

Message from the Director

It is hard to believe that the New Year is underway! 2008 seemed to fly by due, in large part, to the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) undertaking several new initiatives to better serve our clients.

Among those initiatives are the 2008 HCVP Landlord Conference; creation of the Rent Affordability Calculator; extensive web site links to community resources; the updated utility allowance schedule; expansion of our suburban municipal partnerships, and most of all, continuous, full utilization of every available voucher.

Thanks to property owners throughout Cuyahoga County, the CMHA HCVP provided housing assistance payments to subsidize the maximum number of households authorized by HUD. That number had reached 14,083 by year end. On behalf of all of us here at the HCVP, thank you for your support.

It is now time to look forward to all of the opportunities the New Year will bring. This edition of our newsletter features information about some of these opportunities, including the changes in our Administrative Plan for 2009; a general introduction to our off-site workshops for current HCVP landlords, and an update on our Homeownership Program.

May you have a safe, healthy and happy New Year! And remember to visit the Housing Choice Voucher Program web page at www.cmha.net for the most up-to-date information about this Program.

Self-Sufficiency and Home Ownership—Very Real Options for Voucher Holders

Among the biggest surprises about the HCVP are the long-term opportunities it provides to program participants.

Over 50 HCVP participants have now purchased their own homes and are utilizing their housing assistance to help pay the mortgage. While it takes work, it is possible for any participant to eventually qualify for this Program, and HCVP staff members provide counseling and guidance throughout the process.

The most important step for most voucher holders is to enter the HCVP Family Self-Sufficiency Program. The program helps participating families achieve a series of goals, leading to economic independence and self-sufficiency. As their income rises, the associated incremental rent increases go into an escrow account, which is paid out to the family upon achieving all of those goals. Some families have received checks for thousands of dollars after reaching all of their goals.

Households interested in utilizing their voucher to purchase a home must meet the following criteria:

- Be a current HCVP participant for at least one year and in good standing
- Be a first time homebuyer
- Have a minimum income of \$15,000 (Heads of household who are elderly or disabled will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.)
- Have full-time employment for at least one year prior to application (Welfare assistance may be used for elderly and disabled families only)
- Have a minimum of \$3,000 in savings (FSS Program participants with escrow balances of \$3,000 or more are exempt from the minimum savings requirement.)

Participating families must complete first-time buyers counseling, comply with mortgage terms and notify CMHA of any changes in their circumstances.

For more information, about the FSS Program, contact Bernice Hannah-Sanborn at (216) 426-2731 or e-mail her at hannahb@cmha.net. For information about the Homeownership Program, contact Velmarie Peoples at (216) 426-2783 or e-mail her at peoplesv@cmha.net.

2009 Landlord Training Update

For the past two years, the HCVP has presented a half or full-day conference designed to provide property owners and managers with helpful information about the HCVP, property management and community expectations and resources. While these have been well-received, many landlords cannot take the time away from their properties for a full conference experience.

In response, the Voucher Program is planning three FREE off-site workshops during 2009. The workshops will focus on general areas of interest and feature speakers from the Program—staff and successful landlords—as well as resources from throughout Cuyahoga County.

Workshops are planned for March, June and September. Watch for detailed information in upcoming monthly check inserts.



HCVP Administrative Plan Changes for 2009

The HCVP has made changes in the 2009 Administrative Plan. Details can be found at www.cmha.net under the HCVP tab. All changes are effective, January 1, 2009 (except where specified). The key points are conveniently summarized below:

