

July/August 2015

Volume 24: Number 4

## Regional Housing Mobility and Interdistrict School Integration: What We Know and What We Need to Do

*In two major recent studies, Professor Raj Chetty and his colleagues found substantial increases in adult income levels and long-term educational attainments for children who move to and grow up in lower-poverty communities—especially where children stay in these neighborhoods for a substantial period of time. This research builds on findings from the Moving to Opportunity research that had already found substantial health benefits for women and girls who move to low poverty neighborhoods. It also builds on several decades of educational research demonstrating strong short- and long-term educational benefits for low-income children attending racially and economically integrated schools (see [www.school-diversity.org](http://www.school-diversity.org)). All of this research confirms what practitioners have long known, that relief from segregation isn't just a right, it is also good for children. Accordingly, in this issue, we are not going to go over this ground again. Instead, we turn our attention to what needs to be done: what are the barriers standing in our way, and how can we make housing and school integration work in more of our segregated metropolitan areas? — the editors*

### Mobility Works America

Elizabeth Julian

In 1978, Congress chartered the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, a non-profit organization to support community development in the United States. NRC was chartered based on the belief that investing in local community development organizations was the best way to revitalize lower-income communities and address the conditions of slum and blight that impacted so many people in those

communities. In 2005, NRC began doing business as NeighborWorks America. NWA provides grants and technical assistance to more than 240 community development organizations working in nearly 4,400 urban, suburban and rural communities across the country. NWA also provides training for community housing and development professionals through its national training institutes. It had total revenues

of approximately \$248 million in 2012-13, most of which were government grants (NWA is one of several specially earmarked annual appropriations for community development organizations).

NWA is an excellent model for a new national housing mobility initia-

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*NeighborWorks might look like. In Part II (next issue), a proposal for a new opportunity-based CDFI program, first introduced in a 2008 article for the Urban Institute, will be reintroduced as model for directing additional federal resources toward fostering more open and inclusive communities, building on another successful model in the community development field.*

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tive to support families living in high-poverty, highly distressed areas who would like to live in areas with less poverty, less crime, less distress and more opportunity. The recent studies on housing mobility by Raj Chetty and colleagues culminate decades of research and evaluation of housing mobility as an anti-poverty strategy for low income families. From the Northwestern University evaluations of the Gautreaux families' experience in Chicago, through two decades of research and evaluation of the data coming from HUD's Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment, there is now clear and convincing evidence that letting low-income families move from high-poverty neighborhoods to neighborhoods with more opportunities has a positive impact on children's life chances in terms of health, education and economic well-being. There is also now clear and convincing (and gut-wrenching) evidence that the life chances of children growing up in areas of high poverty and severe distress are significantly diminished. It is time for creation of a Congressionally-chartered housing mobility non-profit organization to support housing mobility for low-income families in distressed communities who choose to take that path out. It could operate much as NWA does.

Housing mobility organizations,

*Poverty & Race* (ISSN 1075-3591) is published six times a year by the Poverty and Race Research Action Council, 1200 18th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036, 202/906-8023, fax: 202/842-2885, E-mail: info@prrac.org. Chester Hartman, Editor. Subscriptions are \$25/year, \$45/two years. Foreign postage extra. Articles, article suggestions, letters and general comments are welcome, as are notices of publications, conferences, job openings, etc. for our Resources Section. Articles generally may be reprinted, providing PRRAC gives advance permission.

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### Possible Congressional findings for MobilityWorks America

(a) The Congress finds that—

(1) Moving To Opportunity demonstration has proven its worth as a successful program to improve the life chances of low-income children by providing them housing vouchers, counseling and housing search assistance to move from areas of high poverty and urban distress to areas of low poverty and greater opportunity.

(2) The demand for housing mobility counseling services in cities throughout the United States warrants the creation of a public corporation to institutionalize and expand housing mobility counseling services, and other related services which promote access of low-income families living in high-poverty areas to areas with lower poverty, less crime, better schools, healthier environments, and access to greater economic opportunity.

