

# Transcript: Interview with DC Staff

- [Jie] Alright, so why don't we jump into the questions that we have for the PHA staff? Yeah Angela and I will go back and forth in terms of the sections here. Would you state your name and your organization please?

- [Aisha] My name is Aisha Thompson and I work for DC Housing Authority.

- [Jie] What is your current position and title?

- [Aisha] My current title is I'm the CO-Deputy Director of the Housing Choice Voucher Program. And I oversee all of housing programs which will consist of the local program, the federal program and our Contracts Department. Also, I do oversee all Quality Assurance Department as well and or ROTC Department, which is Relocation Orientation Training, and Counseling division.

- [Jie] Thank you, how many mainstream vouchers have you been awarded up-to-date?

- [Aisha] 90, we received 69 initially and 21 for the Cares Act so we have a total of 90 vouchers.

- [Jie] Okay, is that the same number of vouchers currently being administered?

- [Aisha] Currently we have 35 being administered.

- [Jie] Okay, and out of the 35 vouchers are they all currently being utilized by voucher recipients?

- [Aisha] Yes, the 35 that we have there've been all leased up and we're, yes, we're paying on those.

- [Jie] Okay, what is the level of effort in terms of estimated number of staff and labor hours to manage the voucher program?

- [Aisha] As far as the staff so we have a different department called ECOD that's our Eligibility Department. So once the applications come through eligibility or through ECOD, they will process, we have a housing specialist that will process that eligibility packet. So we have the eligibility specialist. Then once the person has been deemed eligible for the program, then they will go through the orientation coordinator process which is she will do the briefings. So once the person has been issued a voucher then they'll go ahead and do the lease-up once the client has located a unit. But just as with our special purpose vouchers some of our clients may need assistance in locating a unit. So that's where our ROTC department will come in or a mobility specialist they offer we offer a unit search, alright? If the client requests assistance in locating a unit our mobility specialist will assist them and give them referrals. So in a sense one person or one client will actually touch like four different, staff members. Alright? Which could, I would

say equate to maybe two hours each depending on the frequency I would guess especially when it comes to mobility because if you give them a set of referrals and they go look at units and it's not what they like, and they want more, of course, that mobility specialist will be working with that client until they actually find a unit that they like and get approved for. So I would say in an average of maybe eight to 10 hours and labor hours that we work with one client.

- [Jie] Okay, okay. Do you know in the case of Milton, if he utilized the referral or the housing location services that you guys are providing?

- [Aisha] No, he did not. He did not utilize the mobility specialist for his case. He looks like how he got referred you're the one that actually assisted him in locating the unit that he's in now.

- [Jie] Okay, okay.

- [Aisha] But we do have that services especially once again for a special purpose voucher clients.

- [Jie] Okay, alright. So I'll let Angela take the rest of the questions on this list here. Alright Angel

- [Angela] Okay, Aisha. Did you guys target a specific preference with regards to the mainstream vouchers? There were different levels where you could use someone that was homeless or people that were formerly homeless and or in permanent supportive housing or transitioning out of like an institution. So were there any certain particular preferences that you did use as part of your application for the mainstream voucher program?

- [Aisha] No, we don't, even though we have a local preference or local preference is homelessness. We did not use that for the mainstream voucher, but for any of our special purpose voucher, what we do they don't have to qualify for the local preference. So we will go by the social service provider their waiting list. So we didn't select any of those preferences. So anyone that they fit that's how the referrals were came through.

- [Angela] Okay, okay, great. How did you guys how do you recognize that you're being successful in your administration of the mainstream voucher program? Are there any particular parameters or goals that you guys set up that you were monitoring to say whether it was a quantity? I think you said you're currently 35 out of 90 or being but are there any particular parameters that you set out for yourselves?

