RCRPublic/rcrmain.asp> for current PIC data. The figures cited here are from May 2005.

the funding allocation system from a unit-based system to a dollar-based system limit the amount of funds housing agencies receive each year because the system does not account for extra costs, such as an unforeseen rent increase when a tenant moves from a high- to low-poverty neighborhood.<sup>5</sup> Further, the State and Local Housing Flexibility Act of 2005 threatens to eliminate portability options entirely [see next section]. Under the bill, families would retain their right to move to other jurisdictions within states or regions only if the administering housing agencies have a standing agreement.

## Policy Solutions

In recent years, regional administration of the voucher program is one of the many reforms proposed to ameliorate portability problems and likely the most promising. Regional administration of the program would reduce the number of housing agencies, and would mean that voucher holders could move within a region without having to port in and out.<sup>6</sup> Since most mobility moves are from one jurisdiction to another jurisdiction within one region, regional administration of the program would facilitate moves to low-poverty neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, these proposals met great resistance from housing agencies across the country. Less radical solutions would simplify the portability process for voucher households. We offer two interim solutions:

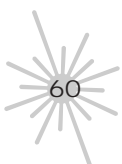
- **Portability Agreements.** To simplify the portability process innovative housing agencies develop portability agreements that outline a streamlined process for voucher households to move in or out of their jurisdiction. HUD should require housing agencies to develop portability standards and agreements with other housing agencies in their region.
- **Portability Central Reserve Fund.** HUD should create a central reserve fund that housing agencies can draw on to cover the cost of vouchers porting into higher cost jurisdictions. This fund would help alleviate the financial disincentives housing agencies have in accepting vouchers from other jurisdictions. It would also help smaller “initiating” housing agencies respond to the cost of voucher holders porting out to high rent jurisdictions. We estimate that a central reserve fund could cost roughly \$39 million.<sup>7</sup> This estimate helps get us closer to understanding how much

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5 For more information of the effects of the new funding system see the work of Barbara Sard and Will Fischer at the Center for Budget Public Priorities (<http://www.cbpp.org>). See specifically, *Local Consequences of HUD's 2004 Voucher Funding Bill* (2004).

6 See Katz and Turner, "Who Should Run the Voucher Program: A Reform Proposal" (2001).

7 Please see the appendix below for our estimate assumptions. Lower-bound, upper-bound, and average estimates are provided. To the extent that a portion of ported vouchers are already included in each agency's base funding, the projected cost of the central reserve fund may actually be lower.



a reserve fund would cost, but is limited by lack of available data, and should not be used as a final cost projection. A more detailed estimate that takes into consideration the current funding structure of the voucher program, projected portability moves (both the number and geographic location), and fluctuations in household income should be considered in a final cost projection.

## Conclusion

For over 10 years, advocates and researchers have called for reform of portability procedures. The case is clear: the current portability system is broken and is growing worse over time. But eliminating portability procedures is not the answer. Portability continues to be the ticket to lower-poverty communities for many families, and is essential, under the current system, to ensuring the right of housing choice.

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## Appendix: estimating the cost of a central reserve fund to support voucher portability

The attached tables summarize the projected costs of an annual central reserve fund to cover the excess costs of portability moves from lower cost jurisdictions to higher cost jurisdictions. We calculated three estimates: an average estimate, an upper bound estimate, and a lower bound estimate. These are rough estimates based on our understanding of the general contours of the portability data and the following assumptions:

1. Total number of portable vouchers in circulation:
  - There are currently more than 44,000 portable vouchers in use (about 2.4% of the 1.86 million vouchers in use nationally).<sup>i</sup> This figure includes all vouchers retained by one PHA but administered by another. It does not include families who have moved through portability and then been “absorbed” into a receiving PHA’s program in prior years (thus, the cumulative total for portability may be significantly higher over time). At this time, beyond these total figures, there is little demographic data available on the nature and cost of portability moves.
2. Based on the limited knowledge we have of the portability data, we conservatively over-estimated the number of vouchers that would be traveling from lower to higher cost jurisdictions, as follows:
  - **Rural (or non-metro) to Metro moves** are estimated to be no more than 20 percent of total (a high end figure — probably much lower). To calculate these FMR differentials we used the average differential between metro and non-metro rents.
  - **City to suburb moves within metro areas** are estimated to be no more than 40 percent of the total. We used a 15 percent payment standard differential to estimate the additional cost of city to suburb moves.
3. Portability cost reduction factors are not included in the estimates. However, in discussing the proposal for a central reserve fund, it should be noted that portability from higher to lower cost areas saves almost as much money as it costs in the other direction, though the savings would not appear in the reserve fund itself:
  - Suburb to city moves are likely to be as high as 40 percent of total and would usually be higher-to-lower rent moves within the same metro area, in theory cancelling out the additional cost of the city to suburb moves.

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i This total excludes approximately 18 “Moving to Work” agencies that administer approximately 160,000 vouchers.

- Metro to rural moves are a much smaller number than rural to metro moves, but they also result in significant savings to the program — but are not similarly not included because they would not reduce the size of the reserve fund.
  - Moves from one metro area to another (including across state lines) are a small number, and they are probably an equal number higher and lower cost moves, so we'd be safe to ignore them for now.
4. Typical bedroom size in the HUD PIC data set is 2.4 - we used 2 BR FMRs as a benchmark.
  5. We assume scale of portability remains constant (if portability is made easier to implement, presumably the numbers would go up).
  6. We first ran the analysis using average rents, yielding a **\$39 million** total. We also ran the numbers using high (Boston) rents and low (Omaha) rents to create a high-low range. The high and low tables should be used only to give a sense of the maximum range, although it is anticipated that portability costs will be more common in high rent areas.
  7. Please note that these estimates do not include any consideration of transfers of administrative fees – they only address reimbursement for excess rent charges for lower-to-higher cost moves. In addition, to the extent that portability moves have already been included in an agency's base funding, there may be no need to tap into a central fund.



**Estimate for Portability Reserve Fund - Average FMRs****\$ 38,860,800.00****1. Total Cost Estimate Based on Average FMRs****Cost of Rural (non-metro) to Metro Moves \$ 21,542,400.00**

[number of moves from rural to metro]\*[average cost difference of move]\*

12=total cost of rural (non-metro) to metro moves

8800\*204\*12=21,542,400.00

Average FMR for all PMSA/MSA areas	\$	696.00
Average FMR for all non PMSA/MSA areas	\$	492.00
[average cost difference of move]	\$	<u>204.00</u>

**City to Suburb Moves within Metro Areas \$ 17,318,400.00**

[number of moves from city to suburb]\*[average cost difference]\*

12=total cost of city to suburban moves

17600\*82.5\*12=17,318,400.00

Average 2 bdr FMR for PMSA/MSA	\$	550.00
115% of average 2 bdr average FMR for PMSA/MSA	\$	<u>632.50</u>
[average cost difference of move]	\$	82.50

**Notes:**

1. The total number of portability moves is 44,000. This figure includes all vouchers retained by one PHA but administered by another. It does not include households who have ported and then been "absorbed" into a receiving PHA program in prior years (thus, cumulative total for portability may be significantly higher over time).
2. Based on suggestions from HUD staff, we assumed that 20 percent of overall portability moves (8,800) are rural (non-metro) to metro moves; 40 percent of overall portability moves (17,600) are city to suburban moves.
3. Our cost estimate does not include metro to rural moves because they are a small number. It is likely that these moves would reduce the overall cost of portability slightly.
4. Our cost estimate does not include suburb to city moves, which are about 40 percent of the total. Assuming the differential for these moves cost less than city to suburban moves they would in theory cancel out the cost of city to suburban moves.



Estimate for Portability Reserve Fund - Upper Bound

**\$ 91,006,080.00**

**2. Estimate Based on High Rent Metro**

**Cost of Rural (non-metro) to Metro Moves**

**\$ 50,899,200.00**

[number of moves from rural to metro]\*[average cost difference of move]\*12=total cost of rural (non-metro) to metro moves

$$17600 * 482.00 * 12 = 50,899,200.00$$

Boston PMSA/MSA FMR

\$ 1,266.00

Fitchburg

\$ 784.00

[average cost difference of move]

\$ 482.00

**City to Suburban Moves within Metros**

**\$ 40,106,880.00**

[number of moves city to suburb]\*[average cost difference]\*12=total cost of city to suburban moves

$$40,106,880.00 = 17600 * 189.9 * 12$$

Average national 2 bdr FMR

\$ 1,266.00

115% of average 2 bdr national FMR

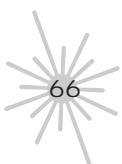
\$ 1,455.90

[average cost difference of move]

\$ 189.90

Notes:

1. The total number of portability moves is 44,000. This figure includes all vouchers retained by one PHA but administered by another.  
  
It does not include households who have ported and then been "absorbed" into a receiving PHA program in prior years (thus, cumulative total for portability may be significantly higher over time).
2. Based on suggestions from HUD staff, we assumed that 20 percent of overall portability moves (8,800) are rural (non-metro) to metro moves; 40 percent of overall portability moves (17,600) are city to suburban moves.
3. Our cost estimate does not include metro to rural moves because they are a small number. It is likely that these moves would reduce the overall cost of portability slightly.
4. Our cost estimate does not include suburb to city moves, which are about 40 percent of the total. Assuming the differential for these moves cost less than city to suburban moves they would in theory cancel out the cost of city to suburban moves.





Estimate for Portability Reserve Fund - Lower Bound

\$ 33,264,000.00

3. Total Cost Estimate Based on Lower Rent Metro

**Cost of Rural (non-metro) to Metro Moves** **\$ 12,672,000.00**

[number of moves from rural to metro]\*[average cost difference of move]\*12=total cost of rural (non-metro) to metro moves

$$17600 * 120.00 * 12 = 12,672,000.00$$

Omaha FMR	\$	650.00
Franklin County FMR	\$	530.00
[average cost difference of move]	\$	120.00

**City to Suburban Moves within Metros** **\$ 20,592,000.00**

[number of moves city to suburb]\*[average cost difference]\*12=total cost of city to suburban moves

$$17600 * 97.5 * 12 = 20,592,000.00$$

Average national 2 bdr FMR - Omaha	\$	650.00
115% of average 2 bdr national FMR	\$	747.50
[average cost difference of move]	\$	97.50

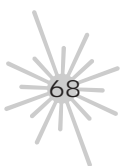
Notes:

1. The total number of portability moves is 44,000. This figure includes all vouchers retained by one PHA but administered by another. It does not include households who have ported and then been "absorbed" into a receiving PHA program in prior years (thus, cumulative total for portability may be significantly higher over time).
2. Based on suggestions from HUD staff, we assumed that 20 percent of overall portability moves (8,800) are rural (non-metro) to metro moves; 40 percent of overall portability moves (17,600) are city to suburban moves.
3. Our cost estimate does not include metro to rural moves because they are a small number. It is likely that these moves would reduce the overall cost of portability slightly.
4. Our cost estimate does not include suburb to city moves, which are about 40 percent of the total. Assuming the differential for these moves cost less than city to suburban moves they would in theory cancel out the cost of city to suburban moves.

## Anita

### Incremental Steps Toward the American Dream

Anita was living in New York City public housing when she got a voucher through the Moving To Opportunity demonstration. After five years of living in the “projects” she could leave the relentless violence and the fear that accompanied it behind. The only requirement was that she had to find an apartment in a low-poverty neighborhood. Working with a housing search counselor, she tried to locate a unit in Manhattan. After searching for three months, exasperated, she said to her counselor, “to use this voucher I’m going to have to move out of New York City.” Her housing search counselor replied, “You could do that, you know.” Three weeks later Anita was looking at an apartment in Milton, a suburb about 20 minutes outside the city limits of Boston, Massachusetts. The apartment had a huge yard and was only 15 minutes away from her sister’s house. She packed her up her belongings and her two boys, who were 8 and 10 at the time, and moved to Milton. Anita was a substitute teacher at her son’s school while she looked for a full-time job, which she found about one month later. For a few years, Anita and her family lived in Milton. The neighborhood was quiet and she was closer to her sister. She was getting used to Boston winters, when out of the blue her old boss called and offered her a lead teacher position at the school she had been working at in NYC. After a lot of thought, Anita moved her family back New York. With her new salary, she could now afford housing on her own: an apartment on one of Harlem’s rapidly gentrifying blocks. Anita says her next stop is homeownership. As a teacher, she thinks she might qualify for HUD’s Teacher Next Door Program.



# Civil Rights Implications of the 2005 "Flexible Voucher" Proposal

Philip Tegeler and Shayna Strom\*

In its proposed "State and Local Housing Flexibility Act of 2005", S. 771, the administration has revived its 2004 proposal for a Flexible Voucher Program. This bill would place new obstacles in the path of low-income families seeking to move to lower-poverty communities. By eliminating the current system of "income targeting" of vouchers towards the most needy families in the Section 8 program, the bill could also deprive up to several hundred thousand black and Latino families of essential housing opportunities during the next 5–10 years, if housing agencies elect to remove income-targeting guidelines.

## Restricting the right of housing choice

The bill as currently drafted would restrict the ability of families to move to communities of their choice and would impede their ability to move to lower-poverty (and higher-rent) neighborhoods in two ways.

First, the bill would continue a version of the new voucher budgeting system (begun in the 2004 fiscal year) that limits public housing agencies (PHAs) to a fixed sum of funds for the year, based on the prior year's housing voucher budget, with no right to receive extra funds when costs for individual vouchers increase.<sup>1</sup> This funding system, which replaced a system that paid agencies for the actual cost of vouchers in use, creates a financial conflict on the local level between the number and the quality of housing

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\* Philip Tegeler is Executive Director of the Poverty & Race Research Action Council (PRRAC). Shayna Strom was a volunteer research associate at PRRAC in 2004-05; she is currently working as an organizer with the Working Families Party in New York.

1 The new bill would base funding on each PHA's share of national voucher funding in the 2005 fiscal year.

placements. In other words, since apartments in segregated, higher-poverty neighborhoods are more likely to have lower rents, an agency will face pressure to serve more families by approving tenancies in those areas rather than paying the higher cost of subsidies for families to move to housing located in better areas. This system has already led to reductions in allowable rents across the country, and denials of family moves to higher-cost areas. This type of conflict is bad for fair housing, deprives poor families of choice, and will lead inexorably to more segregation. HUD knows that the problem could be ameliorated with a special reserve fund for moves to lower-poverty areas, but such a reserve fund does not appear in the bill.

Second, the bill appears to restrict the long-standing right of Section 8 families to use their vouchers across jurisdictional lines (for example, moving from city to suburb). The language of the bill suggests that city and suburban housing authorities must “agree” on a system for transferring vouchers (“portability”) before families can move! If this interpretation of the bill is correct, it would give suburban government officials the authority to simply say “no” to additional city families seeking to rent private apartments in their town. The fair housing consequences of such a rule are severe.

## Eliminating the current income-targeting system will lead to loss of vouchers for black and Latino families

Currently, the Section 8 program requires that PHAs distribute at least 75 percent of their vouchers in each fiscal year to “extremely low-income families” (earning 30 percent or less of the area median income). This income-targeting requirement has meant that black and Latino families, who are disproportionately concentrated in the extremely low-income bracket,<sup>2</sup> have been successful in receiving the majority of vouchers.<sup>3</sup>

The proposed bill, S. 771, would alter drastically the “income targeting” of vouchers to the most needy families in the Section 8 program, a step which, if adopted by Congress and implemented by local PHAs, could result in a huge loss of vouchers for black and Latino families.

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2 Nationally, 30 percent of median income is \$16,950 for a family of four, which is roughly equivalent to the poverty threshold. See Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Introduction to the Housing Voucher Program” (Washington, DC: 2003), p. 3. In 1999, black and Hispanic households were three times more likely to live below the poverty level than white households. See Joseph Dalakar and Bernadette D. Proctor, *Poverty in the United States: 1999* (United States Census Bureau, Washington, DC: September 2000), p. v.

3 See Deborah J. Devine et. al, *Housing Choice Voucher Location Patterns: Implications for Participants and Neighborhood Welfare* (Washington, DC: January 2003), especially p. 91, table A-3.



According to the proposed legislation, at least 90 percent of vouchers would go to families with incomes up to 60 percent of area median income.<sup>4</sup> This change would give housing authorities the incentive and the ability to distribute vouchers to higher-income (predominantly white) households rather than lower-income (largely minority) households, as the former require fewer subsidy dollars and thus enable a limited pool of funds to reach a larger number of families.

Based on data from the 2000 Census and area median income data maintained by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, we can anticipate the racial impact of these proposed changes. Currently, an average of 40.9 percent of all vouchers in the United States go to non-Hispanic blacks, and 16.3 percent go to Hispanics.<sup>5</sup> Assuming a turnover of approximately 230,000 vouchers annually,<sup>6</sup> and assuming that turnover is similar throughout the country and that distribution of vouchers mimics distribution of population, we would expect about 94,070 black and 37,490 Latino families to receive new vouchers annually under the current targeted system. However, if income targeting were altered as proposed in the forthcoming HUD bill, and new vouchers were distributed evenly across all eligible income levels (a conservative assumption), then we would expect only 40,923 black and 25,328 Latino families to receive vouchers next year—a loss of 53,147 vouchers for blacks and 12,162 vouchers for Latinos.<sup>7</sup>

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4 The remaining 10 percent of vouchers could be available to any families that meet the eligibility standard for the program (incomes not exceeding 80 percent of area median income).

5 Devine et al., *Housing Choice Voucher Location Patterns*, p. 91.

6 There are approximately 2.1 million vouchers in circulation, with a turnover rate of around 11 percent. See Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Introduction to the Housing Voucher Program" (Washington, DC: 2003), p. 3. With income targeting, 75 percent of these turnover vouchers (approximately 170,000) have to be distributed to extremely low-income families.

7 This number was determined by calculating the number of people whose income is under 60 percent of area median income (AMI) in every county in every state, and then determining what percentages of such people nationally are of any given ethnicity. Those percentages were then multiplied by 90 percent of the annual turnover in vouchers. A similar process was repeated to determine the percentage of people of given ethnicities under 80 percent of AMI; those percentages were multiplied by 10 percent of the annual turnover in vouchers. The two figures were summed to result in the number of families of each ethnicity receiving housing vouchers in the first year of a new program.

