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# Threats and Opportunities: Experiencing Public Housing in Utica, New York

Allison Patchen, Class of 2010

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One of the most challenging effects of living below the poverty line is difficulty finding safe and affordable housing. In the early 1990s, the US government sought to remedy what social scientists call “concentrated poverty,” said to cause heightened crime rates, lower employment levels, and lesser educational attainment in cities. The result was Housing Opportunities for Everyone (HOPE VI), which is designed to replace low quality housing or abandoned buildings with new housing structures. For many people who live in cities, public housing is the only affordable option. Utica, a city that houses a large number of refugees, was one of the select cities in the United States to receive funding from the HOPE VI project. Through six diverse focus groups with residents of the Utica Municipal Housing Authority, I ask why public housing residents are not yet self-sufficient. In my analysis, I find that residents prefer to live in public housing for a variety of reasons, that many residents are under-informed about opportunities available to them, that they depend on family networks for support, and that there is a need for support services such as citizenship classes for refugees.

*“I don’t even think about (moving out). I think I’m gonna die there.*

*I don’t want to pay heating and lights.” – Doris, 58*

## Introduction

Many families living at or below the poverty line struggle to find decent and affordable housing. Some are just one paycheck away from homelessness. Public housing became a part of the mission of the US government during the Urban Migration that took place from the 1940s through the 1960s. These housing units quickly became “urban ghettos” (Sugrue 1996). In the early 1990s, the US government sought to remedy what many social scientists called “concentrated poverty,” which causes negative effects on a community such as heightened crime rates, lower employment levels, and lesser educational attainment. The result was

Housing Opportunities for Everyone (HOPE VI). HOPE VI, initiated in 1993, is designed to place new housing structures in places where low quality housing already exists or where abandoned buildings are currently standing. The goal is not only to change the nature of the space, but also to change the economic structure of the community by bringing in residents of higher income levels. Furthermore, it includes a “community and supportive services component designed to help raise the incomes of public residents and move them on a path towards financial self-sufficiency” (Reig, Liebow, and O’Malley 2006, 192).

Public housing has been established throughout the country to provide decent and safe rental housing “for eligible low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities” (“HUD’s Public Housing Program”). An individual’s eligibility depends on his or her annual gross income, status as elderly, disabled, or as a family, and US citizenship or eligible immigration status (1). Rent or Total Tenant Payment (TTP) is based on a family’s anticipated gross annual income less deductions for dependents, elderly family members or persons with disabilities. TTP is determined as the highest of either (a) 30% of monthly adjusted income, (b) 10% of monthly income, (c) welfare rent, if applicable, or (d) minimum monthly rent, as established by the Housing Authority, at times as low as \$25. According to the HUD website, an individual may stay in public housing as long as he or she complies with the lease. An individual or family will not be required to move from public housing unless there is affordable housing available on the private market, based on income.

For this project, I examine the efforts of the Utica Municipal Housing Authority (UMHA) in meeting the needs of residents of its housing units and the HOPE VI target area. The UMHA administers approximately one thousand public housing units as well as the HOPE VI target area. The public housing units range from one-bedroom apartments to six bedroom apartments. There are attached apartment buildings, high-rise apartment buildings, and duplexes that serve families, elders, and people with disabilities. The large population of

refugees and immigrants occupy a significant proportion of the subsidized housing units of the Utica Municipal Housing Authority. I thought these residents might have different limiting factors that cause them to remain in public housing than the residents who have been living in public housing for many years. As of 2007, the median household income in Utica was \$30,971 with 24% of people living below the poverty line.

In this paper, I argue that few residents have goals of self-sufficiency because many have larger issues that they are dealing with and because push factors for leaving public housing are relatively absent. Essentially, my research question is: What is keeping current public housing residents out of the private market? Why are they not “self sufficient”? These questions had been negotiated with the grant-writer, Mr. Furman, and executive director, Dr. Herbowy, of the Housing Authority prior to the beginning of the research. Each of the six focus groups was targeted at a specific population, which gave me information about senior citizens, young adults, residents of each housing area owned by the Utica Municipal Housing Authority, and the two major refugee populations in the area, Russians and Somali Bantu.

In this paper, I focus on urban poverty, its diverse manifestations among people, and how the Housing Authority attempts to tackle the related issues. Across the focus groups, issues of cost and safety are two of the most common reasons people cite for living in public housing. First, I will discuss the

theoretical framework I employed in the analysis of these focus groups, focusing primarily on theories of concentrated poverty, social capital and human capital. Next, I review the research previously completed on the HOPE VI project and Family Self Sufficiency across the country and in Utica. Finally, I identify my contribution to the body of research on the topic.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social disorganization has been discussed as a threat in poor urban neighborhoods since 1925 (Park & Burgess, 1925). In that era, public housing was seen as a transitional *and functional* part of the metropolis “where new immigrant groups would pass through for a temporary period of time” (Curley, 2005, Park & Burgess, 1925). However, since the mid-1960s, social conditions for the “urban underclass” have worsened. Wilson (1987) and Sugrue (1996) argue that the suburbanization of jobs and a lesser demand for low skilled labor contributed to a “downward spiral for urban blacks.” Furthermore, economic integration of urban areas lessened with the onset of the “democratization of suburbia.” Here, the loss of entry-level jobs, the loss of middle class community members (both black and white), and capital flight to the suburbs causes concentrated poverty. Wilson (1987) argues that as time progresses, the urban blacks became ever more isolated from informal job networks, employed role models, and mainstream patterns of behavior (Curley, 2005). In Utica, concentration effects may effect more than just the urban black population, but also poor whites,

Latinos, immigrants, and refugees, all of whom are part of the urban underclass. Despite the change in the reality of experiences for the urban poor, many policies and programs, including the family self-sufficiency program of the UMHA, remain rooted in the concept of public housing as a transitional step in the road to homeownership.

Social disorganization can also be defined as a lack of social capital. Coleman’s (1988) concept of social capital “allows taking resources and showing the way they can be combined with other resources to produce different system-level behavior or, in other cases, different outcomes for individuals” (S101). The concept of social capital is useful in assessing the threats and opportunities for self-sufficiency present in public housing. His theory of social capital involves three subsets. Social relationships that provide information that facilitates action are one type. The second form is norms and effective sanctions. Prescriptive norms, or “norms that one should forgo self interest and act in the interests of the collectivity” strengthen families and generally encourage people to work for the public good (S104). This theory states that effective norms can reduce deviant actions that harm others. The final form of social capital according to Coleman depends on two essentials: reliability of the social environment, which implies that commitments will be upheld, and the actual extent of commitments held. Impoverished urban centers are often lacking in all or nearly all of these categories. In Utica, the majority of public housing units are part of large complexes physically located apart from

private housing, which may contribute to a lack of social capital as discussed above.

