

# Housing Connector Team: Ensuring Special Purpose Voucher Holders' Success

**Kentucky Housing Corporation**

Special Needs Housing: Combating Homelessness

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## **Housing Connector Team: Ensuring Special Purpose Voucher Holders' Success**

**Summary:** In response to low lease-up rates for 300 Mainstream Vouchers, Kentucky Housing Corporation (KHC) created the Housing Connector Team (HCT) in 2022 to provide housing navigation and supportive services across the 118-county Kentucky Balance of State to households experiencing or with a history of homelessness using Special Purpose Vouchers (SPVs). The HCT helped SPV holders overcome barriers to leasing and housing retention and ensured lease up of all SPVs. The HCT fosters collaboration between KHC departments, CoC partner agencies, SPV holders, and their landlords.

**Program Description and State Housing Need:** KHC is the largest public housing authority (PHA) in the Commonwealth, providing Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) in 87 counties and SPVs, including Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs), Mainstream Vouchers (MVs), and Stability Vouchers (SVs), in the 118-county Kentucky Balance of State (KY BoS). Because KHC's Homeless Programs Team (HPT) serves as the Collaborative Applicant/Lead Agency for the KY BoS Continuum of Care (CoC), KHC prioritized 300 MVs awarded in 2020 and 2021 for households experiencing or with a history of homelessness referred by CoC partner agencies through the KY BoS CoC Coordinated Entry System (CES). Even with the great need for permanent housing resources for this target population, the MV lease up rate was quite low, with only 52 vouchers utilized through September 2021 despite nearly 400 referrals from CoC partner agencies. The MV application denial rate was over 54%. In assessing this challenge, the KHC HPT learned that CoC partner agencies did not have the ability to support referred clients through the MV application, housing search, and lease up process because they were often stretched thin with case management and other urgent tasks. KHC's SPV administrative staff also did not have the time or capacity to engage in direct outreach to landlords or tenants in the field to ensure MV-eligible units were identified and all required paperwork was completed.

Therefore, the KHC HPT proposed creation of the Housing Connector Team (HCT) to provide direct housing navigation and wrap-around supportive services to SPV holders, who often are experiencing unsheltered homelessness and do not have access to basics that the program often requires for success, such as a mailing address (all SPV correspondence sent by mail), photo IDs, transportation, email, phones, etc. The need for this team was heightened when KHC received 257 EHVs July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, and 25 SVs on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, which are also referred through the KY BoS CoC CES. While originally proposed to provide 15 Housing Connectors across the state to align with Kentucky's 15 CoC regions, the HCT deployed five Connectors and one supervisor, who onboarded from February through November 2022, initially focusing on EHVs. Despite the smaller team size, this innovative model has proven highly effective in filling a critical gap: bridging the space between SPV holders, KHC's SPV administrators, landlords, and referring CoC partner agencies.

**Innovation and Partnerships:** KHC hired Connectors with direct case management experience with training in homeless and housing services best practices including landlord outreach/negotiation, mental health first aid, SOAR, and trauma-informed care. They have a strong understanding of the systems their clients must navigate, including mainstream benefits

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services programs and social services providers in their local area. The HCT also can conduct HQS/NSPIRE inspections should KHC's HCV inspector team need assistance, ensuring that SPV inspections do not delay lease up.

One of the defining features of this program is its collaborative approach. HCT and KHC SPV administrative staff meet weekly to review and conduct case conferencing for each household who is currently issued a voucher and in the housing search. Case conferencing and consistent communication allows the team to share information, troubleshoot barriers in real-time, and ensure that the tenants are supported throughout the entire process—from referral to lease up. The HCT also regularly updates CoC referring partners on client status. The HCT conducts proactive landlord outreach and provides in-person tenant support. The HCT often travels to very rural parts of the state to reach small private landlords who do not utilize technology- or even have internet access. They will go to landlords' homes to complete leasing packets and explain program policies and regulations. This has fostered a deep sense of trust with the program, by having a name and face to put to the term "Voucher Program". This boots-on-the-ground approach has been innovative and successful, allowing the HCT to form relationships with landlords across 118 counties to quickly identify suitable housing units, streamline the leasing process, and ultimately help tenants secure long-term housing.