Thus, over time, and based on current income distributions by race, HUD's proposal would foreseeably take away as many as 360,996 vouchers from blacks and 31,426 vouchers from Latinos,<sup>8</sup> not counting vouchers lost in New England.<sup>9</sup> This represents a potential future loss of approximately 392,422 vouchers from very low income black and Latino families.<sup>10</sup>

## Reducing income targeting will undermine efforts to deconcentrate poverty

By removing the program's current focus on the poorest city residents, the proposal to eliminate income targeting would steer new vouchers away from the most deeply segregated and poverty-concentrated neighborhoods, undermining the voucher program's core goal to deconcentrate poverty. Architects of the successful *Gautreaux* and Moving to Opportunity housing mobility programs have called for a much stronger targeting of vouchers to these hypersegregated neighborhoods. Yet HUD's proposal would lead us in exactly the opposite direction, taking away the one opportunity many families in our poorest, most opportunity-deprived neighborhoods have to move out.

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- 8 This number was determined by calculating the number of people whose income is under 60 percent of area median income (AMI) in every county in every state, and using that to calculate the percentage of people of a given ethnicity under 60 percent AMI in each given county. County-level data was then aggregated to state-level data, and the percentage of people of a given ethnicity under 60 percent AMI in each state was multiplied by 90 percent of the number of vouchers available in a given state. The same process was repeated to find the percentage of people of a given ethnicity under 80 percent AMI in each county and state, and the state-level data was multiplied by 10 percent of the number of vouchers available in a given state. These figures were summed to get the number of vouchers available to people of a given ethnicity in each state, and that information was aggregated to determine the national-level data.
- 9 Area median income data for New England is calculated at the level of county subdivisions (townships, towns, cities), but very limited racial data is available at that level, making a calculation of vouchers lost in New England very difficult. Accordingly, these calculations of vouchers lost from minority families are quite conservative.
- 10 This data can also be displayed by state. In Wyoming, the percentage of non-Hispanic blacks who currently receive vouchers but would not if income targeting is eliminated is approximately 88 percent. In California, that percentage is 71 percent.



# Summary Table: Housing Voucher Program Policies That Influence Housing Voucher Mobility

Barbara Sard\*

**A**s an illustration of the policy changes discussed in this chapter, the following table summarizes specific program elements of the voucher program that have worked to encourage or discourage housing mobility in the past. These separate program elements are set out side by side with HUD’s recent administrative actions and provisions in the administration’s proposed “State and Local Housing Flexibility Act Of 2005.”

Voucher Program Elements that Encourage Mobility		
Policies	Status in 2005	Under Proposed State and Local Housing Flexibility Act (S. 771/ H.R. 1999)
<b>1. At least 80% of vouchers must be tenant-based and families in units with project-based vouchers have right to mobile voucher after one year</b>	Required by statute	Would continue under Title I, Flexible Voucher Program, though mobility right after first year restricted to jurisdiction of PHA and prior subsidy level. Could be waived under new Moving to Work provisions.
<b>2. PHA discretion to set payment standard up to 110% of FMR in any neighborhood</b>	Permitted by statute but PHAs may be constrained by fixed funding.	<b>No.</b> No explicit limit on payment standard but funding reduction will create constraint on use of discretion.

**PHA = Public Housing Authority**  
**FMR = Fair Market Rents**  
**MSA = Metropolitan Statistical Area**

\* Barbara Sard is Director of Housing Policy, Center on Budget & Policy Priorities.

**Voucher Program Elements that Encourage Mobility - continued**

Policies	Status in 2005	Under Proposed State and Local Housing Flexibility Act (S. 771/ H.R. 1999)
<p><b>3. PHA option to request HUD approval of higher "exception payment standard"</b></p>	<p>HUD has approved only a handful of area exception payment standards since HUD memo in fall 2003. Refusal to grant exceptions violates regulations and statute.</p>	<p><b>No.</b> Same as above.</p>
<p><b>4. FMR set at 50th percentile in 39 metro areas where voucher use overly concentrated</b></p>	<p>Notice dated August 25, 2005_( FR ) rescinds 50th percentile FMRs for 34 MSAs, and adds 10 new MSAs to list of areas permitted to have higher rents. (Because of changes in the boundaries of the metropolitan area FMRs in 2006, parts of the 39 original 50th percentile metropolitan areas are now in 48 metropolitan areas and rural counties.) Will have no practical effect, however, if no additional funding is granted to PHAs to support higher rents.</p>	<p><b>No.</b> Payment standards would no longer be pegged to the FMR, but funding constraint on increasing cost per voucher.</p>
<p><b>5. Renewal funding policy based on actual costs, allowing agencies to make use of policies 2—4 without reducing number of families served</b></p>	<p>Regulatory requirement overridden by appropriations act. Fixed funding based on costs in May–July 2004 creates serious obstacle for agencies that had not previously adopted higher payment standards; agencies that had policies in place likely to have sufficient funding to continue.</p>	<p><b>No.</b> Flat or declining funding likely.</p>
<p><b>6. "Portability" right to move to any other community that has a voucher program</b></p>	<p>Many agencies have unlawfully limited portability moves in 2004 and 2005 due to funding limits. HUD notice PIH 2005—7 may encourage PHAs to believe such restrictions are lawful. <i>See Bishop-Sard memo posted at <a href="http://www.nhlp.org">http://www.nhlp.org</a> concerning this notice.</i></p>	<p><b>No.</b> Right to move subject to agreement by "sending" and "receiving" agencies.</p>

**PHA = Public Housing Authority**  
**FMR = Fair Market Rents**  
**MSA = Metropolitan Statistical Area**





**Voucher Program Elements that Encourage Mobility - continued**

Policies	Status in 2005	Under Proposed State and Local Housing Flexibility Act (S. 771/ H.R. 1999)
<b>7. Project-based vouchers may only be located in areas that would deconcentrate poverty and expand economic opportunity</b>	Current statutory requirement. HUD's final regulation requires a PHA to establish a site selection policy in its administrative plan and to consider the current poverty rate as well as various indicators of neighborhood dynamics in setting the policy. 24 CFR 983.57, effective November 14, 2005.	<b>No.</b> No statutory constraints on location of project-based units. Unclear if HUD's "site and neighborhood standards" regulation would still apply to new construction and substantial rehabilitation.
<b>8. Project-based vouchers may have higher payment standard in tax credit units outside of "qualified census tracts"</b>	Current statutory requirement.	<b>No.</b> No explicit limit on payment standard but funding reduction will create constraint on use of discretion.
<b>9. SEMAP: 5 points for plan to expand housing opportunities; 5 bonus points for improved deconcentration</b>	Still in effect but lack of new vouchers reduces significance of SEMAP scores	<b>Unlikely.</b> Performance standards not specified in bills, but neither prior Bush proposal has included mobility-related goals in performance incentives.
<b>10. Regulations restrict use of residency preference to areas where will not adversely affect fair housing</b>	In effect	<b>Unclear.</b> Bill is silent, but HUD unlikely to continue rule under a block grant.

PHA = Public Housing Authority  
 FMR = Fair Market Rents  
 MSA = Metropolitan Statistical Area

### Voucher Program Impediments to Mobility

Policies	Status in 2005	Likely to be improved by SLHFA
<b>2,500 administering agencies create a confusing bureaucratic transfer and billing system</b>	Continues	<b>No.</b> Bill proposes no change in current administrative structure though it would make it easier for HUD to defund agencies and reallocate vouchers to other PHAs or nonprofit or for-profit entities.
<b>Moving with voucher to area served by different agency administratively burdensome for PHAs and creates new risks of denial and delay for families</b>	Continues	<b>No.</b> Would be more difficult to move.
<b>Lack of special administrative fees for housing search assistance</b>	Continues, and administrative fee cuts will further deter agencies from providing search assistance	<b>No.</b>
<b>Minimal SEMAP incentive to promote mobility and no other effective HUD monitoring</b>	Continues.	<b>No.</b> Performance standards not specified in bills, but neither prior Bush proposal included mobility-related goals in performance incentives.
<b>PHA may restrict to living in issuing jurisdiction in first year if apply from outside</b>	Continues (at PHA discretion)	<b>No,</b> and PHAs could wholly deny right to move to another jurisdiction.
<b>New participant or mover may not pay more than 40% of adjusted income</b>	Statutory, so will continue unless Congress alters. (Likely to be pressure to do so.)	<b>Yes.</b> For better or worse, tenants are likely to be "allowed" to pay an unlimited percentage of income towards rent.
<b>Ineffective administration by some PHAs making owners of more desirable units in some areas unwilling to participate</b>	No likelihood of improvement. Fee cuts likely to make some PHAs less prompt in performing administrative tasks that affect owners.	<b>No,</b> as block grants would be administered by same agencies as currently.

# **Building a Better Mobility Program: Best Practices and Program Models**



# Essential Elements of Successful Mobility Counseling Programs

Gene Rizer\*

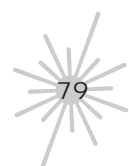
There is considerable variation in the design of housing mobility counseling programs. This is affected by a number of factors including available resources for counseling, needs and goals of the population being served, constraints on where participants may live and the availability and affordability of housing in those areas, and acceptance by landlords and residents. There are also significant differences between housing relocation programs and traditional “voluntary” mobility counseling programs, although most good relocation programs include mobility counseling components. This chapter will review some of the common elements of mobility counseling programs, recognizing that at each stage of the process, program elements can be adjusted to achieve greater or lesser degrees of mobility, depending on the particular goals and constraints of the program.

The essential elements of mobility programs are summarized here using nine categories:

- Administration of the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program
- Key program definitions
- Recruiting participants
- Recruiting and retaining landlords
- Establishing and maintaining effective relationships with service providers
- Pre-move counseling
- Housing search assistance
- Post move counseling
- Evaluating program performance and outcomes

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## Administration of the HCV Program

Almost all mobility programs are paired with some form of housing assistance, most commonly housing choice vouchers (HCVs), needed to provide broader housing choices to participants. Vouchers have been used in most of the desegregation cases, and in HUD's two major mobility demonstration programs—Moving to Opportunity (MTO) and Regional Opportunity Counseling (ROC).

The quality of the administration of the voucher program is key to the amount and quality of the housing available to program families. It is very difficult, if not impossible, for a mobility counseling program to be successful if the HCV program supporting it is not well administered.

Landlords may be impressed by the initiative of program families or by their preparation to be good tenants through training, workshops, and counseling. And landlords may appreciate the promised follow-up from counselors if there are problems. But more important to most landlords is that they will receive timely and accurate housing assistance payments, timely and consistent application of HCV program rules, and effective communications with program staff.

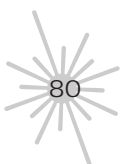
In addition to general performance in administering the program, and in recognition of how important voucher program administration is to landlord participation, mobility programs have tried a number of ways to enhance voucher program administration specifically for a mobility program. Some examples are:

- Adopting special procedures or fast track processing for units proposed for the mobility program,
- Assigning specific high-performing staff for some or all processing to achieve speed and consistency, and
- Assigning a specific person as a central contact for any issues a mobility program landlord has with HCV processing.

If landlords do not receive adequate service from the HCV program, no amount of mobility counseling will recruit and retain them in the program.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the goals of the mobility program can be substantially aided by responsive and consistent administration of the voucher program, where there is good communication with landlords and between the HCV program and counseling staff.

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1 Landlords with units in opportunity neighborhoods are generally less dependent on the program for tenants so they are less tolerant of delays in initial occupancy and payments resulting from voucher program processing. The same landlord may be willing to tolerate more delay for units located in less desirable neighborhoods than in opportunity neighborhoods.



Most mobility programs to date have chosen or were required to have a separate nonprofit organization conduct the counseling activities for the program. This was a requirement of the Moving to Work (MTO) and Regional Opportunity Counseling (ROC) demonstration programs funded by HUD. The principal arguments for this approach are that (1) counseling is not a major activity or area of expertise for PHAs, and (2) having a separate organization provides an opportunity for the counseling to have an independent voice enabling counselors to be advocates with the PHA on behalf of the families they counsel.<sup>2</sup>

Using a separate nonprofit counseling agency remains the most common model, but there have been examples of the same organization operating both the voucher and counseling program. Those operating such programs see the major advantage as the increased ease of communication and the clear assignment of overall responsibility for the effectiveness of both program elements to a single person who has clear authority over both program components.<sup>3</sup>

There is general recognition of some built-in tension between the administration of the voucher program, in compliance with very detailed federal regulations, and the advocacy needed by counseling staff, regardless of whether these staff members work for the same or separate organizations. Under either model, it is important that the counseling staff have sufficient power to be real advocates for their clients in insuring that the HCV processing meets the needs of the clients.

## Key Program Definitions

Almost all housing mobility counseling programs have program-specific definitions for who is eligible and where participants are required or encouraged to live. These definitions reflect key decisions in program design that affect the activities and outcomes of the program.

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- 2 A few PHAs participating in the ROC program proposed that they also do the counseling. These PHAs believed their experience with other mobility programs or with the Family Self-Sufficiency program prepared them to do an effective job of mobility counseling. In a few cases, they believed they were the only local organization with actual experience in providing counseling related to making a successful move to an opportunity area.
  - 3 Programs where the same organization administers both the vouchers and the counseling include the Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) second mover program, where CHA's contractor performs both functions, and the Thompson Mobility Program in Baltimore, where a private firm administers the mobility program vouchers and does the counseling. In the latter case, the coordination is even closer because the only portion of the Housing Authority of Baltimore City's voucher program administered by the contractor is the vouchers specifically allocated for the mobility program.

**Eligibility.** Eligibility may be defined in terms of a consent decree to describe the plaintiff class, where the family currently lives, or the family's status in the HCV program (i.e., applicant versus current participant),—or a combination of these. For example, a program for current HCV participants might restrict eligibility for mobility counseling to participants currently using their vouchers in high poverty areas. A program resulting from a court decision may identify a specific list of families (e.g., all residents of a PHA's public housing program at the time of the court order or consent decree) to represent the plaintiff class. But regardless of the type of program, there is usually a more restrictive definition of eligibility than simply being an applicant or participant in a voucher program.

In some programs there is a broad definition of who can apply and participate, but a more restrictive definition for determining who will receive all or certain counseling services. For example, most programs require attendance at workshops and have other performance requirements that must be met for counseling assistance to begin or continue. Some of these are designed, at least in part, to help ensure that the family is motivated to make an opportunity move.

Some programs also have definitions of readiness to make the move as a way to focus limited resources on those with at least a reasonable chance of being successful under the program. In some programs, the applicant family with low prospects may be able to attend group counseling sessions and workshops and receive some counseling, but not receive more intense counseling, search assistance, or referrals to specific units until specified major impediments to successful leasing in opportunity neighborhoods are adequately addressed.

These policies are certainly affected by how many families apply compared to available voucher and counseling assistance. But, if resources are limited compared to demand, and there is not some screening of applicants to receive the services of the program, there is a danger that resources will be so diluted that few families receive adequate assistance to make a mobility move.

**Opportunity Neighborhoods.** There are always definitions of the neighborhoods to which mobility program participants are either encouraged or required to move. Most court ordered programs, and some past demonstration programs, have restricted use of program vouchers to defined neighborhoods or census tracts that meet certain criteria (e.g., tracts where less than 10 percent of residents are in households with incomes below the poverty level). While poverty rates alone are used for most voluntary programs, some programs define opportunity neighborhoods in terms of concentrations of poverty, race, and other subsidized housing.

These definitions have a great impact on the activities, costs, and other metrics of the program. If the definition of opportunity neighborhoods is too restrictive, it may be





difficult for even a well-designed counseling program to help families achieve opportunity moves without other interventions, such as financial incentives for landlords. On the other hand, if the definition is too broad, it may not be clear that program services have had much to do with any deconcentration that is observed.<sup>4</sup>

Typically, a court-ordered program or an experiment (e.g., MTO) restricts use of the housing voucher. However, without the force of a court order or experimental constraint, there is usually no restriction on where the voucher can be used, so the counseling must focus on convincing the family that an opportunity move is in its best interest. In programs where the voucher may also be used in nonopportunity areas, services may be restricted (e.g., referrals are limited to units in opportunity neighborhoods, post-placement counseling is available only to households moving to opportunity neighborhoods).

Obviously, housing mobility programs that are most successful in moving families to low-poverty neighborhoods are those that restrict the choices a family can make, although these programs may not be appropriate for families who are involuntarily displaced. In such cases, it may be beneficial to offer the mobility program separate from the regular relocation program as a special option, with geographic restrictions, for families who choose to participate.

## Recruiting Participants

All mobility programs use outreach to inform and attract eligible households. Sending a clear and consistent message about who is eligible can help prevent confusion and frustration for applicants and extra work for counseling and HCV staff. A challenge for all outreach programs is to attract the eligible population while minimizing applications from ineligible families. It is also important, both for controlling costs and satisfactory customer service, to determine basic eligibility as quickly as possible. Applicants are often unhappy when they expend effort to attend orientations or provide significant amounts of personal information, only to be informed that they are ineligible for the counseling program.

Almost all programs provide a brochure or other materials describing program objectives, eligibility requirements, and how the program works. These materials provide contact information, and some include a preliminary application form.

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4 In HUD's Regional Opportunity Counseling Demonstration the range of definitions of opportunity neighborhoods was from census tracts with 5 percent or less poverty in San Diego to less than 40 percent poverty in New Jersey's program.

Most programs provide presentations about the program to prospective participants and community groups. Video presentations can help ensure consistency. Some program materials and presentations include summaries of research on the outcomes for families in other mobility programs to encourage participation and help set reasonable expectations.

If the program is for voucher participants making second moves, there is an opportunity to promote the counseling program with handouts and encouragement at the family's annual eligibility recertification for the voucher program.

For court ordered programs, it may be possible to more directly target marketing to eligible families. For example, if the program is targeted to current residents of public housing, then marketing only to the individual public housing developments can be very cost effective.

Mobility programs have tried a number of other techniques for informing prospective applicants. A short list includes newspaper and radio advertisements, appearances on local call-in radio programs, press releases, and announcements in church bulletins.

Once a program has achieved some initial success, the materials and presentations often are supplemented by testimonials of program participants about their experiences. This is a very effective way of recruiting new families and helping to ensure that these families have reasonable expectations regarding the program and what the move will mean. Some programs also include testimonials of satisfied landlords to help recruit both participants and landlords. If the program surveys participants or landlords, favorable survey results may also be useful in recruiting participants.

## Recruiting and Retaining Landlords

The importance of high-quality administration of the HCV program in recruiting landlords has been discussed. In addition, mobility program participants themselves are often attractive to landlords because

- They are making an effort to better their circumstances and get off public assistance,
- They have received training and counseling that has prepared them to be good tenants, and
- They have a counselor who can be relied upon to respond quickly when there is an issue between the landlord and tenant.