The effects of social capital and social disorganization can be best understood through the framework of concentrated poverty, which was the primary motivation for the development of the HOPE VI project. Popkin, Levy, and Buron (2009) define concentrated poverty as “communities with poverty rates of 40 per cent or more.” Galster, Cutsinger, and Malega (2008) find that those living in disadvantaged, inner-city neighborhoods with high levels of poverty and social disorganization have poorer health, lower levels of educational achievement, fewer employment opportunities, increased likelihood for gang recruitment, and heightened exposure to violence when compared with people living in more advantaged neighborhoods.

Concentration effects, often associated with public housing, are a major threat to an individual’s growth. South (1999) argues that *concentration effects* are the results of the high level of social isolation from mainstream patterns of behavior due to the lack of sustained interactions with “steadily employed persons from stable families.” Another side effect of concentrated poverty is institutional decay, or decreased financial support and leadership in a community due to the emigration of residents who used to provide these services (Galster, Cutsinger, Malega 2008). Stigmatization of a community, another concentration effect, occurs when institutional, governmental, or market actors

negatively stereotype all of its occupants or decrease the quantity or quality of resources they invest there (Galster, Cutsinger, Malega 2008). These effects can be seen in Utica in the poor condition of the roads surrounding some communities of the UMHA, and the poor quality of parking lots and public space.

Motivation, a prominent issue in the discussion of poverty, is essential in examining self-sufficiency in the context of public housing. Although some argue that federal policies serve to subsidize dependent behavior that keeps people poor, the motivation theory gives a different perspective.

Learned helplessness implies a motivational deficit (people come to believe action is futile), cognitive interference (people will have difficulty learning that action can produce favorable results in new situations) and an affective reaction (depression or resignation). Further [...] the perception of helplessness can be inferred from the environment, without direct experience of failure (Kane 1987: 411)

Related to this is the self-determination theory, used to explain an individual’s lack of motivation or internalization. It entails examining individuals’ social contexts their developmental environments to examine the degree to which their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are being or have been thwarted (Ryan and Deci 2000, 74). Thus, an individual may become passive or unmotivated as a result of the situation in which he or she grew up. Self-determination theory and motivation theory examine the

“therapeutic value of choice” and the difficulties an individual may have making choices, especially if one does not expect that he or she can personally help attain it (Kane 1987: 410). How do neighborhoods affect an individual’s self-motivation and expectancy? What effects does public housing have on how children are socialized?

Massey and Denton (1993) argue that federal housing policy promoted disinvestment in black urban neighborhoods and further segregated cities by placing public housing projects in predominantly poor black communities. They point out that this hyper segregation leads to social isolation, a theme in social theory on urban plight. As one of the expressed goals of HOPE VI is mixed-income housing, the hope is that social isolation will be combated. Theoretically, improving the SES of the most distressed neighborhoods will result in a greater diminution in social dislocations than proportionally comparable improvements in other types of neighborhoods (Crane 1991, as quoted in South 1999). Crane argues that social problems are contagious and are spread through peer influence; this suggests that social problems will be alleviated through positive peer influence. To what extent has socioeconomic integration occurred thanks to the efforts of HOPE VI? Has it had the desired effects?

### **Literature Review**

Extensive research and evaluations have been done on HOPE VI throughout the country over the past sixteen years. In order to receive HOPE

VI funds, buildings must be in need of drastic improvement, a neighborhood must show signs of distress, and substantial matching funds must be available to the community (Rosenthal, 2004). Only 28 housing authorities nationwide received HOPE VI funds. The Utica Municipal Housing Authority received a grant totaling \$11,501, 039 and sought to use this money to replace Washington Courts with new subsidized housing units in the Cornhill district. The premise of the project is to decrease the concentration of poverty in at-risk urban centers and increase social capital through “scattered site” housing that would promote the economic integration of these communities (Gilderbloom 2008). The HOPE VI project also sought to help residents attain financial self-sufficiency (Popkin et al 2009). This differed from the traditional goal of public housing: to provide decent, affordable housing; now public housing could become a “means to economic independence” (Newman and Harkness 2002: 21).

Recent empirical data suggests that there are some benefits of mixed-income housing, but it does not have “the transformative effects policy makers and scholars had envisioned” (Popkin et al. 2008). For the HOPE VI project, many residents had to be relocated during the rebuilding or renovation of existing housing projects. Popkin et al. (2008) found that the largest and most important effect of HOPE VI relocation was the reduction in the fear of crime. This study shows that there were no changes in self-sufficiency (employment rates) for residents, for whom health problems are some of the major obstacles

to employment. “A housing-only intervention may not have been sufficient to address the serious, chronic health needs of these vulnerable residents” (Popkin et al, 493).

Reig, Liebow, and O’Malley (2006) examine the outcomes of HOPE VI in Seattle, where the mix of public housing was similar to that of Utica, NY, including senior housing, public housing apartments, affordable homeownership units, and a community center. They also had commercial space. Like Utica, the Rainier Vista, the section of Seattle that received funding, residents included immigrants from East Africa as well as African American and American born white residents. They find that in Seattle, the HOPE VI project was combined with Jobs-Plus, another program focused on helping low-income individuals become self sufficient. They find that a “formal body representing tenants on matters concerning housing and community life in their development,” the a Rainier Vista Resident Leadership Team (RVLT) was developed. After elections, the RVLT board of directors was representative of the development’s ethnic and national groups (197). Although this form of community development seemed successful, residents who participated in the job-plus program left the development and moved to a different part of the city (199). This study shows that helping residents find and maintain jobs is a complicated and difficult endeavor.

Research overseen by Owens-Manley (2007) has indicated that HOPE VI has “fallen short of the original hopes an[d] expectations, and the community

remains very distressed economically.” A major critique of HOPE VI in Utica was “the perceived failure of HOPE VI to building anything *but* houses” (Owens-Manley 16). At the time of the study, education and job training were significantly lacking in the community. One of the major issues Cornhill Residents had with HOPE VI was that they were not involved enough in the planning process and were not kept informed its proceedings. Residents stated what has been demonstrated throughout HOPE VI projects across the country: policy makers seek to minimize cost and maximize efficiency and are less concerned with the furtherance of public values (2003, “When Hope falls Short”). HOPE VI is structured as a set of contractual relationships with local public housing authorities, which in turn contract private developers and management companies, which was the case in Utica. Although HOPE VI requires the input of the residents, private companies and Housing authorities often refuse to give them meaningful opportunities to provide their input (2003).

