DEAR RESIDENTS,

The Housing Authority of New Orleans is happy to deliver the first edition of the Housing Choice Voucher Program Newsletter to update you on what’s happening at HANO.

In this issue, we will update you on the policies and procedures of the HCVP program, and several important or recent activities in our communities. We have also included some tips on how voucher holders can adjust to their neighborhoods, and highlighted vital sections of the program handbook.

HANO staff members have been busy upgrading internal systems and enhancing programs to better serve our residents. Recently, we launched the Housing Choice Connect tool, and the new Elite system, which generates voucher distribution and reports.

Please take some time out of your busy schedule to catch up on the activities and programs that are there to better serve HANO residents.

Sincerely,

Administrative Receiver David Gilmore

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HANO ENCOURAGES FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program is part of HUD’s Home Ownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere (HOPE) Initiative to encourage economic stability and to reduce family reliance on public support.

FSS staff members work directly with families throughout the program which include financial fitness classes, educational development, and career training. Once the participant reaches the one-year mark, he or she is then eligible to receive first time home buying assistance.

“Through the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, we have been able to help families prepare for meaningful careers, increase their income, and assist them when purchasing a home,” said HANO Public Housing FSS Coordinator Elizabeth Hanami. “As a team, we strive to help the participant reach every goal set no matter how high that goal might seem.”

HANO anticipates building partnerships for the program that will create strategic alliances with community agencies, schools, and businesses to increase resources. Workshops will be scheduled in the coming months. Currently, the FSS program is assisting 235 HANO families.

To register, contact Stephanie Banks at sbanks@hano.org or Christell Washington at cwashington@hano.org, or call the HCVP hotline at (504) 708-2800.

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HCVP OFFICE IS MOVING!

The HCVP office located at 3630 MacArthur Blvd on the Westbank will close permanently at the close of business on March 30, 2012. The new HCVP offices will open on April 2, 2012 at 4100 Touro St. (Senate St. entrance). If you have any questions, call the HCVP hotline at (504) 708-2800.
MOVING HOME

After an extensive amount of time, hard work, discipline and sacrifice, Ronnell Webb became a first time homeowner through HANO’s Homeownership Program. The authority offers the program to Housing Choice Voucher participants, allowing families to apply their housing assistance payments to monthly mortgages, an option for first time homebuyers only.

Webb, a single mother of three, began the program in January 2009 and completed the program in December 2011. When asked how her life has changed she said, “I can’t even put it into words. It’s such a beautiful thing knowing you’ve accomplished something so major from where you started out. It makes you change and take pride in your life, and gives you a new sense of direction.”

Last year, HANO assisted 28 HCVP families in purchasing new homes across the city using their vouchers toward monthly payments.

To take the first step in purchasing a dream home, contact the HANO Homeownership Department at (504) 670-3277 or visit www.hano.org.

HANO LAUNCHES ELITE SYSTEM

This month, HANO launched the new Elite System, which generates updated documents on voucher distribution and inspections, financial reports, waitlist data and leasing information. These tools allow HANO staff to securely and efficiently complete data searches and payment distributions, along with scheduling reexamination reviews for program participants.

“HANO prioritized the reorganization of our database and reporting system,” said Administrative Director David Gilmore. “We’ve replaced the previous system with Elite, offering new features and security controls to increase program efficiencies. Elite also includes a fully intergrated inspection system, and is hosted and supported by the HANO IT staff.”

Vendors and landlords can view housing assistance Payments by resident, the status of an inspection, and the current and upcoming recertification process through the landlord portal.

Inspectors now utilize a handheld computer to enter real time data, which reduces the amount of paperwork, uploads photos, and downloads inspection reports to the main system daily.

For more information about the HANO Elite system visit www.hano.org.

