



It Starts with Housing

Public Housing Agencies
Are Making Second Chances Real

June 2016

Introduction

“The opportunity to secure an affordable, decent place to live is part of an effective second chance.”

— HUD Secretary Julián Castro



Dear Reader,

President Obama has called America a nation of second chances, and many of our fellow citizens are hoping for such an opportunity.

Over 600,000 people are released from incarceration every year. Many of these returning citizens are mothers, fathers, and children. The unfortunate reality is that the first question many face when exiting the door from prison to freedom is, “Where am I going to sleep tonight?”

As Secretary Castro stated, “The opportunity to secure an affordable, decent place to live is part of an effective second chance.” Only with safe and affordable housing do returning citizens have the foundation necessary to secure and maintain a job, access health care, and pursue their education. That is why the importance of housing for the successful reintegration of those returning to society cannot be overemphasized. Simply put, it starts with housing.

Across the country, many communities are working to ensure that returning citizens have a safe place to sleep and rebuild their lives. *It Starts with Housing* highlights three of these models from public housing agencies of diverse size, location, and circumstance:

- King County Housing Authority’s (WA) comprehensive supportive housing model
- Burlington Housing Authority’s (VT) transitional housing model
- New York City Housing Authority’s family reunification model

In addition, we share the story of how the Housing Authority of New Orleans collaborated with community stakeholders to revise its admission policy to expand access for prospective residents with criminal conviction records. We also include information from the housing authorities in the cities of Baltimore, Los Angeles, and New Haven, CT.

With housing at the forefront, all of these approaches demonstrate the leadership of public housing agencies in coordinating and collaborating among key community stakeholders. I hope that you find these models helpful as you contemplate, plan, and implement strategies to make second chances real for those men and women returning from incarceration in your communities.

With much appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Lourdes Castro Ramirez".

Lourdes Castro Ramírez
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Office of Public and Indian Housing
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Partnerships Matter



“Reentry housing programs run by housing authorities succeed due, in large part, to the partnerships those agencies have with service providers, parole and probation, and resident leaders.”

– Margaret diZerega, Project Director,
Vera Institute of Justice

It Starts with Housing is designed for public housing agencies and other stakeholders that are interested in collaborating to make second chances real for the men and women returning to their communities every year.

Housing agencies are a critical part of the solution for returning citizens – most of whom are low income and many of whom are at risk of homelessness. But without partners, housing agencies often do not have enough resources to address returning citizens’ urgent housing and service coordination needs.

In many cases, partners provide a lead role in coordinating outreach, referral, and service delivery, freeing housing authorities to focus on providing core housing services. This is one reason why collaboration between public housing agencies and community stakeholders are essential.

The diagram above outlines the range of partnerships – in the government, non-profit, and private sectors – that housing agencies have formed to more effectively reintegrate returning citizens. Concrete examples of these partnerships are presented throughout these pages.

Building a Successful Reentry Program

Who Will You Serve?

How Will You Reach Participants?

What Is Your Housing Plan?

Who Will Provide Services?

How Will You Define Success?

This resource outlines three distinct reentry housing models – from King County, Burlington, and New York City – to illustrate their different approaches to addressing the questions above.

By presenting the core elements that public housing agencies have considered in designing their programs to house returning citizens, we hope *It Starts with Housing* serves as a useful blueprint for working with community stakeholders to implement successful programs in your communities.

Ways HUD Is Supporting PHA Efforts to House Returning Citizens

- Initiated the Pay for Success demonstration program to incubate innovative approaches for reducing recidivism and homelessness among returning citizens.
- Launched the Juvenile Reentry Assistance Program (JRAP) demonstration with legal aid providers in 18 pilot cities, to improve access to housing, education, and job opportunities for youth with criminal records.
- Issued guidance explaining that blanket bans against people with criminal records violate the Fair Housing Act when such policies disproportionately deny housing to people of a particular race, national origin, or with other protected characteristics.
- Reiterated that disqualification for public or assisted housing is mandatory in only limited instances for specific types of criminal activity.
- Clarified that an arrest cannot be used as proof of criminal activity to disqualify someone from HUD-assisted housing.