- [Aisha] Yeah, for us, we were trying to get to at least 90% by the end of this fiscal year for us which is September 30. So that would have been our goal. I know, of course, because of COVID, there was a little bit of delay in transition into teleworking as well as families searching, going out and searching for units and so forth. So they have been a little bit of delay. But our goal is to, in our initial 69 our goal was to make sure we made it at least by 50%, right? By the mid year. So basically we have partnered with outside agencies, right? To make sure that we have a continuous flow of applications that are going through eligibility. So once again hopefully we can meet our goal by the end of the fiscal year. And hopefully at least get 10 referrals per month.

It's a kinda pretty much meet our goal towards the end of the year. So that's how we're kinda measuring it to see how successful we can with those that we have been awarded to utilize all those vouchers.

- [Angela] Okay, alright. And is there any particular like quantity, or can you in terms of some of those other agencies that you are trying to work with were there people, any new ones or were they existing agencies you've had already been that you just kinda retapped into to drive that relationship?

- [Aisha] Sure, so we actually started earlier this year I would say probably February or so that we've part kinda partnered with other agencies just to see how we can get some referrals in so we can increase the utilization on there. So we do meet monthly with our partners. We go over utilization report, we go over any issues that they may be facing or are troubleshooting maybe with documentation and so forth. And actually go through the process. So the agency and the outside agency as well will know exactly where the clients are in the process. And then they will let us know how many applications they expect to come through through eligibility. So basically we have a very good relationship with our partners and the monthly meetings do help at least they are aware of the process and we know what's actually coming down the pipeline, right? So we'll also know how to allocate our staff as well. So for example, if somebody says, well we have a 25 coming through, we make sure that we do have that staff dedicated to process those cases that are going through eligibility.

- [Angela] Oh, that's great. Was there any necessity to kind of amend or implement any new policy and procedures with regards to administrating the mainstream voucher program as opposed to what you were already existing doing? Did anything new come up?

- [Aisha] I think what kind of pushed that is just to assist us with, because we already have an infrastructure out there, right? In the city that will assist the homeless population and of course folks that were disabled. So why not tap into those agencies as well. So if they already have the population and they can fit the mentioned criteria. Cause I know initially that was one of the struggles with agencies is to fit the criteria, of course, and of course disabled and homelessness or even transitioning out of the institutionalization places. So in that sense, since the structure was already there we just thought it would be best to partner with them, right? And to tap into their waiting list and keep things moving on our end so we can actually utilize the vouchers so.

- [Angela] Okay and that's a big point in terms of recognizing something that needed to be overcome. Were there any other particular challenges that you can think of that you also have to face and kind of deal with, whether it was on your agency side or with the other agencies you're working with that they needed to kind of come along? It's similar to what you've just spoken but were there any other issues?

- [Aisha] No, I think maybe the only other challenge that I know for like the tenant may face is actually finding those units, especially, if they're disabled as well and they will need that assistance. So even working with the case workers for example, or voucher briefings, right? We also invite our caseworkers to be a part of the voucher briefings, right? So they kind of know when the clients are, they've been issued their voucher, they're ready to search so we keep them

in the loop. So to also build that relationship with the caseworker 'cause sometimes our clients are hard to reach, as well we're trying to issue the voucher as they may change their phone numbers, email address is not working. So that they're trying to build that relationship with the agencies and the caseworkers as well just to make sure that, the client have that support system. So if something doesn't work or the DC housing staff can actually reach out to someone else, of course, with permission, of course is to make sure that the clients are aware that they're at the next step and nothing is being delayed. So the process will go through smoothly.

- [Angela] It's alright. It sounds like communication is a very critical part of the whole process working. And particularly it sounds like you guys are very got a lot of things, moving parts and a lot of relationships that you're managing. And so, but yeah, I could see that being a very big one to overcome and make sure that you have working slowly. Okay. Jie did you wanna take the next set of questions there?

- [Jie] Sure, sure sure, I'm curious to know the types of partners that you engaged over the years and the new partners you brought on board, are they primarily homeless shelters and disability service agencies? And if so how did you manage those partnerships effectively? And was there some additional outreach that you had to do in the community as well? So just talk a little bit about the overall partnership establishment as well as maintenance of the partnership and what type of resources were leveraged out of these relationships?