If the program is trying to achieve leasing in opportunity neighborhoods that are higher cost, the PHA must have a program payment standard that is adequate for participants to afford the units. Even though program families may choose to pay more than the standard 30 percent of adjusted income for their housing, they are prohibited from selecting new units that require them to pay more than 40 percent of their income for rent and tenant-paid utilities. A family paying near this rate, or even higher at a later recertification when the 40 percent limit does not apply, runs a greater risk of being unable to pay its rent and utilities. Not meeting these obligations is a program violation, which may cause the family to lose its assistance and restrict its ability to again apply for voucher assistance. Landlords' decisions to participate can be affected by their perception of the adequacy of the payment standards and their perception of the risk associated with program families having to pay too much of their income to live in their units.

Other techniques that mobility programs have used to attract and retain landlords include:

- Providing information about the program through
  - ◆ Producing articles or advertising in the magazines or newsletters of local landlord associations
  - ◆ Becoming members of landlord associations and participating in their meetings and conferences
  - ◆ Holding informational meetings about the program
  - ◆ Providing program brochures and brochures specifically for landlords
  - ◆ Visiting rental owners and management companies with units in opportunity areas<sup>5</sup>
  - ◆ Contacting smaller landlords about specific listings
  - ◆ Contacting landlords through other civic and religious organizations to which they belong<sup>6</sup>
  - ◆ Making it easy for landlords to get general information or answers to specific questions by assigning a person to take and respond to these calls and by advertising the program's web site, where landlord questions will receive timely responses
  - ◆ Making sure participants know how to refer landlords they meet during their housing search to get more information about the mobility program or HCV program processing.

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5 For large owners and property management firms, some mobility programs have found success marketing to the corporate or regional level; other have successfully marketed to on-site managers.

6 Some programs go back to the same civic organizations annually to report on program progress.

- Helping landlords market their units by:
  - ◆ Encouraging landlords to list their units in opportunity neighborhoods for referrals to program participants<sup>7</sup>

Encouraging landlords to register to be included on a more general referral list of landlords expressing their willingness to consider mobility program families as tenants  
 Providing help to participants with application fees and security deposits, so that landlords can get the security deposit they normally charge and families still have sufficient resources to make the move

- Providing information for participating landlords (which may be given also to prospective landlords) and obtaining feedback from landlords by:
  - ◆ Producing periodic landlord newsletters that provide updates on the voucher and mobility programs, tips on property management topics, and testimonials from other landlords and participants<sup>8</sup>
  - ◆ Conducting periodic surveys of landlords related to the services they and their tenants have received relative to the mobility program
  - ◆ Conducting periodic meetings to explain changes in the program and clarify program requirements, or to share the results of landlord surveys and describe how issues raised are to be addressed
  - ◆ Creating a landlord advisory committee for the mobility program to better understand landlords' needs and concerns, obtain suggestions for program improvements, and act as a sounding board for proposed program changes.
  - ◆ Having a counselor call the landlord, particularly during and soon after the placement, to ensure that the tenant gets off to a good start
  
- Rewarding and recognizing landlords for their participation, such as:
  - ◆ Providing a "signing bonus" (cash or gift certificate) or other reward to landlords willing to participate in the mobility program<sup>9</sup>
  - ◆ Creating awards or other recognition to specific landlords who have made special efforts to support the program
  - ◆ Providing special events, such as an annual breakfast, recognizing and appreciating landlords' contributions to the program

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7 This can greatly reduce the marketing costs for some small landlords and also give first chance at these units to program participants.  
 8 Landlords with only a few rental units particularly appreciate this service.  
 9 Some programs limit this, or provide larger bonuses, to landlords with units in particularly desirable locations. Some offer bonuses to participating landlords who refer other landlords who lease units under the program.

## Establishing and Maintaining Effective Relationships with Service Providers

An early activity for a mobility counseling program is to identify the services available to participants both in the areas in which the families now live and to which they may move under the program. Most programs have an active program of contacts with these providers to explain the mobility counseling program, who is eligible, how it works, how one applies, and what the needs of the population are expected to be. Many also have a plan for periodic contacts, and some assign staff to keep in touch with specific service providers and to provide updates to counseling colleagues based upon those contacts.

Many programs maintain a list of referral sources and contacts for distribution to the clients through a resource room or during counseling, and some have a manual they provide to movers that contains useful information about their new community or neighborhood.

Some programs offer initial and update presentations to the staff of other service agencies about the mobility program, and they encourage similar presentations from agencies about their programs. These help build relationships, and clients of both programs may benefit when more effective referrals can be made. Also, when mobility program counselors are knowledgeable about the requirements of other programs, they can more effectively advocate on behalf of clients entitled to services.

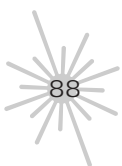
## Pre-Move Counseling

There are a number of steps and activities common to mobility counseling programs that occur prior to the initial program move. The sequence may vary depending on the program (e.g., whether the voucher is issued before or after counseling begins). The activities include:

- Conducting an initial program workshop to describe the program, how families may benefit, benefits that others have received from this or other mobility programs, the effort that will be required of the families, keys to being accepted by landlords in the opportunity neighborhoods, and how to evaluate a prospective unit and effectively interact with a prospective landlord.
- Obtaining the family's permission to obtain a copy of its credit report to help in identifying family needs and obstacles to their being able to make an opportunity move. This may occur very early, even at the point of submission of the preliminary application.

- Conducting separate workshops or group sessions on more specific topics. In some programs these also serve to weed out families not willing to make at least this initial effort. Common topics for these workshops include:
  - ◆ Your rights and responsibilities as a tenant
  - ◆ How to be a good tenant
  - ◆ Budgeting and credit repair
  - ◆ How to search for housing
  - ◆ How to successfully present yourself to a prospective landlord
  - ◆ How to recognize and get help with illegal discrimination
  
- Holding an initial interview with an assigned counselor. This generally involves a joint assessment of the family's counseling needs by the counselor and the family, and it provides an opportunity for the family to identify what it hopes to get from the program and the effort it is willing to make to achieve these goals. This is sometimes done through a home visit that enables the counselor to see the current environment as a part of the assessment. Typically, the counselor has reviewed a copy of the family's credit report prior to this interview.
  
- Developing and executing a family plan and agreement that identifies family goals (including sub-goals toward reaching the larger goals), services to be provided, and efforts the family agrees to make. Family plans should have specific dates and identify how achievement of goals and milestones, for both the family and counseling agency, will be measured. The plans may also have provisions for requesting a modification of the plan.
  
- Providing specific counseling by staff, or referrals to other service providers, based upon the family plan. This is particularly important where there are changes that need to occur for the family to be successful in its housing search. It is also an opportunity to begin work on long-term problems, which may extend beyond program placement. Examples of counseling at this stage may include:
  - ◆ More intense efforts to clear credit or landlord reference problems
  - ◆ Job training and search
  - ◆ Educational opportunities
  - ◆ Substance abuse
  - ◆ Parenting skills

Typically the initial focus of counseling for most families is helping them be able to rent a unit in an opportunity area. This usually involves providing information about housing options, how to evaluate prospective neighborhoods, and how to conduct a housing search, select a unit and negotiate with the landlord.



If there are barriers to the family being accepted by landlords with units in opportunity neighborhoods, these must be addressed as quickly as possible. This counseling may be provided by staff or through referrals to other organizations with specific expertise. This may involve a credit repair plan for correcting credit report errors and paying off creditors. It may also involve developing an explanation that can be shared with landlords about how the family got into financial difficulty (e.g., unaffordable housing costs, high interest consumer credit), what they have done and are doing to correct past bad credit, and how living in affordable housing will help them solve their past problems and avoid future problems. Some programs help families develop a “resume” that addresses their rental and credit history to present a complete picture to prospective landlords.

Counseling may also address possible differences in landlord attitudes toward families with credit issues. For example, in many markets families with some credit issues are more successful in convincing owners of only a few units that they will be good tenants. In these cases the family gets to meet the owner and has a chance to market itself as a good tenant directly to the decisionmaker. For large owners and large property management firms, on-site managers may have to follow stringent rules for screening, without much flexibility to make individual exceptions.

It is important for counselors to know the screening criteria commonly used by landlords and what data sources landlords look at to apply those criteria. Mobility programs typically try to obtain the same information the landlords will be looking at in order to be sure all issues are addressed.

Counseling almost always involves helping families plan for the costs of moving to and maintaining a new unit. In many markets tenants are charged an application fee and a security deposit prior to move-in. Typically, these upfront costs are higher in more desirable areas, where there is greater competition for the units. These costs can be a major barrier to program families. Many mobility programs provide resources, as part of the program design or a separate grant from a foundation or lending institution, to help families with these costs. This assistance, which may be either a grant or a loan, is often critical to family success in a mobility program.

A major temptation is for a family to use credit to furnish their new unit, which may make it difficult for them to meet their rent and utility obligations. Pre-move counseling often includes discussing this risk and helping the family with more affordable options. Some mobility programs have arrangements with or make referrals to thrift stores or charities that provide furniture, curtains, and the like.

It is important for participants to have a complete picture of their ongoing housing costs. This is not just the rent, but what they should expect in terms of tenant-paid utili-

ties and how these costs can vary greatly seasonally. It also includes the costs for keeping the unit clean and making any repairs for which the family is responsible under the lease.

## Search Assistance

The pre-move counseling discussion includes elements related to housing search, but many programs also provide more direct search service, including:

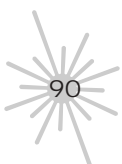
- Neighborhood information
- Resource rooms
- Community tours
- Unit and landlord listings and referrals
- Transportation and other direct assistance

**Neighborhood information.** A key element in helping a family to make a successful opportunity move is to identify what the family wants in a new neighborhood and provide information that allows the family to identify the neighborhoods meeting these criteria.

For mobility programs with significant restrictions on where the voucher can be used, considerable attention is paid to describing the allowable areas so that families do not waste time looking and negotiating for units in unallowable areas. Searching in unallowed areas can be very frustrating for both tenants and landlords. Programs usually provide maps outlining the opportunity areas. Some programs provide an acceptable list of census tracts or other geographic designations. Some provide lists of acceptable zip codes, with an indication that the family should call with the specific address if it finds a unit in a zip code where some, but not all, of the area is acceptable. Most areas have web sites available that identify the census tract (and block group) for any unit address. Participants may be able to look them up on the web or call their counselor to insure that a unit is in an opportunity neighborhood.

Generally, program target areas are described in terms of census tracts, but tenants and landlords don't identify neighborhoods in these terms. So maps showing streets at the boundaries are typically more useful. For some programs these boundaries are really quite complicated, making this one of the greatest challenges in communicating with the program families and landlords.

Many programs also provide neighborhood profiles that summarize information about the housing and residents of each neighborhood. This may include census or more recent data on the number of rental and ownership units by unit type in the neigh-





borhood, and the range of housing costs. It may include a breakdown of residents by race, ethnicity, household size, and income to give a sense of who lives in the neighborhood. Some programs also list public and private schools, along with available performance measures for each. School locations, shopping areas, medical facilities, and continuing education and social service centers are also often shown on neighborhood maps. Some programs also provide listings of licensed childcare providers, churches, major employers, and some forms of entertainment.

**Resource rooms.** Some programs have a resource room that contains information about each opportunity neighborhood and the providers of a wide range of services. Some also have much of this information available on their web site for remote access by clients. Participants are encouraged to use these facilities during the search process, whether for the initial or a subsequent move.

**Community tours.** It is common for mobility programs to provide tours to opportunity neighborhoods so participants can get a feel for the neighborhood, its housing, and the services available. These tours often stop at multifamily housing developments with affordable rents whose landlords are willing to consider program participants. This gives families a chance to meet the on-site managers, see the housing units and determine if this is a place they would like to live. Sometimes there is an opportunity for tour participants to fill out an application and have an interview with the manager. In some programs, there has been a sense of competition among tour participants for desirable units.

**Unit and landlord listings and referrals.** Most programs offer the opportunity for landlords to list individual vacant units with the counseling agency for referral to program participants who meet their screening criteria. Counselors at some agencies directly refer these units to persons in their caseloads whom they know are interested in a unit of that size in that area. Others agencies post these units in their resource room for access by all interested program families. Many programs also have a list of housing developments located in opportunity neighborhoods, whose landlords welcome program participants.

**Transportation assistance.** In addition to the tours, some programs are able to take a family to visit specific units in a selected neighborhood. Others do not have the resources for this level of assistance, but may have funds for public transportation (bus, taxi) that are available to participants for use in the housing search.

Transportation is frequently a major issue for program families seeking housing opportunities in suburban areas. There may be public transportation available during the normal workday on major arteries into the central city, but the service may not be scheduled during the times needed by persons working outside the typical workday (e.g., those working nights and weekends). Some public transportation systems are bet-

ter at getting a person to and from the central city than they are in giving access to local services in the suburban areas.

In some cases, desirable affordable housing is not accessible to persons without an automobile. As a result, a few programs have been able to secure assistance in purchasing a car for program participants. This can be direct purchase of used vehicles or assistance in purchasing automobiles reconditioned by nonprofit organizations. Some programs have involved reduced insurance and some maintenance during the first year of ownership. These programs may be very important for families to have access to employment opportunities or to make an opportunity move and still maintain current employment or educational opportunities. It can certainly broaden the area that a family can consider in its housing search.<sup>10</sup>

## Post-Move Counseling

Mobility programs are frequently evaluated based upon the percentage of participating families that stay in their initial program unit or move to another opportunity neighborhood. Some do not have retention in an opportunity neighborhood as a goal and others have retention as a goal, but have very few resources for post-move counseling.

While most programs have some post-move follow-up and counseling the amount varies considerably. Some examples of follow-up include:

- One or more scheduled contacts (some do home visits) soon after the move
- A contact (for some a home visit) at about nine months into the family's voucher program lease to have a discussion about whether the family is considering a move and why they want to move, and to encourage them to stay or consider moving to another opportunity area
- Assistance for a second move (a few also track the families through two or more years)<sup>11</sup>
- At least one scheduled follow-up with each program landlord

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10 Two notable programs are (1) the Grand Rapids, Michigan, ROC program, where the Michigan TANF agency provided funds for automobile purchase, insurance, and maintenance to program participants needing a car to gain access to employment opportunities; (2) and the program in Baltimore's Thompson Partial Consent Decree where the Abell Foundation has made grants to a local nonprofit, Vehicles for Change, to provide reconditioned automobiles at below-market prices and some maintenance for mobility program participants moving to opportunity areas outside the city of Baltimore.

11 The longer tracking period has been advocated particularly for public housing relocatees who often make the first move to an impacted area and often need continuing services to move to and stay in opportunity neighborhoods.



Post-move counseling allows for a greater focus on the elements of the family plan that are not specifically related to achieving an opportunity move. Once the housing issue is at least somewhat settled, there can be a greater focus on employment, education, and other needs and objectives of the family.

In addition to one or more formal post-move contacts, most programs also offer assistance to both the tenant and landlord should an issue arise.<sup>12</sup> These services typically relate to the family plan and may include referrals and ongoing coordination with other service providers, as well as direct counseling from program staff. Some programs have also included mediation services to resolve tenant-landlord disputes.

In order to provide maximum continuity for the tenant, landlord, and counselor, most programs assign the same counselor for the full period of a family's participation in the program.<sup>13</sup> Some programs have separate staff assigned to pre-move and post-move counseling. This separation is typically implemented to:

- Ensure that adequate attention is provided for post-move counseling, particularly given the typical emphasis on achieving initial lease-ups of program participants.<sup>14</sup>
- Allow some specialization among staff (e.g., post-move counselors might specialize more on employment and education).

## Evaluating Program Performance and Outcomes

Mobility programs have a great need for data for program management, oversight, and formal program evaluation. This includes the usual data related to household characteristics and participation in the voucher program. But it also includes data on the needs, plans, counseling received, and outcomes for the families. This includes information about where they move from and to, their assessment of the program and its services, and how satisfied they are with the housing they receive. It also often includes data on how landlords assess the program and their experiences with the administering agency and their program tenants.

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- 12 The Metropolitan Council (Minnesota) ROC program provided a 24-hour pager number for landlords to call in an emergency related to a ROC client. This services was seldom used by landlords, but most landlords appreciated the availability, and it was a symbol of the agency's commitment to helping make this a successful tenancy.
  - 13 It is also argued that there is more job satisfaction for counselors who are able to follow a family all the way through its participation.
  - 14 Having clear expectations, with measurement and feedback, of the priority and amount of post-move counseling can help overcome this, but counselors are often making decisions about which tasks to do next. Given the urgency to the client because of voucher issuance time limits and urgency to the landlord to get vacant units leased as quickly as possible, counselors must be responsive, and this may be at the expense of delayed post-move counseling.

Extensive data are needed in the end to evaluate the whole program, but data are also needed from the beginning to allow managers and policymakers to assess progress and effectiveness and to adjust personnel, policies, and procedures to attempt to improve program performance. Each program is different and unique in its goals, clients, and community, so there should be an expectation of perhaps a few major mid-course corrections and many smaller adjustments to processing and services. These should be easier to identify quickly if appropriate data are collected and organized to effectively track program experience.

Many programs conduct surveys of families soon after they move to evaluate the search and move process and again after they have had a chance to acclimate themselves to their new environment. Some also conduct surveys of participating landlords, either by follow-up calls or formal surveys, after the move and perhaps some months later.

If possible, a few years into the program, a full evaluation should be made of the outcomes for program participants. The effectiveness of the services provided should be evaluated, including a real assessment of the impacts of the program for the families. This includes identifying who benefited and how they benefited, and who did not benefit much and why. This should include measuring retention by identifying where families have moved and where they live at the time of the review. It may also include some measures of outcomes for family members, such as the progress of children and adults in their education and changes in employment for adults.

Effectively evaluating the outcomes for families requires being able to locate them long after the counseling activities are completed. This is not very difficult for families remaining in the same voucher program at the time of the evaluation, but it is often very difficult to locate participant families whose voucher assistance has ended.

There is a great need for a common set of measures of mobility program events and services and of the outcomes, including the data needed to be collected to do this. It has been very difficult to compare programs and their effectiveness, and certainly to isolate the effectiveness of particular policies and practices, including the nature and extent of the counseling provided.

There is always a great, and understandable, interest in determining the costs of the program per family making a successful move, but these comparisons are difficult in terms evaluating programs because of the effects of differences in resources and of the definitions of who is eligible and what is an opportunity move. We now know something about who benefits overall from mobility programs, but there is much to learn about the relationship between particular policies and practices, their costs, and the outcomes for participants.



