



PHA Spotlight: Washington D.C. Housing Authority Mainstream Voucher Implementation

CHALLENGE

The District of Columbia’s annual Point-In-Time count as of January 27, 2021 determined 8,309 persons as homeless, reflecting a second year decrease since 2020. However, those classified as chronically homeless, increased from 2020 and for five years since the 2017 count. The District of Columbia Housing Authority’s (DCHA) challenges include aiding clients with their mobility needs especially during COVID, reaching clients with limited to no access to technology, finding strategic partners to provide services and/or client referrals that meet specialty voucher (Mainstream, VASH) requirements; lastly finding and retaining a viable pool of landlords.

SOLUTION

DCHA’s participation in the Mainstream voucher program realized achievements that include meeting its leasing goal of 50% of the 90 awarded vouchers by mid-year of the 2020-2021 fiscal year. This has been achieved by:

- Outreach and partnerships with an existing network of agencies that specifically serve the populations identified in the Mainstream voucher NOFA.
- Development of a strong and growing pool of units, matching landlords and tenants, through “Meet and Lease” gatherings.
- Development of specific communication solutions that involved Point of Contact (POC) persons and Customer Solution Center/kiosks.

Existing Social Service Networks Accessed to Engage New Partners

DCHA recognized that the District of Columbia has a robust existing infrastructure that support the disabled and aging communities as well as social service agencies serving homeless clientele that match the Mainstream program criteria. DCHA used homeless as its minimum criteria and shared the availability of vouchers and program criteria with this network and various agencies. Partnerships were easy to form and agencies were anxious to forward their pre-screened clients to DCHA for an eligibility review.

Creation of “Points of Contact” to Ensure Clear and Direct Communication between All Parties

With appreciation for the vast and varied network of agencies with whom it could partner, DCHA structured an internal processing system with a Point of Contact for each department: Eligibility, Orientation/Leasing, Counseling, and Mobility. Clients are processed through each department (usually at least 4 persons) in succession, culminating with a leased unit. The ROTC (Relocation, Orientation, Training

and Counseling) department assists clients who need more direct assistance in finding units due to their disability. Landlords and owners have a POC to assist with their specific needs. Monthly meetings between internal staff and partner agencies to troubleshoot issues and review client and utilization status have been extremely vital to the successful management of client processing and communication.

Improve Client Access to Technology through Creation of Customer Solution Center/Kiosks

DCHA anticipated and effectively addressed the challenges that clients may have in maintaining communication with the various entities providing needed services. In order to assist clients with limited access to communication technology, DCHA operates several Customer Solution Centers/kiosks throughout the district to provide clients with access to computers, phones, tablets and other technology that aids their ability to retain contact with needed resources. Clients or case workers can easily schedule time for a “pod” for virtual convenings.

Encourage Client-Landlord Engagement through “Meet and Lease” Meetings

DCHA understood that successful leasing of the specialty vouchers is only possible with a ready and able pool of landlords/owners. In order to develop this pool, DCHA created a program called “Meet and Lease”. This innovative program took place in person three times per month (including a Saturday) at the DC offices and placed both landlords and applicants together. The meetings are segmented by bedroom size, so owners get to “showcase” their available units to the clients who are specifically looking for those units. Clients are equally empowered to search, preview and select the units they desire. In some cases, units are even leased on the spot. Meet and Lease meetings have been highly successful during COVID, which were all conducted virtually.

Landlord portals were used as a marketing tool to disburse notifications of the Meet and Lease schedule and landlord education sessions, thus helping to minimize the down time for vacant units. This marketing goes to multi-family owners as well as smaller “mom & pop” property owners.

RESULTS

DCHA has reached 50% utilization rate of the initial allocation of vouchers by mid fiscal year. With its internal goal of obtaining 10 referrals a month from partner agencies, DCHA hopes to meet 90% utilization of the total awarded vouchers by the end of 2021 fiscal year.

INSIGHT/LESSONS LEARNED

Maintaining strong and deliberate communication with all key parties: clients and partners (referring agencies and property owners) is vital to the successful leasing of units.

RESIDENT INTERVIEW

Milton is a disabled person that originally submitted an application for a housing choice voucher in 1996. Married and working for over 20 years, he had no need for a voucher. However, upon losing his legs and his wife leaving the marriage, Milton found himself alone and in need of housing. While at a local homeless shelter, Milton with the help of a case worker was able to reconnect with DCHA. His disability placed him

at the top of the list and after four months of working with a DCHA housing specialist, Milton was able to get his own unit in January 2020.

Milton loves his new home because it is secure, clean, and equipped with amenities including roof-top seating area with a TV. He also likes the convenience of being close to public transportation. Milton is excited to be working with the Social Security Administration and its employment search program. He hopes to obtain some type of office or desk work in the near future.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Ms. Aisha Thompson, District of Columbia Housing Authority
Co-Deputy Director of Housing Choice Voucher Program
athompson@dchousing.org or alemire@nhhfa.org