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Preventing Homelessness: Helping families stay out of shelter

Latest MBHP Housing Matters Forum covers best practices for homelessness prevention

On September 15, MBHP convened a panel of industry experts for the latest installment of our Housing Matters Forum Series. The topic was Preventing Homelessness: “Front-end” solutions to help families stay out of shelter. The panel was moderated by Rose Evans, deputy undersecretary of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development. Participants included Regine Chrispin of MBHP; Lynn Delidow, vice president and regional manager of Maloney Properties; Gail Livingston, deputy administrator of housing programs for Boston Housing Authority, and MBHP RAFT participant Lisa Grullon.

Chrispin, who manages MBHP’s Housing Consumer Education Center, spoke about one resource in particular: RAFT funding. RAFT, which stands for Residential Assistance for Families in Transition, is a state-funded financial assistance program that helps families facing a housing crisis. Recipients can use RAFT funds to cover moving expenses or to avoid losing their current homes.

Chrispin also revealed new data from MBHP regarding the RAFT program. *RAFT in Review II*, the



MBHP Housing Matters Forum moderator and panelists along with MBHP board members Mary-Anne Morrison, Elizabeth Gruber, Esther Schlorholtz, Peter Munkenbeck and board co-chair Cynthia Lacasse; Tom Plihcik, executive director of New Lease for Homeless Families; and MBHP Executive Director Chris Norris.

latest report from MBHP, highlights the effectiveness of the program. One finding was that, in three years of the program, out of the 3,000 families who have participated, only 15 families have received funding for all three years. The report also demonstrated that in Metro Boston RAFT

potentially saved the state an estimated \$20 million dollars last year. The report also illustrates the important role that MBHP’s work in the field has in implementing the RAFT program: last year, families from 28 cities and towns (93 percent of MBHP’s region) received RAFT funds.

RAFT at colocations

MBHP staff members meet people at the following locations to assist them with RAFT applications. Visit www.mbhp.org (Programs > Colocations) for days, times, and contact information. For more about our work in the field, see Page 4.

Bunker Hill Community College
Roxbury Community College
CONNECT (Chelsea)

Interfaith South Services (Quincy)
Somerville Homeless Coalition
WATCH CDC (Waltham)



Mission statement

MBHP's mission is to ensure that the region's low- and moderate-income individuals and families have choice and mobility in finding and retaining decent affordable housing; all of our programs and initiatives are designed to encourage housing stability, increase economic self-sufficiency, and enhance the quality of the lives of those we serve. To achieve our mission and to promote efficient service delivery, we work collaboratively with a broad array of service providers and neighborhood-based organizations.

MBHP's programs

MBHP empowers families and individuals to move along the continuum from homelessness to housing stability. Serving more than 20,000 households annually, we work seamlessly to bridge the gaps among government, nonprofits, and corporations to continually increase our impact. With more than 30 years' experience piloting and implementing housing programs, we have solidified our position as an industry-leading expert on navigating the affordable housing field.

Our broad array of programs and services, as well as our extensive network of property owners and fellow service providers, allow us to address a wide range of housing-related issues, from preventing evictions and homelessness, to helping people find suitable homes, to making rent more affordable.

For more information on the many programs and services we administer, visit us online at www.mbhp.org or call our Housing Consumer Education Center at (617) 425-6700.

Going digital

MBHP Inspectional Services is utilizing technology to work more efficiently.

In 2012, MBHP inspectors began using tablet computers to complete inspection reports in the field, which minimized the amount of time needed to process paperwork. This instant access to reports and files allows office-based staff members to respond to questions, concerns, or complaints without having to disrupt inspectors in the field, increasing their productivity.

Based on the feedback we received, the computerized forms now have drop-down menus with the most common reasons for failed inspections, making it easier for owners to understand the exact repair needed. Inspectors can even use the online system to email reports, sending information to property owners and MBHP staff in real time so that lease-ups can occur quickly.

MBHP is also utilizing secure cloud-based technology to enable inspectors to share files when they are away from the office. This eliminates the need for their morning commute to downtown Boston, thus increasing their availability in the field and allowing them more flexibility to schedule inspections around tenants' needs. It also frees up desk space and phone lines in the office and saves MBHP \$20,000 each year in parking costs alone.

Since 2012, MBHP has increased the number of inspections we conduct annually by more than 1,000. In September, MBHP began providing technical assistance to other regional administering agencies so that this system can be implemented across the state.

Compass Family Self-Sufficiency Program Update

May marked the end of the first year of the Compass FSS Program. This partnership with Compass Working Capital enhances MBHP's existing FSS program by providing financial coaching with an increased focus on asset building and debt reduction.

