

# ENHANCING RURAL REENTRY THROUGH HOUSING PARTNERSHIPS

*A Handbook for Community Corrections  
Agencies in Rural Areas*



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FAMILIES ARE PART OF THE SOLUTION

## **DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE**

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- Emphasizing local control, based on the needs of the field.
- Developing collaborations and partnerships.
- Providing targeted training and technical assistance.
- Promoting capacity building through planning.
- Streamlining the administration of grants.
- Creating accountability of projects.
- Encouraging innovation.
- Communicating the value of justice efforts to decision makers at every level.

## **FAMILY JUSTICE**

Family Justice taps the natural resources of families, the collective wisdom of communities, and the expertise of government to make families healthier and neighborhoods safer. Since its founding in 1996, Family Justice has emerged as a leading national nonprofit institution dedicated to developing innovative, cost-effective solutions that benefit people at greatest risk of cycling in and out of the justice system. Through advocacy, education, and research, Family Justice offers a range of systemic interventions that address the complex issues of people living in poverty, such as substance abuse, mental illness, and HIV/AIDS. By providing extensive training and support to government agencies and community-based organizations, Family Justice helps families unlock their potential to lead healthier and more productive lives.

## **HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL**

The Housing Assistance Council (HAC) is a nonprofit corporation headquartered in Washington, D.C. The Housing Assistance Council has been helping local organizations build affordable homes in rural America since 1971. HAC emphasizes local solutions, empowerment of the poor, reduced dependence, and self-help strategies. HAC assists in the development of both single- and multi-family homes and promotes homeownership for working low-income rural families through a self-help "sweat equity" construction method. The Housing Assistance Council offers services to public, nonprofit, and private organizations throughout the rural United States. HAC also maintains a special focus on high-need groups and regions including: Indian country, the Mississippi Delta, farm workers, the Southwest border colonias, and Appalachia.

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## Introduction

Family Justice initiated the project “Housing Partnerships to Enhance Reentry Outcomes” in response to rural community corrections officers grappling with housing families involved in the criminal justice system. Time and again community corrections officers cited the same challenges.

- *“Our local Salvation Army allows only one-night stays. We have no options for someone who is homeless and drug-free. Their only option is to remain incarcerated.”*
- *“Transitional housing was our only real option, but funding has been cut.”*
- *“The lack of employment opportunities, marketable skills, education experience, daycare, transportation...all these contribute to continued criminal behavior, relapse, and rearrest/conviction.”*
- *“Those areas that are economically depressed offer little support. Often the home environment is not suitable for a good start.”*
- *“I believe the main problem is the repeat offenders who have burned all their bridges and no one will take them due to their past history.”*
- *“Family members are not committed for the long haul.”*

With support from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Family Justice explored the challenges of rural housing and reentry, as well as opportunities for collaboration that could yield creative solutions.

## The Handbook

Rather than dictating a course of action, this handbook is meant to spur consideration and collaboration and share what Family Justice has learned about rural housing and reentry. The following pages discuss potentially beneficial partnerships that community corrections departments can cultivate to fully tap resources and expertise. The handbook also suggests various strategies to increase housing options for people coming home from jail and prison—and for their families. This manual offers community corrections:

- Strategies for partnering with families and supporting them through the reentry process
- Strategies for broad-based collaboration to address affordable-housing access issues
- Information about housing laws and policies that affect people involved in the justice system in rural areas
- Information about rural housing programs and low-income housing tax credits

This handbook can also serve as a resource for housing professionals by providing information about the potential benefits and challenges to housing families involved in the justice system. The handbook describes opportunities for collaboration with community corrections agencies in rural communities to enhance public safety.

Family Justice maintains that families are part of the solution. Families can provide invaluable resources to loved ones involved in the criminal justice system. With education and support, families, community members, and neighborhood agencies can be enlisted in an effort to increase public health and safety by helping loved ones involved in the justice system meet their goals and obtain housing.

## The Project

In consultation with the Housing Assistance Council, Family Justice identified rural communities with significant rates of poverty, crime, and housing issues. Family Justice also sought out community corrections departments with demonstrated leadership and innovation in rural communities. After a thorough site-selection process, Family Justice chose to launch a pilot project with the Arkansas Department of Community Correction because of a confluence of factors including the rurality, poverty, high rates of prisoner reentry, and prevalence of housing issues in a group of contiguous Arkansas counties.

Family Justice and the Arkansas Department of Community Correction convened a work group whose members included rural housing developers and representatives from corrections, community corrections, rural public-housing authorities, community-based organizations, and academics specializing in rural issues. This diverse group came together to address common goals such as enhancing public safety, decreasing homelessness, and reducing the burden on the state caused by the continued incarceration of prisoners who lack viable housing options. The exchange of ideas and information sparked new solutions and fresh opportunities for collaboration among professionals invested in the successful housing and reentry of people returning to live with their families in rural areas. The Arkansas work group started by identifying seven primary goals and created an action plan to execute them.

These initial goals are to:

1. Solidify the work group into a coalition that meets regularly to discuss reentry, housing, and community corrections issues.
2. Plan for reentry early in the period of incarceration and improve release plans.
3. Institute certificates of rehabilitation that document successes of people in prison (such as the completion of programs).
4. Create a comprehensive state reentry resource guide.
5. Catalog state and local policies that restrict the housing, employment, or benefits of formerly incarcerated individuals.
6. Increase the employment prospects of formerly incarcerated people by providing training programs for work in industries with a significant number of jobs.
7. Match volunteers from churches with projects that meet the needs of formerly incarcerated people in rural areas, such as mentoring and transportation.

As the Arkansas Department of Community Correction began work toward each of these goals with a network of concerned agencies and individuals, Family Justice compiled lessons learned from the process in a handbook suggesting ideas and alternatives for other community corrections departments around the country.

## Defining Rural

Defining what is rural is a challenge for policy makers and practitioners alike. In general, rural areas share the common characteristics of comparatively few people living in a geographic area, and limited access to large cities and market areas for work or everyday living activities. Over the years, public agencies and other researchers have used combinations of these factors to define rural and to designate geographic areas as rural. Among the more widely used definitions of rural is “nonmetropolitan.” The U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas according to published standards that are applied to Census Bureau data. The general concept of a metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area is that of a core area containing a substantial population nucleus, together with adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that core. The OMB classifications include the following:

- *Metropolitan Statistical Areas* have at least one urbanized area with a population of 50,000 or more, plus adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core areas as measured by commuting ties.
- *Micropolitan Statistical Areas* have at least one urban cluster of between 10,000 and 50,000 people, plus adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core areas as measured by commuting ties. This classification is often considered rural or “small town.”
- *Outside Core Based Statistical Areas* are not included in Metropolitan or Micropolitan Statistical Areas. This classification is generally a proxy for “remote rural.”

Whether your community meets the technical definition of “rural” or does not, the following material may be useful to you.

## High-Need Rural Areas<sup>1</sup>

Stable, affordable housing is crucial to the success of people coming home from jail and prison in rural America. Finding and maintaining housing in rural areas poses many of the same challenges as those in urban areas, heightened by extreme poverty and a lack of resources. Poverty is widespread among several concentrated geographical areas and populations in rural America. Central Appalachia, the Lower Mississippi Delta, the colonias along the U.S.-Mexico border, and Native American lands experience high rates of poverty and substandard housing. These rural areas and populations have endured decades, if not centuries, of pervasively poor social and economic conditions. Many of the areas' problems stem from historical patterns of unsustainable use of land and natural resources combined with a lack of reinvestment in the communities. These systemic problems have been further exacerbated by decades of neglect and continued disinvestment, which produce a cycle of poverty that is extremely hard to break. One visible impact of the economic distress experienced by residents of these geographic areas is poor housing conditions.

### Border Colonias Region

The U.S.-Mexico border region is dotted with hundreds of rural subdivisions characterized by extreme poverty and severely substandard living conditions. These communities are called colonias. Colonias are defined primarily by what they lack, such as potable drinking water, paved streets, sewer systems, and standard mortgage financing.

The border colonias region encompasses 66 counties in the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California that are within 100 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border. Colonia developments began as small communities of farm laborers employed by a single rancher or farmer. Most colonias emerged in the 1950s as developers discovered a large market of aspiring homebuyers who could not afford homes in cities or did not have access to conventional financing mechanisms.

### Central Appalachia

The Appalachian Mountains are the oldest above-ocean mountain range in North America. This geography, and the vast natural resources within these mountains, has greatly influenced the region's social, economic, and political characteristics. The region is marked by low income, poor health, inadequate housing, and substandard education. Subsequently, Appalachia has frequently been defined as a subculture within the broader context of mainstream America. In spite of these burdens, Appalachians have a rich culture and traditions of resiliency, community, and family that have helped them persevere through a tumultuous 20th century.



## Lower Mississippi Delta

The Lower Mississippi Delta region is defined as 219 counties and parishes in portions of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, and Kentucky that cover more than 3 million acres of land. Multigenerational poverty is pervasive, and the patterns of African-American residence in the Lower Mississippi Delta are linked directly to the institutions of slavery and the agricultural economy it supported. Even today, spatial segregation is socially sanctioned and perpetuated through economic exploitation and social isolation of African-American populations. Efforts to address the region's housing needs require multilevel approaches that speak to the counties' social, political, and economic infrastructure. In addition to increased financial resources, the Delta is in need of greater community and organizational capacity to address the interconnected housing needs that affect the region.

