



THE PEOPLE'S HOUSE

Reflections from Public Housing Residents and Partners

A PUBLICATION OF THE MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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Public Housing Team from left to right, Akia Burnett, Maria DeVoogd, Celeste Starks, Bernard Gwekwerere

Dear Resident leaders,

The time has come once again for us here at the Michigan State University Community and Economic Development Program (CEDP) to express our gratitude and appreciation for being allowed to serve and facilitate public housing residents through the final phase of the ROSS II Public Housing Leadership Capacity Building 2003-2005 training program. We have developed lasting contacts and relationships that will continue to shape and improve the quality of life in public housing. While this is the last issue in this series, we will continue to seek opportunities to advance this effort and achieve improved quality of life. Thank you for the time you, the residents and community partners, spent visiting "Our House." This year we would like to take our hats off to those MSU Public Housing Fellows who demonstrated a Spirit of Excellence when an opportunity afforded them conversations with the Director

of the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth. We witnessed outstanding leadership qualities in action during the presentation; the quality and character of your appeal to strengthen the partnership between the State of Michigan and our public housing neighborhoods is just another example of empowerment through residents at work. Now, as we face greater challenges, we have faith that all our residents will rise to the occasion as more changes occur for the public housing community, and decent and affordable housing.

As is often said, "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link," and this is true for in today's housing situation and the quality of life in Michigan. Poverty has not been alleviated to the extent envisioned when public housing was established in the thirties. Public housing was set up to provide safe and affordable housing that would improve quality of life for the low income and less advantaged individuals in the United States. The effort focused on providing housing, neglecting to address these situation that placed individuals and families in circumstances. The quality of life has not improved following the provision of "affordable" housing. This suggests that conditions of affordable housing need to be complemented by efforts to assist individuals in disadvantageous circumstances to overcome these conditions. This can be achieved by situating the lack of housing and poverty situation in the competitive U.S. economy. In a very aggressive environment that of necessity will squeeze some individuals into poverty. More so now with the knowledge economy that favors more the prosperity of the informed. The less informed become more and more disadvantaged. The confluence of the knowledge explosion with technological advancement means that men and women with higher literacy and competency will succeed.

The larger economy has evolved tremendously since public housing was initiated. Public housing needs to evolve at the same pace as the larger economy. This is possible when decision makers put public housing in the limelight and residents of public housing are empowered to actively contribute to the decisions that affect public housing. MSU, together with residents of public housing in Michigan, have over the last several years engaged in a program to build leadership capacity in public housing. The leadership program was an effort to motivate and open up opportunities for leaders to learn to seek solutions for public housing that respond to the evolving knowledge economy of today. Again, we thank all the residents for working relentlessly to attract resources to improve the quality of life in public housing.

Striving to Open Opportunities for Residents Living in Public Housing

by
Bernard Gwekwerere

In 2000, the MSU Community & Economic Development Program was awarded a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Resident Opportunities for Self-sufficiency (ROSS) Program grant to provide public housing residents of Bay City, Muskegon, Muskegon Heights, Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, Ecorse, Highland Park, River Rouge, and Lansing with supportive services, resident empowerment activities, and activities to assist residents in becoming economically self-sufficient. The public housing team at the now Community Economic Development Program's (CEDP) Public Housing Unit was responsible for implementing this program with public housing residents.

The ROSS program offered a series of training sessions that had been requested by residents through a needs assessment. The training program ran for eight months of the year with one face-to-face session and a distance learning session conducted each month. The training sessions included:

- Understanding HUD's policies and procedures
- Increasing resident participation,
- Fundamentals of shared leadership,
- Five year and annual plan for Housing Authorities
- Economic development,
- Planning for health and wellness, including substance abuse,
- Legislative day.

At the end of the eight months, residents who participated in 80 percent of the training received a Michigan Fellows Institute diploma at a colorful ceremony hosted at the Kellogg Center. The grant ran for three years, starting in 2000. In 2001 a concurrent grant was awarded to serve public housing residents in Detroit, Inkster and Benton Harbor. The first graduates of this program were Mr. Tom Dennie and Ms. Bettie Louise Day (Muskegon), Ms. Pat Patrick and Ms. Gwen Cooney (Lansing), Ms. Virginia Blossie and Ms. Sharlene Bentley (Bay City).

Spot Light Lansing

In Lansing Pat Patrick had been involved in social development programs for public housing residents in Lansing. One of these activities was Dress for Success. She continued the program af-



*Bernard Gwekwerere,
MSU-CEDP Graduate Student,
Public Housing Team*

ter her participation in the ROSS program. Pat has improved her leadership capacity to run the event. Dress for Success was a social gathering for Lansing public housing residents to develop self confidence and exhibit their talent, as well as gain exposure to professions for future employment. Dress for Success is an event where residents come together and put on a fashion/talent shows and a job fair, to expose the youth and residents of Lansing Public Housing to services and opportunities offered by these organizations. Pat has brought Dress for Success to the Lansing Police Department, Michigan State University Police Department, Lansing Community College, the Lansing Fire Department, Boys Scouts, and Michigan State University's Community Economic Development Program. Youth and residents have supported this program through participation and attendance at the event. Various organizations have donated gifts for social networking and development occasion. Gifts have included computers, garments, and many more donations. The Lansing Housing Authority has provided personnel and financial support for this occasion. Pat does the preparatory work of contacting stores and other organizations for donations, distributing fliers to mobilize residents for the occasion, mobilizing residents and youths to prepare to exhibit their talents, and organize and prepare food distribution.