**Successes and Marketplace Benefits:**

- 1) The HCT's hands-on support has significantly reduced the burden on CoC partner agencies, which are often stretched thin with case management and other urgent tasks. By taking on key responsibilities such as housing search, landlord outreach, and in-home case management after lease-up, the HCT allows these agencies to focus on their core competencies, such as providing intensive social services and support.
2. HCT first began working with EHV's in February 2022, dramatically reducing the time from referral to voucher issuance and from voucher issuance to lease-up. By following households through the entire process, they ensured EHV holders did not miss deadlines, and offering hands-on support, the HCT has streamlined the housing search process, providing faster and more efficient access to stable housing. (See Attached)
3. Increased Lease-Ups: When the Housing Connector Team (HCT) began working with the Mainstream (MS) program in August 2023, the program has experienced remarkable growth in lease-up activity. In just three months—from August to November—lease-ups increased from **296 to 419**, marking a **41.6% increase**. This unprecedented acceleration occurred despite a pause in accepting new referrals in October, underscoring the effectiveness of HCT's strategies in reducing bottlenecks and helping participants secure housing faster than ever before.
4. The HCT has been able to conduct direct outreach to landlords and tenant support in the field across a huge geography- activities that are typically beyond the capacity of the PHA. This proactive approach has ensured that more landlords are willing to participate in voucher programs, and tenants have received personalized support that facilitates their successful lease-up and long-term housing stability.
5. The HCT has creatively integrated multiple funding streams, (including ERA2, CoC Rural SNOFO, Stability Vouchers, and HOME-ARP) to ensure that clients receive housing assistance **and** wraparound services they need to remain stably housed. This holistic approach has made the program a model for leveraging resources and coordinating services for vulnerable populations.

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6. By providing a dedicated point of contact throughout the entire process, the HCT has received positive feedback from tenants, landlords and referring partner agencies regarding the support they have received. Many tenants have expressed appreciation for the clear communication, ongoing assistance, and the opportunity to access wrap around support while navigating the voucher and lease-up process. The HCT has assisted over 185 Households with returning Recertification paperwork- which prevents termination from the program and over 100 Transfers (ensuring Households don't become homeless again after initial lease up if they are evicted/ need to move etc.)

**Effective Use of Resources:** KHC was able to strategically deploy pandemic-response funding to ensure SPV holders with a history of homelessness had the support needed to lease up their vouchers and achieve housing stability. Initially funded using only ERA2 housing supportive services and administrative dollars, the initial successes of the HCT allowed KHC to secure highly competitive CoC funding to support ongoing Connector services via the Rural SNOFO competition awarded in February 2023. KHC will also use HOME-ARP funding to support HCT operations through October 2023. The flexibility of the HCT is also helping KHC ensure we will spend down all remaining ERA2 funding by the September 2025 deadline, as they started providing increased direct client services, the HCT provided over \$220,000 in services such as Security Deposit, LL incentives, Household items, back owed rent, hotel/ motel vouchers etc., from December 2024 through May 2025. Additionally, by improving SPV lease up rates, the HCT's work contributed to KHC's PHA regaining "high performing status" from HUD. Upon receiving that notification, KHC's Managing Director of Tenant Assistance Programs said that "this could not have been achieved" without the HCT's help. The HCT's impact on our voucher programs and their clients has been a truly impactful investment of one-time grants that led to sustainable funding.

**Replicability:** KHC believes the HCT is a replicable model for HFAs that also administer tenant-based vouchers across a broad geography. It shows how a Balance of State CoC and a PHA can collaborate to ensure SPVs targeted to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness can be effectively deployed with the housing navigation, supportive service, and landlord engagement supports that population may need to achieve lease-up and housing stability. The HCT has shown how to use multiple funding streams to provide these services and how this innovative model can successfully apply for and receive CoC funding. The team has effectively mitigated issues that contributed to the underutilization of some of KHC's SPV programs by offering direct, on-the-ground support to both tenants and landlords. The success of this model speaks to its ability to adapt to the unique needs of special populations in Kentucky, providing a scalable, sustainable solution that could serve as a national best practice.