## Native American Lands

Native Americans are a diverse group consisting of more than 500 tribes in disparate locations across the United States, with some commonalities among largely rural Native American communities. Native Americans are historically one of the poorest groups in the country, and persistent poverty and inadequate housing conditions continue to be key issues on Native lands nationwide. Some common barriers to improving housing conditions include the complexity of trust ownership; the inability of banks to foreclose on Indian lands held in trust; lenders' resulting unwillingness to make loans to Native Americans; and the scarcity of financial institutions near Native American lands.

Added to the seemingly insurmountable issues of poverty and housing deficiencies are social challenges such as substance abuse and access to quality education. Economic and social issues such as these are most pronounced in tribal areas. Although it is an oversimplification to speak of the population as a homogenous group, some issues are common, if not universal.

# Affordable Housing Challenges in Rural Areas

## Race and Ethnicity

Rural areas of the United States tend to be more racially and ethnically homogenous than the nation is as a whole. Nationwide, approximately 69 percent of the population is white and not of Hispanic origin. In rural areas, 82 percent of households are white and non-Hispanic. Data show that housing conditions for minorities in these areas are often worse than for rural whites or all households overall. People of color in rural parts of the country are more likely to live in substandard housing, experience problems affording housing, and are more likely to be poor. In rural counties with a high percentage of minority residents, we must consider the role that geographic isolation and relative segregation play in the intersection of race, ethnicity, poverty, and housing.<sup>2</sup>

## Income

Incomes are lower in rural areas than in the rest of the country. Median household income is \$35,995 in nonmetropolitan places, as compared with \$48,451 for mostly urban metro areas.<sup>3</sup> This gap is due primarily to the high proportion of low-skill and low-paying jobs in rural areas, combined with lower levels of education. Workers in rural communities are more likely to be underemployed and less likely to improve their job circumstances over time.<sup>4</sup> Though significant gains have been made in recent years toward reducing poverty among rural Americans, poverty rates are still disproportionately high among subsections of the rural population—namely among women and minorities. The poverty rate for people of color in these areas is twice the rate for that of white non-Hispanic residents. Rural African-Americans experience poverty at three times the rate that rural whites do.

## Housing Affordability

For much of the last century, the poor quality and condition of homes was the primary housing concern facing rural America. It can be argued that affordability has become the greatest challenge for low-income rural households. There is a profound lack of affordable housing in rural areas. Housing costs are usually lower in rural areas, but so are incomes. In some areas, housing costs have also outpaced incomes. Approximately 5.2 million rural households (just under one-quarter) pay more than 30 percent of their monthly income for housing costs and are considered “cost-burdened.” Thirty-six percent of cost-burdened households in rural areas are renters, though renters represent less than one-quarter of all rural homes.

## Housing Quality

In the past few decades, the quality of housing in rural America has improved considerably. Despite this progress, housing problems persist in the United States and tend to be most common in rural areas. Though rural homes constitute a little more than one-fifth of the nation’s occupied housing units, they account for more than 30 percent of units that lack adequate plumbing. According to a 2005 American Housing Survey of indicators of housing adequacy, 1.7 million units (6.3 percent) are either moderately or severely substandard, a slightly higher rate than in cities in metro areas.

## Household Crowding

Nationwide, crowding is primarily a problem in urban areas and among Hispanic households. Overall, Latinos occupy one-quarter of all crowded housing units in rural areas. Crowded living conditions are a source of stress for many families. In rural areas, crowding is often an invisible form of homelessness, as some rural households “double up” with friends or relatives in reaction to adverse economic or social situations, or to escape other substandard housing conditions.

## Rental Housing

Home-ownership rates have reached historically high levels in the past few years; more than two-thirds of Americans now own their homes. The home-ownership rate is even higher in rural areas, where more than three-quarters of housing units are owner-occupied. In a nation that places a high value on home ownership and has committed substantial resources to increasing opportunities to own, the needs of renters are often overlooked. This is especially true in suburban and rural communities, where home ownership has long been the preferred form of tenure for the vast majority of households. Millions of families unable to purchase or uninterested in owning a home rent one instead. Renter-occupied households in rural areas are twice as likely to live in substandard housing as their counterparts who own. Additionally, more than half of all rural households with multiple housing problems—such as quality, crowding, or affordability—are renters.

## Manufactured Housing

Manufactured homes are widely popular in rural America. Nationwide, approximately 7 percent of occupied units are manufactured homes. In rural areas, the prevalence of manufactured housing is twice the national rate, as manufactured homes make up 15 percent of rural units. Though rural areas contain less than one-quarter of the nation’s housing units, more than one-half of mobile homes are located there. Manufactured housing is one of the most dynamic and controversial residential innovations of the past 50 years. The manufactured-housing industry has transformed dramatically over the past few decades, producing homes of greater quality, size, and safety. Some manufactured-home models are virtually indistinguishable from conventional single-family units. However, while many physical and structural attributes of manufactured housing have improved, other factors, such as financing, retail systems, installation, and consumer protections have not progressed as well. Many new manufactured homes are still financed with personal property loans by subprime lenders and companies specializing in manufactured-housing credit. This form of financing is less beneficial to the consumer than a more traditional loan because it typically offers higher interest rates and shorter terms and, in some instances, can be predatory in nature.

## Rural Homelessness

Though many people associate homelessness with cities, the issue also has alarming effects in rural areas. Individuals may live with family or friends in overcrowded homes. They may stay in substandard housing because they have no other affordable options. In fact, rural homelessness is “often precipitated by a structural or physical housing problem jeopardizing health or safety.”<sup>5</sup>

Factors that contribute to rural homelessness include poverty, lack of affordable housing, limited job opportunities, low wages, and long periods of unemployment. No national survey has assessed the number of homeless people in rural parts of the United States,<sup>6</sup> but research by the Rural Poverty Research Center indicates that homeless people in rural areas are more likely to be white, female, married, employed, and homeless for the first time than their urban counterparts.<sup>7</sup> Another study found that the majority of people who are homeless in rural areas are families, single mothers, and children.<sup>8</sup>

The National Coalition for the Homeless argues, “Restricting definitions of homelessness to include only those who are literally homeless—that is, on the streets or in shelters—does not fit well with the rural reality, and also may exclude many rural communities from accessing federal dollars to address homelessness.”<sup>9</sup> Incarcerated people are also affected by how homelessness is defined. In some states, including the Arkansas pilot site, incarcerated people without a home to return to remain in facilities for additional time but are not recognized as homeless. Because they do not fall under the traditional definition of homeless, they cannot access services and treatment opportunities traditionally available to homeless populations.

For more information about initiatives to address rural homelessness, see the following resources:

[www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1961](http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1961)

[www.ruralhome.org/manager/uploads/HousingPlusServices.pdf](http://www.ruralhome.org/manager/uploads/HousingPlusServices.pdf)

## Rural Reentry Issues

The percentage of incarcerated people who come from rural areas varies from state to state. In Arkansas, for example, 44.6 percent of people in prison come from rural communities. However, these rural communities are dispersed throughout 63 counties, while the 55.4 percent of people in prison who come from non-rural areas are concentrated in 12 counties. This makes it difficult to deliver resources to all of the rural communities where incarcerated people return home, but it is important to remember that a significant part of the prison population does not come from cities, and that they also need services to halt cycles of crime and victimization. In examining the demographics of your own state, consider the ways that creative collaboration might help you improve service delivery to rural areas.

### American Rural Population and Incarceration

To date, there has been very little analysis comparing rates of incarceration in rural versus urban areas. According to commonly held principles of spatial crime analysis, there is a close relationship between place of crime and place of residence. Because place of residence data is not publicly available or standardized, Family Justice used the county of conviction as a proxy for county of residence. Table 1 below describes the rural and urban distribution, in six selected states, of the general population and population of people who are incarcerated based on the place of conviction.

### Rural vs. Non-Rural County of Conviction for People Who Are Incarcerated

State	Size of Population		Rurality			Incarcerated Population		
	Total State Population	Population in HAC Rural Counties	Number of Non-metro Counties	Number of Metro Counties	% of Population from HAC Rural Counties	Total Number of People Incarcerated in the State	Number of People Convicted in Non-metro Counties	% of People Convicted in Non-metro Counties
Arkansas	2,673,400	1,350,327	63	12	50.51%	19,556	8,727	44.6%
Florida	15,982,378	1,008,529	31	36	6.31%	99,889	9,450	9.5%
Iowa	2,926,324	1,469,137	86	13	50.20%	42,961	15,502	36.1%
Kansas	2,688,418	1,263,071	97	8	46.98%	59,882	47,721	79.7%
Kentucky	4,041,769	2,106,800	104	16	52.13%	25,141	12,789	50.9%
North Carolina	8,049,313	2,604,298	66	34	32.35%	28,487	10,544	37.0%
All Selected States	36,361,602	9,802,162	447	119	26.96%	275,916	104,733	38.0%

According to HAC, approximately 20 percent of Americans reside in rural counties and about 40 percent of the incarcerated population comes from rural areas.<sup>10</sup> Table 1 presents a similar picture: Approximately 27 percent of the population in these six selected states live in rural counties and 38 percent of people who are incarcerated were convicted (and likely live) in a rural county. It is important to recognize the high likelihood of rural residency in some states and even more important to consider the relative rate of rural/urban incarceration based on the size of the county population.

The distribution of rural counties is different in every state. Some states—like Kansas, Iowa, and Arkansas—have far more rural than metro counties and the rural counties are home to approximately half of the state population. This distribution will lead to a high likelihood of a greater number of convictions in rural counties. Other states, like Florida, have a more evenly distributed number of rural and urban counties and yet have a very small percentage of the population residing in rural counties.