- [Aisha] Yeah, so basically for our partners they're mainly disabled agencies as well as aging as well so more aging and disability. And of course, some with other social services as well. So and or they partner with other partners as well. So it's like for example if one agency may have outside providers that serve a certain population as well so they have kind of a broader network, and so maybe one person may need the services of another agency so in collaboration with all these outside agencies and if they fit the criteria then that's how we'll get the referrals. So it's just pretty much partnering with them. We've used these agencies in other capacity as well. So of course we have knowledge of those agencies and what they could do and what the population that they serve as well. So basically since the city has that infrastructure especially with the homeless services or the agencies or the shelters services as well, and of course the social service reference agencies. So with all those different things going on, that structure is already here. It just took us to be able to tap into those agencies and resources. And to be able to communicate with them and partner with them and say, okay, and this is what we need, this is what we have, we do have these vouchers. And if you do have the population that can utilize these vouchers and then that's how we work with those special purpose vouchers.

- [Jie] Okay, okay. Were there any challenges that you experienced or had to overcome while building or maintaining these relationships where everybody was pretty much on board and as soon as you shared with the information they were

- [Aisha] Oh yeah, no challenges there at all. the agencies were very happy that we do have, cause housing in DC especially as the cost of housing to and of course is with the shelter system folks, some folks don't be comfortable there. They wanna get permanent housing sooner rather than later. So the agencies that we've partnered with they were all very happy and excited to come on board. To partner with us to say, how many can we get? You know what I mean? Kinda

and so basically just going through the criteria with them, and build that relationship and that partnership with them. And give us meeting with them on a monthly basis. It shows how willing and their efforts that they're putting into this as well, right? So and just to see that our families especially for those who are homeless and disabled that they can get housing as quickly as possible. So upfront definitely no challenges there. There were willing able already have folks that could fit the criteria and just needs to vet them so they can go through eligibility process.

- [Jie] Very nice. Can you talk a little bit about any internal resources that you were able to leverage to decline or success in this particular specialty voucher program? I think you mentioned about the mobility search assistance, were there any other type of existing resources within DC Housing that were leveraged to help minister this program?

- [Aisha] Okay, so in ROTC, what we also do of course without our landlords, we don't have units, right? So we also have landlord briefings as well for existing and new landlords that are coming on board who would like to know about the program and for the population that we serve. So we do have landlord briefings. We have them three times a month, two times during the week, two Thursdays. So the first Thursday and the third Thursday of the month and also Saturdays to accommodate, forth working landlords. So we have that upfront as well, for landlords to know the process. So to me, when you telling them how the process works and what they're signing on to as well, it goes smoothly. So they know what to expect when they submit a request for tenancy approval, right? They what the process is, they know the documentation that they need to submit. So when they're educated upfront it also minimize the delays, right? That would come with the list up. So education obviously for the landlords and our clients, of course, for me, it's the key, right? Because of course when you're landlords we have to establish and make sure they're owners and so forth. So that process may delay if the landlords are not aware of what they need to submit with the packet. Right? So and how to submit it as well because of course you have different other agencies that may have different ways of submitting. So by educating the landlords upfront it totally minimizes the length of time our families takes to lease out. So that's one key and of course, we talked about the inspections process, right? For them just to let them know what inspectors may come out and look at, right? And so forth. So, and of course, and what it is, of course, during COVID as well, right? if we're doing virtual inspections what is needed and so forth. So educating the landlords definitely is a key upfront speaking about our mobility piece to assist any of our clients and of course those are special purpose voucher clients. We have meet and lease events, right? So we have meet and lease events three times a month as well two during the weekdays and well in the afternoon hours. And then we have one on Saturdays as well. Our meet and lease, we kicked off during COVID. We had it before pre COVID in the office where landlords could come in showcase their units. Clients will come in pick and choose they see what landlords have available. Some landlords get a tenant right there and then so basically even though during COVID, we didn't stop right? We're now doing this virtually, right? And it's been successful since we started this virtually. So landlords still on a virtual platform showcase their units, alright? So the landlords would register some landlords with units up to 200 and we have different rooms. So if you, for example, you may have four bedroom units you're in a four-bedroom unit meet and lease event. If I have a two-bedroom unit, meet in the two-bedroom unit event. And landlords go and showcase their units all our clients who are actively searching with vouchers, right? They also come in the meet and lease events to see what's out there cause during COVID maybe some folks can't really see the unit as well or go

