

**Public Housing in the Public Interest
Examining the Chicago Housing Authority's
Proposed Service Connector Model**

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MPC Fact Sheet #2

Research conducted by

Robin Snyderman, Housing Director and
Steven D. Dailey II, Housing Associate,
Metropolitan Planning Council.

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CHA Transformation Plan Statistics

Number of units currently in CHA's system	37,308
Number of units available	23,658
Number of units occupied	22,103
Number of demolished units	1,306
Number of residents who had been relocated as of January 1, 2001	161
Number of residents relocated into other public housing units	97
Number of residents relocated into the private market as of March 31, 2001	84

Source: Chicago Housing Authority



Introduction

In October 2000 the Metropolitan Planning Council published *Public Housing in the Public Interest: Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) Transformation Plan Update*. First in a series of "Fact Sheets," it set forth five key principles against which this historic redevelopment effort will be evaluated by the council. To be a success, MPC argues, the Plan for Transformation must:

1. Promote and support creative strategies to increase affordable housing options for lower-income individuals.
2. Clearly and consistently communicate with public housing residents and regional stakeholders to enable informed choice.
- 3. Ensure quality supportive services that are accessible to residents.**
4. Handle relocation fairly and compassionately and on a realistic timetable.
5. Institute strong accountability mechanisms.

As part of the initial analysis, several concerns were identified which required attention, ranging from whether there are adequate capacity and resources to carry out the ambitious Transformation Plan, to whether there are viable service strategies and tracking mechanisms in place to prevent families from "slipping through the cracks."

Beginning with this Fact Sheet, the Council will look more closely at how the Plan is measuring up to each of these five principles, beginning with the third. Arguably, none of the the problems the Transformation Plan seeks to solve can adequately be addressed – from redevelopment financing to tenant rights to community acceptance – until CHA residents have access to quality supportive services. Experience in Chicago and elsewhere has shown that dollars alone cannot adequately rebuild communities. Equal attention must be paid to the human side: developing residents skills and capacity to achieve self-sufficiency and employment. This report examines the Service Connector model – CHA's response to that issue – and its promise, potential shortcomings and alternative approaches that may prove useful.



Service Connector Model

The Service Connector Model is a CHA program designed to link public housing residents to supportive services during the Plan for Transformation to promote housing permanence and economic self-sufficiency. Available to residents who choose to participate, services will be introduced via referrals and general outreach. It is not anticipated that all residents will choose or need the same level of support.

Service Connector Model Outcome Measures

1. Lease Compliance – Are residents adhering to the requirements in the lease agreement?
2. Employment – Are heads of households able to secure and retain full-time or part-time permanent employment at a living wage?
3. Family Stability – Are families mentally and physically healthy? Are parents engaging positively with their children? Do adults' lifestyles accommodate stable employment and lease compliance?
4. Community Integration – Are CHA residents able to access community resources?

Having assessed the CHA's proposed Service Connector model, the Metropolitan Planning Council raises the following concerns:

1. **Time** is needed to make the model operational on such a large scale. The current one-year Service Connector contracts, renewable only if funding is available, are cause for serious concern.
2. Ongoing **cross-training** is needed to promote uniform communication and understanding among the individuals and organizations involved in the Service Connector model. Such coordination must vigorously respect residents' **confidentiality** rights.
3. Although current **staff to resident ratios** are estimated at 1 to 139, it is unlikely this will be sufficient to address the diversity of resident needs. It is also questionable whether **existing city service providers** are prepared to handle a dramatic increase in referrals from the CHA.
4. The voluntary nature of this program necessitates an improved atmosphere of **trust** and **tenant participation**.
5. A **public accountability process** should be established to ensure that all parties involved with the Transformation Plan benefit from each others' experience and can adjust procedures year to year.

Housing Linked to Services

For families across the region, home is more than a roof and four walls. A home is part of a stable neighborhood offering a convenient range of shopping, child care, health care and transportation choices. If such services are difficult to find or lack flexible hours, families can be stranded and their economic health threatened.