(b) The purpose of this subchapter is to establish a public corporation which will continue and expand the efforts of the Department of Housing and Urban Development to promote access to opportunity for low-income children and their families by working cooperatively with local housing providers, housing authorities, governments, schools, and the broader community to allow children to escape the life-sapping experience of living in neighborhoods of high poverty, high crime, environmental hazards, failing schools, and lack of economic opportunity, by moving to neighborhoods of safety, security and opportunity.

like community development organizations, are best operated at the local level, working directly with the families who live in highly distressed areas, and providing counseling and related support and assistance to help the family find the right place for them in the broader housing market. While housing mobility organizations have never been funded to the degree that CDC's have, by government or philanthropic organizations, the metrics of success for children making these moves are now clear. And there are such organizations in communities around the country to build on and learn from. The regional mobility programs in Chicago, Baltimore and Dallas which assist families participating in the Housing Choice Voucher program are examples of what can be accomplished even with little reliable government or philanthropic support. It is time to invest in building a network of local housing mobility organizations that can provide the same sort of expertise and support to families that want to live in higher-opportunity areas, as the CDCs provide to local communities on the issues of reinvest-

ment and revitalization. While much has been accomplished by CDCs in the past 35 years, it is now clear that there is no silver bullet when it comes to dealing with decades of entrenched poverty, segregation and neglect. Giving families who would like a choice to live in higher-opportunity communities a chance to do so is an anti-poverty policy that makes sense and that deserves equivalent support alongside our long-standing efforts to revitalize high-poverty communities.

So, how could it work? The purpose of this short piece is to plant the seed of an idea which will hopefully engage law and policy makers, experts, advocates and low-income families to work together to provide a robust and creative answer to that question. However, the NRC/NWA model is an excellent place to start, given its mission and history.

The NWA Board of Directors consists of high-level government officials, including the Secretary of HUD, a member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve system, a member of the Chief Counsel Office of the

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they are aware of lack other features and amenities they desire, so they are not part of their search.

The explanation of the mismatches for Latinos and African Americans are different, since the mismatch occurs at a later stage. Most important, our study contradicts the central tenet of those who argue that minorities “self-segregate”: Not only do African Americans and Latinos report a desire for diverse neighborhoods, but by and large they succeed in searching in neighborhoods that match that desire. The question is—what happens between the search and the move that results in African Americans and Latinos living in less diverse neighborhoods than they desire and in which they search? It may be that African Americans and Latinos search in these communities, and they learn something about the communities that makes them undesirable. Alternatively, they may experience hostility or discrimination when searching in these

neighborhoods, thus creating barriers that impede them from translating their attitudes into actions.

Although these results are not conclusive, the patterns point both to an area ripe for future research and policy implications. For whites, as noted above, one explanation for the mismatch is that whites may be unaware of communities that are diverse—and these blind spots explain the disjuncture between attitudes and action. If this is part of the answer, then one policy implication is that racially diverse neighborhoods need to market themselves more effectively to potential new residents of all races/ethnicities, but perhaps especially to whites. The results for African Americans and Latinos suggest a different point of intervention—that between the search and the move. This pattern suggests that for Blacks and Latinos the policy interventions should focus on what happens between the search and the move, since they say—and try to

act on—their preferences for more diversity. The nature of the intervention would depend on whether the decision not to move into a place that was searched in was an outgrowth of discriminatory treatment (pointing to a need for stepped up enforcement) or other barriers. The results point to the continued importance of HUD’s call for research on the role of the housing search process in the building of inclusive communities. All groups report wanting to live in more diverse neighborhoods than they currently live in; policies need to figure out ways to make it possible for people to translate those attitudes into actions—actions that will, in the aggregate, help to foster the inclusive communities that HUD—and our nation—envisions. □

*For further reading:*

Lareau, Annette & Kimberly Goyette, editors. 2014. *Choosing Homes, Choosing Schools*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation

*(MOBILITY WORKS: from page 2)*

Comptroller of the Currency, the Director of the Office of Thrift Supervision, and a member of the Board the National Credit Union Administration. The chairman of the Board is the Comptroller of the Currency.

Given the now clear benefits of housing mobility for families in terms of children’s physical and mental health, education, employment and earnings, as well as social and developmental outcomes, the Board of Directors for MobilityWorks America (MWA) could include the Secretaries of HUD, HHS, Departments of Education, Labor, and Treasury, to insure that federal programs support families in their efforts to access opportunity.

In addition to the Board of Directors, there could be a National Advisory Board made of up individuals with experience in housing mobility from around the country, including practitioners, academics and policy advocates, who would help design the initial structure, and help guide the investment in mobility efforts.

#### **42 USC §8101 (Congressional Findings and Declaration of Purpose for NeighborWorks)**

(a) The Congress finds that

(1) the neighborhood housing services demonstration of the Urban Reinvestment Task Force has proven its worth as a successful program to revitalize older urban neighborhoods by mobilizing public, private, and community resources at the neighborhood level; and

(2) the demand for neighborhood housing services programs in cities throughout the United States warrants the creation of a public corporation to institutionalize and expand the neighborhood housing services program and other programs of the present Urban Reinvestment Task Force.

