

Transcript: Interview with NHHFA Staff

- [Jie] Why don't we jump into this list that we prepared for PHA staff? Yeah, I think some of these questions we can skip here.

- [Ann] Okay.

- [Jie] So I know, Ann, you said you're the main person that's administrating the mainstream voucher program, correct?

- [Ann] We do the day to day.

- [Jie] Okay.

- [Ann] So not so much the overall, but we do the day to day.

- [Jie] Okay, so about how many of those vouchers have you been awarded up to date?

- [DeeAnn] 340

- [Ann] 340, yes.

- [Jie] Okay, okay.

- [DeeAnn] We have 340 counting our last Cares Act application or award, I should say, in January of this year.

- [Jie] Okay, okay, and how many out of the 340 are currently being administered?

- [DeeAnn] I had 229, Ann.

- [Ann] Yeah, 229.

- [DeeAnn] Mostly, the 75 we just received in January are still, have not been leased up, but, so the 229 would be, we had another supplemental Cares Act in August, so we've had that one working on.

- [Jie] Okay, and Ann, about how many residents have been placed through voucher program?

- [Ann] I don't know what you meant by that, how many residents. You mean like ever? Like with turnover?

- [Jie] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

-[Ann] Like up to date or currently that they're using the voucher program.

- [DeeAnn] So 229 are currently on the program. And then we have a group that are on Ann's team that have a voucher that are searching. There's like 25, 30, whatever that have vouchers. We pull one for one on the mainstream program.

- [Jie] Okay, okay.

- [DeeAnn] Because, like I said, the first year, we only had 50 and we leased up like 60. So we go one for one pull. And so all the slots are taken when I say that other than the new 75.

- [Jie] Got it, got it, got it. Okay, okay.

- [Ann] If I can add, I think around what you meant with the many residents have been placed, maybe have there been those that have been placed and left? So the number would be greater than the 229 as opposed to just what is active right now.

- [DeeAnn] I don't know that, Ann. I looked at the, we haven't had many go off. We know that because when we were over leased, we were hoping some would go off. So we've had very little turnover. It's mostly been the delay is in them finding an apartment. You know, we have so many voucher holders all the time. So other than the 75, the 75 are new.

- [Jie] Outstanding.

- [Ann] Yeah, we did a new preference with the 75, which I know one of those questions is--

- [Jie] Yes, yes.

- [Ann] Conference question, so with the new 75, we did a brand new, that moving on rapid rehousing preference for permanent supportive housing. We had not done that before, we did something new with those 75 to address.

- [Jie] Oh, excellent.

- [Ann] State and address homelessness.

- [Jie] Okay, okay. Yeah, that actually jumps right into that question that we had under the program implementation area. So can you talk a little bit more about that particular preference? Is that something that you all change in your admin planer?

- [DeeAnn] Yes, we did. So originally we had the two at risk of being an institution or transitioning out of an institution. That the preference we had. And then we added the third one, the new one with participating in a rapid rehousing or permanent supportive housing program.

- [Jie] Okay, okay, excellent. Angela, you want to help lead the next set of questions?

- [Angela] Okay, great, thank you. All right, so that's great that you were able to add on that third preference. Was there a particular reason that you were attracted to that or just found that there was also a greater need to address that preference?

- [DeeAnn] A little bit of both. We had a request a while ago from the state of New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services to do that, what they call moving on preference. And then HUD had published this moving on guide, and at the same time when we received these vouchers, like Daryl was saying, there was a lot of stuff going on with these homeless camps in Manchester and the governor had, was addressing it through some housing instability council. And we thought, oh, we have these 75 mainstream vouchers, we can do something different with them. And if we try this moving on program, well don't try, do it, then we will be able to free up some of the state dollars that are in that permanent supported housing program, and they were identifying some residents who didn't need the intensive services any longer, but they needed the financial help, they needed the voucher help. So Ann and her staff did the moving on kind of the guide. There was a webinar recently that HUD actually hosted and actually the HUD user, you know, we got some information out about with the state, and I think, Ann, we have about 20 now referrals in.

- [Ann] Yeah, I think we have 20 referrals in.

