

The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

Published as a community service by The Abell Foundation

ABELL SALUTES: Baltimore County Head Start-Core Knowledge partner- ship, for effecting “quantum leaps in the cognitive development of at-risk children”

In fall 2001, only 22 percent of Baltimore County's Head Start pre-schoolers entering kindergarten were assessed as “fully ready” for school by Maryland's Model For School Readiness assessment; today, that percentage is 66. Moreover, Baltimore County Head Start children have moved from among the lowest performers in the State to the highest, surpassing the State average for Head Start students at 49 percent “fully ready.” (Urban Head Start programs with comparable demographics such as Montgomery and Prince George's Counties have less significant increases. Baltimore City's percentage of “fully ready” Head Start children was only 37 percent). Skeptics may well wonder what's going on here, what's making the difference?

What's making the difference is the decision by Baltimore County Head Start and its operator, the YMCA of Central Maryland in 2001, to collaborate with the Core Knowledge Foundation in a five-year pre-school pilot program. Funded by the Abell Foundation and the Weinberg Foundation, the Core

continued on page 12

Private Discomfort In Public Housing:

A cultural conflict is simmering in public housing, between longtime and elderly residents and younger disabled residents. The issues are security, lifestyle differences, safety—and ineffective communication.

Baltimore is dotted with high-rise public housing buildings originally built for senior citizens – familiar landmarks such as the two Lakeview Towers, W. 20th Street and Govans Manor. However, many Baltimoreans would be surprised to learn that these buildings are no longer senior-only. Indeed, more than a third of their occupied apartments are home to people with disabilities under the age of 62. In two of the buildings, a majority of the occupied apartments are home to non-elderly tenants with disabilities. These are people under the age of 62 – sometimes many years younger – who are deemed disabled under federal law and regulations. Some have physical challenges; others have mental disabilities or are recovering alcoholics and drugs users.

This demographic shift in the tenant population of these buildings stems from several factors – including changes in federal law, new attention to the needs of people with disabilities and a changing housing market that has provided more options for low-income senior citizens. But this change has also created problems for some residents that are going unresolved by the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) and the broader community.

Interviews and conversations with roughly two dozen public housing residents make clear that there is a troubling culture clash taking place in some

of these mixed-population buildings that house both the elderly and younger disabled residents. In some cases, younger residents – and the guests that visit them – often cause elderly residents to be concerned about their safety. In other cases, older residents object to the lifestyle, dress and objectionable language of some younger residents. While in others, older residents are distressed by drug dealing, panhandling and behavior they believe has no place in buildings that are home to senior citizens. Some HABC officials concede that the problems within the buildings are becoming worse as more non-elderly residents move in. At the same time, it's also apparent that the needs of younger disabled residents are also not being well met by HABC.

The problems in these buildings have not received adequate attention from HABC, city and state officials, or from the private sector. In particular, HABC has taken few assertive steps to address the readily apparent problems and officials say they lack the financial resources to develop meaningful responses, due largely to cuts in federal housing funds.¹

This report examines the problem, both nationally and in Baltimore, and offers recommendations for improving the quality of life for thousands of Baltimore public housing residents.

continued on page 2

A NATIONAL CHALLENGE

Baltimore is not the only city to have difficulty meeting the challenge of providing public housing for both elderly and younger residents with disabilities. The problem has plagued localities across the country.

Some non-elderly people with disabilities have been eligible for public housing since the late 1950s. In 1973, Congress explicitly prohibited discrimination on the basis of handicap in federally supported programs. In 1988, Congress expanded the Fair Housing Act to prohibit public housing agencies (and private property owners) from discriminating against individuals with disabilities. In passing the 1988 amendments, Congress stated:

“The Fair Housing Amendments Act...is a clear pronouncement of a national commitment to end the unnecessary exclusion of persons with handicaps from the American mainstream. It repudiates the use of stereotypes and ignorance, and mandates that persons with handicaps be considered as individuals. Generalized perceptions about disabilities and unfounded speculations about threats to safety are specifically rejected as grounds to justify exclusion.”

The Act prohibits discrimination based on handicap, which is defined as:

1. A physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of a person’s major life activities (including working, taking care of one’s self, performing manual tasks, or going to school);
2. A record of having such an impairment; or
3. Being regarded as having such an impairment.

HABC requires applicants for housing to submit a statement from a physician or health professional attesting that they meet the criteria for being considered disabled. Among the underlying causes of a disabling impairment can be a history of drug or alcohol abuse. This standard was established over a period of nearly two decades through congressional action, HUD regulations and court decisions. However, federal regulations make clear that persons who are currently using an illegal drug are not to be considered as having an impairment that would protect them from discrimination.²

Changes in the law led to a significant increase in the number of non-elderly individuals with disabilities moving into formerly senior-only buildings, particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The change was also fueled by local housing authorities that needed to increase their occupancy rates by accepting younger, disabled people as tenants when older residents took advantage of other housing options available to them. This population change led to friction, some of it highlighted in media accounts. Congress responded in 1992, by amending federal housing statutes to allow local public housing agencies to apply to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for permission to designate some public housing units as elderly-only. Such designations would be approved only if they would not hurt the ability of the agencies to provide housing to non-elderly public housing tenants, particularly younger people with disabilities.