HANO IN PHOTOS
HOW TO BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR

- Notify neighbors if you are hosting a gathering that may end late in the evening. Consider extending an invitation to your neighbor.
- Be respectful of your neighbors’ sleep schedules, especially those with young children or that normally leave early for work.
- Utilize public trash receptacles. Help keep your neighborhood clean.
- Keep your yard tidy and encourage neighbors to do the same.
- Participate in local neighborhood watch programs, neighborhood association meetings, or just keep an eye out for the safety of your neighbors and their homes.
- Report suspicious activity to HANO Police Department or the proper authorities.

DON’T LOSE YOUR VOUCHER!

Administrative Receiver David Gilmore has set a no tolerance standard for the families that do not follow the rules which allow them to retain their housing assistance vouchers. Below are examples of the most common reasons residents lose their housing vouchers.

The HCV family must:
- Supply all household information necessary for the annual or interim recertification process
- Notify HANO in writing of any plans of leaving the unit for an extended period of time
- Allow HQS inspections to take place
- Notify HANO and the property owner in writing before moving
- Notify staff within 10 days in writing of changes in the household composition (birth, death, marriage, adoption, or court awarded custody)
- Notify staff within 10 days in writing of any changes in household income
- Request approval from staff when adding household members
- Promptly notify staff if the number of family members is reduced

The HCV family must not:
- Commit any serious or repeated lease violations
- Commit fraud, bribery or any criminal act in connection with the program
- Engage in drug-related criminal activity or violent criminal activity that threatens the health, safety or right to peaceful enjoyment of other residents and persons residing in the immediate vicinity of the premises
- Sublease or sublet the assisted unit
- Receive HCV assistance while receiving additional subsidy for the same unit or a different unit under any other federal, state, or local housing assistance program
- Damage unit or premises (other than damage from normal wear and tear) or permit guests to damage unit or premises

For a complete listing of the family obligations, please review your Housing Choice Voucher or go to our website, www.hano.org.

HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS

In accordance with Federal Regulations, all HCV assisted units must be inspected annually to make sure that the unit continues to meet HUD established Housing Quality Standards (HQS). The head-of-household is required to be present for the annual inspection, and the owner is encouraged to be present as well. Some of the most common items that cause the unit to fail an HQS inspection are non-working smoke detectors, broken or missing window panes, non-locking windows, chipping and peeling paint, non-working outlets, exposed wiring, holes and stains in the walls and ceilings, and floor covering that cause tripping hazard.

Remember if you cause damage to the unit, it is your responsibility to make the repair. Your landlord should be contacted for problems in the unit that are not your fault. For additional guidance on problems in your unit, contact your assigned case manager.
CRIME PREVENTION CORNER:
Protecting Your Credit

The HANO Police Department encourages all Housing Choice Voucher Program families, particularly those within the Homeownership program, to be mindful of possible criminal activity.

Residents should be aware of scams targeting first-time homeowners, including identity theft. Criminals will use several methods of obtaining personal information such as searching through trash to find old bills or papers.

Thieves also target grocery stores and restaurants in search of credit and debit card numbers. Sometimes employees are bribed into noting and passing this type of information to a criminal.

Today, credit card criminals invent false banks, savings and loans corporations, and financial institutions that will contact individuals with bad or no credit with promises of low-interest rates and pre-approvals.

Phishing, or an attempt to acquire information, is a tactic used through spam or pop-up messages on computers.

Criminals have also been known to apply for a change of address at the local post office to alter a victims mailing address. This tactic is used to obtain billing statements, mortgage payments, and bank statements to secure personal information.

And don’t forget about the old fashioned pick pocket trick! Remember to always secure your wallet or purse.

To avoid becoming a victim of identity theft, consistently review bank and credit card statements, and watch for new purchases, cash advances or bank withdrawals. If bills are not received on time, be sure to contact your creditors immediately.

Remove mail from mailboxes as soon as possible. Also consider purchasing a mailbox lock, or rent a post office box. Never release personal information over the telephone or to an unverified email address.

Cut or shred all receipts, credit card applications, old checks or bank statements, but do not place them in the trash. Remember to annually check credit reports for free at www.annualcreditreport.com.

For more information or to report a crime call the HANO Police Department Hotline at (504) 670-3372.