# Case Studies In Mobility Program Management: Texas And Chicago

## Promoting Successful Moves in Dallas

Elizabeth Julian\*

The Inclusive Communities Project (ICP) is a new Dallas-based nonprofit organization that works for the creation and maintenance of thriving racially and economically inclusive communities, expansion of fair and affordable housing opportunities for low-income families, and redress for policies and practices that perpetuate the harmful effects of discrimination and segregation. ICP is the current incarnation of the Walker Project, a fair housing organization initially created and funded as part of the remedy in the *Walker v. HUD, et al* housing desegregation lawsuit filed in Dallas in 1985. After funding ended, the organization was dormant for several years before being reborn as ICP in early 2004.

In late 2004, ICP was appointed to administer the Walker Housing Fund by the Court overseeing the Walker case. The Fund, also part of the remedy in the case, has as its purpose expansion of housing opportunities for low-income families in the Dallas metropolitan area. Among other uses, the Fund can be used to provide mobility assistance to families who have, as part of the remedy in *Walker*, chosen to use their voucher to move into higher-opportunity neighborhoods and communities (the court-ordered target areas are census tracts which are less than the city average in terms of poverty and African-American population). Over 5,000 families are currently living in the targeted areas, and are potentially clients of ICP.

As administrator of the Housing Fund, ICP created the Mobility Assistance Program (MAP) to work with families who may need assistance to make their choice successful. MAP has a director and four experienced counselors who work directly with families, providing assistance in the following areas:

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\* Elizabeth Julian is a civil rights attorney and Director of the Inclusive Communities Project, Dallas, TX

**Home Visits:** MAP counselors conduct pre- and post-move home visits to families living in targeted areas to help them make the best choices for themselves and their families. During the visits, counselors conduct an assessment to help identify resources the family may need to make a successful transition to a new area, including the families attitudes about their move, and what they like and don't like that may affect their decision to stay in a non-impacted area.

**Social Service Referrals:** In follow up based upon the assessment MAP works with social service agencies to help families meet various needs such as job training, child-care assistance, and emergency financial assistance, as well as a variety of other needs.

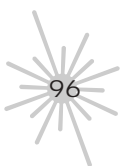
**Fair Housing Education:** MAP assists families in pursuing housing discrimination complaints. If a family believes they have encountered housing discrimination, MAP counselors may (a) assist the family in negotiating a resolution of the complaint with the person or entity suspected of discrimination, (b) assist the family in filing a formal complaint regarding the discriminatory conduct (c) assist the family in obtaining legal services where appropriate. In addition, MAP engages in education and outreach activities that inform families about their rights under the Fair Housing Act and other civil rights laws related to housing and housing opportunities.

**Mentor/Tutor Program:** MAP recruits positive role models to mentor/tutor children that may be experiencing social or academic challenges while adjusting to their new neighborhood. Volunteers are asked to commit to one hour per week for one year.

**Life Skills Training:** Quarterly, MAP counselors offer opportunities for families to participate in informational, educational, and/or entertaining events dealing with personal development, education, financial management, and a variety of other topics.

**Financial Assistance:** ICP assists Walker Settlement families that may experience financial burden when relocating due to the higher costs often associated with higher opportunity areas. On a case-by-case basis, ICP offers assistance with application fees, moving fees, utility deposit, security deposit, rent burdens and landlord bonuses.

Because MAP has only been in operation since mid 2005, there is little in the way of long term result data. However, initial assessments have shown, consistent with others' experience, that the greatest problems facing families in the targeted areas are lack of affordable childcare, lack of reliable public transportation, and high utility costs, particularly where families have been able to rent single family homes. There is a significant demand for mentors as well, which creates an opportunity to connect families with their new community on a more long term basis. Approximately half of the heads of households being served are not currently working, which suggests that an employment strat-



egy could be key to improving chances of success, and MAP is currently evaluating how to be more pro-active in the area of employment and job-readiness.

Though new to the mobility counseling community, because of the nature of the funding available as of the litigation, ICP has the ability to make a long term commitment to the sort of post-move counseling that has been identified as necessary to successful mobility moves, and to obtain information that will inform future efforts to make mobility both a horizontal and vertical move for low income families who choose to participate.

## CHAC's Mobility Counseling Model

Jennifer Lee O'Neil\*

### Design

CHAC, Inc., administrator of Chicago's Housing Choice Voucher Program, began mobility counseling in 1998. The Housing Opportunity Program (HOP) is a voluntary, income-based program that offers a full range of services with the goal of helping families with housing vouchers move to opportunity neighborhoods. CHAC defines an opportunity neighborhood as one where the poverty rate is less than 24 percent. To be eligible, a family must have leased a unit with a voucher for at least one year.

The program assists voucher holders who are transferring from one unit to another, rather than new admissions to the program. For this reason, the program is sometimes referred to as a "second mover" program, even though families may have been voucher holders for several years and may have made multiple moves. CHAC designed the program with this focus because families receiving a voucher for the first time often feel the pressure of having to lease within a specific timeframe or lose the voucher. For this reason they are less likely to take the time to explore unfamiliar neighborhoods and more likely to take the first unit that is available to them. Families who have leased in the private market with a voucher have some experience with landlords, the search process, and the voucher program.

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\* Jennifer Lee O'Neil is Deputy Director, CHAC, Inc.

## Focus

In addition to the voluntary, income-based, second-mover design, the focus of HOP is on information and message. Efforts to inform and to send a message encouraging housing search in better neighborhoods include special briefings, point-of-contact materials, theater productions, and neighborhood tours. All families who plan to move must attend a two-part briefing: a voucher program refresher and a special briefing that informs clients about fair housing, opportunity neighborhoods, and the Housing Opportunity Program. Theater productions that emphasize messages about housing choice, housing quality, and tenant and landlord responsibilities take place in CHAC's waiting area and during selected briefings. A magazine, *Opportunity Knocks*, is distributed to voucher program participants, and *Explore Chicago* neighborhood van tours allow families to become familiar with a variety of Chicago's low-poverty communities. These strategies encourage families to consider neighborhoods they would not ordinarily search and ultimately make better choices about their housing.

Another strategy to support and encourage mobility has been the regular review of program policies and procedures. For example, a review of inspection procedures or comparable rent data resulted in adjustments that affected the quality of housing and/or the contract rents approved in specific neighborhoods. One of the procedural changes CHAC made was to "fast track" the inspection, rent determination, and leasing process for families moving from high- to low-poverty census tracts.

## Services

The Housing Opportunity Program offers program participants the following services:

- Landlord Outreach
- Fair Housing training and enforcement in partnership with the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- Search Assistance
- Counseling and referrals to break down barriers that prevent successful leasing in opportunity neighborhoods
- Security deposit assistance in the form of a no-interest loan
- Post-move support including link to Family Self-Sufficiency Program
- Neighborhood tours and transportation to view available units
- Staffed resource room with telephones and computer access
- Web site property listing service

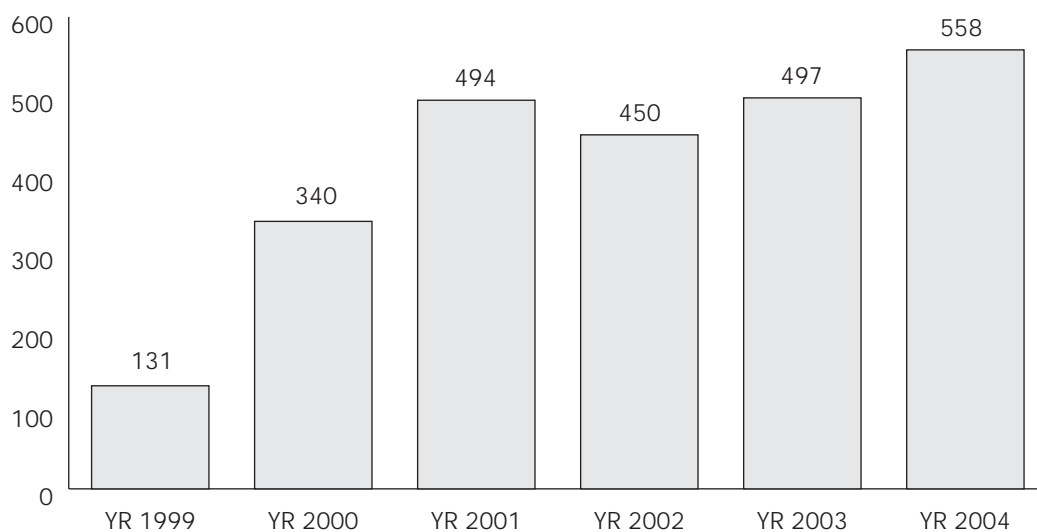




A staff of 18, including housing counselors, landlord outreach specialists, resource room staff, post-move counselors, and support staff provide these services to approximately 2,000 HOP participants who enroll each year. Messaging and information work that this staff provides affects many more families than just those who enroll in HOP.

## Outcomes

Of the nearly 7,000 families counseled and leased, more than 2,400 have been successful in moving from high- to low-poverty neighborhoods. Additionally, 2,800 families residing in opportunity neighborhoods were assisted with their search so they could stay in opportunity neighborhoods.



## Cost

Mobility counseling and related activities are funded by the Chicago Housing Authority. This is possible, in part, because Chicago is a Moving to Work demonstration site, which provides the housing authority with greater flexibility. Mobility counseling costs have fluctuated since the beginning of the program in 1998 as the program grew, averaging approximately \$2,200 per family successfully counseled to move from high- to low-poverty neighborhoods.

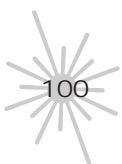
## Challenges

During the seven years of operating a mobility counseling program there have been several challenges but none quite so difficult as post-move support. Whether one counselor should provide both pre- and post-move assistance or whether these functions

require different skills or are too demanding for one individual are dilemmas that CHAC has struggled to resolve. The counselor who first meets and works with a family establishes a relationship that is valuable and perhaps necessary to providing post-move support. However, the counselor who attempts both inevitably finds her priority to be the pre-move counseling, and is, therefore, unable to give necessary attention to the family following the move. A separate and different staff providing post-move assistance has had difficulty establishing a relationship with the family. In fact, they have found it difficult to even gain access to families after they have moved.

Determining the level of post-move counseling or support actually needed and identifying successful strategies to offer assistance has also been examined through the years. CHAC's current model is to make available a separate staff of counselors who assist when and if they are needed and requested by the families. The emphasis, however, is on finding ways to help the family that is new to the neighborhood to become involved so that they feel that they are part of the community—that they belong. It is important for people in the neighborhood to see the family as part of their community as well. Encouraging community involvement may take the form of introduction to other families, asking a member of the community or a faith-based organization to play a mentoring role, or getting the family involved in a neighborhood association, block club, or as a volunteer in the local school system.

Another challenge has been determining who to serve. CHAC's program initially assisted any family who was making a move, whether their current housing was located in a high- or low-poverty neighborhood. Two years ago staff felt that they could make a greater impact by providing services only to people making a move from a high-poverty area, so eligibility for enrollment in HOP was limited to families who lived in a high-poverty area. But because so many families have expressed a need for search assistance to stay in opportunity neighborhoods, CHAC has reversed that decision and is once again assisting families that currently live in low-poverty neighborhoods who are trying to stay in low-poverty neighborhoods.



# The Wallace Decision and the Future of Housing Mobility in the Chicago Metropolitan Area

Paul Fischer\*

As part of Chicago's ambitious "Plan for Transformation" of public housing, more than 3,500 public housing families were relocated using housing choice vouchers since 1995. Contrary to press reports and anecdotal evidence, almost all settled in the city of Chicago. Fewer than 2 percent moved to the suburbs.<sup>1</sup> Over 85 percent moved to Census tracts that were 80 to 100 percent African-American in a city that is 37 percent African-American.<sup>2</sup> Most of the high-rises are located in the black south and west sides of the city, and over 97 percent of movers relocated to those same areas. In most instances south side relocating families stayed on the south side and west side relocation families stayed on the west side. It is important to note that for the most part families being relocated were not given the option of moving outside the areas of traditional settlement.

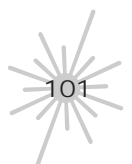
The initial failure of the Plan for Transformation to deliver on its promise to move former public housing residents to areas of opportunity illustrates the importance of including strong mobility provisions in *any* public housing relocation plan. The stark geographic pattern of relocation, and the absence of any significant relocation of these families into the predominantly white north side or the suburbs was an important consideration in the filing of a lawsuit to ensure that families received all of the opportunities they were entitled to under federal relocation and fair housing requirements.

On January 23, 2003, the Sergeant Shriver National Center on Poverty Law filed *Wallace et al. v. the Chicago Housing Authority*<sup>3</sup> The plaintiffs alleged that "from 1995 to the present, CHA failed to develop a program to assist plaintiffs to relocate to racial-

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\* Paul Fischer is a professor at Lake Forest College, which is located outside of Chicago; he served as a consultant in the *Wallace* case.

- 1 Information about the location of relocated families is from Paul Fischer, "Where Are the Public Housing Families Going? An Update" prepared from CHA data for the Shriver Center.
- 2 There was some improvement in the poverty levels of the receiving Census tracts compared to the high-rise Census tracts, but that should be expected since the Census tracts with the concentrations of high-rise public housing are the poorest in the city.
- 3 The Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and Business and Professionals for the Public Interest (BPI) joined the Shriver Center in filing the lawsuit. BPI later withdrew from the case.



ly integrated communities”<sup>4</sup> The plaintiffs were public housing families leaving high-rise developments being demolished as part of the CHA’s Plan for Transformation, the local version of HOPE VI. They were given housing choice vouchers (HCVs) to relocate to the private housing market. The families had the option of taking a temporary voucher with the assumption they would return to a new unit of public housing in a mixed-income development or a permanent voucher giving up their right to return. Approximately ninety percent chose the temporary voucher.<sup>5</sup>

After two years of litigation, the parties reached a settlement agreement, which was approved by the court on March 12, 2005. Under the settlement, the CHA is to make “‘best and reasonable efforts’ to assist these residents to exercise their own choices to relocate to economically and racially integrated communities.”<sup>6</sup> The benefits to residents that are spelled out in the agreement depend on when the family was originally relocated.<sup>7</sup> There is a different mix of services provided to class members leaving public housing beginning in 2004 and those who relocated after October 1, 1999, or made a subsequent move after October 1999.

For the 2004 group, private agencies contracted with the CHA will implement a series of services including individual service plans and small group one-on-one presentations encouraging moves to Opportunity Areas, which are Census tracts with less than 30 percent African-American population in the city and less than 10 percent in the suburbs; or low-poverty areas, which are Census tracts with less than 23.4 percent poverty in the city and less than 10 percent poverty in the suburbs.<sup>8</sup> Families choosing to get involved in the program can opt for either units in low-poverty Census tracts or Opportunity Census tracts. In the city there is a great deal of overlap between the two so the choice of one criteria usually means the other as well. It also includes identifica-

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4 *Diane Link Wallace et al. v. the Chicago Housing Authority*, Settlement Agreement and Order, United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois Eastern Division, No.03 C 0491, March 2005, p. 1.

5 About 50 percent of families leaving the high-rise developments chose the voucher. Most of the other families were relocated to public housing developments that were not slated for demolition.

6 This is from a press release describing the settlement. "These residents" refers to those families relocated from the high-rises using a HCV or to be relocated in the future as part of the Plan for Transformation. It is important to note that the program applies only to families that moved out after October 1, 1999, when the relocation rights contract was signed or made a subsequent mover thereafter.

7 Information for this section of the paper is from a side letter to the settlement titled *Summary of Relocation and Service Delivery Efforts Available to Wallace v CHA Class Members*, Wallace et al. v the Chicago Housing Authority, No. 03 C 491 (Castillo, J.) March 14, 2005.

8 The "30 percent African-American" criteria for opportunity areas in the city is based on the Gautreaux definition and the 10 percent figure for the suburbs is based on the percent African-American in the Cook County suburbs and was used by the Housing Authority of Cook County in its mobility efforts. The low-poverty criteria of 23.4 percent in the city has been used by CHAC in its mobility program but it is unclear how it was determined, and the suburb definition is the percent in poverty in suburban Cook County.



tion of a number of units available in Opportunity Areas and escorted visits. Contractors are not allowed to identify any units that are in racially segregated and high-poverty areas although families can identify those units on their own. Contractors must also conduct landlord outreach in Opportunity and low-poverty areas.

Families relocated before 2004 but after October 1999 are offered a modification of CHAC's existing Housing Opportunity Program (HOP) called Enhanced HOP.<sup>9</sup> The combination of programs includes referrals to at least three units in low-poverty areas, security deposit loan assistance, neighborhood tours, and post-move counseling for two years. There are continuing financial incentives to encourage CHAC to facilitate mobility moves and to encourage retention of families in low-poverty areas. It is important to note, however, that the HOP program only focuses on low-poverty goals while the Enhanced HOP focuses on both low poverty **and** racial diversity goals.<sup>10</sup>

Not surprising, given the past reluctance of the CHA to make location data on relocating public housing families public, much of the settlement agreement is taken up with the crucial monitoring of mobility activity, including the gathering and analyzing of relevant data. Details about mobility-related services are found in a side letter to the agreement. In contrast to the landmark Gautreaux program, all mobility efforts are entirely voluntary on the part of plaintiff class members. The greatest deficiency of the agreement is probably the absence of any specific numerical mobility goals for relocated families, which makes it difficult, although not impossible, to define success. (See "Measuring the Performance of Assisted Housing Mobility Programs," this volume.)

It is much too early to determine whether this agreement will remedy the high levels of racial segregation characteristic of the relocation program up to this date. The key to its success is in the implementation and the failure of past relocation efforts give reason for some caution. What needs to be done to improve the chances of success?

Private agencies with a proven track record of successful mobility programs must be an integral part of the program. In Chicago that means the Leadership Council and Housing Choice Partners, both with years of experience and an overriding commitment to mobility. CHAC leadership has been very supportive of mobility both locally and nationally, but a recent study of voucher location patterns in the Chicago area shows continued high levels of racial concentration in the city and suburbs.<sup>11</sup> Hopefully the

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9 CHAC, Inc., is a private agency contracted by CHA to operate its HCV programs.

10 The Enhanced HOP includes more extensive mobility orientation as well as neighborhood tours to Opportunity Areas and low-poverty areas. CHAC is also required to identify at least three units in Opportunity Areas for those interested in such a move. CHA will also fund two additional caseworkers for those families who moved before October 1999 and are not eligible for these other programs.