BALTIMORE’S HISTORY

To understand the situation in Baltimore’s public housing buildings today, it’s important to review key events over

the past dozen years.

In the 1990s, HABC won approval from HUD to designate two newly built buildings as senior-only. However, HABC sidestepped federal rules and unilaterally designated many other buildings as senior-only. In some cases, the housing authority placed large banners on high-rise buildings advertising them as senior-only housing – a designation made without federal approval.

In 1996, Daniel P. Henson III, then the commissioner of HABC, said in a newspaper interview that 19 of the city’s 39 housing complexes had been reserved for residents over the age of 60. Henson said the move was necessary, in part, to keep out recovering substance abusers and others who would “bring society’s problems into the elderly buildings with them.”

In response to the newspaper article, federal housing officials said such designations violated federal law. At the time, federal officials found that within 15 mixed-population buildings, only 4 percent of households were headed by a non-elderly person with a disability and said more needed to be done to accommodate those with disabilities.

Roughly 18 months later, federal housing officials again warned HABC that too few non-elderly people with disabilities were moving into the mixed-population buildings, suggesting a pattern of discrimination. By June 1998, only 6 percent of residents of those buildings were non-elderly people with disabilities; at the same time, nearly twice as many non-elderly people with disabilities as seniors were on the waiting list for HABC housing.

“Our review of HABC’s occupancy data for these buildings suggests that persons with disabilities are not being admitted to these buildings to a degree that is even close to their representation

continued on page 3

continued from page 2

on HABC's waiting list," a federal housing official wrote to Henson in June 1998.

Aside from the issues revolving around senior-only buildings, during a period of several years beginning in 1995, federal housing authorities also found that HABC was out of compliance with federal disability requirements and needed to do more to accommodate low-income people with disabilities in Baltimore.

Despite years of pressure and negotiations, advocates for people with disabilities could not reach an agreement with HABC on how to do that. Ultimately in 2002, a number of Baltimoreans with disabilities filed suit against HABC seeking more suitable housing. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was unable to reach a voluntary settlement of the issues with HABC and took the unusual step of referring the matter to the Justice Department, which also filed suit against HABC. The two lawsuits were finally settled with a consent decree in 2004.

The decree requires HABC to take a series of significant steps to improve housing opportunities for low-income Baltimoreans with disabilities. As of April 2006, HABC had renovated, for example, 297 public housing units (both in the family development and the mixed population buildings) for residents with mobility impairments, and plans to renovate an additional 180 in the coming year, according to HABC. The consent decrees also preclude HABC from applying to designate any more of its public housing stock as senior-only.

In the eight years since HUD first expressed concerns about the small number of non-elderly people with disabilities in the mixed-population buildings, that number has steadily climbed.

Baltimore's Mixed-Population Buildings		
Building Name	Number of Units Available to the Elderly and Non-Elderly Disabled	% of occupied households that are headed by a non-elderly disabled person
McCulloh Homes Hi-Rise	394	45
Lakeview Tower	161	61
Lakeview Tower (2)	144	55
Claremont Homes	152	44
W. 20th Street	357	32
Monument East	187	40
Wyman House	168	30
Chase House	189	28
Govans Manor	199	21
Bernard E. Mason	223	16
The Ellerslie	125	25
Bel-Park Tower	274	44
The Brentwood	150	46
Rosemont Tower	203	33
Primrose Place	125	26
Hollins House	130	35
The Allendale	164	18
Laurens House	36	20
Carey House	23	37
Homewood House	36	20
TOTAL	3440	35
Source: Housing Authority of Baltimore City		

As of April 2006, 35 percent of the occupied units in those buildings were headed by non-elderly disabled residents. In Lakeview Towers, that population accounts for more than half of the households. In several others, the percentage is higher than 40 percent. The following chart shows the breakdown at the city's 19 mixed-population buildings.

Today, just as in the mid-1990s, non-elderly people with disabilities far outnumber the elderly on HABC's waiting list for housing. As of June 2005, there

were 22,023 households on HABC's waiting list for either public housing or a Section 8 voucher that can be used to rent a home from a private landlord. Of those, 8,426 (38 percent) were non-elderly people with disabilities, while 1,360 (6 percent) were elderly.³

Given those numbers, it's clear that the mixed-population buildings will become home to an increasing number of non-elderly disabled residents in the years to come.

continued on page 4

RESIDENTS' CONCERNS

Esther Hall has lived in the Wyman House public housing building for 16 years. For many years, she went downstairs daily to visit neighbors in the lobby. She had no qualms about venturing to the laundry room to do some wash at 2 or 3 in the morning. Today, she makes it to the lobby only a couple times a week, and she won't go to the laundry room at any hour unless she's accompanied by someone. Although she has not been the victim of any crime or harassment, she says she is concerned about some of the building's younger residents and their guests.

Many others share that assessment. One veteran employee who works in the mixed-population buildings describes the conditions as "horrible."

At Claremont in East Baltimore, residents and visitors routinely knock on doors asking for money or cigarettes. One senior grew so weary of being asked for money that she placed a sign on her door reading, "Don't knock on my door." Drug use and heavy drinking is apparent, according to two elderly residents of Claremont.

