



## Bringing Education Home: **Housing Authorities and Learning Initiatives**

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Cover photo: YTP student at Seattle Housing Authority's Jackson Park study center  
Photo courtesy of Molly Magee, volunteer with Catholic Community Services Youth Tutoring Program

# Bringing Education Home

Education is essential to transcending poverty and achieving economic mobility.

Over the past few decades, however, the achievement gap between the affluent and poor has increased. The negative impacts of poverty on educational outcomes are well documented: low-income individuals—including those living in assisted housing—have slower cognitive development, higher school dropout rates, and lower levels of college enrollment and completion. These effects last beyond childhood and adolescence, adversely affecting career and income prospects, and hampering individuals’ ability to escape poverty.

Children from low-income families have the same educational needs as their wealthier peers, but they face additional barriers and greater challenges in achieving positive outcomes. Strained finances often cannot be stretched to adequately meet basic needs such as shelter, food, and healthcare, making it difficult to focus attention or resources on learning. Housing and job insecurity may mean frequent moves and a lack of continuity at school. Additionally, the poor often find themselves with limited access to high quality community services and resources, including successful schools.

Across the country, housing authorities provide millions of low-income families with the security and stability of affordable housing, enabling them to better meet their basic needs. Beyond shelter, these agencies strive to provide opportunities and resources that support residents in becoming self-sufficient and moving out of assisted housing into the economic mainstream.

Recognizing the critical role that education plays in achieving this goal, housing authorities are identifying ways in which they can leverage the housing assistance they provide to improve educational outcomes for

their residents. They are broadly involved in education-related initiatives, from birth through high school and beyond, that will equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and the confidence needed to succeed in life. Many housing authorities have programs that address needs along nearly the entire learning continuum, from cradle to career, while others have targeted their efforts on a subset of age groups.

Housing authorities are not doing this work alone. They are aligning with and adding value to local approaches taken by schools, educators, nonprofits, and government agencies. Such partnerships allow for streamlined, holistic efforts that combine expertise and resources to greater effect. These agencies are drawing on the lessons of prior efforts while incorporating data collection and analysis in current programs that will enable them to review and refine efforts going forward. In this way, they are stretching limited funding by ensuring their services are efficient and effective, targeted, and sustainable.

While involvement in education initiatives depends on local circumstances, there are some common strategies and approaches that housing authorities are employing. As explored in this publication, these include early intervention and parental engagement (A Strong Start, 2); partnerships with school districts and place-based programs (Partnering for Success, 9); tutoring and workforce development (Opportunities Outside of School, 16); and emphasizing the value of education through requirements and incentives (Creating a Culture of Success, 27).

The profiles on the following pages highlight just a handful of these programs and services through which housing authorities are strengthening neighborhoods and improving lives. By further establishing themselves as a platform for educational success, housing authorities are bringing education home.

Instructor assisting a student with writing and penmanship through The Bridge Project in Denver





# A Strong Start

## Early Childhood Education and Parental Engagement

Early childhood is a time of rapid development that sets the stage for future learning throughout a child’s life. Unfortunately, disparities in cognitive, social, behavioral, and health outcomes by income group appear as early as nine months of age and grow larger by the time a child is two. Low-income infants and toddlers score lower on cognitive assessments and are less likely to receive positive behavior ratings than those from higher-income families. Additional risk factors such as belonging to racial/ethnic minority groups and having mothers with low education levels are correlated with even larger disparities.<sup>1</sup> Early differences grow larger through age five and persist thereafter. Preschool language, attention, and math skills predict achievement at the end of elementary school and even into high school.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, all is not lost for the more than 900,000 children under the age of six living in a public housing or a Housing Choice Voucher household nationwide. Research shows that interventions in early childhood can have lasting, often sizeable, benefits on areas such as cognition and academic achievement, behavioral and emotional competencies, educational progression and attainment, child maltreatment, health, delinquency and crime, social welfare program use, and labor market success.<sup>3</sup> Children from lower-income families generally gain more from pre-school education than do children from families with more means. Further, cost-benefit analyses have shown that the value of the benefits of such programs is very large relative to the costs.<sup>4</sup>

Seeing the potential of this approach to improving children’s outcomes in school and in life, housing authorities are choosing to invest in their very youngest residents. Eighty percent of CLPHA members responding to a survey on education initiatives have some sort of relationship with pre-kindergarten education, largely by means of Head Start and Early Head Start centers located on their properties. Because much of the variation in early childhood abilities is thought to be explained by differences in early parenting, many housing authorities have sought to strengthen their efforts with a component that actively engages parents as partners in fostering their children’s learning and growth. These programs empower parents to help their children succeed, as well as to address their own needs. The best place to start is at the beginning, and housing authorities are doing just that.

<sup>1</sup> [www.childtrends.org/Files/Child\\_Trends-2009\\_07\\_10\\_ES\\_DisparitiesEL.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2009_07_10_ES_DisparitiesEL.pdf)  
<sup>2</sup> <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Barnett%20Paper.pdf>  
<sup>3</sup> [www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND\\_MG341.sum.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG341.sum.pdf)  
<sup>4</sup> [www.psychologicalscience.org/journals/pspi/pspi\\_10\\_2.pdf](http://www.psychologicalscience.org/journals/pspi/pspi_10_2.pdf)

A Smart from the Start family “goes fishing”



## Boston, Massachusetts

### SMART FROM THE START

The Boston Housing Authority’s (BHA) education initiative, Pathway to Success, advances outcomes for residents by focusing on transitional periods along the education continuum that often pose challenges to low-income families. The initiative proposes strategic interventions at these risk points, starting from the earliest age to build a strong foundation for future learning.

Under Pathways to Success, BHA continues to participate in citywide efforts to align opportunities and service needs. For the past several years, foundations, nonprofits, and public agencies in Boston have partnered through the Boston Opportunity Agenda to create a seamless, educational pipeline for the city’s youth and children. They are combining their resources and expertise around this single agenda.

In 2008, Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino and community partners launched Smart from the Start, a comprehensive family support and school readiness project for families with young children living in and

around public housing developments. The Boston Housing Authority was a founding partner of the program, which expands and strengthens early learning opportunities for low-income children from birth to age five, and promotes parents’ roles as their children’s first teachers.

“Smart from the Start was one of our first steps toward a broader, citywide initiative called Thrive in 5, which strives to ensure that all young children and their families receive the services and support they need, prior to kindergarten, to be ready for success in school and in life,” says Mayor Menino.

Smart from the Start’s strengths-based, empowerment approach gives the city’s most vulnerable families the tools, resources, and support they need to break cycles of generational poverty and chronic school underachievement. The program’s Executive Director, Cherie Craft, asserts that “By focusing on strengths and resiliency rather than employing a deficit-based/medical model that that attempts to fix ‘what’s

Smart Class of 2012-2013



- Smart from the Start currently serves nearly 4,000 low-income children, school-aged siblings, and adult caregivers.
- Smart families have incomes in the lowest 10 percent in the city.
- At the time of enrollment, 77 percent of caregivers are unemployed.
- 77 percent of enrolled children show increased language and literacy skills.
- 76 percent of enrolled children display positive social/emotional growth.
- 92 percent of participating caregivers increased the amount they read to their children.
- 80 percent of participating caregivers have set and achieved goals for their own self-sufficiency while engaged in the program.

wrong,’ Smart from the Start is able to nurture trusting relationships with families who have been reluctant to engage in traditional social services.”

Facilitated in five languages, Smart programming supports every member of the family. Smart staff members work with parents to select activities they feel will best support them in helping their children to achieve school readiness. The range of services includes: prenatal outreach and education, Welcome Baby Home Visiting, Play-to-Learn Groups, school readiness socialization groups, and parenting workshops.

Additionally, the staff works with parents to help them set and achieve their own goals, the pursuit of which is aided by access to GED, ESOL, and financial literacy classes. Smart from the Start also provides referrals and teaches families how to utilize existing local resources and services such as libraries, which including crisis intervention and family stabilization services.

Smart from the Start currently serves nearly 4,000 low-income children, school-aged siblings, and adult caregivers from families with incomes in the lowest 10 percent in the city. At the time of enrollment, 77 percent of Smart parents and caregivers are unemployed, and their average household income is approximately \$7,000 in a city where the median income is \$60,000.

The majority of families enrolled in Smart from the Start are BHA public housing residents or recipients of Section 8 subsidies, and Smart programming is located either on BHA property or within close proximity to ensure that families have easy access to programs and services. Over the past four years, Smart from the Start has expanded from three program sites in three neighborhoods to 15 program sites across seven neighborhoods. The program works closely with BHA to coordinate outreach, family engagement, classes, support services, special events, and resource development.

“We are invested in preparing our public housing youth for a future of educational and academic success and Smart from the Start does just that,” says BHA Administrator Bill McGonagle. “We want our kids to be healthy, happy, ready and excited to start kindergarten when they are five years old and recognize that the foundation must be built very early on and involve the whole family.”