Pat draws support and leadership from her colleagues in the leadership capacity building program. She in turn inspires her colleagues who also learn from her experiences. These experiences were shared among the fellows at their monthly training sessions. These sessions were a rich social event for sharing and generating ideas for improving the quality of life in Michigan's public housing. Fellows are always proud to share their experiences and efforts to build quality life in public housing. Not only did they share their success stories but also frustrations in their endeavors. From similar stories of frustration they drew strength to persevere that reassured them that they were not alone in the struggle. As the group grew and broadened their horizon they understood the challenges facing them in public housing.

These activities have contributed to Pat Patrick's growth in leadership capacity and residents have benefited from the opportunities to network and exhibit a positive image of public housing.

Residents Participate in Community Activities & Apply for Non-Profit

The residents who participated in this program worked hard to bring economic and social development activities to their communities. They experienced and exhibited social and economic growth. Their understanding of issues and themes in public housing were extended, resulting in the residents engaging in activities to support other residents and confront housing authorities in matters where they did not serve the interests of the residents.

As the program progressed, residents' interest to participate increased and more residents joined the program. Over time the program had new participants and graduates from previous years. It became apparent that the graduates had different and advanced needs, relative to the needs of the new recruits to the program. The group then evolved into two complementary subgroups, one for beginners and the other for the graduates. This development led to the birth of the Michigan Housing Fellows. Michigan Housing Fellows are graduates of the ROSS program who mentor new recruits of the program and spearhead development activities in their communities.

Fellows later saw the need to organize and become a non-profit organization, so that they could fundraise on their own and support development programs in their communities. It became apparent to them that they needed to advocate vigorously, drawing public attention to their struggles and thus obtaining the support they required to raise their quality of life. To do that, they established a formal organization that would work to improve the image of public housing and educate the public, and supporting organizations about the pressing need to support public housing.

The fellows have since applied for their 501(c)(3) non-profit status. This organization is positive outcome of the ROSS. The organization has started to advocate for public housing interests in Michigan. Recently, they met with Director David Hollister of Department of Labor & Economic Growth to brief him on the deteriorating support and quality of life in public housing so that he could make appropriate decisions and move to help broaden financial support for Michigan public housing. This organization is directing its efforts to diversify the funding sources available to public housing in Michigan. Its members have observed and experienced the decreasing funding from the federal government, which is the main source of support for public housing. Michigan Fellows are striving to improve the quality of life in public housing which has been deteriorating steadily. The quality of life has steadily been deteriorating due to fewer programs that target public housing residents. Programs are powered by funding which has been steadily drying up.

We have said good bye to a few:

One day at a time--this is enough. Do not look back and grieve over the past, for it is gone; and do not be troubled by the future, for it has not yet come. Live in the present, and make it so beautiful that it will be worth remembering.

.....Ida Scott Taylor

Though their physical bodies are no longer with us, to help us along our path, they are always here in spirit and we would like to give gratitude to the MSU Fellows whom have made their transition.



*Clinton Smith,
Ann Arbor Fellow*



*Elizabeth Anderson,
River Rouge Fellow*



*Roger Grant,
Detroit Fellow*



*Betty Louise Day,
Muskegon Heights Fellow*

***The Affordable Housing Forum at
Michigan State University
Detroit College of Law, Moot Court Room
Dr. Sheila Crowley, President, National Low
Income Housing Coalition***

***1:00p.m. - 4:00p.m.
June 22, 2005***

***Contact: Cathy Kuhn 517-353-9555
for more information***

Improving Housing Strategies with the Leadership of MSU Public Housing Fellows

*by
Cathy Kuhn*

MSU Public Housing Fellows understand that while being involved in local issues and activities in their own communities is an essential component of effective community leadership, being a leader also entails being cognizant of national trends in housing provision. As these leaders know, fluctuations in the approach utilized to provide housing for struggling citizens can have important consequences not only on the ability of these citizens to reach their self-sufficiency goals, but also on the long term vitality of their local communities. While much of the nation's past public housing policy has been devoted to the construction of public housing communities throughout the country, current trends reveal a decrease in public housing construction and an increase in the provision of tenant-based housing vouchers to meet the housing needs of low income citizens. The growing popularity of housing vouchers is clearly reflected in funding trends that show that at the same time that there has been a drastic drop in funding both for the production of federally subsidized housing developments and for subsidies for privately-owned project-based housing, there has been an increase in funding for tenant-based housing mobility vouchers. Recent research points out that since the 1970s there has been a major shift in the ratio of vouchers issued to the number of public housing units constructed; although only .6 vouchers were issued for every new unit of public housing committed in the 1970s, during the first four years of the 1990s, there were 4.75 vouchers issued for every unit of project-based or subsidized housing (Hartung, 1997).

Utilizing vouchers to meet the housing needs of residents has great appeal to many policy makers not only because their reliance on the private market decreases government intervention and responsibility in housing provision, but also because vouchers are believed to offer public housing residents greater choice in making housing decisions. Advocates of the voucher program assert that providing low-income families with opportunities to move to improved neighborhoods and housing units is an essential component in helping public housing residents reach self-sufficient. Vouchers may help some families move



*Cathy Kuhn, former
MSU Public Housing
Team Member*

to better neighborhoods, but a number of people are beginning to raise questions about the ability of the voucher program, as it is currently structured, to meet the housing needs of many low income families. Voucher administrators and researchers have pointed to a number of barriers that may limit the degree to which vouchers provide low-income families with a greater degree of choice, and thus argue that these barriers will need to be

addressed if the tenant based voucher program is to be successful in meeting the needs of low income families.