An eight-year resident of West 20th Street, James Jackson, despairs of the younger residents who he says are drug addicts and alcoholics. Drug dealing is sometimes obvious in and around the building and some residents drink alcohol in elevators or hallways, he says. "These young people don't have respect for senior citizens," he says. The result has been that many seniors don't feel safe in elevators or hallways. "That is bad when you don't feel safe in your own home," Jackson says.

Elizabeth Holloman, 79 and blind, has lived in Lakeview Towers near Druid Hill Park for a quarter century. She has grown weary of disrespectful younger tenants (or their guests) who repeatedly ask for money, drink and use

▲

The assessment that drugs are being used or sold in mixed-population buildings is shared by some HABC staff. Many of the younger residents "are still in the middle of that lifestyle. People who are visiting them bring stuff into the building," says one HABC employee.

▼

drugs in and out of the building. Some sell drugs in the stairwells, she says. "I feel threatened because I don't know what they will try to do," she says.

Clenso Robinson, a 59-year-old resident of Monument East, is himself disabled, but he expresses little sympathy for younger residents with disabilities who have changed the character of the building. He notes that the younger residents often have children, either living with them or visiting, which causes noise and disruption that upset senior residents. He adds that drugs are a problem in the building.

The assessment that drugs are being used or sold in mixed-population buildings is shared by some HABC staff. Many of the younger residents "are still in the middle of that lifestyle. People who are visiting them bring stuff into the building," says one HABC employee.⁴

Many elderly residents express concerns about younger residents with mental illnesses. In particular, some younger residents cause disruptions in the build-

ing when they fail to take their medicine, according to the elderly residents. One younger resident at Claremont who suffers from a mental illness has made threats against a vending-machine serviceman and once threatened to blow up the building, according to Anna Warren, a tenant leader in the building. In interviews, such concerns arise repeatedly and experts who have assessed the situation say that these younger residents with mental disabilities are not receiving adequate mental health services.

Not every view of the situation is bleak. Isla Murrill, a 70-year-old resident of Govans Manor, says problems between different groups of residents have eased in the last year. "Some of the younger people who have come in are learning how to work with us," she says.

She credits some of the change to occasional visits by social work students at Morgan State University.⁵ And she says residents were vigilant about reporting drug trafficking in the building, which led to the removal of some residents. Floor captains in the building provided additional monitoring and communication, she says.

One non-elderly resident of West 20th Street, who is disabled, said it is unfair to blame all the problems in the building on the disabled population. "Some of the older ones are bringing this crazy stuff in," she says.⁶ Other young residents interviewed for this report echoed that sentiment and said they worry about being stigmatized because other younger residents are creating problems in the buildings.

Few people in Baltimore seem to be doing more to address the problems in the mixed-population buildings than Myron Alston. A four-year resident of Monument East, Alston says he is determined to break down barriers in the building and create a better sense of community. The 55-year-old Alston, who has a physical disability, leads an effort to obtain and distribute free food

continued from page 4

and household products to residents of Monument East and several other housing projects. He obtains donations from area grocery stores and recruits others to help him. By getting others involved – including younger people with disabilities and older residents – Alston says he builds community.

Alston has also established a tenants-on-patrol operation, in which he and two other men walk through the building at night, with walkie-talkies, to keep an eye on things. “We’re making sure there’s not a lot of noise, or nobody’s sitting in the hallways,” Alston says. If anybody refuses to turn down their loud music, the patrolling tenants call the police.

Alston has also helped start music nights at Monument East and has organized community dinners for the entire building, feeding more than 650 people at a time. “I’m trying to get people motivated to work together,” he says. “Right now, the biggest problem we have is communication, but we’re working on it.”

Such bright spots are reassuring, but widespread anecdotal evidence suggests that many residents of these buildings are becoming more withdrawn and isolated as they become more concerned about other residents.

CRIME AND SECURITY

On March 21, 2006, the worst fears of many in the mixed-population buildings were realized when a new resident of the Brentwood Apartments, a 51-year-old man deemed disabled, fatally stabbed a 73-year-old man who had lived there for several years. The two men were neighbors on the 11th floor and had argued about alcohol sometime before the stabbing, according to police.

The younger man had a criminal record, including a 1999 conviction for assault and a March 2004 conviction for misdemeanor cocaine possession.⁷ How-

ever, HABC officials maintain that nothing in the man’s criminal record precluded him from living in public housing under the agency’s eligibility rules.

Michael Allen, formerly of the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law and a principal author of HABC’s 2004 Section 504 Self-Evaluation, believes the agency has more than enough authority under the federal Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act to exclude such applicants with criminal and drug possession histories. “All tenants—whether they be seniors or younger people with disabilities—deserve better attention by HABC to screening out people with backgrounds that are not conducive to public housing,” says Allen. “Thorough screening and strong enforcement of lease provisions will benefit the entire community.”

The incident exacerbated a concern about crime held by many residents in mixed-population buildings. Although those concerns are real, statistics show that these developments have relatively few reported serious crimes. In 2005, there were no homicides, shootings or rapes reported in the buildings, according to statistics compiled by the Baltimore City Police Department (BCPD).