Since the program’s launch, data has been collected to measure impact in three areas of focus: community change, family change, and the developmental progress/school readiness of participating children. Independent evaluation studies have shown that 77 percent of Smart children show increased language and literacy skills, and 76 percent display positive social/emotional growth.

Prior to joining Smart from the Start, 77 percent of families had not known that talking to their baby increased language acquisition, but 92 percent of caregivers now read more to their children. Additionally, nearly 80 percent have set and achieved goals for their own self-sufficiency while engaged in the program. Results will soon be available from a 2012 evaluation measuring the school readiness of the first significant cohort of children entering kindergarten.

“When I see the improvements in these kids’ lives,” says Mayor Menino, “I know we did the right thing.” ■

# Akron, Ohio

EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE



Children join the band at “Concert in the Park,” an ECI Family Outreach Event

Building on its vision that a spirit of community and adequate resources will empower residents to become educated, healthy, and self-sufficient, the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA) launched its Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) in 2007. ECI was developed to improve the school readiness of AMHA’s youngest residents, and it reflects evidence that starting early and engaging parents are key ingredients.

“ECI helped me find myself!” says Dorsanya, who has been participating in the program for two years. Dorsanya had a weak support system when she enrolled as a teen mother, but the assistance and encouragement of her ECI Child and Family Partners have helped her become a confident parent who knows her neighbors and is familiar with community resources. Having learned the benefits of early childhood education she has enrolled her two children in Head Start. To ensure the family’s sound future, Dorsanya is currently studying nursing at the University of Akron, and her fiancé is completing GED preparatory courses.

AMHA’s leadership and staff strongly believe that all children deserve high-quality early care, education, and support services that ensure comprehensive healthy development. With this in mind, ECI is designed to maximize scarce resources and provide programs that work directly with children and their caregivers. The program also links families to community resources that provide a continuum of care and address children’s developmental needs. ECI operates under the premise that investments in early childhood intervention programs provide a foundation for success later in life and deliver long-term economic benefits—producing returns on investment up to \$17.07 for every \$1 spent.<sup>1</sup>

Through the Early Childhood Initiative, AMHA offers early care and education to its 3,000 children under age five—nearly 10 percent of the county’s children in this age group. In FY 2012, 770 individuals participated in ECI. More than 500 attended at least one monthly event, and over 400 home visits were conducted.

<sup>1</sup> Karoly, A., M. R. Kilburn, and J. S. Cannon. (2005). Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results, Future Promise. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation



Through four program components—Home Visitation Services, Parents as Teachers™ (PAT), Family Outreach Events, and a Maternal Depression Program—AMHA offers early care and education to its 3,000 children under age five. Through personal home visits, including the evidence-based PAT curriculum, ECI works with parents to help them ensure their child’s successful development. ECI also offers assessments for early-detection of health and developmental delays. When necessary, referrals are made for further evaluation and treatment.

Support, offered through home visitation, helps families meet basic needs and encourages work toward economic self-sufficiency. Monthly Family Outreach Events foster a sense of community around the importance of early childhood and provide the opportunity for families to learn more about early childhood programs and services offered by agency partners. Finally, the Maternal Depression Program administers reliable assessments for detection and referral and offers monthly support groups, “Mom-ME Time,” for at-risk mothers. To tie it all together, ECI has a solid model in place to evaluate the program, which it carries out with the assistance of evaluators at the University of Akron.

Other services are provided through referrals to valued community partners. The comprehensive content areas recommended by the State of Ohio for early childhood and utilized by Summit County's First Things First approach are incorporated into the programming. These content areas—early care and education, family support, health, and special needs—provide a framework to ensure all the needs of the children are addressed within their environments. By coordinating resources already existing

within the county infrastructure, ECI is able to provide comprehensive services to meet each developmental need.

ECI’s main role is to connect with families to build relationships of trust and empower parents like Dorsanya to be their child’s first and most important teacher.

Based on focus group feedback, “the critical variable that seems to attract the parents to PAT is the very strong bond that [they have] developed with the AMHA home visitor,” says program evaluator Dr. Peter Leahy of the University of Akron. “Parents highly value the relationship they have developed, value the information and instruction they provide and rely upon them in times of need.”

Throughout Dorsanya’s participation in the program, ECI Child & Family Partners have noticed significant increase in the parents’ engagement with their children, both in home visits and at events. Child & Family Partner Kari Sansone stresses that parent engagement is vital to children’s development: “It helps the kids learn and feel confident, loved, important, and plays a role in children reaching [PAT] milestones without delays.” Dorsanya’s children, according to Sansone, “always hit their milestones on time.” ■



# New York, New York

NYCELL

Committed to preparing residents for a lifetime of learning, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) recognizes the importance of starting early and engaging parents. One of the ways it promotes this aim is through the New York City Early Literacy Learners (NYCELL) program, a joint initiative between NYCHA, the Office of the Mayor of the City of New York, and the New York City Department of Education (DOE). Now in its seventh year, the initiative fosters positive parent-child interactions that strengthen toddlers’ pre-reading and language skills so they can enter school ready to learn and succeed.

“NYCHA goes far beyond housing to enrich the lives of residents and offer real, tangible opportunities by facilitating access to social and educational services,” says NYCHA Chairman John Rhea. “We remain committed to investing in NYCHA programs like NYCELL, which touch the lives of hundreds of public housing families and ensure long-term success for our young children.”

NYCHA and the DOE’s efforts extend beyond preschool and childcare. Designed for families with children aged one to three years and nine months, NYCELL provides parents and caregivers with the knowledge and skills they need to help their children become active learners. Participants receive two hours of programming twice per week for 12 weeks. Three cycles are held between October and May at each of five NYCHA Community Centers across the city.

Sharon Myrie, NYCHA Executive Vice President for Community Programs and Development (left); Florelle Diver and son Jackson; and Deborah Taylor, DOE Liaison at the Department of Youth and Community Development

Child and Family Partner Lindsey Klucar helps children with arts and crafts at an ECI Family Outreach Event



NYCHA has served approximately 1,300 families since the NYCELL program began in 2005. A 2012 evaluation found that the majority of families learned to use four of the seven listed literacy activities. A full 100 percent reported using the activities with their child at least several times per week, while 98 percent indicated using the take-home materials (toys and books) at least several times per week.

Leading the charge are NYCELL's Literary Associates. Evaluated and hired by the Department of Education, these educational facilitators have a background in early childhood education and development, and they participate in professional development sessions with licensed educators. Associates lead a range of learning activities with parents and their children such as reading readiness strategies geared towards developing speaking, listening, pre-reading, and pre-writing skills.

The program teaches and encourages a range of activities that families can replicate at home that include: reading time, finger plays, conversation, singing, identifying street signs, and name recognition. NYCELL families also receive materials and resources to encourage at-home learning experiences, such as age-appropriate books and educational toys.

“The overarching message of this program is you are your child’s first teacher,” says D’Andra Van Heusen-Thomas, Manager of Educational Service for NYCHA. “Without even realizing it, parents create fantastic teachable moments simply by talking to their children and naming people, places and things. But, there’s this whole other universe of written language that parents can get their children excited about by reading to and with their children.”

Jennifer Martinez participated in two cycles of the NYCELL program with her two-year-old son at NYCHA's Melrose Houses in the Bronx. “I was a young mother. I didn’t have experience in the things young children need to thrive and prepare for school,” she says. “The NYCELL program is a good thing for younger parents and low-income families who don’t have access to [other] programs.”

In addition to understanding early childhood development and advocating for your child’s education, NYCELL session topics include financial literacy, healthy eating, appropriate book selection, and storytelling techniques. NYCELL also offers a network of support and ongoing professional development for parents, and Literary Associates assist families with referrals to social service agencies, adult basic education programs, GED preparation, and ESL classes.

The program reaches out to parents or primary caregivers in or near NYCHA housing developments. NYCHA families are the program’s target participants, and the Authority aims to have 51 percent resident participation. Remaining places are available to residents of the

surrounding neighborhoods. Each NYCELL session is limited to eight families to ensure a small, hands-on atmosphere in which participants can achieve the maximum benefits of the program. NYCHA has served approximately 1,300 families since the beginning of the NYCELL program in 2005.

Evaluation by an independent research firm in January 2012 found that participants significantly improved their interactions with their young child with respect to affection, responsiveness, encouragement, and teaching. Former program participants indicated that families continued to regularly use the literacy activities, materials, and/or strategies at home with their child. Families also reported that NYCELL participation helped their child’s social and emotional development in preparing them for preschool.

More than two-thirds of respondents expressed strong positive opinions about specific experiences within the program. Ninety-one percent strongly agreed that the NYCELL program was helpful to their family and that the site was child friendly. The majority of families learned to use four of the seven listed literacy activities, including: songs (88 percent), finger play (81 percent), read alouds (74 percent), and rhymes (60 percent). A full 100 percent stated that they used the activities with their child at least several times per week, while 98 percent indicated using the take-home materials (toys and books) at least several times per week.