"The link between housing and services is essential in all communities," points out Katrina VanBalkenburgh, program officer at the Corporation for Supportive Housing, a nationally recognized nonprofit organization. She supports the provision of permanent housing options linked to comprehensive services. "The extra challenge in the supportive housing field, where we are actively working to prevent homelessness and instability among vulnerable populations, is introducing that link on-site, even if the ultimate goal is to assist families to access existing, off-site services."

Supportive housing, in its broadest definition, is housing linked with social services tailored to the needs of the population being housed. Thanks to the supportive housing field, the interdependence between housing and supportive services has been well documented and provides useful lessons for the CHA.¹ Studies have shown that linking support services to quality permanent housing allows residents to effectively integrate into community life at a much higher rate than otherwise would be the case.

CHA residents have long lived in isolated communities disconnected from the rest of the city and a range of business opportunities and social service providers. The reinvention of public housing outlined in the Transformation Plan is an effort to end that isolation over the next seven to 10 years. The CHA's strategy to ensure access to appropriate services is called the "Service Connector Model." The success of this program, though budgeted at a fraction of the overall redevelopment effort (\$5.9 million of an annual \$130 million commitment), is fundamental to the reinvention of public housing.

Jean Butzen, director of Lakefront SRO, another supportive housing organization, argues that supportive services are essential to the success of the CHA plan. "Like us, the CHA must be intentional and meticulous about designing a safety net with and for the residents. The last thing any of us want to see happen as a result of the Transformation Plan is an increase in the City's homeless population due to the decrease in its public housing stock." The magnitude of life changes which the Plan will trigger for CHA residents necessitates a substantive service approach, to help families understand their rights, responsibilities, choices and opportunities. Without such attention, it will be nearly impossible for families to maintain housing stability.

"The truth is that it will be very hard work," adds Pat Dowell of Near West Side Community Development Corporation. "Housing experts and service providers speak different languages, and play by different rules. How do you offer services to promote lease compliance without violating confidentiality rights? How do you strike the right balance between case management and community development? There's more than one answer to these questions, but figuring out the right approach for each site requires an intimate working relationship between property managers and service providers."

A Shift for CHA

Far from its original purpose as transitional housing for the working poor, much of the public housing in Chicago has devolved into permanent communities of extreme poverty. In the past, CHA allocated portions of its capital budget for direct service delivery. Although the intent was to provide services easily accessed by its residents, the result was the duplication of services that further segregated

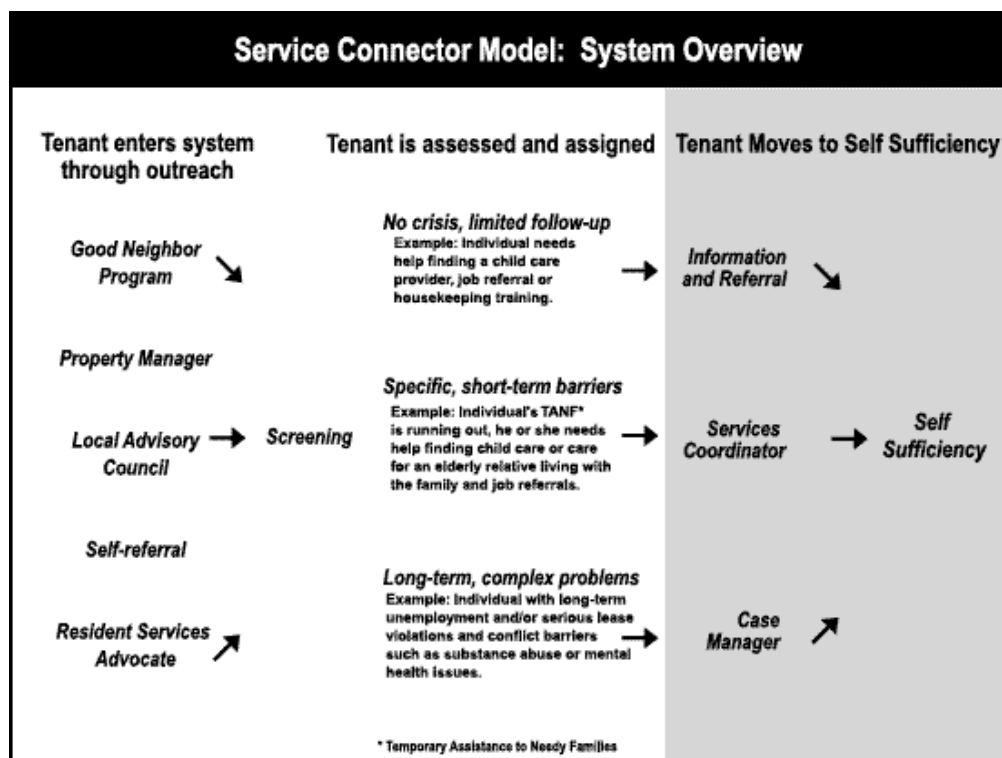
residents from the larger community. The services provided were often fragmented and ineffective. Moreover, funding these services was undermining the ability of CHA to maintain its own properties.