Using basic descriptive statistical analysis and significance testing, Family Justice compared the difference between rural and non-rural rates of incarceration relative to the size of the population. Arkansas and Iowa have significantly lower rates of incarceration in rural areas. A slightly higher rate of incarceration in rural Kansas counties was found to be insignificant and—interestingly, considering the number and size of the counties—Florida has a significantly higher rate of incarceration in rural than urban counties.

These findings are supported by other scholarly research on the rural/urban differences of people who are incarcerated. Further research is needed to develop this picture, which currently indicates that involvement in the justice system and the related impact on families is not significantly different in rural or urban areas.<sup>11</sup> The need for developing reentry interventions in rural areas is indicated.

## Housing

Rural communities have a shortage of safe, affordable rental housing. When trying to find housing, people involved in the justice system may face restrictions from public housing providers and discrimination from private landlords. They may not have the financial resources to pay for application fees or security and utility deposits. People who have been incarcerated often lack the credit history that landlords require—and the subprime lending practices that have contributed to the U.S. financial crisis are even more prevalent in low-income rural areas, resulting in increased instability and foreclosures.

## Health and Social Services

Because fewer people return to rural areas than to cities after incarceration, resources are often concentrated in urban centers. People residing in rural communities typically have less access to health and social services than people living in cities and suburbs. They may have to travel long distances to visit a free clinic, a food bank, or a counselor. To get the services they need, people often must secure transportation and child care in addition to having sufficient time to make the

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A rate of incarceration was calculated based on the size of the population. The result of the formula (number incarcerated/population) multiplied by a constant (1,000) is the rate at which people were convicted per every 1,000 people in the county.

Here are the results for HAC rural vs. metro counties in each of the six states (\* indicates significance):

Arkansas\* (6.54 rural, 8.28 metro)

Florida\* (10.14 rural, 6.63 metro)

Iowa\* (9.38 rural, 16.65 metro)

Kansas (27.79 rural, 21.03 metro)

Kentucky (6.27 rural, 6.3 metro)

trip. These additional stressors make it even more difficult to meet all the demands of work, family, and probation or parole.

### Acquaintance Density

Rural communities have high levels of “acquaintance density,” meaning that a high percentage of people know one another. This can be positive when a personal relationship facilitates sharing resources and offering support—for example, offering a job to a friend’s son when he comes home from prison. However, the lack of anonymity in rural communities can increase the stigma of entering a mental health center or a drug treatment program. People may decide not to seek the help they need to avoid the shame and stigma associated with mental illness, addiction, and criminal justice supervision.

### Transportation

People in rural areas do not have the benefit of comprehensive public transportation. When social services and government offices are far away, people must often rely on the help of friends and family to get them where they need to go. People who have been incarcerated for long periods of time often lose their driver’s licenses, and, even if they are able to obtain a license upon release, they may not have access to a vehicle. In some places, probation and parole officers drive to rural areas within their jurisdiction. Social service providers often lack the financial resources to create mobile units or satellite offices to serve populations in remote areas.

### Employment Opportunities

Rural areas often have fewer employment opportunities. Major industries such as mining, timber, and manufacturing have declined, increasing competition for a smaller number of positions and giving employers the option to hire someone without a criminal background. Furthermore, as these industries are replaced by jobs that require different skill sets, people involved in the justice system are at a significant disadvantage if they did not have the chance while incarcerated to learn trades that are in demand.

# Housing and Reentry: An Overview

## The Opportunity

For most readers of this handbook, at least one of these goals is a priority for your agency:

- Decreasing recidivism;
- Decreasing homelessness;
- Enhancing family health and well-being;
- Increasing public safety; or
- Creating cost-effective solutions.

Shared goals and a common stake in societal issues provide a great opportunity for collaboration. Partnerships that draw on the complementary expertise of policymakers, criminal justice agencies, community-based organizations, and housing providers can make a positive impact on people who are involved in the justice system while achieving a number of other important goals.

## The Research

- **Housing is a key factor for successful reentry.**
  - A study by the Center for Housing Policy found that people coming home from prison are more likely to commit additional crimes if they do not find satisfactory housing upon release.<sup>12</sup>
  - Studies have found that the number of times a person moves after reentering the community from prison is highly correlated with re-incarceration.<sup>13</sup>
- **Housing affects access to employment and health care.**
  - Access to decent, stable, and affordable housing substantially increases the likelihood that a person involved in the criminal justice system will be able to find and retain employment, stay drug-free, and refrain from committing additional crimes.<sup>14</sup>
- **Housing programs are cost-effective alternatives to incarceration.**
  - In New York City, it costs \$164 per day to incarcerate a person in city jail and \$74 per day to incarcerate them in state prison, but only \$41.85 per day to provide someone with supportive housing.<sup>15</sup>
  - In Seattle, it costs \$87.67 per day to incarcerate a person in city jail and \$95.51 per day in state prison, but only \$26 per day to provide someone with supportive housing.<sup>16</sup>



## Strategies for Engaging Families

“Who will you be going home to?” This is a question corrections staff and parole officers typically ask people leaving jail or prison. The answer often includes family or friends. Several months later, it’s not uncommon for the individual and the family to be frustrated with the challenge of rekindling relationships and finding ways to contribute materially and emotionally. At this point, parole officers may get calls from family members who do not know what else to try. Does this sound familiar?

Given sufficient support, families can be an unparalleled resource for safe and effective community supervision. This section of the handbook presents Family Justice’s suggested methods and tools for engaging families when a loved one is involved in the criminal justice system.

### Family, Broadly Defined

By learning about people’s families, you can gain a fuller, more accurate picture of their lives. Using a broad definition of *family* can help identify the most significant people in an individual’s social network. Family may include:

- Traditional and nontraditional family members;
- Immediate and extended family; and
- Friends and neighbors, co-workers, clergy, or other important people in one’s social network.

Allow individuals to define their own families by finding out whom they consider to be the most supportive people in their lives.

### Why work with families?

- **Families are experts on their own lives.** Family members know each other best. They know their own history, community, and culture. They remember what has worked in the past. They know which friends and family members are supportive and whom they can trust. Family expertise is a resource that can be tapped to make supervision more effective, decrease the likelihood of recidivism, and enhance family well-being. Tapping the resources of social networks requires treating families with respect, recognizing their strengths, and acknowledging their power to make decisions and maximize their resources.
- **The family is a natural system for early crisis intervention.** Family members are the first to celebrate each other’s successes, and they are also the first to notice when something seems amiss. They see the symptoms when a loved one with a drug addiction is relapsing or at risk of relapse. They see changes in behavior and other signs if someone is no longer taking medication for mental illness or another serious condition. If families feel comfortable reaching out to probation officers, parole officers, or service providers, they can work as a team to prevent escalation of the harm, or violations of supervision mandates.

- **Families provide motivation for their loved ones to comply with mandates.** Staff members often ask participants\* what motivates them to change, to keep trying, to do the difficult work that must be done to get a job or stay drug-free. In response, many people take out their wallets to show pictures of parents, children, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, godparents, grandparents, and friends. These are the people who give them a feeling of self-worth, inspire hope, and keep them invested. These are the people they want to make proud—or in some cases, prove wrong. Members of a social network can help motivate a loved one to meet goals and comply with supervision mandates.

*\* When Family Justice works with people on a direct-service level, we refer to them as participants. The word assumes a partnership and acknowledges that people participate in decision making.*

- **Families provide a long-term connection that outlasts government interventions or treatment.** When someone finishes parole, loses touch with their case manager, or stops going in for check-ups at a local clinic, families are still there. Family members are often available to one another day or night, after offices close and programs end. When agencies and professionals invest in families, they invest in long-term success.
- **Families and social networks are a cost-effective resource.** When agencies and professionals equip family members with the tools they need to support one another, they decrease reliance on government and costly social service agencies.
- **Families can improve reentry outcomes.** Family contact during incarceration can result in improved behavior in prison and better parole outcomes.<sup>17</sup> During six months of family case management at La Bodega de la Familia, arrest rates among drug users were 11 percent, in contrast with 21 percent in a comparison group. Among families, 90 percent resolved medical-service needs and 80 percent resolved social-service needs.<sup>18</sup>

*Research indicates that family support can positively influence juveniles under criminal justice supervision<sup>19</sup> as well as adults reentering communities.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, studies have found that “intimate partner and family relationships [are] significantly related to the intermediate reentry outcomes of employment and staying off drugs.”<sup>21</sup>*

## Family Justice's Core Concepts for Working with Families

### 1. Consider people in CONTEXT.

All human beings are complex. People have many sides and reveal different attributes, depending on the context. For example, someone might be a cooperative member of a team at work, but an authoritarian parent at home. By recognizing each person as multifaceted, you can help build the foundation of a trusting and collaborative relationship. A supervisor or case manager who simply labels a person (for example, “drug addict”) misses other important qualities, such as someone’s role as a devoted parent or skilled mechanic. Exploring the contexts of family and community reveals a richer and more accurate picture.

### 2. Build on FAMILY INTERACTIONS.

Family members know more about themselves than anyone else does, and often have more influence over someone achieving a goal than any outsider—including a probation or parole officer. In every interaction, it is important to remember that each individual’s behavior affects the behavior of another person. A change in one family member’s behavior often has an impact on other family members’ behavior.