Summary of Reentry Models



Description	Comprehensive supportive housing aimed at reentering parents	Transitional housing with supportive services for those under supervised release	Allows reentering individuals to live with their families in public housing while receiving supportive services
Targeted Population	Individuals recently released who are at risk of homelessness and are able to reunite with their children	Individuals who have completed their minimum sentence but have 1 year of correctional supervision remaining and no housing available upon release	Individuals released within the past 3 years who are otherwise ineligible for public housing assistance
Number Served Annually	46 families	15 individuals	60–75 individuals
Program Length	Up to 2–3 years	Until participant completes conditions of release	Varies
Housing Assistance Provided	Section 8 project-based vouchers subsidize families living in a nonprofit-operated supportive housing site	Housing Choice Vouchers subsidize beds in transitional housing facilities	Temporary permission granted for participants to reside with their families in public housing
Significant Outside Sources of Funding	King County, private foundations	Vermont Department of Corrections	New York City Department of Homeless Services



The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) collaborated with community stakeholders to develop a new criminal background screening policy for those seeking admission to HANO-subsidized housing. Key partners included the Vera Institute of Justice, residents, advocates, state and local government agencies, and private landlords.

Who Will You Serve?

The population of returning citizens is as diverse as the programs formed to address their needs. Some programs are targeted towards special populations with unique needs, or otherwise limit eligibility to those recently released from incarceration. Other programs, such as the New York City Housing Authority's, serve broader populations.

Only in limited and specific cases do HUD statutes and regulations prohibit someone's admission into HUD-assisted housing based on criminal activity. And in only two cases – where someone has been convicted of producing methamphetamine in federally-assisted housing or must register as a lifetime sex offender – is someone permanently barred. In all other cases, PHAs and owners have discretion to serve all returning citizens.

King County Housing Authority (WA)

Program serves returning citizens who are:

- At least 18 years old
- Recently released from incarceration into King County
- Homeless upon release or with a history of homelessness
- Parents with a reasonable chance of reuniting with their children

Burlington Housing Authority (VT)

Program serves returning citizens who have:

- Supervised release by the Vermont Department of Corrections with a year or more of supervision remaining
- No housing available upon release

Many participants have mental health concerns, developmental disabilities, or substance abuse issues.

New York City Housing Authority (NY)

Program serves returning citizens who are:

- At least 16 years old
- Released from incarceration within the past 3 years
- May be unable to receive housing assistance due to their history of criminal offenses

How Will You Reach Participants?

Successful reentry programs typically develop robust outreach and referral networks to identify potential participants and direct them to a program.

These networks often include correctional and probation agencies, which can begin identifying eligible individuals prior to their release from prisons. They also frequently include governmental agencies focused on the homeless, as well as nonprofit organizations dedicated to serving reentering citizens.

In some cases, one agency or organization takes the lead on gathering applications from the network, checking the applications for completion, conducting a pre-assessment, and then referring applicants to the housing agency to determine eligibility.

King County Housing Authority (WA)

- The Passage Point program relies on a wide-ranging network of government and community organizations to identify potential candidates.
- Relationships that the YWCA actively developed with correctional facilities throughout King County are of particular importance.
- Prospective participants go through a rigorous screening process that includes an application, child reunification assessment, and housing voucher approval.

Burlington Housing Authority (VT)