in or don't wanna keep traveling around and looking at units they can see what the landlord has to offer during the meet and lease events. And if they like the unit, they contact the landlord after the meet and lease and they will handle their lease-up and process after that. But we do have that available and that does help especially for the house to house folks, for example if we're in the mainstream and they need they're disabled and they need that unit the accessible units of course, if there is any that showcase they will be able to meet with that landlord virtually after the fact or a call or scheduled to see the unit face-to-face if they want to do it in person. But that really has most of our clients, especially during COVID to see units, right? And to select if they do like it. So that's been successful even during COVID and it's been done virtually.

- [Jie] Just out of curiosity what will be like the percentage of landlords who are, let's say, multifamily owners own large apartment building owners versus just like a one of a single family home or condo units owners who want to participate in the mainstream program.

- [Aisha] Since we are not so they wouldn't know that they have the special purpose vouchers. So they wouldn't specifically know that this person has a special purpose voucher. So it's just across the board. So is basically whichever unit the client wants and whatever features fit their needs. The landlords we have both, landlords with multi-family units and the small mom and pop landlords as well, that participates in all our events. But it's still up to the client and the landlords are not too specific about what the voucher type it is, special purpose vouchers versus current inventory. Cause it could be vast it could be fab it could be any other special purpose voucher so they're not specifically, they don't know specifically what that special purpose voucher is.

- [Jie] Right, okay, okay. Now from the voucher holder perspective do you see like they have a preference for, like a single building, like Milton's clearly in a high rise building with the rooftop, right? Or versus somewhere sort of in a maybe not so urban environment or apartment building environment, but in a single family home or something like that. Do you see such a preference from a voucher holder.

- [Aisha] No, I think it's basically their needs, right? And within the district, basically they can go to anyone of our parties in the district. They literally based on the area they choose and the type, but of course, folks with larger family household may want single family house. So and that is we do have landlords especially for the, I will call them hard to house. if there are, they need a larger unit. So of course we try to encourage landlords especially to come to landlord peoples as well if they have larger units, right? Because within the city those are the units that could be harder to locate. So especially if they have a larger household they would need a larger unit. So we encourage our landlords to participate in our briefing and also the meet and lease so families will see what options are out there for larger units. But that's the only thing that I may see is maybe of course the larger families may want a single family home because you may not find a four or five bedroom apartment or a condo, but the single-family homes may fit their needs. So once again, it's up to the family, their choices, where they want to go and what structure they decide to lease up man.

- [Jie] Okay, okay.

- [Angela] Can I ask a question real quick, just gonna take a question. Do you have any statistics on around the percentage out of like, if you are looking at your whole pool of applicants, are there a certain percentage that are more where you have a disabled person with the family versus the percentage of those that are just single and maybe looking for those single type units wherever they may be. But is there, cause it's been interesting with some of these interviews in terms of it seems like we hear a lot about the single person that's disabled but not necessarily what percentage there is of maybe disabled with family.

- [Aisha] No upfront, I don't even know that the percentage upfront but it would be good for me to look back and see if we do have that information based on those who currently have the mainstream voucher to see what the percentage looks like.

- [Angela] Cause that's one of the great things I think about the mainstream program that it is focused on those that are disabled but then maybe there's that other level there of disabled with family that we might, I don't know if we even.

- [Aisha] Yeah, that's an untapped category, right?

- [Angela] I'm sorry Jie, I just wanted to ask.

- [Jie] No, no that's a good question to ask. We just talked about some of these effective ways to help mainstream applicants to successfully find housing how about practices that you've found to be effective to help them maintain their housing stability? Can you talk a little bit about some of the supportive services that they may be receiving and how you all play a role in terms of making sure that once they get the housing they maintain it and be able to stay there for a long period of time.