The Owens-Manley study identifies another major problem related to HOPE VI: the perception that one must be in the “in” crowd to be considered for the reconstructed housing. That is, certain individuals are favored others based on an official’s discrepancy. Marquis and Ghosh (2008) also find that there is a bias in the selection of which individuals are accepted for resettlement in the new communities and which are relocated to other communities. This coincides with the finding that “hard to house” residents

who have to deal with multiple complex problems such as mental illness, severe physical illness, substance abuse, large numbers of young children, weak labor market histories and criminal records are less likely to realize meaningful improvements in quality of life (Popkin et al 2009, 494).

Some of these variables do not play a part in Utica, as individuals with criminal records are not permitted to live in the public housing units. In 2002, a study was published that examined the long-term effects of public housing on self-sufficiency. Newman and Harkness (2002) find that people who had lived in public housing between the ages of 10 and 16 had higher annual incomes and were about 7% more likely to be working than other individuals who were raised in families with comparable incomes. However, Sanbonmatsu et al (2006) studied the effects of the Moving to Opportunity program, which showed that “there was no difference in the children’s achievement test scores or measures of school or behavioral problems for any age group” (Mouw 98). This implies that living in “concentrated poverty” may have little or no effect on children’s academic outcomes.

Self-sufficiency is increasingly a primary objective of local housing authorities. Anthony (2005) was one of the first to research the outcomes of a Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program. He finds that any participation at all in an FSS program will increase one’s earnings over the next few years, but completion of the program is associated with a much greater wage increase and increased likelihood of movement to

private housing, often in the form of homeownership (2005). Despite the reported successes of FSS programs, some experts criticize the concept of “self-sufficiency.” Hawkins (2005) questions the legitimacy self-sufficiency as a goal because it is difficult to define, difficult to evaluate, and “limited, unattainable, and insufficient for policymaking” (79). However, Hawkins argues that self-sufficiency should reflect four dimensions: 1) autonomy and responsibility, 2) financial security and responsibility, 3), family and self well-being, and 4) basic assets for living in the community (2005). He argues that decreasing long-term poverty and welfare depends on a combination of many factors, so all these must be treated. Hawkins however, does not evaluate current FSS or PFS (personal and family sustainability) programs.

The needs assessment for the Utica Municipal Housing Authority builds upon the work of Owens Manley (2007), Anthony (2005), and Hawkins (2005) and examines the new needs and obstacles residents face after this community reconstruction. It evaluates the current attitudes of the residents of the UMHA’s subsidized housing units through the use of focus groups. The study focuses particularly on the services currently being provided to residents in addition to the services the residents think would be beneficial to them. The concepts of concentrated poverty and social capital are examined by inquiring about individuals’ length of stay in the housing units and their reasons for living there. Finally, it explores the added challenges refugees and immigrants face in public housing.

## **Methodology**

I chose to work directly with the Utica Municipal Housing Authority (UMHA) for this project because it would allow me direct access to the residents of the subsidized housing units. It also gave me access to knowledge about all services currently being offered to residents and the extent of use of each service in the community. I was also allowed to work within the structure of the housing authority by collecting information in the three largest housing facilities and tapping into the networks that already existed between UMHA employees and community members.

The method of data collection for this project was six focus groups that took place on Thursday October 15, Thursday October 22, and Tuesday, October 22. The intention was to have four focus groups, but attendance was so great at the two sessions on October 22 that I had to split the group into smaller groups. Participants in each focus group lived in public housing. Although the focus group participants were not a random sample of the population living in the units, the attendance was focused on subgroups of the population who lives in public housing. The first focus group contained ten young adults between the ages of 18 and 25. The second focus group was made up of four residents of Gilmore Village who were participants in the family self sufficiency program. The third and fourth focus groups were each made up of 8 participants who were residents of Perretta Towers, the senior and disabled living space. The fifth focus

group consisted of refugees from Somalia, a Haitian immigrant, and an African American citizen. The sixth focus group had 14 Russian refugee immigrants who lived in Adrean terrace. See Appendix A for demographic information on group participants.

Participants were recruited for the focus groups in two ways. The case managers for Gilmore Village, Adrean Terrace, and Perretta Twin Towers were informed of the focus groups and asked to invite people to attend. Beyond this, the maintenance workers at Adrean Terrace and Perretta Twin Towers distributed fliers to each household. Jason Beck, AmeriCorps Vista worker, and I handed out the fliers door-to-door on two occasions in Gilmore Village and Adrean Terrace to invite residents to participate. Our goal was to attract as diverse a population as possible for the focus groups in the limited amount of time we had to conduct them. In Adrean Terrace, we had an over-representation of the refugee populations and an under representation of native-born populations.

Each focus group met once, for approximately 45 minutes. I facilitated four focus groups and Jason Beck facilitated two. We followed a discussion guide that had been developed through collaboration with Dr. Herbowy, executive director, and John Furman, grant-writer, at the Municipal Housing Authority (Appendix B). We conceptualized “self-sufficient” as living outside public housing, so I asked participants why they currently live in public housing, how long they plan to stay, and what would move them to leave

public housing. In order to better understand their needs and how they were being met, I asked participants about the services they receive and what they would like to receive.

The first focus group was made up of ten young adults, aged 18-25 who were participants in the Job Crops program, designed as a job training program funded through the federal stimulus. All of these participants live in the HOPE VI target area, and some of them live in public housing. The focus group took place during their last day with the program, so all were invited to participate; only one person opted not to participate. For the first focus group, participants were thrown off by the first question, "How long have you lived in subsidized housing?" because few of them live in subsidized housing, and even fewer of them call it by that term. The participants did not understand the purpose of the research as well as other groups did, and I did not understand exactly how these people fit into my project at first, but they all reside in the HOPE VI target area.

The second focus group consisted of four people, all of whom are participants in the Family Self Sufficiency Program (FSS). This one fostered the most in depth discussion. Information was shared among group members as they explored the nuances of each question.

The focus groups with the senior citizens took place in an open "community room." Two focus groups were held at the same time, and there were other people in the room. At times

it was difficult to hear participants and at times they did not seem engaged, as they frequently made side conversations with their neighbors. However, many people had come to the room with the purpose of participating in the focus group and were interested in sharing their experiences.