# Visuals

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KHC EHV Referrals and Lease Ups				Total Vouchers	Leased Up	% Utilized	Available Vouchers	Not Available					
				257	212	82%	45	9					
Date	Total Referrals Received	Change # %	Pending Referrals To Be Processed	Pending Briefings	Briefings Completed Pending Leasing Docs	Pending Inspections	Passed Inspection Pending Lease Up	Total Lease Ups Completed	Change # %	Denials (Total)	Denied Expired Voucher	Denied Voluntary Withdrawal	Denied Did not Complete Briefing
2/15/2022	90		1	16	44	6	2	16					
3/8/2022	126	36 40%	3	15	50	6	1	19	3 19%				
3/22/2022	161	35 28%	5	60	62	4	1	23	4 21%				
3/31/2022	168	7 4%	4	59	69	3	0	25	2 9%				
4/5/2022	169	1 1%	4	57	67	3	0	25	0 0%				
4/19/2022	190	21 12%	13	39	93	6	0	25	0 0%				
5/3/2022	209	19 10%	13	36	105	6	1	27	2 8%				
5/17/2022	213	4 2%	11	17	113	12	3	30	3 11%				
5/31/2022	223	10 5%	14	12	117	12	5	34	4 13%	29			
6/14/2022	232	9 4%	12	14	119	9	2	43	9 26%	33			
7/14/2022	249	17 7%	11	7	124	7	3	56	13 30%	41			
7/29/2022	252	3 1%	3	10	123	6	3	63	7 13%	44			
8/18/2022	256	4 2%	4	7	111	10	3	70	7 11%	51			
9/13/2022	265	9 4%	3	8	100	10	1	78	8 11%	65			
10/4/2022	272	7 3%	2	6	102	6	1	82	4 5%	73			
11/8/2022	283	11 4%	1	7	70	19	2	93	11 13%	91			7
12/12/2022	298	15 5%	3	5	76	2	1	113	20 22%	106			9
2/7/2023	352	54 18%	6	9	66	10	1	125	12 11%	135			9
3/7/2023	388	36 10%	8	12	94	10	3	135	10 8%	145			9
4/11/2023	402	14 4%	5	5	76	6	3	152	17 13%	155			11
5/9/2023	410	8 2%	2	4	80	5	3	165	13 9%	158			11
6/13/2023	417	7 2%	2	2	65	2	4	182	17 10%	166			12
8/8/2023	426	9 2%	2	3	53	4	3	187	5 3%	181			12
9/12/2023	439	13 3%	1	4	50	2	5	197	10 5%	188			13
10/10/2023	444	5 1%	2	1	47	7	2	199	2 1%	194			13
11/7/2023	448	4 1%	0	1	44	5	5	203	4 2%	200			14
12/8/2023	450	2 0%	0	0	33	5	0	212	9 4%	211			14

