

Transcript: Interview with Santa Ana Staff

- [Jie] Oh, to make sure it's recording. Okay, yes. All right, so this interview consists of several sessions and Angela when I will just take turns asking you guys a series of questions here. So, let me go with Judson first, so would you please state your name and your organization?

- [Judson] Yes, of course. My name is Judson Brown, I serve with the City of Santa Ana as the housing division manager.

- [Jie] All right, let's go to Maria.

- [Maria] Hey, my name is Maria Hodson and I am a senior housing specialist here with the City of Santa Ana Housing Authority.

- [Jie] Okay, sounds good, thank you. And you all can take turns answering this question here. What is your role pertaining to the administration of the mainstream voucher program?

- [Judson] Well, I'll jump into it, at the high level, I have been responsible for submitting our grant applications for the mainstream NOFAs that have been issued. And then once the grant application is issued, then I've worked closely with our team and with our partner agencies to establish the infrastructure of how and, how we would be receiving referrals, qualified eligible referrals for the program. And then lastly monitoring our progress to lease up those vouchers to full utilization. And, but most of the tremendous work in administering our mainstream voucher program comes from Maria.

- [Maria] So my role is to receive the referrals from our partner agencies. So we, my job is to establish if they have effective and efficient relationships with our partner agencies to receive referrals and assist the families that are being referred for this housing opportunity.

- [Jie] Thank you, Maria. The next set of questions has to do with probate capacity, so I'll let Angela jump in here.

- [Angela] Okay, all right. Can you describe to me exactly how many voucher, mainstream vouchers you've been awarded so far? We have our, I think we have a spreadsheet that it's somewhere around 200 or so?

- [Maria] Yes, of course, so we've been awarded mainstream vouchers in increments.

- [Angela] Right?

- [Judson] So starting with the 2017 mainstream voucher NOFA, we were awarded and I'm going to struggle here a little bit without information in front of me. So we were awarded 50 vouchers as part of that NOFA and then in the 2019 NOFA, I'm sorry, yeah, fiscal year of 2019 NOFA, we were awarded 70 vouchers, so we were up to 120. And then last year as a result of the CARES

Act, we were awarded an additional 36 vouchers, so that jumped us up from 120 to 156. And then most recently with the September, 2020 NOFA, we were awarded 75 additional mainstream vouchers. So 156 and 75 gets us up to a very large allocation for a medium-size housing authority, as 75 plus 156 is 231. And the utilization of those vouchers we've been aggressively and proactively trying to lease up all of those vouchers. And most recently we're excited to have leased up our allocations from 2019 and 2017 and we're now making substantial progress on leasing up our allocations from 2020 and yeah, from 2020.

- [Angela] Oh, okay. So as far as you kind of was answering one of my next questions around the utilization. So you're about what 75% in terms of percentage wise of the total vouchers somewhere in there?

- [Judson] Well, so out of 231 vouchers, we currently have I believe Maria, 103, only leased up?

- [Maria] Yes, we have 103.

- [Judson] 103 currently leased up, no that's that doesn't take into consideration the voucher holders we have out there searching. We do have a Maria, what would it be? Maybe 30 to 40 voucher holders out there searching?

- [Maria] We have about 15 actually, we've had a few that submitted our TA, so we're just pending, they're moving. So there's some in a fluid state where their inspection has passed and now we're waiting on a move-in date.

- [Angela] Oh, okay, that sounds great, all right. How much, or how would you estimate the level of effort that it takes in terms of being able to what staff and I don't, or Maria are you primarily the single person or do you have other people working with you in order to do this outreach and to work with the residents?

- [Judson] I guess I have been working now with the mainstream voucher since we have been awarded these special purpose vouchers and so yes, I have been the sole individual with some assistance from part-time staff to take the family from referral all the way to lease up. So that referral comes to me, I coordinate with the service provider, there are phone interview because we have been doing phone interviews with the clients and then I coordinate with their service provider to provide any pending verifications for completion of their file and then after that, once they've passed the background, they've met the income qualifications, they've met the criteria for the mainstream voucher, we schedule the voucher briefing and that is done virtually via Zoom. And so I coordinate the packet pickup from, with the service provider for them to come and pick it up and ensure that the client will have adequate tools to be able to log into Zoom and view the briefing which usually is about an hour and a half. So we go through the important points from the briefing, the voucher issuance, the occupancy, their TTP, their, the, what the process is to request an extension. And then also we introduce them to our owner incentive through our partner agency, through WelcomeHomeOC where they will be essentially matched with a unit and assisted with their lease up process. So, yes, and then once they've leased up and moved in, I provide the property management and all of our team, WelcomeHomeOC and their service

providers with the breakdown of rents and approval for moving. And then I step the lease and processed any lease admission.

- [Angela] Wow, that's amazing, that is awesome. You're able to accomplish so much and to be here you have to have placed so many residents, even so far, that's, just awesome. So needless to say, it's your full-time job, 40 hours plus, so I would imagine, so.