11 *Putting the Choice in the Housing Choice Voucher*, A Report by the Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance Housing Choice Voucher Advocacy Project, July, 2004

Enhanced HOP program can help change that pattern, but CHAC would be wise to consult with proven mobility agencies as it develops its orientation, counseling, and landlord outreach programs targeted at these relocated families.

Marketing is especially crucial for the success of this effort. Most of the targeted families are unfamiliar with areas of the city and suburbs beyond their segregated and impoverished neighborhood. Many are cynical about any help from the CHA or its partners. Since this also a voluntary program, a great deal of creativity and resources needs to be focused on selling mobility or the pool of potential participants could be quite small, and the best counseling and outreach will have little impact.

The CHA must be more transparent in providing information in a timely manner. Monitoring must be continuous, which means information must be provided accurately and often. Program modifications will assuredly be needed, which makes timely information for ongoing evaluation a necessity. This will require close cooperation between the parties.

Even without specific goals, the Wallace agreement does provide a potential remedy for some of the racial concentration in the relocation program but it requires careful and thoughtful implementation and a commitment to its success by all parties. The foundation of the Wallace settlement is a series of mobility programs to meet the needs of families at different stages of the relocation process. The mobility related services are similar to those found in other mobility efforts from the orientation and video to one-on-one counseling to neighborhood tours and targeted landlord outreach. What are different are the effected population and the context, both of which make success more difficult. The families, for the most part, are among the poorest in the city and have lived for many generations in the most segregated neighborhoods in the city under the administration of a very paternalistic housing authority. Generally, the relocation program itself has operated in crisis mode with large numbers of families given from thirty to sixty days to relocate. Many families moved out years ago and are disconnected from the CHA. None of this is conducive to generating a pool of families who are motivated and knowledgeable about mobility. On the other hand we have a wealth of experience garnered over more than thirty years about how to make mobility work. The goal of the Wallace Settlement is not very different from other mobility efforts; expand housing choices for low-income African American families who, historically, have been denied that choice. Public housing families leaving CHA high-rises are an extreme example of choice denied but they also represent an opportunity for mobility to make a profound difference in people's lives. The challenge is to make sure that happens.



## Rhonda Fuller

### A Woman on a Mission

**R**honda Fuller made moving her full-time job—and for good reason. Her family faced countless obstacles living in a high-poverty neighborhood in Chicago. Dodging stray bullets, witnessing drug deals and drug use, and enduring threatening looks and inappropriate propositions were a part of her daily life. It was a major problem that just kept getting worse. Coinciding with the living situation was Rhonda's disability. Rhonda suffers from a very painful, chronic disease called Interstitial Cystitis (IC).

Rhonda had moved to a storefront apartment two years earlier when her garden apartment failed an emergency inspection. But what was once a quick solution to her housing needs was becoming a life-threatening liability.

After a suspected gang member tried to entice her 12-year-old son with a wad of money, Rhonda began her mission to remove her family from to a safer environment. She enrolled in CHAC's Housing Opportunity Program (HOP) and devoted six to eight hours each day to her search. Among the places she looked for suitable housing were the Internet, real estate sections of newspapers, and rental notices in grocery stores. She visited neighborhoods she liked and jotted down phone numbers on "for rent" signs. She also registered for Explore Chicago, CHAC's free neighborhood tour service that provides housing information and offers tours of Opportunity Neighbor-hoods on the north, south and west sides of Chicago. "I made moving my full-time job," said Rhonda.

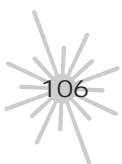
Ultimately, it was Rhonda's HOP counselor Yvette Almonte, who found the apartment. While out hunting on her own, Rhonda received a call from Yvette about an available apartment in a community with a poverty rate under 12 percent. The owner wanted to show the apartment immediately, and Rhonda did not keep him waiting: She was a woman on a mission. When she arrived, Rhonda fell in love with the apartment. Yvette got busy and facilitated the process. HOP came through for this family in crisis, and one month later Rhonda's nightmare was over.

The Fullers have settled in and the difference between the two neighborhoods is amazing. "It is so quiet," she whispered. "And I'm not stressed anymore. My building is secure, and I have a backyard for my son to enjoy and feel safe. Now, when my son wants to play basketball, I feel comfortable allowing him to play at the nearby basketball court."

But what's most important is that Rhonda feels good about herself and the future of her family. She now has the time and the peace of mind to focus on the things that are important to her—like being active in the Interstitial Cystitis Association (ICA), the organization that provides support and education for individuals suffering from IC, and working on her Family Self-Sufficiency goals, which include owning her own home.

Her advice to other families who may be in the same situation—living in high-poverty neighborhoods where gangs and crime are rampant—is to stay determined and focused, and sign up for HOP. Take advantage of all the opportunities available to create a better life.

(Virginia L. Bailey—CHAC)





# Measuring the Performance of Assisted Housing Mobility Programs

By Margery Austin Turner and Xavier de Souza Briggs\*

Now that assisted housing mobility programs have been established in a wide range of market and policy environments, it is time for advocates and practitioners to think more critically about their performance and to develop sensible and defensible measures for monitoring outputs and outcomes. The past two decades have brought a sea change in public expectations about the performance of government-run or government-funded programs (Nye and Donahue 2000; Osborne and Gaebler 1993; Osborne and Plastrik 2000), with countless reform efforts, summits on reinventing government, significant new legislation,<sup>1</sup> and mixed progress. Although many public sector programs have long relied on procedural rules and requirements to manage their activities, this approach cannot ensure that an intervention will yield its intended results. Likewise, nonprofit organizations are under increased pressure from philanthropic and other funders to demonstrate performance (Letts, Ryan, and Grossman 1998). Just as businesses track profits and market share (not just costs and sales), public and nonprofit agencies need to track the short-term and long-term outcomes that their programs are intended to achieve (Hatry 1999). Increasingly, therefore, public agencies and nonprofit organizations are adopting performance management, which consists of both *measures* and *strategies* for using them well to promote results (Kaplan and Norton 2000). This chapter provides a brief introduction to the basic concepts of performance measurement, and then presents a framework for developing specific performance measures for assisted housing mobility programs.

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\* Margery Austin Turner is Director of the Metropolitan Housing & Communities Policy Center at The Urban Institute; Xavier de Souza Briggs is Associate Professor of Sociology and Urban Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

1 A key example is the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, which requires performance measurement of all federal agencies as part of the annual budget process.

## The basics of performance measurement

Experts on performance measurement and management distinguish between different types of measures, all of which can play useful roles (Lampkin and Hatry 2003; Poister 2004). Although terminology varies, here we outline the rationales for four basic categories of performance measures and the context for their use in implementation:

1. *Input measures* track the resources that an agency uses to accomplish its goals. Examples include number of staff, funding levels, facilities, and types of services offered.
2. *Process or activity measures*, which include indicators such as intake volumes, case-loads, and turn-around times, track the agency's activities. These are metrics of "the wheels turning," and can help spot bottlenecks, service interruptions, or backlogs.
3. *Output measures* track what the agency produces directly and what staff can realistically be held accountable for. In the context of a desegregation remedy, examples of output measures could include the number (and percentage) of clients who move to opportunity neighborhoods, the number of new housing units produced in opportunity neighborhoods, the cost per successful placement, and rates of retention in opportunity neighborhoods.
4. *Outcome measures* reflect the interim and long-term benefits that a program is intended to achieve for its clients or for the larger community. In the context of a desegregation remedy, interim outcomes include exposure of families to healthier neighborhoods and access to services from those locations; long-run outcomes including improved mental and physical health, educational achievement, and employment success for participating families; as well as lower levels of segregation in the community as a whole.

Of these four categories of performance measures, outcomes (especially long-term outcomes) are the most difficult to track. In addition, outcomes are likely to be affected not only by the performance of the program, but by other, exogenous factors as well. As a consequence, while program managers and staff can and should be held accountable for meeting process and output targets, they cannot fully control the achievement of outcomes. Nonetheless, a serious performance measurement system should track outcomes (at least for a sample of its clients) in order to assess the extent to which a program's outputs are helping the advance its intended goals.

One of the important advantages of performance measurement is that it can inform problem-solving and continuous improvement (Hatry 1999; Poister 2004). For example, suppose that a program's staff were dutifully adhering to all of their procedural requirements, but that large numbers of clients were dropping out of the program before completing it. A performance measurement system would call attention to this problem (by



providing evidence of high enrollment but low completion rates) and provide an incentive for managers to figure out why so many clients were dropping out and correct the problem in order to achieve acceptable completion rates. Similarly, good performance measures can generate meaningful measures of program's cost-effectiveness. In the example above, measures of cost per client enrolled could be replaced with measures of cost per client completing the program—or better yet, cost per client who moved to an opportunity neighborhood, found a job, or became a homeowner (depending upon the purpose of the program).

Although performance measures have the potential to strengthen the management of public programs, they are not foolproof. In designing a performance measurement and management program, it is important to be aware of risks as well as benefits. In particular, performance measures can undermine a program's effectiveness if they measure the wrong things—perhaps because the results that matter most are too difficult to count or quantify—or if they fail to recognize and address competing objectives. For example, it is easier to track the number of program participants who succeed in moving to an opportunity neighborhood than to track the number who succeed in staying there for more than a year. And program staff might be encouraged to focus all their efforts on placing clients in any neighborhood rather than in the most beneficial neighborhood if performance measures focused exclusively on short-term placement rates. Finally, while performance *measurement* is important, a focus on data collection and analysis should not be allowed to distract from the real goal of managing for results (Poister 2004).

## Measuring the performance of assisted housing mobility programs

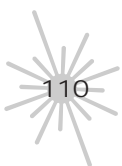
Establishing a meaningful set of performance measures—for a particular local program or for the field as a whole—will require a substantial investment of time by program designers and staff. Here we draw upon the experience of assisted housing mobility programs to recommend a framework for defining these measures.

**Inputs.** It almost goes without saying that a housing mobility program cannot succeed without a sufficient number of qualified staff, adequate facilities and equipment, secure funding over the needed time frame, and time to plan and set up before beginning to serve clients. Actual targets for these input measures will depend upon the specifics of the program, but most assisted housing mobility programs are staffed by a full-time director, housing counselors (qualified to work directly with families who want to move), outreach specialists (qualified to recruit landlords—and potentially developers—to accept participating families), and clerical staff (Turner and Williams 1998). Facilities typically include office space (that is convenient for clients to visit), a resource

room equipped with information about neighborhoods and housing opportunities throughout the region, and a van or some other form of transportation for taking families to see possible neighborhoods (Turner and Williams 1998). Funding obviously needs to cover the costs of staff and facilities, but in addition, funding may be needed to cover families' transportation costs (as they search regionwide for housing), incentive payments to landlords, and revolving loan funds to help participating families cover application fees, security deposits, and moving costs (Turner and Williams 1998). Finally, any new program needs time for design, recruitment, and start-up before it can start delivering services at full capacity. Many mobility efforts have struggled at the outset because they were expected to begin serving a full caseload of clients too early (Goering, Feins, and Richardson 2003; Turner and Rawlings 2005).

**Process.** The next group of measures for monitoring the performance of a desegregation remedy should focus on the activities carried out by staff. Again, actual targets will depend upon the specifics of the program design, but measures should be developed to track the following essential components of a quality mobility counseling program (Turner and Williams 1998):

- *Initial outreach, briefings, and assessments.* Families' needs vary widely, and many low-income families living in segregated neighborhoods are apprehensive about the prospects of moving. Therefore, an essential first step in an assisted mobility program should include proactive outreach to potential clients—to help them understand the potential benefits of mobility—and case-by-case assessments—to determine what forms of assistance each family will need to prepare for and accomplish a successful move. In addition to conducting routine, group briefings for prospective clients, some mobility counseling groups have developed creative new outreach strategies, including videos and “street” theater productions. Possible performance measures include number and types of briefings and briefing materials, number of potential clients briefed, percent enrolling, and percent returning for an individual assessment.
- *Landlord outreach and recruitment.* An effective mobility program has to recruit landlords as well as clients, including landlords who manage affordable rental properties in a wide range of opportunity-rich neighborhoods. Strategies for recruiting landlords include videos and glossy brochures, but also presentations at meetings of area landlords. Some programs have had success in enlisting one or two prominent local landlords to serve as “emissaries,” introducing outreach staff to other property owners and encouraging professional colleagues to participate in the mobility program. Potential performance measures include number and types of briefings and briefing materials, number of landlords briefed, percent agreeing to participate, number of available properties (and units) available in opportunity-rich neighborhoods, and share of all opportunity-rich neighborhoods in the region in which units are available.



- *Housing search assistance.* The central activity of any assisted housing mobility program is to provide direct assistance with housing search. Some programs focus on preparing and coaching families to search independently, while others provide more hands-on assistance. Both approaches can be effective, and their relative merits probably depend upon the characteristics of participating families (do they have the capacity to search independently?) and of the local housing market (how tight is the market for rental units in opportunity-rich neighborhoods?). Many programs, however, offer tours of opportunity-rich neighborhoods, identify several available units for a family, provide help with transportation during the search process, accompany families in their visits to available units, and offer revolving loan funds to help pay for security deposits and moving costs. Potential performance measures include number of families receiving search assistance (per counselor), number of families receiving specific services, number of units in opportunity-rich neighborhoods offered per family, number and percent of families placed, average search times, and client satisfaction with services received. Care should be taken to avoid measures that create an incentive for counselors to steer families to disadvantaged or transitional neighborhoods, which may offer the easiest, quickest, and cheapest placements.
- *Post-move and second-move counseling.* Many assisted housing mobility programs provide some level of counseling and assistance to families after they have moved. This assistance can range for a phone call or visit to ensure that a family is settling in and finding its way around the new neighborhood, to several months of help as families adapt to their new surroundings. Many programs help resolve conflicts or disagreements between families and landlords, a service that can be particularly important to landlords who are skeptical about the reliability of participating families. In addition, some programs contact families as the end of their lease term approaches to help with a subsequent move if necessary. This kind of second-move counseling can be critical to ensuring that families are able to remain in opportunity-rich neighborhoods—or advance to successively better neighborhoods—over the long term (Cunningham and Sawyer 2005). Potential performance measures in this activity area include number of families receiving follow-up services, number of landlord or tenant requests for service, number and percent of clients evicted, number and percent of clients renewing their leases, number of clients receiving assistance with a second move, and client and landlord satisfaction with services received.

**Outputs.** As discussed earlier, a meaningful system of performance measures must go beyond inputs and process to track outputs—the direct results of the services being provided. We understand that other experts are defining the essential characteristics of opportunity neighborhoods for this remedy, and identifying areas in the Baltimore metropolitan region that meet these criteria. Using this definition of opportunity neighborhoods, output measures should track:

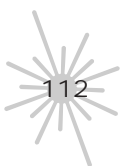
- number of housing opportunities created in opportunity neighborhoods;

- number of families (and percent of all clients served) who are placed in these neighborhoods;
- number of families (and percent of clients served) who remain in opportunity neighborhoods over several years; and
- number of different opportunity neighborhoods (and percent of all such neighborhoods) to which client families move.

Program managers should be held accountable for achieving specific targets for each of these output measures. This does not necessarily mean that every participating family must move to an opportunity neighborhood, or that the program should dictate which opportunity neighborhoods are acceptable destinations for any given family. Instead, targets of this kind would require program managers and staff to create sufficient opportunities and provide sufficient assistance to families to meaningfully disestablish segregation among federally assisted families in the Baltimore metropolitan area. In addition, one of the lessons emerging from the Moving to Opportunity demonstration is the importance of tracking retention as well as initial placements. A remedy is less likely to yield lasting benefits for either families or the larger community if participating families only remain in opportunity neighborhoods for the length of their initial lease term.

**Interim and end outcomes.** The last category of performance measures focuses on the extent to which participating families are able to “leverage” location to meet their needs and gain access to the social and economic mainstream. As discussed earlier, families who have lived in segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods for an extended period are likely to have been significantly disadvantaged by the experience. Enabling them to move constitutes a critical first step, but alone, it may not be enough to undo the damage of segregation. In the short-term, are family members able to access transportation, health care, schools, and jobs in their new neighborhoods? And in the longer term, do they experience improvements in health, education, employment, and income? Although these outcomes are influenced by many factors beyond the control of program managers and staff, monitoring them is essential to identifying major barriers families face and suggesting key services or supports that program staff could deliver. For example, suppose families who have moved to suburban neighborhoods report that public transportation is inaccessible or unreliable in these neighborhoods, and that they are having difficulty shopping for food, getting to their doctor, and looking for work. This information could motivate program staff to link these families to other programs that help families buy and maintain reliable cars, potentially solving a problem that would otherwise prevent families from remaining in opportunity neighborhoods over the long-term.

Collecting data on interim and long-term outcomes can be more challenging (and expensive) than collecting basic data on inputs, process, and outputs. One strategy would be to track samples of participating families over time, interviewing them at regular intervals using standardized survey instruments. Well-established survey questions have already been developed by MTO and HOPE VI researchers.



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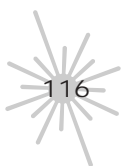
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# **N W**

**New Constituencies for  
Housing Mobility**



# Chicago Latinos and the Housing Choice Voucher Program

Ofelia Navarro\*

## History

The Latino Mobility Housing Choice Voucher Program, managed by the Spanish Coalition for Housing (SCH), began in 1999 as a result of litigation to remedy past discrimination against Latinos in policy and practices of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA).<sup>1</sup> The CHA/Latino Consent Decree, ordered by the court, outlined certain actions that HUD and CHA would take to increase Latino participation in Chicago Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs.<sup>2</sup> In 1998, Latinos represented about 25 percent of the eligible families for the program and less than 2 percent of the participants. Today, Latinos are about 12 percent (4,000 families) of the housing choice voucher holders. Is this progress? YES. Is it enough? No, not by any measure.

## Opportunity & Challenge

Shortly after the Consent Decree was negotiated, CHAC, Inc., opened up the Housing Choice Voucher General Wait List to the public. The result was about 100,000 respondents, of which only 500 were Latinos. After the lottery selection process was held, there were 40,000 in total and about 200 Latinos on the general wait list. This was destined to perpetuate the unbalanced distribution of public housing resources that existed in the past and, due to recent policies and funding cuts, still does.

