

WELCOME TO *"The Bridge"*



Welcome to "The Bridge" Newsletter, a publication to connect housing counseling information seekers with information providers throughout the Office of Housing, Department of HUD, and the Housing Counseling industry.

Housing Counseling Rocks in Virginia!



By P. Kevin Morley/Times-Dispatch

RICHMOND, Va. –

Donna Scaturro loves coming home. "I can't explain the feeling of accomplishment I get when I turn the key and go home."

Scaturro, 52, who moved into her Highland Park house in June, is the first member of her family to own a house. The New York native battled drug addiction, homelessness, incarceration and bone cancer before achieving her dream. "I always knew that I wanted a house," she said. "This has been a dream of mine since I was homeless."

Clean and sober for five years, Scaturro closed on her house May 30 thanks to programs run by Virginia Supportive Housing, Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Project Home and other local organizations. "They held my hand through the whole process," Scaturro said.

Scaturro met Donna Stallings, who now works for Virginia Supportive Housing, at a financial competency class and told her she wanted to buy a home. But a house was out of reach. She was deeply in debt. Stallings helped Scaturro get started on a debt repayment plan. A few years later, Scaturro took a Virginia Housing Development Authority homeownership class. There, she reconnected with Stallings who helped Scaturro enroll in a savings program that would match \$2 for every \$1 that Scaturro saved.

Because of that program and other grants she received, Scaturro said she had no out-of-pocket expenses when she purchased her home.

"She's truly an example of our mission of providing people with affordable housing," Stallings said, adding that Scaturro is paying less on her mortgage than she was for rent. "I can make memories in my house," she said. "I'm here to stay."

"I think anybody that decides to take 16 classes is a little bit unique; she was very dedicated to the process," said Kelly Gill-Gordon, who taught the homeownership class that Scaturro took. Scaturro is setting up her home and probably will for some time. Her last residence had a bedroom, bathroom and kitchen, so she has no furniture for her living room or spare bedroom. Still, she is anxious to have her daughter and grandchildren, who live in Delaware, visit her at her new house. Scaturro lost touch with her daughter during the height of her addiction, but reconnected when she graduated from Boaz & Ruth's recovery program.

Scaturro said she was afraid the time apart would ruin the relationship. But her daughter and her grandchildren came to Scaturro's graduation. They are more than mother and daughter, Scaturro said.

"We're best friends ... These are good times."

And she hopes for more to come.

THE OHC REORGANIZATION – Update in Brief



Union Negotiations

Management and the AFGE commenced negotiations the week of July 16th and are in the process of finalizing a management agreement. Negotiations with NFFE are expected to commence the week of August 6th.

Manager Reassignments

The first phase of manager reassignments has been completed and managers have been notified. A second phase that involves the merit staffing of management positions is pending OHR postings of the positions.

Implementation Schedule

The following implementation schedule has been established to provide estimated timeframes when milestones will be accomplished. Dates are subject to change in response to unforeseen delays.

Milestones	Dates
Issue Memorandum to Solicit Expressions of Interest from Managers	June 2012 <i>Complete</i>
Receive Expressions of Interest from Managers	June 2012 <i>Complete</i>
Managers Notified of Reassignments	July 2012 <i>Complete</i>
Issue Memorandum to Solicit Expressions of Interest from Staff	August 2012
Receive Expressions of Interest from Staff	August 2012
Staff Notified of Reassignments	August 2012
Target Effective Date of Reassignments	August 2012*
Transition Period	August – September 2012
Realigned Single Family and OHC Fully Operational	October 2012

OUT AND ABOUT

Fixing the Housing Market - HUD's Perspective

On Monday, July 9, Senior Policy Advisor Sarah Gerecke was a panelist at the annual meeting of the National Council of La Raza in Las Vegas, NV. The panel, Eleven Million Reasons to Fix the Housing Market, was moderated by Jerry Maldonado, Program Officer at Ford Foundation and featured Aracely Panameño, Director, Latino Affairs, Center for Responsible Lending; Jose A. Garcia, Policy Fellow, NCLR; and D. Steve Boland, Managing Director, National Mortgage Outreach Executive, Bank of America. Fifty counseling and industry participants filled the room. Later the same day, Secretary Donovan and CFPB Director Cordray answered questions and listened to consumer stories during the Economic Town Hall.