- [Judson] Absolutely, yes, it is quite extensive. I enjoy it, so it doesn't feel like such a big task, but it is something that is, now that we have even greater numbers, we do need, we have hired a new staffs, thank goodness. So we're working on onboarding her and working her through the process that that's been established.

- [Angela] So you anticipate that person is going to be full time then, so it'd be two staff persons? Okay.

- [Judson] And Angela, I want to build on this too, cause what, we're in the presence of greatness here with Maria, you guys got to understand this. So we'd like to refer to her as Michael Jordan, cause she's .

- [Maria] Oh, my goodness.

- [Judson] So while leasing up these 103 mainstream vouchers, homeless voucher holders that we referred, Maria also leased up 25 foster youth through our Foster Youth Independence Program, 75 homeless veterans in a new construction project called Heroes Landing, HUD-VASH veterans through our Heroes Landing project, 75 homeless veterans. And then most recently, it's kind of like just dribbling and just hitting threes all day, leased up a 56 unit new construction project for chronically homeless individuals.

- [Angela] Wow.

- [Judson] We're talking over the numbers are over 200 homeless individuals, including veterans and foster youth and chronically homeless individuals, over the last two year period, she's incredible. Absolutely incredible.

- [Angela] That is simply awesome, I cannot.

- [Maria] Thank you Judson.

- [Angela] That's great. I also wanted to find out in terms of the different allocations Judson that you described that you applied for in increments and receiving these vouchers, were there particular preferences that you had indicated in your application that you were going to apply or did they change, or did they grow in terms of number of preferences with each application that you did?

- [Judson] Well, so the context here in the City of Santa Ana is first and foremost we're one of the lowest income cities in Orange County. And then second, we have the highest concentration

of homeless individuals in the county. Out of the 2019 point in time count based on the most recent data readily available to us, right? 1,600 individuals were counted as unsheltered and sheltered homeless individuals in our city, which was 500 more than the closest city to us. It was, we're by far have the largest and highest concentration of homelessness in our community. And so when we applied for our first allocation in 2018, we knew first and foremost that they were going to be following under our homeless preference and that we would be using our homeless preference to try and serve homeless individuals. And it built upon our work in developing permanent supportive housing opportunities for homeless individuals using our project-based vouchers and so now we were able to use tenant based vouchers to house people experiencing homelessness.

- [Angela] Okay and well, among those statistics in terms of the homeless, was there that mental health, the disability component that also did the, was there any kind of numbers that jumped out with you with regards to that and how that applied to the mainstream program to those vouchers?

- [Judson] Yeah, well, I, the, there is a substantial, I don't know the percentages, but there's a substantial number of people experiencing homelessness who have a disability and so we've in terms of receiving and qualifying eligible referrals of homeless individuals from our community who are persons with a disability, we've never run into an issue where there's not a qualified knowledgeable referral or person, homeless individual who is a person with a disability. The, I don't have the point in time count data off the top of my head of the number of sheltered and unsheltered individuals who were persons with a disability, but I believe it was around 40 to 50%.

- [Jie] Okay, okay and did you set up some, any parameters I know that you indicated you had currently have 103 utilization of those vouchers, but did you set up any specific criteria of what defines success for you in terms of how you accomplish the work and then in terms of the end result with the residents, were there any particular parameters that you were looking to and targets I should say, that you were looking to hit with regards to the defining success?

- [Judson] I would say there's two key parameters that we've always been focused on, first and foremost was utilizing the assistance, utilizing the vouchers and leasing up eligible and qualified referrals. The, it's a heavy lift for any housing authority you take any one given housing authority, it's a very heavy lift for a housing authority to lease up hard to house individuals, right? And we're going to all experience that with the emergency housing vouchers as housing authorities are now trying to plan and scramble, to lift up these emergency housing vouchers over the next six months. So with these mainstream vouchers, we've always focused on our utilization. It's been consistently our main topic of conversation, after utilization is retention. When, once individuals are leased up, then we want to ensure that the supportive services that their, the service providers are obligated to provide are actually being provided and those individuals are retaining their housing. Maria did I capture that well?

- [Maria] Yes, that's correct, yes. Making sure we extend all the funds that are awarded to our housing authority.

- [Jie] Okay, alright. Were there any particular policy and procedures maybe that you, were there any changes based on how you're going to implement the program versus any other administration of your vouchers, whether project-based, or tenant-based, were there any changes or even when regards to work outreaching and working with partners that provided resources, were there any other new kind of policies or procedures you have to set in place?