- [DeeAnn] And now, a couple that are looked too, maybe. I don't know if we, nope three.

- No, we have three that are voucher holders. One that we believe is going to lease a place, so that one we're hoping is going to be real quick.

- [Jie] Okay.

- [DeeAnn] So in this state knows in working with the part of our, that we need to utilize 80% of the voucher allocation because we want it to always be eligible to apply for future awards. And the state, the people we're working with and Ann and her team, you know, we're, not that we're going to take them away, but we, you know, we're working on those and we'll make sure. And we have the whole year, we're not worried about it, but.

-[Angela] Okay, great. It sounds like a great addition to your whole program there. So how would you define and what have you done to set as your goal or as in what will be demonstrating you as successful with regards to the mainstream program? How can you define that criteria that you'd like to meet?

- [DeeAnn] Our goal is to lease them all up, always. A goal is set. We have monthly, what we call a marketing meeting. We have monthly meetings where we, so we use the high forecasting tool even for the mainstream program. So we're always looking at who and how many are looking, searching, leased up, how many do we need to pull from the waiting list? Because the other two preferences, we also were working with the state, you know, on those as well, identifying through the referral process. When we, you know, we have a memorandum of agreement when we did the first round of mainstream in 2018 and that NOFA. We met with the state and then all the agencies, the DHHS, the nonprofit agencies, all the agencies that would

provide case management, support, services. So they come with that preference referral, and then right away we can pull it from the waiting list and work with that agency to help with paperwork. The agency sends us the referral and, you know, they're working with the client as are we. We do everything through the mail. We don't, unlike a local housing authority, we don't have many clients come to the office. So we're really tapping into all those agencies. So I guess if I, I guess, Ann, we would say success for us would be that we lease them all. Like we did the first year. The first year we were a little ambitious in pulling. We pulled more than we had slots for.

- [Ann] Right.

- [DeeAnn] And then I talked to Ashley Matthews at HUD, we're like, what do we do? And, you know, she said there's another NOFA coming out. And we were awarded in the second NOFA. We weren't going to kick anybody off the program, but we wanted to, then we kind of learned early on that it's not like our regular voucher program where you have a lot of turnover. There's not a lot of turnover and we can't over pull, you know? We need to do a one for one pulling in, you know? We have on Ann's team, we have two expeditors, what we call expeditors. I think some agencies refer to them as navigators. We have two staff, one works with Ann, and another one in another part of our division, but they work with all the voucher holders and they track in spreadsheets their barriers. So Ann meets with that person and we have our monthly meeting that we can see the barriers. Are there any, you know what can we do to address those barriers? Is it something we, often it's just lack of one bedroom apartments or lack of first floor apartments. And so they are working with barriers and giving extensions. We're pretty generous with extensions for the voucher. Time, knowing that they need time to address those barriers and find a place. You know? I don't know, Ann, if you can think of anything else with that. When Daryl said he had two caseworkers because the person he works with Ann, her name is Tish, and Tish works with them one-on-one. So she would be calling Daryl, checking on Daryl, because we want to give extensions. We want to check on their housing search throughout the process. And...

- [Ann] Yeah. She works directly with all the voucher holders as soon as they get a voucher. So she makes contact with them. She finds out where they're looking. She gives them referrals if she knows of any open units or any landlords that are looking for clients. So she touches base with them and continues to have that dialogue. And that's what helps them be so successful in their lease up. And, so she's the first person they get in touch with. And then...

- [DeeAnn] She is, and then when they, in Daryl's case, he found his own apartment. So we call them sometimes the expeditors they're the salespeople too, they sell the program. You know, they're first voice that this landlord might hear, a new landlord. So we've kind of given those two that task of you're the voice of the authority. You can get extensions, you work with the landlord, you can look at reasonable accommodations, you know? Customer service is a big thing and trying to get landlords to participate in this program, especially if they have to negotiate the rent. And that's what, you know, that's what at least Tish and the two people who do that. And we call them expeditors, I don't know if they're, we call them expeditors because we want to expedite the process, you know?