In an attempt to adequately meet the housing and service needs of residents and reintegrate them into the broader fabric of society, CHA has decided to get out of the service delivery business, and instead improve residents' access to services already available in the community. The core strategy calls for the deployment of development-based community workers, who will assist residents in identifying and accessing services provided by existing public or private institutions, such as the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development, Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Department of Human Services or the United Way.²

The Service Connector model was originally outlined in the Plan for Transformation submitted by the City of Chicago and CHA and approved by HUD in 1999. Isabelle Blanco, chief of programs for the CHA, in coordination with the Chicago Department of Human Services (CDHS), will manage the initiative.

Current projections suggest there will be one service coordinator for every 139 households, but it is recognized that households will need different levels of services at different times.

After collecting feedback from working groups, CDHS released a request for proposals (RFP) in April 2001 for organizations interested in providing services through the Service Connector model for 24,900 households in 23 CHA family developments. The Service Connector model divides the City into six clusters, and assigns a variety of staff, both on and off-site, to each cluster. The model is designed to assist residents in accessing available resources through a coordinated system of outreach, assessment, referral and follow-up.





By aggregating CHA family developments into clusters throughout the city, the model intends to aggressively use existing public and private nonprofit services for job training, education, youth programs, childcare and counseling, thus exposing residents to broader networks and reducing isolation and labeling.

CHA's budget allocates \$5.9 million to CDHS for 101 staffed positions for one year: one clinical social worker and supervisor per cluster plus case managers, service coordinators and resident service advocates at each development. The ratio of 139 households to one staff person includes all of these positions, though not all will be based on-site. While a vast improvement over initial Transformation Plan projections of 875:1, this ratio is still about three times higher than tenant-service ratios at sites which have successfully integrated housing and services.

Collectively, the CDHS staff is charged with helping residents identify their needs and referring them to private providers or government agencies, coordinating closely with CHA's property management contractors. Of the \$5.9 million committed to the Service Connector model, \$1 million has been set aside to "purchase" services that are not readily available in particular clusters, such as vocational training or substance abuse counseling. CDHS and the Chicago Department on Aging (CDOA) have been contracted to manage the Service Connector program at its family and senior developments, respectively, while CHA monitors progress.

Outcomes areas have been established as performance measures, to guide the activity of contractors and on-site staff, including:

- housing permanence/lease compliance
- employment
- family stability
- community integration³

The core concept is to identify points at which services can support housing choices. For example, if a resident is aware of available services in advance of a job loss, she can access the necessary support to avoid being evicted for nonpayment of rent. The service connector staff person might link the resident to a local job developer through the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development and assist in negotiations with the property manager to arrange a payment plan. The tenant might be asked to sign a confidentiality release, allowing the manager and the service staff to discuss her case in her absence, to maximize efficient communication and problem solving. If a tenant is less aggressive in seeking support, his property manager might warn him that he should work with a service connector to find a new job, and then give him a limited time frame within which to gain employment. To ensure respect for the resident's confidentiality, he might then alert the service connector staff that the tenant needs assistance without specifying the nature of his problem.