(b) The purpose of this subchapter is to establish a public corporation which will continue the joint efforts of the Federal financial supervisory agencies and the Department of Housing and Urban Development to promote reinvestment in older neighborhoods by local financial institutions working cooperatively with community people and local government, and which will continue the nonbureaucratic approach of the Urban Reinvestment Task Force, relying largely on local initiative for the specific design of local programs.

The overarching goal would be a national housing mobility organization which supports and invests in a network of regional housing mobility organizations which provide direct counseling and other forms of assistance to

individual families, as well as engage in related activities at the local level to enhance and expand the ability of families to take advantage of the housing mobility option.

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Following in the successful path charted by NRC/NWA at the national level, MobilityWorks could engage in development of policy, training, research/evaluation, and oversight/monitoring of grant recipients. For example, there have been six National Housing Mobility Conferences over the past 20 years bringing practitioners, policymakers, researchers and clients together to talk about what works, and building the movement from the grassroots up. A nationally chartered non-profit modeled after NRC/NWA could give local organizations the support and consistency necessary to take this important work to the next level. MWA would also provide a consistent set of standards to ensure that housing mobility programs maintain strong opportunity-targeting as a condition of continued financial support.

At the local/regional level, the benefits provided by the basics of mobility counseling work (individual counseling, housing search assistance, landlord outreach and recruitment, move-related financial assistance, and post-move assistance focused on stability and accessing opportunities in the new communities of choice) could be expanded by networking and partnering with other non-profit, philanthropic and governmental institutions along with the private real estate and financial sectors to enhance the ability of families to find housing and access opportunities being created by market-driven investment in non-low-income areas.

Initially, it would make sense for the focus of MWA to be on helping HUD leverage the benefits of the Housing Choice Voucher program by providing mobility assistance to voucher families who wish to use their vouchers to live in better neighborhoods and communities in a region. The voucher program has long been recognized as having the potential to greatly expand housing choice, potential that to date has been limited, particularly in large metropolitan areas, by lack of resources and public policies committed

#### 42 USC §8105 (powers and duties of NeighborWorks)

(1) The corporation shall continue the work of the Urban Reinvestment Task Force in establishing neighborhood housing services programs in neighborhoods throughout the United States, monitoring their progress, and providing them with grants and technical assistance. For the purpose of this paragraph, a neighborhood housing services program may involve a partnership of neighborhood residents and representatives of local governmental and financial institutions, organized as a State-chartered non-profit corporation, working to bring about reinvestment in one or more neighborhoods through a program of systematic housing inspections, increased public investment, increased private lending, increased resident investment, and a revolving loan fund to make loans available at flexible rates and terms to homeowners not meeting private lending criteria.

(2) The corporation shall continue the work of the Urban Reinvestment Task Force in identifying, monitoring, evaluating, and providing grants and technical assistance to selected neighborhood preservation projects which show promise as mechanisms for reversing neighborhood decline and improving the quality of neighborhood life.

(3) The corporation shall experimentally replicate neighborhood preservation projects which have demonstrated success, and after creating reliable developmental processes, bring the new programs to neighborhoods throughout the United States which in the judgment of the corporation can benefit therefrom, by providing assistance in organizing programs, providing grants in partial support of program costs, and providing technical assistance to ongoing programs.

(4) The corporation shall continue the work of the Urban Reinvestment Task Force in supporting Neighborhood Housing Services of America, a nonprofit corporation established to provide services to local neighborhood housing services programs, with support which may include technical assistance and grants to expand its national loan purchase pool and may contract with it for services which it can perform more efficiently or effectively than the corporation.

to the effort. Given the enormous investment that the voucher program represents, it only makes sense to leverage that investment with a commitment of resources designed to make that investment yield maximum dividends in terms of improved life chances for children. Not every voucher family will choose the mobility option, but for those who do, or want to, they should be given the support which will allow them, and our society at large, to obtain the full benefits of that choice.

According to the organizational narrative, the origins of NWA are traced back to 1968, and to Dorothy Mae Richardson's work to create the Neighborhood Housing Services of Pittsburgh. In similar fashion, the origins of MWA can be traced back to Dorothy Gautreaux and her 1966 litigation

on behalf of low-income black families in Chicago which created the first housing mobility program, and provided thousands of low-income black families with life-changing opportunities to move out of the Chicago ghetto. After 45 years, it is time to invest in the vision of an open, inclusive and fully integrated society through empowering low-income families to access opportunities throughout a region, not containing them in historically segregated and underserved areas. By building on the successful NRC/NWA model of investing in revitalization and community development, Congress can finally address both the separate and unequal vestiges of the policies of racial segregation, conditions for which government at all levels it is largely and irrefutably responsible. □