- [Angela] Yeah, and what I'm hearing is that you have definitely identified that for you, the success of the program, it sounds like, is definitely getting those vouchers and finding clients and

getting them housed. So getting you being able to utilize all of them is definitely one of the main optics with regards to success. But it also, I hear you saying that it sounds like, again, the networking and the cohesiveness between all the different parties is what works with that timeline. And that timeline and overcoming whatever some of the barriers you mentioned, all leads to that fulfillment, so that success. So, okay. I appreciate that very much. Do you have any particular policy and procedures that you've implemented that contributed to that that may have like stabilized or just allowed for a quick understanding? Okay, to do this, we have to do this. Anything like that procedures, or all policy?

- [DeeAnn] I don't know about if anything is written procedure. I mean, they have goals, you know, that we gave to the expeditors of what they need to do, but these two people, I don't know, they just have this talent for it. They want to do it. It just kind of happened. And then they wanted, they sort of designed and created the process as we went, and they started attending the HUD landlord webinars series for landlord engagement, and they would come to us with ideas and were working on a couple of things based on their input. So they've kind of designed how those services work. And I don't know that we have anything other than what's like in our procedures, like our admin plan, Ann, more than that.

- [Ann] I don't think so.

- [DeeAnn] It's really about the barriers, and tapping into the landlord community for vacant units. So they've established, I think that's probably one of the best things they've done is they've established these relationships with the landlords. And when we, you know, when COVID hit and we were getting landlords calling thanking us for paying them still because they didn't know what to expect with moratoriums and rents. And they being kind of that first contact and that landlord connection, so landlords often call them when they have a vacant unit.

- [Angela] Got it, yeah.

- [DeeAnn] To see, you know, do you have anybody looking because they've had a good experience, and that's really what we want. The client, the landlord to have a good experience that they find their, get to use their voucher.

- [Angela] Okay, well is there anything in terms of even quantifying that landlord outreach or the frequency of that one of your expeditors would contact a client? Is it like a plan to always contact them like once a week or? And you mentioned your landlord kind of web training or webinars it was. Is that once a month or how, it sounds like those are part of maybe your admin plan, but they are important to your success.

- [Ann] Landlord webinars series is a HUD series.

- [Angela] Oh, okay.

- [Ann] That's on the HUD website. They created like a landlord guidebook, taskforce, and webinars series. So, and they've made some recommendations to us that we're going to ask actually our board to develop some type of incentive program there. What the goal, I guess, they

have is they have to make initial contact with the new voucher holder within five days. So Ann has outlined for them some very specific steps to help them, but they, I want to say they helped us to develop them, you know, make contact, note the barriers, tell us what you've done because when we're looking at voucher extensions, when we meet monthly with them, they know exactly where every voucher holder is at in their search.

- [Angela] Okay, okay.

- [DeeAnn] And trying to look at, oh, they share the poverty maps, they share the high areas of concentration. We maintain on our website a vacant unit list of landlords who have vacant apartments. So they're continually using that. And then the reasonable accommodations is a big one too. When, you know, someone needs exception payment standard or more search time. So they do that. They'll make those recommendations to Ann for approval.

- [Angela] Okay.

- [DeeAnn] Yeah, I think they're just, right now, you know, the barriers they're identifying are just the shortage of vacant apartments to just, I don't think we're unique in that, but they're just not a lot of, and these are mostly one bedroom apartments.

- [Angela] That's mainly what you're looking for and that's what's at short supply. Okay, great. Well, you've been really great in terms of describing some of the, I guess, the challenges and some of the things that you're trying to overcome. Anything else that you can note that is maybe unique to dealing with the preference population that you've chosen, that you've been able to successfully overcome or still grappling with? Besides like maybe the vacancies?

