

City of San Diego Housing Commission Achievement Academy ~ A Pathway to Success

The 2018/2019 San Diego County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) is charged with conducting investigations of local government agencies. These investigations typically include in-depth research, interviewing of witnesses and visiting relevant locations or facilities. In some cases, reports are generated that are critical of local agencies or officials. From time to time, however, the Grand Jury has found that agencies or officials are performing in an outstanding manner or providing noteworthy community services. As an example of this, the Grand Jury found that City of San Diego Housing Authority's Achievement Academy provides services that deserve special mention and recognition.

Members of the Grand Jury interviewed the management of the San Diego Housing Commission and conducted a follow-up visit to the Housing Commission's Achievement Academy on September 17, 2018. A summary of our discussion and findings follows.

Too often we hear that recipients of public benefits are content to continue to accept whatever benefits are available and are not motivated to achieve self-sufficiency or to improve their lives. However, the tenants receiving rental assistance from the City of San Diego Housing Commission (Commission) are proving that this notion is not always correct. The vehicle through which these tenants are moving forward is called the Achievement Academy, a job development and work readiness program operated by the Commission. The Academy's programs, workshops and other services are available free to families receiving Federal Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers and tenants residing in the Commission's public housing units.

The Achievement Academy functions as a major support system for the Commission's designation as a "Federal Moving to Work" agency. This designation, given by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to only 39 public housing agencies nationwide, enables the Commission to implement innovative housing assistance programs while helping residents on their path to economic independence. The staff and activities of the Achievement Academy make that path significantly smoother.

The Commission encourages financial self-reliance and provides the support families need to achieve it through initiatives like the Achievement Academy, established with the funding flexibility under Moving To Work. The Academy has served more than 5,600 individuals since it opened in 2010, including placing more than 1,000 individuals in jobs. The average income of Academy

participants has increased more than 38 percent in that time.

The Achievement Academy is a learning and resource center located at the Commission's headquarters in downtown San Diego. It is equipped with a 30-station computer lab and two large classrooms. With a staff of 13, the Academy provides programs that emphasize computer literacy, career planning, development of job skills and personal financial management. Typical workshops include job search preparation, effective resume writing, and building interpersonal and team skills. A model of public and private collaboration, the Academy also coordinates regularly scheduled job interviews by such employers/partners as Ace Parking, Home Depot, Manpower, Sea World and the Urban Corps.

The Academy receives the bulk of its funding from HUD but has also been successful in obtaining grants for items that HUD does not cover. A major grant of \$780,000 from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation funded a program called "2 Gen San Diego" which aided 60 families from the City Heights neighborhood receiving rental assistance, with additional services such as financial counseling, employment preparation, and access to health care.

Some of the other programs offered by the Housing Commission in which the Achievement Academy plays an important role include:

- ***Path to Success*** - an ongoing program which allows "Work-Able" families to increase their earned income without a corresponding increase in their portion of the rent payments.
- ***Family Self-Sufficiency*** - a two year program which can provide participants with up to \$10,000 (placed in an escrow account) contingent upon meeting employment and educational objectives.
- ***Power of One*** - a one year program for single parents receiving rental assistance which provides help with career planning and financial management.
- ***Reading for Success*** - the Academy, in cooperation with the San Diego Public Library, has a lending library of about 1,500 donated children's books which are made available to families receiving rental assistance or living in public housing.

The Achievement Academy has steadily increased the number of users of its services programs from 1,179 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 to an estimated 2,000 in FY 2018. The Housing Commission's Moving To Work Plan for FY 2020 contains a chart displaying the overall effectiveness of the Academy. See Appendix A covering FY 2018 (the last year for which statistics are available).

On June 7, 2018, HUD announced that the San Diego Housing Commission was

one of 17 housing agencies in the country to be designated as an EnVision Center, a multi-agency program designed to promote self-sufficiency for those currently or potentially receiving housing assistance. The staff of the Achievement Academy will incorporate EnVision during 2019. The program has four areas of emphasis:

1. Economic Empowerment
2. Educational Advancement
3. Health and Wellness
4. Character and Leadership

Training will be carried out both at the Achievement Academy and at the South Metro Career Center operated by the San Diego Workforce Partnership, which is the Housing Commission’s partner in EnVision. The significance of this designation is that it will allow the Achievement Academy to serve prospective recipients of assistance now on the waiting list for Section 8 vouchers in addition to those currently receiving benefits. Also, the EnVision Center is located within a Promise Zone, another HUD designation which will allow the Achievement Academy and its partners to access additional staffing and to obtain priority for federal grants and tax credits.

The Achievement Academy, in conjunction with its partner agencies, operates a robust menu of innovative training and educational programs designed to improve the lives of clients while simultaneously reducing their dependence on public aid. For this service, the Grand Jury commends the Achievement Academy of the San Diego Housing Commission.

APPENDIX A

Achievement Academy FY 2018			
Metric	Baseline	Outcome	Benchmark Achieved
Number of rental assistance participants receiving core services	982	1,343	Yes
Number of rental assistance participants with an increase in earnings	229	377	Yes
Number of rental assistance participants placed in employment	144	326	Yes
Number of rental assistance participants employed for 12 or more consecutive months	44	46	Yes
Number of rental assistance participants who attended a work readiness workshop	727	319	No
Percent of rental assistance participants who attended a recruitment and resource fair and obtained employment as a direct result	0%	25%	Yes
Number of rental assistance participants who completed vocational or bridge training	0	31	Yes

Source: San Diego Housing Commission (Page 30) *Moving To Work Annual Plan for Fiscal Year 2020*