The program has the potential for far greater impact since past participants have indicated that they continue to use the strategies and materials they received from NYCELL with additional members of their families. “My daughter loves books to this day. I attribute her love of books and reading to the program. I have this seven-month-old baby and she sits and reads to him. She makes up stories and is storytelling,” reports one parent. ■

# Partnering for Success

## Working with Local Schools

No matter how noble their intentions, housing authorities are experts on housing and community development, not on education. Taking an education initiative to full scale requires strong partnerships with the actual experts on the issue: local school districts.

Many housing authorities have Memoranda of Understanding in place with area school districts, primarily to enable data sharing. Shared data helps both partners to identify opportunities for working together to improve students’ educational outcomes. For example, attendance records may highlight a need for truancy prevention efforts to reduce absenteeism. A housing authority may be well-situated to assist with such efforts, as it knows where students live and has regular contact with their parents. Data-sharing efforts may be broad, or they may be more focused, with a particular district (in areas where the housing authority jurisdiction encompasses multiple districts) or with a particular school.

These more focused agreements often form the basis of place-based community initiatives. Since the advent of HOPE VI and the proliferation of mixed-income and mixed-use development, housing authorities have devoted their attention not merely to the housing stock that they own and maintain but to revitalizing the communities in which they are located. As they do so, they develop a vested interest in improving the educational outcomes of the residents living in those neighborhoods. This can become part of the core revitalization strategy, as it encourages families with children to come to and stay in the neighborhood. Better schools breed residential stability and vice versa, as lower rates of mobility at the schools are associated with improved academic achievement.

How the housing authority expresses and acts on its vested interest in its neighborhood schools varies with local dynamics. The housing authority may simply advocate for a seat at the table of planning school-improvement efforts. It may build a new school for the community as part of its physical revitalization and set a specific agenda for that school. The housing authority and the school district may plan to align their resources and develop shared guiding principles and goals for their respective neighborhood revitalization efforts. The two organizations may come to see themselves as “two individuals intimately bound together to address the key challenges of one neighborhood.”<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, both seek to leverage their own resources and share their expertise in order to foster “successful students, strong families, and engaged communities.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/2012/placebasedreport.doc  
<sup>2</sup> www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/01/pdf/community\_schools.pdf



# Tacoma, Washington

## MCCARVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROJECT



McCarver Elementary School

The strategic mission of Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) is to help people succeed not just as tenants but as parents, students, and wage earners. THA wants the families it houses to prosper, and for their time with the housing authority to be transforming and temporary. It wants this especially for the children. School success is part of this transformation. Accordingly, THA has undertaken its Education Project.

“The purpose of THA’s Education Project is to find out how a public housing authority can help the children it houses succeed in school and help improve schools that serve its communities. If this project is effective, its strategies will be instructive for thousands of public housing authorities and school districts and their community partners,” explains Michael Mirra, THA’s Executive Director.

One of the components of the Education Project centers around McCarver Elementary School, in Tacoma’s Hilltop Neighborhood. At McCarver, 99.5 percent of students are very poor. Student turnover over the last four years has ranged from 100 to 179 percent, reflecting the housing instability of poverty. The school has more homeless students than any other in the city.

### Additional Elements of the THA - Tacoma Public Schools Partnership

- Plans are underway to locate Head Start classrooms at two THA public housing communities.
- AmeriCorps volunteers at community computer labs provide afterschool tutoring.
- THA receives hundreds of surplus books from the school district and distributes them to residents through the “Reach Out and Read” model.
- The State of Washington administers a College Bound Scholarship program that makes post-secondary schooling affordable for every eligible low-income child that signs up by the end of the eighth grade year. THA now enrolls effectively 100 percent of its eighth graders every year.

In the first year of the McCarver Elementary School Project, THA used housing assistance to stabilize 49 families with 76 children who attended the school and were experiencing homelessness or whose families were at imminent risk of experiencing homelessness. In order to receive this assistance, families are expected to keep their children, who represent 20 percent of the school’s students, enrolled in McCarver. Parents must both commit to active involvement in their children’s education (as defined by the school) and develop an individual plan for their own education and employment. THA placed two case managers in an office at the school to facilitate interaction and support, as they help participants identify needs and goals, provide counseling, and make connections to resources.

Further, THA has leveraged its housing dollars for commitments from the school district to reform on teacher quality and curriculum. The school culture will be transformed as it adopts the Primary Years International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, hoping to help its students feed into the already established IB middle and high school in the area.

Dr. Carla Santorno, Superintendent of Tacoma Public Schools commented, “We appreciate the partnership with the Tacoma Housing Authority and the important work being done with the McCarver students and their families. What we’re confirming is what we’ve always suspected—that school is more difficult for kids from families forced to move often due to economic and other life circumstances. Not every school can teach exactly the same things at the same time on every subject. So bouncing around from school to school with breaks in between means some kids don’t get that solid foundation of learning concepts that build on each other. For these kids in the Housing Authority program at McCarver, the stability they’re experiencing could mean they will experience huge academic excesses that otherwise might pass them by.”

After one year of operation, the McCarver program is working. Housing outcomes clearly improved, as all 49 families accepted into the program have been stabilized in their own homes. The program and its community partners have also provided other types of assistance to participating families, such as food, clothing, toys, utility subsidies, furniture, bedding, and household items. Overall, the annual turnover rate for the school as a whole declined from 107 percent in 2010-2011 to 97 percent in 2011-2012.

“This program has helped me and my daughter tremendously,” says single parent Shandel Clinton, who no longer faces frequent moves as

she struggles to make ends meet. Her daughter is on the right academic track, and Shandel has been able to pursue her own goals that will position her to provide for her family. “Having a support system...has shown that there are people who care if I succeed in life...actually giving me the opportunity to be in my own stable home and stable environment all while enrolled at Everest College as a Medical Assistant.” The program provides parents with motivation, support, tools and resources to improve their lives and livelihoods. Since joining the program, two parents have gotten their GED, one completed an associate’s degree, and two received professional certification. Twenty are now employed, and their monthly income has increased by about \$100 on average.

Further, as observed by a McCarver staff member, “For the parents that are really truly engaged in the Program, the kids are showing growth in their academics.” Available data show that in the first year of the program, there have been fewer suspensions, an increase in attendance, increased parent engagement, and signs of both academic and behavioral progress for students. Teachers report that the students in the program made significant gains in social skills, maturity, learning skills, and self-confidence. This year, twenty-six of the students in the program received school awards; one was named student of the year. While the academic data from one year is just a preliminary indicator, important measures of student academic growth are promising. Program students made substantial progress in reading, showing more than three times the gain of students in similar schools and comparison groups.

As intended, the McCarver program has eliminated a major source of stress on its families—housing instability—and has succeeded in providing additional supports. With some of their burdens relaxed, parents have turned their attention to improving their economic standing and becoming more involved in their children’s schooling, which has helped better school performance. Just one year has made all the difference for participating THA families and for the McCarver Elementary School, and further gains are expected as the agency continues to partner with the Tacoma School District on this and other elements of the agency’s Education Project. ■



A mural created by the children in the Eastside Terrace after-school programs under the guidance of artist Mauricio Robalino  
Photo courtesy of William Wright Photography



# King County, Washington

EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Through its housing programs, the King County Housing Authority (KCHA) provides 20,000 children with a place to call home. These children live in some of the poorest, most at-risk households in the region with annual family incomes that average \$18,000. Almost 70 percent are minority, and many are children of refugees and immigrants, with roughly half living in homes where English is not spoken proficiently. More than 50 percent of these households were homeless prior to receiving housing assistance.

As a regional housing authority, KCHA's operations extend across 17 school districts. These districts range from high poverty communities to some of the strongest school districts in the nation.

KCHA has begun to review its housing programs and policies through the lens of educational outcomes. If the ultimate measure of success for KCHA programs is improved academic and life prospects for these low-income children, what should these housing programs look like? How can housing resources be most effectively deployed to influence educational outcomes? How does KCHA integrate these values into the core mission of the Housing Authority and convey them to staff and program participants?

In attempting to answer these questions, KCHA is developing an array of responses intended to significantly improve the likelihood of educational and life success for the children it houses. These interrelated approaches include: 1) assisting families who wish to live in high-opportunity areas in securing housing and successfully navigating local school systems; 2)

encouraging classroom stability by counseling families on the importance of not disrupting their children's education by moving during the school year; 3) rapidly rehousing families who become homeless; and 4) creating place-based partnerships between the Housing Authority, local schools, families, and service providers in three neighborhoods where significant concentrations of children live in KCHA-assisted housing and where the Authority has developed extensive on-site early learning and after-school facilities and programs.

These partnerships are initially focused on achieving grade level competency in English for all students by the end of third grade through a mix of strategies that include early learning interventions, culturally competent parental engagement, and close coordination between schools and after-school programs.

Close collaboration between school systems and the Housing Authority holds significant promise as an approach to improving educational outcomes for the region's poorest children. These partnerships and the joint initiatives they support are built on a foundation of extensive data sharing and analysis. Data is essential for assessing baseline performance, developing intervention strategies, tracking progress, and evaluating what works.