- [Aisha] Yeah, I think most it's still building that relationship or continue to have that relationship with our partners even after lease up, right? Because of course, if a family eventually wants to transfer, to another unit maybe after a year or so they still would reach out to their case workers and the case workers are still working with us on new folks that are coming onto the program. So as did mention that he has a caseworker. So when like if that caseworker is so tied to the agency, then if he has questions even about his housing he will know that he needs to reach out to Mr. Queen, alright? So even having that POC, right? A Point of Contact within DC Housing also helps. so with all our special purpose vouchers we do have a point of contact in each department, right? So in eligibility, there is a point of contact there. If there's any issues with anything coming through eligibility for the orientation briefing, for them to be, go through orientation and get a voucher there is a point of contact for that step as well. There's also a point of contact, in our mobility portion of it if that request from the client that they need some assistance in searching for a unit, there is a POC there. And also with the lease up process more likely it's Mr. Queen for a special purpose voucher. So he's the POC, right? For that step. So each step of the way there is a point of contact, but, most of our special purpose voucher clients know who to reach out to housing if they have any issues with their housing and with any services that they may have or need they would always loop in their caseworker. If internally, we're trying to resolve any issues and we cannot get in contact with the client we'll always reach out to the social the caseworker because we still have that continuing relationship with our partners. Once

again, on a monthly basis all of us with all our special purpose vouchers we literally send emails back and forth. They know who to reach out to if there's anything pertaining to the client that they need assistance with.

- [Jie] Okay, okay, that's very streamlined process. You've got there. Let's see. Are there any challenges that you've experienced or overcome around successfully identifying at least program participants in the target groups?

- [Aisha] I think we've pretty much overcome our challenges on the front end of course, which is first to establish the partnership of course, to get more folks that fit the criteria for mainstream especially if the different mainstreams will come to to be referred to us so we can go through eligibility. So that initially would have been the hardest thing to overcome is to get folks who fit into that order family that fits into that criteria, so that we've kind of ironed out right now. And then the other piece of it would have been the especially since COVID hit, just to make sure folks even if they don't have that, the technology, right? To even do the briefing virtually what DC Housing has done as well. we now have a customer solution center that folks who don't have that technology like a cell phone a tablet or a laptop, they could still come in make an appointment to come in to the customer solution center where our staff, obviously we're still teleworking but our staff will still, brief that person virtually but the client would have access to a computer. So they can sit there in their own pad and have that one-on-one with who they need to talk to maybe their housing specialists, go through a virtual briefing. They've done a wonderful job of building out a customer solution center so folks can still have that flexibility if they would like to come in and speak to someone if they don't have the technology to do so.

- [Jie] Is there more than just one centers that you're talking about? Are there multiple centers all throughout the different quadrants of the city?

- [Aisha] Oh no so we have our main headquarters but the customer solution center, it's we have several, the different kiosk is where, we can schedule folks for appointments when they come in. So if once again, say it's at our main center. That's where it's located. But there are several cases that if a client would like to come in still, to still have to be seen or have a conversation or have an appointment with a staff, they can do so and they can still do that technically virtually but in their own space while they're talking to the staff.

- [Jie] That's actually very unique that you guys are making technology platforms available for folks that are, that just don't have the means or access to a computer, to web conferencing. So that's a great one, we're gonna definitely emphasize and highlight in our reporting. Are there anything else you would like to add? Angela, do you have any other questions or clarifying questions for Aisha?

- [Angela] Yeah, I have a couple. One is I've been in HUD a long time but your acronyms are just like, I'm loving them. Meeting lease customer solutions. It's just like, awesome. I need a new book and ledger here to keep track but it tells me that you guys have just totally focused in on what is working and then it's kinda taken it on and made it really special. So I think that's just really great. But with regards to that, around the meet and lease did you ha did you find or is there any mechanisms that you're able to articulate to potential landlords of how this meet and



lease process works for them? I mean, is that something that you do use as an engagement to get more landlords involved? And second question is, do those landlords or do you have any statistics on whether their vacancy losses lowered and that that's again another a hook for them to say, well, why are you out there by yourself when we can bring the residents to you?

