

Family Self-Sufficiency Program Helping Make Dreams Come True

Open any newspaper or listen to any news-cast and you're likely to be barraged with disparaging news regarding the Section 8 program. The Federal Administration has proposed budget cuts and housing authorities are scrambling to find ways to cover the expected shortfalls (See story below). But while the program may face challenges in the coming years, there are many success stories that continue to go unpublicized.

Everyday there are people like Susan Forgione working with families to realize their dreams of homeownership, helping them accelerate their careers and increasing their money making potential. Susan is the Director of Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS) at the Boston Housing Authority where she works alongside her staff of Ruth Olsen and Martha Scanlon.

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Tracy signs the final documents at her closing, officially making her a homeowner

Washington Pols Mull FY05 Budget

Politicians in Washington D.C. are currently in the process of negotiating the budget for the 2005 fiscal year. The Federal Administration's FY05 proposed budget would drastically alter the public housing landscape. The proposal reduces funding for the Section 8 Program by more than \$1.6 billion. In addition, it would eliminate funding for the HOPE VI Program.

At the time this story was written, the House Appropriations Committee had reworked the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) budget, which funds the public housing and Section 8 programs, so that it had less of a cut to the Section 8 program than originally proposed. However, in order to do so, a cut was added to public housing programs in this version of the budget.

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Unity Days are Back for the Summer

Unity Days were started in the 1980s in response to neighborhood tensions. The first Unity Day was at the Washington-Beech housing development in Roslindale. The event was so successful that other developments began having Unity Days and now residents at many BHA housing development hold their own annual Unity Day during the summer months.



Children enjoying the amusements at Old Colony's Unity Day celebration



Kids at the Maverick Unity Day jump around in an inflatable dog

Unity Day Schedule

Development:	Commonwealth
Date:	August 14, 2004
Time:	1:00 pm – 5:00 pm
Location:	35 Fidelis Way, Brighton
Development:	Franklin Field
Date:	August 14, 2004
Time:	12:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Location:	70 Ames Street , Dorchester
Development:	Mary Ellen McCormack
Date:	August 14, 2004
Time:	12:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Location:	Sterling Square, South Boston
Development:	Bromley Heath
Date:	August 20, 21, & 22, 2004
Time:	All day
Location:	Bromley Hall area next to Amphitheater
Development:	Whittier Street
Date:	August 21, 2004 (Rain Date) August 28, 2004
Time:	12:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Location:	200 Ruggles Street
Development:	Orient Heights
Date:	August 28, 2004
Time:	12:00 pm – 6:00 pm
Location:	Orient Heights Community Building

Note: All dates and times listed are tentative and are subject to change. Please check with the development for more information.

A Community Center Grows at Faneuil Gardens

Faneuil Gardens' residents, BHA staff, neighbors and elected officials got their first glimpse of the newly completed community center and computer lab at a grand opening ceremony held at the Development on June 15.

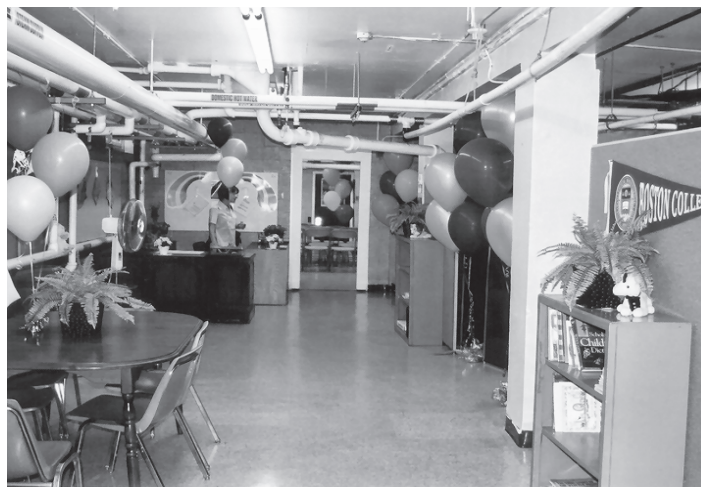
At the long-awaited unveiling, Faneuil Gardens Tenant Task Force President Ruth Stone described the project as an "absolute community effort."

The community center, which took 18 months to complete, is outfitted with a pool table, a television, a ping-pong table, a library of children's books and a meeting room.

