



The BULLETIN

News about the SHA Housing Choice Voucher program

DECEMBER 2008

Published quarterly for landlords and service providers

1 Our mission only begins with providing housing; about other programs

2 October workshop a success; February workshop scheduled

3 Fair Housing questions & answers for landlords

4 *Inspector's Corner:* Dealing with infestations of bedbugs

Voucher program update

Providing good, safe housing is just part of our mission



Dear housing provider,

AS OUR NAME IMPLIES, the chief purpose of Seattle Housing Authority is to provide housing. We do so through the Housing Choice Voucher program (Section 8), and also through our Low Income Public Housing program, the Seattle Senior Housing program, and our Impact Property Management program, which administers the family communities of High Point, NewHolly, Rainier Vista and other properties.

But Seattle Housing Authority does more than provide housing for our participants and tenants. Our mission statement is "to enhance the Seattle community by creating and sustaining decent, safe and affordable living environments that foster stability and self-sufficiency for people with low incomes."

To foster their stability and self-sufficiency, we offer participants in the Section 8 program a number of programs.

One of them is the Family Self-Sufficiency program (FSS), which offers participants the opportunity to set five year goals for themselves and links them with supportive services in order to help them overcome challenges and obstacles such as transportation, credit, childcare, etc. that may prevent them from reaching those goals. The FSS program also provides monthly deposits into an escrow account for participants that increases based on increases in their earned income and rent. Participants may withdraw funds from their escrow account while they are in the program to

assist them in accomplishing their goals (e.g., for car repairs, tuition, home ownership, and the like).

Another program is The Job Connection, which exists "to empower residents to be actively involved in their own neighborhoods, to establish a strong network of partnerships, to value neighbors' cultural diversity, and to be educated and motivated to improve their own lives." The Job Connection helps people achieve their employment goals, beginning with an assessment of their interests and their skills. With the assistance and guidance of trained employment counselors, each participant identifies and develops his or her own individual goals and develops a plan to meet his or her employment needs. Job Connection counselors help people prepare résumés and assist them in arranging and preparing for interviews with prospective employers and in obtaining jobs. From the period of January through October, 2008, Job Connection staff services resulted in 188 job placements, with an average hourly wage of \$14.06; 86 percent of these jobs have benefits. Job Connection counselors also assist participants in planning for and attaining career advancement once they've landed a job.

These and other programs are described in detail on our website, www.seattlehousing.org (under "Residents"). I urge you to learn about these programs and, where appropriate, to refer your tenants to them for assistance.

THANK YOU ONCE AGAIN for participating in the Housing Choice Voucher program. As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call me.

LISA CIPOLLONE-WALTERS
DIRECTOR OF HOUSING ADVOCACY
AND RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
206-239-1523

Training for landlords

PorchLight again hosts daylong landlord workshop on protecting investments, preventing crime

ON OCTOBER 21, at PorchLight, Seattle Housing hosted a landlord training by the Seattle Neighborhood Group. This training, which we also hosted last year, helps landlords protect their investments by learning proven techniques and strategies to screen applicants, create strong rental agreements, resolve problems early, prevent illegal activity, build a strong community and avoid costly evictions.

Ron Oldham, former SHA deputy director and Seattle landlord, discussed crafting a business plan for investment property, the importance of carefully screening tenants, writing a good lease, and, most importantly, “DWYSYWD: *Do What You Said You Would Do.*” As a property owner, he said, “if you have a tenant who is causing problems or failing to pay rent, prompt action in compliance with the law and your lease is imperative to regaining control and preventing more serious problems down the line.”

Kelly McKinney of SNG presented information about Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)—that is, design that clearly delineates public from private areas to prevent people who don’t belong on your property from hanging out and possibly engaging in illegal or undesirable activity. Sita Degiulio Das, Seattle Neighborhood Group, spoke about the possibilities of crime prevention through community organizing: By making sure your tenants know the neighbors and vice versa, you can help create a community that discourages illegal activity. Detective Gary Kinner from the Seattle Police Department narcotics unit let participants know what to watch out for when they suspect tenants may be engaged in drug-related criminal behavior. He noted the importance of being proactive.

Finally, Chris Benis, legal counsel to the Rental Housing Association of Puget Sound, hammered home the importance of doing thorough background checks, entering into solid leases, and documenting problems in writing. “If your tenant is causing problems but there’s nothing in the lease that prevents them from doing what they’re doing, you will have a hard time getting them to change their behavior,” Benis said. “If your lease is solid and your rules are clear and you enforce them, you’ll be able to evict a problem tenant or get them to comply.”

The 18 attendees learned the ins and outs of applicant screening including Fair Housing issues, background checks and references, warning signs, best practices for reviewing rental agreements, and requirements for denying applicants. They also discussed the essentials of rental agreements, ongoing management, crime prevention employing natural surveillance and other methods,

warning signs of drug activity and gang activity, eviction and working with law enforcement, and the benefits of working with the Housing Choice Voucher program.

