

# The Housing Connectors Team Program

## **Kentucky Housing Corporation**

Special Needs Housing: Combating Homelessness

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**HFA Name:** Kentucky Housing Corporation  
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### **The Housing Connectors Team Program**

As the largest Public Housing Authority (PHA) in the state, Kentucky Housing Corporation (KHC) provides its traditional Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program to 87 counties, as well as special purpose vouchers to the 118-county Kentucky Balance of State Continuum of Care (KY BoS CoC). Since July 2020, KHC has been allocated over 600 special purpose vouchers, including Mainstream, Elderly/Disabled Housing Vouchers, Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs), and Family Unification Program (FUP). Soon it will also receive the largest allocation of Stability Vouchers in the state. Kentucky as a whole has received 567 EHV allocations, 272 of which went to KHC. Suffice it to say, the KHC HCV program has experienced a significant expansion.

### **Innovation**

EHVs were created to target rental assistance to households who are: homeless; at risk of homelessness; fleeing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking; or were recently homeless or have a high risk of housing instability. To meet the demand of the EHVs and to best serve the special populations for which they were created, KHC created a new innovative team within the Housing Contract Administration (HCA) Department as an interdepartmental point of contact and provisioner of EHV services. Called the Housing Connector Team (HCT), it is comprised of five regionally located Housing Connectors and a supervisor. The team is tasked with helping people experiencing homelessness achieve housing stability by ensuring swift lease-ups and continued support. The HCT serves as a liaison between eligible EHV households, KY Balance of State (KY BoS) case managers, landlords, and the KHC HCV Department. The Housing Connectors (HCs) work in the field, not in an office, to help tenants search for housing, work with local landlords, and address housing stability barriers.

The HCT was hired specifically because they have specialized training in best practices for serving people experiencing homelessness, making them a great fit for HCA. Once employed by KHC, the team received intensive in-house training from the HCV Department. In addition, since joining KHC, they have taken the Nelrod Training and are now Certified Housing Quality Standards (HQS) Inspectors. The HCs knowledge of special populations, housing vouchers, and inspections mean they can work with clients from initial contact through housing placement. What would typically take three departments for the EHVs only takes one team. This has had the added benefit of increasing in trust and rapport between landlords and KHC.

### **Results and Replicability**

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When the HCT program started, KHC had facilitated 12 EHV lease-ups. Since the HCT program has been active, 153 additional EHV lease-ups have been facilitated.

These results are decidedly replicable. In fact, both sides of HUD responsible for EHV—Public and Indian Housing (PIH) and Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPS)—have encouraged all PHAs to develop EHV teams as a national best practice for the program to ensure the most effective implementation. The HCT is an innovative team that braids pandemic relief funding, EHV Admin and most recently secured CoC Supportive Services Only funding under the Special NOFO so that the team may continue service activities beyond COVID relief funds. These funds provide all staffing costs to support the team’s sustainability. Additionally, the overall success of the HCT since its launch in 2022 has garnered KHC-wide commitment to its sustainability and its growth.

This cross-departmental partnership is an admirable example of what can be achieved when different teams within a large organization come together with a shared commitment to finding innovative solutions to complex challenges, such as ending homelessness.

### **Removing Barriers**

The boots-on-the-ground approach has enabled the HCT to identify gaps and bring them to the attention of the HCV program, which in turn has been able to lower barriers and improve outcomes. At the beginning of the HCT program, for example, HCs were stymied by outdated information. Each week, the HCT would receive a spreadsheet with updated household information, but soon after being sent, the spreadsheet would become outdated because the status of inspections, lease agreements, and voucher paperwork were constantly evolving. Often, households and case managers weren’t sure if their paperwork was received and being processed, if an inspection had been scheduled, passed, or failed, etc. The HCT decided to implement Smartsheet, a technology that includes real-time updates on client progress, automated workflows for case managers, and data visualization tools for tracking outcomes. With Smartsheet, the HCT avoids all duplication of efforts and any confusion about who should be working on what when. If a status changes on a Tuesday, HCT doesn’t have to wait until the next week to find out. The updated household information is immediately available in Smartsheet. All parties know when it’s their turn to move the cases forward. This technology has increased efficiency exponentially and allowed the HCT to easily share reports with partner agencies.

### **Success Story**

Below is the expedited timeline for a real client who secured housing through an EHV with the assistance of the HCT.

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**Step 1: EHV Referral, Program Briefing, and Voucher Issuance (13 business days)**

- 9/30/22: A referral is sent to HCV EHV Targeted Program Specialist.
- 10/03/22: A briefing letter is mailed; the HCT coordinates with the referring agency to ensure the briefing is completed quickly.
- 10/5/22: The program briefing is completed.
- 10/19/22: The voucher is issued.

**Step 2: Housing Search (3 months)**

- 10/19/22: Housing search begins. HC travels to make in-person contact with property management companies and apartment complexes. HC reaches out to local CoC Homeless Service providers to request landlord contacts.

**Step 3: Landlord Engagement (8 business days)**

- 1/30/23: Using one of the landlord contacts from the local provider, the HC matches a landlord and his available unit to the client. HC facilitates meeting with landlord and client.
- 2/08/22: HC works with landlord to facilitate the delivery of correct and complete leasing documents to the HCV program.

**Step 4: Inspection to Lease-Up (5 business days)**

- 2/14/23: The Target Program Specialist sends Request for Inspection (RFI) to Inspection Team. Inspection fails. HC submits request for reinspection.

**Step 5: Lease-Up (1 business day)**

- 2/21/23: HCT completes HQS Reinspection and unit passes. HCT facilitates lease-up. HC moderates conversations between the tenant and the landlord regarding expectations on tenancy (maintenance requests, communication preferences, etc.).

The EHV holder officially moved from homelessness to housed by signing the lease. The landlord received the sign-on bonus and security deposit within 10 business days.

This story is just one example but highlights the importance of the HCT program and its partnership with the KY BoS, KHC HCV Department, and the KHC Inspection Team. This alliance has resulted in successful outcomes for many clients, like the tenant highlighted above. Through their joint efforts, they have created a more streamlined and efficient process for lease-ups, while also prioritizing the needs and well-being of their clients, partners such as Homeless Service Provider agencies and landlords.

The relationship between the PHA and the CoC in the KY BoS CoC is strengthened and more cohesive because of this new partnership. Together, they combine their expertise and resources to create a truer continuum.