

July 7 – 13, 2011

Broward's housing authority gets funds to help reunite families

Staff Report

LAUDERDALE LAKES, FL – Broward County Housing Authority (BCHA) has received nearly \$1.2 million in Family Unification vouchers from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The 100 vouchers will reunite families that have been split up due to inadequate housing, as well as help young adults (ages 18-21) who are aging out of foster care.

The Family Unification vouchers enable families and young adults to rent housing from private landlords and pay about 30 percent of their monthly income toward rent and utilities.

"There are people in Broward County who are struggling every day to keep their families together and a roof over their heads," said Ann Deibert, CEO of BCHA. "These vouchers will help. The voucher program underscores how important the need is for quality affordable housing in our community."

The Family Unification vouchers were a result of a competitive grant with \$15 million allocated nationwide through more than 1,900 vouchers. BCHA was awarded 74 percent of the vouchers in Florida and was granted the most money of any housing authority in the United States. Eligible public housing authorities were selected in highest rank order by scoring each application based on the rating criteria. BCHA already administers 325 Family Unification Vouchers with Plantation-based ChildNet, a private not-for-profit organization that administers the child wel-



STOCK PHOTO

fare system in Broward County.

"It's heartbreaking to realize that thousands of children live in foster care or are forced to live with other families because their parents can't afford a home," said HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan. "The funding provided today will keep thousands of families together."

BCHA worked closely with ChildNet to secure the grants.

"This was a team effort between BCHA and ChildNet," Deibert said. "HUD was looking for agencies that had previously administered a family unification

"It's heartbreaking to realize that thousands of children live in foster care or are forced to live with other families because their parents can't afford a home"

— HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan

program. Fortunately for us and Broward County, the relationship was already in place between our two organizations."

ChildNet will refer eligible families and youth to the program and will provide case management.

"ChildNet and the Broward County Housing Authority are helping families whose inadequate housing is the primary factor in the separation or near separation from their children and former foster youth in need of housing

assistance," said Emilio Benitez, ChildNet's president and chief executive officer. "This is an excellent example of Community Based Care in action. This interagency effort and resource sharing to combat the problem of homelessness for

Broward County's most needy families will not only preserve families but also provide youth aging out of foster care with the support they need as they transition to living on their own."

According to HUD, the program saves the federal government money. It costs approximately \$57,000 annually per family to place children into foster care. The cost to provide housing and support services, such as those in the Family Unification Program, averages less than \$14,000 per family each year. HUD expects the program will reunite nearly 3,500 children with their parents, saving \$74 million in foster care annually.

Cost savings are also significant for young adults aging out of foster care. The average annual cost for a voucher for young adults is \$5,600, one-tenth of the estimated costs associated with undesirable outcomes such as homelessness, jail or residential treatment for mental illness or drug rehabilitation.

"These Family Unification vouchers underscore the critical role stable housing plays in keeping families together and safe," said F.J. "Rico" Petrocelli, Chairman of the BCHA Board of Commissioners. "We will be able to reunify hundreds of Broward County children with their families, prevent homelessness among youth aging out of foster care and ultimately reduce costs to the taxpayer. Because of our track record of doing things the right way, BCHA was able to secure the majority of the vouchers in Florida. HUD knows that when they give BCHA money, it will be spent correctly."