Participants received a guide including resources for dealing with these and other issues involving rental property and tenants. They also got to ask a lot of questions and share their experiences. Mike Jung, Owner Liaison for the SHA Voucher program, said of the Q & A, “Getting some of the facts is a good starting point, but when we hear from landlords about their actual experiences, it always amazes me how often someone else attending the training has been in a similar situation, and how together with the experts people can formulate a plan of action to deal with nearly any situation.”

☛ *If you missed the October 21 workshop but you’re interested in this training, there will be one more session this year on **Thursday, December 4.** To register or learn more, go to www.sngi.org/landlord.html or call Lois at 206-323-3150.*

Landlord

Tuesday workshops

Every third Tuesday,
February through November,
from 5:30 until 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, February 17

Fair Housing for Section 8 Landlords

**Learn about the rights & responsibilities
of residential property managers
from veteran civil rights analysts
JT Delich and Chenelle Love of the
Seattle Office for Civil Rights**

- Fair Housing overview
- Fair Housing & the application process
- Fair Housing & advertising
- Resources for landlords

Bring your questions & concerns!

from 5:30 until 7:00 p.m. at the
**Seattle Housing Authority
PorchLight Community Room
907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200 :: Seattle WA 98107**

Questions? Ideas for workshops?

Contact Mike Jung, Owner Liaison, at
mjung@seattlehousing.org
or 206-239-1672

Keeping clear of Fair Housing issues

Best leave mention of the church out of the ad

Is it O.K. for manager Joe Thomas to advertise his rental apartment this way? “One bedroom unit. Ideal for mature person. Quiet neighborhood, many amenities. Close to St. Martin’s Church.”

Under Fair Housing laws, it is not legal to advertise any preference for or against a “protected class” of persons. Here’s what the federal Fair Housing Act (FHA) says about advertising:

It shall be unlawful to make, print or publish, or cause to be made, printed or published, any notice, statement or advertisement with respect to the sale or rental of a dwelling which indicates any preference, limitation or discrimination because of race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national origin, or an intention to make any such preference, limitation or discrimination.

In Seattle, protected classes include race, color, national origin, religion/creed, sex, disability, parental status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, political ideology—and whether or not one has or will have a Housing Choice (Section 8) voucher.” (See a complete list at www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/FHlaws.htm.)

Because ads that designate the type of tenant desired can often cross the line into stating a preference for or limitation against certain groups, be sure to use caution when using advertising.

For example, most prospective tenants will assume that “mature person” means that manager Thomas is looking for a single tenant or a retiree, and that he does not want families with children.

Also, while it’s fine to refer to landmarks, using a landmark such as St. Martin’s Church could be construed as implying a preference for members of that church.

Consider using advertising that alerts home-seekers to the size and location of the unit, the monthly rental price, and any features that make the unit desirable, such as included utilities, laundry room, pool, etc. This will assist a prospective tenant in matching his or her needs with your openings.

Manager Thomas should think about limiting his advertising to, **“One-bedroom unit. Quiet neighborhood, many amenities,”** and maybe expand on those amenities.

Keep in mind that even if your rental property is

exempt from the Fair Housing Act because you do not own four properties, the FHA covers all advertisements (and City of Seattle Fair Housing laws may apply where the owner has fewer properties). The advertising rules apply to *all* written notices or oral statements by *anyone* engaged in the sale or rental of a dwelling. Written notices and statements include applications, flyers, brochures, deeds, signs, banners, posters, billboards or any documents used in the sale or rental process.

For an online list of words that you should avoid in ads, see www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/advertise.htm.

* * *

A gay couple who applies for rental of a one-bedroom apartment in Seattle meets and exceeds the rental criteria established by property manager Jill Greene. Greene tells them she’s sorry, but she cannot rent the advertised one-bedroom unit to them and tells them that they must instead wait for an available two-bedroom apartment.

Does her saying so violate Fair Housing laws?

The federal Fair Housing Act does not cover sexual orientation or marital status as protected classes, but City of Seattle housing ordinances do. So, since the apartment is in Seattle, manager Greene should have let the gay couple make their own choice of unit.

In Seattle, Fair Housing laws do not allow a housing provider to base rental or sales decisions on a person’s sexual orientation or marital status. “Sexual orientation” is generally defined as including male or female heterosexuality, bisexuality, or homosexuality, and includes a person’s attitudes, preferences, beliefs, and practices pertaining to sex (but does not include conduct that is a public or private nuisance or is unlawful under county, state, or federal law). “Marital status” is usually defined as including people who are single, married, separated, engaged, widowed, divorced or (in some jurisdictions) cohabitating.

In the same way that you don’t (and cannot) consider an applicant’s race or religion in the rental decision, sexual orientation or marital status cannot be used as criteria.

—Courtesy King County Office of Civil Rights

“Keep in mind that even if your rental property is exempt from the Fair Housing Act because you do not own four properties, the FHA covers all advertisements.”

Inspector's corner

Bedbugs bugging your tenants? Tenants bugging you?