Many housing administrators report that one of the principal barriers faced by voucher holders in using their voucher to find appropriate affordable housing is the lack of private landlords who are willing to rent to low income and minority participants (Rubinowitz, 2000). Although recent policy changes (such as the removal of the "take one take all" requirement allowing landlords to refuse to rent to anyone who does not meet their pre-determined tenant qualifications) aim to attract more landlords into the program and thereby increase the residential options of program participants, some argue that due to the racial and economic characteristics of families who participate in residential mobility programs, these policy changes may in fact make it more difficult for participants to find landlords willing to rent to them. For example, because low-income voucher holders may lack resources to pay a security deposit or may have a history of credit or legal problems, their ability to meet private market rental requirements may be limited. Although some housing officials assert that intense screening of program participants is an essential component in ensuring landlord satisfaction and program success, others express concern that inability to meet these screening requirements may prevent some of the nation's most vulnerable families from receiving housing assistance. Moreover, to the extent that providing landlords with greater power and flexibility in making rental decisions affords them greater opportunity to discriminate in these decisions, these policies may be particularly harmful to the success of low-income minority voucher holders in finding housing on the private market.

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Another major factor challenging the ability of residential mobility programs to move low-income families into better neighborhoods is the general lack of affordable housing in many metropolitan areas. Researchers point out that for a number of reasons including a decline in funding for new construction of public housing, a rise in the number of low income families and a deteriorating housing stock, the supply of affordable housing has been steadily decreasing. Given this reality of the state of the nation's affordable housing, some researchers and housing officials argue that without a regional affordable housing agenda that aims to build affordable housing throughout a large metropolitan area, simply giving vouchers to low-income families will not increase the amount of choice that they have in making their housing decisions and may in fact create a re-concentration of low income families within high poverty areas that offer the greatest number of affordable housing options. By hindering the voucher program's ability to break-up concentrated poverty and disperse low income and minority residents throughout metropolitan areas, the lack of widespread affordable housing has the potential to undermine one of the most important goals of the tenant based voucher program.

A final factor that may diminish the capability of residential mobility programs to move low-income families into better neighborhoods relates to the mobility desires of the program participants themselves. Although some program participants point to the desire to live in better neighborhoods as their chief motivation for participation in residential mobility programs, a growing amount of ethnographic research suggests that some families living in high poverty areas may be somewhat reluctant to move away from the important resources and social networks located in their neighborhoods. Voucher holders report that these resources not only offer important moral and emotional support, but also provide essential services such as transportation and affordable child care (Turner, 1999). Unless voucher programs are complemented with policies that provide families who move to unfamiliar areas with services that supplement the loss of important support systems, the ability of participants to prosper in their new environments may be compromised.

Residential mobility programs have the potential to be an important component in a comprehensive effort to meet the housing needs of low income families. If utilized alone, however, these policies

may not represent an effective solution to the complex problems facing urban families. Providing families with greater choice and with expanded opportunities to move to better neighborhoods requires more than simply supplementing family income through the provision of a housing voucher. Instead, effective policies will recognize the many barriers that families face in the private housing market and will incorporate strategies to help overcome these challenges. For example, providing families with services such as credit counseling, security deposit assistance, and housing counseling may increase the likelihood that families will be successful in using their vouchers on the private market. Moreover, in order to ensure that families have as much choice as possible in finding the residential environment that best meets their needs, residential mobility programs must be complemented with increased construction of affordable housing throughout metropolitan regions, as well as a stronger commitment to the enforcement of fair housing laws.

It seems clear that in order to be successful in improving the quality of life of low income families, policy makers must generate creative and comprehensive policy that recognizes the unique challenges and resources of a wide variety of families. Because MSU Public Housing Fellows are intimately aware of the needs of local residents in their communities, they represent a vital resource in helping to make tenant-based mobility programs a successful strategy to meet the housing needs of families living in their local communities.

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Southeast Michigan Community Alliance

*by
Chris Smith*



*Chris Smith,
Southeast Michigan Community
Alliance (SEMCA)*

The Southeast Michigan Community Alliance (SEMCA) is one of 25 Michigan Works! Agencies (MWA) in Michigan mandated to administer state and federal funds related to employment and job training programs (also referred to as workforce development). SEMCA is also one of sixteen regional statewide Substance Abuse Services Coordinating Agencies (CA). In this capacity, SEMCA administers a network of over 40 substance abuse services providers, managing over \$13 million in federal block grant, Medicaid, and locally-generated funds. SEMCA's service region consists of Monroe County, Wayne County (except for Detroit, which has its own MWA & CA)

SEMCA's workforce development programs consist of Work First (for persons transitioning from public assistance programs), adult services for unemployed and underemployed persons; services for persons recently laid off; specialized services for youth employment, and several other programs. Each year over 12,000 people are served in the SEMCA region through these programs.