Families also tend to behave differently during times of transition and crisis (such as a son coming home after serving one year in prison or a daughter entering drug treatment as part of her probation conditions). These changes are often temporary. Family members’ responses represent their attempts to explore and adapt. Understanding interactions within a family and taking them into account helps staff shape more constructive interventions and focus on developing more positive and promising interactions among individuals.

### 3. Focus on STRENGTHS.

People can use previously unrecognized talents to learn, grow, and change. A deliberate inquiry can help identify positive behaviors and successful coping mechanisms, as well as skills and talents of the individual and his or her social network. Case managers and community corrections officers can help mobilize these strengths and encourage their development, boosting self-esteem and empowering the individual and family to set goals and take action toward reaching them.

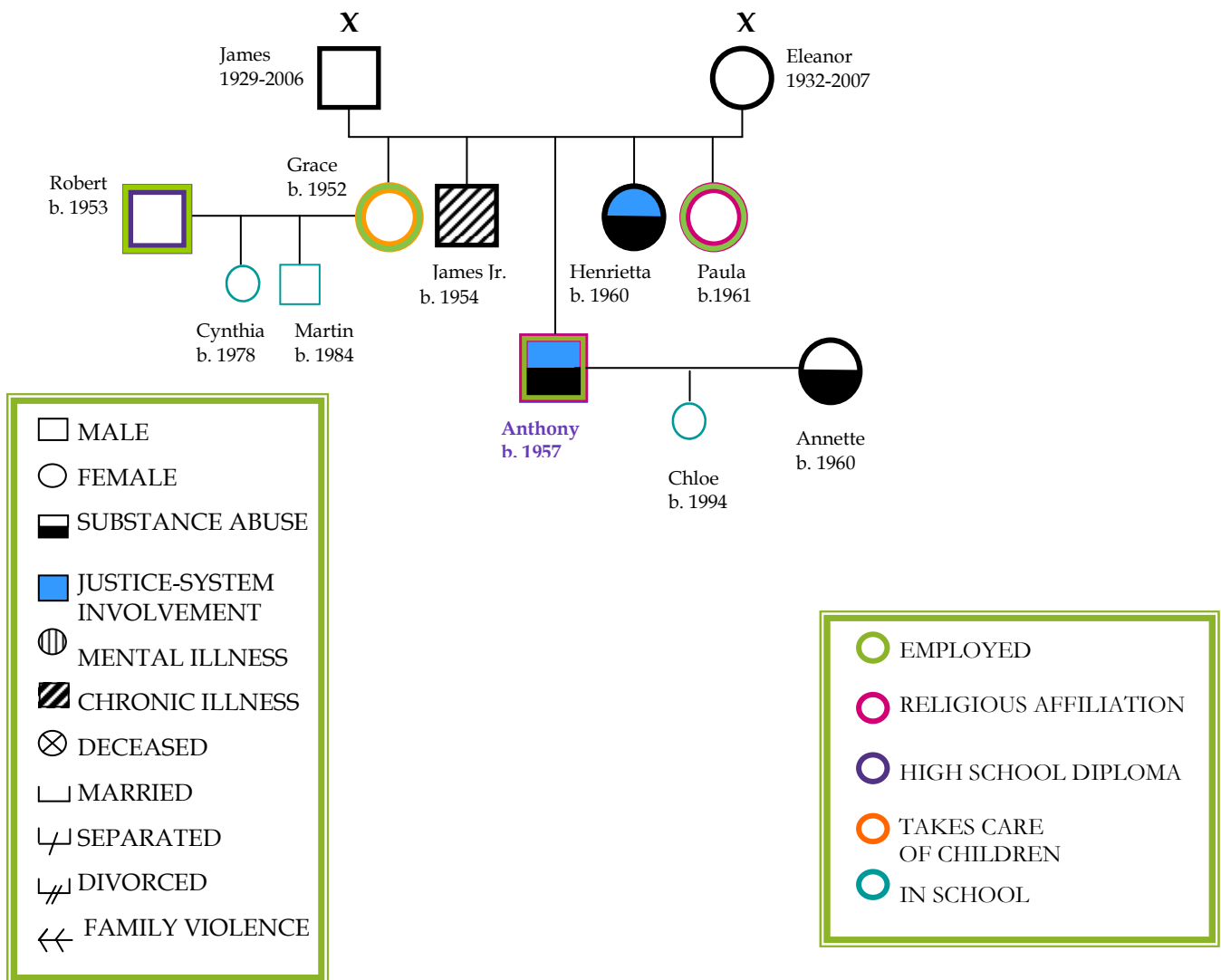
## Family Mapping Tools

Family Justice uses family mapping tools to help identify support and resources, provide valuable information at a glance, create opportunities for families to tell their stories, and build relationships through collaboration. Community corrections officers have found the following tools useful as part of a family support model of supervision. You can use these tools as a means of recording information and tracking progress.

### Genograms

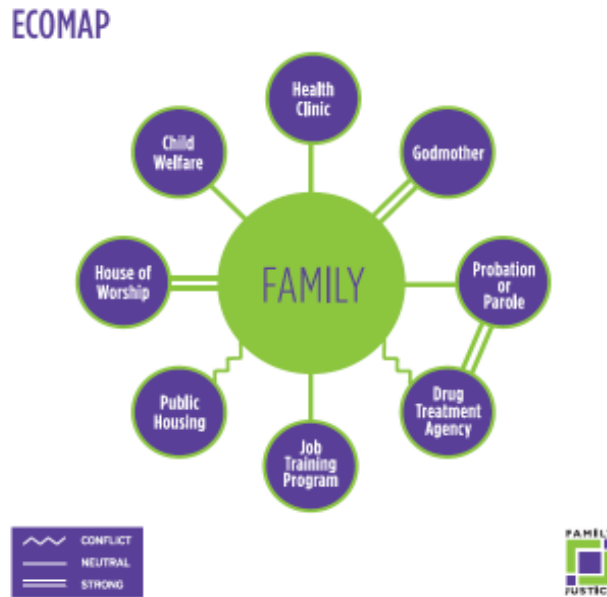
A genogram is a tool that goes beyond the typical family tree, creating a visual representation of strengths, such as education, employment, and social support, and challenges, such as involvement in the justice system, substance abuse, mental illness, and chronic illness. The genogram is useful as a tool for engagement and serves as a way of organizing family information. If you prefer to record this information in another way, feel free to adapt the mapping tool as you see fit.

Genogram of the Allen Family



## Ecomaps

An ecomap illustrates the relationships between family members and the key people and institutions in their lives. These may include schools, houses of worship, employers, probation or parole officers, child welfare, drug counselors, health-care and child-care providers, and social workers. The ecomap also depicts the nature of the relationship between agencies, allowing insight into ways to improve communication and service coordination.



An institutional ecomap displays an agency’s connections to other entities and the nature of those relationships. This tool can be helpful in planning collaborations among organizations.



## Family Action Plans

Through Family Action Plans, participants set relevant goals with the support and guidance of a family case manager or other staff member. Some of these goals will include parole mandates and the family will create others. The written plans include objectives and tasks, and strength-based goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, realistic, and time-limited. Family Action Plans recognize that family members have the power to make change and are experts about their own lives.

## Supporting Families: Strategies for Family Reunification

*“Family-based strategies for housing stabilization among the formerly incarcerated present and sustain many of the same risks that lead to crime, but a family able to provide support without excessively burdening itself can play an important role in stabilizing all aspects of a [formerly incarcerated person’s] life, including housing.”<sup>22</sup>*

### Get to know families.

While incarcerated people are on the inside planning for reentry, families are preparing for a homecoming on the outside. Many families have concerns about reentry, their loved ones, and their own ability to cope during the transition. Community corrections officers can establish relationships with the families of the people they supervise. As mentioned above, families can be an important resource for successful supervision. Families are often strong sources of support, especially when they have addressed their own needs and concerns.

Many families face multigenerational challenges such as poverty, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, mental illness, and involvement in the justice system. These patterns can lead professionals to focus on people’s deficits or write off family members as negative influences. However, when staff members know that families face these issues, they have the opportunity to understand people’s choices and behaviors in context and to build productive relationships with family members. For example, when a person on parole does not show up for his appointment, a parole officer may make a call to a family member and learn that the man’s grandmother, who usually watches his children, is in the hospital an hour away. The next time the parole officer meets with this man, they may discuss his grandmother’s health, measures the family could take to help keep her out of the hospital, and options for child care. This may improve the health and well-being of the family and help ensure that the person on parole does not miss future appointments.

Family members may be hesitant to work with a probation or parole officer. Families may be suspicious of law enforcement, or may have been disappointed by social service providers, courts, and other governmental systems in the past. Perhaps goals were overly ambitious, perhaps they did not agree with the goals that were set for them, or maybe they felt criticized or disrespected. How can officers help build trusting and mutually beneficial relationships? How can they show families that this time will be different?

## Potential Strategies for Community Corrections

Probation and parole officers can become powerful advocates to enhance housing options for people who are involved in the justice system. Community corrections personnel can spearhead efforts to create sustainable change in their communities. Below are suggestions that may be useful strategies for collaboration to increase housing access, which can improve reentry outcomes.