First year accomplishments:

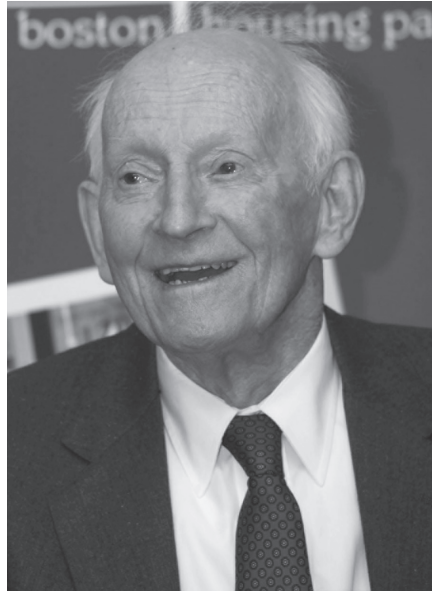
- Received 615 applications, enrolled 79 new participants.
- 54 percent of participants increased their credit score.
- 51 percent reduced their total debt.
- 69 percent reported an increase in earned income.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT: Robert Whittlesey

Robert Whittlesey has been a driving force throughout the history of MBHP, and his support of the organization continues to this day.

A pioneer of affordable housing, Whittlesey is credited with creating the community housing development model. Bob, as he's known, says his inspiration for working in the social services sector started in his childhood, listening to his uncles who served as advisors to President Franklin Roosevelt. This played out throughout his career, a continuum that began locally and expanded to a national level.

In 1964, Whittlesey served as the founder and executive director of the organization known today as The Community Builders, where he and his team worked on landmark affordable housing developments. It was his experience there that made him a natural fit when a new nonprofit needed a leader. It was a unique partnership that brought together CDCs, who knew how to revitalize communities, with local businesses, who had the funding to make projects happen. It was called Boston Housing Partnership—which would later become MBHP.



Robert Whittlesey was honored by MBHP at our fourth annual Founders Celebration in 2011.

“It was a time when business people saw the stress of these urban neighborhoods and realized that they had to be a part of the recovery,” said Whittlesey. The partnership had a simple yet effective strategy. During his tenure as executive director, they created more than 2,000 affordable homes.

Whittlesey saw what BHP was able to accomplish in Boston and wondered if it was happening in other parts of the country. In 1992, he started the National

Association for Housing Partnerships, a network for groups around the country to help them share information and build up each other's work. This work gives him a unique perspective on MBHP's legacy and current role. It's part of the reason he continues to donate to the organization.

“There's a vast need in this country for housing for people with low incomes,” said Whittlesey, “and what MBHP does is very special. You touch a lot of activities in the housing field. I don't know any other partnership in the country that does what MBHP does.”

At 94 years old, Whittlesey shows no signs of slowing down. He currently serves as Chairman of the Board of the Acton Housing Authority, which last year unveiled a 12-unit development named Whittlesey Village, in honor of the long-time affordable housing champion. Like Whittlesey, MBHP continues to be an active presence in the affordable housing field.

“MBHP is always expanding, doing new things,” he said, “and you need the funding to do that.”

Thank you to our recent grant funders

Bank of America Charitable Foundation, Inc. • Citi: Housing Supports • Bader Philanthropies
TD Bank • Glendon/Tung Fund • Cambridge Community Foundation

Back to school help

MBHP works with partners and donors to help kids get ready to go back to school.

Since 1999, the employees at Ropes & Gray have come together to support homeless families. This year, once again, staff members volunteered to purchase backpacks and fill them with school supplies. In total, the firm donated 200 backpacks for MBHP to distribute to the children of families placed in motels in MBHP's region.

“Families placed in motels face so many challenges,” said Launa Allen, Ropes & Gray's manager of project services. “Through the backpack program, Ropes & Gray is proud to make things a little easier for parents and their children, especially so they can focus on getting out of a shelter and into their own homes.”

MBHP also partners with Cradles to Crayons to distribute hundreds of backpacks to children of participants in our other programs.



Ropes & Gray employees held a “packing party” to get the backpacks ready.

MBHP in the field

To better serve clients across our region, MBHP has branched out of our Boston office to meet them where they are.



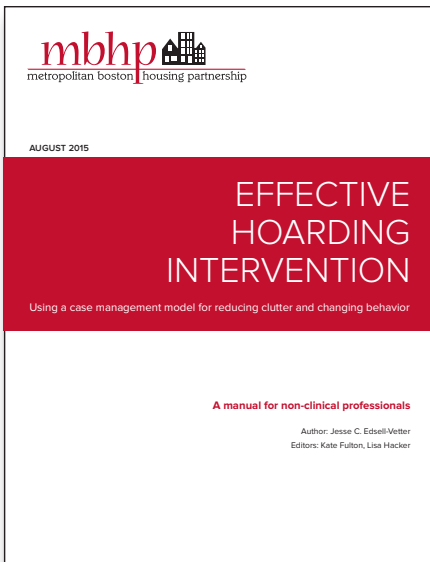
Representative Kevin Honan speaks with participants receiving training in computer skills from Jewish Vocational Service at the June 6 MBHP workshop.