The Consent Decree provided the opportunity for Latino community organizations to market the public housing and voucher program to Latinos. The marketing campaign was called *Vivienda Al Alcance (Housing Within Reach)*, and it netted 15,000 Latino

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1 Latinos United et al. vs. the Chicago Housing Authority and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (N.D. Ill. No. 94 C 1229).

2 CHA/Latino Consent Decree No. 94 C 1229.

applicants for the voucher program and 10,000 for public housing programs. The campaign's success effectively disproved the assumption of many critics that Latinos did not want to participate in these subsidized programs.

## SCH Mobility Counseling Program

As Mary K. Cunningham and Noah Sawyer recently observed,

The body of evidence that moving to low-poverty neighborhoods can produce positive outcomes for low-income families is growing, yet the question of how to encourage or orchestrate moves to low-poverty neighborhoods remains largely untested. Put simply, we know that helping families move to a better neighborhood can improve their access to opportunities, but we do not have strong evidence on how to encourage these moves.<sup>3</sup>

The experience of SCH in implementing a mobility voucher program for Latinos has demonstrated that mobility counseling works and can provide the encouragement for Latinos to access quality housing and make incremental moves to becoming financially stable and more self-sufficient.

As we considered *how* to encourage people to make opportunity moves, we sought to present the program as an opportunity to advance, and not a way of life. We did not want the public housing subsidy to become a way of life or an intergenerational dependency for Latinos in Chicago.

We looked at creating opportunities for the participants to enter as well as exit the program. Mobility counseling needs to be very hands-on and comprehensive in providing a variety of support services critical to the success of stabilizing our families' housing situations, so that they can then concentrate on moving towards self sufficiency and a better quality of life. As an integral part of these goals, we also stressed the importance of avoiding patterns of racial segregation and concentrated poverty in the design of the program.

The secret or **how to**, is to provide the services like a calling. This means that you start with an unshakeable belief that all clients can and should be assisted until an acceptable and beneficial resolution is reached. SCH take a very "hands-on and whatever it takes" approach to client service. Next, SCH counselors are trained to *understand the ins and outs of the Housing Authority's Administrative Plan*. The understanding of the housing authority's policies and practices is the knowledge base needed to be as

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3 Urban Institute, *Moving To Better Neighborhoods with Mobility Counseling* (2005)



thorough as possible. SCH wins the trust of the clients, and thus their cooperation, with comprehensive knowledge and time-tested expertise that advocates in their interests.

As an example of how mobility counseling has positively impacted some of our clients:

### **Maria Garcia<sup>4</sup>**

**T**his single mom with two children was living in a high-poverty neighborhood and was having problems due to gang activity and harassment directed toward her teenage boy. Her situation improved drastically when she moved to a low-poverty opportunity area with the assistance of the SCH Mobility Program. This move allowed her son to concentrate on his education and getting a job, her daughter graduated from high school and is attending Wright College, which happens to be walking distance from their new apartment. Access to public transportation is another convenience that has allowed Ms. Garcia to go back to school to obtain her counseling certification. The certification will assist her in making a career advancement at her current employer, a health care provider. Also, Ms. Garcia is working on improving her credit report through our Financial Literacy Program, so she can apply for homeownership through the Choose To Own program at CHAC, Inc.

### **Margarita Montejano**

**M**argarita was a single mother of two, who also elected to move from the Section 8 program to participate in the Choose to Own Program. She works for the YMCA as a teacher making \$30,000 per year, which puts her at below 50 percent of the median income. On her own income, she qualified for a loan of only \$80,000, not enough to buy the home she needed. SCH provided the gap money for down payment in the amount of \$40,000 and \$5,000 as a closing-cost grant through the SCH Initiative Program. Margarita bought her house for \$124,000 in a low-poverty area. With this assistance, Margarita was able to give up the subsidy from the CHAC Program and become totally self-sufficient. She has owned her home for two years and is living with her two sons, all thriving from the fact that they are now successful homeowners.

These two clients were motivated to make incremental moves with the help of the Spanish Coalition for Housing's Mobility Counseling Program. These are just two of the many clients that have benefited by the extra investment mobility counseling offers. The long-term result is a client that is on the way to increased self-sufficiency and a sense of self-determination and empowerment.

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4 The names in these profiles have been changed to protect the privacy of our families.

## Mobility Tracking

The tracking chart of the SCH Mobility Counseling shows a 70 percent placement into low-poverty opportunity neighborhoods.

### Monthly Cumulative Counts and Averages for SCH Mobility Counseling

Month	# of Leases	Mob Moves	Hi-Lo Move	Lo-Lo Move	Hi-Hi Move	Lo-Hi Move	Recruited Landlords	Units Avail.	Units Avail. in Low Pov.	Clients/LLs Counseled
Mar-04	36	22	8	14	6	8	99	121	91	1,486
Apr-04	28	20	5	16	4	3	33	175	106	1,255
May-04	43	33	6	28	4	5	141	173	150	1,255
Jun-04	38	33	9	24	5	0	95	136	80	1,246
Jul-04	40	28	5	23	10	2	156	161	80	1,230
Aug-04	51	31	11	20	13	7	101	108	122	1,321
Sep-04	53	40	14	27	6	6	151	213	111	1,231
Oct-04	42	32	15	9	17	1	223	119	118	1,200
Nov-04	16	13	3	10	2	1	144	177	125	1,125
Dec-04	30	12	6	6	16	2	70	70	50	789
Jan-05	74	53	21	35	8	10	154	195	130	1,068
Feb-05	34	26	6	20	2	6	121	174	118	1,219
Mar-05	80	20	15	15	0	3	80	147	106	1,223
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>565</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>1,568</b>	<b>1,969</b>	<b>1,387</b>	<b>15,648</b>
<b>Average:</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>1,204.0</b>

SCH has an impressive record of providing services to the Latino community when it comes to the Housing Choice Voucher Program, formerly known as the Section 8 program. The above chart showcases only one year of providing services for the program. This report tracks the following fields of information:

- # of lease-ups—number of successful lease-ups for each month as well as the cumulative count and monthly average.
- # of mobility moves—number of lease-ups in census tracts that are < 23.49 percent of the poverty level.
- # of Hi—Lo, moves from high-poverty to low-poverty areas
- # of Lo—Lo, moves from low-poverty to low-poverty areas
- # of Hi—Hi, moves from high-poverty to high-poverty areas
- # of Lo—Hi, moves from low-poverty to high-poverty areas
- # of Recruited Landlords—number of landlords recruited to participate in Housing Choice Voucher Program
- # of Units Available—number of new units available to housing choice voucher holders.



- # of units in low poverty—number of new units available in low-poverty (23.99% or lower) areas
- # of Clients/LLs Counseled—number of renters and landlords that have been served by SCH monthly and cumulative.

## Landlord Outreach & Services

At the beginning of the SCH Mobility Counseling, it was a challenge to dispel the stereotypes and myths of the voucher program, especially among the small landlords in low-poverty and Latino community areas. These landlords did not know how the voucher program worked, they feared that they would not be able to select their own tenants; also they feared that they would lose the right to evict problem tenants. With an ongoing, aggressive landlord outreach campaign, SCH recruited landlords to supply the demand from the hundreds of new Latino voucher holders. A landlord education campaign in the form of a Bilingual Landlord Association was created to inform and empower landlords in low-poverty areas to participate in the housing choice voucher program. SCH effectively communicated the benefits to landlords participating in the voucher program. In providing landlords with added resources, we gained respect and cooperation from landlords. Many landlords would go above and beyond the requirements of the program to assist the tenants, such as lowering the amount of security deposit or accepting installment payments to lessen the financial burden of our voucher holders.

Again SCH's approach with the landlords was similar to that of tenants, very hands-on with supportive services for landlords: assistance in navigating the Housing Quality Standard Inspection, screening tenants, and understanding their rights and responsibilities as landlords in the housing choice voucher program and the Chicago Residential Landlord/Tenant Ordinance.

Contrary to recent media stories about many Chicago landlords failing inspections, in our experience, the landlords have provided units in very good condition, especially in opportunity areas.

## In Conclusion

The question of how policymakers juggle the desperate need for basic needs versus long-term commitment to ensuring access to equal opportunity is highlighted by the increased numbers and demographic trends we are seeing. According to a study by the Notre Dame Institute for Latino Studies,

During the 1990's Latinos experienced the largest growth of any of the major racial/ethnic groups. Latinos, in fact, were responsible for most of the population

growth in Metropolitan Chicago during the 1990's. of the regional net growth of approximately 830,000 persons in the 1990's more than two-thirds, 568,000, is attributed to Latinos.

Unfortunately no one has ever won equality simply because of number crunching and demographic trends. It takes direct and innovative actions that *think outside the box*, and solve problems that present obstacles to the successful goals of the voucher program.

The CHA/Latino Consent Decree provided a window of opportunity to distribute public housing resources in a more diverse and equitable manner. The result has been that about 4,000 Latino families are benefiting from the voucher program and SCH Mobility Counseling. Of these families 70 percent were successful in moving to opportunity areas.

The experience of SCH with the mobility program confirms and agrees with the four policy recommendations put forward by Cunningham and Sawyer:

*#1—Target economically stable households for mobility program participation.*

Designing proactive programs that target those most likely to succeed with realistic goals, concrete resources, and support such as mobility counseling.

*#2—Offer intensive housing search assistance or different services to “hard-to-move” families.*

Intensive hands-on counseling and ongoing support in developing a family improvement plan of action is necessary to address any barriers or social needs that will arise.

*#3—Focus on retention services for voucher holders who moved to opportunity neighborhoods.*

Regular, ongoing counseling with site visits to assist families having difficulties in adjusting to new neighborhoods and providing support services to respond to any setbacks that may arise.

*#4—Provide a continuum of services for self-sufficiency.*

Motivating voucher recipients to take advantage of programs like Family Self-Sufficiency, Choose to Own, and any trainings available that can contribute to achieving their individual and family goals.

SCH recommends that policy makers take seriously the numbers and demographic trends that speak to the current and growing numbers of Latinos and their housing needs. Also, if we look and learn from the results of SCH, we will reap more successful mobility moves. The Spanish Coalition for Housing's Mobility Counseling Program has shown that mobility counseling is an effective investment that pays dividends such as more self-sufficient and empowered families.





# Public Health and Housing Mobility: Fair Health through Fair Housing

Gail Christopher\*

*Social justice and equity have been central to the mission and vision of public health because health is a prerequisite for human development. The idea of a basic public responsibility for social health and welfare and the responsibility of those in public health to be advocates for social justice and collective action has been the foundation of public health ... and health is a collective public good that is actively produced by institutions and policies.*

- *Health Equity and Social Justice: A Guidebook for Local Public Health Agencies.* National Association of County and City Health Officials

The public health community offers a new constituency for housing mobility by framing the concept as a strategy for addressing health disparities. As reported in the September/October 2005 issue of *FOCUS*, the magazine of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, there is an emerging health justice or “fair health” movement in this country which acknowledges the central role of historic racial discrimination and social injustice in persistent health disparities. Fair Health as a concept acknowledges the individual’s inalienable right to equal opportunity for a healthy life as codified in international law and embodied in founding documents of this nation. Health is a prerequisite for “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” A public health approach to health disparities will focus less on finding fault in individuals and more on offering solutions (such as Medicare, Social Security assistance and/or housing mobility) that begin to distribute societal resources more equally across socio-economic groups.

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As the links between low socio-economic status, concentrated poverty and poor health outcomes become more widely understood, proponents for eliminating health disparities through public health interventions will see housing mobility as an important contextually-based intervention strategy. Contextually-based health interventions such as air bags, fluoride water treatment, or moving people to low-poverty and better resourced communities do not depend exclusively upon individual resources and behavior change. Rather, they change environmental factors, and, as a result, put individuals and families at a reduced risk for mortality and morbidity.

The link between socio-economic status and mortality is well established. Debate still exists concerning exact cause-effect relationships, but the correlation between low education levels, low income and excess mortality are well documented throughout history and in diverse cultural contexts around the world. Link and Phelan (2005) argue that it is the persistence of these associations, regardless of historic period, country, health care delivery system and/or local culture that sheds light on the causative aspect of the relationship between socio-economic status and mortality. Disease does not flow directly from income, educational or occupational status. Other mechanisms involving behaviors and environmental exposure must also be present. Link and Phelan posit that focusing on the mechanisms that happen to link the two (socio-economic status and disease) at any particular time, will not lead to a better understanding of the effect of socio-economic status. They suggest a focus on the persistence of the relationship itself. Despite vast differences in the places, populations, cultures and eras in which it has been studied, the irrefutable nature of low socio-economic status as a fundamental underpinning of excess mortality, morbidity and health disparities emerges. Therefore, interventions that address socio-economic status disparities are needed.

Housing mobility addresses socio-economic status and many of the specific mechanisms within the immediate environment. By enabling families to move from concentrated poverty to low poverty neighborhoods, many “mechanisms” of the socio-economic status-disease correlation are addressed.

Helen Epstein in her groundbreaking New York Times article, *Ghetto Miasma — Enough to Make You Sick* (October 12, 2003), clarifies that it is not just drug overdoses or guns that cause high rates of death in neighborhoods of highly concentrated poverty. Rather, it is chronic diseases such as stroke, diabetes, kidney disease, high blood pressure and certain types of cancer. In exploring the relationship between where people live and health, she cites research results from programs such as HUD’s Moving to Opportunity project to demonstrate that when families moved to better neighborhoods, the health of children and parents improved. There were fewer asthma attacks, and lower rates of depression and anxiety. In the end, Epstein reiterates that a deprived environment causes stress and stress coupled with other deprivations causes poor overall health.



It is in the best interest of the nation to accelerate progress in eradicating racial and ethnic health disparities. Tackling inequalities in health has been clearly stated as an overarching aim of the nation's public health policy. Healthy People 2010 proclaims an ambitious goal of eradicating health disparities by 2010; but, progress has been too slow. Progress will be accelerated by stronger collaboration between advocacy and professional communities concerned with achieving social justice. The housing mobility advocates and public health advocates for social justices must begin to work together.

In its 2002 report, "Reducing Health Disparities through a Focus on Community," PolicyLink (a national advocacy organization working to advance policies to achieve economic and social equity) proposed a framework based on emerging research, to describe how social, economic and physical environments in neighborhoods affect health. They assert that neighborhood factors influence health in at least four ways:

- (1) direct effects on both physical and mental health, (2) indirect influences on behaviors that have consequences, (3) health impacts resulting from the quality and availability of health care, and (4) health impacts associated with the availability of "opportunity" structures.

Many of the stories depicted in earlier chapters of this report illustrate these influences. The health of children and adults has improved markedly when families moved from impoverished neighborhoods with high crime and inferior housing, to more economically stable communities with a better quality of life.

Connecting the researchers, advocates and practitioners within these two distinct communities – housing and public health – will require several specific strategies.

- A. Both groups must see the clear advantage to be achieved from collaboration. Related information dissemination, publications of related research results, forums and web-based interaction can help facilitate needed communication across professional sectors.
- B. Both constituencies must translate the issues into their own professional values and mandates. Public health leaders can show how housing issues and housing mobility policies relate to the ten essential functions of public health agencies. Public Health agencies are charged to:
  - (1) Monitor health status to identify community health problems;
  - (2) Recognize and investigate problems and health hazards in the community;
  - (3) Inform, educate and empower people about health issues;
  - (4) Mobilize community partnerships and actions to identify and solve health problems;

- (5) Develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts;
  - (6) Enforce laws and regulations that support, protect and insure safety;
  - (7) Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable;
  - (8) Assure a competent public health and personal health care workforce;
  - (9) Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility and quality of personnel and population-based health services;
  - (10) Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.
- (Mays, Miller, and Haverson, 2000)

- C. Housing mobility experiments and policies must be diverse enough to be adapted to different regional and economic contexts. What works in Chicago will have to be modified or adapted to fit laws and imperatives of a California or Texas community. Best “adaptation” practices should be disseminated.
- D. The health benefits and positive results of housing mobility interventions must be portrayed clearly to diverse constituencies, particularly to policy makers, legislators, developers, educators and health officials.

Results of the Gautreaux, Moving to Opportunity and HOPE VI experiments indicate that it is in the best interest of the health of families that were fortunate enough to move and/or to be assisted as they relocated to better, low poverty neighborhoods. But this form of social intervention cannot be widely duplicated or expanded as a public health policy until its benefits are more widely perceived. Therefore an expanded constituency for housing mobility is needed. Public health advocates for social justice are ideal partners. There will be a need to re-examine what is currently viewed as essential public health functions to determine intersections with housing mobility concepts. As Alonzo Plough reminds us in his article, “Promoting Social Justice Through Public Health Policies, Programs, and Services,” (Levy and Sidel 2005) any public health practice competency that addresses the impact of social injustice in health will go beyond affecting individual behavior change to enabling more accountable public and private decisions concerning the basic needs of groups of people who have poor health because of discrimination based on race, income, ethnicity, language or sexual orientation. Access to affordable housing in low poverty or mixed income neighborhoods is one of the basic needs that should be addressed. This nation’s housing voucher program has a natural constituency among public health practitioners and researchers committed to social justice. Like the Fair Housing movement, the Fair Health movement requires strong coalitions and complementary efforts that engage many disciplines.



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## Amanda: Playing Tennis at the Neighborhood Park

**W**hen Amanda lived in public housing she stayed in the house all day long watching the clock and the TV. She didn't like leaving her apartment because she would have to walk down four flights of stairs in the dark because the lights were always broken out. One time, when she was eight months pregnant, she was chased up the stairs, through the dark halls. She recalls thinking that the guy "was going to kill her." The violence in her old neighborhood was endless and all-consuming. Her door and hallway were vandalized and there were always people hanging out front selling drugs. She didn't feel safe, so she stayed inside or went to her mothers in a neighboring town. The only exercise she got was when she walked her 6- and 10-year-olds to school. Since moving from public housing, life has changed dramatically for Amanda and her two children. She's no longer afraid to go outside. She leaves her apartment everyday for her job. She goes to the local park to play tennis with a friend. When the weather is good, she goes for long walks around the neighborhood. All around her life is healthier. Amanda isn't overweight, but she watches what she eats because her doctor told her she has high cholesterol. She cooks at home most nights trying to choose healthy options. She fights with her kids to eat vegetables, and only occasionally gives into their requests for McDonald's or pizza. Amanda admits that over the holidays she cheats on her healthy eating at work, but she's come a long way from sitting in the house all day.