- [DeeAnn] I think we, just because of the nature of our program or some of our other preferences, we have about 65, 70% of all our voucher holders have a disability. So having the mainstream program, it wasn't any different than any other program we've done. We've worked, you know, with folks with disabilities. The bulk of our vouchers are with that population. And it, so we probably, probably why we need more one bedrooms. You know, they also, New Hampshire housing is the, we do the low-income housing tax credit program. So we finance and finance a lot of multifamily affordable housing. And we know that in house and the expeditors know that as soon as these properties are getting ready to go online, we know and they, some have saved our utilization and, you know, so they know when there's a new property going online and these landlords, and while they're working with the voucher holders, some of those barriers they're trying to address is how to help them get ready, you know? Do you have the security deposit, do you have, you know, someone has three pets or someone has, you know, what other things that may slow down their lease up process. So they're constantly helping them or providing information referral, you know? Call, talk to your caseworker or call this agency, or, you know, what areas they need help with. Because once they find a place, we don't want them to lose it. I mean, they'll get the inspector out there, you know, as soon as we can. And, you know, they're making first contact with that landlord as soon as we can so that we don't lose, we don't want to lose that opportunity for any voucher holder to lease up, not just the mainstream, but.

- [Angela] Okay, that's great. I really appreciate that. Well, on the flip side then, what about in terms of other relationships that you've been able to develop with agencies? Any, can you name specific partnerships that you've developed either where you may be further developed, you may have had the contact, but yet you're further developed as a result of the mainstream or in new partnerships?

- [DeeAnn] We've had that, so what we did, thank you for reminding us of that. So early on in the process, we did some training, onsite training with the DHHS with connecting with them and all those nonprofit agencies that we didn't know many of them. I mean, we knew the community mental health centers because they're a little bit more visible, but a lot of the smaller agencies, we had trainings and onsite, walked them through the process, explained it all. I don't know, we had 80, 90 people, and those who couldn't make it, we did some road shows. So, you know, we went to Project Mountain, it's a rehabilitation center for young adults with disabilities. So we would go and try to, you know, do some trainings. We just actually did one with . So try to get more information to them about why we need what we need so timely. So we're getting paperwork, you know, we do everything by mail, so it can be overwhelming for the participant, and we don't want to terminate someone's assistance for no paperwork, you know? So we're reaching out to the agencies. They probably work more one-on-one with them, Ann, and developing those relationships. We, I don't want to say it. When there's a problem, they'll escalate it up. Like, if they're not responding or they're not helping, because, you know, according to DHHS, all these agencies are on board with this program, everybody wants the voucher, and they want to do their part to help with the paperwork to the degree that they can. But it's usually the paperwork would be kind of be the thing that slows it down sometimes. Then like Darryl said, once Tish is done with her piece, it goes then to a different caseworker who will be, you know, his, who will do the paperwork, the annual process. So he'll meet somebody new now, have somebody new, but hasn't had a recertification yet. So he hasn't, but with his now getting married, he will have that.

- [Angela] I'm just really glad that you all have the internal capacity, you know, the funding and the capacity to have the navigators or expeditors, like you said, cause that's not the reality of all housing agencies across the country. And that really helps.

- [DeeAnn] And the road shows.

- [Jie] Yeah.

- [DeeAnn] Yeah we, remember Ann, years ago we did it cause we, and then we stopped and then we did it, and then we're like okay, clearly this works. We have to work these goals and tasks into, and these two, so we used to have, like, I don't know, like 10, I want to say mini expeditors. Like everybody kind of did their own, and it was a little disjointed when you had staff taking care of their own. So we moved it. These two just liked it, came up with ideas, were very engaged in the process. So it's like okay, well, you know, we'll just put it with two people, which was easier for us to manage as well.

- [Ann] And they can work the coordination, so they, you know, get ahold of that inspector. Are you out there today? I've got somebody who really, you know, found a unit. Can you run in and

do that inspection? So they work really closely with the inspectors, with the folks that are doing the eligibility, so they know what's coming up. So it's a lot of coordination, but they take it and run with it. So that's why.

- [Angela] So it sounds also by, as you said, because it was with so many people involved and trying to be a little bit of a coordinator by narrowing it down to two, those relationships ongoing are developed to continue to facilitate the communication, the coordination, and you almost get to know that person really well whoever they may be and whatever role they have. So that sounds really good. Any other resources were leveraged because of these relationships and partnerships? Resources, I mean, obviously you're going to them to tell them about who you are, what you have available, and trying to pull and get clients. But any resources leveraged?

