

2007 NAHRO AWARDS

AGENCY AWARDS OF MERIT IN HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

ADMINISTRATIVE INNOVATION

OUTREACH SPECIALIST

1. **SUMMARY OF PROGRAM:** To streamline vendor information, increase vendor participation and de-concentrate highly saturated voucher areas within the city of Fort Worth, a new administrative position was created to address each of the problems listed above. **The Outreach Specialist** has face-to-face contact on a daily basis with both Fort Worth Housing Authority (FWHA) staff but more importantly with those property owners with rental properties in the Fort Worth area. The Outreach Specialist has been successfully marketing and promoting the FWHA voucher program to those individuals with the means to purchase properties in low voucher participation areas in an effort to de-concentrate.
2. **DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM:** In the fourth quarter of 2005, the Fort Worth Housing Authority determined that the need to expand our outreach and education program to provide our voucher holders more choices for safe housing within the city limits of Fort Worth had reached the point of necessary action. Statistical analysis had presented very high numbers of voucher participants within certain zip codes within the city.

In an effort to de-concentrate high minority, voucher saturated areas, a conclusion was reached to create the Outreach Specialist position to a.) Target areas of low or no voucher participation for inclusion in the voucher program, b.) Educate new and existing property owners about the FWHA Housing Choice Voucher Program and, c.) Market the importance of this program to those unfamiliar or who had a negative preconceived misconception about the program and the participants. In May of 2006, a candidate was selected and the Outreach Specialist began the education process.

Since inception of the Outreach Specialist position, FWHA has been directing all new property owners interested in participating in the voucher program to register to attend a "Landlord Orientation" prior to listing their property on the availability list provided to FWHA clients. The prospective property owner is instructed at the time of registration what documents will be necessary for participation and asked to provide them the day of their visit. The response has been very favorable, with responses such as "this orientation should be mandatory" coming from new property participants after each orientation without fail. This face-to-face with prospective property owners also gives FWHA the opportunity to "recruit" property owners interested in purchasing more properties to take a look at those areas we have designated as "low saturation" areas as well as promote participation in our Shelter Plus Care program.

3. **THE RESULTS/SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM:** The success of this program/position evidences itself every day. Since inception of the Outreach Specialist position, FWHA has welcomed one hundred and nine (109) new property owners to the voucher program with numerous others currently in the process. The efficiency of the program has increased as a whole because new

landlords are educated in the process from the beginning and are more knowledgeable about what to expect and what is expected. FWHA has increased the number of "Passed" initial inspections, which in turn makes the move-in process much timelier and less frustrating for all involved. FWHA has dramatically reduced the number of telephone calls and complaints regarding delays, misunderstandings, and general lack of knowledge regarding program operation. Even the FWHA Accounting Department has seen the benefits of the program as the problems decrease regarding returned mail and/or monies due to address, banking and/or contact information changes not being received or processed in a timely manner. This will be an ongoing process as we reach each new goal.

4. **THE COST/FINANCING OF THE PROGRAM:** The cost of this program is the annual cost of the Outreach Specialist position (\$32,560.00). That cost, however, is offset by the efficiency of the program itself primarily seen in the Inspection and Accounting Departments. Fewer repeat trips for re-inspections are quite a savings. Less time spent on the phone for staff members in the Assisted Housing Department explaining the moving process or listening to complaints regarding landlord issues produces a savings. Time and money saved in postage, cancellation of checks paid in error, re-issuance of new checks have all contributed toward off-setting the cost of this position.

5. **INNOVATION:** Having one central person for property owners to contact regarding changes, issues, and concerns has made our vendors feel more valued and our clients less confused about the moving process. Most importantly, we are making face-to-face contact with those property owners in the city of Fort Worth who are interested in working with the Fort Worth Housing Authority to improve and provide housing in de-concentrated areas of the city.