The substance abuse services programs provide funding for an array of substance abuse treatment and prevention services. SEMCA provides funding for inpatient, outpatient, sub-acute detoxification, and methadone treatment services. About 8,000 people are served each year through SEMCA substance abuse treatment dollars. The substance abuse prevention programs, which targets young people, serve about 20,000 people annually.

Between five and ten percent of the persons served through SEMCA funding are public housing residents. The following free services are available to public housing residents who reside in the SEMCA region: (1) resume development and makeover, (2) career counseling, (3) access to training grants and programs, (4) posting resumes on Michigan's Job Bank (a web-based database), (5) access to computers, faxes, and telephones, and a variety of supportive services such as child care that assist in the job seeking process.

SEMCA has had significant interaction with residents and staff in public housing communities throughout western Wayne County and the Downriver area. The directors of various public housing commissions have also served on the SEMCA board of directors. In addition, SEMCA has entered into several grant partnerships with public housing commissions, such as the Youthbuild initiative offered by HUD.

Most recently, SEMCA partnered with the City of Inkster to fund a community needs assessment (conducted by MSU Urban & Regional Planning Program) that was prompted by residents of the Inkster Public Housing system. This study is available online at <http://www.semca.org/outreach.htm>.

Between five and ten percent of the persons served through SEMCA funding are public housing residents.

Christopher B. Smith is the Chief Operating Officer of SEMCA. To learn more about SEMCA and its programs, please visit www.semca.org.

2004
Public Housing Fellows



Angela Fentress, Muskegon Heights



Bess Artis, Detroit



Carol Mayes, Detroit



*Narcissus Jackson,
River Rouge*



Gwen Hawkins, Detroit



Rosanne Johnson , Detroit



Ardell Green, Detroit



Velma Rogers, River Rouge



Beatrice Sharkey, Detroit



Kahdijah Pasha, River Rouge

Leadership Skills Can Make a Difference

by

Alicia Earle

I started graduate school at Michigan State University in January 2001 and received my Masters degree in Public Administration and Urban Affairs in May 2003. I didn't immediately start working with the Public Housing Institute or with the Community & Economic Development Program. In fact, I heard from a friend of mine about the work they were doing and then became very interested. When I got to the Community & Economic Development Program, I was welcomed with open arms and my work with Michigan's public housing community began.

Initially, I wasn't really aware of the issues involving public housing residents because, unfortunately, we get bombarded with images of "welfare queens" and other indolent individuals who are living off the government and who do not want to take the initiative to do anything for themselves. So, we have a tendency to disassociate ourselves from "those" people because they are not like us and do not share our value system and therefore, don't share "our" agenda.

Well, this is far from the truth! Public housing residents, just like other individuals who find themselves in circumstances or situations that may not be advantageous or out of their control, are still human beings first and who deserve to be treated as such.

Different socioeconomic statuses should not determine, nor affect the opportunities that people are provided but as you and I both know, it does. Just like our next door neighbor or the revered politician or preacher, public housing residents care about their communities, want their children to be safe, want livable, viable and safe communities, affordable housing, a good school system, livable wages, equal treatment under the law, and other liberties that all Americans subscribe to. Is that asking too much or does it sound like individuals who don't care and have no initiative, motivation or drive?

This is what I found working with Michigan's public housing communities—individuals who are dedicated to their communities not only want to improve their plights in life but the lives of other individuals in similar situations. I found vocal and



Alicia Earle,
Presidential Management
Fellow, U.S. Immigration and
Customs Enforcement

activist-minded individuals who had stakes in their communities, senior citizens with the spirit and the motivation of 18 year-old's, and leaders of all ages involved in identifying their respective community issues and focusing their efforts into an agenda to address and develop effective responses to their problems. I saw the local, grassroots dynamics and looking at it in terms of ROSS leadership and leadership capacity, the residents were able to actualize and integrate the leadership competencies: communication, influencing/negotiating, customer service, resilience, interpersonal skills, continual learning, flexibility, integrity/honesty, and their internal awareness about public housing issues.

These leadership competencies that I observed public housing residents using and integrating, are the very same ones that I have adapted and am now using in my position as a Presidential Management Fellow with the US Department of Homeland Security, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). This is a two-year program that grooms recent graduate students for management positions in the federal government. I have been researching and participating in various training opportunities as well as attending meetings, committee hearings on Capitol Hill, and symposiums to enhance my professional development. In addition, I've completed an Individual Development Plan to serve as a guide in my development, as well as networking with people within and outside of my agency. Even though what I have been doing is in context to my particular program and agency, these are transferable skills and activities (knowing how to talk and relate to people, those interpersonal and communication skills, to build consensus through give and take, and to acclimate yourself in response to new and changing conditions, etc.) that residents can and have used in their capacity as ROSS participants or as an employee of any federal, nonprofit or private agency.

Congratulations to the 2004 ROSS Public Housing Institute graduates! Special thanks to Celeste Starks and the entire Community and Economic Development Program Public Housing Institute staff.

Safe and Affordable Housing in Michigan is Not a Dream

by

State Representative Michael C. Murphy

Access to affordable housing in safe neighborhoods is a major problem for many Michigan families. It makes it difficult to provide the basic necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care and hinders one's ability to attain a better life.

An individual or family who pays more than 30 percent of their income for housing is considered "cost burdened." This applies to the estimated 12 million renter and homeowner households across the country that now pay more than 50 percent of their annual incomes for housing. Families with one full-time worker earning the minimum wage cannot afford the local fair-market rent for a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in the United States.