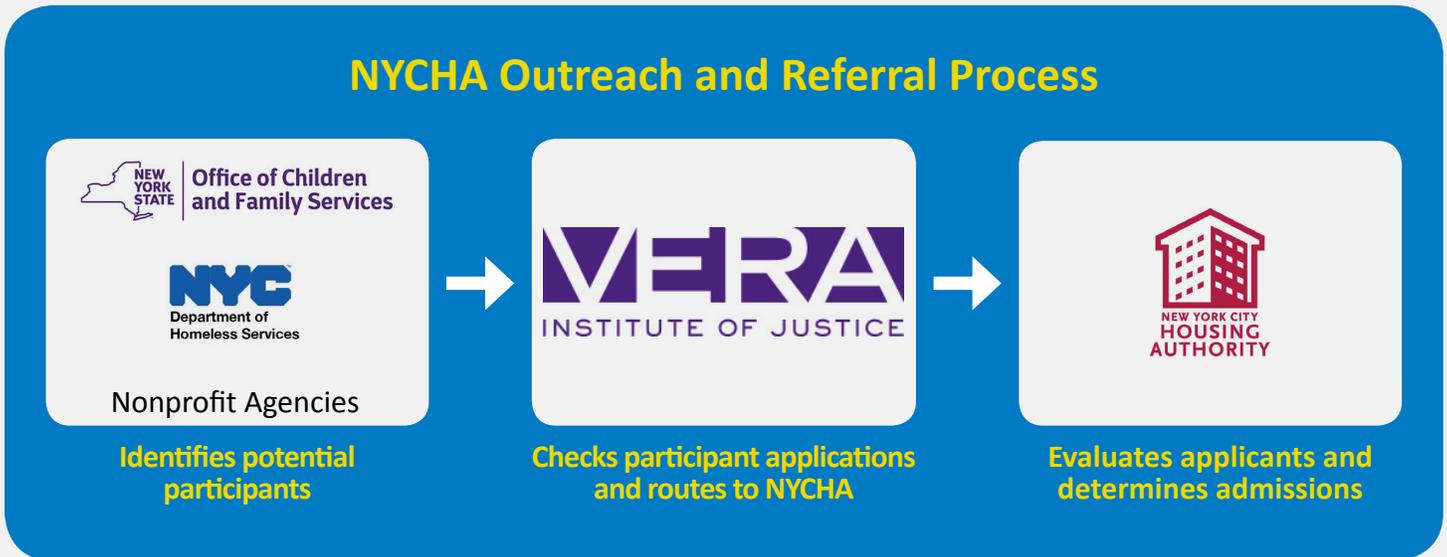
- The Burlington Probation and Parole Office and the Vermont Department of Corrections identify potential participants – often while they are still incarcerated – and refer them to the Burlington Housing Authority (BHA).
- Referrals may also come from the local drug court, local community justice center, and the Vermont Department of Children and Families.
- BHA then conducts an intake interview to assess whether the candidate is a good fit for the program and to determine their best housing options.

Compare: Similarly, in Baltimore, the Maryland Department of Public Safety and various nonprofit agencies identify individuals who are at risk of homelessness upon release. The department refers them to the Baltimore Mayor's Office of Human Services, which then works with the Housing Authority of Baltimore City to determine eligibility.

New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)

- Thirteen nonprofit agencies partner with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to identify potential participants inside prisons and in the community.
- The NYC Department of Homeless Services regularly identifies people in shelters who may be eligible for the reentry program.
- The NY State Office of Children and Family Services refers juveniles coming out of their facilities.
- Families living in NYCHA housing also make referrals to the program.
- Once potential participants are identified and applications are prepared, the Vera Institute of Justice ensures the applications are complete and routes them to NYCHA's Screening Committee, which evaluates and determines admission.