- [Judson] Absolutely, I want to highlight two. So first was trying to figure out how to link these referrals to landlord incentives. So you see in the allocation of emergency housing vouchers that we all received, right? You see that, how does now provided funding for housing search assistance and including the payment for application fees and security deposits and holding fees and landlord incentive payments? Well, we knew that was the best practice as a housing authority, as many of our partner agencies do and so when we received our first allocation of vouchers, our initial goal was figuring out how to connect them to a landlord incentive program, our local landlord incentive program. And so we, when we received our first allocation, we approached our local landlord incentive program and said, hey, we've got these vouchers, we've got a homeless service provider who's going to provide us with referrals, can you guys provide them with assistance through your landlord incentive program? And they, it was like an unfunded mandate, right? Of, we've got vouchers, but we don't have any funding for the landlord incentives and the wraparound supportive services. And so they actually engaged in a private market campaign and raised over \$500,000 to provide landlord incentives to lease up our first allocation of 50 vouchers. And that was just a phenomenal to see, that was an awesome success of the above a public-private partnership of leasing up homeless voucher holders, homeless tenant based voucher holders. The, but then we had the shift, right? Cause we couldn't go back to them and say, okay, we've got, what was our second allocation? 70 more, right? We've got 70 more vouchers, can you guys raise another \$500,000 to do this again? So we actually had the shift and so we've been working in a very creative partnership with individuals who are referred to as a CalOptima eligible. And CalOptima is the, what's the parallel across the country? I get the term, it's our healthcare program for low income families and individuals, right? And that's what California calls it, CalOptima, right? And so we've partnered with agencies who are able to access funding through that healthcare program to provide not only the landlord incentive piece, right? But also funding for wraparound supportive services. And it's not a huge amount of funding we're talking about, I think it's like a package of like \$4,500 per household or \$5,000 per household with a certain allocation for the housing navigation component and landlord incentives and a certain component for the wraparound supportive services. But, so we added in that additional layer of eligibility of, okay persons with a disability who are homeless, who are also CalOptima eligible. And if you're a low-income family in California, then your eligibility for, you're going to be eligible for CalOptima. And so, the, it's just a matter of signing you up, basically. So nearly every referral every referral, we've never had an issue where an individual is not eligible for CalOptima, right? So through this very creative partnership, we've been able to gain access to not only funding for landlord incentives, but also funding for wraparound supportive services and that is how our program has evolved. And so that's the first key piece, key policy and procedure, key procedure that we implemented for our local program to get to 103 leased up so far. And that's how we're continuing to lease up individuals through our program. The second policy that we already had in place for our housing authority was that our criminal background check screening policies are the bare federal minimums. We don't implement any additional local criminal background check screening requirement beyond the

federal minimum. And we took that memo from the general, HUD's general counsel very seriously and then the guidance from HUD in terms of criminal background check policies being as a different barrier, especially having a disparate impact on low income families and different racial groups. And so we have that in place and so we don't ever have an issue where an individual doesn't pass our criminal background check screening requirements.

- [Angela] That's fantastic, that is awesome. Can you just kind of just, I want to just kind of ask a side question with regards to the owner incentives, were those funds more like, was it extra deposit in the form of like extra deposit, can you just kind of describe a little bit how, what that incentives look like?

- [Judson] Of course, yeah, so it's the array of landlord incentives that can capture the interest and willingness of landlords to make units available to homeless voucher holders. So starts with funds to pay for the application fee for the household, then funds to pay for their security deposit up to two months, or the set or the lower of the two months, or the landlord security deposit. Then the, then an incentive payment of \$500 for that landlord. If they lease up, they're willing to lease up their unit to homeless voucher holders will give them an incentive of \$500 to do so. And then the landlords are always frustrated with HQS, right? And the delays and working with the housing authority and all that, right? So, we have a holding fee that if the landlord holds their unit and makes it available for that individual and continues to make it while they're waiting for the inspection, while they're waiting for the half contract and then we'll also pay a holding fee and then finally, basic moving costs, utility arrears, utility deposits and furnishings and then finally funding we, the struggle in, is actually providing the funding for the supportive services. But through this partnership we've established with the whole person with CalOptima, we're able to do that.

- [Jie] Okay, all right, that is just awesome. I know it sounds like you've really kind of hit the nail on the head and particularly on those owner incentives what could help someone get involved in the program that normally wouldn't consider it? So that's great and you mentioned a little bit about some of your challenges. So this CalOptima program sounds like it's one of the ways that you've also been able to make sure you can bring appropriate resources to your clients. So any, are there any other challenges that you've faced, that you've been in, how you, can you describe how you overcame them or are you still struggling with?

- [Judson] Maria, I, we, I think we'd, I, off the top of my head I'd say staffing and capacity, for sure, even though we work Michael Jordan.

- [Maria] Yes, that's a one major one and then having to do work arounds due to COVID, because of COVID the limitations that we have with seeing clients in the office and scheduling Zoom out and so making sure the client has the technology that they need in order to participate in those briefings. So primarily that, the COVID impediment has delayed some of the processes that we've had in place.

- [Angela] Okay, all right. And then hopefully moving forward they'll become less of an impedance, so.

- [Judson] Yes.

- [Angela] Okay, that's great, all right, Jie, I'll turn over for you to the next set of questions.

- [Jie] Sounds good, thank you Angela. That was great to learn about the inner workings of the program implementation. Now we want to shift gear a little bit and talk about the resources and partnerships. We touched upon that a little bit already but if you could just go a little deeper in terms of the effective partnerships that you have built with community stakeholders, organizations and agencies that serve this particular target population and how you built those partnerships or if they're not new, how do you maintain these partnerships and what type of resources will leverage due to those partnerships?

