

DHS assists with East End redevelopment project

Khavah Murray worked as a direct-care therapist for many years but now her work is healing in another way. As a Department of Human Services resource specialist, she is assisting with an important neighborhood revitalization project in the East End, by helping to strengthen community ties to health, human service, education, employment and other resources.

As part of DHS Integrated Program Services, Khavah is on the case management team that is easing a transition for residents of the East Liberty Gardens rental assistance units and the Hamilton-Larimer public housing development. The residents will be moving to new units that are being built where East Liberty, Larimer and Shadyside intersect. The new units will replace the ones being torn down, unit for unit.

The revitalization is fueled by a \$30 million U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) [Choice Neighborhoods](#) Implementation (CNI) Grant, awarded to the city in 2014. Pittsburgh was one of four cities nationwide, out of 43 applying, to receive the funding.

CNI projects incorporate a coordinated approach to ameliorating community and social issues and building vital community partnerships that help people in project areas. As CNI's housing implementation entity, [McCormack Baron Salazar](#), moves forward with designing and building mixed-income housing and mixed-use development in the East End project area, the nonprofit [Urban Strategies, Inc.](#) of St. Louis, has been coordinating case management, investing \$4.5 million of the grant to ensure the best possible outcomes for affected residents.

Urban Strategies Inc. has contracted with DHS and three other partners who compose what is called the "People Program" component of the project. Other key partners are the Kingsley Association, 3 Rivers Workforce Investment Board (3WIB)/PA CareerLink, Pittsburgh Public Schools and East End Cooperative Ministry. All work from offices established in both East Liberty Gardens and Hamilton-Larimer.

Some current residents have lived in the developments for decades, so the work of all of the People Program partners is crucial. Leaving familiar surroundings is always difficult but can be especially so for people who have barriers to success, such as low income or physical disabilities.

"The case management works to ensure that residents have access to supportive services so they can cope with the change process and take advantage of resources being invested in the community," said Uma M. Murgan, Vice President, Projects and Fund Development for Urban Strategies. "The case management helps residents make informed choices about where they relocate and to be ready to move back when new housing is built."

Khavah is taking inquiries from housing residents, case managers, employment specialists, health care workers – anyone else involved in the project – to provide links to a spectrum of resources such as infant and toddler screenings, income supports, smoking cessation and criminal record expungement. "I help to figure out the resource when a need is identified, to find out if the person qualifies and how to apply for it," Khavah said.

She also has put together a newsletter that keeps residents informed. Topics include upcoming events such as CPR training, sessions on completing magnet school applications and complimentary luncheons. The newsletter also reminds residents of such important tasks as paying rent on time and keeping case management appointments.

Becky Gloninger, Senior Project Manager for Urban Strategies Inc. for the Pittsburgh Choice Neighborhoods project, said DHS and Khavah's assistance has been most welcome, with Khavah's ability to easily build relationships with project partners and residents especially notable. "She has no judgment, she is respectful and show warmth toward the residents. She is very flexible and willing to help, which is the only way the project works," Becky said.