

HOPE VI Community & Supportive Services Best Practices – Community Engagement/Health/Wellness Boston Housing Authority

Residents as Assets: Reinvesting in the Community

Poor health is a consistent barrier to public housing residents' self-sufficiency. Residents often experience difficulty both identifying and trusting knowledgeable health care providers, and many providers are seen as being outside the community and experience difficulty reaching out to residents and developing relationships with them. Residents often rely on their neighbors for healthcare information. While there are many longtime residents who are knowledgeable about health, these residents often have difficulty getting hired as outreach workers because they lack education and training.

To address poor resident health and the lack of information, the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) partnered with the Boston University School of Public Health and the Boston Public Health Commission to seek funding from the Centers for Disease Control to form the Partners in Health and Housing Prevention Research Center (PHH-PRC). PHH-PRC has partnered with the Community Committee for Health Promotion, which is comprised of public housing residents, advocates and other providers who are equal partners in the design and implementation of PHH-PRC's work.

One of the PRC's projects is the Resident Health Advocate Program, which trains up to twelve public housing residents annually to serve as "promotoras" or front-line health educators. For three months, the RHA trainees attend weekly classes on basic health and wellness topics and techniques for effective leadership in the community. Upon training completion, RHAs are recommended for an eight-month internship, where they work in their developments to identify and "connect" residents with services and information most in demand.

The Resident Health Advocate Training Program has trained over 60 residents. Of these residents, 97% completed in-class training, 90% are involved with internships, and 53% are employed post-placement. RHAs have connected numerous residents with much-needed healthcare services.

For more information on this Best Practice contact:

Rachel Goodman, Rachel.Goodman@bostonhousing.org, 617.988.4021