- [Judson] Absolutely, absolutely. So, with our first allocation, our first partnership that we had ever established with our mainstream vouchers was with our, actually our emergency shelter provider, this organization by the name Illumination Foundation. Kinda called nexus they were, there, they have a strong affiliation with Disneyland and, anyways, but they're, they were our first partnership ever and when we approached them and said, hey we've got 50 vouchers, we want to work with you. We want to establish a partnership where you'll be our referral agency, and we'll lease up these voucher holders together. Well, they didn't have the funding for their housing navigation services and so, what they did at the time is they actually took a continuum of care grant that they had received and they amended that grant to allow, with approval from HUD, allowed them to amend that grant to use their continuum of care grant funds to provide the wraparound supportive services and the housing navigation services to lease up. And it wasn't 50, we were like, hey, we've got 50 vouchers, let's lease up homeless individuals with these vouchers. They came back to us and committed to 38.

- [Jie] Okay.

- [Judson] And so, we, that was our first ever partnership was 38 vouchers to lease up with our emergency shelter provider who had to amend their continuum of care grant to find funding for those wraparound supportive services. So we still had 12 vouchers as part of that partnership. So our second partnership was with our local health care agency and it was just a basic request. We didn't know how it was going to go and we said, hey, we've got 12 additional vouchers, we know you've got terrific staff there at your team working with mental health services act funds and other tenant based voucher opportunities and we asked them if they would be interested in being a partner referring agency to us and they're funded through public funds. So, fortunately at the time they said yes and they were able to refer family, 12 individuals over to us to lease up to the 50 threshold that we have to all, at least have all 50 voucher holders. Well, the second round of funding, that's when they got, oh, I'm sorry. And I forgot to mention this, right? Well, when we had those 50 voucher holders, we also connected them with our local landlord incentive program provided by the United Way. And the United Way had just established the landlord incentive program about six months before we received those vouchers and we worked with all four housing authorities to do so, but they were still, they're still getting off the ground at the time. And so, with our 50 vouchers, they committed to a private market campaign to raise \$500,000 which I shared. And so, with the referring agency from our emergency shelter provider, from our local healthcare agency, which is county funded for 12 of those vouchers and 38 of those

vouchers, we combined it with our local landlord incentive program and we were able to lease up all 50 vouchers. With the second allocation of 70 vouchers, that's when it got more complicated. 'Cause again, we knew that our, the first time around our provider had to go through a lengthy process to amend their continuum of care grant to lease up their vouchers. And it led to funding, identify funding for the supportive services. And so, what, we started discussions with a whole new collaborative that had just formed in Orange County called the Health for Housing OC collaborative, the Health for Housing Orange County collaborative. And that collaborative was forming around individuals who are CalOptima eligible, which if you're low income and or in California, you're CalOptima eligible. And to connect them with a, the healthcare funds that were allocated to that individual as part of their, an array of health care services that they were eligible for. And so, they formed this partnership of five different organizations and we approached them and we said, we've got 70 vouchers and we're interested in working with you to lease up these 70 vouchers, because we think this could be a very unique and innovative partnership. And so, they agreed to enter into a partnership with us and since then, we've now been serving, again persons with a disability who are homeless, but who are also CalOptima eligible, who are eligible for healthcare services for low income individuals through the State of California. And those healthcare services have been able to pay for the wraparound supportive services being provided by the provider and a portion for landlord incentive payments. And we meet on a monthly basis, Maria, right? With the collaborative?

- [Maria] Yes.

- [Jie] And do you want to share more about the collaborative?

- [Judson] Yeah, so they provide the referrals to us and support the family in their journey from the referral to the lease-up, they assist with going out and viewing the unit, application, any documentation that they need to get them ready for the lease up, switching utilities into their name cause all of those, like behind the scenes or tasks that have to be accomplished to lease a unit, those are not really something that the housing authority assists with or provide information. So that's where the supportive service partner comes in and they play that role where they're right next to the client assisting them with that process. So they're able to successfully lease the unit, go to a viewing and currently the viewings, it just depends on the property, they may be done virtually. So they assist with those viewings, with technology to ensure that they're able to connect with the landlord and meet all of the requirements that the property management is requesting of them. With also renter's insurance we're seeing a lot of renters insurance requests from property managers and that owner incentive program also assist them with that component of the application process. So yeah, it's a very dynamic relationship, but the housing authority, the tenant, the service provider and our owner incentive partner, we all meet and collaborate and talk about how, what our progress is, how it's going, where the holes are, where we need to focus our attention to and to, on another point is of all the vouchers that we've issued, I would say about maybe one or two have expired. So we have not had a high turnover in vouchers. If we issue a voucher, it's almost a guarantee that they're going to be leased up with our partner community that we have established with the owner incentive partner and our service provider. So we're all committed to the referral, seeing them from the beginning stages to the lease up stage.