# Housing Mobility as a Women's Rights Issue

Emily J. Martin\*

Poverty in the United States is a women's issue, for at all stages of their lives, women are far more likely than men to be poor. In 2003, for instance, women were 39 percent more likely to be poor. Single mothers and elderly women were even more vulnerable to poverty—86 percent more likely to be poor than single fathers and 71 percent more likely to be poor than elderly men, respectively. More than one-third of single mothers lived in poverty in 2003 (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). Because of their poverty and the related fact that women are more likely to be the primary caretakers of children, women make up the majority of adult recipients of housing assistance. Both low-income housing policy in general and housing mobility specifically thus must be judged in part by their effectiveness as a response to the gendered nature of poverty.

**Housing mobility and violence against women.** Domestic violence forces many women to choose between their safety and a roof over their heads. For example, a recent survey of homeless women in Minnesota found that 46 percent reported that they had previously stayed in abusive relationships because they had nowhere else to go (Wilder Research Center 2004). Studies across the country show that domestic violence is a primary cause of homelessness for women and children, with between one-quarter and one-half of those homeless reporting they lost their homes as a direct result of violence (ACLU Women's Rights Project 2004). Because of the close link between domestic violence and housing loss and instability, housing assistance programs should specifically take into account the barriers that domestic violence victims face in attempting to find and keep housing.

For example, public housing agencies (PHAs) operating voucher programs can and should adopt policies that make clear that violence against a voucher holder is not an

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appropriate basis for terminating voucher assistance. (Instead too many PHAs today move to terminate assistance when criminal activity occurs in the home, regardless of whether the voucher holder is the victim or perpetrator.) PHAs may adopt preferences for voucher applicants seeking to escape domestic violence, thus potentially saving lives. They can adopt policies making clear that voucher applicants can mitigate negative information regarding their rental, credit, or criminal histories that might otherwise affect their eligibility for voucher assistance by showing that the violence against them was a cause of the negative history. They can also make sure that vouchers allow families to move quickly in emergencies, by suspending residency requirements for those who need to seek new housing outside of the jurisdiction to protect their safety, and by developing an expedited process for approving rental units in emergency situations. (Martin and Stern 2004.)<sup>1</sup> When PHAs take these steps to increase housing mobility for battered women, they help reduce domestic violence.

Housing mobility not only has the potential to help women protect themselves by leaving violent relationships, it also promotes the safety of women and families by providing a way out of high-crime neighborhoods. As Congress documented in its initial passage of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994, the fear of violence restricts women's movements.<sup>2</sup> In violent neighborhoods with high levels of street harassment, the intimidation and restriction on women's movement is even more pronounced, leaving many afraid to travel through their neighborhoods (DeKeseredy, Alvi, and Tomaszewski 2003; Renzetti and Maier 2002). Moreover, fear for their families and the resulting need to supervise children closely in dangerous neighborhoods further limit women's choices and mobility (Rosenbaum and De Luca 2000). When increased housing mobility permits women and families to move to safer neighborhoods, women feel more freedom to work and otherwise take part in life beyond their doorsteps; they also feel more secure in letting their children explore opportunities outside the home.

**Housing mobility and the health of women and their children.** As set out elsewhere in this report, research supports the theory that moving to better neighborhoods improves families' health. For instance, the Moving to Opportunity demonstration project found a reduction in obesity and depression—two conditions that disproportionately affect women—among adult participants. The study found similar mental health improvement for adolescent girls. (Turner and Acevedo-Garcia 2005.) Children moving to low-poverty neighborhoods are also apparently less likely to be the victims of crime

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1 In addition, federal law should be amended to make clear that when a tenant has moved out of an assisted unit in violation of a lease because remaining in the unit would endanger her safety, the lease violation should not restrict voucher portability. Provisions have been proposed for inclusion in the 2005 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA III) that would address some of these concerns.

2 S. Rep. No. 102-197, at 38, 53 (1990).





or experience serious asthma attacks (Sard 2001). Neighborhood may also influence teenage girls' likelihood of becoming pregnant (Turner and Acevedo-Garcia 2005).

One of the primary causes of improvements in mental health for housing mobility participants appears to be the lessened fear of violence and neighborhood crime (Turner and Acevedo-Garcia 2005), a fear that is especially likely to be experienced by women given their greater sense of vulnerability to violence described above. The improvements in mental health suggest the broad public health benefits of increased safety in housing, benefits that will likely primarily accrue to women.

In addition, improved child health through housing mobility both is itself an obvious social good and also has the potential to increase families' economic resources by removing a barrier to women's employment (Sard 2001). Just as lessened fear for their children's safety gives women increased freedom to work outside the home, so does increased healthiness in children, as children's illness and injuries and the troubled behavior that can arise from children's depression or anxiety often disrupt mothers' employment and can pose a significant barrier to sustained paid work for poor women.

**Housing mobility and women's economic opportunity.** Housing mobility also can address women's disproportionate poverty, not only by improving the health of women and children, thus removing barriers to women's employment, but also by helping families move to jobs. One of the primary purposes of housing mobility efforts is, of course, to allow low-income families to leave poor neighborhoods for communities offering greater economic and educational opportunities, and while the evidence so far is mixed, there is reason to believe that well-designed housing mobility programs hold exactly that promise. Housing mobility thus may also be an important tool to help TANF-assisted families move from welfare to work (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2005; Rosenbaum and DeLuca 2000; Sard 2001.) Such increased economic self-sufficiency not only helps families out of poverty, but also promotes gender equity, given that the low-income families who receive housing assistance are primarily headed by single mothers. Poor, single mothers face many barriers in seeking well-paid employment, from gender segregation in the workplace, to overt discrimination, to child care responsibilities, to lack of education and training, to lack of neighborhood opportunities. Housing mobility, while in no way a panacea, begins to address some of these barriers, by moving women closer to employment opportunities; by reducing women's vulnerability to violence from intimates or strangers and thus increasing their autonomy and ability to seek and hold a job; and by improving child outcomes and thus reducing women's childcare obligations. Advocates should recognize and promote this aspect of housing mobility policy and its potential to address women's poverty.

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## Natalie

### No Longer Worried About Safety

**W**hen Natalie moved from her Los Angeles public housing development to a single-family home in the valley, she felt like a heavy burden had been lifted from her. The panic attacks she experienced regularly stopped and she no longer felt “trapped.” She felt comfortable with her new neighbors, something she never felt when she lived in the projects. In the projects there were “murders and drive-by shootings.” She didn’t feel safe going out or letting her children play outside. She kept her nose clean, hoping that no one would bother her family. When she signed up for the Moving To Opportunity program, moving was a relief, but she still has worries. She worries about money, about how she’ll make ends meet every month. She’s concerned about how her teenage daughters do in school, and if they will go onto college, and if they do, if she can afford to send them. These worries are dramatically different from the pressures she felt raising daughters in public housing. Girls were especially vulnerable in her old neighborhood. The men in the neighborhood would harass teenage girls and offer them drugs “free of charge.” She said it was unlikely to see a teenage girl not pregnant, instead of the other way around. Natalie acknowledges how her worries are different now, and how important living in her new neighborhood is for her daughters. Here “they see everyone leaving for work everyday, and coming home.” This includes their mom, who started working shortly after they moved. Natalie used her income tax check to buy a car, which she needs to get back and forth to work. On the weekends, she drives her daughters to the mall. They window shop, hang out, and have lunch. Life is much calmer since she moved from public housing.





# **A Vision for the Future: Bringing Gautreaux to Scale**



# A Vision for the Future: Bringing Gautreaux to Scale

Alex Polikoff\*

Reading Jason DeParle’s recently published *American Dream*, one is struck (for the thousandth time?) by the unremitting, intergenerational persistence of ghetto to poverty. From W.E.B. DuBois through James Baldwin and Kenneth Clark, in compelling reportage by Nicholas Lemann, Alex Kotlowitz, and DeParle, in statistical analyses, ethnographic studies, and academic research papers without number, the point is made over and over again: the concentrated poverty of urban ghettos condemns generation after generation of black Americans to what Clark called lives of impotence and despair.

Yet, some may object, only 2.8 million black Americans live in concentrated urban poverty—metropolitan census tracts with poor populations of 40 percent or more. That’s only one percent of Americans. Sad to be sure, but not a big enough deal in terrorism times to get worked up about unless you’re some bleeding liberal. The country has more pressing matters to attend to.

Query. Some 170 years ago Alexis de Toqueville called racial inequality “the most formidable evil threatening the future of the United States.” Toqueville went on to prophesy that the racial inequality evil would not be resolved—indeed, that it would eventually bring America to disaster. How could that be? How could 1 percent of Americans, confined to ghettos, be a nation-threatening matter? Bear with me, and I’ll try to explain.

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First, take small comfort from small numbers. In an earlier *New York Times* piece, DeParle makes this point about the small ghetto population:

The poverty and disorder of the inner cities lacerate a larger civic fabric, drawing people from shared institutions like subways, buses, parks, schools and even cities themselves... Perhaps most damaging of all is the effect that urban poverty has on race relations. It is like a poison in the national groundwater that is producing a thousand deformed fruits...

What deformed fruits? Among them is nothing less than breaking up the coalition that birthed the New Deal and the Civil Rights Movement, a political sea-change that began in the World War II years, gathered strength over the next two decades, then led to Richard Nixon's election in 1968, followed in 1980 by the triumph of Ronald Reagan and the final dissolution of the New Deal coalition with its reigning creed of consensus liberalism.

Powered by the trauma of the Great Depression, America was becoming a nation concerned with social justice. New Deal measures were driven by social justice ideals. In 1944 FDR called on Congress to enact a "second" Bill of Rights, this one to be devoted to social and economic, rather than civil and political, "rights." He even vetoed a revenue bill because it failed to tax "unreasonable" wartime profits and provided relief "not for the needy but for the greedy." To be sure, the veto was overridden. Yet the Fair Deal moved "fairness" to center stage, and Truman initiated desegregation of the armed forces in its name. Johnson's Great Society was to be great precisely because it elevated social and economic justice to explicit national policy. Though far from having carried the day, social justice was clearly "in play" in the American psyche for the three decades from the onset of the New Deal through the cresting of the Civil Rights Movement in 1965.

In November 1968 that psyche underwent fundamental change. From a nation concerned with fairness we became a nation that under Richard Nixon slammed the doors on school and housing desegregation. After a brief interlude of "trusting" Jimmy Carter, our changed character re-emerged with traits deepened and intensified. Under Reagan we became a thoroughly uncaring nation, obsessed with the "free" market and with crafting rules to foster still more personal acquisition by the most favored. The animating visions of the New Deal, the Fair Deal, and the Great Society—"Government by organized money is just as dangerous as Government by organized mob," FDR once said—had become as irrelevant as ancient relics.

There is no single explanation for America's character change. But a major factor was disaffection by the blue-collar workers and white ethnics who had been core elements of the New Deal coalition. Disaffection over what? The answer is over blacks





trapped in ghettos trying to penetrate white neighborhoods. Hubert Humphrey, champion of civil rights, not Richard Nixon, with his coded anti-black speeches and shameless pandering to Southern segregationists, suffered the consequences. There were other 1968 election issues to be sure, but a number of historians make a powerful case that it was fear of ghetto blacks “invading” white neighborhoods that finally sundered the coalition that had given America its consensus liberalism creed.

Another example of a deformed fruit is the War on Drugs, targeted on black ghettos. Since Reagan assumed office, we have built over 1,000 new prisons and jails, many crowded beyond capacity. Crowded with whom? The answer is blacks from ghettos. By 1990 nearly one of every four young black males in the United States was under the control of the criminal justice system, more in major cities (over 40 percent in Washington, over 50 percent in Baltimore). In his book, *Malign Neglect*, Michael Tonry observes that the rising levels of black incarceration were the foreseeable effect of deliberate policies:

Anyone with knowledge of drug-trafficking patterns and of police arrest policies and incentives could have foreseen that the enemy troops in the War on Drugs would consist largely of young, inner-city minority males.

Part and parcel of our mass incarceration policy are “three strikes” laws that mandate long prison terms for third convictions. California has meted out a 25-year sentence for the third strike theft of a slice of pizza, another for pilfering some chocolate chip cookies. Thirteen-year-olds have received mandatory, life-without-parole sentences.

Heartless sentencing may not be the worst of it. Like alcohol prohibition, the War on Drugs is directly responsible for the black market and the crime it spawns, fueling some of the very ills that are among the root causes of crime, diverting money from education and social initiatives. Between 1980 and 1995 the proportion of California’s budget devoted to prisons grew from 2 to 9.7 percent, while the proportion for higher education dropped from over 12 to 9.5 percent. In 1980 there were over three times as many black men in college and university as in prison and jail, 463,000 as against 143,000. Twenty years later there were *fewer* black men in college and university than in prison and jail—603,000 compared to 791,000.

In short, as a nation we are doggedly pursuing a ghetto-targeted mass incarceration policy that is both mindless and destructive of traditional American values. It is mindless because at enormous cost we insist on sticking with a policy that is having no demonstrable effect on drug availability, drug crime rates, or crime rates generally. It is destructive of values because it has driven us to extremities that no fair-minded person can defend.

A final example of disfigured produce is the demise of welfare. The tangled skein of Americans' negative views about welfare is not easily unraveled. Yet racial hostility, mostly toward blacks, appears in the literature as a "major," even "decisive," factor. In the understated language of one study, racial animosity makes welfare for the poor, who are disproportionately black, "unappealing to many voters."

But rarely have high public officials matched the explicitness of Newt Gingrich. At the heart of Gingrich's successful dump-welfare campaign, linear successor to Ronald Reagan's Welfare Queen and George Bush's Willie Horton, was a stick-figure caricature of the ghetto: "You can't maintain civilization with 12-year-olds having babies and 15-year-olds killing each other and 17-year-olds dying of AIDS." The image of the black ghetto was thus instrumental not only in ending decades-old welfare entitlement, but also in dropping the jobs, training, and childcare originally supposed to have been part of the deal. We don't yet know for sure what effect welfare reform is having on children, although DeParle's recent book supplies no cause for optimism. But the concern for maintaining civilization has not led to measures to help the ghetto children—American children, let us remember—who inhabit Gingrich's caricature.

Can these (and other) deformed fruits be blamed solely on black ghettos? No, they cannot. Ending black ghettos wouldn't end anti-black attitudes any more than ending Jewish ghettos ended anti-semitism. But it would be difficult to find many features of American society that match the black ghetto's poisoning effect on attitudes, values, and conduct.

Sixty years ago Gunnar Myrdal wrote,

White prejudice and discrimination keep the Negro low in standards of living, health, education, manners and morals. This, in its turn, gives support to white prejudice.

Decades later sociologist Elijah Anderson's studies of a ghetto and an adjacent non-ghetto neighborhood led him to conclude:

The public awareness is color-coded. White skin denotes civility, law-abidingness, and trustworthiness, while black skin is strongly associated with poverty, crime, incivility, and distrust.

In American society at large most whites act like the ones Anderson studied—their public awareness is also color-coded and they therefore steer clear of poor blacks and keep them in their ghettos. Predictable ghetto behavior then intensifies whites' sense of danger, validates their color-coding, and drives their conduct.



Urban economist George Galster describes a self-reinforcing “ghettoizing cycle.” First, ghettoization induces “behavioral adaptations” by ghetto dwellers. Widely reported by the media, ghetto behavior is then seen as validating and legitimizing whites’ prejudicial attitudes toward blacks. The prejudices translate into withdrawal from blacks, and into discriminatory conduct in housing, zoning, employment, and institutional arrangements of all sorts, which in turn lead to more ghettoization.

Ghettoization is growing, in spite of many reasons to have expected the contrary (the Kerner Commission report; anti-discrimination laws; substantial growth of the black middle-class; unprecedented good times in the 1990s). Between 1970 and 2000, the number of metropolitan ghetto census tracts (40 percent or more poverty population) doubled, from around 1,100 to over 2,200, and the number of blacks in metropolitan ghettos increased from under 2.5 to over 2.8 million. There is every reason to believe that there has been further ghetto growth since the 2000 Census.

In a nutshell, that is why I think we’d be well advised to play it safe with respect to Toqueville’s prophecy. Color-coded poison continues to flow into our groundwater, with disfiguring results that are plain to see. Disaster may not come in the form of riots and race wars, as Carl Rowan predicts in his recent book, *The Coming Race War in America*. But it will be disaster no less if American values are sufficiently deformed.

So what can we do about it? One answer is a Gautreaux-type housing mobility program writ large (high quality pre- and post-move counseling, coupled with housing search assistance and identification of homes and apartments, to enable inner-city families to move with housing vouchers into middle-class neighborhoods far from the ghetto). Let me lay out the elements of what I believe would be a workable program, and respond to some of the multiple objections that will probably flood your minds—a sketch only, of course, for the full rendition would take more than the allotted space.

Suppose 50,000 housing choice vouchers were made available annually, were earmarked for use by black families living in urban ghettos, and could be used only in non-ghetto locations—say, census tracts with less than 10 percent poverty and not minority impacted. Suppose that the vouchers were allocated to our 125 largest metropolitan areas. Suppose, that to avoid “threatening” any community, no more than a specified number of families (an arbitrary number—say, 10, or a small fraction of occupied housing units) could move into any city, town, or village in a year.

If an average of 40 municipalities in each metropolitan area served as “receiving communities,” the result would be—using 10 as the hypothetical annual move-in ceiling—that 50,000 families each year, or 500,000 in a decade, would move in “Gautreaux fashion.” Notably, the 500,000 moves would equal almost half the black families living in metropolitan ghetto tracts.

We cannot, of course, assume that half of all black families in metropolitan ghettos would choose to participate (though they might). But neither would it require the departure of every other black household to change radically the black ghetto as we know it. With enough participants, radical change would be inevitable. Whatever the time frame, we would at last be treating a disease that has festered untreated in the body politic for over a century.

The hypothetical is plainly intended only to show that a national Gautreaux program could operate at a meaningful scale; it is not a real-life working model. Metropolitan areas vary greatly—in 2000, the 35 largest of the 331 metropolitan areas contained over half the metropolitan ghetto tracts. An actual program would be tailored to these variations, operating at greater scale in big ghetto areas and at lesser (or not at all) in metropolitan areas with small black ghettos.

(The hypothetical is also limited to census tracts with 40 percent or more poverty. Neighborhoods with 39 percent poverty can be pretty bad places too. Some of the literature even suggests that many neighborhoods in the 30–39 percent range are likely to be on their way to higher poverty. The response is that we must begin somewhere; once extreme-poverty neighborhoods are dealt with, the mobility program could be expanded into lower-poverty areas.)

The hypothetical raises several questions. Would 50,000 vouchers a year be feasible? Could such an enlarged mobility program be administered responsibly? Would enough families volunteer to participate? Could 50,000 private homes and apartments be found each year?