“All tenants—whether they be seniors or younger people with disabilities—deserve better attention by HABC to screening out people with backgrounds that are not conducive to public housing”



There were seven robberies, 12 aggravated assaults and 45 calls for service for issues related to illegal drugs. (The figures for robberies and aggravated assaults both decreased from 2004 to 2005, according to BCPD.)⁸

Although the official crime statistics are relatively low, some residents and others report that elderly residents of mixed-population buildings can be afraid to report crimes or inappropriate behavior – that involved them directly or that they witnessed – for fear of reprisal. This assertion is hard to assess but is backed up by the observations of officials who are familiar with the concerns. “Seniors are afraid of retribution” from residents and guests involved in drugs, says William Miller, executive director of the Greater Homewood Community Corporation, which has worked on services in mixed-population buildings in north Baltimore.

This assessment was also supported by Major Jesse B. Oden, the head of the housing police unit within the Baltimore City Police Department. In an interview, he said crime in mixed-population buildings is under-reported because of senior residents’ “fear of retaliation.” However, Major Oden stressed that “very little” drug dealing takes place in the mixed-population buildings, and noted that he could not remember the last time a drug-related search warrant was issued for one of the buildings.

In 2005, HABC established a new lease enforcement unit to deal with problem tenants. In its first year, the lease enforcement unit took very few actions in the mixed-population buildings.⁹ Data provided by HABC show that only two households were evicted from mixed-population buildings in 2005 for reasons related to criminal activity. Three others moved out for “voluntary” reasons after the lease enforcement unit became involved in their situations, HABC records show.¹⁰

continued on page 6

continued from page 5

One area of concern for many residents was the uneven performance of front-desk monitors in the mixed-population buildings. These HABC employees are charged with monitoring the building entrance to ensure that only residents and their guests come in. Many residents contend that these employees do not adequately screen visitors, and the author of this report noticed monitor stations that were not staffed at least twice during visits to the buildings. Some residents complain that they often get only a busy signal when they dial the front-desk monitors. “The [monitoring] system is broken,” one Lakeview tenant told HABC officials at a recent tenant council meeting. Added another, “We see a lot of people we don’t know in the building.”

Although some residents say they expect the front-desk employees to serve essentially as security guards, HABC officials say that monitors are not trained for security work. If they become aware of a security concern, monitors are instructed to call the police. HABC officials concede that the low-paid monitor positions have high rates of turnover. And in many cases, only one monitor is on duty at a time, meaning that the front desks have no staffing whenever the monitor leaves for a bathroom break or for any other reason. HABC officials say that budget constraints preclude adding more monitor staff to ease such problems.

One step that could help bolster security would be video surveillance systems. HABC analyzed the cost of installing such systems in 2004. The agency estimated that it would cost \$584,000 to install and operate the cameras in all mixed-population buildings in the first year and \$120,000 to operate them in the second year. However, HABC considers the family housing projects, with their greater rates of crimes, as a more pressing law-enforce-

ment priority than the mixed-population buildings.

THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY’S PERSPECTIVE

Advocates for people with disabilities have paid close attention to the issues affecting quality of life in the mixed-population buildings.

These advocates acknowledge that some younger disabled residents may be using drugs or causing problems. But they reject the assertion that these younger disabled tenants are entirely responsible for the buildings’ perceived and real problems. Indeed, some disabled residents of mixed-population buildings contend that some elderly residents are engaging in inappropriate activity, including drug use and the hiring of prostitutes.

While elderly residents of the mixed-population buildings have raised valid concerns about conditions within their buildings, advocates for people with disabilities say they also want more attention from HABC to the issues within those buildings, which also affect disabled residents. Problems in those buildings can be particularly troublesome for low-income people with disabilities because they, unlike seniors, have few other housing options. Since 1992, advocates estimate that at least 500,000 units of affordable housing have been designated elderly-only around the country; during that time, the number of units designated for people with disabilities has been far smaller.¹¹ “There are many more options for senior citizens than for persons with disabilities,” says Lauren Young, director of litigation for the Maryland Disability Law Center.

That makes it particularly troubling for people with disabilities that conditions in the mixed-population buildings have deteriorated. Advocates say that it is incumbent upon HABC to manage the mixed-population buildings effec-

tively – for the benefit of all residents, disabled or not. And they reject any discussion of designating any housing as restricted only to people with disabilities, which would amount to a new form of segregation. Such segregation would reinforce existing stigmas, and experience has shown that housing set aside for people with disabilities has often been in poorly maintained buildings in economically disadvantaged communities, advocates say.

THE LOCAL RESPONSE

The issues facing residents of mixed-population buildings have been apparent in the public housing arena for many years, going back to the 1980s, and have arisen in public housing in many places in the country.

But HABC appears to have done little to address these issues. Indeed, due to budget cutbacks, HABC has taken steps that may have exacerbated tensions within the mixed-population buildings. In Baltimore now, for example, some high-rise building managers are spread thin by having to oversee two buildings, each with hundreds of residents.

HABC also employs counselors to work with public housing residents to obtain needed services and to handle such things as crisis management, referrals, bringing providers into the buildings and assisting tenant councils. At one time years ago, the authority had about 35 counselors, with one assigned to each public housing building or development. As of February, the department employed only 14 counselors and supervisors to work with more than 40,000 people in the city’s 35 public housing developments, including family projects and mixed-population buildings. Counselors are sometimes assigned to as many as five mixed-population buildings, although HABC has taken recent steps to require counselors to spend more time in some mixed-population buildings. Discussions with HABC employees make it clear that

continued on page 7

these counselors are able to focus on only the most pressing problems in each building. There is little time for programs or efforts designed to reduce tensions between different age groups in a mixed-population building.