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KHC Mainstream Voucher Tracking														
Date	Total Referrals Received	Change		Pending Referrals To Be Processed in the Pipeline to Determine Eligibility	Pending Briefings	Briefings Completed Pending Leasing Docs	Pending Inspections	Passed Inspection Pending Lease Up	Total Lease Ups Completed	Change		Denials		
		#	%							#	%	Denied: Over Income	Denied: Expired Voucher	Failure to Return Paperwork
3/31/2022	460	6	1%	257	32	109	20	6	123	3	2%	4	57	
4/5/2022	466	30	6%	251	42	115	4	18	126	5	4%	4	57	
4/20/2022	496	40		141	44	123	8	17	131	8		4	57	
5/3/2022	536	25		203	53	125	9	3	139	2		4	57	
5/16/2022	561	24	4%	213	49	132	11	4	141	2	1%	4	57	
5/31/2022	585	111	19%	196	43	140	9	7	143	2	1%	4	57	
8/18/2022	696	49	7%	167	37	203	5	0	160	17	12%	7	57	
9/13/2022	745	93	12%	215	38	210	19	0	177	17	11%	7	57	
10/4/2022	838	71	8%	210	37	211	48	1	192	15	8%	8	58	
11/9/2022	909	57	6.27%	231	36	181	19	1	210	12	6%	9	58	
12/13/2022	966	68	7.04%	213	56	192	27	8	222	15	7%	9	58	243
2/7/2023	1034	102	9.86%	249	60	218	21	1	237	11	5%	9	58	243
3/7/2023	1136	47	4%	219	53	237	22	8	248	9	4%	9	60	247
4/11/2023	1183	69	6%	236	63	271	16	18	259	15	1%	10	68	250
5/10/2023	1252	57	5%	130	65	208	23	13	274	22	8%	18	78	284
6/13/2023	1309	115	8.79%	110	53	246	21	13	296	30	10.14%	22	78	285
8/9/2023	1424	108	7.58%	92	15	180	40	8	326	24	7.36%	33	101	285
9/12/2023	1532	102	7%	8	37	194	28	22	339	30	9%	11	102	290
10/11/2023	1634	39	2.39%	25	8	258	25	14	359	60	16.71%	11	123	329
11/7/2023	1673	9	1%	0	9	239	34	14	419	-25	-6%	11	123	338
12/8/2023	1682			10	6	231	47	20	394			13	167	343