"KCHA provides stable housing for over 20,000 children in our community. Ensuring that these kids have an opportunity to succeed in school and in life is among our most critical priorities as an organization. Our children are our community's most precious asset and are integral

to our region's economic future," says KCHA Executive Director Stephen Norman. "Given the considerable barriers so many of them face in achieving success in school, it only makes sense that we partner with school districts and provide the programs and support necessary to help them prosper."

KCHA has entered into FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) compliant data sharing agreements with the Kent, Highline, and Bellevue school districts. Data sharing agreements with additional districts are anticipated as these efforts expand.

"The Kent School District believes that by working together with KCHA we can accelerate our students' academic achievement and school success while building stronger, more culturally relevant partnerships with parents and families," says Dr. Edward Lee Vargas, Kent School District Superintendent. "We know that these data sharing agreements are a most effective way of helping us, together, build a safety net of increased and enhanced learning for our kids while strengthening considerably the power of partnerships between the home and school."

KCHA is incorporating voluntary parental consent for the sharing of academic information with after-school and supportive service providers into annual lease renewals, and both cohort and individual outcomes will be tracked on an ongoing basis.

"The information we obtain will form the foundation of the programs and activities we provide to young people to help them achieve academic and lifelong success," says Mike Heinisch, Executive Director of Kent Youth and Family Services, the after-school provider serving more than 900 students at several communities in the East Hill neighborhood of Kent.

The breadth and the variety of strategies being explored offers the opportunity to identify and document key ways in which housing policy changes and program initiatives can successfully influence educational outcomes. KCHA is exploring ongoing partnerships with the philanthropic community and educational research firms to create a structured research and evaluation framework for these initiatives. It is anticipated that individual cohorts will need to be tracked for at least five years to assess the lasting effects of educational gains.

The most immediate intended outcome for this initiative is empowered families and increased prospects of academic and life success for the region's poorest and most at-risk children. For the Housing Authority, it is intended to reframe KCHA's mission to incorporate consideration of educational and life success goals for youth into housing program design and execution.

Over time, these approaches are also intended to help transform how multiple institutions and

systems—school districts, early learning programs, housing authorities, and nonprofit community-based providers—communicate and coordinate on the policy and planning level, share and use data, and deliver services to low-income households. For KCHA's community partners this initiative will challenge them to improve core internal competencies around educational issues and to improve the delivery of culturally competent educational support. ■

Photos courtesy of William Wright Photography





# Washington, DC

CHOICE NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE



DC Housing Enterprises, the nonprofit development subsidiary of the District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA), recently closed a \$12.1 million loan for Educare, a new school that will offer a holistic and research-oriented, best practices approach towards education for 175 students from low-income households, ages six weeks to five years old. DCHE provided New Market Tax Credits to the Educare DC project, which also provided Ward 7 with new job opportunities for low-income District residents.

For decades, the District of Columbia’s Kenilworth-Parkside neighborhood has faced many of the same problems endemic to high-poverty communities around the country: struggling schools, little access to capital, high unemployment, poor housing, persistent crime, and other interrelated challenges.

In 2010, the Obama Administration launched its Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative in recognition that these interconnected challenges could only be tackled effectively if federal agencies tore down their silos and started working together—and in concert with local community leaders—to provide interconnected, place-based solutions.

The place-based approach to help neighborhoods in distress transform themselves into neighborhoods of opportunity caught fire in DC’s Kenilworth-Parkside neighborhood. Community leaders moved quickly to engage civic-minded residents and property owners to take advantage of the Administration’s desire to fund transformative programs.

When the U.S. Department of Education (ED) initiated Promise Neighborhood Grants in 2010 to support local plans to improve the educational achievement and healthy development of children, Irasema Salcido quickly applied. The CEO of three Cesar Chavez Public Charter Schools and the Principal for the school in the Kenilworth-Parkside area, Salcido formed the

DC Promise Neighborhoods Initiative (DCPNI), and it won a \$500,000 planning grant from ED.

“You could feel the energy emanating from the community, once planning began,” says Adrienne Todman, Executive Director of the DC Housing Authority (DCHA) and one of the early members of DCPNI. “When it came time for DCHA to apply for HUD’s Choice Neighborhood Grant, it was obvious that Kenilworth-Parkside was the perfect community to benefit from the Administration’s integrated approach to revitalizing neighborhoods.”

DCHA won a Choice Planning Grant to reposition Kenilworth Courts public housing in 2012, and Salcido and DCPNI joined the DCHA Principal Stakeholders Board. Both organizations have targeted the larger community, bringing several neighborhood associations and individual developers into the process.

DCPNI is focusing its work on a two-generation approach to support the children and their families—from birth through school, career and community service—to achieve the educational objectives of the community’s transformation. DCHA focuses on the housing, neighborhood, and people of Kenilworth-Parkside. Needless to say, the goals and objectives of both organizations are totally synergistic. Both DCHA and DCPNI have engaged the Urban Institute as their data/evaluation partner so data, analysis and evaluation methods, tools and outcomes can be shared.

The planning has expanded to include many other stakeholders: the District Mayor and governing Council have pledged their support

and funding, and there is active participation from the DC Public Schools and the city’s transportation, planning, recreation, and park agencies. The public-private partnership includes DCHA’s private and nonprofit development partners, the local faith-based community, leading national education nonprofits, and many others, including the National Park Service, which operates the adjacent Kenilworth Park and Aquatic Gardens.

Although the Kenilworth-Parkside community is physically isolated from the rest of the city, it has tremendous assets, current and planned. Planning efforts that have already borne fruit include Educare, a national network of state-of-the-art schools funded mostly by existing public dollars. It has just opened a \$12 million school for at-risk children and will provide direct services to 157 infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families in the Parkside Community. Near-term plans include a new health care center being built by the DC Primary Care Association, to be operated by Unity Health Care; new pedestrian bridges across the Interstate blocking the south side of the community; bike and walking trails; and a planned facility to house DC’s community college.

This year, both DCHA and DCPNI have applied for implementation grants from their federal partners, HUD and ED. Whatever the outcome, this public-private partnership focused on Kenilworth-Parkside is already transforming a community of engaged, civic-minded residents and inspired leaders. ■

Educare



Cesar Chavez Public Charter School, Parkside Campus





# Opportunities Outside of School

## Tutoring and Workforce Development

Education is most often thought of in terms of schooling, but significant learning occurs outside of school time, whether for a student who is out of school for the day or for one who has already exited the formal schooling system. Housing authorities, along with their community partners, provide the setting for such learning to occur. Ninety-five percent of CLPHA members surveyed are involved with after-school tutoring and/or workforce development programs for their residents. These are the two most common education-related activities among survey respondents. These types of activities likely earn their popularity because of their efficacy and the opportunity for the housing authority to add value through its collaboration in programming.

Along almost any axis of measurement, after-school programs for school-aged children can have a positive impact on their participants' lives. They can improve academic achievement: better performance in school (as measured by achievement test scores and grades), greater on-time promotion, improved homework completion, higher school attendance, less tardiness, and lower drop-out rates. They can improve social and developmental outcomes: decreased behavioral problems; increased confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy; lower levels of depression and anxiety; and improved feelings and attitudes towards school. They can have a positive impact on prevention outcomes: avoidance of drugs and alcohol use, decreases in delinquency and violent behavior, avoidance of sexual activity,

and reduction in juvenile crime. They can even contribute to healthy lifestyles: better food choices, increased physical activity, reduction in BMI, and improved blood pressure. All of these positive outcomes are more likely if children participate in after-school programs with greater frequency and in a more sustained manner.<sup>1</sup> Co-location of the after-school programs with the child's housing facilitates such participation.

As students grow older, the benefits of out-of-school learning opportunities remain. Expanded learning opportunities for older youth, including not only traditional academic after-school tutoring but also internships, independent study in alternative settings, and wraparound support services, continue to improve academic performance, college and career preparation, social and emotional development, and health and wellness outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Cross-system alternative types of learning environments can also successfully reengage those who are among the nearly one-third of our nation's youth who do not complete high school or its equivalent and who need additional preparation to achieve more successful participation in the workforce.<sup>3</sup> This includes both alternative schools for youth who have recently dropped out and basic adult education for those who have managed for some time but are looking to build a stronger foundation for themselves.

<sup>1</sup> [www.hfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/fckeditor/File/file/OSTissuebrief10\\_summary.pdf](http://www.hfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/fckeditor/File/file/OSTissuebrief10_summary.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.aypf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/publications/AYPF\\_ELOs\\_w-cvr.pdf](http://www.aypf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/publications/AYPF_ELOs_w-cvr.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [www.nyec.org/content/documents/2-CROSS-SYS\\_COLLAB\\_brief\\_final.pdf](http://www.nyec.org/content/documents/2-CROSS-SYS_COLLAB_brief_final.pdf)

DU student volunteer tutoring two elementary school students



## Denver, Colorado

### THE BRIDGE PROJECT

The mandate of the Housing Authority of the City and County of Denver (DHA) extends well beyond the walls of its multi-family developments. Agency leaders and program staff understand that a healthy, vibrant, and thriving community enhances economic prosperity, providing the support and encouragement needed to achieve upward mobility in today's urban neighborhoods.