At the last focus group session at Adrean Terrace, approximately fifty people came. The majority of them were Russian refugees who did not speak English, and there was a substantial minority of Somali-Bantu refugees who did not speak English. I randomly split the Russians into two groups. Mr. Furman facilitated one group, and Jason Beck facilitated the other. There was a translator from the Russian population for each group. As my tape recorders ran out of power, neither of these two groups was recorded. As Mr. Furman did not take notes during or after his focus group, I was not able to use the information he gathered. Jason recorded the responses to the questions as they were provided, which was made easier due to the delay of translation. The Somali-Bantu focus group had more fluid attendance; the majority of participants arrived on site approximately twenty minutes late, and one woman, from Haiti, arrived twenty minutes into the session. Despite some side conversations during the focus group, participants seemed eager to answer my questions. This group was translated by Jama, a 17-year-old son of one of the participants.

As a final element of the research, and as an attempt to gain a more holistic understanding of the issues related to public housing, I interviewed Mallory

Oakes, the family self-sufficiency coordinator for the UMHA. As this research aims to examine why people are not yet self sufficient, Ms. Oakes was the best person to interview as she works directly with residents hoping to become self-sufficient. During an interview that lasted approximately 40 minutes, I asked Mallory about some of the questions that had arisen during the focus groups. Oakes has worked for the housing authority for nearly 18 years, so she was able to provide in-depth answers to my questions.

After completing each focus group session and the interview, I transcribed the data. The results were then coded and analyzed for this paper. The primary codes I used were loving public housing/not wanting to leave, wanting to leave, convenience, paying bills, security, explaining rationale (for living in public housing), opportunities/needs for children/youth, being/expecting to be coddled, attaining self-sufficiency, not being informed, and identifying needs of others. In my final analysis I selected the codes that best fit into my research question and had the richest information.

## Results

Based on my findings it is not possible to fully explain the reason the residents living in public housing are not self sufficient. However, the focus group discussions provide helpful insight into the threats and opportunities associated with gaining self-sufficiency from public housing. Here Mallory Oakes, FSS coordinator, defines self-sufficiency:

I would say, you know bettering yourself as a person in all aspects um, and, having enough income in your household to support your whole family outside of public housing.

The purpose of her position is to “help motivate the residents and if they’re already employed maybe look for more gainful employment, if they’re not employed, help them get employed. Um also help them as far as training, education-wise or on-the-job training.” With the help of the theories of concentrated poverty, social isolation and social capital, I provide residents’ explanations for living and staying in public housing, and then provide the motivations for leaving that a few participants articulated. Next, I explore thought processes of participants with regard to obtaining jobs and having concrete goals. Finally, I discuss the supports and services identified by the refugee/immigrant and the senior groups, which had the greatest needs.

## *Reasons for Residence*

The vast majority of participants were content to live in public housing. Many had complaints about heating or maintenance issues, but they would rather live here than in the private market. The waiting list for entering public housing is long; an individual may wait up to five years before moving in, according to Housing Authority Officials. In the six focus groups conducted, consisting of approximately 60 people, only five people stated that they wanted to leave; three young adults, one senior citizen, and one Somali Bantu. Overwhelmingly, participants stated that they enjoyed living in public housing and

that they had no intention of leaving. This may be related to the lack of prescriptive norms Coleman (1988) describes as a lack of social capital. Although it might be “better” for an individual who has enough income to move out of public housing to provide a space for another needy person, the individual will remain in public housing out of self-interest.

When comparing one’s current experience in public housing with a previous experience in the private market, an individual’s rationale for staying in public housing becomes clearer:

*Leantine:* Where I come from I say this is luxury, seriously. Where I grew up I never grew up with stairs in the house, I grew up with elevators, and stairs was like twenty floors like one staircase so this is luxury. It’s beautiful it’s quiet you know, barbeque with your family and stuff. You can do your own thing, it’s beautiful, it’s beautiful. [...] I’m not moving. (Group 1)

One woman who was displaced with the reconstruction associated with HOPE VI shared her experience with the group:

*Tashmica:* When I was living there, I was forced to move, I wouldn’t a moved.

A: Why did they force you?

*Tashmica:* cause they tore down—they tore it down!

A: That’s right, they tore it down. I’m sorry—so is it a real burden for you to have been displaced?

*Tashmica:* Well yea, you had the center in the back, then you had the park, then you had my church and I didn’t have to go nowhere. Now you gotta travel here and here and there just you know to go to church, to find something to do, you know [...]

A: If you could go back to subsidized housing, you would?

*Tashmica:* I would, I loved to live in Washington Courts (group 1)

This is a common thread throughout the responses to this question. Over and over, participants expressed that they did not want to leave, that “it’s better here.” Even Mallory stated that it made more sense to live in public housing than in the private market for a number of reasons. It is easier, more convenient, much more affordable, and more secure. This may be indicative of the lack of other viable opportunities for quality housing so the reliability of the social environment that the UMHA offers to its residents is an element of social capital that they were not willing to give up.

One of the primary reasons people implied for remaining in public housing was fear. A fear of job loss, a fear that they could not make ends meet, or a specific fear of paying utilities, surrounded the conversations about living in public housing.

*Doris:* We thought about that [buying a house], me and my husband, but then I was like, you know you gotta pay your bills, your taxes and if something go wrong it gonna come out of your pocket. (Group 2)

Doris was paying the flat rate at UMHA: \$600 per month for a one-bedroom apartment, the maximum payment. She clearly made enough money to rent on the private market or even to purchase a house, but she was afraid to take the risk because of the added responsibilities that are attached to living outside the public market.

Sheer expense was also a major rationale for living in public housing. Residents of Adrean Terrace related their experiences on the private market, explaining that they paid more than twice as much. One Somali-Bantu Participant related his story:

*Jama:* He say before here he used to pay rent some other place. He used to pay bills like a lot more than now. He used to pay different payment, for heat, electricity, water. Now, so he came here, and me, myself I came here. He say the electricity and water and the house payment is all connected, it's together. He say he don't have any arguments about it, he's fine, he's happy, he likes it all. He say he used to pay \$400 something before when he used to live somewhere before. And \$400 for the house and the other payments so that is \$400 for electricity and \$400 for house payment and that is \$800. (Group 5).

Other participants agreed that, despite working, they could not afford to pay for housing, utilities, and food. For the Somali-Bantu, public housing is not the 5-year "stepping stone" Mallory Oakes states is the purpose of public housing, but rather a permanent solution to a problem of not having the ability to support their large families on limited

incomes. This is consistent with other findings that since the 1970s, public housing has moved from being a "temporary way station" for families to a permanent stop (Bratt 1989, Anthony 2005).

The fear attached to moving to the private market may be the result of social isolation. If a resident is not regularly exposed to people with steady jobs who own their own homes, it may be difficult for them to think it would be possible for them to own a home. A lack of relationships with people who can provide information about having made the transition from public to private housing may be related to residents' reluctance to take what they may perceive as a huge risk in moving out.