- [Maria] And Jie and Angela, what we're, what you're hearing from us too at the local level, if you go to the 30,000 foot level and look and evaluate everything, right? The family option study found that tenant based vouchers are effective in ending homelessness, right? That was, there's facts. There's a hard study longitudinal study, it determined that housing vouchers are effective to end family, end homelessness, end the person's homelessness. Well, we have HUD-VASH vouchers that are combined with funding that pays for the VA staff to provide wraparound supportive services, it doesn't pay for a landlord incentive component, but it pays for the wraparound supportive services, right? And then we have, but we have mainstream vouchers where we as housing authorities receive the mainstream vouchers, but we didn't receive any funding for the providers who are making those referrals to us provide those wraparound supportive services or to incentivize landlords to issue those vouchers. And you look at how we're evolving, right? So now, had amazing work at the federal level under our leadership with the emergency housing vouchers and those emergency housing vouchers now come with the funding for landlord incentives and housing search assistance, right? So it's huge how we're evolving, how we're learning and realizing one, how we're growing from that family option study and how we're learning as an industry that, how effective vouchers are to end an individual's homelessness when they're combined with funding for the wraparound supportive services and incentives for landlords to accept those vouchers.

- [Jie] That's a great point, that's a great point. So, figuring out the magic, the winning formula is key. We talked about a lot of the resources that you are able to leverage. Were there any particular challenges in terms of building and maintaining a relationship? And if so, how did you guys overcome those challenges?

- [Judson] Well, I'd say the biggest challenge is trying to figure out the funding for the wraparound supportive services and the landlord incentives. It's hard to explain the partners, our partnership with CalOptima eligible individuals and how they're funding, funded through this Health for Housing OC collaborative. And it was a big success for Orange County when \$500,000 was raised to lease up 50 voucher holders. That is the struggle, that's the struggle, it's not that we don't have qualified and eligible individuals to be referred to us, we have 1,600 individuals that were counted in our community in the 2019 point time gap. It's the wraparound, the funding for the wraparound supportive services, the funding for landlord incentives to lease up those voucher holders. When that all comes together well, when everything works well, then we're able to lease up those voucher holders. And I'll give you a parallel, we, back in, I believe it was 2015 or 2016, 2016 we ish, we received 10 referrals, might have been 20 referrals, but I believe it was 10 or 20 referrals from one of our local homeless service providers or just a regular tenant based voucher. And our policy, our administrative plan policy, we have 50% of our turnover vouchers must be used for people experiencing homelessness for individuals experiencing homelessness. And so, we received referrals from that homeless service provider and only if I remember correctly, only about two or three of those individuals actually leased up with . And so the stories, and then you hear anecdotally stories of individuals and in emergency shelters, individuals on the street and unsheltered locations who have a voucher, but they can't lease up with it. So, the, again, we're evolving, we're growing through your work, through HUD's leadership, we're evolving and growing and realizing how effective tenant based vouchers are to reduce homelessness and how important it is to combine those resources with supportive services

and landlord incentives. And cause that has been our number one barrier is identifying the funding source that could pay for the supportive services and the landlord incentives.

- [Jie] Got it, got it, thank you, thank you. I have one final question before we hand it over to Angela to talk about applicant and participant engagement. So, you shared a lot about the sort of the external community level resources, you were able to leverage through the partnerships. Were there any internal resources that was already existing within the PHA that you guys used or leveraged to contribute to the success here? So, some of the things could be accessible housing registry or housing search assistance or anything else that you've already had and that was easily leverageable.

- [Judson] Great, question. And I want to answer that question, Maria I think you were going to say something on the last question though too.

- [Maria] Yes, I was going to say something and it was regard like housing stock. Like one of the challenges that we have had with regard to matching a client to, of a unit is that the limited housing stock that we have here in Orange County. And so we're seeing that a little bit in our last issuance of vouchers that we received, there's been a slower process of them being matched, they've had to utilize their voucher extensions past 120 days. So that's been a little bit of a challenge now we're seeing that. So it'll be interesting to see moving forward, with the vouchers that are going to be on the street that have been issued through the emergency housing grant what that's going to look like and what that's going to, what that unit selection is going to be involved with our partner agency, United Way, because they're the ones that go out and do the recruitment of the owners and have the housing stock available for our clients. Our clients have the option of going out there and looking for a unit on their own, but I will say that those that are, that do choose to do that have a lower chance of finding a unit and eventually they partner with United Way because they just aren't successful on their own securing a unit. So I just wanted to make sure that, that was a point.

- [Jie] That's a great point to note, that's a great point to share.

- [Judson] And Jie, so returning back to your question you asked, what internal resources did we use and did we reallocate to lease up these mainstream vouchers, right?

- [Jie] Yes.

- [Judson] The, leasing up these mainstream vouchers and administering them has put a an administrative burden on our entire team in the midst of a hiring freeze for our housing authority. And I can clearly say that Maria has carried that wait upon her shoulders since first allocation of these mainstream vouchers, when we looked around, when we were served our first allocation, we looked around and we said, okay we've got new vouchers, new special purpose vouchers and we said, who would be the best to person on our team to ask, to see if they'd be willing to administer and lease up these special purpose vouchers and be responsible for them? And we approached Maria and we said, Maria, okay, we'll give you responsibility for these, we're going to give you responsibility for these vouchers and will you be willing to reduce your caseload? And she was already carrying a caseload of over 350, right? Or 375, Maria? [Jie] - Wow.