In addition, Boston College generously provided the development a grant, which was used to buy computers. Area business also provided assistance by purchasing books for the reading room.

"This building truly houses a *community* center where men and women shared a common vision of their neighborhood and actively participated in bringing the vision to life," explained Regional Vice-President of Winn/Peabody Cruz Management Linda Hamilton.

At a ceremony to commemorate the new area Hamilton praised the contributions of all the men and women involved in the project. "I can tell who did the work because they still have light blue paint on their jeans," she mused.



The Faneuil Gardens Community Center opened on June 15 after 18 months of work.

BHA Administrator Sandra Henriquez told onlookers, "You are the heart and soul of this community of neighbors."

Henriquez encouraged the group to look past their low-income status and aspire for greatness. "With vision you will get there," she said. The completion of the community center serves as a model of what can be accomplished with hard work and dedication.

The center is located at the site of an old day care center. With the new space, leaders of the development hope to reestablish a semblance of the youth program disbanded three years ago due to lack of funds.

"It has the potential to transform and bring together a neighborhood," explained Site Manager Bill Sullivan.

Stone added: "We challenge everyone to rise to the occasion and take part in making the community center the true center of our community; attend programs, get involved in planning meetings, volunteer. Make it yours!"



The new computer room was made possible through a generous donation from Boston College

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Washington Pols Mull FY05 Budget

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Before anything becomes final, however, the budget goes through many revisions, and often is reviewed and approved by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, a Conference Committee if the two versions are different, the members of the House and Senate, and of course, the President himself.

Below is a description of the portion of the Administration's budget that would affect public housing and the Section 8 program as originally proposed. Because the budget includes drastic cuts to these programs, some tenants and tenant advocacy groups are lobbying against the cuts. For example, the Resident Advisory Board (RAB) sent letters to the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development (the House Appropriations Committee), petitioning them to fully fund public housing programs.

Section 8

One of the components to the proposed budget is the Flexible Voucher Program, which would replace the current Housing Choice Voucher Program. This proposal would give public housing authorities (PHAs) money in block grants for all renters instead of money for each individual renter. This means that housing authorities would be given one lump sum to distribute among all the agency's renters, instead of an individual dollar amount for each voucher.

The plan stems from what officials see as the rising cost of Section 8 subsidies. Proponents of the plan argue that it will deregulate the voucher system, diminishing Washington's role and empowering local housing authorities. They also claim that it will grant PHAs greater flexibility to address local priorities given local market conditions.

Detractors claim that the decrease in funding would put housing authorities in the tough position of choosing to fund more families of higher income, while neglecting the poorest few or funding fewer families with lower incomes. The National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Offi-

-cials (NAHRO) estimate that 250,000 families nationwide could lose their vouchers if the current HUD budget is passed. At the BHA the cuts could effect up to 2,500 voucher holders.

As a result of the pending Section 8 cuts, nearly two-thirds of PHAs around the country have already stopped issuing vouchers, while they remain inundated with long wait lists. The Boston Housing Authority has closed its waiting list, which currently has thousands of families on it.

HOPE VI

The HOPE VI Program is once again in jeopardy of being eliminated. The Administration tried to disband the program last year but was unsuccessful due to strong bipartisan opposition. The program has suffered severe cuts in the past few years with funding dropping to \$149 million during fiscal year 2004. The cuts mean that the program, which used to serve 25 to 30 communities and received \$574 million, now aids fewer than 10.

HOPE VI was created in 1993. Public housing authorities that receive HOPE VI funding use it to redevelop severely distressed housing developments.

The BHA currently has two completed HOPE VI Developments at Mission Main and Orchard Gardens and one currently in the construction process at Maverick Gardens. The program has helped spur growth in each community.

Public Housing Reform Test Program

Another idea HUD is working on is the Public Housing Reform Demonstration Program (PHRD), modeled after the Moving to Work Program (MTW), introduced in 1998. Fifty PHAs would take part in a three-year demonstration of the program to test its efficiency. The PHRD would move participating authorities to a more project- and asset-management based system.

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FSS Program

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FSS is open to all families receiving Section 8 assistance through the BHA and only has one simple requirement: a desire to become self-sufficient and a willingness to work hard to accomplish that goal.