The agency finds that residents experience a holistic and profound transformation when they break from the cycle of poverty and attain economic mobility—and it promotes education as a prime component in achieving that goal. DHA works with community-based agencies to provide innovative programs, including numerous educational opportunities for at-risk youth. A partnership between DHA and the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work resulted in The Bridge Project, which provides hundreds of volunteers for on-site educational support to children in public housing. For 21 years, it has pursued the goal of helping children and youth living in Denver's public housing neighborhoods achieve their academic potential and graduate from high school with the resources necessary to succeed as adults.

"The Bridge Project's partnership with the Denver Housing Authority and the University of Denver is a unique illustration of the power of collaboration in our community," states Molly Calhoun, The Bridge Project's Executive Director. "Apart we could work as individuals, but together we have incredible power to engage the potential in our neighborhoods. We believe in our families, we believe in education and we're excited about the future."

The Bridge Project began in 1991 at North Lincoln Park Homes, DHA's oldest and largest public housing family development. It provides educational supports and opportunities for

The Bridge Project's tutoring programs run year-round, and summer programming closes the learning gap usually associated with the closing of schools and traditional after-school programs during the summer and holidays. During the 2011-2012 school year, 549 students were served in Bridge programs.



children from preschool to college through three primary components: after-school, summer, and scholarship programs. More than 250 volunteer college students from the University of Denver provide one-on-one tutoring, homework help, and technology education to DHA youth during the school year.

Tutoring programs run year-round, and summer programming closes the learning gap usually associated with the closing of schools and traditional after-school programs during the summer and holidays. Together with public housing employees, tutors work to address issues that can indirectly affect the well-being of the children and which can impede learning—issues such as nutrition, medical care, violence and family conflict.

Much of the program's success derives from gaining the trust and investment of children and their families as active participants. Locating The Bridge Project in the hearts of DHA neighborhoods has strengthened community networks and continues to make Bridge staff more approachable, making it easier for parents to get involved. Additionally, Bridge sites offer greater accessibility than most traditional tutoring sites, with operating hours from the afternoon into the evening. Today, the program is offered in four of DHA's family developments located throughout the city—Columbine Homes, Quigg Newton Homes, Westwood Homes, and Mariposa (formerly South Lincoln Park Homes).

During the 2011-2012 school year, 549 students were served in Bridge programs. According to a national case study, the number of hours spent at Bridge directly correlates with an increase in reading levels. An

evaluation of participants between 2004 and 2005 found that 75 percent saw an increase of at least one grade level in their reading scores. The study also shows that, compared to a national sample of peers, children who participate in Bridge programming feel more confident in their intellectual and academic abilities. The Bridge Project's benefits extend to the college volunteers who spend time tutoring and mentoring; they report increased confidence in their intelligence, academic abilities, and their future.

The Bridge Project aims to increase the graduation rates among public housing residents, and tutors from the University of Denver serve as models of educational success to which DHA youth can aspire. Scholarship programs are offered for Bridge participants to use for college or vocational training, and every high school graduate is eligible. In the fall of 2012, 63 Bridge scholarship students were enrolled in higher education programs. Over the program's history, over \$875,000 has been awarded in scholarship aid to 163 students. Notably, every Bridge scholarship recipient has been a first generation college student.

According to Ismael Guerrero, DHA Executive Director, "Education is the ultimate form of economic empowerment for our young people. The Bridge Project provides the opportunity that our kids need to elevate out of poverty and pursue their dreams." ■

<sup>1</sup> How Housing Matters: Using Public Housing to Strengthen Children's Education. CASE STUDY The Bridge Project, Denver, Colorado. Prepared by the Center for Housing Policy November 2, 2011

DU Student volunteers assist elementary school students with after-school reading at Westwood Opportunity Center



YTP student and tutor at the Jackson Park study center  
Photo courtesy of Molly Magee, volunteer with Catholic Community Services Youth Tutoring Program



# Seattle, Washington

YOUTH TUTORING PROGRAM

A bright, energetic sixth-grader, Saahid\* smiles as his tutor helps him with basic reading skills. He is confident in his ability to learn and proud of the good grades he's achieving—but this wasn't always the case. When he first entered the Youth Tutoring Program (YTP), a partnership between Seattle Housing Authority and Catholic Community Services, he was doing poorly in school. Saahid's basic skill level was evaluated, and he was matched with two tutors to guide him through a customized curriculum. Although he enjoyed the tutoring sessions and quickly mastered skills, his grades did not improve. His tutors wondered what was going on.

Through close coordination and communication with Saahid's schoolteachers, the challenges became clear. His high energy level was leading to behavioral problems in the classroom, and poor penmanship made it very difficult to grade his work. Together with Saahid's parents, YTP staff addressed the behavioral challenges and increased their

focus on his writing skills. Saahid's grades shot up, and as he began to succeed, his confidence grew. Today he is proudly excelling in school.

"It's extremely rewarding to work so closely with students and see their lives change as a result of their success," says Justin Twenter, one of YTP's volunteer tutors. "You can see their confidence grow right before your eyes, and their huge smiles when they bring back those good grades just warm your soul."

Motivated by the belief that success in education is the best pathway out of poverty for low-income children and youth, Seattle Housing Authority and Catholic Community Services are deeply committed to improving the academic achievement of students living in public housing. More than a basic tutoring or homework completion program, YTP combines individualized attention from dedicated volunteer tutors with strong coordination and communication between tutors, students, their parents, and the schools. Each year the program serves approximately 450

\*Not his real name



students in first through twelfth grades who live in six of Seattle Housing Authority's low- and mixed-income public housing communities.

More than 500 volunteer tutors provide personalized assistance and guidance. When students enter the program, their skills are assessed, they are matched with two tutors, and they work through a customized skill-building curriculum that corresponds with Washington State school standards. The emphasis on individualized attention means that learning occurs at the student's pace—tutors ensure that each student has fully mastered a suite of skills before moving on. Students often remain with the same tutors for several years, and the strong relationships built between them are another key to the program's success.

"We are extremely proud of the academic success of our students, but the real strength of our program goes far beyond grades," says Cicily Nordness, Director of Youth Services for Catholic Community Services of King County. "Studies have shown that positive adult relationships, like those between our tutors and students, not only boost academic success but also build overall confidence, allowing students to succeed in their present academics while also preparing them to make better life choices—now and for the future."

The close-knit team of tutors, student, family, school administrators, and teachers provides a strong, ongoing support system. Supervisors at each tutoring center are full-time staff, allowing them to deeply engage with students, their families, and schools. They often attend parent-teacher conferences and work with schools to support Individual Education Plans for students. This hands-on approach facilitates seamless coordination to support each student's academic growth and success over the long term.

This approach is paying off. In 2011-2012, the Youth Tutoring Program served 467 students. A recent survey found that 95 percent of the students and 96 percent of their parents saw improvements in grades and schoolwork, or maintenance of good grades, due to participation in the program. The results also indicated improvements in key skills and indicators of future academic success.

"YTP's thoughtful, personalized approach leads directly to the academic achievements of these students living in our public housing communities," says Andrew J. Lofton, Executive Director of the Seattle Housing Authority. "Most of them are graduating, going on to college, and expanding their opportunities for life-long success and self-sufficiency, which directly advances our mission. We couldn't be more proud of this program and our partnership with Catholic Community Services." ■

Top: YTP student and tutor at the Jackson Park study center  
Bottom: YTP student in Seattle Housing's High Point family community

Photos courtesy of Molly Magee, volunteer with Catholic Community Services Youth Tutoring Program

In 2011-2012, the Youth Tutoring Program served 467 students. A recent survey found that 95 percent of the students and 96 percent of their parents saw improvements in grades and schoolwork, or maintenance of good grades, due to participation in the program. The results also indicated improvements in key skills and indicators of future academic success.



Work Force College Tour 2012



# Cambridge, Massachusetts

THE WORK FORCE

Akilah Armstrong, a Work Force student since seventh grade, is building on her strengths. "I was set on becoming editor of the high school yearbook," she says of one goal that she achieved in her senior year. "I've learned how to become a better leader, and I am able to stand in front of a group of students, make them listen to me, and guide them in their work." Now in her freshman year at Bentley University in Boston, MA, Akilah credits her drive and ability to the support and guidance of the Cambridge Housing Authority's (CHA) Work Force Program.

Founded in 1984 to combat the dropout trend among Cambridge's low-income youth, The Work Force is a comprehensive educational enrichment and work-readiness program for public housing students. The program builds on students' strengths through the development of a variety of educational supports and job readiness skills, case management, and the provision of modest college scholarships.

From eighth grade through high school graduation, participants receive help at home, at school, and at work when students achieve job placements. Coordinating with local schools, the program assists students in honing their skills and focusing on the goal of higher education. The program's College Success Initiative aims to ensure that students are college-ready and prepared to graduate in the requisite two or four years.

