

Supportive Housing

The “invisible” population in public housing:

A concern raised by the Informed Neighbors Corps is the presence of “invisible” residents in Creighton Court and other public housing communities. This phenomenon occurs when existing tenants open their homes, under the table and for indefinite lengths of time, to other families or individuals who may not have anywhere else to live. The “invisible” individuals’ names do not appear on housing leases or any other legal documents, and so it is therefore impossible to determine their actual prevalence or to track them in any way.

What it means for the redevelopment:

The Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority does not currently enforce certain breaches of lease terms, including the housing of “invisible” tenants. However, once The Community Builders (TCB) take over as the property manager of the new development, all rules of the new leases will be strictly enforced, and having unnamed persons in the household will be considered lease-noncompliance. Current Creighton Court residents must demonstrate at least two years of lease *compliance* before being deemed eligible. Therefore, it is imperative that all Creighton Court residents become lease-compliant as soon as possible in preparation for TCB’s takeover. Consequently, it is important for “invisible” residents, as well as the residents who host them, to know about the existence of programs in Richmond (discussed below) that provide immediate housing to people without a permanent place to stay. These services would enable “invisible” tenants to stop living in violation of someone else’s lease terms, and would, in turn, increase everyone’s chances of being eligible to move into the new community.

An outline of the Pathways to Housing Model from the Urban Institute follows below:

Pathways to Housing (a Housing First model) centers on providing permanent supportive housing immediately -- without requiring pre-existing psychiatric treatment or sobriety -- and then combining the housing with supportive treatment services in the areas of mental and physical health, substance abuse, education, and employment in order to facilitate recovery and integration into the community. Pathways supportive services are voluntary and not tied to maintaining housing, and there is no time limit on the services offered.

Pathways provides scattered-site apartments rented from private landlords in buildings that are just a regular part of the neighborhood. The program never rents more than 20% of a building's units, nor does it cluster units close together in one area, to avoid creating the atmosphere of a “housing program” and to minimize potential stigma. Clients pay 30% of their income toward rent, and Pathways pays the difference between the client’s rent contribution and the total rent, using a variety of funding sources.

Each Pathways program site has a housing department with staff who find and secure appropriate apartment units for Pathways clients. Housing department staff members also take

responsibility for apartment inspections and maintenance issues, and they handle all communication with landlords about any issues that tenants may have.

Evidence Base: Over the 22 years, there has been a variety of studies conducted in different cities that found that Pathways to Housing programs have a significant, positive impact on its target population. Research ranged from studies conducted by Pathways staff under federally-funded grants including a randomized control trial, Pathways' collaborations with researchers, and studies conducted by independent researchers or universities. Research shows that the cost of providing a home and support services to someone who is homeless and has a mental illness is significantly less than the expense of cycling in and out of emergency rooms, shelters, psychiatric hospitals, and jails.

- From baseline to two-year follow-up, Pathways Housing First participants spent approximately 80% of their time stably housed, versus 30% for participants in the comparison group, who were assigned to traditional programs that made treatment and sobriety prerequisites for housing.
- At two-year follow-up, participants reported significantly more choice with respect to their housing, treatment, and daily living than participants in the comparison group.
- From baseline to two-year follow-up, participants accrued significantly fewer supportive housing and services costs than participants in the comparison group.

Existing services in Richmond:

- **Virginia Supportive Housing:** A Place to Start (APTS) is a regional program that serves individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and serious mental illness. APTS immediately houses these individuals, providing initial stability, which then allows the individuals to engage in services. The Intensive Community Treatment (ICT) team is comprised of an administrative assistant, a licensed clinician(s), case manager(s), a nurse, a peer counselor, and a part-time psychiatrist. They have partnered with the Daily Planet and have so far provided long-term housing for about 100 people.
- **Housing advocate:** Sponsored by Office of Community Wealth Building and the Richmond Health District, housing advocates will provide an additional point of information and resources for residents. Independent of RRHA, housing advocates aim to increase transparency, free communication, and full disclosure for residents. This person would help residents understand the intricacies of the lease and to navigate the referral networks available. There is currently one housing advocate in the Health Resource Center at Creighton.
- **Other potential partners** include: The Daily Planet, CARITAS, The Healing Place