In contrast to the staffing levels in HABC buildings, a private nonprofit company, Homes for America Inc., will provide a full-time building manager and full-time service coordinator to the Leonard W. Foxwell Sr. Memorial Apartments building in northwest Baltimore when it purchases the property in 2006. The 200-unit building is home to both elderly and non-elderly disabled residents, all eligible for housing subsidies.

HABC has been unable to secure federal resources to address issues in the mixed-population buildings. In 2005, the authority applied for a HUD grant to pay for additional staff in some of the mixed-population buildings but was turned down. An appeal is planned and the authority is expected to re-apply in 2006 for such a grant.¹²

Outside providers and agencies do offer some services inside some mixed-population buildings, but there appears to be a broad need for more – for residents of all ages and disability status. The Maryland Department of Aging helps fund, for example, a congregate housing program to provide meals and basic assistance to elderly residents. That program was available in at least 10 of the mixed-population buildings but is now in only three, serving about 50 residents.

Mental health services are widely perceived as being inadequate for mixed-population building residents of all ages. “The inadequacy of services is not only for the elderly, but people of all ages who are depressed, addicted, formerly homeless,” says Joanne C. Gladden, an associate professor of nursing at the College of Notre Dame, who has

▲

Outside providers and agencies do offer some services inside some mixed-population buildings, but there appears to be a broad need for more – for residents of all ages and disability status.

▼

supervised seminars and other events in high-rise public housing buildings in Baltimore for several years.¹³

The lack of staff attention to the problem might be of less concern if these buildings had tenant councils that were able to plan events and take other steps to bring these high-rise communities together. However, interviews suggest that many of these tenant councils do not function effectively.

HABC has recently begun a limited program aimed at the problems in mixed-population buildings. The program, known as the Building Communities Initiative, seeks to identify and train residents to become active in community building activities and conflict resolution. The concept could have some merit. But, to date, HABC has committed no new funding to the program and has been unable to secure outside funding.

In tandem with the Building Communities Initiative, HABC is looking to establish a new program that pairs young people with elderly or disabled residents of public housing – to provide companionship and assistance with basic personal assistance.

The Baltimore City Police Depart-

ment’s housing unit has recently assigned an officer to develop a program along the lines of Citizens on Patrol, to help develop an in-house awareness of security issues. And HABC’s top officials have asked the police department’s housing unit to increase the police presence in the mixed-population buildings, particularly at the first of the month, when benefit checks are cashed. That has typically translated into police officers parking outside these buildings to monitor activities. Baltimore police do not make routine patrols inside the mixed-population buildings.

RESPONSES ELSEWHERE

The issues in Baltimore’s mixed-population buildings arise in many communities, generating a variety of responses.

The Housing Authority of the City of Annapolis, for example, is planning to seek permission to designate the Glenwood mixed-population building as elderly-only, in response to problems mixing the two populations currently living there.

Such designations are not feasible in many areas and some cities have responded assertively (beginning many years ago) to the issues.¹⁴ The housing authority in Providence, R.I., for example, secured state grants to hire social workers to provide outreach, assessment, crisis intervention, education, advocacy and referrals to community agencies.

Other housing agencies have worked closely with community-based mental health providers to develop a system of support services for the mentally ill. In other cases, housing agencies have developed numerous agreements with nonprofit groups to work specifically to improve the sense of community inside mixed-population buildings.

In Knoxville, Tenn., a community development corporation has sent case managers to visit public housing resi-

continued from page 7

dents in their homes to help them find appropriate community services in response to problems in the building.

In Connecticut, unlike here, state officials are working on the issue. Legislation approved by the Connecticut General Assembly in 2005 requires state social service agencies to work directly with local housing authorities to identify services that are available, improve outreach efforts, and bolster crisis intervention services. This year, the legislature is considering several steps to improve services for elderly and non-elderly people with disabilities in public housing, including a new expenditure of \$1 million for resident service coordinators. In January 2006, Connecticut legislators joined local public housing officials at a forum to discuss the issue.

The Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon took a comprehensive approach to the issue in 1994, when younger, disabled residents began moving into senior-only buildings. The Portland authority convened a 34-person committee that included housing officials, residents, police, church representatives, city agencies, and social service representatives to develop a plan for merging the two populations in 10 (now 11) public housing buildings. Among the steps taken since then: a) better training in mental health issues for staff; b) placement of a current total of four counselors to work in the 11 buildings; c) better communication and more regular resident meetings; d) staff training to respond to the needs of people with disabilities; and e) mediation training. All of Portland's mixed-population buildings have a full-time site manager and a part-time, evening assistant manager. Most of the buildings receive support from outside community partners through an Adopt-a-Building program. To enhance security, residents must use a coded swipe card to enter their build-

ing and all buildings have closed-circuit security to allow residents to see who is entering the building.