Grant Reporting Requirements Training Webinar:

On Friday, July 13, 2012, Ben Detterman, Housing Program Specialist from Denver HOC, led a webinar training for housing counselors on HUD's grant reporting requirements. Also co-presenting information on grant requirements were Rhonda Rivera, Chief, Program Support Division from the Santa Ana HOC and Teresa Bardwell from Rural Community Assistance Corp. (RCAC), a National Housing Counseling Intermediary. There were 60 counselors in attendance. The training consisted of an overview of the current grant reporting requirements and reviewed the sample budget, quarter report format, and client list templates that were provided to the participants. The presenters responded to various questions related to policy and procedures on grantee reports that are coming due on July 31, 2012. The next webinar topic will be counseling and will be held on July 20, 2012. These webinars will be recorded and archived by RCAC. A link to the webinar sessions for all housing counseling agencies nationwide will be provided at a later date so that this valuable training can be viewed by counselors who were unable to attend and for use as an additional reference tools.

RCAC is a multi-state agency that helps build the capacity of other nonprofit agencies and create new agencies to serve low-income people living in the American rural west. Learn more about RCAC by visiting their website at: <http://www.rcac.org/>

THE BRIDGE is pleased to recognize Champions of Service who have provided exemplary service in the Housing Counseling arena, inside and outside of HUD. Nominations of persons both inside and outside of HUD are welcomed. Please send your nominations by the 20th of each month to thebridge@hud.gov.

CHAMPIONS OF SERVICE – KUDOS to Carmen Castro-Conroy

It's Official: Rep. Van Hollen Puts Tribute to Montgomery County Housing Counselor Into the Congressional Record



Washington - Eighth District Congressman Chris Van Hollen took time last week to call Congress' attention to the "dedication and compassion of HUD-certified counselors who are assisting those hardest hit by the housing crisis."

The congressman read into the Congressional Record a moving July 15 interview in the Washington Post Magazine with Carmen Castro-Conroy, a senior counselor with the Housing Initiative Partnership in Montgomery County.

"I hear a lot of judgment out there of people that go into default, but I always think it could happen to anybody," Mrs. Castro-Conroy says in the magazine's First Person Singular column. "I have clients who never thought they'd be diagnosed with cancer. Never thought they'd lose a husband. Never thought they were going to lose their job. It makes me very conscious about how one day you could think you have everything, and the next day your life could dramatically change. ..."

Later in the interview, Mrs. Castro-Conroy continues, "I love what I do. I was thinking about this during the weekend, during Mass. This is one way to show that you love God, working in the face of people that are in trouble, people that are suffering. Before '08, I was working in a home-ownership education program. We were all pulled out from that to serve in foreclosure intervention counseling. We didn't know how long it was going to last, and now we're in the fourth year of crisis. And we don't see the light at the end of the tunnel." As Rep. Van Hollen notes in the record, there are a great many counselors just like Mrs. Castro-Conroy. They are unsung first-responders in our no-holds-barred fight to preserve and protect the most precious financial asset families have - their home. Since the start of the foreclosure crisis in 2007, counselors with Maryland's HOPE Counseling Network have helped more than 70,000 families facing foreclosure. And there may be light, at last, at the end of that tunnel. Maryland foreclosures declined by nearly four (4) percent during the second quarter of 2012, compared to the same period last year.

Visit Community Review, the official blog of the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, to get the latest in housing and community development news.