The Service Connector RFP anticipates three major phases for many families during the CHA's transformation plan, which may trigger as many as three moves for residents. CHA is planning for supportive services to respond to the distinct needs of residents during each of the potential phases – the Crisis Phase, the Transition Phase and the Permanence Phase.

During the Crisis Phase, the Service Connector model seeks to provide supportive services as a safety net to prevent families from losing their homes, such as in the scenarios described above. During the Transition Phase, goals are to provide support to families: 1) before physical redevelopment or rehabilitation take place; 2) while residents are in transitional housing and their homes are being redeveloped; and 3) when it is time to move to a redeveloped public housing unit or use a Housing Choice Voucher (formerly called a Section 8 rent subsidy) in the private rental market. In the final phase, Permanence, the goal is to help families find housing in the general market. Success of the Service Connector model depends on a number of previously disconnected entities working collaboratively with the Service Connector staff:

- Good Neighbor counselors
- Relocation and mobility counselors
- Local Advisory Committee presidents (elected by residents at each development)
- Housing managers, and
- City/state/federal/private services providers.⁴

Good Neighbor Program

For 2001, \$1,590,000 has been budgeted for programs to assist residents in making successful transitions into new communities, whether in the private market or in other CHA housing. This "Good Neighbor Program" consists of workshops on housekeeping tips, conflict resolution, monthly budgeting and other family resources and will be managed by five organizations under contract to the CHA.

Relocation Counseling

Relocation counseling will be made available to all families (an estimated 6,000 during the 10-year Transformation Plan) moving into the private market using Housing Choice Vouchers, and will include some follow-up contact after the move. Counseling for each family or individual will include reviewing service needs, providing contacts to services, teaching apartment search techniques, educating families about and performing credit checks, assisting with unit inspections, assisting in rent negotiations, identifying at least five housing options, providing transportation to at least three housing options, and insuring that families comply with all programmatic requirements and successfully move into a unit. CHA has contracted with two Chicago firms, E.F. Goughan and Changing Patterns, to carry out this program.

Mobility Counseling

Mobility counseling is intended to be an enhanced version of relocation counseling for families who express an interest in moving to opportunity areas. These are defined as city census tracts where less than 23.49 percent of the population lives below the poverty level and where less than 30 percent of the population is African-American. In a suburb, they are tracts where the percentages of residents who are African-American or who live below the poverty level are not more than 10 per-



cent. These families will receive more intensive counseling services in their new communities. In addition to the services offered in the relocation counseling package, families choosing "mobility" moves will receive counselor visits 30 and 60 days after move-in, and an in-home visit 10 months following the 60-day visit. Assessment and tracking will focus on the family's long-term self-sufficiency. The services include contact 90 days prior to renewal of the Housing Choice Voucher, problem resolution assistance and a survey during the second year of tenancy. The 2001 budget for both Relocation and Mobility Counseling is projected at \$2,100,000.

Early Implementation of the Service Connector Model

As of April 2001, the CHA had five service pilots operating, and the Service Connector RFP had been issued for 23 properties.

One of the five models, launched in September 2000, is run by CHAC. This organization serves approximately 3,250 Housing Choice Voucher program participants and their property owners in Chicago's South Shore Community (ZIP codes 60619, 60637 and 60649) and the south suburban communities of Calumet City, Sauk Village, Glenwood, Hazel Crest, Lansing, Country Club Hills and Riverdale. The primary responsibilities of the three Service Connector coordinators in this pilot program are to (a) encourage community-based support, and (b) help families and landlords access government and private sector services by making referrals, acting as advocates and offering support. Since the beginning of 2001, there have been 145 new cases opened with 60 of them being resolved. The majority of contacts to date have been employment related.