It doesn't have to be that way.

During this past legislative session, there were many different bills introduced in the Michigan House of Representatives to help protect the rights of access to safe and affordable housing for law-abiding families. Three in particular were designed to improve access to affordable housing, protect tenants from discriminatory renter policies and increase the power of neighborhood associations. Despite not being considered for a vote, I believe these bills can be the foundation for new legislation next year to improve our communities and housing options in Michigan.

The first bill, House Bill 5713, addressed the issue of affordable housing in Michigan by providing an income tax credit for any taxpayer who makes a monetary contribution to a qualified community housing development organization (CHDO). These are the not-for-profit organizations that operate across the state, working with local communities and volunteers to help secure affordable housing for low to moderate income individuals. They also offer support services to all tenants in order to assist them in maintaining their housing stability and enhance their quality of life.

I believe such a measure would be an important investment in our future, both economically and socially, and it will help to promote and establish affordable and livable communities throughout Michigan.

The second bill, House Bill 5973, would expand the Elliot Larsen Civil Rights Act to include protections for "source of income," thus preventing discrimination in renting practices based on certain



*State Representative,
Michael C. Murphy*

economic variables. Under current law, landlords may refuse to rent properties to people based solely on the fact that they receive federal Section 8 housing vouchers, child support, disability, social security or other lawful income sources. This bill would ban that practice.

Since some advocates contend that discrimination based on income is used to segregate low-income and disabled individuals and helps contribute to depressed communities and the cycle of poverty, I believe this legislation is critical to improving access to affordable housing.

I authored the third bill, House Bill 4798, as a way to help empower neighborhoods and keep affordable housing safe. It would guarantee a legal voice for Michigan's numerous neighborhood associations and allow such organizations to testify during the sentencing phase of a criminal trial. This is important because the devastating effect of a crime can often extend beyond the victims and their families.

Throughout Michigan, neighborhood associations have had a positive impact on their communities through revitalization programs, economic development efforts, community policing, and numerous social and philanthropic events. They work to pull communities together and build stronger social and political networks that keep neighborhoods an attractive place to live and safe from crime. In fact, last year, several neighborhood associations in the City of Lansing began a public campaign to keep criminal activities off the streets of their neighborhood. Coordinating with local public and police officials, the association began an active community policing effort and a public awareness campaign using yard signs and letters to the editor. As a result, there has been a visible decrease in criminal activity. I believe that allowing neighborhoods to testify in court on the impact a particular crime has had on their community is a valuable tool to improve the status and safety of communities and neighborhoods offering affordable housing.

The bottom line is, if nothing is done, access to affordable housing that is safe and secure will continue to be an issue for far too many Michigan families. I look forward to reintroducing and supporting bills like these next year and improving the housing options for Michigan families.

*To find out more on the Bills mentioned in this article visit
www.michiganlegislature.gov*

A House Divided

by
Rex L. LaMore

On June 16, 1858, Abraham Lincoln delivered to more than 1,000 Republican delegates at the Illinois statehouse what is now remembered as his “House Divided Speech.” The title of the speech is drawn from a quote in the speech which paraphrases a statement by Jesus in the New Testament. In this now historic speech, Lincoln argued that freedom for African Americans could not be granted in some states while slavery was advocated in other states.



Rex L. LaMore,
Director, CEDP

*I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South.*¹

Today we find ourselves in a similar crossroads, perhaps not as central to our democracy as the question of emancipation or slavery, but a crossroads none the less. This crossroads ask us to decide, will we as a nation choose to *utilize our public institutions* to provide safe, affordable, and decent housing for the elderly and the needy, or not? We are a divided people on this issue. Some argue that shelter is such a fundamental human need that a civil society has an obligation to assist those in need, others maintain that the market will provide safe; affordable housing.

The availability of affordable housing in the State of Michigan is heavily reliant on two sectors, the non-profit housing development corporations and the public housing community. Non-profits, through public and private partnerships construct and manage single family and multi-family affordable units. The nonprofit financing and management mechanisms by which affordable housing is actually made available are complex web of financial packaging that requires significant “up-front” management cost. In a 2001 study conducted by the MSU Community and Economic Development Program (CEDP) entitled “*Organizational Capacity and Housing Production: A Study of Non-profit Organizations In Michigan*” researchers concluded that the production capacity of Michigan’s nonprofits offer little promise to produce

the necessary units to meet the affordable housing needs of the state in the near future. More must be done to assist them in producing more units of available, affordable and safe housing.

The state of Michigan has approximately 24,700 available public housing units managed by 134 public housing commissions. These commissions house over 30,000 residents, 71 percent of whom are extremely low income. Approximately a third are the elderly, a third are differently able, and a third are single parents with children². These public housing residents, many of whom work full or part-time, have an average annual income of approximately \$10,414 per year.

For the past several years, we at the MSU/ CEDP have had the great privilege and opportunity to work with the leaders of our Michigan public housing communities. From the resident leaders, to the dedicated executive directors, to the civic minded public housing commissioners, we have joined together to strengthen our public housing neighborhoods. “The public housing neighborhoods of our state are alive and well!” Though these neighborhoods face significant challenges in maintaining and improving their quality of life, they are endowed with a great strength of character and an indomitable will that will not give up.