- Walk-in re-examination days are discontinued. The HCVP will send a written notification of each participant's re-examination appointment/mail-in due date. If the participant does not comply, a final appointment will be scheduled, and written notification will be mailed. Families who fail to respond after both notifications will be proposed for termination. The letters will specify that families will be able to reschedule their appointment for a documented emergency if they call before the second appointment date.
- Minors who will turn 18 within four months of the re-examination appointment must attend the interview, as well as live-in aides
- To verify their legal identity, family members must provide one document from each of the following categories:
 - ✓ Category A: Current Drivers License, U.S. Passport, Government Issued Identification, Veterans Universal Access ID
 - ✓ Category B: Certificate of Birth or Naturalization Papers, Church Baptismal Certificate, U.S. Military Discharge Papers (DD214), Hospital Records (birth letter)
- The subsidy standard now specifies that 2 children under age 4 will share a bedroom.
- Families must take possession of the subsidized unit within five days of the effective date of the HAP contract, or CMHA may terminate the contract. The family must notify CMHA, in writing, within 14 days of the effective date of the HAP contract if they do not take possession. Failure to do so may result in the family being proposed for termination.
- Following is the restatement of a portion of the Plan's Lease Review segment to comply with Ohio Landlord/Tenant Law: For multi-unit structures (duplex and larger) where a driveway and/or lawn are shared by more than one dwelling unit, the landlord is required to maintain those common areas, which include snow removal and/or lawn care. For single family dwellings, and for multi-unit structures where the HCVP participant has exclusive use of the driveway and/or lawn, the lease must specify the responsible party for the snow removal and/or lawn care.
- Effective March 1st, the minimum rent will be \$50.

Passing HQS Inspections: Use the Checklist Instead of Intimidation

Owners are encouraged to pre-inspect their own rental units with the Housing Quality Standards Inspection Checklist included in all Voucher packets, as well as on the HCVP page of the CMHA web site. This is the only way to increase the likelihood that a unit will pass when CMHA inspects it.

Intimidation of HCVP Inspectors will not be tolerated, whether the intimidation is verbal or physical, such as invading an individual's personal space. Not only will such aggressive behavior be ineffective in obtaining a pass score, but it could lead to an owner being disapproved from doing business with the HCVP. This is outlined in the CMHA HCVP Administrative Plan where it identifies the reasons for disapproving owners, including the following circumstance: "The owner has engaged in or threatened abusive or violent behavior toward PHA personnel."

Keep those Payments Coming!

UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION

Property owners should make sure the HCVP has current mailing addresses and phone numbers. Every year, Program employees receive calls from landlords about missing payments and tax documentation, because an address changed. Don't be caught in this situation. Let the HCVP know if there is any new contact information. Just go to the HCVP page on the CMHA web site, www.cmha.net, and click on the Landlord Change of Address form on the dropdown menu; complete the form and mail it to the attention of the Finance Division (3400 Hamilton Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44114), fax it to (216) 432-3971 or e-mail it to prudhoet@cmha.net.

Calendar of Events

Please arrive on time; latecomers will not be admitted.

Mover's Session Schedule

(Bring current photo ID)

Every Tuesday and Thursday

10:00 to Noon and 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Plus the following Saturdays, 10:00 to Noon:

January 10th, February 14th, March 14th

Landlord Briefings

(Required for new landlords before signing an HCVP contract; please arrive on time; attendance is limited to 35 persons per Briefing)

Friday, January 9th..... 3:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Saturday, January 17th..... 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.*

Friday, January 23rd..... 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, January 28th..... Noon – 1:30 p.m.

Friday, February 6th..... 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

Friday, February 13th..... 3:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Saturday, February 28th..... 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.*

Monday, March 2nd..... 3:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Friday, March 13th..... 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, March 21st..... 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.*

Monday, March 30th..... 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

*Reservations are required for Saturday sessions: call (216) 426-2808 or e-mail daughert@cmha.net.

Landlord Briefings on the Road at Cuyahoga County Libraries:

January 16th

in Fairview Park, 21255 Lorain Road at Noon

February 27th

in Independence, 6361 Selig Drive at 2 pm

March 20th

in Solon, 34125 Portz Parkway at 2 pm

Contract Signing Sessions

Contract Signing Sessions for Property Owners and Agents will take place 8:30 – 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 – 4:30 p.m. in the HCVP Computer Lab (3400 Hamilton Avenue, Entrance B) on the following Wednesdays:

January 7, 2009, January 21, 2009

February 4, 2009, February 18, 2009

March 4, 2009, March 18, 2009