Portland officials report that conditions in the buildings are generally strong more than a decade after the plan was launched. One key achievement was breaking down communication barriers between populations and helping residents become more engaged in activities and tenant council work. One key lesson: disruptive behavior by a small group of residents – even just one resident – can hurt the atmosphere in a building and stoke perceptions that the building is more troubled than it is.

A 1996 study for the Fannie Mae Foundation concluded there was no easy solution. But it recommended that housing agencies take these steps: improve applicant screening to eliminate incompatible residents; set up residential zoning within buildings by



Portland officials report that conditions in the buildings are generally strong more than a decade after the plan was launched. One key achievement was breaking down communication barriers between populations and helping residents become more engaged in activities and tenant council work.



lifestyle, functional ability and support needs (in buildings where such clustering is practicable); establish better case coordination between mental health and social service agencies; and provide better staff training to cope with interpersonal relations, group dynamics and other issues.¹⁵

These common-sense responses are needed in Baltimore. But outside experts who have looked at the issue agree that progress comes only with good management.

“In a word, the solution is management, management, management,” says Ann O’Hara, director of housing for the Technical Assistance Collaborative in Boston, which has studied issues in mixed-population buildings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In several interviews for this report, elderly residents of Baltimore’s mixed-population buildings expressed their strong desire to return to the days of senior-only housing. The reality is that such a move will not happen in the foreseeable future and there are compelling arguments against it, most importantly the critical need to find suitable housing for thousands of low-income persons with disabilities in Baltimore.

With HABC’s public housing waiting list dominated by non-elderly disabled people, the percentage of households in the high-rise buildings headed by a non-elderly person with a disability will surely grow. Already, two of the city’s mixed-population buildings have a majority of residents who are younger people with disabilities. It is not inconceivable that many more, if not all of the buildings, could eventually have a majority of residents who are non-elderly (a trend due in large measure to the fact that older people tend to have more options beyond public housing than do people with disabilities, such as assisted-living facilities and federally subsidized developments).

continued on page 9

With that in mind, this report offers the following recommendations:

1. Recognize the Problem

While this report does not attempt a rigorous statistical analysis of the situation, interviews and observations make clear that there is a problem in Baltimore's mixed-population buildings. A key cause is the unwillingness of the federal government to respond to the issues apparent in many mixed-population buildings. The federal government has cut back significantly on its housing budget, leaving housing authorities to try to cope with complicated issues without adequate resources. The federal government should make funding available to help these authorities and tenants.

At the same time, elected officials at both the city and state level must acknowledge that residents of these buildings – both elderly and not – need more support to maintain a good and safe quality of life. The Housing Authority of Baltimore City, along with a variety of groups and institutions in the community, must also refocus on the problems. One thing seems clear: HABC does not have the resources or wherewithal to tackle the issue on its own. However, HABC must take the lead to develop responses to the challenging issues – both within the agency and in the broader community.

2. Improve Staffing

HABC should look for ways to improve staffing within the mixed-population buildings. It is unacceptable to have a half-time building manager and a once-a-week service counselor in developments with such pressing needs. Private-sector apartment buildings typically maintain better staffing ratios to adequately respond to the needs of residents of all ages.

▲

The federal government has cut back significantly on its housing budget, leaving housing authorities to try to cope with complicated issues without adequate resources. The federal government should make funding available to help these authorities and tenants.

▼

3. Improve Security

Although crime statistics show that serious crime is rare, many residents of mixed-population buildings say they live in fear. Some steps could help ease such concerns. HABC should consider expanded use of video surveillance systems and other monitoring devices as well as the use of coded swipe cards to enter buildings. The authority should also improve front-desk monitoring procedures and institute a more rigorous system of visitor sign-ins. Guests who break the rules should be kept out of buildings. Given the reports of drug use, drug dealing, panhandling and prostitution in some buildings, Baltimore City police should increase their presence in and around these buildings.

HABC has created a lease-enforcement unit, a good step. It should work aggressively to sanction and/or evict problem tenants. HABC should also review and strengthen its screening procedures for would-be tenants.

4. Continue to Expand Housing Options for People With Disabilities

Many low-income disabled Baltimoreans have few housing options beyond public housing. Seniors, on the other hand, have many more affordable residential communities available to them, subsidized by the federal government.

Under the terms of consent decrees reached with the the Maryland Disability Law Center and federal government, HABC is required to create more units for people with disabilities. People with disabilities also get a strong preference for filling one-bedroom apartments in the city's family public housing, and more Section 8 vouchers are being set aside for this population. These are critical steps to give people with disabilities more options and HABC should work to implement them as expeditiously and efficiently as possible.

5. Provide Move-In Assistance for Tenants with Disabilities

Disability advocates have sought HABC assistance for some disabled tenants moving into public housing, particularly those living in their own home alone for the first time. Such assistance lasting for six months would help disabled residents understand their responsibilities as tenants and provide them with access to services that are available in the building or community (although the available services may currently be inadequate). Any such assistance would have to be carefully structured to ensure it does not amount to illegal screening of disabled applicants.