Our public housing neighborhoods and residents are an incredibly valuable resource to the people of Michigan. These often forgotten and maligned communities, which many think of as the abandoned communities of failed federal housing policies, provide a great service to a very needy Michigan population. As President Lincoln so eloquently argued a house divided will not stand, so we must seek to support our public housing communities and not abandon them to decay and indifference. Together we can make a difference.

(Footnotes)

1 **Speech before the Republican State Convention “House Divided” by Abraham Lincoln** Springfield, Ill.

June 16, 1858 <http://www.founding.com/library/lbody.cfm?id=322&parent=63>

2 <http://pic.hus.gov/servlet/> accessed 10/28/2004

The Relationship Can Make the Difference

By
Lionel Rayford

The relationship between public housing administration and residents should be one that focuses on the mission, goals, and objectives of the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development when it was formed some sixty plus years ago. The mission was to provide safe, decent, and sanitary housing for low to moderate income families.

I would like to see Housing Commission Boards of Directors and the Executive Management that operate public housing form a relationship that would foster empowering Residents to become self-sufficient and productive.



*Lionel Rayford, Former
Executive Director of Ecorse
Public Housing*

what will happen to public housing initiatives that have in the past helped shape the lives of so many of our nations public housing residents? How can the hundreds of thousands of public housing residents who want to make a positive change in their lives make this change or transition from the public housing despair to a life of self worth?

Public housing residents and the administrations of public housing need to mobilize efforts and foster a relationship that will lead to self sufficiency. The two will have to do a reality check because one depends on the other. I believe that if and when the resident population of public housing wants to see a change and is willing to sacrifice for that change management should be willing to embrace any positive change that is initiated by the resident representation, resident leadership and/ or resident council. I believe that mobilization of a statewide resident public housing association such as the one formed by Michigan State University will be a start for setting the standard for public housing commissions and residents in this state and across the country. The group Michigan Housing FELLOWS, a 501c (3) non-profit resident group that has set an agenda that will empower resident councils across the State of Michigan.

I ask that the Directors and Boards of Directors throughout the state of Michigan begin to meet with their resident councils and take a serious position with assisting them in their effort to become self sufficient. Provide resources to your councils so they that can provide direction. Board members bring valuable resources and information to the table such as business contact and how to do. Some have grant writing contacts; others have community contacts and others so on. If and when the three bodies come together, the sky is the limit and money will fall into everybody's hands to fund the initiatives. The key to a successful three way relationship would be for the parties to come together and talk just one time and everyone will realize that each has some of the same common concerns.

Understanding that the economy is tight and each housing commission will face budget cuts and lose the slight edge of a few years ago, there are other outside resources available to tap into. There will have to be a formation of committees comprised of staff, commissioners, and executive management in order to impact this partnership and some extra hours beyond the regular eight hours.

How can the hundreds of thousands of public housing residents who want to make a positive change in their lives make this change or transition from the public housing despair to a life of self worth ?

For many years in some public housing communities, management's only concern was eight hour days and forty hour weeks that lead to a paycheck, exit the community and see you next week, only to return to what was left on the development when they left on Friday. In this day and time some public housing communities have taken the lead to champion initiatives that have had a positive impact on the lives of their resident population. Over the years HUD has sponsored and funded resident initiative programs that target resident participation and resident employment. Programs like Urban Initiatives Anti-Crime Program, Interagency Crime Prevention Program, Urban Parks Recovery Program, Alcohol, Drug Abuse & Mental Health Program, Victim Witness Assistance Program to name a few dating back to the late 70s and early to mid 80s.

At one time the federal government did pump millions of dollars into its resident initiatives programs, but now that the funding has nearly dried up, what can the residents of public housing do? In recent years public housing initiatives have relied on funding from the HUD sponsored ROSS ACT. Today, in 2005, these funds are now drying up and will be no more for the time being. So, I ask myself,

Artist in Residence

by

Elizabeth Lindsley

Executive Director, Ann Arbor Public Housing



*Jane French, Resident Artist of Miller Manor,
Ann Arbor, Michigan*

Little did we know when Jane French moved into Miller Manor Apartments in Ann Arbor in 1995, that our community would take on a dramatically different look. Jane, a high energy, exuberant, petite individual, became involved in the resident council and an active participant in an early ROSS grant to promote resident business initiatives. Jane championed the creation of an art studio. What began with HUD approval to take one one-bedroom unit off line for resident participation in art activities, now is the “Waterstone Art Studio,” a space where Jane paints and creates, and encourages other residents to exercise their creative talents. More amazing yet, is that the art is not confined to apartment 501, the Studio, but has spread outside, down the hallway corridors of the fifth floor, and to other floors’ elevator

lobbies, in the form of dramatic mural art, and to other residents’ apartments.

Jane, the oldest of three girls, was born in a little town in Kentucky, and reports that she grew up in a creative environment, where her mom always had crafts and art supplies available. Her mom was a super seamstress and made all of the children’s clothes. By the time Jane was a teenager, she was into fashion design. Her dad ran a furniture store and was a radio guy. Between her mom and her dad, Jane developed a wonderful feel for fabric, texture, color, trim, and design, as well as jazz. She reports that in grade school, she was always chosen to do the bulletin boards as the seasons or holidays changed; in high school, she won some poster contests, and later, while working in a library, was charged with doing murals in the children’s section.