### Draw on social networks for housing and other forms of support.

*In an Urban Institute study in Chicago, people interviewed four to eight months after release cited family as the most important factor in helping them stay out of prison; 92 percent reported getting financial support from someone in their family and 88 percent were living with family.<sup>23</sup>*

Parole officers routinely perform home visits and report on the nature of parolees' living arrangements. Parole officers could:

- Partner with and engage family members to ensure that they can effectively support a loved one who is involved in the justice system.
- Provide referrals to family members who need treatment for substance abuse, chronic or mental illness, or those looking for employment, counseling, or further education.
- Consider the benefits of allowing the person under supervision to live with a friend or family member who provides positive social support. This can be done as part of the typical process a parole officer undergoes in determining where and with whom a parolee is allowed to reside.

At times living with family is *not* the best option for someone returning home from jail or prison. For example, a parole officer might ask a woman preparing to leave prison about staying with an aunt who lives near by. The woman may decide that she does not want to live with her aunt—her only relative in the area—because her aunt drinks frequently and the woman does not feel that her aunt's home would be a supportive environment for her recovery.

### Engage public housing authorities to address shared goals.

Public safety is a priority for public housing officials and community corrections personnel. Public safety and family well-being are compatible goals. By educating public housing officials about the value of family stability, community corrections agencies can promote community safety. Community corrections agencies can help inform and influence the decisions of public housing authorities. Housing authorities may establish family well-being as a priority and recognize the ways in which a well-supported family can be a resource for maintaining community safety and stable housing.

You may want to:

- Know the law: Many public housing providers are misinformed about the degree of discretion they have under local, state, and federal laws to rent to people with criminal records.
- Urge public housing authorities to use discretion and consider factors such as the type of crime committed, the time that has passed since crimes were committed, the programs an individual has completed, whether he or she is employed or in treatment, whether the person is connected to a network of supporters, the wishes of the family, and the benefit to the family if this individual is permitted to reside in public housing.
- Find out whether your state issues certificates of rehabilitation or certificates of relief that prospective tenants can present to public housing authorities. Help people involved in the justice system gather records of good conduct, progress, employment while incarcerated, educational attainments, and other documents that support their housing application.
- In cases when a parolee has demonstrated consistent progress and social responsibility, offer reassurances (not guarantees) about an individual or family you believe will be a responsible tenant.
- Advocate for public housing authorities to set aside a certain number of available units or Section 8 vouchers for people involved in the criminal justice system and for their families.

### Communicate with private landlords.

Housing providers often need reassurance when considering renting to people involved in the criminal justice system. Landlords often have more autonomy to choose tenants than they think. In the course of their normal routines, community corrections officers can advocate for families they believe will be good tenants.

Consider:

- Reaching out to private landlords. Ask them how they make decisions. Ask what their concerns are and brainstorm about what you can do to make them feel comfortable renting to people who have been involved in the criminal justice system.
- Educating landlords to help dispel the stigma surrounding families with a loved one involved in the justice system. While protecting confidential information, be open about people's strengths, challenges, and concerns, and how you intend to support family members.

### *Housing Readiness*

*In Oregon in 1998, the Portland Housing Center created a housing readiness curriculum for renters having difficulties finding housing because of their rental history, poor credit, or a criminal background. Ready to Rent teaches tenant responsibility, landlord-tenant law, strategies for credit repair, and financial management.*

*Ready to Rent offers a train-the-trainer program so that agencies that provide advocacy, referrals, or case management for people who face housing barriers can offer its curriculum. For more information, visit [www.readytorent.org](http://www.readytorent.org).*



## Work in partnership with housing developers and nonprofit housing providers to create housing options for people who have been involved in the criminal justice system.

Demand for affordable housing exceeds supply, and this has a great impact on families that have a loved one involved in the justice system. The federal government has advocated for the renewal of public housing nationwide. When public housing is reconstructed, buildings often have fewer units—and many are re-designated for tenants with higher income levels as buildings are turned into “mixed-income” housing.

In a declining economy, the job market is more competitive, and this often means fewer options for people who have a criminal record. As a result of limited income, many families do not qualify for “mixed-income” housing.

Think about:

- Asking housing developers to commit to creating sufficient units for people in lower income brackets and designated spaces for collaboration with community-based organizations that provide support services. For example, the New York City Housing Authority was the site of one of Family Justice’s satellite offices in East New York, a Brooklyn community disproportionately affected by crime and victimization. A developer might also design public housing developments with space for social service offices or a library.
- Supportive housing is often designed solely for individuals. You may want to encourage developers to create supportive housing or transitional housing for *families* with a loved one involved in the criminal justice system.

### ***Employment***

*While obtaining affordable housing is crucial, families must earn enough income to pay subsidized rent and utilities. In most cases, finding employment is essential to maintaining a stable living situation. Though employment is not the primary focus of this handbook, agencies that concentrate on securing housing for people coming home from jail and prison should consider a companion effort to help families find jobs and support themselves.*

## Advocate for policy change.

In an era when incarceration has increased exponentially, current laws are often conflicting and contrary to the safe and successful reentry of incarcerated people in their communities. Many policy makers and their constituents understand that meeting the basic needs of people coming home from jail and prison—such as housing—can help them succeed. Many would agree that people who have served their time deserve real second chances. However, local, state, and federal policies do not always reflect this. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Close to a third of the adult population, or 64 million Americans, have federal or state criminal records, and are therefore potentially affected by federal laws and regulations that limit their access to public housing.”<sup>24</sup>

Arkansas' reentry work group—comprising housing developers and representatives from corrections, community corrections, public housing authorities, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and academics—identified a number of policies they would like to see changed. For example, people in Arkansas cannot be released from facilities until they have an approved address to which they will return. Even though parole has been granted and the person is scheduled to transition to community supervision, the person must remain incarcerated due to a lack of housing. The work group discussed advocating for this group of people to be classified as homeless so that they can have access to homeless services and be released from prison.

In forming your own work group, you may choose to:

- Educate yourself about the policies that affect your work and participants' success.
- Advocate for tax incentives for organizations that provide housing or employment opportunities for people with criminal histories.
- Advocate for certificates of rehabilitation to present the accomplishments and credentials of those who are working hard to change.
- Seek out opportunities to influence law and policy that affect public safety and effective prisoner reentry through professional associations.

## Process

While housing for individuals involved in the criminal justice system—and for their families—is a challenge across the nation, every community is different. People have different cultures, different resources, and different needs. Though each community will respond to the issue in ways that are appropriate on a local level, here are some suggestions about processes that have been effective in the past.

### Create an advisory group of community stakeholders.

Housing and reentry encompass many other issues, professional disciplines, and program areas. Think about what goals you may share with community partners:

- Decreasing recidivism
- Decreasing homelessness
- Enhancing family health and well-being
- Increasing public safety
- Creating cost-effective solutions

Who in your community has a stake in these goals and needs to know about your activities? Use your advisory group strategically: Some members should be people with resources; some with experience or expertise, who are great at generating new ideas; and others who are methodical. The advisory group should include people who can become strong advocates for the project and others who need to be won over to the cause.

A sample **advisory group** might include representatives from:

- Law enforcement
- Corrections
- Community corrections
- People involved in the justice system and their family members
- Public housing
- Nonprofit housing developers
- Local Section 8 landlords
- Department of Social Services
- Community-based organizations that serve people coming home from jail and prison and their families
- Community development organizations
- Homeless shelters
- Relevant government offices

### **Research the issues.**

Issues that affect reentry housing include:

- Growing rates of homelessness
- High rates of crime and recidivism
- High rates of people released from jail and prison each year returning to the local community
- Limited services for low-income families and people involved in the criminal justice system
- Restrictive public-housing eligibility policies
- Long waiting lists for affordable housing

### **Draft an agenda.**

- What do you want to accomplish?
- What kind of approach would work in your area?
- What challenges do you anticipate? How might you overcome them?
- What additional partners can you engage?

**Exercise:** *Try creating a collective wish list.*

If the advisory group and its members had infinite resources, what would you do to increase housing options for people leaving prison and jail?

Make a wish list of programs and solutions, and then talk about what it would take to accomplish those things. Collaboration can make even the loftiest goals attainable.

### Form an action plan and assigning duties.

Family Justice has used action plans with participants at its direct-service sites as well as in professional development. Action plans identify large goals and break them down into achievable steps. Your advisory group may want to create an action plan. Ask members to take on appropriate tasks. The group could then meet regularly to report on progress, update the plan as necessary, and discuss unexpected challenges and victories.

Goals should be:  
**Specific**  
**Measurable**  
**Achievable**  
**Relevant; realistic**  
**Time-limited**  
**Strength-based**

In an initial meeting in Arkansas, the work group split into small groups to brainstorm potential goals, and then came together to discuss which goals people could agree upon as priorities. After identifying goals, the work group listed the immediate objectives and tasks related to each goal. Each member took on tasks with specific due dates and agreed to report back. At subsequent meetings, the work group members discussed their successes and challenges, assigned new tasks, and amended their plans as necessary.

#### Action Plan: Sample Item

Goal: Build 14 units of transitional housing by September 2011 for families with members reentering the Kensington community.

- Objective 1: Find a nonprofit housing developer to work with by November 2009.
  - Create a list of four affordable housing developers who work in this area—George T. by October 1, 2009.

### Reach out to new partners.

Creative problem-solving involves matching the right people with the right tasks. What issues do you want to tackle? To which community organizations can you reach out? Seek out those who share common interests or have a stake in your goals. For example, in many rural communities transportation is a challenge for participants who want to attend treatment or other programs but live far from available services. In these areas, community corrections departments may not have funding for people's transportation. Perhaps a nearby church would be willing to have volunteers drive a van or could donate a van and provide a stipend to drivers.

