

# CWD

Center for Workers with Disabilities

a technical assistance center of APHSA and NASMD

HOUSING ISSUE  
BRIEF SERIES

BRIEF NO. 3

JULY 2009

# APHSA

American Public Human Services Association



# Making the Connection: Fostering Relationships with Local Partners

*The American Public Human Services Association Center for Workers with Disabilities (CWD) partnered with NCB Capital Impact to develop a series of technical assistance issue briefs targeted to the needs of Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) projects. These briefs will provide information and strategies on affordable housing financing and programs that could be accessed by workers with disabilities. Additionally, these briefs will provide MIG projects with guidance on how to gather information about their state housing and community development agencies and related programs. For more information on this and other resources, contact Nanette Relave at NRelave@aphsa.org.*

## Introduction

The previous issue briefs in this series have provided information on how to identify key state level programs and policies for the development of affordable housing opportunities for workers with disabilities. These briefs, available at [http://cwd.aphsa.org/publications/center\\_pubs.asp](http://cwd.aphsa.org/publications/center_pubs.asp), identified strategies for the development of cross agency partnerships at the state level to create the infrastructure necessary for expansion of housing opportunities for people with disabilities. While state level programs and partnerships are critical for systems change, partnerships forged at the local level put policy into practice.

This brief will build upon the information provided in earlier briefs and provide additional information on how to make connections with local public and private housing providers. This information includes an overview of local housing agencies and providers, strategies for local coalition building, and examples of successful cross sector collaborations targeting housing for individuals with disabilities.

### Key learning objectives of this brief include:

- Identifying strategies that can be employed to create partnerships and coordinate programming with the local housing resources;
- Learning how to make connections with local housing providers, both public and private; and
- Highlighting successful cross sector collaborations targeting housing for individuals with disabilities.

MIG projects do not provide direct housing services to workers with disabilities, however partnerships and initiatives involving MIGs can provide needed support for the implementation of housing strategies at the local level that expand options for workers with disabilities.

As discussed in the second brief of this series, *Making the Connection: Building Cross Agency Partnerships*, partnerships are essential to successful community integration. Facilitating employment and community living takes more than intention; it takes significant cooperation and a network of support. Building partnerships with local housing providers and agencies can be accomplished using the same techniques outlined in the previous brief in this series. These techniques include identifying key local stakeholders, seeking out current programs and coalitions, and identifying clear measurable outcomes. By supporting local partnerships, MIG projects can help key stakeholders to better provide needed affordable housing options for workers with disabilities.

### The Value of Making Local Connections

Over the past 30 years, the federal government has steadily decreased its funding and role as the nation's leading provider of affordable housing, passing most of that responsibility onto states. States in turn look to cities and counties to pursue the majority of affordable housing development. This shift has resulted in a heavy reliance on local organizations in establishing needed housing for specific populations. With a greater emphasis on cities and counties to meet the housing needs of workers with disabilities, more and more local stakeholders are seeing the benefits of local partnerships.

With limited funding available and an increasing need for integrated affordable housing in community settings, key players in the housing and social services fields are faced with challenges. Pursuing affordable housing projects has become more complex. Additionally, the current economic crisis is having a significant effect on the housing industry. At the same time, partnering to achieve common goals—such as increasing the supply and affordability of housing for people with disabilities—creates new avenues for housing strategy implementation.

In many ways, partnerships help to streamline efforts. There are numerous players at the local housing level, including the local public housing agency, city or county housing and community development departments, local planning and zoning boards/agencies, mission-driven non profit housing development agencies, and community leaders like clergy, civic leaders and businesses. Initiating partnerships with any and all of these local stakeholders can begin to provide structure and movement in expanding housing opportunities for workers with disabilities.

## Creating Partnerships at the Local Level

Given that affordable housing is largely produced at the local level, MIG projects interested in housing issues may want to engage the housing community at the local level in addition to making connections at the state level. For example, MIG projects could engage with various stakeholders to help increase awareness of the housing needs of workers with disabilities. MIGs could lend support to housing partnerships that include the disability community at the local level. For MIGs, it is important to recognize that the focus of affordable housing nationally tends to be on workforce housing needs. MIG projects can play an important role in conversations on workforce housing, helping to include the housing needs of workers with disabilities as part of the discussions on affordable workforce housing.