One of the most praiseworthy programs to develop from FSS is the Homebuyer's Club. The FSS Program has served 16 families in their quest for homeownership. Every person who graduates from the program share similar characteristics: determination, dedication and perseverance.

Josette, a single mother with three children, one of which is disabled, embodied those characteristics and as a result purchased her first home in May. Tracy also endured the ups and down of the process and accomplished her goal of homeownership despite being a single mother and putting her oldest child through college. She purchased her home in late July.

Since the program began in September of 1993, the FSS team at the BHA has served 100 residents. In addition, there are 300 families currently enrolled in the program and hundreds more on the waiting list.

Participants in the Homebuyer's Club are required to attend 10 hours of "Homeownership 101," a class that is made possible through the assistance of the City of Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development. In addition, they must attend six to twelve months of BHA homeownership counseling. Experts in the field of law, finance and housing speak to the students and lend their expertise to the class. "They explained to us what we need to do to own a home," said Tracy. "They were very helpful."

"Our goal is not only to get them into a house, but to stay in one," said Forgione.

A big part of making that happen are people who have gone through the program themselves who come back to share their personal experiences with the group.

Josette tells people contemplating the program to, "Make sure you have your credit all set, it's the most important thing, without good credit it won't happen."

How FSS Works

- ✧ The head of household enters into a five-year contract with the BHA. This contract contains a service plan that identifies the employment goal of the participant and outlines the activities and services necessary to achieve this goal. The FSS Coordinator helps the family obtain the services listed in the plan and the BHA establishes a savings account when the family increases its earned income.
- ✧ When the rent goes up due to an increase in earnings, the amount of the increase will be placed in a savings account for the family. The family will receive all of the money in the account, plus interest, when the FSS Contract is successfully completed.
- ✧ To complete the program, a person must be working and all family members must be off public assistance for at least the last 12 months of the five-year contract.

Note: A person must be a Boston Housing Authority Section 8 voucher holder to qualify for the program.

"I think the message is people had to work hard but its worth it and you can do it," added Forgione.

The reward for all the hard work and dedication is purchasing a home for the first time. Tracy now owns the single-family home she had rented for the past two years in Hyde Park.

"It's a scary process to go through," said Tracy. "You get upset and stressed out. But you learn a lot just going through it."

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BHA Announces Energy Project

Savings Expected to Exceed \$5 million

The Boston Housing Authority has announced a partnership with Citizens Conservation Services, an Ameresco company, to maximize its savings through the implementation of integrated water and energy conservation improvements as well as related resident health upgrades. The project will affect approximately 5,000 apartments in 15 developments throughout the City of Boston and is expected to save the BHA more than \$5 million a year in energy savings.

"The BHA continues to find new, innovative, and economically responsible ways to provide families with clean and safe environments in which to live," said BHA Administrator Sandra Henriquez. "Citizens Conservation Services is a proven company that has worked with many other public housing authorities throughout the nation and we look forward to a long and productive relationship with them."

BHA designated Citizens as the company that will implement this round of energy performance measures in fifteen of its family and elderly/disabled developments. Citizens will now embark on an extensive energy audit of the fifteen developments to finalize which upgrades will be undertaken at each site.

"We are very excited for the opportunity to work with the BHA to help meet their environmental, infrastructure, energy and cost reduction goals," said George Sakellaris, CEO of Ameresco. Steve Morgan, Citizens President, added "It is an honor and a challenge to work with one of the nation's best managed and most sophisticated housing authorities to address both energy conservation and healthier apartment conditions in the same effort. We look forward to a close collaboration over the next dozen years."

Energy and money saving upgrades will include actions like replacing water closets, showerheads and faucet aerators, consolidating electric meters, installing energy efficient lighting, converting electric heat to gas, upgrading or replacing old central heating plants and installing co-generation and renewable energy systems. In addition, measures such as adding or improving apartment exhaust systems and adding dryer vents will also be

undertaken to improve healthy living conditions for residents. An extensive resident education, training, and employment program will complement and reinforce the program over the life of the project.

It is expected that the money saved over time through energy conservation will cover the cost of the upgrades and healthy apartment improvements. The total savings over a twelve (12) year period is expected to be approximately \$60 million.