6. Increase Community Involvement

HABC has cut back severely on staffing within its mixed-population buildings, even as the needs within those buildings continue to rise. Others must help address those needs, particularly the state of Maryland and other Baltimore City agencies, but also private

organizations and nonprofit groups. Some organizations have already taken steps to help, such as Morgan State University's social work department, the nursing department at College of Notre Dame, Greater Homewood Community Corporation, churches and others. But much more help will be required to provide needed services and assistance to both the elderly and people with disabilities, particularly mental health assistance. Other outside groups could play a role by working with tenants and tenant councils to build community and break down walls of separation that are dividing these buildings. HABC should aggressively seek to enlist such partners and create sustainable roles for these partners to play.

Other states have taken a more hands-on role in meeting the challenges inside mixed-population buildings. Maryland state officials should look for cost-effective ways to help. One possibility tried in other states would be to pay for a full-time residential service coordinator in each building.

7. Improve Mental Health Services to All Residents

The Psychogeriatric Assessment and Treatment and Teaching in City Housing program (PATCH) provides on-site mental health assessments and treatment to older residents of public housing, using funding from the state of Maryland and other institutions. HABC and other partnering organizations have unsuccessfully sought funding to create a new program to provide similar services to younger residents. Because the need for this kind of service remains high, HABC and others should continue to explore ways to provide it, with a goal of assisting and encouraging public housing residents of all ages to receive mental health treatment when needed.

ABOUT THE REPORT

Author Tom Waldron is a Baltimore researcher and writer, and a former reporter for The Baltimore Sun, where he covered state issues for more than a decade. This report is based on a review of numerous documents, site visits to several mixed-population buildings and interviews with more than 30 people, including the following:

Joanne C. Gladden, College of Notre Dame

William Miller, Greater Homewood Community Corporation

Maj. Jesse B. Oden, Baltimore City Police Department

Michael Allen, formerly with the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Lauren Young, Maryland Disability Law Center

Luciene M. Parsely, Maryland Disability Law Center

Janice MacGregor, Maryland Department of Aging

Ann O'Hara, Technical Assistance Collaborative

Spencer L. Giles, HABC Lease Enforcement Unit

Amy Wilkinson, HABC associate executive director

Jemine Bryon, HABC deputy executive director

Fred Swan, HABC director of resident services

Jannai Goslee, HABC general counsel

Portia Meachem, HABC special programs supervisor

Trudy P. McFall, chairman, Homes For America

June Murray, Morgan State University, director of gerontology,
Department of Social Work

Beatrice Robbins, Johns Hopkins Bayview, geriatric mental health
services manager

Naomi Bledsoe, Housing Authority of Portland, program manager for
seniors and people with disabilities

Cliff Martin, deputy executive director, Housing Commission of
Anne Arundel County

Public Housing Residents:

Devon Wilford-Said, Rev. Ahmed B. Said, Anna Warren, Isla Murrill,
Myron Alston, James Jackson, Clenso Robinson, Esther Hall, Pearl Johnson,
Earlene Smooth, Elizabeth Holloman, Julia Brinson and Lil Easley

The Abell Foundation also sponsored a community forum at one public housing building, where more than 15 people shared their views.

Footnotes

¹ HABC's public housing budget, which is all federal funds, has decreased the last three years and could be cut again in the budget being considered by Congress.

² Active drug users are prohibited from living in public housing. And a person must wait three years after a felony conviction or after leaving incarceration to become eligible for public housing. Applicants must submit to a criminal background check. However, HABC does not require applicants to go through drug screening.

In 1998, Congress included a provision in federal housing law stating that "no individual shall be considered a person with disabilities, for purpose of eligibility for low-income housing...solely on the basis of any drug or alcohol dependence."

³ As of the summer of 2005, HABC subsidized 20,918 households, either in public housing or with Section 8 properties. Of those, 4,520 were categorized as elderly households (3,192 in public housing and 1,328 in Section 8), and 4,319 were non-elderly disabled households (1,705 in public housing and 2,614 in Section 8 properties).

⁴ A 2005 grant application by HABC to The Abell Foundation notes that "Many of the [non-elderly disabled tenants] are actively using alcohol and drugs and may be engaged in crimes such as prostitution."

⁵ The Morgan State students visit once a semester, under the direction of Dr. June Murray, a professor who initiated the visits to ease the isolation of seniors in the building.

⁶ Several residents of mixed-population buildings said there is a problem with prostitutes entering the high-rise buildings to visit residents, including some who are elderly. HABC officials acknowledged that there may be a prostitution problem, but said it was difficult to prevent.

⁷ The accused man had also been charged in 2003 with breaking into the house of an elderly relative (although that charge was dropped.) At the time of his arrest in 2003 on the cocaine and burglary charges, he was ordered to undergo drug and alcohol treatment, according to court records. After his conviction on the cocaine possession charge, a judge imposed a one-year probation sentence. Eight months later, in November 2004, the court issued a warrant for his arrest after he allegedly violated the terms of his probation, by failing to find work or go to school and by not staying in contact with his probation agent. The man eventually returned to court. His probation ended in June 2005, not long before he moved into the Brentwood, according to residents there.

⁸ By comparison, crime remains a major problem in other public housing in Baltimore. In HABC's family developments in 2005, there were 12 homicides, 33 shootings, 3 rapes, 83 robberies, 277 aggravated assaults and 3948 calls for service related to drugs. (Those crime figures also decreased from 2004 to 2005, according to BCPD.)