### ***Staying Informed and Getting Ahead***

In the subsidized housing units in Utica, there are various services available to residents. However, some residents are not as well informed as other residents due to their lack of social relationships, or a deficiency in social capital. Social Capital theory, as described by Coleman (1988) emphasizes the importance of social relationships that provide information that facilitates action. For example, Diane has been living in public housing for a little over a year. She knows she would like to leave public housing within a year or two and she sees that education will help her achieve her goal. In November she began a BOCES program that will result in her certification in nursing. At various times throughout the focus group, it was clear that she was not as well informed as the other three residents, who had lived their

ten or fifteen years, and had other family members living in the complex as well.

*Diane:* I was tryin' o find out. Dominick told me they had this program where they help you with school..."

*Cascilla:* That's the one she's in ...

*Diane:* But who do you have to contact for that?

...*le'sha:* Just tell Mallory and she give you papers and you take it to whoever and they look at the books and you fill out the paperwork and you get a check every month

This is a case where Diane had heard about a program but did not know how it worked or how to get more information about it. This program would provide her with a government subsidy for going back to school. Furthermore, it would provide financial counseling and homeownership classes, elements of the program she did not know about, but was interested in when she heard about them during the focus group. Less than a minute later, Cascilla mentioned a reading program the UMHA had for kids during the summer; Diane's response was, "Oh, they did?" Although it is likely that she received some passive information about the program, such as fliers in the mail, she clearly did not take advantage of it. Even though Cascilla does not have young children, she still knew about the program because she is a well-established community member, having lived in public housing for more than a decade.

Diane has lived on her own since she was sixteen years old, but this seems

to be the first time she is on this type of public assistance. She does not seem to know how things "work" as well as those who are more established in the community and who have spent extended periods of time on public assistance. In discussing homeownership, Diane was the only participant who was interested in purchasing one in the future. Doris, however, knew about a support that the UMHA provides to its residents:

*Doris:* I think she explained it to me like if they raise your rent, whatever money was raised goes into an ESCROW account and that is saved for like one year or two, but then at the end you gotta be specific about what you wanna do with that money. But it goes into a ESCROW account.

... *Diane:* Oh, really?

Often, what the residents save in an ESCROW account is spent on cars or homes, the participants in the focus group told me. According to Mallory, "They can actually take it out and use it at any time during the 5 years for specific reasons, to help them maybe achieve their next goal." As Diane is an aspiring homeowner, it would be useful for her to take advantage of this program. With more information she might be able to judge the benefits it may provide her family. While discussing health care, Diane complained of having to pay for her daughter's prescriptions out of her own pocket. Immediately, the other three women present asked her which kind of Medicaid she had. They told her to change to Fidelus because it's better and less expensive. All agreed that Fidelus is the best service provider.

Diane's case is probably not unlike other short-term users of public housing. New to the system, and without strong social relationships in her community, she does have as much knowledge about the programs available to her and her family. These programs could be used to support her and help her get on her feet more quickly if she were informed enough to take advantage of them.

### ***Lacking Concrete Goals***

The Family Self Sufficiency Program is concerned with helping individuals make enough money to support themselves financially independent of public assistance of any kind. Participation in such a program requires a significant time commitment for job-skills training, job searching, and working (Anthony 2005). Another major element of the program involves goal setting, short term and long term. This proves difficult for many residents of the Housing Authority and the HOPE VI target area.

For many young people in the United States, "getting in to college" is a concrete aspiration that they reach toward for the first eighteen years of their lives. Upon entering college, a student may aspire to succeed in school, but a larger goal is needed to follow graduation. At an elite university, that goal could be more education or an internship. These goals aspirations discussed frequently in the community and are expectations for students when they first enter school. For those living in poverty, getting to college may seem the ultimate goal. Upon arrival there, new

challenges may arise that prevent them from completing their education.

In my first focus group, all participants but one had completed either high school or their GED. One student had finished only eleventh grade, but about half of them had one semester or more of "college." However, for the majority of the participants, who were between the ages of 18 and 25, the goal was to go to college. Many of the young people wanted to get good jobs so they could pay their way through college. College was a general term used by all participants; they did not say what college they wanted to attend or that field they wanted to pursue.

Upon probing participants the young adult focus group about what their aspirations were, the majority of responses were vacant stares. Only one participant, Vladimir, stated that he wanted to get a good government job and move out on his own:

*Vladimir:* That's what I'm lookin' for...  
A good job with benefits, a state job,  
or a government job.

A: A state job. So how are you going  
to get that job?

*Vladimir:* A civil service test.

A: And then you can get it? So  
you're ready, you're on track?

*Vladimir:* A couple of references from  
the boss, that's it.

He also was the only one with a concrete plan about how he would meet his goals – take the civil service test. However, even that concrete plan is unclear, because Vladimir did not express what

type of work he wanted with the government.

This speaks the fact that these young people were raised in a different social and cultural context than people who attend elite universities, where the vast majority of students intend to pursue some sort of professional work and have an idea of the field they would like to enter. The participants in the job-training program provided by the UMHA to young unemployed people were unable to state a job that they would like to do. They were unable to articulate problems they were facing and could not state in a concrete manner what their aspirations in life were.

These findings are evidence of Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. They argue that "human beings can be proactive and engaged or, alternatively, passive and alienated, largely as a function of the social conditions in which they develop and function" (Ryan and Deci 2000, 68). It seems that the environment in which these young adults were raised has caused them to develop into more passive members of society who are less capable of determining for themselves what sort of future they would like to pursue, compared to those of a more privileged background.

Participants in the FSS program at Gilmore Village (focus group 2) were more able to state goals, but plans were still not very concrete. Ie'sha enrolled herself in a GED program and stated

something she thought the housing authority could do for her:

*Ie'sha:* Some type of training, any type of training. Anything... I would do construction too. I have three kids, I would do anything it takes for my babies. Construction, plumbing, anything.

This is evidence that there is abstract willingness to learn a new skill or to take a class where she will be able to make enough money to support her children. However, she does not say what type of work she would like to do. Although she is willing to do "anything" she is not currently gainfully employed.

Despite this lack of concrete goals, a strength of the participants in the first two focus groups is that they enrolled in programs to help them formulate and attain goals. These participants are already steps ahead of their peers who have not enrolled. The participants in the Job Crops program learned skills such as lawn mowing and painting, and the participants in the FSS program received subsidies to support their return to education or job skills training. At the very least, they were interested in making money and were motivated to try to find ways to make more money, which did not seem to be the case among the senior or refugee populations.

