

2007 NAHRO AWARDS

AGENCY AWARDS OF MERIT IN HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

ADMINISTRATIVE INNOVATION

TENANT MEETINGS

1. SUMMARY OF PROGRAM: The administration of the Fort Worth Housing Authority (FWHA) chose an innovative response to a rising number of complaints about a perceived increase in crime, truancy, and problems of assimilation between local residents and recent evacuees from hurricane Katrina. The FWHA arranged meetings with tenants at their complex that focused on the specific responsibilities of the housing authority, the landlord, and the tenants which allowed a discussion of the recent problems within the context of responsibilities and solutions. The success of these meetings led the FWHA to continue these meetings on a proactive basis throughout the community.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM: The FWHA and a private developer had partnered to create a high quality complex that housed a mix of full rent and assisted housing recipients. The FWHA had begun receiving complaints from tenants that indicated a rise in crime, possible gang activity, and a general dissatisfaction with the quality of the residence. Problems at school, particularly between the newly arrived students from New Orleans and the established student population, had spilled into the complex causing confrontations between residents. After a meeting with the owner of the complex in June 2006, the FWHA decided that there was a need for a meeting with all parties (Housing Authority, Landlord and Tenants) to remind everyone of their shared responsibilities and within this context address client issues, program violations, and complaints.

The FWHA created a presentation based on an interlocking triangle of responsibilities that emphasized that the success of the program depended on mutual cooperation. The objective of this approach was to explain the limitations and responsibilities of each party, to remind the residents of the rules of the HCVP program they had agreed to follow, and to create a context to discuss how to address violations of this agreement. Three one - hour meetings were arranged to accommodate the schedules of all the clients at the complex. The FWHA demonstrated the importance of the meeting by being represented by the Director of Assisted Housing, the Housing Operations Administrator and Supervisor, the Inspection Supervisor and the Inspector assigned to the complex, the Administrator of Special Programs, the Safety and Crime Management Coordinator, and the Social Service Coordinator. The landlord was represented by the Vice-President of Property Management, the leasing agents, and resident managers. Over 72% of the residents attended. The Housing Operations Administrator and the Safety and Crime Management Coordinator gave presentations followed by questions and comments from the tenants. Residents were encouraged to ask questions and make comments of a general

nature directly to administrators and managers of the program. Most importantly, residents had an opportunity to meet with program supervisors and apartment managers after the meeting to address individual concerns.

Because of the success of these meetings and the obvious interest of the residents, this program is being planned throughout the city at all of the multi-family complexes. Attendance exceeded 80% at a neighboring complex. Planning for the meetings took approximately one month and will assist all Housing Choice Voucher and Shelter+Care clients residing in multi-family complexes. The apartment complexes are cooperating by providing space and refreshments for the clients.

3. THE RESULTS/SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM: The large turn-out and commitment shown by all parties allowed the apartment management to successfully request additional attention from the City of Fort Worth Police Criminal Response Team. According to the Safety and Crime Management Coordinator, there has been a noticeable drop in reports of criminal activity. The FWHA has seen a reduction in the number of requests to re-locate and the apartment managers have reported a decrease in complaints and an increase in resident satisfaction. Apartment managers are enthusiastic about the program and feel that it helps them to relate to resident concerns. Because of the success of the program and high level of interest of the residents (72% attendance) the program is on-going. Any agency that is willing to provide the commitment to meeting with their clients on a pro-active bases should be able to replicate this program.

4. THE COST/FINANCING OF THE PROGRAM: The cost of the program was limited to the expense of mailing invitation letters to the residents using the FWHA database and providing attendees with handouts (agenda, tenant responsibility forms, and community-based policing information.) FWHA employees adjusted their schedules to attend and the apartment complex contributed the use of their community room and refreshments.

5. INNOVATION: The FWHA is using an innovative approach to a common problem. By pro-actively meeting with residents at their complex before a crisis, by creating a context of shared responsibility, and by demonstrating a commitment to the residents and management of multi-family complexes, the FWHA has shown its willingness to partner with its clients to explore cooperative solutions. The one-on-one contact between clients, apartment managers, and directors of the FWHA promotes a climate of trust and cooperation while avoiding quick solutions and unrealistic expectations. The re-emphasis of the guidelines of the Housing Choice Voucher Program reminds clients of their responsibilities and possible consequences of violations in a non-threatening atmosphere. Clients left the meeting empowered rather than chastised.