The fifteen developments that will be audited are Bromley Park and Heath Street in Jamaica Plain, Commonwealth and Washington Street in Brighton, Franklin Field, Franklin Hill and Pasciucco in Dorchester, Holgate and Whittier Street in Roxbury, Lenox Street in the South End/Lower Roxbury, Old Colony in South Boston, Washington Beech and Roslyn Apartments in Roslindale, Torre Unidad in the South End, and the Charlestown development in Charlestown.

Prior to this designation, the BHA participated in two earlier energy performance contracts that saved the Authority more than \$16 million. Those contracts allowed the BHA to fully replace the original 1938 heating system at the Mary Ellen McCormack development in South Boston as well as upgrade heating and water systems at BHA state-funded developments throughout the city.

By the Numbers

15

Developments slated to be audited for energy upgrades

5,000

Apartments that will be upgraded

\$5,000,000

Expected yearly savings

\$60,000,000

Projected savings over the 12 year period

FSS Program

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And through the, at times, turbulent process special bonds are often forged between the FSS Coordinator and the client.

"She's my buddy, she's my partner," said Tracy of Susan Forgione. "The whole FSS team basically encouraged us and told us to stick with it and everything will work out."

Josette explained: "they're wonderful, very knowledgeable."

In addition to the praise from clients, the FSS team's accomplishments have not gone unnoticed by those in the world of housing either. They received the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) Award of Excellence for their participation in a Family Self-Sufficiency Loan Program. The program helps families in their goal for economic self-sufficiency by making emergency loans available for credit rehabilitation, debt consolidation and emergency expenses.

As for potential cuts that may impact the program in the future Forgione said: "We're far more geared to fight battles for our clients, making sure they have what they need." But she concedes that cuts to the program would be "universally devastating," to FSS Programs across the country and says it would be a "real setback."

"Without this program I don't think I could have done it myself," explained Tracy. "I really appreciate what FSS has done for me."

FY05 Budget

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While many housing organizations such as the Council of Large Public Housing Authorities (CLPHA) praise the MTW Program, they are more skeptical of PHRD. Critics worry because the proposal will allow the test PHAs to do away with the Brooke Amendment, which sets resident rents at 30 percent of their income. However, it is currently unclear how housing authorities will be chosen to participate in the program.

BHA Police Accreditation

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will be conducted in Roxbury Community College's Mainstage Theatre at the Media Arts Building.

If an individual is unable to speak at the public information session but would still like to provide comments to the assessment team, he may do so by telephone by calling (617) 988-5315 on Monday, August 16, 2004 between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.

Faneuil Gardens

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Picture frames filled with memories of past excursions and events associated with the development adorn the center's walls. Plaques and awards the site has received over the years are also proudly displayed along with past newsletters residents have produced.

"Remember the following letters F-O-H-G-Y-C-B," urged Henriquez to the crowd of adults and young people. "Find out how good you can be."

With the resources that the new community center will provide, it will be a much easier for residents to do just that.



HOPE VI Progressing at Maverick Gardens

Maverick Gardens received a HOPE VI grant from HUD in 2001 to revitalize the development. The below photos show the progression of phase one of construction (left photo) and the state of the old site (right photo).

The completion of the project will result with 396 mixed-income rental units on the Maverick Gardens site and on an offsite area known as Carlton Wharf. The units will be developed in three phases.



Phase one and two are expected to be completed by February of 2005, while phase three is slated for completion in 2006.

Maverick Gardens is a significant part of the redevelopment and revitalization of the East Boston area. Scenic views of Downtown Boston and Charlestown are visible from the property facing the waterfront.

BHA Police Undergo Accreditation Process

A team of assessors from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc., (CALEA), will arrive on August 14, 2004 to examine all aspects of the Boston Housing Authority Police Department's policies and procedures, management practices, operations and support services.

Verification by the team that the Boston Housing Authority Police Department meets the Commission's state-of-the-art standards is part of a voluntary process to gain accreditation—a highly prized recognition of law enforcement professional excellence.

Accreditation lasts for three years, during which the agency must submit annual reports attesting to continued compliance with those standards under which it was initially accredited. The BHA Police Department was first accredited six years ago and has chosen to begin its third accreditation process.

As part of the on-site assessment, agency employees and members of the community are invited to offer comments at a public information session on August 16, 2004 at 7:00 p.m. The session

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