Funding for housing at the local level comes from various sources. These sources include federal programs such as the Community Development Block Grant program and the HOME Investment Partnerships program which make grants to eligible entities including participating jurisdictions. Participating jurisdictions (PJs) are defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as municipalities with populations at 50,000 or greater. In addition to federal funds, local funds for housing include bonds, housing trust funds and various grants and loan programs offer avenues for local partnerships.

Most recently, states and local governments have received funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (AARA) and many may compete for additional funding through Notices of Funding Availability. This May, HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan announced that HUD will offer nearly \$1 billion in funding for public housing units nationwide. Of that funding, \$95 million is set aside for housing units and community facilities for the elderly and persons with disabilities. Additionally, the Green Retrofit Program for Multifamily Housing is partly aimed at owners of properties who receive assistance pursuant to Section 811 to help them make energy and green investments to units.

The Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) was recently authorized under Title III of the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008. The NSP offers a prime opportunity to increase the level of affordable, accessible housing and expand support to local housing and service providers. The primary purpose of the NSP is to rid communities of vacant properties resulting from increased foreclosures as a result of the downturn in the housing market.

Eligible uses of funds include acquisition, demolition or rehabilitation of abandoned properties and down payment assistance for low and moderate income homebuyers. Additionally, the program encourages reuse of properties which provides an opportunity to create affordable, accessible housing units. NSP requires 25 percent of funds to be directed towards special needs populations. This provides an important opportunity for local housing and service providers to develop much needed affordable, accessible and integrated homeownership and rental opportunities for persons with disabilities.

NSP funds are distributed through existing local housing programs (e.g. CDBG, HOME and McKinney-Vento) to designated NSP grantees, primarily participating jurisdictions. Additionally, local Public Housing Authorities were also awarded increased levels of funds through NSP. MIG projects and their partners could consider making connections with local participating jurisdictions and public housing agencies to encourage the use of NSP funds for workers with disabilities. MIG projects could also educate human services networks on opportunities at the local level for expanding affordable and accessible housing with NSP resources. MIG projects could encourage cross-agency coalitions to create local strategies for the use of NSP funds for people with disabilities.

MIG projects may also be in a position to help bring stakeholders together for cross-agency communication and information exchange. For example, if a local alliance, task force or coalition of housing and social services agencies exists, it is likely the two fields (housing and social services) do not have a shared lexicon or knowledge base and therefore do not always understand each other's frame of reference. MIG projects can encourage disability and social service organizations to reach out to housing providers and establish a working dialogue. Additionally, working with a local government's community development department and/or planning and zoning department can bring a greater focus to the housing needs of workers with disabilities.

## Promising Practices

### **Rhodes to Independence, Rhode Island**

Rhodes to Independence (RTI) is a collaborative initiative fostered by the award of a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant in 2000. Over the years, RTI has created various workgroups, including a Housing Workgroup. In 2006, the group held quarterly meetings to focus on specific, yet shared goals such as developing legislation for a home modification revolving loan program, identifying strategies to implement a Rhode Island Accessible Housing Registry, and developing presentations on housing as part of the partnership's Speaker's Bureau. This effort recognized that barriers to employment for people with disabilities extend to areas such as housing.

### **Housing Opportunities Commission— Montgomery County, Maryland**

Montgomery County's Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC—the county's public housing authority) partners with Jubilee Association of Maryland, Inc. (a service provider) and the county's Department of Housing and Community Affairs to address unmet housing needs for people with disabilities. In general, housing is not affordable for individuals on a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) level of income in Montgomery County. Accessible housing located along transportation nodes is even more difficult to come by. The fair market value for a three-bedroom unit is \$1,647 per month, while the average monthly rent per person (assuming a three-person home) is \$606.60.

Using financing from capital bond funds, CDBG funds and project-based vouchers, HOC was able to renovate two homes for individual lease in this fairly new partnership. Jubilee refers interested individuals to HOC and provides services onsite if requested. Other service providers also offer services onsite. Each individual resident pays \$202.20 per month for rent and a utility allowance (this amount is 30 percent of an individual's SSI income). Individuals have access to Section 8 housing vouchers should they wish to move. The homes are well-located near major transportation nodes, shopping and services, and are renovated with full accessibility features. One home received \$492,000 from the state to fund rehabilitation (including wheelchair accessibility, sprinkler systems, heating, cooling and electrical) and the county's Department of Housing and Community Affairs committed acquisition loans of \$535,000 at a zero percent interest rate. The capital bond requires that Jubilee provide services for 40 years. Jubilee provides one live-in staff member to the three-person home. This partnership offers an example for other housing and service providers to consider.