HACoLA on the Hill

Each year, the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles (HACoLA) visits our nation’s capital to meet with elected officials and discuss the state of federally funded housing assistance programs in Los Angeles County. Visits to Washington D.C. have become more important in recent years due to federal budget cuts and their crippling effect on HACoLA’s housing assistance programs. This year, a delegation of HACoLA staff visited Washington D.C. March 10-12, to meet with Congressional representatives and advocate for program funding and reform.

The Washington D.C. visit was part of the annual National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) Legislative conference, which provides a platform for housing and community development officials throughout the country to come together and discuss the issues affecting their residents, program participants, and current program funding levels. While at the NAHRO conference, HACoLA attended seminars that offered insight and perspectives on current Section 8 and public housing issues, as well as community planning and development issues.

Aside from the NAHRO conference, HACoLA used this opportunity to convene with members of the California Association of Housing Authorities (CAHA). CAHA is a professional and advocacy association representing California’s housing authorities. As active members, HACoLA took this opportunity to team up with CAHA to combine strategies to advocate for similar issues affecting California housing authorities.

Further, HACoLA successfully engaged officials from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to discuss the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) Program, which provides housing assistance and supportive services for homeless disabled veterans throughout the nation. During this meeting, officials from both organizations examined the program’s current practices and identified key areas for improving performance. While meeting with VA officials, HACoLA expressed its continued commitment to eradicating homelessness for the honored veterans of Los Angeles County.

These annual visits to Washington D.C. illustrate HACoLA’s commitment to assisting families in need throughout the County. If the funding increases from the recently passed federal budget and the proposed increases in the President’s 2015 budget are any indication, HACoLA’s persistent advocacy is beginning to pay off. HACoLA will continue in its commitment to advocate for the funding and regulatory latitude needed to operate highly successful rental assistance programs.
On January 31, 2014, more than 40 representatives from the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) toured award-winning affordable housing properties in the Los Angeles area, as part of NAHRO’s biennial leadership retreat.

The tour included visits to properties representing both HACoLA and the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, including HACoLA’s The Growing Experience (TGE) urban farm, which received a NAHRO Award of Merit in 2011. The group toured the grounds of the farm, stopping to view the aquaponics system where tilapia are being raised along with edible crops, the chicken coop, and of course, the fruit and vegetable gardens. Visitors were even able to purchase some of the jams made from fresh TGE produce in TGE’s community kitchen. The kitchen, which opened in summer 2013, has allowed TGE to expand its food preservation efforts to include pickling as well as turning excess produce into homemade jams and jellies.

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In March 2013, the First 5 LA Commission awarded seven non-profit service providers contracts to assist 700 homeless families over two years. The Grants Management Unit of the CDC’s Community Development Division was tasked with ensuring the successful implementation of the Rental Assistance and Supportive Services Program for Homeless Families by providing the necessary technical assistance to service providers awarded funding under the Program. One year later, the results have been outstanding. By the end of December 2013, 403 families had been enrolled, with 301 families having received rental subsidies. The Program is on pace to exceed its anticipated service goals for the current fiscal year.

The Rental Assistance and Supportive Services Program was created for families with children, ages zero to five, who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness and have been involved with the County’s Department of Children and Family Services. In July 2012, the First 5 LA Commission approved a one-time allocation of $25 million and designated the CDC to act as technical advisor and Program administrator. Of these funds, $8.05 million was allocated for Rental Assistance and Supportive Services. In September 2013, the First 5 LA Commission approved an additional $10 million for the Program, with $9.2 million targeted for rental assistance and supportive services.

Today, there are currently 15 service providers on board offering intensive case management to participating families including linkages to an array of other services to assist families in stabilizing their lives. These services have included life skills training, money management, parenting skills training, health and nutrition education, as well as educational and recreational opportunities for the children. Families that are interested in the Program should dial 2-1-1 for assistance in applying.