### ***Immigrant Issues***

Refugees enter the country with a specific cultural background and a history of hardship. Two major refugee populations in Utica are Russian and Somali Bantu. Since they are refugees

and not immigrants, the circumstances of their pasts are typically traumatic, which makes it more difficult for them to readjust once they come to the United States. Among the participants of the three focus groups involving refugees from Russia and Somalia, fewer than one third could speak English at a level even close to conversational. This obviously limited their ability to communicate their needs and desires to the group. Not speaking English may carry with it a stigma that alienates these individuals from other parts of society. However, both ethnic groups were engaged in the conversations and were interested in sharing their points of view. Among the participants were four immigrants; three of them lived in Perretta Twin Towers—two from Puerto Rico and one from Italy—one, from Haiti, lived in Adrean Terrace.

English Language Learning classes and citizenship classes were of great interest to the refugees and immigrants. Milda, a Haitian immigrant who is 31, has been in the United States for fifteen years and has lived in Adrean Terrace for 9 years. She was able to provide some insight into the situation of a non-English-speaking immigrant:

*Milda:* So like some of them, not everyone can get into this country. Some of them they don't know how to write, some of them they don't know how to read. I taught myself all these things. When I first came here, I was the same thing. Some of them they don't know how to write. Some of them, they're very intelligent, but the problem is they don't know how to write and they don't know how to read. Just, you can talk to them, they

understand what you says to them but it is difficult for them to put it in writing. But it would be ok for you to teach them how to write, if you teach them how to read, so if you open like uh English classes, it would be better for them. (Group 5).

Milda has since learned how speak, read, and write in English and completed a college degree. All of the Somali-Bantu participants of this group as well as the Russian participants of Group 6 were very interested in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. However, among the senior citizens, the situation was different. Although the three participants who were immigrants could speak English, it was not clear whether non-English speakers would be interested in classes. Carmen, from Puerto Rico, stated:

*Carmen:* I donno if he wanna [learn English] because sometimes he don' wanna go to school.

A: But what if somebody came here?

*Carmen:* Oh, I don't know

The situation in Perretta towers may be different because it is targeted toward the senior citizen and disabled population. There may be a greater sense of community among separate ethnic groups in the building, as described in Irene's comment:

*Irene:* It isolates them. They stay to themselves right, because they do not understand English very well. Like I communicated with one of the ladies over there *really* slowly but she really don't understand what I'm saying at all times. Because I was uh, I knew, I had known German, and those

people had known German at one time, but you know I haven't used my German in 30 years, so.

A: So it's really difficult to communicate with the Bosnians. And the people who speak Spanish...

*Irene:* None. But they speak Spanish among themselves and that bugs a lot of people a lot of times, because they think they are talking about people, and maybe they are, maybe they're not. So they primarily stay to themselves and the English people stay by themselves. 3 Groups... within a community. (Group 3).

Here, Irene expresses her desire to be able to communicate with her neighbors in the community and her frustrations with not being able to communicate. Although Carmen stated that she does not think her husband would like to learn English, Irene seems to think it is important in the creation of a cohesive community. Similarly, Randy, the African American participant who was part of the Somali Bantu group, said, "English classes, you know, we need someone to come in and teach English classes..." (Group 5). He peered around the table with a look of concern and compassion, as if he truly wanted to be able to communicate with these people and make their lives better.

Beyond the debate about learning English, refugees and immigrants also expressed interest in becoming US citizens. Both the Russian participants and the Somali Bantu participants were eager to begin the process of obtaining citizenship. When the classes were mentioned in group 5, everyone began to speak at once. Jama was only able to

translate one person's comments, "She say she wanna know then the classes are gonna start." Similarly, Milda explained what she knew about the process and expressed her interest in becoming a US citizen.

Each of the ethnicities seems to embody its own community within the housing units of the UMHA. Although it seems that native-born residents of public housing are concerned about them and would like to better understand them, the refugees I spoke with were unable to communicate. Among the Somali-Bantu, social cohesion can be seen in the community of families who depend on each other for emotional support. Similarly, among the Russian population, there seems to be a sense of family among the many participants. In both communities, there were multiple cases in which the older members of the communities looked to the young people to translate for them when I went door to door inviting residents to attend the focus group; at times the children were as young as five or six.

Perhaps as a result of refugees' cultural experiences and lack of English knowledge it is more difficult for them to fathom "self sufficiency." As they are new to the country, they are less likely to have informal networks they can tap to try to find work or to ask for advice about possible decisions they make. Networks of non-English-speaking refugees are very likely limited to people of their own ethnicities. This seems to limit social interactions and may perpetuate the problem of social isolation in the community in the form of poverty, lack

of jobs, and lack of English skills in the community.

### **Senior Issues**

The senior living spaces offered by the housing authority bring together many low-income senior citizens and people with disabilities. Between Perretta Towers and Chancellor, there are over two hundred senior citizens utilizing UMHA housing units, which I hypothesized may cause concentration effects. As Galster, Cutsinger, and Malenga (2008) theorize, the consequences of concentration effects are poorer health, lower levels of educational achievement, fewer employment opportunities, and social isolation. Obviously the case is somewhat different for senior citizens, who live on a fixed income because few, if any are still employed. Seniors tend to have more severe and frequent health complaints because of their age, but the participants in the focus group seemed to have few severe health issues; all were well taken care of in terms of health care and were satisfied with their level of education. Only one participant said she wanted to go back to school, and most said they had completed at least their GED. Social isolation did not seem to be a problem either because various participants compared their experiences with other seniors or stated they had connections outside public housing, such as their families.

Senior citizens reported general satisfaction with their experiences in public housing. They felt safe because the housing authority kept the area around the complex free of ice during the

winter, had a security guard to keep out non-residents or unwanted people, and there is a string to pull in each apartment if a resident has a medical emergency. Here again, the reliability of the environment seemed a very positive element in participants' experiences with public housing, but one resident shared her frustrations with medical care:

*Sharon:* Alright, I'm with Secure Horizons, now I can't get my medication... because it's called co... something gap. They took away my, uh, the "d" on the social security...

*Ken:* Part D is medicine isn't it?

*Sharon:* Part D on the Medicaid and stuff. They took that away. I can't get prescription drugs, co pays are ridiculous, I can't even pay for them! I'm in a stoop. And pissed. (Group 3)

Here, as had happened in Group 2, one of the other women asked her why she didn't change her policy to Fidelus. Sharon responded, "Because I have no idea of anything!" This is a case where social capital in the form of social relationships is lacking, which has consequences for her emotions and health. Each of the other participants in the focus group had enough medical coverage to pay for their doctor appointments and medicine without trouble.