- [Jie] Which, will you reduce your caseload proportional to everybody else so that you can take on these vouchers and the reduction wasn't one for one, we were trying to be the equitable, right? But it wasn't one for one, it wasn't like, hey, here's 50 and we'll reduce it by 50, it was more, I think it was like, what 20, right? Or something like that, or Maria?

- [Maria] Is it small percentage, I think it was 10%?

- [Judson] Yeah, yeah, so, and so we, it's again carrying the weight of these vouchers on her shoulders. She took on this responsibility on behalf of the housing authority and meanwhile managed her own caseload and it was so, the internal resources that we used, we didn't have extra resources coming in and in the middle of that all, we were in the middle of a hiring freeze. So after we leased up those 50 and we went to ask, hey can we hire an additional staff to help us administer these new special purpose vouchers, the answer was no. And so, fortunately a year later, we're now getting out of that hiring freeze and we're interviewing individuals today, this afternoon, but we're still at the same, we're it's still, I think Maria, we're still the same number of staff as we were two years ago.

- [Maria] Right, we are, yes, we are. We've had a net gain of one, but she's already at the level where we were with the caseload size when we were starting this process. So we've gained so many vouchers and new residents that it's, we haven't had a relief of the caseload size in quite some time. But I do want to add, yes, I took on that responsibility but if it wasn't for Judson's leadership and allowing me with the flexibility to be able to come up with innovative ways and new ways to process these referrals, it would have been a challenge if we would have been stuffed to this is how the housing authority does business and this is how we're going to do it. It would have been a challenge because some of those parameters are limiting to staff and Judson has allowed us, or allowed me to be able to be flexible in my relationship with the service providers in the way that we provide service to our referrals and our clients, which has broadened our scope and the ability to reach many more families than if we would have continued the traditional path of seeing the clients one-on-one in the office, waiting for approving the file when we have everything in the in the file. Whereas we can request for documents to supplement what we have and then pending what they need to provide such as receipt that they've requested their birth certificate, something in the file that tells us they're working on it but we can proceed as long as their background check has cleared, they've met the income qualifications. We don't want to hold up their housing opportunity because those documents are not in the file. So that has been instrumental in critical in us being able to move forward with our approval process and that's a direct result of Judson's flexibility with our program.

- [Jie] That's great, I think you lean right into the next section on the practices that are effective, right? So I'll let Angela handle those set of questions.

- [Angela] And I just also want to just before I get into those questions, just tell you I admire the love fest, you guys got going here. It's the way in any institution, any operation, any corporation, the way it works best. So I love to hear again my background, also Maria, understanding how flexibility can be such an asset. So Judson, kudos to you on that, but to further go on with what

you were saying in terms of how, what's been so effective to be able to lease up, I heard you say that having that flexibility because we can know that I guess people with disabilities can have difficulties maneuvering larger institutions to get those concrete documents. So that's, I heard that, but I also want to go back a step in terms of some of the things you talked about in terms of the agencies you're working with that assisted the residents, so did I hear that that was one of the ways that your clients have been able to, you've been able to be more successful with your clients is through these partner agencies and I wanted to clarify, I heard the CalOptima, I heard United Way, but I heard a collaborative, you said about five agencies, could you just touch on that real quickly, either one of you?

- [Maria] Of course, you've got just the monopoly of agency partners, right? I mentioned the beginning, right? Our continuum of care, our continuum of care had to amend and I was the chair at the time of our continuum of care, but we had to amend a grant for one of our homeless service providers to use their continuum of care grant funds under a bonus funding round to, in order to lease up our 38 vouchers, our local health care agency, which is funded by our county. We said CalOptima but then we said that Health for Housing Orange County collaborative that was formed around health outcomes for homeless individuals and in ensuring, trying to connect those individuals to housing, is that the best outcome for their health, right? The best, and so, it's, and then lastly our local United Way. So you've got, six different homeless service providers, you've got our county health care agency, you've got our local United Way, you've got our continuum of care, everybody just working together as a team to lease up people with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness.

- [Angela] Okay, all right, have you found any type of challenge with regards to the housing types? Whether it be finding studios or one bedrooms, or if you have more disabled families that you're trying to help, has there been any type of issues with regards to just the type of units and not being able to match? Or has that been a struggle for your clients in order to get an acceptable unit?

- [Judson] Yeah, so one bedroom units are in high demand, most of our individuals that we are assisting are single individuals.

- [Angela] Okay.