The Work Force has homework centers at each of CHA's four site offices, providing students with a dedicated workspace, fully-equipped computer labs, internet access and learning center coordinators, and tutors to both instruct and hold students accountable to their established goals. When students turn 15, they are eligible to work in what the program calls "try-out" jobs—paid internships with local employers who are trained by The Work Force to serve as mentors. Several students have the opportunity to work at CHA's central and site offices, learning administrative skills as well as getting an inside look at what it takes to run the agency day-to-day.

- A third-party study of Work Force alumni found that:
- 94 percent had enrolled in a college or technical training program upon graduation.
  - 91 percent were either working and/or going to school at the time of the study.
  - Two-thirds no longer lived in public housing.



From the time that they enroll in the program, students engage in college preparatory activities providing exposure to admissions officers, college students, and alumni. There are trips to local and out-of-state colleges, and help with applying for financial aid and admission. Graduating seniors are all guaranteed a modest scholarship, called a “book award,” and also have the opportunity to compete for larger, achievement-based scholarships to support their post-secondary education.

“We want them to envision, from an early age, what the college experience will be like,” says Steven Swanger, CHA Director of Resident Services and founder of The Work Force. “This program helps prepare them for it academically, experientially, and socially.”

Some academic components are funded by the public schools, including a Summer Literacy Camp for rising eighth graders and a Summer College Immersion Program for students entering their senior year of high school.

“The Work Force wasn’t there to just help me when it came to academics; they helped me grow as an individual,” says Meron Teklehaimanot, a Work Force 2012 graduate. “My counselor was able to help me shed light on what was important to me. We [students] shared what was important to us and how we could protect and pursue our goals.”

A recent third-party study of Work Force alumni spoke to the overall success of the program in preparing young people for long-term personal and professional success. Fully 94 percent had enrolled in a college or technical training program upon graduation, 91 percent were either working and/or going to school at the time of the study, and two-thirds no longer lived in public housing.

“The Work Force program allows us to meet our mission of fostering self-reliance in a profound way, extending far beyond providing families a place to live,” says CHA Executive Director Greg Russ. “CHA’s role grows; as a co-investor with our families, working with students and their parents to prepare them for upcoming opportunities. Through the program we are able to present the idea of a bright future, showing our students the steps they need to take, and supporting them so they get there.”

Akilah reports that her freshman year is off to a great start. There is a lot of homework, but nothing she can’t handle. CHA is proud to say that, through The Work Force, she and fellow alumni are prepared to conquer the challenges they face and realize their goals. ■

Left: Rising eighth graders participating in The Work Force Summer Literacy Camp  
Right: Ninth grade students getting ready to conduct informational interviews at Draper Laboratories in Cambridge



# Camden, New Jersey

YOUTHBUILD



The Housing Authority of the City of Camden (HACC) knows that one size does not fit all when it comes to education. “This is especially true for at-risk youth living in HACC housing and the surrounding neighborhoods,” says HACC Executive Director Maria Marquez. That is why the agency has been proud to serve as a non-traditional educational haven for youth seeking assistance. It does so through its YouthBuild Academy, an academic and vocational training program for young adults between the ages of 17 and 24.

Locally managed by the housing authority, YouthBuild is a federally-funded program developed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to help low-income, inner-city youth obtain a skilled profession while earning their GEDs of high school diplomas. Additionally, program staff and community leaders work with participants on leadership skills, civic engagement, and asset building.

Since launching in 2003, the HACC YouthBuild Academy has accepted nearly 1,000 Camden youth who have dropped out of high school, been in the juvenile justice system, or are otherwise at risk of failing to reach key educational milestones that lead to career fulfillment.

YouthBuild students Shaquaan Hinton and Rico Cintron working on the Habitat for Humanity site



- HACC’s YouthBuild program has a retention rate of 73 percent throughout the duration of the program.
- More than 51 percent of students show an increase of two educational levels in literacy and numeracy.
- Over 64 percent of students receive their GED or high school diploma along with one of the four industry-recognized certificates.
- Once they leave the program, over 45 percent of students continue their education or are placed in employment.

A quarter of these participants come from public or subsidized housing. Through its YouthBuild program, HACC builds community resources and helps households move across poverty thresholds into the mainstream economy.

The annual program officially begins in October but accepts students throughout the year. Through classroom instruction at Camden’s YouthBuild headquarters, students work to complete their high school diploma or earn a GED. Starting in 2010, HACC YouthBuild was able to fully operate as a high school under a New Jersey Office of Attorney General Expansion Pilot program.

Students also take introductory construction classes that equip them with construction skills. “During the practical part of the course, they use these skills in the rehabilitation of affordable housing units,” says Diane Davis, Program Coordinator of HACC’s YouthBuild program. “They work on vacant apartments, primarily in the HACC developments of Ablett Village or Branch Village, so that new families can move off the waiting list and into a home.” At the culmination of their construction training, YouthBuild participants receive a certificate from the Home Builders Institute.

Over the past few years, HACC leaders have introduced additional certification tracks in culinary skills, communications technology, and medicine. These additions take into account the large local footprint of media and communications giant Comcast and an increase in the number of hospitals around the city. “We wanted to tailor the program to address that growth so that participants could take advantage of those employment opportunities,” explains Assistant Program Coordinator David Goodman.

The retention rate of 73 percent throughout the duration of the program speaks to the efforts of HACC’s YouthBuild leaders to foster a positive community in which members support each other’s successes. More than 51 percent of students show an increase of two educational levels in literacy and numeracy. Over 64 percent of students receive their GED or high school diploma along with one of the four industry-recognized certificates. Once they leave the program, over 45 percent of students continue their education or are placed in employment.

The program’s emphasis on leadership development, personal growth, and community service ensures that students leave with more than

academic qualifications and career skills. They have confidence in themselves, a sense of hope, and a network of support that will sustain them as they move forward in life.

Interest in the program continues to grow, as does the waiting list of applicants. Fortunately, in August 2012 the Department of Labor awarded HACC its third YouthBuild Grant. The \$1,021,000 will fund operations for another three years. “This grant will give us the boost we need to continue meeting the needs of our at-risk youth in ways that we might not be able to do without the YouthBuild program,” says Marquez.

She also points to a new pilot program with Habitat for Humanity that HACC hopes will lead to other funding opportunities. “This year, we have made arrangements with Habitat to provide a transitional home for six of our YouthBuild students who were without housing stability. We hope to expand this in future years. ”

Either way, with support from HACC and each other, future participants will continue to fulfill the YouthBuild motto: “Rebuilding our communities and our lives.” ■

Literacy trainer Adrienne and her class



# Chicago, Illinois

## CONTEXTUALIZED LITERACY

Low literacy levels can be a significant barrier to employment and advancement for public housing residents—but a recent pilot program implemented by the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) suggests a successful way to address this issue. By integrating literacy training into its Transitional Jobs workforce programs, the pilot helped participants raise their literacy level by an average of more than three grade levels in reading and four grade levels in math.

Because most advanced training and education programs require a ninth-grade reading level, the pilot was developed specifically for residents who read below the eighth grade level. Reviewing the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores for more than 2,000 residents, CHA found that an alarming number of adults fall into that category: 63 percent of 18-25 year olds, 61 percent of 26-40 year olds, and 73 percent of 41-61 year olds tested below an eighth grade reading level. Such low literacy levels undoubtedly hinder long term self-sufficiency.

In 2011, the Chicago Housing Authority, with funding from the Partnership for New Communities, tested four models of literacy instruction to determine what impact they had on individual literacy advancement, employment placement, and earnings. Each model used a different strategy. Two integrated computer-based technology with instructor support, and two utilized an instructor-based model. Further, two of the programs



The 94 residents who enrolled in the program completed an initial TABE test, scoring an average grade-level equivalent of 7.1 for reading and 6.7 for math. At the end of the program, average scores had increased to 10.2 in reading and 11.0 in math. Nearly 83 percent of those tested after the program maintained or increased their literacy level.

Fifty-eight participants completed the transitional jobs portion of the program, and 29 obtained unsubsidized employment, representing 70 percent of the program’s goal. In addition, nine participants earned their GED in 2011.

integrated literacy with work experience (simultaneously) while two ran the literacy program first and then placed participants into their subsidized placement. But all programs were 12 weeks in duration and used the same basic program:

- Enrollment: orientation, assessments (including TABE);
- Job Readiness Training: work behaviors and soft skills, interviewing, applications, work expectations;
- Transitional Job: placement into subsidized employment with wraparound services for workforce support;
- Post TABE: a TABE test to measure grade level at the end of the program;
- Placement: placement into unsubsidized employment or enrollment in a vocational or training program where a ninth grade level is required.

Additionally, all four models employed contextualized literacy training, which is designed to increase participants’ literacy levels within particular occupational contexts. This kind of programming is based on findings that contextualizing learning to a specific career or industry helps adults advance their academic skills more rapidly while preparing them for the workplace.