## Celebrate success.

Amid project delays and unexpected challenges, we sometimes forget to celebrate successes. Find ways to congratulate families and advisory-group participants on meeting their goals; even a small step counts as progress. You may want to:

- Host a family day so that you can meet families and congratulate them on everything that is going well.
- Organize an awards ceremony for participants, family members, advisory-board members, or others who have contributed to the community.
- Host an event. Boaz and Ruth, a nonprofit in Richmond, Virginia, hosts the Long Walk to Freedom. The community walk is designed to raise awareness about reentry challenges and successes, and to raise money for the service providers that participate by lining the route with information booths.
- Solicit political and media attention. Consult someone with experience in public relations and gauge sentiment in the community. If it seems advantageous, initiate a public-service campaign. Get professional advice about contacting local newspapers, online communities, and radio and television stations about your project.



## The Role of Corrections Agencies

Though this manual is directed toward community corrections personnel, members of the pilot work group formed by the Arkansas Department of Community Correction chose to involve their counterparts from the Department of Correction in their efforts. Both agencies recognize the importance of continuity between preparation inside a facility and services upon release.

Here are some potential strategies corrections partners may consider to support efforts in community corrections:

### Maintain family relationships during incarceration.

- Provide incarcerated people and their families with phone cards to help them stay connected, instead of charging exorbitant amounts for collect calls.
- Facilitate more frequent visitation by extending hours.
- Provide transportation to distant institutions.
- Host special events for families.
- Make the process of entering correctional institutions more welcoming to children and adults who visit.
- Institutional release officers could create a forum for family members to discuss their concerns about reentry before their loved one is released.

### Consider family in reentry planning.

When creating reentry plans, corrections staff should urge people to think about their families:

- Who will serve as a resource?
- Who will require support?
- What changes might have taken place while the person has been incarcerated?
- Who would the person like to be in touch with?
- What issues should be discussed prior to release?

### Facilitate the process of obtaining housing.

- Correctional case managers can address housing needs or employ a reentry housing coordinator.
- Allow incarcerated people day passes to look for housing and jobs in the community during the last 90 days of their sentence.
- Establish contacts with local housing providers and maintain a list of possible rooms or apartments for rent.
- Consider contacting rural housing programs, such as self-help housing, that assist families in building housing at low cost.
- Consider allowing formerly incarcerated people to move to another county or state if appropriate family supports are there.

## Case Studies

### Maine Department of Corrections<sup>25</sup>

#### Impetus:

Almost 40 percent of people in homeless shelters in Maine have been incarcerated. Both the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing) and the Maine Department of Corrections (DOC) want to keep shelters available for the existing homeless population and knew that providing stable housing for formerly incarcerated individuals would enhance community safety and reduce recidivism.

#### Collaboration:

Maine DOC worked closely with MaineHousing to tackle the issue of providing safe, affordable housing for people involved in the justice system. Becky Hayes Boober, executive director of the Maine Department of Corrections' Maine Reentry Network, said, "We looked at it as a surmountable challenge. We knew we had to get beyond the 'turf stuff,' beyond the barriers. We decided to put the best interests of the families at the center of our decisions, and that helped us let go of all the other bureaucratic issues."

When the Maine Reentry Emergency Transitional Housing pilot program began, the Maine State Housing Authority and the DOC signed a memorandum of understanding detailing their cooperation and specific strategies for working together.

Many sources fund the collaboration: the governor's office, the state legislature, the Maine State Housing Authority, HUD funds, Maine DOC, the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative, the Prisoner Reentry Initiative, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

#### Program Features:

- Maine law has a two-tiered registry of people convicted of sex offenses. In compliance with federal HUD regulations, those on the lifetime registry do not qualify for housing assistance. However, those with a 10-year ban still qualify for some MaineHousing services and subsidies.
- The Rental Assistance Plus Care (RAC) program provides rental assistance coupons and support services to populations who are low priority for Section 8 and therefore not eligible to jump long waiting lists and obtain housing in the short term. RAC is a 24-month, full-market value rental subsidy designed for people leaving correctional institutions, youth who have aged out of foster care, homeless youth, and victims of domestic violence.
- A RAC housing coordinator in each of three state regions helps people reentering the community to find and retain housing. The coordinator serves on DOC reentry teams to assist correctional facility residents in obtaining safe, affordable housing before release from prison.
- DOC assembled reentry teams to connect RAC participants with resources in the community. Each team is tailored to a specific participant, and often includes both natural

supports such as mentors, friends, and family members, and professional supports such as parole officers, case workers, counselors, and drug treatment professionals. Together, they create a reentry plan addressing strengths, risks, and needs. The team follows the individual for six months to two years after release.

- A women's reentry emergency housing program pays the deposit and first month's rent for an apartment. Women are enrolled in a prerelease program during the last six months of their sentence. During this time women can look for jobs and housing and plug into the network of treatment and support options available in the community. Finding a job and demonstrating their drug-free status make them eligible for housing.

#### **Outcomes/Next Steps:**

- DOC is developing a housing registry of landlords who are willing to rent to people with a history of involvement in the criminal justice system. The DOC is also working with the Maine State Housing Authority to educate more landlords.



## Housing Assistance Rental Program (HARP), Salt Lake County, Utah<sup>26</sup>

### Impetus:

The Homeless Assistance Rental Program was created in 2006 by a coalition of agencies concerned about homelessness among people with mental illness, substance abuse issues, or involvement in the justice system, as well as youth aging out of foster care.

### Collaboration:

Through collaboration among the Salt Lake County Divisions of Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Criminal Justice Services, and Youth Services, and the Housing Authority of the County of Salt Lake (HACSL), the program provides immediate housing and supportive services to the targeted populations. Participating agencies and the county jail can refer people to HARP. Each agency is responsible for providing case management and other supportive services to the people it refers. HARP is funded by HOME money from the Department of Housing and Urban Development as well as funds from the Salt Lake City Council.

### Program Features:

- The Housing Authority assists people in finding affordable housing and provides Tenant-Based Rental Assistance and Section 8 vouchers to supplement income.
- The Housing Authority cultivates a large network of landlords and educates them about the program. The Housing Authority also guarantees that rent will be paid and that tenants from the program will check in regularly with supportive service providers. Landlords have the opportunity to meet with case managers to address their concerns. Though there are funds set aside to pay for damages should a problem occur, no such funds have been needed since the program's inception.

### Outcomes/Next Steps:

The Utah Criminal Justice Center (of the University of Utah) evaluated the program and found that it improved participants' quality of life. The evaluation showed a marked reduction in incarceration of HARP participants. In the year before the program started, 58 participants were in jail for a total of 4,826 days. In the year after the program began, 29 participants were in jail for a total of 1,000 days. The number of jail bookings also dropped. The use of benefits decreased among people who had received them prior to HARP participation, but increased among those who had not.

## Burlington Housing Authority (BHA)<sup>27</sup>

Though Burlington is a city, the innovative Vermont program described below contains strategies that may be adapted for use in rural communities.

### Impetus:

In 2005, Vermont was faced with an increasing number of individuals involved in the justice system, causing the state's fast-growing corrections budget to exceed even the state's education budget. For years, state policymakers had discussed strategies to decrease recidivism, reduce reliance on incarceration, and cut costs—but little programmatic activity occurred on a local level. Finally, a group of municipal officials, law enforcement professionals, corrections personnel, and service providers set out to address cycles of involvement in the justice system.

### Collaboration:

The group formed a regional advisory committee to determine the state's needs, draft a housing plan, and implement an effective project. The goals of the housing plan specified increasing the availability of appropriate housing for people being released from jail, coordinating services, and creating means for support of and accountability from people reentering their communities. The BHA then developed the Burlington Housing Authority's Offender Re-Entry Housing Program.

### Program Features:

- Staff contracted by the Department of Corrections—Offender Re-Entry Housing Specialists (ORHS)—work with incarcerated individuals, and those under high-level community supervision to assist them with finding appropriate housing. With a specialist's help, many reentering people are able to join families in public housing or Section 8 rental properties.
- The Burlington Housing Authority reviews each application for public housing on a case-by-case basis. Housing authority staff reports that they are reassured when applicants participate in the program, because they are able to make informed decisions based on ORHS recommendations.
- ORHS staff works with local landlords to secure housing. A handful of local property owners participate in the program with the understanding that the ORHS will provide follow-up support and housing retention services to people in the program. This service includes direct collaboration with the DOC field staff (probation/parole officers) and any other community service providers with whom the program participants interact. It also offers crisis intervention, conflict resolution, employment search assistance, budget assistance, relapse prevention planning, and supportive counseling. As a result, people are less likely to lose their housing if they return to jail for a technical violation of release conditions, and landlords perceive a reduced risk in renting to those tenants.

### Outcomes and Next Steps:

With the help of the regional study group, the BHA recognized the need for housing designated for special populations. Together with community partners—Vermont Works for Women, the Howard Center for Human Services, Vermont Children’s Aid Society, Mercy Connections, and others—BHA developed a supported transitional housing program, Northern Lights, for incarcerated women returning to the community. After an initial commitment of seven months, residents obtain a housing voucher they can use to transition to other types of housing in the community. Support services are provided for at least six months after the resident graduates the program.

The BHA also partnered with Dismas of Vermont to create additional transitional housing units in the area. After working through the appropriate community channels, including the city council and the planning and zoning office, Dismas and BHA met with opposition from community members who did not want transitional housing in their neighborhoods. The partners persisted and found a community for the project after several unsuccessful attempts. By collaborating with Police Chief Steve McQueen, they made the case for building nine units in the city of Winooski.