Bound for Success

In the June 1, 2012 issue of *The Bridge*, Brian Siebenlist explained the formation of three ‘*Success Teams*’ structured working groups formed to rethink and propose creative solutions to some of the most challenging issues facing the Housing Counseling Program. The Success Teams, on average, consisted of a balanced group of 12 - 15 internal and external stakeholders; each led by two (2) team leaders, who also had two (2) coaches they could use as a resource. The three (3) teams, their general goals, and their respective leaders included:

Team Golden Eye – Show me the Money (Steve Mares, Stephanie Williams)

- *Goal* = Improve the grant making process

Dancing with Systems (Anita Olson, Bobbie Thomas)

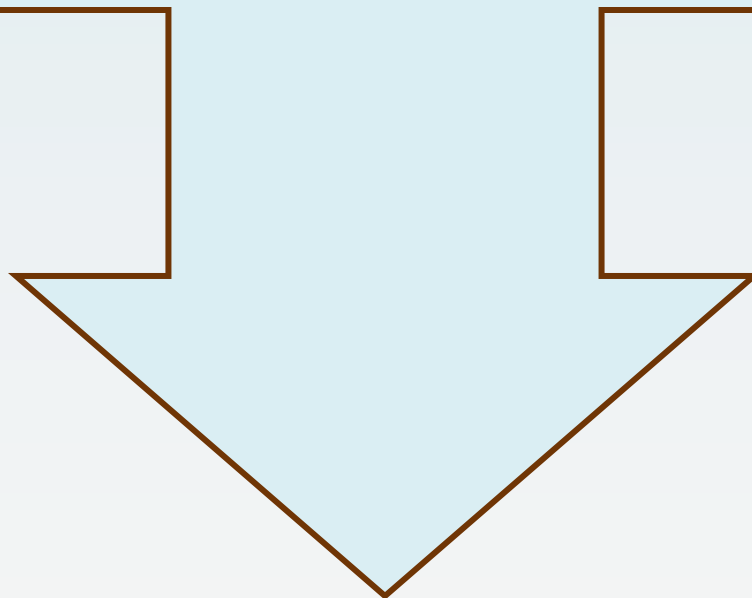
- *Goal* = improve systems to reduce resources (HUD and Partners) spent on administrative work and increase resources spent on benefiting consumers

Meaningful Measurements (Beth Cahall, Loraine Griscavage-Frisbee)

- *Goal* = improve the measurement and reporting of the impact of the Housing Counseling Program

The teams were challenged to: examine their respective issues from various perspectives; brainstorm regarding, and test, potential creative solutions; and develop an implementation plan that results in a measurable outcome.

On July 11, 2012, the Success Teams reported their results for dialogue and feedback to a panel that consisted of Carol Galante, Acting Assistant Secretary for Housing/ FHA Commissioner, Mr. Jim Gray, Federal Housing Finance Agency, and Ms. Lisa Danzig, HUD’s Office of Strategic Planning.



SUMMARY REPORTS



Team Gold 'n Eye

The Gold 'n Eye Housing Counseling Success Team was charged with “improving the distribution and monitoring of HUD Housing Counseling grants.” After significant research and discussion, the team decided that the most important problem to solve was improving the Housing Counseling Program’s Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) process in response to: (i) the pending reduction of HUD staff devoted to the Housing Counseling Program under the Congressionally-approved Office of Housing Counseling; and (ii) requests from Housing Counseling Agency (HCA) stakeholders for a streamlined, more quantitative application process.

At the conclusion of the two-month project, team co-leads Stephanie Williams (Atlanta Homeownership Center) and Steve Mares (Philadelphia Homeownership Center) presented the findings and recommendations to a panel of judges, including the Acting Assistant Secretary for Housing, Carole Galante. The proposed solutions include:

- produce a streamlined, quantitatively-focused FY 2013 NOFA for all grantees
- create a new standard form NOFA application
- publish the FY 2013 NOFA prior to funding appropriation
- extend the FY 2013 NOFA application period
- develop an online, paperless, self-scoring application; and
- restructure the current funding model to reduce the number of grant applications reviewed directly by HUD.