⁹ The lease enforcement unit was created following the dissolution of HABC's police force, which had more than 70 employees. The Baltimore City Police Department now polices public housing buildings. As of March 2006, 66 officers were assigned to the unit within the department that polices HABC properties.

¹⁰ The lease enforcement unit intervenes in cases referred by the police or building managers. Tenants who are arrested are often evicted, according to HABC officials. In other cases, investigators attempt to determine if a reported problem is being caused by a resident or a guest. Any eviction action taken against a tenant must be approved by an HABC attorney.

¹¹ National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, "Housing for People with Mental Illness," presentation to NAMI national conference, June 2005.

¹² Public housing tenant councils, as well as non-profit organizations working with tenant councils or HABC, are also eligible to apply for these grants from HUD, but officials said none have done so in recent years.

¹³ HABC, along with outside agencies, tried unsuccessfully in 2005 to secure federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration funding to improve mental health services for public housing residents over the age of 60.

That grant application built on a study of the issue by the Maryland Department of Aging, completed in 2004, which outlined a process for developing a model for improved service delivery for older public housing residents. The study concluded that there were inadequate supports to allow elderly residents to age in place (and avoid being moved into nursing or assisted living facilities) and that there was "a lack of coordination of information and service delivery among the multiple public and private agencies serving elderly public housing residents." www.mdoa.state.md.us/SAEPHrpt1.pdf

¹⁴ One of the most thorough looks at how local housing agencies responded to the challenges of mixed-population buildings was released in 1993: "Creating Community: Integrating Elderly and Severely Mentally Ill Persons in Public Housing," prepared for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

¹⁵ Leonard F. Heumann, "Assisted Living in Public Housing: A Case Study of Mixing Frail Elderly and Younger Persons with Chronic Mental Illness and Substance Abuse Histories," *Housing Policy Debate*, Volume 7, Issue 3, Fannie Mae Foundation, 1996.

"Private Discomfort In Public Housing" is available on The Abell Foundation's website at www.abell.org or: write to The Abell Foundation 111 S. Calvert Street, Baltimore, MD 21202

**The following back issues of
The Abell Report are available.
Check request and send to:**

The Abell Foundation
111 S. Calvert Street, Suite 2300
Baltimore, MD 21202

PLEASE SEND ME:

May 2006

MAGNA's Baltimore Technical Training Center, for providing an opportunity to learn the tool and die trade, and for inspiring a passion for a life within it.

January 2006

Underground video gambling industry costing Maryland more than \$15 million annually in uncollected taxes.

December 2005

Special Education in the Baltimore City high Schools: Perspectives, Challenges, Recommendations.

September/October 2005

Going Public With School Privatization: State's contract with Edison Schools, Inc. is in its fifth year. A new report examines the arrangement and raises the question: Is it a good deal for the Baltimore City Public Schools?

November/December 2005

In New Orleans, death was highest among people who lacked access to cars. In Baltimore City, the percentage of those with lack-of-access is higher than New Orleans's.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

ABELL SALUTES:

Continued from page 1

Knowledge Pre-School Initiative helped Baltimore County Head Start administrators, teachers, children and parents focus on providing the resources and training needed to produce what Heather Callister, director of the pre-school initiative, calls "quantum leaps in the cognitive development of at-risk children."

Ms. Callister observes, "The remarkable success of the Baltimore County Head Start program is due, purely and simply, to the commitment of Head Start teachers and YMCA administrators to embrace change for the betterment of the children.

"The change includes the adoption of the Core Knowledge pre-school curriculum, which includes the best practices that research has identified and continues to identify. No rocket science here, just skill-based planning, intentional teaching that develops children's skills, specifically early language and literacy classroom mentoring of teachers, and ongoing assessment of skills to evaluate a child's progress and needs. Yes, and for the critics, play is an integral component. Core Knowledge is one of the very few pre-school curricula that has external evaluation to demonstrate its effectiveness. And finally at a cost of \$450 per child annually, the project can be replicated."

Over the last five years, the Core Knowledge Pre-School Initiative has provided not only intensive staff training for all County Head Start Teachers and Assistants in the Core Knowledge domains: Social Skills; Children's Literature; Phonemic

Awareness; Oral Language; Mathematical and Scientific Reasoning; Art and Music; and Movement and Coordinators. In addition, every classroom was given the necessary resources and materials to implement the curriculum and was provided with twice-monthly mentoring.

According to Ms. Callister, Baltimore County's Head Start children are excelling in three of kindergarten's most important and, for low income children, most challenging academic areas: language and literacy (53 percent ready); mathematical thinking (64 percent ready); and scientific thinking (45 percent ready). Baltimore County Head Start children rated 61 percent "fully ready" in the domain of social competence, on a par with the State average. The program runs four half-days a week, 20 percent of its children have assessed challenging behaviors and 10 percent are English As A Second Language (ESL) students. Interestingly, only 15 percent of Baltimore County Head Start teachers have a Bachelor's Degree and a small percentage of those have a major in childhood education. "Yet," Ms. Callister notes, "these teachers have demonstrated that, with adequate support, they are more than qualified for the challenge."

The Abell Foundation salutes Baltimore County Head Start, the YMCA of Central Maryland, and the Core Knowledge Pre-School Initiative for effecting "quantum leaps in the cognitive development of at-risk children"