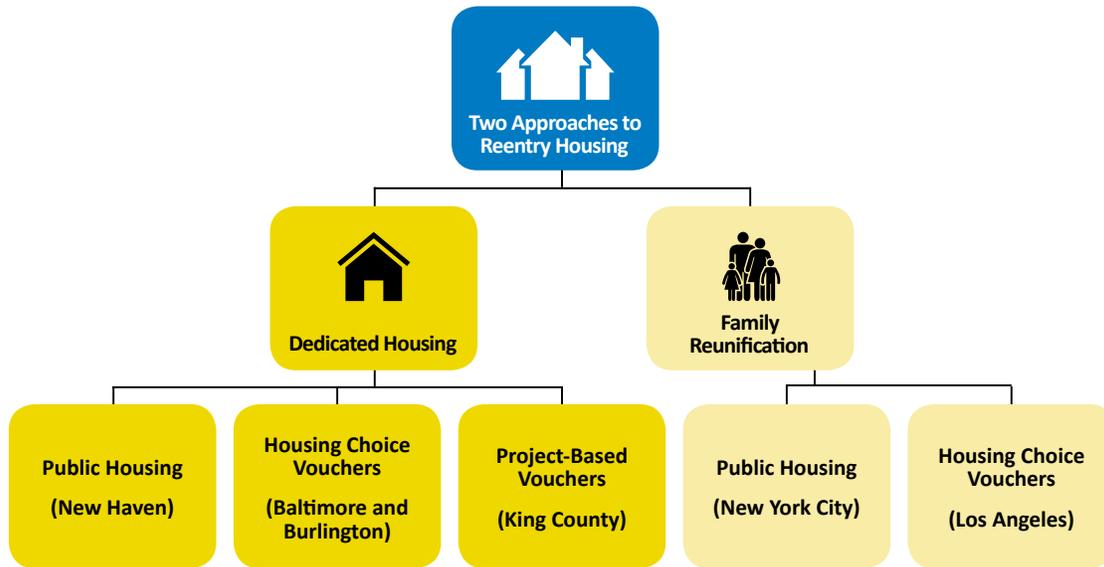
NYCHA Outreach and Referral Process



Lessons Learned

- Engage resident groups and property managers early in the planning and rollout of the program. They are an important source of effective outreach and referrals.
- Involve government agencies that have a shared interest in public safety and successful reentry, such as parole, probation, and correctional agencies, and agencies focused on the homeless.
- Raise awareness about the fact that those with criminal records are eligible for assisted housing.
- Create a centralized program hotline to provide responsive customer service and to ensure continuity when individual staff members are unavailable.

What Is Your Housing Plan?



For many returning citizens, housing is the most daunting challenge they face. Without savings or employment, these citizens cannot afford the steep upfront costs for a place of their own. Policies that restrict admission based on one's criminal background further contribute to putting affordable housing out of reach.

As providers of safe, secure, and affordable housing, public housing agencies are uniquely equipped with a range of tools to facilitate housing opportunities for returning citizens. Some of these tools include revising their Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policies (ACOP), leveraging their local preferences for Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV), employing Family Unification Program (FUP) Vouchers or Project-Based Vouchers (PBV), and, in some cases, taking advantage of Moving to Work (MTW) flexibilities.

Many HUD-supported reentry housing programs fall into one of two categories:

1. **Dedicated housing** set aside for returning citizens. This model is particularly suited for reentering populations with special needs, such as those at high risk of homelessness or who need substance abuse treatment.
2. **Family reunification**, enabling returning citizens to live with family members who already reside in assisted housing. This model adds returning citizens as residents of already occupied units. It serves those with family members who are willing and able to accommodate them in assisted housing.

King County Housing Authority (WA)

Each year, the King County Housing Authority (KCHA) allocates up to 46 Section 8 Project-Based Vouchers to single parents who will be homeless upon release.

- Participants and their children use vouchers to move into multifamily apartments operated by the YWCA in a rural, high-opportunity neighborhood.
- KCHA's authority to innovate under HUD's Moving To Work (MTW) flexibilities has enabled it to leverage its own funding with that of other county agencies, to target single parents and to partner with the YWCA.

Compare: The Housing Authority of New Haven similarly used MTW flexibilities to dedicate 16 public housing slots to chronically homeless returning citizens.

Burlington Housing Authority (VT)

The Burlington Housing Authority (BHA) owns and manages several buildings that have been converted into transitional housing.

- BHA contracts with the Howard Center – Vermont’s largest nonprofit community mental health and human services provider – to oversee “Northern Lights,” an 11-bed transitional housing program designed to serve female returning citizens.
- The Vermont Department of Corrections contracts with BHA to provide 4 subsidized apartments to participants at “30-42 King Street,” a BHA-managed property designed to serve the chronically homeless.
- Housing Choice Vouchers fund housing for these 15 annual participants, including non-elderly disabled vouchers, and use local preferences to target additional vouchers.

Compare: The Housing Authority of Baltimore City has established a local preference to serve up to 200 chronically homeless individuals who have been recently released and are enrolled in the Ex-Offender Program run by the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice.

New York City Housing Authority (NY)

- The New York City Housing Authority grants temporary permission to participants to reside with their family living in NYCHA public housing.
- Participants can stay with their families on a temporary basis while in the program.

Compare: The Housing Agency of the City of Los Angeles is piloting a family reunification program that adds returning citizens to their family members’ leases. This requires approval from both the participant’s families and their landlord. If their landlord approves, the participant is added to the family’s Housing Choice Voucher. If the landlord does not approve, the family may request to move with a new voucher that includes the program participant.

Lessons Learned

- The dedicated housing model tends to be more resource-intensive than the family reunification model.
- When implementing the family reunification model, take special care not to re-introduce the participant to environments that might trigger past involvement with the criminal justice system.
- Build and maintain positive relationships with neighbors. Securing their support is critical to success.
- Think strategically about tapping into unlikely resources and partners that may have furniture and other household items to donate.

Who Will Provide Services?

In all of these models, housing not only shelters program participants, but also provides a platform for the effective delivery of comprehensive supportive services. Through these services, participants receive the tools and support to build life skills and turn their lives in new directions.