A streamlined NOFA process will allow Office of Housing Counseling staff to focus on its primary responsibility of providing assistance to HCAs and monitoring their performance. In addition, HCAs can increase the provision of counseling services to consumers.

Comments on the above as well as additional comments and suggestions welcomed at thebridge@hud.gov



THE SUCCESS TEAMS



Dancing With Systems

The primary goals of the **Dancing With Systems Success Team** was to: (1) develop recommendations and strategies to improve Housing Counseling Program SYSTEMS to increase operating efficiencies for industry partners, housing counseling agencies and HUD; and (2) increase resources for programs benefiting consumers. The most challenging issues to be addressed were: (1) client level data collection, verification, visibility; (2) remote monitoring; and (3) communication. The availability of technical assistance for Client Management Systems (CMS) and Housing Counseling Agencies, the performance review process, and the burden of preparing quarterly reports were also addressed.

Extensive discussion was devoted to the challenges of networking 46 different Client Management Systems in a manner that provides useful and accurate data, cross-network communication, and complete access to data fields. The very nature of Information Technology (IT) systems makes “quick fixes” virtually impossible. The Team’s approach was to suggest action steps that could address this enormous challenge incrementally. The suggestions included:

- **Determine if the OHC should continue to support the Housing Counseling System or build a new system**
- **Create an IT oversight team consisting of HUD and Housing Counseling Agencies**
- **Require complete electronic file creation in CMS**
- **Require CMSs to build functionality for complete electronic file**
- **Build CMSs to provide default answers to data points the counselors don’t populate (are not relevant) so that counselors don’t have to answer questions or respond to irrelevant data points**
- **Allow HCAs to electronically communicate a majority of requirements once, and simplify the oversight and accountability process**
- **Require complete electronic file in CMS**
- **Require CMSs to build functionality for complete electronic file**

Comments on the above as well as additional comments and suggestions welcomed at thebridge@hud.gov



THE JUDGES



Meaningful Measurements

Why do we need housing counseling? and How can we best measure results of HUD's Housing Counseling Program? These are two critical questions often asked by stakeholders. The Meaningful Measurements Impact Team tackled the challenge of finding answers. Team Leaders Beth Cahall and Lorraine Griscavage-Frisbee partnered with HUD staff and representatives from locally approved and national intermediary housing counseling agencies. Over a two month period the group formulated a mission statement for the program and ways to measure this statement.

Help clients build the capability to make sustainable housing and financial decisions which would lead to safe, affordable and secure housing. This mission statement became the foundation for proposed metrics. The Meaningful Measurements Team identified three ways to measure how this mission statement is achieved – client exit surveys, revision of current form HUD 9902 reporting, and long term indicators.

The team developed a draft client exit survey to be administered on-line after conclusion of counseling. The survey site would be developed and maintained by HUD and offer the client survey in multiple languages with questions specifically tailored for each type of counseling activity. The survey would measure the client's perception of increased knowledge and financial capability as a result of the counseling as well as customer satisfaction.

All team members agreed that determining the outcomes of housing counseling can be difficult. The team proposed that the current form HUD 9902, Housing Counseling Activity Report, which focuses on outcomes, be revised to emphasize reporting on immediate, direct results of housing counseling. For example, instead of trying to ascertain if a client eventually purchased a home after counseling, report to HUD if the client was qualified for any down payment assistance programs or had the financial capability to afford a safe, affordable and secure home.

However, to fully measure the results of housing counseling and answer why we need housing counseling, identifying long term outcomes is essential. The group identified the credit report as one reliable indicator for determining long term results of counseling. Because the costs of credit reports can vary so much between high and low volume agencies, the group suggested HUD facilitate negotiations for a flat rate available to all HUD participating agencies.

Comments on the above as well as additional comments and suggestions welcomed at thebridge@hud.gov

**TEAMS, JUDGES
AND COACHES**



Success Teams' Winner

A 3-WAY TIE!



Features of interest, testimonials, general information and announcements are welcomed. Respond to thebridge@hud.gov with comments, articles, questions or suggestions.