Jane says she married at 17, had one daughter (an equally creative actor, choreographer and writer living in Manhattan), and never went to college. She says she was first diagnosed with mental illness at age 19 or 20, but at this time, in her small town, and with her family, there was little support or acknowledgement of the challenges that come with mental illness. As a result, she divorced and has led something of a “gypsy” life ever since, working in a number of different fields, including a florist shop, health clubs, and cleaning business. Her gypsy life was in part a function of her bipolar mental illness that went treated and untreated, resulting in numerous ups and downs. She claims never to have lived in any one place more than four years, until she came to Miller Manor, which is now her “home” of ten years.

Jane is a self-taught artist, having taken only two art courses in her life, (at Oakland University and at Eastern Michigan University). This seems impossible, for once you have seen the breadth of her work, paintings, mural art, furniture creation, and interior design, you would think she had a Masters in Fine Arts. Jane can make something out of nothing. She should be featured on HGTV’s “Design on a Dime,” for she picks up furniture and found items at resale and recycle shops and makes magnificent creations. Her own apartment, ever changing in its design, looks like an artist’s studio, an eclectic mix of furniture, fabrics, colors, and textures that somehow all work together seamlessly. Jane is an inspiration for all of us and an enthusiastic promoter of the creativity in everyone. She has found her talents and, in a stable supportive environment, is able to happily express herself to the delight of all.

The Soothing Comfort of Soul Food

by
Maria DeVoogd



*Maria DeVoogd, MSU
Graduate Student,
Public Housing Team*

On February 24, 2005, many public housing residents of Muskegon Heights, myself, and other members from the MSU public housing team joined together to celebrate African American Week. As we sat down to enjoy the soothing comfort of soul food, the climate at Columbia Court

bought back warm memories of family dining. As I munched on candied yams for the first time, I noticed that children were playing, people were laughing and most importantly, I saw a community celebrating, more specifically, a family rejoicing. After dinner, I had an opportunity to speak with three residents, who were able to share a part of their life over the last 30 years.

“The future is very promising and positive and we already have a new generation of leaders.”

Ms. Betty Jones has lived in public housing since 1959. After a divorce, and trying to raise four children on her own, she knew that living in public housing would help. Betty enjoys the residents and has noticed an increase in the younger



*Ms. Betty Jones,
Muskegon Heights*

generation beginning to live in public housing. Betty noted that many programs have been implemented by MSU’s Public Housing Fellows to tackle problems associated with drugs. “Through the years, drug trafficking is now better and there have been many organizations here trying to get rid of it,” she said. Betty has also suggested the “physical appearance here, at Muskegon Heights, needs to be improved,” and wishes to receive the HopeVI initiative for the younger generation. Betty wants people to know that everyone living here are the same as everyone who live outside of public

housing. She says, “residents here, live the same, and take care of their kids and go to church, just like everyone else.” As the interview ended, Betty Jones would like people to understand that “public housing allows people to live and to have a life.”

Ms. Hen-Rietta Elijah has lived in public housing since 1959 and raised all of her children here. As a resident of Muskegon Heights, she loves the surroundings, mainly, the people and the landscape. Over the years, she has seen the physical appearance change. In particular, she has noticed new windows, central air, and sprinklers for the lawns. As a result of the Fellows, Hen-Rietta,



*Ms. Hen-Rietta Elijah,
Muskegon Heights*

actively participated in programs that created gardens and planted flowers for their community. Even though Muskegon Heights has made modest progress in the physical appearance, she feels that there is still a need for improvements. Hen-Rietta wants everyone to understand that public housing is a good place to live and that she looks forward to seeing the image of public housing change for the better.



*Janice Walker, MSU
Fellow, Muskegon
Heights*

Ms. Janice Walker has lived in public housing for 38 years. As a resident, she has actively functioned as the President and Vice President of the Resident Council, Vice President of the

Commissioner Board, and a leader in her community. Janice loves all the volunteer opportunities Muskegon Heights offers, allowing her to work with children. She loves seeing the children grow up and move on with their lives. Janice says this is important so that “they can bring back the knowledge to teach others.” Since she has been living in Muskegon Heights, she has participated in literacy programs for children and parents, a community gardening project that creates beautiful lawns, and fundraisers for her community. As a resident, Janice struggles with the negative image “outsiders

A Night to Really Celebrate!

by
Akia Burnett



Akia Burnett, MSU Graduate Student, Public Housing Team

Muskegon Heights Public Housing has a lot of things to be proud of; the learning programs for youth, the emergence of resident advocates, and the ability to have a voice. Their achievements of overcoming public housing disparities have been remarkable. Moreover,

they should be proud of residents like Ms. Mary Ann Day and Ms. Valerie Henderson, who together have lived in public housing and contributed to its evolution for a combined total of 87 years.

The week of February 21, 2005 marked the annual Muskegon Heights Public Housing celebration of Black History Month. Thursday, February 24, was soul food night and residents gathered at Columbia Court as a family and in unity

Combined two queens of the Nile with 87 years of experience in public housing.

to indulge in the divine sweetness of soul food. It was hard to interview and take these lovely ladies away from the fresh collard greens, candied yams that were sweetened just right, hot water cornbread, black eyed peas, fried chicken and catfish that all had a touch of TLC. Fortunately for me, I did.