Though the BHA has had success housing women reentering the community, as well as their families, it remains a struggle to find housing for single men who are involved in the criminal justice system. Such men often find it difficult to secure subsidies because families and people with disabilities usually have priority. However, the agency is already planning its next project: creating affordable, transitional efficiency apartments for this “hard-to-house” population.

## Relevant Laws and Policies<sup>28</sup>

Did you know?

- Public housing agencies administer public housing, housing choice vouchers, and other vouchers for special needs populations.
- According to federal law, public housing authorities have the *discretion* to admit applicants with a history of violent, drug, or other crimes if they believe that these applicants will not threaten the health or safety of residents.
- In terms of drug-related restrictions, people can be denied admission to federally assisted housing only if they were convicted of *producing methamphetamine in public housing*, if they were *evicted* from public housing for drug-related activity *within the last three years*, or if they are *currently* abusing substances.
- People who have committed sex offenses are barred from public housing by federal law only if they are *lifetime registered*.

The following overview of federal housing policy is designed to inform readers about the restrictions that apply to people under supervision.

### Federally Assisted Multi-Family Rental and Housing Options

#### Federal Housing Programs

Since the mid-1930s, the federal government has supported the production of low- and moderate-income housing in rural areas.<sup>29</sup> Targeted government housing assistance plays a significant role in the ability of low-income households to obtain and maintain decent housing, and this assistance has directly improved conditions for millions of low-income rural Americans.

The nation's federal housing strategies have evolved into a complex patchwork of programs. Housing initiatives that reach rural communities are primarily funded and administered through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Rural Development, the Internal Revenue Service, and others. HUD is the dominant source of federal funding for low- and moderate-income housing nationwide. USDA Rural Development programs receive a relatively small amount of total federal housing dollars. Still, these programs—specifically, the rental housing program—have produced many units in rural communities across the country.

#### U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development

Rural Development (RD) is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). It operates a broad range of programs formerly administered by the Farmers' Home Administration (FHA) to support affordable housing and community development in rural areas.

RD housing programs are available to eligible applicants in two areas:

- Open country that is not part of, or associated with, an urban area<sup>30</sup>
- Any town, village, city, or place, including a densely settled area, that
  - Is not part of, or associated with, an urban area and has a population not in excess of 10,000 and is rural in character, or
  - Has a population between 10,000 and 20,000; is not contained within a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA); and has a serious lack of mortgage credit as determined by the USDA and HUD.

## U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, often referred to as HUD, is the nation's primary federal agency focusing on issues of housing and community development. HUD works to create decent homes and a suitable living environment for Americans by addressing housing needs, improving and developing local communities, and enforcing fair housing laws.<sup>31</sup>

HUD's divisions include Housing and FHA, Community Planning and Development, Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, Public and Indian Housing, Policy Development and Research, and Public Affairs. Each state has a field office; 29 area offices are located in major metropolitan areas.<sup>32</sup>

The following section provides a brief overview of federally assisted housing options that may be available for formerly incarcerated persons. This includes a general description of the program, its eligibility requirements, and policies toward applicants with criminal backgrounds.<sup>33</sup>

## USDA-RD Section 515 Rental Housing Program

### Overview

USDA's Section 515 Rural Rental Housing program has been the mainstay of the USDA's efforts to serve the poorest of the rural poor for the past 45 years. The Section 515 program provides mortgage loans to develop rental housing for very low-, low-, and moderate-income households. Section 515 is administered by USDA Rural Development (RD) at the national, state, and local levels. The current Section 515 portfolio contains nearly 16,000 projects providing affordable rental units for more than 445,000 rural households. Tenants pay basic rent or 30 percent of adjusted income, whichever is greater. An RD rental assistance subsidy can be used to reduce tenant payments to 30 percent of their income. Tenants may also receive rent subsidies from other sources. Section 515 residents have an average annual income of \$9,785 and nearly 60 percent of them are elderly or have disabilities.<sup>34</sup>

### Eligibility

Very low-, low-, and moderate-income families; elderly persons; and persons with handicaps and disabilities are eligible to live in Section 515-financed housing. Very low income is defined as below 50 percent of the area median income (AMI); low income is between 50 and 80 percent of AMI; moderate income is capped at \$5,500 above the low-income limit. Those living in substandard housing are given first priority for tenancy. When rental assistance is used, top priority is given to very low-income households.

*Admissions for Applicants with Criminal Backgrounds: The owner has discretion in admitting applicants with criminal and drug offenses. 7 C.F.R. § 3560.154.<sup>35</sup>*

### Associated Issues

Many federal rural housing programs have gone through dramatic transformations in recent years because of budget cuts and program alterations. A prime example has been the reduction in the Section 515 rural rental program. In federal Fiscal Year (FY) 1994, the program funded the development of 11,542 units of affordable rental housing. In contrast, only 486 units were developed under the program in FY 2006, reflecting more than a 90 percent reduction from mid-1990s production levels.<sup>36</sup>

### Additional Information

For additional information on Section 515 and RD, contact:

The National Office  
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250  
202-690-1533

or your Rural Development State Office, which you can find at [www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd\\_map.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html)

Copies of RD regulations and handbooks are available at [www.rurdev.usda.gov/regs](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/regs).<sup>37</sup>

## USDA-RD Section 538 Guaranteed Rural Rental Housing Program

### Overview

Under the Section 538 program, USDA RD guarantees loans made by private lenders for the development of affordable rural rental housing with at least five units. The program is used to guarantee permanent financing, or a combination of construction and permanent loan. The current Section 538 portfolio contains fewer than 150 properties. These Section 538 properties encompass more than 8,000 units of affordable rental housing. Section 538 properties are located in 115 counties across the United States and most of these counties also have Section 515 properties.

### Eligibility

Tenants in the Section 538 program must have incomes at or under 115 percent of area median income at the time of initial occupancy.

*Admissions for Applicants with Criminal Backgrounds: The owner has discretion in admitting applicants with criminal and drug offenses. 7 C.F.R. § 3560.154.<sup>38</sup>*

## Associated Issues

Section 538, which was created by Congress in 1996, differs in some important ways from USDA's longstanding Section 515 Rural Rental Housing Program. Section 538 focuses on partnerships between USDA and qualified lenders, whereas Section 515 makes loans directly to nonprofit or for-profit rural housing developers. Section 538 is intended to provide decent, affordable rental housing for low- and moderate-income rural households with incomes up to 115 percent of area median income, higher than the income of households served by Section 515.

## Additional Information

For additional information on Section 538, contact:

Rural Development  
 USDA  
 1400 Independence Ave. S.W., Stop 0781  
 Washington, D.C. 20250  
 202-690-4499

Contact your Rural Development State Office to find the local office closest to you, or visit [www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd\\_map.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html). Copies of RHS regulations are available at [www.rurdev.usda.gov/regs](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/regs).<sup>39</sup>

## HUD Public Housing

### Overview

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Public Housing program is one of the nation's oldest and largest subsidized rental initiatives. Created by the 1937 Housing Act, public housing is a hallmark of the New Deal. Public housing authorities (PHAs) are operated and governed by locally appointed or elected Boards of Commissioners. More than 14,000 public housing developments are operated by 3,050 PHAs, containing more than 1.2 million units. Several million people in this country live in public housing. More than 40 percent of PHA housing units have children present. Approximately 19 percent of PHA residents are elderly. More than half of PHA households are headed by racial and ethnic minorities and nearly 40 percent of PHA-occupied households are headed by women.<sup>40</sup>

Like many other federal housing assistance programs, residents of public housing pay the highest of:

- (1) 30 percent of their monthly adjusted income;
- (2) 10 percent of their monthly gross income;
- (3) Their welfare shelter allowance; or
- (4) A PHA-established minimum rent of up to \$50.<sup>41</sup>

### Eligibility

Public housing is open to low-income households or those that make less than 80 percent of the area median income. Forty percent of new admissions each year are required to have incomes at or below 30 percent AMI.

*Admissions for Applicants with Criminal Backgrounds: PHAs must permanently deny admission to lifetime registered sex offenders and persons convicted of producing methamphetamine at federally assisted housing, 24 C.F.R. § 960.204. There is a 3-year ban on admissions for applicants with a prior eviction from federally assisted housing for drug-related activity, 24 C.F.R. § 960.204. PHAs have the discretion to admit applicants with a history of violent, drug, or other crimes that would threaten the health, safety, or peaceful enjoyment of residents, 42 U.S.C.A. § 1366. PHAs must deny admission to current users of illegal substances, 24 C.F.R. § 960.204.<sup>42</sup>*

### Associated Issues

The demand for public housing far exceeds the supply. Because waiting lists are typically long and in high-need areas, obtaining housing can take years.