Thanks to partnerships with local agencies and funding from the Bank of America Foundation, MBHP staff members are able to travel to locations that are more convenient for our clients, essentially bringing our services to them. Called colocations, these include locations in Chelsea, Somerville, Jamaica Plain, and Dorchester, as well as new locations in Quincy and Waltham.

Through our Motel Re-Housing program, MBHP case managers are also available in motels across our region, working side-by-side with families placed there as part of the state's Emergency Assistance program. Thanks to support from Santander Bank, MBHP is also able to offer workshops with our partners to help clients enhance their skills and increase their job prospects.

“Santander is proud to partner with MBHP once again to help families placed in motels gain the financial knowledge and skills they need to secure safe housing they can afford,” said Santander Vice President and New England Regional Manager Sonia Alleyne.

On June 6, Representative Kevin Honan, House Chairman of the Joint Committee on Housing, stopped by one of our workshops to encourage attendees. “I think it's really wonderful that you're over here,” said Chairman Honan. “I encourage you to continue to learn the important skills that today's job market requires.”



MBHP releases Hoarding Training Manual

Since 2006, MBHP has helped hundreds of people with hoarding avoid eviction and maintain healthier homes. Now, with generous funding from the Oak Foundation, we have created a manual for non-clinical professionals looking to do the same thing. *Effective Hoarding Intervention* breaks down MBHP's model step by step and gives invaluable insight gleaned from our experience in the field. The manual is available at a cost of \$20 each; for more information contact Jesse Edsell-Vetter at (617) 425-6658 or jesse.vetter@mbhp.org.

A fresh start for Nikia

MBHP helps a new mother find a home for her and her son.

Last winter, MBHP began issuing more than 70 state rental assistance vouchers that had been set aside for families on the newly-created Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program waiting list. As part of this process, MBHP works closely with clients to ensure they are able to move into new homes where they can thrive. Sometimes that means leveraging relationships we have with property owners in our region and mitigating credit issues or other issues that are deal-breakers for many landlords. Other times, it can mean educating property owners who are unfamiliar with MBHP's programs. The story below is just one example of how MBHP was able to help Nikia utilize her voucher to secure a new home and begin a new chapter of her life.

Nikia was living with her mother, sharing a bedroom with her 12-year-old sister and 2-month-old son, when she found out she was selected to receive an MRVP voucher. She knew just where she wanted to move: a two-bedroom apartment in a complex in Braintree with utilities included in the rent, which would help her stay on budget. But then she faced an unanticipated barrier that would have prevented Nikia from utilizing her voucher to rent there. Fortunately, MBHP's Fair Housing team intervened.

Once the property owner was informed of their fair housing responsibilities, the company agreed to move forward with the proper paperwork without MBHP having to file a formal complaint. Nikia says it was a relief to know that MBHP was handling things. "I had so many other things to worry about," the new mother said. "It was very comforting to know I had so many people working for me."

Nikia moved into her new home in August. Now, she says, she can focus on saving money and improving her credit, working toward her goal of eventually buying her own home. "Right now it is hard," she admits, "but with the MRVP program it's going to get better."

MBHP has been designated as one of the lead agencies for Mass LEAP, a new five-year program to help people increase their incomes and become more self-sufficient.

MBHP's Mass LEAP enrollment (as of September 1, 2015):

41 MRVP participants
31 Public Housing residents



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E I G H T H A N N U A L



*Founders
Celebration*

MBHP to honor Amy S. Anthony and Helene Solomon on November 12

MBHP’s driving mission is to connect the residents of Greater Boston with safe, decent homes they can afford. For us to be able to do this work, the creation, promotion, and preservation of affordable housing is vital. At this year’s Founders Celebration, MBHP will honor two outstanding individuals who have championed this cause:

Amy S. Anthony, former president and chief executive officer of Preservation of Affordable Housing will receive the Founders Award.

Helene Solomon, founder and chief executive officer of Solomon McCown & Company will receive the Lowell L. Richards III Award.

The event will be held on Thursday, November 12, and will once again be hosted by State Street, the event’s Presenting Partner. To R.S.V.P., contact Mary Jo Kane at maryjo.kane@mbhp.org or (617) 425-6705. More information is on our website at www.mbhp.org/donate.