- [Judson] And not a lot of families, we do have a few, but not a lot. So single unit studios, those are a challenge. Those are, due to that shortage in our housing stock, they find them, but, and then we have certain cities in our community that are just not open to participation. And so for whatever reason if we have a family that wants to live in a certain community, maybe their resources are there, their medical professional is there and they want to live in that community, it just makes it a little bit more challenging and some may not have transportation, so they have to rely on public transportation to get to their locations. So they, most of our families are successful in finding units in certain cities, but not others. So, and then that does reduce their search and where they're able to find a unit, but one bedrooms are hard to come by, studios are even rare.

- [Angela] Okay, okay.

- [Maria] And Angela, if I may too, I want to just touch on two things cause we paint a very rosy picture of everything going on here, right? But here's two realities for you, one that's right on point with what you're asking is that sometimes the scattered site tenant based voucher isn't the right fit for the individual that housing. So yesterday we met on three different cases where one individual was issued a notice to vacate and her neighbor was peaking in her unit and thought that she was making meth and we, and she was issued a mutual rescission but with lease violations. And so we had to decide, okay, do we propose a termination of our assistance for violating potentially producing meth in our unit or do we issue her a tenant based voucher, right? A very messy, super messy decision, right? That's a complicated decision. The second case was an individual who was fully evicted, issued several lease violations for unauthorized occupants, wrote a very lengthy apology letter and was begging for their housing to be maintained but you just had just lease violation after lease violation after lease violation, clearly documented. And again, was that the right fit? Was that tenant based and he, the individual, she, or he asked us in the letter, can you check up on me every week? I'm going to do better, can you check up on me every week? And were the supportive services adequate? Was it the right placement and to put that individual in a tenant-based housing opportunity? And we had a third case, I can't remember the details of it, but I'm just saying in general, we find that some placements aren't ideal in tenant based scattered to housing. And it even gets even messier from there where sometimes we have a referral for our project based housing opportunities with onsite wraparound supportive services where the supportive services are there, right onsite, every day. And the individuals don't want to go into that project, they don't want to go into that, they want the tenant based voucher to lease up in a scattered site model. So, you have that complications in terms of the layer upon availability of units and leasing up and finding a unit. And then I do want to just tell you about it, share the difficulty of finding partners to lease up our units and the funding, identifying the funding of these separate units. We've, we entered into a partnership with the 36 vouchers that we received under the CARES Act and we entered into a partnership with an organization that was working to move individuals from motels who were homeless individuals in California, thousands were placed into motels and the organization was working to move those individuals out of motels, into permanent housing opportunities. Well, we entered into a partnership with them for 36 of those housing opportunities. So far I believe they've leased up three and Maria, yeah.

- [Judson] We actually have now 10, 10.

- [Angela] Okay. 10 out of the 36, but that partnership has been in place for like what six months?

- [Maria] It's been a while, yeah.

- [Judson] It's been a while. So that organization is struggling as one of our partners. And they, we tried to connect them with the CalOptima eligibility team and that was a partnership there. And we, it's like, it's not, we, I'd say out of all the partnerships, it's not one of our most successful partnerships. And that's the, these are realities on the ground, right? Limited units, is the placement correct for the individual? Are they going to succeed and retain that housing? And then how do we make partnerships work on the ground? And we've got experience with all of that.

- [Angela] Well, you almost answered my very next question. So that is just awesome, it definitely goes into where we're looking in terms of what helps that client be successful. You kind of indicated a little bit earlier, too. I think you said there was, maybe it was just around in terms of a couple people dropping out during the application process, but is there any kind of successful measures you found to actually keep, have to retain them, have that percentage of those that have out of the 103, let's say that have been helped. I'm assuming none of them, they're still in their housing or has it turned over? And if so, why, or was it one of the reasons you just kind of spoke about it? Was it the right place? Is there anything that has been consistent that you know that helps people, help your clients retain their housing?

- [Judson] Yeah, so they're, our partnership with their service provider. So their service provider holds them accountable, establishes a plan with them. Like what is it that you're going to work on now that you are successfully housed? You have stable housing now which is critical in order to be able to get your life going is you have to have stable housing. We see that, we know that it's been studied. And so the partnerships to follow up from the case manager to the client, making sure that they are paying their bills, paying their rent. Early intervention if the property manager, which property managers know who the case manager is, they reach out to the property managers or myself and just let us know, hey this is what's going on in the unit now, we need to talk to the client, remind them of the responsibilities, let them know what's appropriate, what's not, guests. We do see where families that are moving from homelessness and they want to help their fellow individual, their, whether it's a friend or a family member, they want to house them too and that's something that we do see a lot, but early intervention and meeting with the case manager, doing a triage and making sure that they understand the ramifications of their actions, that they're not just going to be able to allow individuals to move in without prior approval and they have to be aware that they have to take responsibility. So all of those different components is what's worth with the case manager and the client. And we get lit in on that conversation only if it rises to the level where the client is just not the receptive to the case manager and they reach out to us. And then we just kind of remind them of their responsibilities as a voucher holder and how to maintain those responsibilities in good standing so that those early interventions help, it helps with those individuals that can proceed and understand that process with others that require more, a different level of care where they're living on their own, like the examples Judson provided. Those being on their own which is not be a successful plan for them. They would need a different level of care or a different housing opportunity that would provide them with the support that they need and living on their own does require for them to be able to accept that responsibility.