### Additional Information

For additional information on HUD's Public Housing Program contact:

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
 451 7<sup>th</sup> St. S.W.  
 Washington, D.C. 20410  
 202-708-1112  
 TTY: 202-708-1455  
[www.hud.gov/renting/phprog.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/renting/phprog.cfm)

## HUD Project-Based Rental Assistance

### Overview

HUD's Project-Based Rental Assistance program—often referred to as Project-Based Section 8—provides for privately owned multifamily housing for low-income households through a federal subsidy of the mortgage, rental assistance, or a combination of the two. More than 1 million families live in homes with project-based assistance; two-thirds of these include elderly or disabled family members. People residing in project-based units pay 30 percent of their adjusted income in rent and HUD rental assistance pays the remainder of the unit rent.<sup>43</sup>

### Eligibility

Residents in units receiving project-based Section 8 assistance must have low incomes (less than 80 percent of area median income). Forty percent of new admissions each year are required to have very low incomes (at or below 30 percent of AMI).<sup>44</sup>

*Admissions for Applicants with Criminal Backgrounds: PHAs must permanently deny admission to lifetime registered sex offenders and persons convicted of producing methamphetamine at federally assisted housing, 24 C.F.R. § 882.518. There is a 3-year ban on admissions for applicants with a prior eviction from federally assisted housing for drug-related activity, 24 C.F.R. § 882.518. PHAs have the discretion to admit applicants with a history of violent, drug, or other crimes that would threaten the health, safety, or peaceful enjoyment of residents, 24 C.F.R. § 882.518. PHAs must deny admission to current users of illegal substances, 24 C.F.R. § 882.518.<sup>45</sup>*



## Additional Information

For additional information on HUD's Project-Based Rental Assistance, contact:

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
 451 7<sup>th</sup> St. S.W.  
 Washington, D.C. 20410  
 202-708-1112  
 TTY: 202-708-1455 <sup>46</sup>

## HUD Housing Choice Vouchers

### Overview

Tenant-based federal rental assistance was established in 1974 during a significant overhaul of housing assistance. In 2007, about 1.8 million households utilized HUD rental assistance vouchers, often referred to as Section 8 tenant-based assistance. Housing Choice Vouchers allow low-income households to access privately owned units of their choosing. Within the voucher program, a federal subsidy covers the difference between a tenant's income and the "payment standard," which is the total rent and utility costs the PHA will cover. Housing Choice Vouchers are typically administered by public housing agencies.

### Eligibility

Since 1998, three-quarters of new voucher holders must have extremely low incomes, at or below 30 percent of the area median income (AMI). The remaining 25 percent of new vouchers can be distributed to tenants with incomes up to 80 percent of AMI.<sup>47</sup>

*Admissions for Applicants with Criminal Backgrounds. PHAs must permanently deny voucher to lifetime registered sex offenders and persons convicted of producing methamphetamine at federally assisted housing, 24 C.F.R. § 982.553. There is a 3-year ban on admissions for applicants with a prior eviction from federally assisted housing for drug-related activity, 24 C.F.R. § 982.553. PHAs have the discretion to admit applicants with a history of violent, drug, or other crimes that would threaten the health, safety, or peaceful enjoyment of residents, 24 C.F.R. § 982.553. PHAs must deny vouchers to current users of illegal substances, 24 C.F.R. § 982.553.<sup>48</sup>*

### Associated Issues

Vouchers must be utilized for housing that meets HUD quality standards and is owned by a landlord willing to enter into a Housing Assistance Payment contract with the PHA. The PHA has the authority to modify the payment standard to as low as 90 percent of the Fair Market Rent and as high as 110 percent. Within certain limitations, a qualified tenant can rent a unit for any amount of money, so long as the PHA considers the rent reasonable.

## Additional Information

For additional information on HUD's Housing Choice Vouchers, contact:

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7<sup>th</sup> St. S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20410  
202-708-1112  
TTY: 202-708-1455  
[www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/homeownership](http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/homeownership)

## Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)

### Overview

The LIHTC program, adopted by Congress through the 1986 Tax Reform Act, provides for a reduction in the dollar amount of federal taxes owed by an individual or corporation in exchange for its investment in low-income rental housing. The amount of tax reduction is tied directly to the proportion of low-income persons among the residents of the housing produced. As of 2004, approximately 25,000 LIHTC properties existed throughout the United States and Puerto Rico, with an estimated 1.4 million units of housing. LIHTC tenants pay a fixed maximum tax credit rent based on 50 percent or 60 percent of the area median income. Private landlords operate LIHTC properties, which must accept Housing Choice Vouchers as rental assistance.

### Eligibility

Tax Credit units are available to households at or below 50 percent or 60 percent of the area median income. Approximately 90 percent of these LIHTC units are occupied by low-income households.<sup>49</sup>

*Admissions for Applicants with Criminal Backgrounds: There are no federal rules regarding admission of applicants with criminal backgrounds for Low-Income Tax Credit housing.<sup>50</sup>*

### Associated Issues

LIHTC credits are often combined with funding from other federal and state programs. HUD HOME, Community Development Block Grant, Section 8 project-based, and USDA Section 515 are often used in conjunction with tax credits.

## Additional Information

For additional information on the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program, contact:

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7<sup>th</sup> St. S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20410  
202-708-1112  
TTY: 202-708-1455  
[www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/lihtcmou.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/lihtcmou.cfm)

## HUD Section 202 Elderly Housing

### Overview

HUD's Section 202 program provides capital and operating funds to nonprofit organizations that develop and operate senior housing. Section 202 has two components. The first provides capital advances to nonprofit organizations for the construction, rehabilitation, or acquisition of supportive housing for seniors. Additionally, Section 202 provides rental assistance in the form of Project Rental Assistance Contracts to subsidize the operating expenses of the developments.<sup>51</sup> The average Section 202 resident is 79 years old, and nearly 39 percent of this program's residents are over the age of 80. The average annual income of a resident is little more than \$10,000.

### Eligibility

Residents of Section 202 housing must be at least 62 years old and be very low income.

*Admissions for Applicants with Criminal Backgrounds: Owners must permanently deny admission to lifetime registered sex offenders, 24 C.F.R. § 5.856. Owners have discretion to admit persons convicted of producing methamphetamine at federally assisted housing, 24 C.F.R. § 5.855. There is a 3-year ban on admissions for applicants with a prior eviction from federally assisted housing for drug-related activity, 24 C.F.R. § 5.855. Owners have the discretion to admit applicants with a history of violent, drug, or other crimes that would threaten the health, safety, or peaceful enjoyment of residents, 24 C.F.R. § 5.855. Owners must deny admission to current users of illegal substances, 24 C.F.R. § 5.854.<sup>52</sup>*

### Additional Information

For additional information on HUD's Section 202 Program, contact:

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7<sup>th</sup> St. S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20410  
202-708-1112  
TTY: 202-708-1455  
[www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/mfh/progdsc/eld202.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/mfh/progdsc/eld202.cfm)

## HUD Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities

### Overview

HUD's Section 811 Supportive Housing Program provides housing for people with serious and long-term disabilities. These units are administered by private, non-profit organizations. Section 811 was created through the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990, which separated housing for people with disabilities from the Section 202 program. The intent of the program is to provide housing and community-based services and supports to help those with physical or developmental disabilities live as independently as possible. Additionally, Section 811 provides for project-based rental assistance to cover the difference between the HUD-approved operating cost per unit and 30 percent of a resident's adjusted income.<sup>53</sup>

## Eligibility

Participants must have a disability, such as a physical or developmental disability or chronic mental illness. Additionally, tenants must be at least 18 years of age and have very low incomes—at or below 50 percent of area median income.

*Admissions for Applicants with Criminal Backgrounds: Owners must permanently deny admission to lifetime registered sex offenders, 24 C.F.R. § 5.856. Owners have discretion to admit persons convicted of producing methamphetamine at federally assisted housing, 24 C.F.R. § 5.855. There is a 3-year ban on admissions for applicants with a prior eviction from federally assisted housing for drug-related activity, 24 C.F.R. § 5.855. Owners have the discretion to admit applicants with a history of violent, drug, or other crimes that would threaten the health, safety, or peaceful enjoyment of residents, 24 C.F.R. § 5.855. Owners must deny admission to current users of illegal substances, 24 C.F.R. § 5.854.<sup>54</sup>*

## Additional Information

For additional information on HUD's Section 811 Program, contact:

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7<sup>th</sup> St. S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20410  
202-708-1112  
TTY: 202-708-1455  
[www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/mfh/progdsc/disab811.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/mfh/progdsc/disab811.cfm)

## Additional Resources

Center for Housing Policy  
1801 K St., N.W., Suite M-100  
Washington, D.C. 20006-1301  
202-466-2121  
[www.nhc.org/index/chp-index](http://www.nhc.org/index/chp-index)

Housing Assistance Council  
1025 Vermont Ave. N.W., Suite 606  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
202-842-8600  
[www.ruralhome.org](http://www.ruralhome.org)

Human Rights Watch  
350 Fifth Ave., 34th Floor  
New York, NY 10118-3299  
212-290-4700  
[www.hrw.org/reports/2004/usa1104](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/usa1104)

Legal Action Center  
225 Varick St.  
New York, NY 10014  
212-243-1313  
Toll-free: 800-223-4044  
[www.lac.org/doc\\_library/lac/publications/using\\_laws.pdf](http://www.lac.org/doc_library/lac/publications/using_laws.pdf)

Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
501 Seventh Ave.  
New York, NY 10018  
212-455-9800  
[www.lisc.org](http://www.lisc.org)

National Alliance to End Homelessness  
1518 K St. N.W., Suite 410  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
202-638-1526  
[www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org)

National Coalition for the Homeless  
2201 P St. N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20037-1033  
202-462-4822  
[www.nationalhomeless.org](http://www.nationalhomeless.org)

National Housing Law Project  
614 Grand Ave., Suite 320  
Oakland, C.A. 94610  
510-251-9400  
[www.nhlp.org](http://www.nhlp.org)

National Low Income Housing Coalition  
727 15th St. N.W., 6th Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
202-662-1530  
[www.nlihc.org](http://www.nlihc.org)

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- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
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