- [DeeAnn] Probably just with DHHS with, you know? We have a couple different memorandum of agreements with other pieces of DHHS, so I think leveraging those resources, that staff, and even Ann doing the moving on. The new mainstream preference, you've set up right away with them. Meetings, scheduled meetings, check-ins, process review, paperwork process. So right away, you know, and everything's done now, you know, Zoom. We're not actually meeting with them. But right away, it's like, you know, we set that up and explain the process to them and why we need it. And we learned from them of how they do it and we meet new, I want to say we meet new people for them. We didn't know how many of these people in the moving on program that they've then connected us to that they work with the continuums of care.

- [Ann] Right.

- [DeeAnn] So we know some of the COC agencies, but not like not direct daily contact like they have, and then they're making that referral and looping it back to us.

- [Angela] Did you find any challenges that needed to be overcome on, just kind of relating back a little bit to my experience, sometimes you definitely sound like you've got your kind of process set up and you, actually D said that you needed to learn how they do things, and sometimes there may be not necessarily a real cohesive kind of process there and it has to be worked out. Did you find anything, particularly like with medical agencies when you're dealing with certain things of how they operate, did you find any particular challenges specifically around that? And then how did you overcome them or have you overcome them?

- [DeeAnn] No, no, we had--

- [Ann] No, no, no.

- [DeeAnn] The thing we changed, you know, we, when we applied to the first round, we had to notify everybody on our waiting list, which was we have about over 7,000 people on our waiting list so we gave them all an opportunity to self identify or tell us if they had the mainstream. And then we created the preference form that they would have an agency complete. So it was time-consuming and them knowing us and we knowing them.

- [Angela] Okay.

- [DeeAnn] I don't think we had really any the medical, you know? We designed the referral form to look just like the regulations, you know? What's the definition of transitioning out or at risk. And like Daryl, like his caseworker did it. So he may not have even known.

- [Angela] Right.

- [DeeAnn] He did it, cause I said to him, you know, we obviously have the form because obviously everything still has to go through quality control check, but yes, you know, the referral is in there, and. There might be a change in caseworker along the way, you know, caseworkers may change. But now that we have the agency, we still have an agency connection that I think prior to mainstream we didn't have. We didn't need it to that detail. So now we have the agency connection that they know who we are and we have a place to call to when we, you know, when we need help. Kind of like we do with Vash, we always had that with Vash, but this was something new so we just had to establish that.

- [Angela] Okay, okay. Alrighty. So moving on, what practices have you found to be effective to help mainstream applicants successfully find housing? Is there, what types of houses search assistance is available to them directly?

- [DeeAnn] The expeditors and the agencies they work with could help with some of that. That was part of like the MOU we do with the moving on preference that they also are helping with housing search. And then we maintain on our website, you know, the vacant unit list and the expeditors keep their own list. Not every landlord wants their vacant apartment on our website because they just get inundated with calls, but they will let the expeditors know, you know, just internally. So that would be with housing search, and the inspectors, I guess.

- [Ann] They're, they're--

- [DeeAnn] They're out there.

- [Ann] Yeah, the inspectors are working with the landlords more closely than we are. So they know when a landlord will say, you know, I've got a unit coming up and they've worked with us before. So we have that resource also.

- [DeeAnn] Right. And they could reach out to them and just say, you know, we have somebody looking in that area. If you get a vacancy in the next 30, 60 days, can you call me? So they're making that connection, reaching out to them.

- [Angela] Okay, okay. Let's see. Well, you've answered a lot of these other questions. The challenges experienced around successfully identifying and leasing up program participants in your targeted group. You kind of really already addressed those. Is there anything else that you think you would like to add or that I may not have asked with regards to your program, how you're working with the other agencies, the relationships, your clients?

- [DeeAnn] I think the only thing I can't share too much about because we haven't been approved by our board is our landlord, you know, we're trying to get a landlord incentive pilot program off the ground. And so, it hasn't even been represented to our Board of Directors yet, so I'd hate for them to hear about it in the HUD exchange and that we haven't had the chance to review it with them, but I think that's our next goal is to think of ways to use some of the HUD training we saw, you know, through those webinars. Whether it's a referral, or a sign-on bonus, or a thank you card, you know, something using authority funds, because HUD doesn't provide for that. But something that we need to, we want to get you know, get more landlords.