- [Angela] Okay, so in that case there are clients that may be living on their own and they have the option to just kind of find their own resources or work with their, either a, the doctor or just whatever other sources that they've had as well. So, I think I hear you saying that the overall goal is for them to be successful and as long as they're meeting their parameters, whether they're working with the agencies and the accountability that has been set up for them, based on what's been perceived as their individual need versus somebody that might be a little bit more independent and, but yet able still to appreciate the voucher and wherever they've gone and seek out their own help and assistance then be successful in that housing.

- [Judson] Yes.

- [Angela] No different than the rest of us in terms of choosing how we want to live. So that's actually kind of cool. I think it says any challenges you've experienced to overcome successfully and identifying and leasing program participants in the targeted groups? So I think in terms of the groups of the different preferences, so you may have had the different preferences that you included in your applications, those that are homeless or those who are at risk at being home, or those that are leaving institutions and at risk. So, depending on your preferences, have you had any kind of struggle with any particular subgroup I should say, of your overall client base to fill these answers?

-[Judson] Maria, I guess I'll jump into it, the, we've been proactively trying to house the hardest to serve individuals on our streets with the highest VI-SPDAT scores. And so, the referrals that we've been receiving have been very hard to serve individuals and we're not, there's no creaming going on here in terms of just housing individuals who are hard to serve like we're trying deliberately to serve the hardest to serve. And I'd say, what we're, we then see the results and Maria, it's with our two servers referrals?

- [Maria] Yes, so the ones that are a little bit more challenging that require a different level of care, we just work closely with the case manager, if we're able to assist them, because they have established rapport with the client. They're familiar with their intimate details, whereas we see them in a small window of time. We were, we don't have that rapport that we, that they built with them. So, our role is to get them permanently housed. So that's what we focus on. We don't really focus on the case management of the client or finding out what their critical needs are, housing is what our focus is. So that's why our partnerships are successful because they are the ones that come in and they assist the client with the challenges that they're having. And kind of removes the us from that aspect of it where they have someone that they can lean on without feeling that they have to come to the housing authority for all of their needs.

- [Angela] Okay, all right, great. Well, thank you so very much, Jie.

- [Jie] Yeah, anything else you guys want to add besides what we already covered?

- [Judson] Yeah, just one point I wanted to make is that those partnerships we've talked at length right about the homeless provider referring the individual to us and then our partnership with them to lease them up and then leasing them up with our local landlord and sent the program. But it also includes the landlord and some, now, keep in mind, some landlords, they only care about their bottom line, they're going to, if they have one or two lease violations, they're going to propose an eviction, right? And, but then other landlords, like the, that example I was giving where we had an individual who was allegedly using drugs in her, in their assisted unit, the landlord executed a mutual rescission. And they, and she said, she does not want this individual to lose their housing assistance. And so, with a mutual decision the housing authority doesn't have any evidence to evidence to propose a termination of the assistance. So, we're going to continue, of course assisting that individual. So, there, that partnership with landlords who are willing and interested to provide housing for homeless individuals is also a key key part of the

magic that happens to fully lease up an individual with disabilities who is experiencing homelessness.

- [Jie] That's great. Actually that leads to my final question, what is the feedback loop like when a resident is housed in terms of the supportive services provider giving you guys updates on, just the overall status of the residents, how they're doing and as you mentioned possible drug use if they're in rehabilitation or how they're doing in terms of overall health?

- [Judson] I'd have received feedback from clients when it's positive. Generally when the client are struggling, I don't usually get feedback from the client and less they've been served notices from the property letting me know, hey, there's this activity going on in the unit. So, that's how I find out and when, like the most common occurrences, when, have notices served initially are unauthorized individuals in the unit, loud noises, not respecting the common areas. So those are the types of notices that I see initially when a new family coming off of homelessness moving into a unit. So the positive experiences are directly from the client, the not so positive are from the landlord letting me know in writing that there's been disturbances at the unit.

- [Jie] Okay, good, good. Well, thank you so much for participating in this spotlight project and giving us so much to think about, to write about, we appreciate you all and we'll let you guys know once the final documents and video recording is published on hudexchange.com.

- [Angela] Thank you guys so much, your research and your effort, new report, I think will lay the groundwork for HUD studies with emergency housing vouchers. And we know that's going to be studied as well and you're going to be able to just show, okay, here's what some best practices are for mainstream voucher programs. And now HUD is building upon with emergency housing vouchers, how do we continue that effort? And so you guys, we, your work is extremely important to us on the ground. And it has profound changes at the local level on the lives of the families we're all trying to assist.

- [Judson] Thank you so much, thank you.

- [Maria] Pleased meeting you Angela.

- [Angela] Nice seeing you too.

- [Jie] We'll be, we'll stay in touch.

- [Judson] Yeah.

- [Maria] You enjoy the rest of your day.

- [Angela] Thank you.

- [Jie] Thank you as well. All right, thanks, bye, bye, now.

- [Angela] Bye-bye.