Successful housing reentry programs work with community partners to identify the specific needs of their reentering populations and to coordinate the delivery of services to meet these needs. Partners may provide a range of services, including substance abuse treatment, counseling services, job readiness, financial literacy, and case management.

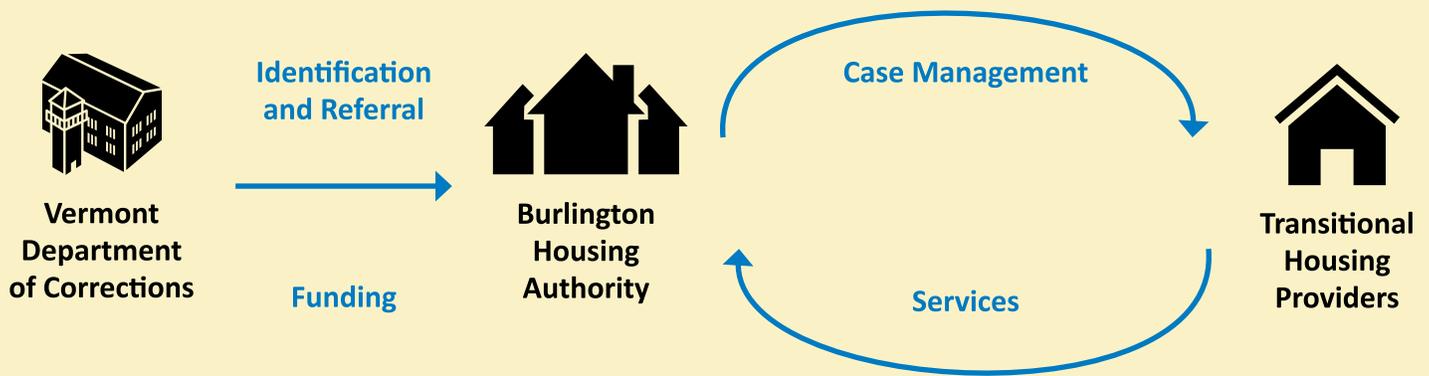
King County Housing Authority (WA)

- Passage Point is a supportive housing program funded jointly by the King County Housing Authority and King County, with additional financial assistance from charitable foundations such as the Gates Foundation and United Way.
- The YWCA designed and runs the Passage Point program, partnering with a range of service providers to offer on-site case management and supportive services to program participants.
- Life coaches work individually with residents, encouraging self-sufficiency, positive community interaction, and the development of life skills and parenting skills.
- Workfirst, Washington State's temporary cash assistance program, also provides education, job training, and employment services.

Burlington Housing Authority (VT)

- Both Northern Lights and 30–42 King Street are transitional housing programs that offer a variety of supportive services to participants.
- Services focus on building participants' life skills, addressing participants' medical and mental health needs, working toward educational goals, and gaining steady employment.
- The Vermont Department of Corrections provides funding to BHA to:
 - Hire reentry specialists specifically dedicated to providing advocacy and housing support for returning citizens
 - Assist returning citizens with first month's rent, security deposit, and other necessary housing expenses at the beginning of their tenancy
- BHA's reentry specialists coordinate case management services by working closely with probation officers and other treatment providers to ensure appropriate support services are in place. They also are the first point of intervention if tenancy problems arise.
- The participant's lease obligations become part of their conditions for early release into the community.

Burlington's Model for Delivering Reentry Services



New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)

- Thirteen nonprofit agencies provide case management services to participants, including job training, job placement, parenting classes, drug treatment, counseling services, and benefits enrollment. Participants:
 - Regularly work with a case manager for at least 6 months
 - Complete individualized action plans by attaining their personal goals
- The Vera Institute of Justice tracks participants and family progress toward completing case management goals, meeting NYCHA lease requirements, and complying with probation and parole stipulations.
- Government partners play key roles in providing services:
 - NYC Department of Homeless Services helps finance the pilot, directing funds from its Emergency Solutions Grant to NYCHA for staff support and to Vera for individual stipends to partner agencies.
 - NYCHA's Office of Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability alerts and connects participants to job opportunities in NYCHA neighborhoods.
 - NY State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision orients parole officers to the program and facilitates participants' move-in to public housing.