Ninety-four residents completed enrollment and completed an initial TABE test, scoring an average grade-level equivalent of 7.1 for reading and 6.7 for math. At the end of the program, average scores had increased significantly—to 10.2 in reading and 11.0 in math. Nearly 83 percent of those tested after the program maintained or increased their literacy level.

“I learned a lot personally and professionally,” says Sylvia, a CHA resident and mother of four who completed the literacy and transitional jobs program. Through 12 weeks of in-class instruction with supplemental computer-based learning, Sylvia increased her literacy level by four grades, from 7.4 to 11.2.

“We are inspired and encouraged by the gains observed during this pilot,” notes Mary Howard, Senior Vice-President of CHA’s Resident Services division. “Increases of multiple grade levels are typically not seen in such a short amount of time.”

The literacy gains translated into successes in employment as well. Fifty-eight participants completed the transitional jobs portion of the program, and 29 obtained unsubsidized employment, representing 70 percent of the program’s goal. In addition, nine participants earned their GED in 2011. While there were grade level increases for all models in the pilot, the programs that utilized computer-aided instruction had the highest and most sustained gains.

Sylvia completed the literacy component and went on to learn critical job readiness skills. After placement into subsidized employment as a Merchandise Associate with retailer T.J. Maxx, she was hired as a permanent employee. Her training and subsequent employment have gave Sylvia the opportunity to develop self-sufficiency and support her family.

Other lessons learned from the pilot include:

- It is possible to successfully incorporate literacy training into a workforce program.
- Significant increases in literacy levels can occur in short periods of time under the right circumstances.
- It is critical to have the right mix of self-paced and instructor-led literacy instruction.
- It is critical to have the right balance of work experience and literacy programming so that participants can relate the material to their work experience.
- It is important to pay participants for this learning, viewing it as a component of the job.

With the help of literacy trainer Adrienne, Sylvia created a Plan of Action for her future, which includes going back to school. She aims to earn her bachelor’s degree in social work so that she can give back and provide opportunities for others. Now she knows what it takes to get the job done. ■

# Creating a Culture of Success

## Educational Requirements and Incentives

By providing families in need with quality affordable housing, housing authorities are doing more than simply sheltering those households from the elements. They offer the foundation for building a home, a sense of safety and security, and the freedom to focus on priorities beyond where one will sleep for the night or how one is going to pay that month’s rent. The choice of priorities on which a household focuses is shaped, at least in part, by the culture and values of the community in which they find themselves. For this reason, housing authorities engage in efforts to build a positive and supportive community.

In many cases, part of the culture that the housing authority wishes to instill in its residents includes a strong communal valuing of education. Research shows that level of education is one of the most important determinants of earning potential. The majority of public housing and Housing Choice Voucher residents have the capacity to increase that earning potential and move up and out of poverty. Housing authorities want to encourage such growth.

Housing authorities encourage educational pursuits in a number of ways. Many offer financial incentives, primarily in the form of higher education scholarship programs for those who live in housing administered by the authority. Many operate the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program, a locality-specific “comprehensive program that gives participating FSS family members the skills and experience to enable them to obtain employment that pays a living wage.” As part of the FSS program, participants build escrow accounts, which can later be used for educational, among other, purposes. Some housing authorities have partnerships with local community colleges that allow their residents to enroll in classes at reduced or no cost. Some

help students to become eligible for state-run educational assistance resources.

Some housing authorities prioritize encouraging educational advancement among their residents to such a degree that they have established education-related requirements for participation in their housing programs. These range from requiring the development of an education plan for participation in a matched-savings program to HOPE VI lease addendums that require children to go to school or to go to school on time. In some instances, residency at a particular housing community requires the development of a family plan to motivate children in their academic pursuits. At all housing authorities, individuals may complete their monthly HUD-mandated community service requirement through engagement in educational pursuits.

Housing authorities do not implement such requirements to burden their residents, but rather to strengthen the incentive to place a strong priority on education, now that they have relief from the stress of maintaining affordable housing. Their goal is to create a culture of excellence, which helps all to succeed.

<sup>1</sup> [www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2012/09/27-education-facts](http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2012/09/27-education-facts)  
<sup>2</sup> [http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/programs/hcv/fss](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/fss)



Honorees at the Student Recognition Awards



# Milwaukee, Wisconsin

EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Sayvon Friend was having a tough time in 2008. Starting his freshman year of high school, he was struggling academically, making poor choices in his social life, and reeling emotionally from the loss of a friend to violence. “That was a real burden on me,” Sayvon shared. “It took me a while to realize that who you hang around with is who you become.” He felt disillusioned and disconnected, but the guidance of Darrell Finch, an education specialist with the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee (HACM), helped to ignite a desire for meaning and accomplishment.

As a resident of Highland Homes, which was redeveloped through the HOPE VI program, Sayvon and his mother were required by their lease to submit his grade reports to Finch on a quarterly basis. The educational lease addendum also required him to participate in activities of the agency’s Education Initiative, which seeks to improve school attendance and educational achievement.

A series of news reports in 2004 documenting low attendance and graduation rates for Milwaukee’s students was the impetus behind the Initiative, which was started in 2005. The Housing Authority’s Secretary-

Executive Director, Tony Pérez, and his staff believed they could play a role in improving those rates for the hundreds of youth who lived in Highland Homes.

“Education is central to a young person’s ability to grow towards self-sufficiency, and we wanted to develop a system that rewards families for providing youth with a strong educational foundation,” says Pérez. “A kid that is engaged in school is less idle and less likely to head down the wrong path.”

“We also know that youth who successfully navigate school and graduate are more likely to move on from subsidized housing, helping to break any cycle of poverty that exists,” asserts Pérez. “This also makes more options available for others who need the high quality, affordable housing that we provide.”

In 2008, Sayvon was not aware of the agency’s larger goals, but he did respond to the occasional contact he had with Finch. Quarterly meetings between Sayvon, his mother, and Finch reinforced the support that the Housing Authority could provide in the form of an individual educational achievement plan, access to tutoring resources, an after-

school computer lab in the Highland Homes neighborhood, visits to college campuses, and special events like an annual spelling bee and a student recognition event.

Sayvon began to flourish, focusing his attention on school, raising his grades, and beginning to feel responsibility as a role model for his younger siblings. In fact, Sayvon’s change in attitude has led his siblings to become achievers themselves. “It’s all about creating an environment of learning,” says Finch. “The entire family – really the neighborhood – needs to buy into the importance of education and to create an expectation that youth will attend school and excel. That’s where we can help.”

Results of the program have demonstrated a significant impact on school attendance and graduation rates, which have ranged between 85 percent and 100 percent during the past four years. With Finch’s monitoring, along with the help of new education specialist assistant Tracy Revels, all 350 youth in the program attend school regularly.

“The program proactively helps prevent problems like crime, drugs, and gangs because we make sure the kids are in school every day,” Finch says. “By working with children and parents to create a plan for educational success, a domino effect is created. First we see a change in attitudes and then a change in behavior, which often leads to an increase in their GPA. They begin to expect that they will have a great life.”

The Housing Authority would like to expand the program to its other family developments if funding becomes available. “The Education Initiative has become a significant part of the stable foundation we can provide to youth as they move into adulthood and self-sufficiency,” says Pérez.

For Sayvon, who graduated this spring and was honored as the Housing Authority’s Student of the Year, the journey continues. He’s now enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and looking forward to a career in music and sound recording. “The Education Initiative helped me to develop confidence in myself and to transition from being a teenager into the real world,” confirms Sayvon. “I’ve learned I need to get a good education, because I eventually want to live a comfortable life for me and my family. And I want others to know that they can succeed, too, with the right influences in their life.” ■

- Since 2008, the annual graduation rate for Education Initiative seniors has hovered between 85 percent and 100 percent, compared with graduation rates of between 66 percent and 69 percent for Milwaukee youth outside of the Initiative.
- In 2012, 12 of 14 participating seniors graduated, and the additional two decided to continue their education to achieve their high school degree or GED.

HACM Graduates with Wisconsin Superintendent of Schools Tony Evers; Darrell Finch; and Oscar Tovar, representative of Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett



Darrell Finch and students in HACM's summer reading program





# Vancouver, Washington

## GOALS PROGRAM



STEPS class: (Clockwise from left) Monét Viveros, facilitator Maggie Gardner, VHA Work Opportunities Program Manager Hilaree Prepula (standing), Terry Armitage, Jamie Busby, and Tyauna Houston

Since the inception of the GOALS program:

- 37 percent of participants have become employed full time.
- 14 percent have increased their income through promotion.
- 18 percent have reconsidered their self-sufficiency goals to include higher education.
- 96 percent have reported an increase in self-efficacy since they began classes.