- [Angela] Okay.

- [DeeAnn] Get new landlords, and not just for the mainstream program. We have the foster youth to independence, the FYI vouchers. And that's also, you know, that may be a hard population to house. So we're kind of doing this, you know, looking at these landlord incentives, so how do we, you know, I have some draft flyers here and I'll share them when they're done, but we have some draft flyers of how do we do more marketing and outreach on our social media and our webpage. And, you know, we've done a couple panels with some landlord association groups on those programs, but getting a landlord to we're their first call, you know? So we're working on that, even though the utilization is good and the expeditors are great, we know what's going on in the state, and that's just keeping, staying in tune to the trending. You know, it's like, okay, now our success rate's dropping. So we're constantly looking at the success rate and how do we get that up? How do we get people to be successful sooner and not have so many holders that, you know, you could risk over leasing. So we try to balance the two.

- [Angela] Okay, okay, great. Jie, I'll turn it over to you. Do you have any other questions you think you want to add or maybe I missed?

- [Jie] I don't have any questions to add, but you know, I like to recap by saying that it seems to me that you all, your success is rooted in the fact that you utilize and be able to leverage locally accessible data. That you really are paying attention to the nuance in terms of the needs of the population. And then, you know, prepare it ahead of time, you know, by investing in time to go to conduct the outreach that necessary to generate the success. So I just commend you all for leveraging data to inform your program design and program performance that led to this level of success. So it was great for us to witness all of that.

- [Angela] That is true.

- [DeeAnn] A lot of this HUD, I mean, you know, HUD has the forecasting tool and HUD has these webinars series and HUD has data also. So we have the local in the, you know, from HUD and talking to the other housing authorities and networking, you know? Go, you know, networking, finding out what's working or you know, what, we don't travel so much anymore, but to national conferences or national we don't go do that, but that's what we try to share ideas and try, you know, if we have to project base some vouchers to increase our utilization, it's like what tools do we have with portability and project basing and, you know, family unification, Vash, you know, because we, I don't know, we want to lease them. We say, and they, I tell you, we have very committed staff who, they want them to be housed, we want to house people. I

don't want to say we don't get paid by HUD unless they leased out, but that's kind of what happens. We don't get paid unless they lease up, but they truly want them to succeed and lease up, you know? We can pull 500 people and we're going to lease somebody, but that's not necessarily the best way to work with people who have challenges. I didn't know some that Daryl had. I mean, we know from what we had for his referral form, but you know, obviously this was a life of poverty and struggles.

- [Ann] Mental health challenges, addiction challenges.

- [DeeAnn] Yeah, you know, the prison and rehab and Crystal Meadows, you know, now he works full-time at McDonald's. It's like, that was, I feel like the best part of the day, I think, is when we get to hear some of those. Like Ann's team and the staff get to hear them.

- [Ann] We do, we do.

- [DeeAnn] All the time. You know, to hear somebody and that they turned their life around.

- [Ann] It's rewarding.

- [DeeAnn] It is, yeah. Turned his life around.

- [Jie] Yes, indeed. Well, thank you ladies for, you know, taking the time to meet with us. If we have any follow-up questions that comes up later on, we'll be sure to reach out to you all via email. And in the meantime, if you have any questions for us, feel free to reach out as well.

- [DeeAnn] All right.

- [Jie] Like I said, we'll let you guys know when the video and the spotlight documents make it onto the HUD exchange website.

- [DeeAnn] How many agencies are you interviewing?

- [Jie] We're at least doing three. Yeah, and you guys are our first ones, so. We delivered a home run, I would say.

- [DeeAnn] Oh no, I'm sure they'll all be good.

- [Jie] Well, thank you again.

- [DeeAnn] You're welcome.

- [Jie] All right, you guys have a great evening.

- [Ann] Thank you.

- [Jie] Bye.

- [DeeAnn] Bye.