The second model targets senior housing. Since June 2000, a Service Connector coordinator under contract to the Chicago Department on Aging has been working at 42 of CHA's 56 senior properties. Private contractors are based at the remaining 14 sites. CHA has committed \$30,000 per property for service staff at these buildings, which works out to approximately one staff person per 155 senior households. As of Jan. 1, 2001, senior services connectors provided 9,175 direct services, 2,690 referrals to case management professionals, and 1,778 acts of assistance with public benefits (i.e., Public Aid, Social Security, etc.).

Three family sites with pilot social service programs have already received HOPE VI redevelopment dollars from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): the Henry Horner Homes, ABLA Homes and the Madden Park/Ida B. Wells developments.

Initial work has focused on families in crisis where eviction proceedings or termination of rental assistance have been initiated, or families at risk of such action.

Lessons from Case Studies

In setting up the Service Connector Model, CHA tried to draw from a number of best practices. MPC highlights two of those here and urges a close look at those elements which will be most difficult for a large public agency to replicate and to quickly bring to a scale that will fairly and effectively serve



CHA residents and surrounding communities. The first example illustrates the most developed service program at a CHA family development, the Henry Horner pilot. The second case study describes a well-established supportive housing program at a building owned and operated by Lakefront SRO.

Case Study: The Henry Horner Homes

Located in a community renamed West Haven on the Near West side, Horner was one of the first CHA properties to undergo redevelopment in 1996 and to achieve a mixed-income strategy. Initially, some of the newly redeveloped properties saw a return of the same kinds of challenges faced by other CHA properties: excessive lease violations, damaged property and other disruptive activity. This prompted some working families to leave the new developments, making it difficult for property managers to achieve a stable mix of 50 percent public housing units and 50 percent working family units. After \$40 million was spent to rebuild 460 units of a planned 700, instances of vandalism and tenant abuse made it apparent that quick action was needed to create a community where people wanted to live.

In February 2000, the Near West Side Community Development Corporation approached the Chicago Bulls to help fund a transitional living program called the Home Visitors program to comprehensively address this situation. In addition, since many Horner residents receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and Project Match were called on to provide support. Project Match's Pathways program, a case management approach to working with TANF families on their journey from welfare to work, was implemented successfully by two local IDHS offices. A private firm, P.M. One, was designated property manager in 1999, and became active in what is now known as the West Haven Families and Community Partnership.

The partnership continues to work to establish relationships among providers, institutionalize links between programs, and clarify their vision, values, and goals. They have worked through issues of sharing information, establishing outcomes, and differentiating roles and responsibilities.

Key lesson learned: Management-service coordination takes time, trust and training.

The Partnership's philosophy is that it can best serve people by creating a consistent voice to articulate and address the needs of families. P.M. One administers both house rules and the CHA lease agreement, which spells out responsibilities both for Horner residents and their landlord. P.M. One and the Home Visitors Program work closely together to ensure quality property management and timely supportive services for all residents through a referral system within the partnership.

Given the shared goal of stable housing with supportive services, all parties involved in the West Haven Families and Community partnership agreed to modify their policies and procedures and exchange confidential information. Shared protocols were established to respond to problems such as delinquent rent payment, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect and school truancy.

Since property managers come into contact with residents on a daily basis, their involvement was key in identifying individual needs for services. Coordinated efforts have encouraged more residents to attend block club meetings, an ideal way to educate tenants on available services and foster a sense of community.



Sample Successes

Both P.M. One and the Home Visitors Program show that better communication among partners can mean a significant reduction in delinquency for the property management company (56 percent) and expanded employment opportunities for Horner residents. Residents have gained new skills, work exposure and confidence. Both service providers and residents view the West Haven Partnership as a critical foundation for achieving self-sufficiency and opening private market housing opportunities. The combination of services not only supports efforts to stay lease-compliant and self-sufficient, but also provides the necessary skills and confidence needed to move from subsidized to non-subsidized living arrangements.