Total Vouchers

Leased Up

% Utilized

Available Vouchers

Passed Inspection Pending Lease Up

Change

Denials

Denied: Over Income

Denied: Expired Voucher

Failure to Return Paperwork

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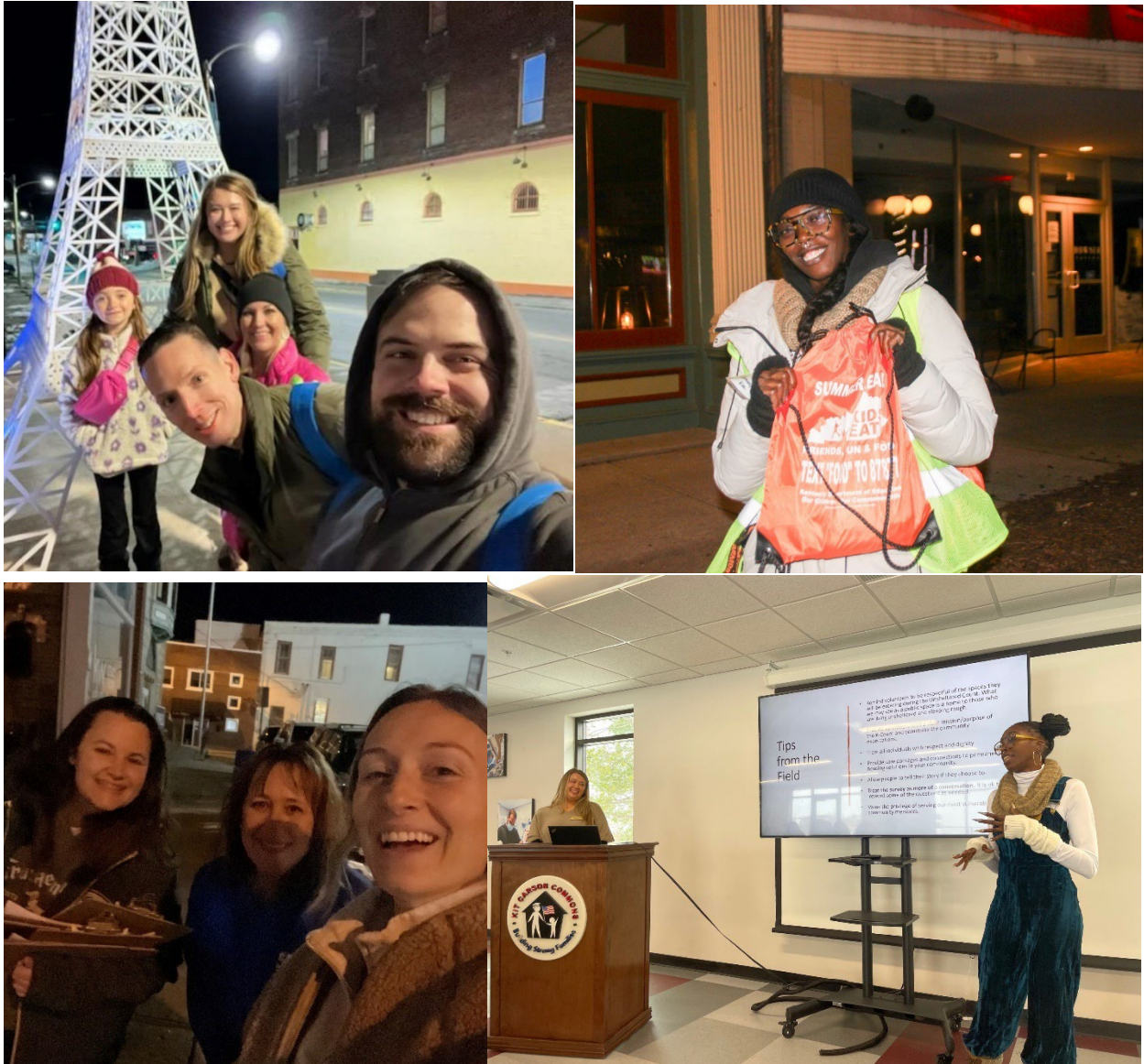
KHC FUP Referrals and Lease Ups				Total Vouchers				Leased Up				% Utilized				Available Vouchers				Passed Inspection Lease Up				Total Lease Ups Completed				Change				Denials (Total)											
Date	Total Referrals Received	#	%	Pending Referrals To Be Processed	Pending Briefings	Briefings Completed Pending Leasing Docs	Pending Inspections	Inspection Pending Lease Up	Completed Lease Ups	#	%	Denials (Total)	Denied Expired Voucher	Denied Voluntary Withdrawal	Denied not Complete Briefing	Failure to return Paperwork	13	15	19	25	41	52	65	75	2	0	0	3	5	10	11	12	10	1	1	0	2	0	10	11	14	15	
3/7/2023	70	16	23%	23	2	16	2	1	32	1	3%	13	2	10	1	1	13	15	19	25	41	52	65	75	2	0	0	3	5	10	11	12	10	1	1	0	2	0	10	11	14	15	
4/11/2023	86	35	41%	50	4	24	3	0	33	0	0%	15	0	1	1	1	15	19	25	41	52	65	75	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	11	11	12	10	1	1	0	2	0	10	11	14	15
5/10/2023	121	27	22%	35	5	42	3	1	30	0	0%	19	0	0	0	0	19	25	41	52	65	75	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	11	11	12	10	1	1	0	2	0	10	11	14	15	
6/13/2023	141	26	18%	25	4	53	3	2	35	5	17%	25	3	0	0	0	25	41	52	65	75	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	11	11	12	10	1	1	0	2	0	10	11	14	15		
8/8/2023	167	23	14%	19	2	54	3	2	37	2	6%	25	3	0	0	0	25	41	52	65	75	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	11	11	12	10	1	1	0	2	0	10	11	14	15		
9/12/2023	190	26	14%	23	1	61	5	2	38	4	11%	41	5	1	1	0	41	52	65	75	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	11	11	12	10	1	1	0	2	0	10	11	14	15			
10/11/2023	216	27	13%	18	3	63	3	2	43	5	12%	52	3	11	11	0	52	65	75	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	11	11	12	10	1	1	0	2	0	10	11	14	15			
11/7/2023	243	19	8%	15	5	60	3	1	48	5	10%	65	12	12	3	3	65	75	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	11	11	12	10	1	1	0	2	0	10	11	14	15			
12/8/2023	262	19	8%	15	5	60	3	1	53	5	10%	75	12	12	3	3	75	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	11	11	12	10	1	1	0	2	0	10	11	14	15			

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A client the Housing Connector Team helped locate housing and move into her home.

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The Housing Connector Team assists with the annual Point in Time Count – the K-Count – in January 2025. They helped train partners on how to perform the count and also helped survey the local communities.