

## Chattanooga Housing Authority Experience and Reaction

### **Experience**

On Friday, we went and visited the Chattanooga Housing Authority. Our visit began inside their community room, which doubled as a meeting room. This set of housing buildings was designed to be an enclosed community. During the Chattanooga's low-income housing's previous history, the buildings were poorly maintained and it was dangerous, even the police did not visit much. However, during the 80's-90's, the old sites were demolished through grant funding. The site that we saw Friday still has difficult issues that they need to deal with on a daily basis. One such issue is determining whose application to approve. How should one qualify to get in? Income is one common method for housing authorities, because it is easily measurable. If not by income, then how? Disability? Determining eligibility was said to be the central problem and there are always more applications than there are units. The men and woman that we met with said that they try to have good relations with their residents, but it can be hard sometimes- especially if there are behavioral problems.

Funding is another problem that they frequently encounter. Residents pay 30% of their income and the amount of rent that can be received per unit is fixed, whether it comes from the resident or is supplemented by the government. Funding becomes an issue because of resident income instability and with government budget cuts. Regardless of whether the landlords or housing authority update appliances or make renovations, the amount that can be received from each unit stays the same. This explains why in the media and through stories it is said that landlords of low-income housing projects are not motivated to fix or renovate their properties. In an effort to increase the quality of living in project housing, when a project site is first opened, there is a quality inspection. Following that, there are bi-annual inspections, as well as

inspections when a complaint is filed. The government can withhold their portion of the money if units are in disrepair or do not meet the inspection standards.

Following the presentations from the men and woman that work there, we were taken to visit a couple of the units. The first unit that we saw had was one where the tenants had recently been evicted, mainly because of non-payment, and partially because they were not taking good care of the unit. The inside of the unit was infested with what looked like hundreds of small cockroaches. The corners of the rooms and baseboards look like they had mold growing on them. Left over trash and personal items were scattered around the unit. The second unit they brought us into was a finished product, ready to move in to. It was the same in size as the other, but was clean. One of the men said that he desires each unit to be good enough that he would allow his mother to live there.

### **Reaction**

My experience at the Chattanooga Housing Authority was not shocking, but I would consider it eye-opening. Many would look at the dirty, infested unit and blame the housing authority, but I do not imagine that they would feel so comfortable showing us that unit if they thought they were to blame for it. One interesting experience that I noted was when we exited the infested house. The men and women from the housing authority immediately began nonchalantly wiping their feet in the grass when they exited the unit in order to make sure that they did not bring anything with them. One man said that he does not make it a habit to walk in grass, but when he is at work he does, so that when he goes into a resident's home, he can walk across the grass to protect himself from potential bugs, without offending the resident. I found that to be very considerate. Another experience I noted was the similarity to what I have seen in the media and T.V. There were a lot of people home, in the middle of the work day, young men and women

loitering about. It was also a lot bigger than I expected-so many buildings with dozens of units each. Overall, I had a good experience in the Chattanooga Housing Authority and feel as though I learned a lot about a population I was not previously familiar with.