



# PHA Spotlight: Housing Authority of the City of Santa Ana Mainstream Voucher Implementation

## CHALLENGE

The City of Santa Ana experienced an 86% increase in homelessness between the year 2017 and 2019. In that time, the Housing Authority of the City of Santa Ana (HACSA) received 231 Mainstream vouchers through four awards from 2018 through 2020 which could be used to address the immediate need of housing the escalating homeless population.

HACSA experienced many challenges, including limited staffing to administer the awarded vouchers during an agency hiring freeze, determining strategic partnerships with service agencies to match targeted populations with needed services, landlord engagement and retention, finding accessible and appropriate housing.

## SOLUTION

Initially facing difficulty in housing those referred from the local homeless agency, HACSA recognized that its ability to serve the hardest to house required them to engage a greater number of landlords and developing strategic alliances with service providers.

### Leveraged Housing Search Supports and Landlord Incentives from Partner Organizations

HACSA established a partnership with the Illumination Foundation, a non-profit agency managing an emergency shelter, that reallocated its available Continuum of Care funds and the incentive funds. This funding helped clients pay up to two months of security deposits, application fee, credit fee, and a holding fee to landlords while HQS inspections were pending, utility deposits, provision of home furnishings, and a direct engagement incentive to landlords to participate in the Mainstream voucher program.

Additionally, HACSA, through collaboration with the local United Way, launched a fundraising campaign that raised a total of \$500,000 to fund costs related to housing search and landlord incentives to increase leasing of the Mainstream vouchers.

### Partnered with State Medicaid Funded Agency to Secure Wraparound Supportive Services and Additional Housing Search Supports

Through partnering with the Health for Housing Collaborative and Cal-Optima, HACSA leveraged Medicaid funds to provide wraparound supportive services and housing search supports. HACSA found that all homeless applicants who are eligible for Mainstream also qualify for CalOptima services, so it is able to secure these supports for most applicants even if they are not already enrolled with CalOptima at the time of application.

### Ensured Regular Communication with Partner Organizations

Intentional communication with partners and internal flexibility within the housing agency became important to ensure both clients and partner agencies remain actively engaged. Monthly meetings with partners became a standard to ensure an understanding of titles, roles/responsibilities, and current goals and to help clients overcome their obstacles.

### Took Advantage of PHA's Flexibility to Have Minimal Criminal Background Screening

#### Criteria

HACSA does not impose any additional criminal background screenings beyond the minimum criteria that HUD requires. They found that removing this barrier to admission has helped ensure almost no applicants are turned away for criminal background issues.

## RESULTS

HACSA achieved great success with the leasing of 85% of both of its 2018 and 2019 awarded vouchers. Specifically, it has a high leasing success rate of clients that are referred for the Mainstream voucher program; no to very low turnover of clients; a growing mixture of landlords working with service providers to manage their client's tenancy and not evicting at the first opportunity; ability to now hire an additional full-time support staff

Continued challenges for HACSA include sourcing appropriately sized units and housing type based on client needs. Studio and one-bedroom units are scarce; while multi-family versus single-family units can be a criterion to consider based on client need or lack of need for community or social interactions to remain compliant to lease rules and housing guidelines. Housing proximity to service providers or transportation to providers also presents a key challenge to client engagement.

## INSIGHT/LESSONS LEARNED

HACSA values the flexibility that tenant-based vouchers have afforded its clients versus project-based vouchers as it appears the Mainstream vouchers can be extremely effective in ending homelessness. Also, the growth of its collaborative to now include seven partner agencies has eased the burden of finding eligible and "screened" clients for housing opportunities.

### Partner Agencies Impact Client Engagement

City Net is a partner agency that refers qualified and eligible clients to HACSA. It assists clients by helping them gather all the required documents and completing the necessary eligibility paperwork. City Net also supports clients through the eligibility interview process, voucher issuance and housing search. It facilitates the interaction between the clients and HACSA. If HACSA is unable to reach a client, City Net will attempt to locate the client in the community to ensure effective communication.

## RESIDENT INTERVIEW

Isaiah is 29 years old and from Orange County, CA. He became homeless in November 2019 and was living on the streets and sleeping in his car.

He entered a shelter for four months to gain access to shower, heat, and other necessities. The living conditions in the shelter along with his ongoing medical and mental health issues made it difficult for Isaiah to remain at the shelter. In May 2020, a friend found a program by the Illumination Foundation that sponsored vouchers for persons to stay in a hotel during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While staying at a hotel, Isaiah gained access to community-based programs, such as City Net, which introduced him to the Mainstream voucher program.

He applied for the voucher program and received assistance from a City Net housing navigator that ended his hotel stay in October 2020. America Family Housing helped furnish his new apartment. Tell-A-Care, a mental health agency that assisted him during the hotel stay continues to provide Isaiah with supportive services.

Isaiah is enjoying his new home and stability. He has a dog and loves the amenities of the apartment complex. He feels better mentally and is much happier. He has become more engaged with other members of the community and shared his experience with friends and those he met in the shelter.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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