Case Study: Lakefront SRO

Transforming broken lives into productive ones can be extremely challenging for individuals faced with multiple dilemmas. Lakefront SRO, founded in 1986 to provide supportive housing to formerly homeless people in Chicago, takes a thorough and thoughtful approach to providing permanent housing with social service supports in order to help residents achieve self-sufficiency.

Key lesson learned: Management-service coordination requires skilled staff, strong tenant relations and on-site opportunities.

Lakefront SRO manages 893 units of housing and incorporates a blended management style. Property and asset management, housing development, and supportive service staff work together as a team to satisfy a "double bottom line:" to give tenants the support they need to reach their highest potential and to keep the building in good shape physically and fiscally.⁵

While some housing providers consider resident services a luxury, Lakefront SRO believes that coordinated services support the goals of asset management, while also aiding families in reaching their own goals. Their research shows that the more effective the resident services, the more likely the development will be fiscally healthy and well maintained.

Lakefront SRO offers services both on and off-site, giving residents increased options to meet their needs. In addition, the design of Lakefront's buildings also makes service connection easier. In one Lakefront SRO property in the South Loop, the service provider and the property manager's office are side-by-side and positioned directly in front of the elevator, eliminating resident complaints that they did not know where to go. This allows not only close resident contact in which relationships between staff and residents can develop, but also enhanced ability for staff to observe behaviors that may call for service supports. Lakefront properties typically include ample community space for socializing, workshops and events.

Meaningful change requires meaningful investment, and Lakefront staffs its properties accordingly. Acceptable service staff to tenant ratios vary from 1 to 25 and 1 to 40, depending on the needs of the property. Full and part-time staff are available around the clock in case of emergency. Supportive services beyond traditional case management and counseling are provided, and include job training and placement, literacy training, continuing education placement, basic health and nutrition and community leadership training.

Sample Successes

As a result of these innovative strategies, the formerly homeless residents of Lakefront SRO properties experience housing stability, substance abuse recovery and job placement. Lakefront SRO has a remarkable retention rate. In 1998, the percentage of tenants who moved into buildings and stayed was 81 percent, and more than three-quarters of those who did leave did so for positive reasons: because they secured a new job, reunited with family or moved in to a bigger apartment.

Comparison of the Service Connector Model and Case Studies

Location	Number of residents	Staff-tenant ratio	Budget
Lakefront SRO	892	Between 1:25 and 1:40	\$640,000.00
Horner Pilot	200	1:66	\$287,000.00
CHA's Service Connector	46,995	Approximately 1:139*	\$5,900,000.00

Sources: Lakefront SRO, Near West Side Community Development Corporation, Chicago Housing Authority
 * Number to be refined as trends are established.

Concerns

As CHA's historic transformation continues, it is important not to lose sight of its most important component. Replacement of CHA's isolated developments is long overdue and necessary. The plan to develop newly constructed or rehabilitated units of public housing among affordable and market rate units is laudable. However, what's most important is not the bricks and mortar aspect of the Plan for Transformation. Quality buildings will not blend in if residents do not become a part of the larger community, both socially and economically.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the transformation plan is that it is intended to reverse this trend – from despair to hope. The plan directly affects the lives of all individuals and families in public housing. The demands on public housing residents are many and complex, and the need for supportive services are just as great. An array of quality, accessible services, including job training, mobility counseling and self-sufficiency programs, is essential to ensure successful transitions for public housing residents. The portal through which residents will access these important supports is the Service Connector model. Yet there are considerable concerns surrounding the model which are shared by residents and stakeholders region-wide. MPC hopes that by highlighting the CHA's Service Connector plans and two case studies, these concerns can be answered.

One of the major concerns is that of **timing**. The CHA expects previously disconnected entities to work in a coordinated manner. This will take time. As illustrated in the Horner pilot discussion, service protocols must be changed, information sharing parameters established, and working relationships built. The RFP calls for one-year contracts, renewable only if funding is available in Year Two. Realistically, it will take over a year just to develop a workable program. Once the Service Connector model is in place, the Transformation Plan cannot afford to disrupt its service strategy. Additional funding must be secured to extend the CHA's commitment to the Service Connector model over the life of the ten-year plan.