The seniors in both focus groups took advantage of the services offered to them through the housing authority, to a much greater extent than in the other housing units. They participated in BINGO, and used the computer. Participants in both groups said they were interested in learning how to use

the computer, and that they would like a larger computer lab. There are two computers for about 120 apartments. Another common desire in both groups was to have exercise machines or a person to come in and teach exercises to the group. Finally, both groups spend considerable time discussing trips they would like to take as a group.

*Theresa:* Well I think trips would be nice. The other seniors, you know how their programs are [...] it would be nice if they brought us to different places, like to northern Utica, like to different places (Group 3)

It seems like Theresa, and the other participants who nodded their heads in agreement after her statement, wanted to be treated as senior citizens were treated in private senior living facilities. Nearly all participants had at least one idea about a trip they would like to take.

Transportation seemed to be an important issue:

*Irene:* From these housing complexes you have grocery buses going so if you can't get out or walk to a grocery store you can go once a week to Hanoford, once every two weeks to um Chantry's and once a month to Walmart. Now it is free transportation the housing has gotten for us. (Group 3)

Irene was satisfied with the services she received here, but she also has a daughter who works across the street who could take her shopping or on other errands if needed. On the other hand, Jose (Group 4), who had lived in New York City before coming to Utica, found transportation a large issue. In his

opinion there were not enough buses available to give him the mobility he needed. It seemed like he did not have a family network to lean on in Utica if he needed something. Gina voiced the importance of a family network in getting transportation:

*Gina:* Once in a while I depend on my sister. She's an \_\_\_\_\_. I need transportation in the wintertime, because I'm a walker in the summer, I can walk miles and miles it doesn't bother me. In the wintertime, I'm terrified to put my feet outside. I can't walk to that sign (points). If I have to go to the doctor, or the bank, or to get my pills...We need someone like that (Group 4).

Thus, family networks seem to be an important issue related to whether a senior resident feels satisfied with the amount of transportation offered by the housing authority.

Unlike other residents of public housing, fear of job loss is not a factor keeping them in public housing. Rather, fear for the safety of their bodies is more prominent. These individuals know their weaknesses and depend on the housing authority to provide them with the support they need. Due to the reliability of the facility and its employees, it seems that the majority of residents are content to live there and do not hope to move out.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this research, I sought to learn more about how residents in public housing construct their experiences there and why they are not yet "self-sufficient." The goal of the UMHA at the

outset of the study was to find out why residents were not self-sufficient and what services could be provided to help them become self-sufficient, in order that Mr. Furman can use the data as rationale for applying for grants to meet these needs. The findings of this study can be used in multiple ways. It will be useful to the housing authority itself. Although the managers of the housing authority often have “community meetings” with residents, discussions primarily revolve around maintenance issues. This research further provides important insight into the reasons people live in public housing. Far from feeling stigmatized for living in public housing, the vast majority of participants felt extremely satisfied, some even privileged, to live there. Lack of income is only part of the reason people live in public housing. The more important element perhaps is the security attached to public housing residence: if you lose your job you will not get tossed out on the street. A \$50 minimum rent is unmatched in the private market. The dependability of the social environment that Coleman describes as an element of social capital seems to be of particular importance in this community.

The senior citizens living in public housing who participated in this study wanted to be treated with respect. The requests they had with regard to additional services would improve their quality of life and may take little effort on the part of the housing authority. The problem with this is, as always, is lack of funds. A difference between Perretta Towers and the rest of the UMHA housing units is that self-sufficiency is not a goal for any residents. All but one

intends to remain in public housing for the rest of their lives because they cannot afford the private housing market. Concentration effects do not seem to be as present among seniors, who struggle to find meaning and purpose in a fixed income experience. There is “no way out” for seniors.

Concentration effects are evident in the results regarding a lack of motivation. It seemed that most participants were not motivated to move away from public housing. As Kane (1987) suggests, “the perception of helplessness can be inferred from the environment, without direct experience of failure.” Without positive role models and shared experiences of friends and relatives who live on the private market, residents may feel helpless. Carmen, from the senior housing site, said, “the people that move out of here, they come back” (Group 3). Residents felt they couldn’t afford to move out of public housing, even if they had not tried it. Others remarked that public housing was “luxury” compared to any other type of housing they had previously inhabited. The residents’ failure to effectively support themselves and their families in the private housing market may have destroyed any motivation an individual may have had to live outside public housing. This larger issue poses a threat to the success of self-sufficiency programs in the UMHA.

Self-sufficiency, as defined by the housing authority (note Mallory’s quotation at the beginning of the results section), is not on the agenda of many of the participants in the focus groups. When I began this study, Mr. Furman

wanted to know why residents were not self-sufficient and what the housing authority could provide to them to make them self-sufficient. Consistent with Anthony's (2005) findings, young adults (aged 25-40) tended to have a greater interest in attaining self-sufficiency than older adults (aged over 40). Refugees in public housing did not seem to understand the concept of self-sufficiency and stated that they would like to remain in public housing for a long period of time, perhaps for the rest of their lives. The disconnect between the goals of the administrators and those being administered to is problematic. As Mallory stated, "You can bring a camel to the water, but you can't make it drink." The opportunity exists for all non-senior residents to participate in the Family Self Sufficiency program, but only a small minority participates. Despite the efforts of the housing authority, if residents are not self-motivated enough to participate they will probably not achieve the goal of self-sufficiency.

The findings here build on the work of Owens-Manley, Coleman, and Curley because it provides qualitative data to explain why some people choose to remain in public housing. The participants' inability to articulate aspirations or goals suggested that social isolation was a problem in the communities. As Curley argues, residents of public housing seem to be isolated from positive role models and to thus continue in the cycle of poverty. Although FSS is available to all residents of public housing, Mallory stated that only 77 families take part, out of over 600 housing units (this excludes the senior residences).

There is much need for further research, as this project faced some limitations. One limitation of this research is that certain populations within the housing authority were under-represented: US citizens who do not take part in self-sufficiency programs. My identity as a young, white, female student of an elite university may have influenced how people responded to my questions. They might have omitted experiences that they thought I could not relate to. For focus groups five and six, it may have been better to conduct the entire discussion in the native language of the participants. In-depth interviews with residents of public housing who participate in job training programs such as the Ross program or FSS could provide more insight about their motivations for participation in the programs. Perhaps this type of information could be helpful to aid in the motivation of other residents to participate. Although quantitative data exists that compares participants in FSS programs with people who do not participate, their data would be strengthened by qualitative data. In-depth interviews could demonstrate qualitative differences between the participants and non-participants, as well as between those who complete the programs and those who do not. Additionally, a longitudinal study could evaluate the effectiveness of FSS programs.