In a conference room at the Vancouver Housing Authority (VHA), twelve women wait eagerly to begin a two-day core class in the VHA's GOALS program. "You are taking classes with a group of people, and you get to know them. They are coming from the same experiences. You get a lot of peer support—that's something that GOALS encourages," says Tyauna Houston, one of the participants. GOALS (Gaining Opportunity At Lifelong Success) is a program of core and elective courses, combined with peer and professional support activities to increase motivation and self-efficacy. Participants learn skills related to motivation, education, employment, financial management, health and wellness, and healthy relationships: all skills that they will require once they leave subsidized housing.

The VHA believes that subsidized housing is the beginning of the journey toward self-reliance for its work-able population, not the end. VHA defines "work-able" as individuals between 19 and 62 years old who are not disabled or caring full-time for a disabled family member. "As self-reliance increases, so does employability and income," says VHA Executive Director Roy Johnson. "We believe that the combination of committed community partnerships and effective case management can provide these residents the motivation, training, and skills necessary to attain a life free from subsidies for themselves and their children."

The GOALS program is key to meeting this objective. Established in 2010 with funding from the JP Morgan CHASE Foundation, GOALS takes a holistic approach to promoting self-reliance through structured, intensive, and peer-focused education. While open to VHA residents in all case-managed programs, GOALS is automatically part of Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Individual Training and Service Plans, making it mandatory for all FSS

participants living in public housing or receiving voucher assistance (Section 8).

"We made mandatory participation in GOALS a part of our HUD-approved FSS Action Plan," says Hilaree Prepula, VHA Work Opportunities Program Manager. "We feel strongly that the motivational and educational aspects of GOALS are important for the success of all our participants. The classes they take will certainly help them now, and because of the structure, may encourage them to think about furthering their education in the future."

Essential to the program's success are partnerships with providers in the community. VHA relies on the expertise of many providers to teach VHA residents, through the core and elective courses, the skills they need to be successful.

Every GOALS participant attends STEPS training. STEPS is a two-day, intensive workshop developed by the Pacific Institute—a version of the same program that they used to train members of the U.S. 2012 Olympic Swim Team—that encourages chronically unemployed individuals to look past their challenges and picture themselves as able, talented individuals with bright futures. This new perspective shapes their future visions, allowing them to stretch outside their comfort zones to strive for greater success than they ever thought possible. Once these goals are in place, Case Managers are able to effectively link them to the resources participants need to achieve them, while connecting them to other peers in the group through the workshops. The program has already produced a number of talented, enthusiastic, gainfully employed graduates.

"GOALS has helped me to get centered and get things figured out," affirms Tyauna. "I like the idea that GOALS provides knowledge, ideas, resources, and support; it is a clear map. It really opens the door for someone like me who is starting fresh—and there are often a lot of closed doors."

Over 75 residents are currently participating in GOALS, and more are added each month. The VHA wants residents to have a stake in the effectiveness of the program, and participants are required to give back either by facilitating an elective course or by sponsoring a GOALS activity. In addition, selected participants are part of the GOALS Success Team that engages in curriculum planning and provides input on program improvements. Current participants encourage and support new members by mentoring and assisting in the GOALS classroom.

Since the program's inception, 37 percent of GOALS participants have become employed full time, 14 percent have increased their income through promotion, 18 percent have reconsidered their self-sufficiency goals to include higher education, and an impressive 96 percent have reported an increase in self-efficacy since they began classes.

"It's amazing to see the interaction these clients have with each other in these classes. There is a lot of energy and enthusiasm from the peers as they stretch, encourage, and grow together," says Prepula. "I've seen resource sharing, cheerleading, and accountability amongst participants that drives them to succeed together and individually." ■

Going Places Network by Walmart Dress for Success class: GOALS participants practicing their interviewing skills with volunteers from the business community







# Atlanta, Georgia

ATLANTA COMMUNITY SCHOLARS AWARD

ACSA Scholar Ginenne Walker engaged in classroom discussion at Georgia State University

Encouraging lifelong learning is integral to the Atlanta Housing Authority's (AHA) vision for building healthy, mixed-income communities and advancing individual self-sufficiency. To further these aims, AHA partnered with the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) to start the Atlanta Community Scholars Award (ACSA) in 2003. Through the ACSA, the agency encourages more AHA youth to consider and pursue higher education.

One of the nation's oldest education assistance organizations, the UNCF works to increase opportunities for minority students. Both UNCF and AHA are committed to helping students from low-income families obtain college degrees, which are becoming entry-level requirements for nearly all careers with higher salaries.

"The ACSA program builds on the successful record of AHA initiatives for nearly two decades to provide residents with access to affordable housing in vibrant, amenity-rich neighborhoods with equally successful schools," says AHA President and CEO Renee Glover. "These initiatives are one of AHA's primary means of lifting people out poverty."

But the agency knows that helping to revitalize schools in redeveloped neighborhoods is only one ingredient in a recipe for residents' long-term educational progress and the doors it opens.

One of the goals behind AHA's efforts to reduce the concentration of poverty and dramatically improve its community schools is to set children on the path to attend college. The scholarship program gives residents a helping hand in making that happen.

Nadia Reese, 22, is one of those residents. Through her grade-school experiences as student body president, a peer tutor, and a work-study participant, Nadia discovered that she wanted to become a teacher. When she graduated from high school with honors in 2008, the ACSA program provided financial support for taking her academic success to the next level and pursuing her career goals.

The ACSA program helps AHA-assisted residents between the ages of 16 and 30 attend the college, university, or technical school of their choice. Scholarship amounts are determined based on need and have ranged from \$500 to \$5,000. Scholars are chosen by an official selection committee, comprised of members from the private sector and advised by the UNCF.

As the ACSA program's fiscal agent, the UNCF provides oversight for grants and gifts received and for scholarship disbursements to awardees, but Scholars are not limited to UNCF-supported schools. Recipients can enroll at accredited institutions of higher learning all across the country.

Scholars are expected to be enrolled full-time and maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.5. The ACSA program also emphasizes the importance of giving back, and recipients are required to complete 40 hours of verifiable community service. They also give back to their AHA communities by serving as role models for AHA youth who may follow in their footsteps.

When returning home during winter break, Scholars often speak to current high school juniors and seniors as part of AHA's Brighter Futures Day. This day-long session provides information on scholarship and internship opportunities, financial aid, and tips for adjusting to college life.

"My hunger for success keeps me focused on doing well in school," says Cedric Norman, 18, who graduated from high school with honors in 2012 and became an ACSA Scholar in 2012. "In this day and age, just doing okay is not enough. I want to inspire others in my community to do better and to be the best. That opens doors."

Cedric is now a freshman at Morehouse College, where he plans to double-major in Biology and Education to become a Biology teacher in inner-city communities. "The reason I want to teach in low-income areas is because I had teachers who were my primary back-bone during some tough times in my life. I want to be that support system for children out there who really need it."

During the 2012-2013 academic year, the ACSA scholarship fund awarded \$51,200. Since the first award in 2004, a total of \$302,340 has been disbursed. AHA employees strongly share the agency's vision, and it is through their generosity during the Annual Workplace Giving Campaign that most of the funds are raised. Outside gifts in the amount of \$219,895 have been used to support the allocated awards as well as to grow the endowment account.

"Knowing I had the support of the Atlanta Housing Authority and all of the employees who had invested and saw something special in me, made me want to prove myself by being a great student," says Nadia. She graduated with honors in 2012 from Wooster University in Ohio and is now employed full-time as assistant to the director of The Posse Foundation in Atlanta. "I don't know where I'd be without an education and the AHA family."

To date, AHA has assisted 82 residents through the scholarship program. "The Atlanta Community Scholars Award has been so successful that the UNCF has decided to replicate it in other cities across the country," says Shean Atkins, AHA's Director of Community Partnerships.

Going forward, Atkins notes, the agency will continue to grow the ACSA Endowment Account to provide an enduring foundation for the scholarship program. Additionally, further efforts will be made to formalize the tracking of outcomes, including Scholars' graduation rates, career paths, and enrollment in post-graduate and professional programs.

For now, AHA's support is helping Cedric get off to the right start in his freshman year at college. "There aren't enough words to describe how grateful I am for the ACSA scholarship," he says. "My community is very proud of me. I plan to make AHA proud, too." ■

ACSA alumna Nadia Reese (Wooster University in Ohio)



ACSA alumnus Demetrious Withers (Emory University) addresses AHA employees during the Annual Workplace Giving Campaign





## CLPHA

The Council of Large Public Housing Authorities supports the nation's largest and most innovative housing authorities by advocating for the resources they need to solve local housing challenges and create communities of opportunity.

CLPHA is a non-profit organization that works to preserve and improve public and affordable housing through advocacy, research, policy analysis, and public education.

CLPHA's nearly 70 members represent virtually every major metropolitan area in the country. Together they manage almost half of the nation's multi-billion dollar public housing stock; administer a quarter of the Housing Choice Voucher program; and operate a wide array of other housing programs.

Housing authorities are the cornerstone of affordable housing and community development. CLPHA:

- Advocates for adequate public and assisted housing funding and policies that support local management and accountability.
- Develops and analyzes policies impacting the affordable housing community.
- Educates policymakers and the public about the critical role public housing and the voucher program play in meeting affordable housing needs.