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Program for Homeless Families... One Year Later

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NAHRO Leadership Visits The Growing Experience

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Affordable Housing Projects Moving Full Steam Ahead

Step Up on Colorado

On February 21, 2014, Hollywood Community Housing Corporation held a groundbreaking for Step Up on Colorado, a new construction of 32 supportive housing units for homeless individuals with chronic mental illness. A Life Skills Coordinator and Case Manager will serve the project’s residents. The Coordinator will help them gain the skills and locate the services necessary to maintain their new housing. Services will focus on substance abuse/co-occurring disorders, mental health, physical health, and practical skills. The CDC provided $1.1 million in County general loan funds.

Courtyard at La Brea

West Hollywood Community Housing Corporation celebrated a grand opening for Courtyard at La Brea on March 1, 2014. Of the 32 units, 15 are targeted toward special needs individuals, including transition age youth (TAY). Courtyard at La Brea offers several supportive services to its tenants, such as in-house counseling and referrals to health care, dental care, mental health services, transportation, and services to the TAY population. The CDC invested $3.7 million in Federal HOME funds, and serves as the bond issuer for Union Bank’s $7.8 million tax-exempt bond loan. In addition, HACoLA has committed 15 project-based vouchers to ensure the units remain affordable for its residents.

Mosaic Gardens At Huntington Park

On March 5, 2014, the CDC joined LINC Housing Corporation and the Huntington Park community to celebrate the grand opening of Mosaic Gardens at Huntington Park, an affordable housing development that provides 24 new affordable units to low-income individuals and families. Mosaic Gardens reused an existing, vacant 55-unit motel and adapted it to provide 24 units of housing for low-income individuals eligible for assistance from the Mental Health Services Act, and very low-income families. The CDC provided $800,000 in First District Homeless Service Center Funds toward the development. Additionally, HACoLA provided rental assistance to the 15 units reserved for TAY who have serious and persistent mental health concerns, and who are homeless and/or are transitioning from foster care.

El Monte Veterans Village

On March 12, 2014, the CDC joined Mercy Housing California to celebrate the grand opening of El Monte Veterans Village, the first permanent supportive community for homeless veterans in the San Gabriel Valley. This landmark development paves the way for future efforts to provide affordable, service enriched, supportive housing for homeless veterans in the Los Angeles area. The $12 million, 40-unit comprehensive affordable housing development for veterans is built in close proximity to El Monte’s downtown areas, services, transit lines, and the local Veterans of Foreign Wars facility. The CDC invested $2.45 million of its City of Industry funds. Additionally, HACoLA provided 40 Project-Based Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers to ensure the units remain affordable.
In March 2014, for the first time in its history, the Los Angeles County Community Development Foundation (CDF) launched a mentorship program for Housing Authority Resident (HAR) Scholarship awardees and other college students living in Section 8 or Public Housing owned or administered by the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles.

To make this program a success, the CDF is looking to partner with college graduates and career professionals to become mentors to help change the lives of students. Mentors will be required to:

- Help students define academic and career goals and create a plan for achieving identified goals;
- Guide mentees toward already established academic and cultural outreach programs at their college/university; and
- Assist mentees to develop career and life skills needed to succeed in their chosen profession.

All mentors and mentees are expected to meet at least four times throughout the academic year, including one job shadowing visit. Persons interested in participating can download the Mentor Application at www.lacdf.org, and submit by May 30, 2014. For more information, please contact CDF at (626) 586-1899.

The Los Angeles County Housing Resource Center, was created to help people list and find affordable, special-needs, accessible, and emergency housing within the County of Los Angeles. Launched in April 2007, the service is managed by the CDC, and fosters collaboration and information sharing among several agencies, organizations, and professional associations representing all jurisdictions within the County. Over 11,000 landlords have registered approximately 70,000 rental units since the website launched in 2007. An average of 2,600 – 3,300 rental units are available or accepting wait list applications on any given day.

The Los Angeles County Housing Resource Center recently launched its first phase of updates to its home page. In February, a new scrolling menu bar that includes a link to list affordable rental units that have accessibility features for persons with physical or sensory disabilities was added. Behind the scenes, there is a new password restricted list of special needs units available to caseworkers and housing locators, which complements the listing of affordable rental units which has already been an ongoing requirement of our housing development loans.

The CDC will continue to enhance the site to meet the needs of Los Angeles County residents, making sure it remains the first stop for affordable housing information.