When bedbugs make their unwelcome appearance, as they are doing with increasing frequency in Puget Sound, it's not uncommon for a tenant to blame the landlord and vice-versa. But trying to identify who is chiefly at fault for an infestation is often impossible to do, and in any case simply postpones the solution, which is to seek out a pest-control professional right away.

Bedbugs, *Cimex lectularius*, are small wingless insects that feed solely upon the blood of warm-blooded animals. While many people associate bedbugs with poor hygiene and housecleaning, such conditions do not have to exist for infestations to occur. Bedbugs typically come into a home as hitchhikers on previously used items, such as mattresses, bed frames, and even desks and dressers.

Bedbugs seek out people and animals, generally at night while these hosts are asleep, and painlessly sip a few drops of blood. While feeding, they inject a tiny amount of their saliva into the skin. Repeated exposures to bed bug bites during a period of several weeks or more causes people to become sensitized to the saliva of these bugs; additional bites may then result in mild to intense allergic responses. The skin lesion produced by the bite of a bedbug resembles those caused by many other kinds of blood-feeding insects, such as mosquitoes and fleas. The offending insect, therefore, can rarely be identified by the appearance of the bites. A physician should be consulted to rule out other causes for the lesions and to offer treatment, as needed. The affected person should resist the urge to scratch the bites, as this may intensify the irritation and itch-

ing, and may lead to secondary infection. Fortunately, bedbugs are not known to transmit any infectious agents.

Bedbugs are slightly smaller than ¼ inch long, rather round or oval, and are rusty red to mahogany in color; they become redder after feeding. The host's blood may appear as a dark red or black mass within the bug's body. Because they never develop wings, bedbugs cannot fly. When disturbed, bedbugs actively seek shelter in dark cracks and crevices.

Cast skins of bedbugs are sometimes found. Although such a finding confirms that bedbugs had been present previously, it does not confirm that any continue to infest the residence. Thus, inspect carefully for live crawling bed bugs. Because many other kinds of small brown bugs may be discovered, it is critical to ensure that the bugs are correctly identified.

If bedbugs are definitely determined to be in a home, it is advisable to hire the services of a reputable pest control operator. Be sure that the pest control operator you hire has experience with bedbugs; it is not sufficient to use an all-purpose pesticide.

Before a pest control operator comes to the property, the tenant should be asked to remove all clutter to aid the operator's work.

A good online resource about bedbugs is www.hsph.harvard.edu/bedbugs/, from which much of this was taken. Locally, there's good information on the Public Health Seattle & King County website, www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health; search for "bedbugs."

—Paul Gimme, Housing Quality Standards Inspector



Phone: 206-239-1500 | Fax: 206-239-1770
E-mail: porchlight.info@seattlehousing.org | website: www.seattlehousing.org

GENERAL QUESTIONS

To speak with a customer service agent about any Housing Choice Voucher program issue, call 206-239-1728 and press '0'

TO LIST AVAILABLE UNITS

Call 206-239-1663 or go to www.seattlehousing.org and click on "Section 8 Landlords" under the 'Housing' menu

OWNER INFORMATION

NOTE: Changes must be submitted in writing
Fax 206-239-1770, attention Mike Jung.
Questions? Call Mike at 206-239-1672

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

MANAGER Barbara Strayer 206-239-1620

OWNER LIAISON

Mike Jung 206-239-1672

OCCUPANCY SUPERVISORS

Tenant-based—
"Aa" through "Lara" 206-239-1619
"Larb" through "Zz" 206-239-1636
Mod. Rehab. & Project-based 206-239-1649

NEW MOVE-IN TEAM

Status of tenancy approvals—
contracts and leases
"Aa" through "Lara" 206-239-1676
"Larb" through "Zz" 206-239-1635
New move-ins fax number 206-239-1760
New move-in team supervisor 206-239-1621

INSPECTIONS

Annual inspections & reinspections 206-239-1645
New move-in inspections—
"Aa" through "Lara" 206-239-1676
"Larb" through "Zz" 206-239-1635
Judy Huertas, HQS supervisor 206-239-1621

HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS INSPECTORS

Bill Francis 206-721-1457, ext. 10
Paul Gimmi 206-239-1632
Sue Nigg 206-239-1639
Jonathan Shibuya 206-239-1616
Jason Shirley 206-239-1646
Nancy Shutes 206-770-6880
Lora Wait-Hoy 206-721-1457, ext. 11

What is PorchLight?

PorchLight Housing Center is a division of the Seattle Housing Authority, the city's largest provider of low-income and affordable housing. PorchLight manages the Housing Choice Voucher program and applications for public housing.

Did you know...

...that owners can find support on our website? Visit www.seattlehousing.org today and click on "Landlords" for helpful information and resources.

...that SHA's Impact Property Services provides lead-based paint abatement services? Impact Property Services offers affordable, efficient service to help solve your deteriorated paint problems. We can provide both EPA-certified lead-based paint risk assessors and EPA-certified lead-safe workers, including painters and carpenters. Call Impact Property Services at **206-716-1310**, extension 13.

...that the City of Seattle provides free information about property owners' rights and city ordinances? Call **206-684-7979** for more information.