The answers are speculative because mobility on such a scale has never been tried, but answers there are. The 50,000 annual vouchers, an arbitrary figure chosen for purposes of the hypothetical, really contemplates 100,000 new vouchers each year with 50,000 of them earmarked for the Gautreaux-type program. The point would be to leave 50,000 new “regular” vouchers for other entering families who were ineligible for the mobility program or who, for a multitude of perfectly understandable reasons, were unable or unwilling to participate. Fairness to non-participants, and the need to deal with the charge that whites were telling blacks where they had to live, would make the “extra” 50,000 vouchers a necessity. However, 100,000 new vouchers per year is not a fanciful figure; Congress authorized more than that number as recently as the year 2000.

Yet the hypothetical program could be run without issuing any new vouchers at all. Currently, about 2.1 million vouchers are in circulation. The annual “turnover rate” is about 11 percent, meaning that for various reasons (for example, a family’s income rises above the eligibility ceiling) some 230,000 vouchers are turned back to housing authori-



ties each year for reissuance to other families. A Congressional enactment could direct 50,000 of these turnover vouchers to the hypothetical program.

The cost of assisting mobility moves must of course be included in the calculus. But at an average of \$4,000 per family—a reasonable, even generous, figure based on the Gautreaux experience—we are talking about \$200 million a year, \$2 billion over 10 years (excluding inflation). To put that figure in perspective and address the question of whether we could “afford” it, consider that for a single year (fiscal year 2004) the Bush administration proposed a military budget of some \$400 billion, which (also excluding inflation)—would amount to \$4,000 billion over 10 years.

It is true that almost any program can be viewed as affordable by comparison with our military budget. But we aren’t talking about “any” program. We are talking about a program to end the successor to slavery and Jim Crow that is perpetuating a caste structure in the United States and threatening incalculable harm to American society. Achieving that, for a negligible fraction—0.0005—of our military budget, would be our best bargain since the Louisiana Purchase.

The negligible fraction is the price tag for mobility assistance only; it does not include the cost of the vouchers themselves. At the current cost of about \$6,500 per voucher, the 10-year voucher tab for 100,000 new vouchers annually would be just under \$36 billion (again excluding inflation). Adding roughly 7 percent for the administrative fees HUD pays to housing authorities brings the total to about \$38.5 billion, less than 1 percent of the \$4,000 billion military figure. Our affordable housing crisis is so severe that, entirely apart from mobility and ghetto-dismantling, we should be—and politics will some day dictate—making affordable housing expenditures of this magnitude. Housing expenditures the “Gautreaux way” would give us the double payback of ameliorating both our affordable housing and our black ghetto crises.

Suppose, however, that the country weren’t ready to spend \$38.5 billion over 10 years for new “double payback” vouchers. Running the hypothetical program with turnover vouchers instead would eliminate entirely the \$38.5 billion cost. This would mean that the only additional tab for the hypothetical program—beyond the costs we are today already incurring for our “regular” voucher program—would be about \$200 million a year, taking us back to that 0.0005 fraction of our military budget. It is mind-boggling to think that, for an infinitesimal expenditure in budgetary terms, we could mount a program that could—to use a storied locution—end the ghetto as we know it.

What about administration? Under a consent decree in a housing desegregation case, the Dallas housing authority in a little over two years assisted some 2,200 families, most of them black, to move to “non-impacted” areas (census tracts in which few Section 8 vouchers were already in use, but in practice the receiving areas turned out to

be predominantly non-black). Dallas was a case of direct administration by a housing authority. The Gautreaux Program was administered by a nonprofit organization. Moving to Opportunity, HUD's five-city Gautreaux-like demonstration program (using poverty, however, not race, as the criterion for receiving communities), involves partnerships between housing authorities and nonprofits. These varied and largely positive experiences suggest that we could handle the administrative challenge of a nationwide Gautreaux-type program.

One often expressed administrative concern is that moving families will cluster in specific, perhaps "fragile," neighborhoods, creating new poverty enclaves, even suburban ghettos. My proposal that program families move to very low poverty, non-racially impacted communities, distant from high poverty areas, coupled with the low annual ceiling on the number of families entering any city, town, or village, makes that unlikely. But this potential problem is easily resolved by the direction included in the Leadership Council's Gautreaux program contract to place families in a dispersed fashion. In practice, this provision gave the Council authority—which it exercised (consistently, indeed, with an "anti-concentration of voucher families" provision in the underlying Section 8 statute)—to avoid clustering of moving families.

Would enough families volunteer to participate? We will not know until we try, but the Gautreaux experience suggests that they may. An average of 400 families moving each year in each participating metropolitan area would be required to reach the hypothetical goal (a smaller average number if more metropolitan areas were used). The 400-per-year number was surpassed more than once by the Gautreaux program even though the number of entering families was artificially limited, not by market factors but by the funding and staff that could be extracted from HUD in the Gautreaux consent decree bargaining process.

Finally, could 50,000 homes and apartments be found each year? The Gautreaux program placed families in over 100 cities, towns and villages in the Chicago area, while the hypothetical assumes an average of only 40. The Census Bureau counts 331 metropolitan areas in the country, while the hypothetical assumes that the mobility program would operate in only 125. Each assumption is conservative with respect to unit supply.

Most importantly, the potential supply of units is not a fixed-sum. More fine-tuning of fair market rents (increasing them in low-vacancy times and places, reducing them where they exceed market rents) and more creativity about responding to landlord concerns (for example, paying rent for the several weeks it sometimes takes a housing authority to "clear" a family for an apartment being held off the market), can make a big difference. For areas in which low fair market rents remained a serious problem, the law creating the mobility program should direct HUD to approve whatever rents were demonstrated to be reasonable (based on comparable community rents)



for participating families. If the 50,000 annual goal were made a bureaucratic imperative, and if local administrators were given the right tools, it is likely that the 50,000 goal would be achieved.

A different kind of question is prompted by the notion of setting aside 50,000 vouchers each year for black families. How can one justify denying poor whites, poor Latinos, and poor Asians, many also living in high-poverty neighborhoods, an opportunity to participate in the mobility program? Would it even be legal?

A dual justification can be offered. The first is that the proposal is designed to help the nation confront its “most formidable evil,” an evil that results in significant degree from fears and conduct generated by confining black Americans, not others, to ghettos.

The second is that the country is responsible for the confinement of blacks to ghettos in a manner and degree that is not the case with other groups. This is obviously so as to poor whites, who already live mostly among the non-poor. Latinos and Asians do not have slavery or Jim Crow in their histories. Nor have they been confined among their own to a comparable degree. Devoting 50,000 vouchers exclusively to blacks in ghettos can thus be justified both by the purpose of the proposal and by the unique history and current situation of black Americans.

As for legality, no one can be certain in a time when 5-4 Supreme Court decisions are routine. But when in 1988 Congress authorized compensation to Japanese citizens who had been herded into World War II detention camps, no serious legal question was even raised. Though the analogy is obviously imperfect, housing choice vouchers as “compensation” for confining blacks to ghettos is not a bad rationale. It is unlikely that even today’s Supreme Court would upset an express Congressional determination to make partial amends in this way for a history of slavery, Jim Crow, and ghettoization.

(One can imagine that, for reasons of policy or politics, Congress would choose to offer the mobility program to all residents of metropolitan ghettos. This would require a reworking of my numbers, and possibly prioritizing poverty families. In the New York City area, for example, almost half the population of extreme poverty areas is Hispanic, and in the Los Angeles area the number is over two-thirds—for the most part, of course, in different census tracts than blacks. Although such an expansion would blunt the programmatic thrust and rationale of ending the *black* ghetto, increase cost and administrative complexity, and probably extend the time frame, it should not affect the basic structure or feasibility of the proposed program.)

Even if a national Gautreaux-type program were doable and legal, objections remain to be addressed. One is that the program would be harmful to the moving families, severing them from family, friends, and institutional support systems, and subject-

ing them to hostility and racial discrimination. One answer is to ask who are “we” to withhold a purely voluntary, escape-the-ghetto opportunity from “them” on the ground that we know better than they what is in their interest. I am reminded of what *New York Times* columnist Brent Staples once wrote about “butchery” in ghetto streets:

Remember how Britons shipped their children out of London during the blitzkrieg? What American cities need are evacuation plans to spirit at least some black boys out of harm’s way before it’s too late. Inner-city parents who can afford it ship their children to safety in the homes of relatives. Those who are without that resource deserve the same option extended to parents in London during World War II.

Moreover, studies of the Gautreaux program show that “evacuation” works well for many participating families.

A variation on the bad-for-them argument is that dismantling the ghetto will undermine black institutions, political power, and ghetto communities that have values deserving preservation. As for black institutional and political strength, Italians, Irish, Jews and others have survived far more mobility than black Americans are likely to experience; it is absurd to contend that the strong, resilient black American culture has anything to fear from a Gautreaux-type program. As for values in ghetto communities, even apart from the butchery of which Staples writes it is plain to any objective observer that the bad far outweighs the good.

A further variation on the bad-for-them argument is that non-movers will be worse off once some of the ablest and most motivated among ghetto residents leave. Even if true, this is not a sufficient reason to reject the approach. Should we not have passed the Fair Housing Act because the departure of better-off ghetto residents may have left those who remained worse off? Moreover, the likelihood that deconcentration will foster redevelopment means that even many of those who choose to remain will be benefited over time.

The latter point may raise eyebrows. Why will redevelopment be fostered? And if it is, won’t gentrification simply drive out remaining ghetto residents? The answer to the first question is a matter of pressure: When, like a balloon being filled, migrants poured in, the ghetto expanded outward; as deconcentration lets out some of the air, the pressure will be reversed.

When ghettos are located near prime areas, redevelopment pressures will be strong. When they are not, the redevelopment pump may need to be primed with government assistance of one sort or another. In both circumstances the concern that gentrification will drive out the remaining poor can be addressed. Where government assists the rede-





velopment process, the assistance should be conditioned on housing for the poor as part of the mix. Where it does not (although usually some form of assistance will be involved), inclusionary zoning can mandate that some low-income housing be included in all new residential development above a threshold number of units. Other techniques—for example, property tax caps—are also available.

Others reject the Gautreaux approach in favor of preferred alternatives. A major one is “revitalization,” but analysis discloses that, absent poverty deconcentration, this is an inadequate alternative. A rudimentary form of revitalization is simply to go in—without worrying about poverty deconcentration through housing mobility—and improve shelter and services for present residents. But with the suburbs having become the locus of metropolitan employment growth, with the opportunity engine the ghetto once was now a destructive, jobless environment, it is hubris to think we could reverse decades-old economic forces through improved shelter and services alone. William Julius Wilson concludes, correctly I think, that without increasing economic opportunities for poor blacks and reducing their segregation, programs that target ghettos are unlikely to have much success.

A more sophisticated revitalization approach is community redevelopment. With a nonprofit community development corporation generally leading the way, the idea is to attack all of a depressed community’s needs comprehensively and simultaneously—not just housing, but commercial development, job creation, school improvement, health facilities, public and social services, credit supply, crime, and drug control. This form of revitalization is almost always aided by government funding of one sort or another.

The attraction of community revitalization is considerable. Residents of depressed neighborhoods need hope; the revitalizing possibility may supply it. Cities need redevelopment; the prospect of revitalizing offers it. Democracy requires a strong citizenry; community-based revitalizing builds strong citizens. No wonder community revitalization is the darling of philanthropy, supported by a growing national movement.

But cautions are in order. First, community redevelopment does not generally focus on ghettos, for few black ghettos boast the key instrument—a strong community development corporation. Second, even in the neighborhoods in which most revitalization has been attempted, the record is distinctly mixed. Revitalizing is a difficult, multifaceted, long-term undertaking. Numerous studies make it clear that even after decades of stupendously hard work and much achievement, jobs may still be scarce, neighborhood schools still problematic, poverty still widespread, crime and drugs still unvanquished. One of revitalization’s most enthusiastic supporters, writing about one of its most notable successes—the South Bronx—acknowledges that the poverty rate there did not decline, that employment was mostly unchanged, and that “substantial racial segregation and isolation will continue.”

The reason has to do with six decades of metropolitan development patterns which David Rusk examines in his 1999 book, *Inside Game Outside Game*. The “inside game” is being played in many large cities and—increasingly—in many older, inner-ring suburbs as well. Relative to their metropolitan regions, these “inside” places face declining employment, middle-class populations, buying power, relative incomes, and tax bases, along with increasing, disproportionately poor, minority populations. The “outside game” is of course the reverse of these patterns, with most of the suburbs, particularly the newer, farther-out ones, garnering a steadily growing share of the region’s jobs, as well as middle-class families with their incomes, buying power, and tax-paying capacities, while housing a disproportionately low fraction of the region’s poor.

*Inside Game Outside Game* analyzes the powerful social and economic forces that generate these metropolitan development patterns, and the institutional—including governmental—arrangements that foster them. The result is what Rusk calls the “tragic dilemma” of community-based redevelopment programs. “It is like helping a crowd of people run up a down escalator.” No matter how hard they run, Rusk writes, the escalator keeps coming down. A few run so fast they reach the top, but most weary and are carried back down.

To be sure, no effort to improve housing and services for poor families should be gainsaid. Some revitalizing activity may actually prevent marginal neighborhoods from becoming ghettos. Yet there is a danger that the appeal of community revitalizing will lead to plans that leave ghettos intact by focusing exclusively on improving conditions within them for their impoverished populations. We should not be about the business of fostering self-contained ghetto communities apart from the mainstream. We should instead be trying to bring the ghetto poor into the mainstream. The critical point is that only by enabling the poor to live among the non-poor will significant, long-term improvements be made possible in the life circumstances of most impoverished families trapped in ghettos.

Experience demonstrates that community revitalizing can best be achieved through a mixed-income approach that attracts higher-income families to (formerly) poverty neighborhoods, thereby creating an incentive for private profit and investment. Like housing mobility, mixed-income development also brings with it the crucial benefit of enabling the poor to live among the non-poor. Community revitalization should thus be seen not as an opposing or alternate strategy but as a follow-on, mixed-income complement to poverty deconcentration through housing mobility.

A final objection is that my entire proposal looks like an indulgent fantasy. Don’t we clearly lack the political stomach for allowing large numbers of black families to move from inner-city ghettos to white neighborhoods? What on earth makes me think that a nation that has treated blacks the way America has through most of its history—

the way it still treats the black poor—would give a moment’s consideration to the course I am proposing? This very black ghetto issue was instrumental in shifting the political alignment of the entire country just a few decades ago, changing American character in the bargain. We remain today the uncaring nation we then became. Indeed, as this is being written the Bush administration is proposing to cut back radically on housing choice vouchers. A Gautreaux-type program would certainly be portrayed as liberal social engineering. Should it ever be seriously considered, wouldn’t some modern-day George Wallace whip up the country’s hardly dormant Negrophobia, perhaps especially easy to do at a time when working and even middle-class Americans are having a hard time?

Maybe. Still, history is full of close calls and surprises. England might have succumbed to the Nazis if Roosevelt had not dreamed up lend-lease and persuaded a reluctant, America First Congress to go along. In 1941, selective service survived by a 203 to 202 vote in the House of Representatives. Truman beat Dewey. Nixon went to China. The Soviet Union collapsed. In one decade the Civil Rights Movement ended generations of seemingly impregnable Jim Crow. In a single fair housing enactment Congress stripped historically sacred private property rights from American landowners. Even with respect to black Americans, history tells us that we can sometimes manage forward steps. Leadership is key, but we will not have a Bush in the White House forever.

(In his book *The Status Syndrome*, Sir Michael Marmot, a professor of epidemiology and public health, relates how for many years a small group of scientists carried out research on health inequalities throughout the world. Marmot calls the research “pure” because the conservative Thatcher administration could not have been more disinterested. When Tony Blair came to power in 1997, the “pure” research was taken down from the dusty shelves to which it had been relegated and a number of its recommendations became national policy.)

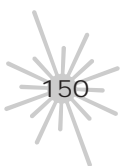
If my analysis is correct, it is ghetto fear—anxiety about inundation and antisocial conduct—that explains a good deal (though not all) of today’s white attitudes toward blacks in general, and white rejection of in-moving blacks in particular. If the ghetto were replaced, over time those fears and anxieties would be ameliorated. Gautreaux teaches that the threshold fear of “them” can be overcome by effective pre- and post-move counseling; by certification from a credible agency that the moving families will be good tenants; and, most importantly, by keeping the numbers down. No more than a handful of families a year entering any receiving community makes a different ball game.

America confronts two courses. The first is to continue to coexist with black ghettos. The second is to dismantle and transform them. The prospect along the first course, as Tocqueville prophesied, is that the evil of racial inequality will not be solved. Inte-

gration of some middle-class and affluent blacks will not change the prospect. Until the vast proportion of black Americans is securely middle-class, says the noted sociologist Herbert J. Gans, so long will whites continue to treat middle-class blacks as surrogates for the poor who might move in behind them. So long as black ghettos exist, threatening inundation should there be a break in any neighborhood's dike, most white Americans will fear the entry of blacks, any blacks, into their communities. And so long as that is the case, America's "most formidable evil" will continue to afflict the nation.

The other part of Tocqueville's prophecy—result in disaster—is less certain. Yet so long as we continue to tolerate the black ghetto, the prospect is for continuation of the two unequal societies described by the Kerner Report, and continued fear of blacks by white Americans. As long as that fear persists, whites will continue to treat black Americans as the feared Other. They are likely to continue to act fearfully and repressively, possibly to incarcerate still more black Americans in still more prisons. In that event, the Toqueville prophecy of disaster may indeed become the American reality.

The alternative is to dismantle our black ghettos and replace them wherever possible with mixed-income communities, thereby to lessen the fear and the fearful conduct they generate. Nothing can bring that about overnight, and any approach will be fraught with difficulty and uncertainty. But a national Gautreaux mobility program is a sensible way to begin a task that we postpone at our peril.



# APPENDICES

Detailed appendices to this Conference Report are available at PRRAC's website, [www.prrac.org](http://www.prrac.org), or [www.prrac.org/projects/housingmobilityreport.php](http://www.prrac.org/projects/housingmobilityreport.php).

**Appendix A: State-funded Housing Voucher Programs**

**Appendix B: State, Local, and Federal Laws Prohibiting Source-of-Income Discrimination**

**Appendix C: Third National Conference on Housing Mobility Participant Contact List**

**Appendix D: Annotated Bibliography of Housing Mobility Resources**







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