Related is the need for ongoing **cross-training and coordinated communication**. There are many individuals: relocation counselors, Local Advisory Council presidents, property managers and good neighbor counselors who are integral to the operation of the Service Connector system. As each interacts with residents and one another, they must have a working knowledge of each others' roles so they can effectively communicate with residents. Central to this challenge is maintaining appropriate standards of **confidentiality**. When property managers and service providers coordinate with each other to better serve tenants, regard for privacy issues must be respected and protocols established. Consistency of information dissemination is extremely important. Mixed messages and misinformation will only make an already complex system more confusing.

Consistency is particularly critical, given the proposed **staff to resident ratio** of the CHA's Service Connector model of one staff person for every 139 lease-holders. That is substantially lower than other successful models. Horner, for example, has a ratio of close to 1 to 66 based on existing trends, and Lakefront SRO properties have ratios ranging from 1 to 25 to 1 to 40, depending on resident needs. Regardless, without a thorough needs assessment of CHA residents, these ratios are nothing more than rough estimates. Plans must be developed to increase the scale of the Service Connector program, in case allocated resources prove insufficient to support families throughout the Transformation Plan. Given the fact that the success of this program is based on the assumption that existing service providers have the capacity to meet the needs of CHA residents, such a contingency plan is critical. For example, the CHA may develop Memoranda of Understanding with CDHS contractors whereby on-site workshops would be developed to introduce residents to these providers and vice versa, before off-site relationships are established.

The relatively small numbers of staff available to work closely with residents makes the process of **building trust** challenging. With both the Horner and Lakefront SRO models, one lesson learned was the more staff communicate with and involve residents in community development and other on-site decision-making, the more likely residents were to utilize the services available. Because the model presumes voluntary resident participation, on-site staff must have a strong rapport with CHA residents to encourage their involvement. One problem has been that many residents feel excluded from the planning process, even though the CHA typically negotiates with the Local Advisory Councils (LACs) at each building, or with the Central Advisory Council, which represents all LACs. Although LAC representatives are elected by other CHA tenants, tension has always existed between the CHA, tenant leaders and the resident population at large. The process of engaging residents in a healthy democratic process, and in the life of their community, requires training, a commitment to public education and time. Whether through block clubs, town-hall meetings, or other social events, property managers and Service Connectors should make a concerted effort to effectively engage the broader resident population and nurture broad input into redevelopment plans.

Finally, the CHA has made tremendous strides in its ability to monitor progress and disseminate information. With the Service Connector program, the CHA will use established CDHS software to track outcomes and improve inter-agency coordination. Given the abundance of anecdotal information about CHA families in crisis, there is a dire need to compare the data collected and analyzed with individual experiences "on the ground." Every family should be tracked. A public accountability process should be established to ensure that all parties involved with the Transformation Plan benefit from others' experience and can adjust procedures year to year.



Part of this accountability means making sure that residents understand that the responsibility for seeking services rests largely on their shoulders. With the Service Connector model, CHA is responsible only for service connection, not direct service provision, which is the responsibility of existing service providers. This is a fundamental change from CHA's past involvement in directly providing social services.

In order for the Transformation Plan to succeed, residents must be assured quality support services, and these services must keep pace with the demolition/rehabilitation process. MPC agrees with Mayor Richard M. Daley and CHA's CEO Terry Peterson that failure is not an option.

Endnotes

1 Diane Glauber, *The Evolution of Supportive Housing* (Orange, N.J.: National Housing Institute, 1996).

<http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/88/suphousing.html>

2 *Moving to Work Annual Plan* (Chicago: Chicago Housing Authority, October 2000).

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 "What is Supportive Housing?," *Technical Assistance and Training Program Manual*, (Chicago: LakeFront SRO, 1999).