

HOPE VI Community & Supportive Services Best Practices – Health & Wellness Meridian Housing Authority

Women Take STEPS toward Positive Changes & Empowerment

The Meridian Housing Authority's (MHA) HOPE VI case management staff met with residents to assess the most significant barriers to resident self-sufficiency. The majority of residents who attended the meeting were women who faced similar barriers to achieving their goals: lack of education, employment opportunities, transportation and child care. Often, they lived from paycheck to paycheck, frequenting pawn shops and check cashing stores to make ends meet. Depression and low self-esteem were common.

MHA case managers formed a women's group to address these problems. The group's focus was to encourage the women to explore how their lives would change if they understood their economic situation. Staff determined that Steps to Economic and Personal Success (STEPS) training would be the best teaching model to use to help the women to gain a greater understanding of their situation.

The women began working with the STEPS curriculum on key concepts of money management and basic parenting. As they became more aware of their economic positions they began to set financial goals for themselves. The first goal was to save \$1,000 by the end of the year. Many of the women have now changed their spending and saving habits and the women's group has sparked the creation of couples groups to explore relationship and family development. Participants who were smokers now attend smoking cessation workshops with the focus of saving money and leading healthier lives. The women are exploring the world around them and have taken a trip to the local airport and participated in a flight simulator exercise to learn about flying. The women continue to meet on a regular basis and extremely enthusiastic. One evening, it was raining with a possibility of a tornado, and they of the participants still attended the group on time! Mt. Zion Baptist Church partners with MHA to provide daycare for the participants.

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