

Denver & the West

Colorado public-housing agencies get \$381,000 to help families become self-sufficient

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The Denver Housing Authority has received another grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to help residents of public housing become economically self-sufficient.

HUD's Public and Indian Housing Family Self-Sufficiency program awarded nearly \$15 million Wednesday to more than 200 public-housing authorities across the nation. Colorado groups received \$381,000.

The Housing Authority of Boulder and the Fort Collins Housing Authority each received \$69,000.

The DHA received more than \$243,000, which will help its five case managers continue to train and educate more than 200 families in its Family Self-Sufficiency program.

Program services include help with job searches and creating resumes, obtaining financial aid and education scholarships, and financial-literacy workshops for credit repair and homeownership.

"About 25 percent of all (program) graduates bought their own home since 1993," said Renee Nicolosi, manager of the Resident and Community Services Department.

An evaluation of HUD's Family Self-Sufficiency programs, released earlier this year, tracked clients from 2005 to 2009 and found that 24 percent graduated from the program; 37 percent left before graduation; and 39 percent were still enrolled.

Because the recession hit halfway through the four-year study, many programs were forced to alter course.

"Denver's program changed focus from providing services that focused on job placement to

services that deliver more training and education as the first step toward employment," the report noted.

People often don't have jobs when they enter the Denver program "or they have jobs that are not full-time or don't pay much," Nicolosi said. "When we do the initial intake, we look at their education level, job skills and what they would like in five years. Some are put on the college or education track, and some are put on the job-training track."

Many are also put on the financial-fitness track "because even if you get your job skills up but don't understand financial literacy, you'll get into another bind," said Nicolosi.

They learn how to increase their income, repair credit scores, reduce debt and start saving money.

"In the last 12 months, 23 people increased their income, 29 people increased their credit score and there were six instances of debt reduction," Nicolosi said.

According to the study, the average annual income for graduates increased from about \$19,900 in the first tracking year to about \$33,400 in the graduation year.

In Denver, about 40 families are assigned to each case manager.

"They update with their case manager on a monthly basis, with an evaluation every six months to review their long-term and short-term goals," said Nicolosi.

Clients "graduate" when they land full-time jobs and stop receiving government assistance.

In Denver, about 40 percent of the graduates get jobs in clerical and office work; 20 percent in technical or management work; 10 percent in human services; 10 percent in health and medical; and 10 percent in manual labor.

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