Ms. Valerie Henderson, Muskegon Heights

Just as it appeared to me by the looks of everyone in the room, these ladies confirmed that they are a family. When asked why they continued to live in public housing, Ms. Valerie Henderson (who has lived in public housing for 53 years since her childhood) replied "I love the people and enjoy them. East Park Manor is like....it is my home." Ms. Mary Ann Day (who has lived in public housing for almost 34 years and never dreamed she would be living there this long) confirmed to me her appreciation for public housing. "I'm comfortable in my apartment where my surroundings remind me of elegance in Norton Shores, Muskegon townhouses.... I enjoy being able to learn and make changes where I live... I appreciate that there is a place for low income. I

was raised as a little girl and had to come back and when I did, I made it my home and help to make it part of a community. I see wonderful things in public housing so I am not in a hurry to leave."

As I gazed the room one last time, I asked myself, "Where are the welfare queens, the youth drug dealers, and other negative images we typically see public housing residents portrayed as?" I saw queens, but not welfare queens. I saw beautiful strong queens of the Nile. I saw young kids giving out things, but it wasn't drugs, it was warm embraces of love and help. When asked the one thing they would like for people to know about public housing and public housing residents, these two queens replied in words of those images I just described. "Get to know us; we are human. They



Ms. Mary Ann Day, MSU Fellow, Muskegon Heights

down us but it's a wonderful place to live." "I would like the media to know more about what we are doing since that's where people get their information from. There is a stigma on all the wrong things."

Ms. Mary Ann Day, who had endured her share of struggles as a resident of public housing and stigmas placed upon those who lived there, shares that story of her life. She watched her mom and dad struggle in public housing until their death. She raised her four kids in public housing, and they would often come home



Christina Clay, Dancing in Celebration of Black History Month

with such disgrace and sadness in their eyes from being taunted by other children and being labeled as "project kids." She told them one thing: "No! There is love in this home," and there was no need to be shameful. As a result of her constant love and support, her children are now school teacher, a probation officer, a son that works hard in the community, and another who works high up in the postal service. So one thing she really wants people to know about public housing is "Great things come out of public housing, and I am a witness to that."

The Accomplishments of an MSU Fellow

by
Pearline Diggs-Townsend-Murray

bring into the community.” Janice is proactive with the police and other community organizations to “get back the community from negative outside sources.” As a minority living in public housing, Janice states that nothing has stopped her from growing, developing, getting an education and finding a job. She says “that being a minority and living in public housing has made me a better parent, knowing that I want to do better for myself and for my family.” Janice additionally mentions that living in public housing has made her a stronger person and more positive. Janice wants everyone to know that, “in the past, people looked upon public housing residents, as persons with no future, who live off public assistance and do not want to better themselves. I am a testimony that this is not true! The future is very promising and positive and we already have a new generation of leaders. I am a parent, a grandparent and a leader and we as a community are striving hard to improve public housing and the next generation. One day we might be able to own and build a house of our own.” Janice Walker concludes the interviews by stating “we are moving forward, ***dreaming houses.***”

Thank you ladies for giving me this opportunity to share your story!



Pearline Diggs-Townsend-Murray, Muskegon Heights, MSU Fellow

Dear Michigan State University Public Housing Team:

I am writing to you on the accomplishments as a Michigan State University Housing Fellow, Public Housing Scattered Site Resident, and as an Employee who started off as a Section 3 worker with the Muskegon Heights Housing Commission.

I first moved to the state of Michigan in 1987, after I graduated from South Panola High School located in Batesville, Mississippi. I came from a family of 14, (7 boys, 7 girls) and I represent the 8th child. I was raised by my grandmother and an aunt who didn’t have any children. I think they did a very good job in teaching me how to make it in life. My mother and father died when I was very young.

I am buying one of the Scattered Site Houses. I have been living there since 1996. I have three children ages 16, 15, and 14. My 16 year old daughter Erica has been nominated to participate with the Student Ambassadors program because of her grades. She also will be featured in the Who’s Who of America Students book, and National Honor Society. Erica was at the State Capitol on Wednesday, October 20, 2004 for KidsSpeak acting as a lobbyist. While she was there, she spoke with one of the representatives. A person from television would like Erica and her mentor to come Kalamazoo to be on his show.

I have learned and enjoyed all of the training that Michigan State University, Public Housing Fellows Program has presented. The public housing team has been very instrumental in helping me learn about Public Housing. I first started when it was MRLN.

Fair Housing Resources:

- Fair Hsg. Ctr. of Metro Detroit 313-963-1274
1249 Washington Blvd. Detroit, MI 48826
- Fair Hsg. Ctr. of Greater Grand Rapids 616-451-2980
1514 Wealthy S.E. Grand Rapids, MI 49506
- Fair Hsg. Ctr. of Southeastern MI 734-994-3426
P.O. Box 7825 Ann Arbor, MI 48107
- The Partnership for Fair Hsg. Ctr. of Southwestern MI 269-276-9100
323 M. Burdick Kalamazoo, MI 49007
- National Fair Hsg. Alliance 202-898-1661
www.nationalfairhousing.org Washington, DC



2002-2003 Public Housing Team from left to right:
Celeste Starks, Johnna Matthews, Bernard Gwekwerere, Kristin Huber, Jose’ Gomez



2001-2002 Public Housing Team left to right:
Jill Harper, Maryellen Lewis, Celeste Starks, Tamara Juarez, Cathy Kuhn, Jose’ Gomez



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