Another space for more research is in the long-term outcomes of HOPE VI. It would be interesting to find out five or ten years after a resident has been relocated, as Tashmica was, what their educational and occupational outcomes are. Poverty still exists in Utica, and

although the UMHA seems to be working hard to improve the situation, it is essential to keep investigating the successes and failures of programs alongside the needs, desires, and aspirations of residents. Finally, it would be interesting to investigate how the people on the UMHA waiting list survive in the time between they qualify to be placed on the wait list, and their placement in a UMHA apartment. Perhaps if residents of public housing knew more about the people waiting, they would be more likely to move out in order to make space for them.

The de-concentration of poverty is going to take more than just rebuilding a few buildings in one community. It will take a serious multifaceted investment in a large community of people. It will probably be a process that takes a long period of time. Despite the offerings of the FSS and Ross programs, a relatively small number of people take advantage of them. Something has to change for these residents to take the step to change their minds about living in public housing.

### **Recommendations**

There are infinite possibilities for addressing the issues presented in this paper. The public housing authority has become an important source of social capital for residents. Therefore, in order to better serve the residents' needs and improve their self-sufficiency, I will make five recommendations. First, the definition of self-sufficiency must be discussed and aligned from the time a resident enters public housing. Second, the cultural background of residents

should be researched and that information used to develop a culturally relevant "manual" that will help with readjustment and provide recommendations and resources for gaining self-sufficiency. Third, invest in a community organizer. Fourth, create a strong community council that comes together around issues other than maintenance, and finally, introduce computer labs and classes accessible for all residents.

The purpose of this paper was to understand why residents of the Utica Municipal Housing Authority were not yet self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency, as defined by the head of the FSS program is bettering yourself as a person in all aspects and having enough income in your household to support your whole family outside of public housing. That kind of self-sufficiency was not an explicit goal of any of the participants in the focus groups. Diana was interested in moving out of public housing because she wanted to buy a house, but she was one of the few who expressed this interest. Therefore, the framing of public housing must change. The definition of self-sufficiency and the establishment of self-sufficiency as a goal for every resident are essential if that is the goal of the employees of the UMHA. If it is not possible for all residents to become self sufficient (according to the definition above), perhaps a new definition is needed. Most importantly, there must be alignment between the residents and employees to achieve the best results.

In this effort, it is absolutely essential to think critically about "self-sufficiency potential." Which residents

have the potential to be self sufficient, and which do not? Senior citizens who live on a fixed income, for example, have little potential compared to a household with two able-bodied adults and few children. Therefore, I propose that every new resident has a consultation in which a caseworker works with him or her to establish an action plan to improve his or her self-sufficiency. This would result in an agreement between the resident and the UMHA regarding how to improve self-sufficiency. The income they save from paying a lower rent could go to their children's education, savings for a car or house. At this time, the caseworker would also inform the new resident about the Family Self Sufficiency Program and the Ross program, as well as other opportunities the UMHA has to offer. If the resident is a senior citizen, the UMHA should also have a consultation with that individual to ensure that they have medical care, are aware of existing programs in the UMHA, and perhaps provide ideas for nearby volunteerism or social justice projects. Increased community involvement could promote a better standard of living among senior citizens. This consultation could also be useful in establishing a plan for English language learning for residents who came to the United States recently, either as immigrants or as refugees. The caseworker should maintain profiles of all residents: family size and ages, skills, aspirations, education needs, and self-sufficiency action plan. Although this will only help new residents, eventually all residents will have had this service when they move in. The purpose of these efforts is to ensure that upon a resident's

placement in public housing, he or she clearly understands the purpose of public housing and how their life will improve as a result of living there.

The establishment of a culturally sensitive manual for residents who came to the United States as refugees can also serve an important purpose in leading them toward self-sufficiency. A community organizer from the refugee population could be hired to compile the manual. First, the HA must understand the background of the refugees. Do they want to adopt the American dream? If the writer of the manual understands the culture they are dealing with, they will be able to align the text with the values of its recipients. If there is a misalignment between the federal desires for residents of public housing and the abilities of the residents, the issue must be addressed. Once that research has been completed, the manual would include important contact people in different fields, steps to follow for taking English classes, completing a GRE or other educational opportunities, where to turn for psychological support, and other things. This manual could then be personally distributed and explained in the residents' native language. The community organizer would stay on as a staff member and would serve as a caseworker for members of their ethnic group. More than one person could occupy this position, depending on the number of ethnic groups in the community.

A community organizer could aid in the strengthening and deepening of inter-residential ties has the potential to aid in self-sufficiency. The UMHA could

document stories of individuals who have moved out of public housing and found success, in the form of a monthly newsletter or on a bulletin board located where people often go. This could spark other residents' desire to move out. Another tactic involves taking time to recognize skills within the community and encouraging residents to use existing skills creatively to get income can increase their self-confidence and improve community relations. The community organizer could conduct a capacity survey with residents to see what experiences and local knowledge they possess. Additionally, associations within the community could be established to capitalize on these skills, or provide childcare to working mothers, or provide support for newcomers to the community. A more casual, open forum could occur on a monthly basis where individuals can discuss what they are struggling with. The recognition of existing knowledge within the community and provision of space to share that information could alleviate the financial or emotional struggles an individual is going through.

A strong community council would be the final step in strengthening and deepening inter-residential ties. It could also improve communication between the UMHA and residents. If the community council had some power to make decisions about their community, residents might take more ownership over the place they live. They would feel more agency within the community and have the potential to become more independent.

Finally, access to computers is essential to low-income individuals of the current epoch. From children's homework assignments to adult's job application process, a computer and a printer is extremely important in the self-sufficiency of residents of public housing. Students reported receiving lower grades because their homework assignments were handwritten rather than typed, and adults stated that they needed computer access in order to get a job. Computer classes could also build the skill sets of individuals. Once an individual has mastered word processor, excel, and PowerPoint, he or she will have access to jobs such as administrative assistant, data entry, or secretary. Furthermore, internet games are useful in teaching children as well as adults new vocabulary words, a helpful support for English Language Learners.

There is much to be done, but there are a multitude of exciting options for the improvement of public housing for residents. This improvement could lead to greater self-sufficiency among residents, which would then allow the UMHA to serve a larger number of people. However, these efforts alone may prove to be lacking. It is still better to live in public housing than in the private market. To address this issue, I would recommend lifting the cap on what residents pay for their apartments. That way, if a resident is making so much money that they do not want to pay 1/3 of it to UMHA for their apartment, they can chose to move out. Then, they could possibly find a private residence that is less expensive. A more gradual move from public to private housing could also be helpful: after a certain point, residents

could have to pay for utilities or for maintenance so that they would have the skills to keep a budget. The issue is many-sided but every side offers an opportunity.

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