Lessons Learned

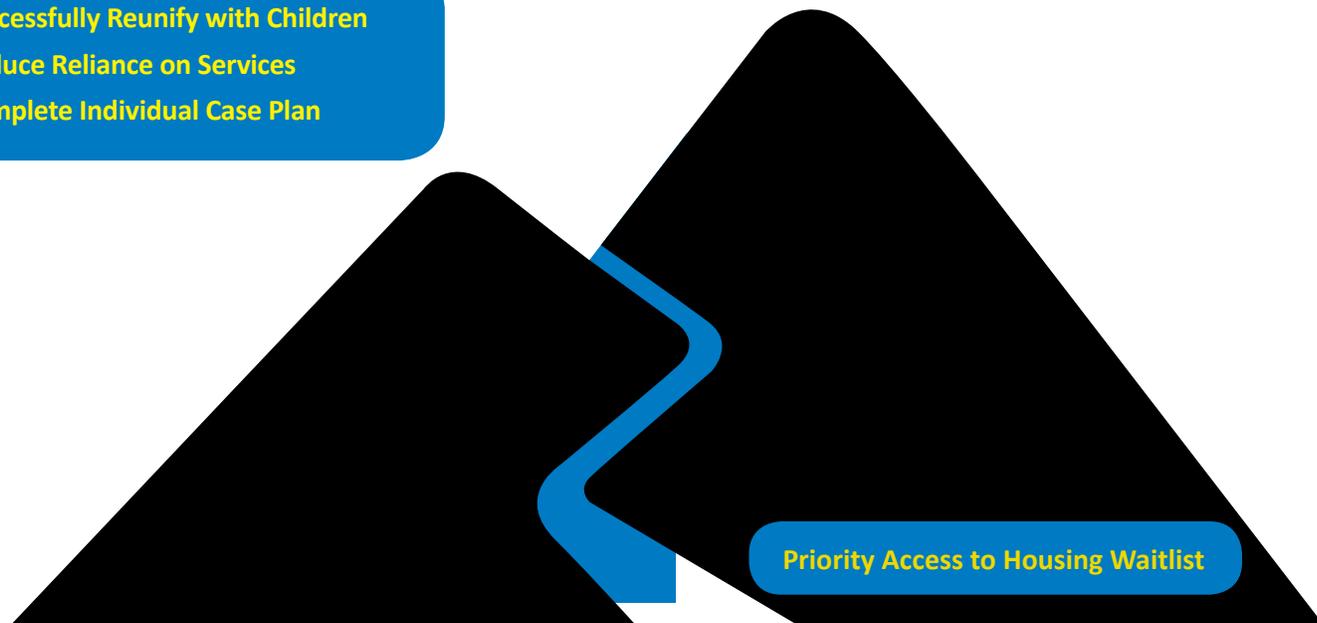
- Regularly convene program partners to review services, to benefit participants and improve outcomes. In New York City, the Corporation for Supportive Housing hosts monthly meetings for this purpose.
- Facilitate communication among partners through monthly reporting of performance metrics. This information will also help support fundraising efforts.
- Establish Memoranda of Understanding with partner agencies to clarify expectations and accountability.
- Connect with the participants' families for additional support.
- Partner with employment agencies to ensure access to employment, education, and training opportunities.

How Will You Define Success?



Graduating from King County's Passage Point Program

- Successfully Reunify with Children
- Reduce Reliance on Services
- Complete Individual Case Plan



Priority Access to Housing Waitlist

Successful reentry housing programs aim to prepare returning citizens to live productively on their own, alter previous patterns, and ultimately reduce recidivism. Each program's "graduation" requirements reflect how it individually defines success.

For example, the King County Housing Authority's Passage Point program graduates participants once they have reunified with their children, completed their individual case plan, and demonstrated independence. Graduation makes participants eligible for regular affordable housing assistance, often with preferential access to ensure housing continuity.

Considering the challenges participants often face, it can take one or more years before participants reach the point where they are ready to graduate. By clarifying goals and establishing concrete metrics for their programs, housing agencies and their partners can evaluate what works, and continuously improve.

King County Housing Authority (WA)

- After 18 to 24 months in the program, the housing authority assists participants with securing permanent housing.
- In contrast to typical transitional housing programs with strict 24-month occupancy limits, Passage Point participants may remain in place until they have completed the reunification process, are stabilized in employment, and can demonstrate their ability to succeed independent of the program.
- Participants who complete the program and regain custody of their children are given priority access to the King County Housing Authority waitlist.
- If participants remain beyond 36 months, Passage Point helps them to secure permanent housing and provides supports for 1 year following their transition to permanent housing.