- [Aisha] Yeah, and I just use an example, like there's we had one landlord who had larger units, right? It was hard to fill those large units. Maybe clients just didn't know about them, or where they were located and so forth so we ensure that whichever landlord reaches out to us to say, oh, we have units available, how can you assist? We say, oh we have meet and lease, and lease events. So they will definitely register. We do have that information on our landlord portal, right? So landlords do know that the meet and lease events do exist. We do send a blast email out as well to all our landlords for these events as well. So we do a lot of marketing to let the landlords know that we have these events going on not because we're not in the office. Cause I know they were used to going on 1133 to do the meet and lease events I know twice a month, but it never stopped for us. We had to figure out how to, people were still moving whether it was COVID or not. It could be because of an HQS move or emergency but whatever the case could be, right? We still have to be able to be flexible as an agency to still serve our clients, right? And once again, for me and for us too, without landlords, without units and we knowing that they're even available we can't house our family. So we definitely engage with them. As I said we do have our liaison as well for any external landlord groups that meet we also have a DCHA representative, I have two then that actually attend several meetings with other partners, right? To share information on the agency of what we have going on. So or if they have any issues with our process being virtually cause I guess once again, for me, educating the landlords on the process, right? Where they're not we're in the office or we're working virtually, the process still goes on but it may have tweaked a bit because now we're virtual, but this is what you need to do. So educating them and definitely being transparent this makes things a lot easier and a process to be more streamlined and then clients or tenants will be happy. All landlords will be happy. So we do a lot of marketing and the landlords with larger units, are happy to even have that I would say like a meet and lease event just for the larger group, and then only of course the families with that bedroom size only got that invite cause he made sure we sent out the invite, we target our marketing too for example. Your folks have different bedroom sizes on their vouchers. You're going to get that meet and lease event invite for that voucher size, right? So if it's a five or six bedroom, voucher family, they're gonna get that event for those landlords who only have larger units. So it gives them awareness that, oh, these units do exist. There are available now ready to rent. The landlords are familiar with the program rules and guidelines on some market rents. So they're also used to or process because they've been to all landlord briefings. So it's a circle so everything should fit of course. Everything should fit together, and everybody should work together and the pieces should fit. So we should have a seamless process.

- [Angela] I was like, you have a really good process going.

- [Jie] Yeah, I was just going to say this a lot of intentional pre-screening and preparation involved. So when the opportunity comes around that's when exactly like preparation meets opportunity equals success. So you guys laid down the foundation to be able to receive these mainstream vouchers and it sounds seamless but there's kudos to you all for having a forethought of laying down a foundation and having to fine tune process, to be able to minister to these

vouchers in an effective manner. So I don't have any other questions. Angela, do you have any kind of questions?

- [Angela] No, I don't. That was just awesome.

- [Jie] Any other parting words for us anything else you would like to add?

- [Aisha] No, I'm going to say I'm grateful for the opportunity.

- [Jie] Yeah, it's great to learn from you.

- [Angela] We are happy that we have the mainstream vouchers we'll do our best to do a lot of outreach or any more partnerships that we can. We can make throughout this process. But hopefully the goals that we have outlined for ourselves and with our partners for me I believe that we'll be successful at doing it. And we can house as many families that we can throughout this fiscal year and to continue to house more families if we receive more vouchers.

- [Jie] Absolutely, I have no doubt you guys will reach new heights. Once we publish this on [hudexchange.com](http://hudexchange.com) we will let you know. We'll send out a link to you also you can share within and within your staff there at DC Housing, as well as share the success with the partners that you engage with. I'm sure they will love to see this information being made public.

- [Aisha] Okay, awesome.

- [Angela] Thank you again.

- [Jie] Alright, thank you so much.

- [Aisha] Bye bye now.

- [Jie] Have a good one, alright you too, bye bye.