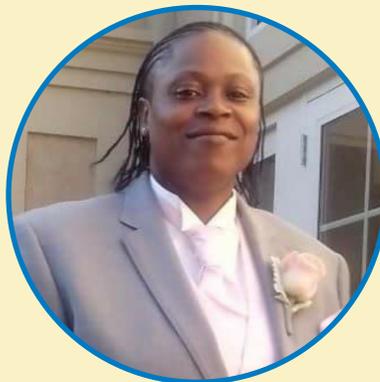
Burlington Housing Authority (VT)

- After participants complete all the obligations of their early release, they graduate from the program and receive a Housing Choice Voucher.

New York City Housing Authority (NY)

- After successfully completing their program requirements, participants may apply to be added to their families' leases on a permanent basis or may apply for their own NYCHA housing unit.

“This program has shown me how to navigate through life. It has also shown that we have individuals and agencies who still care about people. I cannot wait until I am in the right place in my life where I may not need this program, so someone else can benefit to help them change their life like it has changed mine.” – *Tiya Canady, Resident, Housing Authority of New Haven*



Collaborating for Policy Change

Reviewing agency policies provides another opportunity for stakeholders to come together to improve outcomes for returning citizens. The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) adopted this approach by developing a new criminal background screening policy to improve housing opportunities for individuals with criminal convictions.

This landmark policy was the product of many months of close collaboration among stakeholders, including: HANO, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera), residents, community advocates, legal groups, property managers, and law enforcement agencies.

What Does the Policy Do?

HANO's new screening policy eases some of the previous restrictions on applicants with a criminal history, and ensures that such applicants are not denied housing without an individualized risk assessment. The policy applies to everyone seeking admission to HANO-subsidized housing, including those joining family members currently living in such housing.

How Does the Policy Work?

1. HANO screens applicants to determine if their convictions make them categorically ineligible for HANO-subsidized housing under federal law.
2. If eligible under federal law, HANO next uses its new screening guidelines to determine whether the applicant's conviction warrants further examination based on the underlying conduct and how recently it occurred.
 - If no further examination is warranted, applicants are admitted.
 - If further examination is warranted, applicants are entitled to an individualized assessment by a three-member panel, comprised of two senior HANO representatives and one resident representative. The panel's assessment takes into account the nature of the conviction, the time that has passed since the conviction, and evidence of rehabilitation, among other factors.
 - Based on this assessment, the panel determines by majority vote if the applicant is admitted.



Collaboration Timeline

Advocating for Change

In 2012, Stand with Dignity! (Stand) began organizing formerly incarcerated persons and other community members to address HANO policies that excluded individuals based on criminal records.

In 2013, Voice for the Ex-Offender (VOTE) released a report entitled *Communities, Evictions, and Criminal Convictions*, and also advocated for policy reform.

In March 2013, HANO announced its intention to significantly ease restrictions on housing and employment opportunities based on criminal records. Applicants with criminal convictions would no longer be presumed ineligible for housing assistance. HANO began collaborating with Vera for technical assistance, piloting a new research-backed screening process.

Convening Stakeholders and Drafting the New Policy

In 2015, HANO created a multi-sector focus group to recommend the final details of HANO's new screening policy. HANO's Executive Director and a member of HANO's Board of Commissioners led the focus group. The group consisted of property managers, residents, the Mayor's Office, the State Department of Probation and Parole, and advocacy groups, including Southeast Louisiana Legal Services and the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center.

Some of the issues the focus group considered were:

- Whether HANO's third-party managers could be required to comply with the new policy under existing contracts, and how compliance would be monitored?
- How to configure criminal background review panels to ensure resident representation?
- What would be fair and reasonable timelines for applicants to move through the review process and dispute inaccurate information?

After meeting with residents and the public, HANO's Board of Commissioners approved the new screening policy in early 2016.

Throughout the process, advocacy and legal groups, such as Stand, VOTE, and Southeast Louisiana Legal Services, played key roles. These groups attended public meetings, organized residents, and educated stakeholders about how the new policy would promote successful reintegration and more inclusive public housing communities.



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