

Baltimore Regional
Housing Campaign

NEW CHOICES

for all
families & children

PRRAC

Poverty & Race
Research Action Council

Integration Stories from Baltimore

Family descriptions excerpted from
*New Homes, New Neighborhoods, New Schools: A Progress Report
on the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program* by Lora Engdahl, 2009

*I am grateful and so happy to be a part of the
program. It has truly made a big difference in
my life as well as my children.*



Integration stories from Baltimore

The Baltimore Housing Mobility program is one of the most successful voluntary housing integration programs in the country, giving low income families from Baltimore the chance to move into lower poverty, less segregated communities throughout the Baltimore area. Here are a few stories of the more than 1500 families who have moved – from PRRAC’s 2009 Report “New Homes, New Neighborhoods, New Schools: A Progress Report on the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program” by Lora Engdahl.

(participant names have been changed to preserve clients’ privacy)

“I just wanted better and was willing to go just about anywhere. I was not sure what to expect but it has been all good.”

—Program participant

The staff really wants you to achieve more and to accomplish a happy move for you and your family.

—Program participant



Child of MBQ participant at play. Photo: Andy Cook.

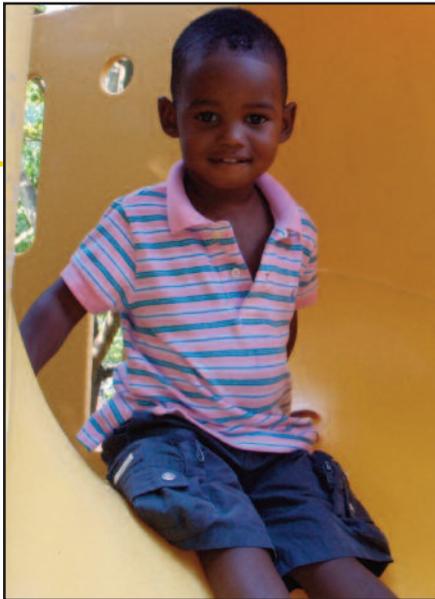
Children Dream of a New Future

When Tamika Edwards, who grew up in Baltimore’s now-demolished Flag House Courts public housing high-rise, arrived at the top of the waiting list for a slot in one of Baltimore’s public housing projects, she turned the opportunity down. Though she disliked her distressed Upton neighborhood, she didn’t want to jump “from the frying pan to the fire,” she said. But when her oldest son, now 16, entered his early teens, she feared that he was starting to conform to the negative influence of peers in their troubled inner-city neighborhood. So she applied for the mobility program and moved her family to Elkridge, Md., even though the commute to her job as a medical technician in the city would be difficult.

“It did not bother me at all to move out here” she says. “I just wanted better and was willing to go just about anywhere. I was not sure what to expect but it has been all good.”

She loves her family’s new home and the diverse community of whites, blacks, Asians and Hispanics in which they live. Now with a car, work is just a 20 minute drive away. And at the suggestion of her closest neighbor, a nurse, she has enrolled in Howard Community College to pursue a nursing degree. Her children, now 16, 12, 10, and 5, have made friends in the neighborhood and at school. The curriculum in Howard County schools was challenging for them, Edwards says, but they have improved their grades from “C” to “A” and “B” averages and expanded their vocabulary, and now dream about their future. One child wants to be a teacher, another a nurse, another a lawyer. “Their schools and neighborhoods have shown them a different life and now they are different,” says Edwards, adding that she too now wants more for herself.

“[The program] has given me a chance of a lifetime ... I am motivated to finish school ... and I want to buy a house like the one I have. I got a taste of something good and I want more.” ■



Child of participating family. Photo: Maurice Gadsden.

MBQ is definitely dedicated professionals helping... people not only to receive housing but to achieve life goals.

—Program participant

— Settling Down Helps Mom Get Job —

Adele Ullman learned about the mobility program from a neighbor at the Perkins Homes public housing complex and didn't care that it might mean moving far from the neighborhood. In fact, "the further away, the better," Ullman says. She moved to an apartment in Bel Air before settling into a townhouse in Abingdon in Harford County. After taking classes in a training program, she now works as a medical billing clerk. She says her neighbors are "fantastic" and that they sometimes mow one another's lawns. Her two children have made friends in the neighborhood and are doing well in school. ■



MBQ Participant's child. Photo: Amanda Boggs.

Divorced Mom Seeks Safety and Good Schools For Her Talented Daughter

As soon as her daughter finished the 6th grade at a Baltimore City middle school, Nicole McDonald moved her from their apartment in the Gilmore Homes public housing development to a townhome in the College Parkway area of Arnold, Anne Arundel County. McDonald had heard of the mobility program even before moving into Gilmore Homes, but wasn't sure she wanted to apply. Then one day, she got a call from her daughter's school saying she had been in a fight, started by some other girls.

"They picked on her and said she had to build up her 'street cred.' I knew right away I had to get her up out of there," McDonald says.

McDonald, who has only been in her new home a short time, reports that the transition has been easy for her and her daughter. McDonald, who was unemployed when she moved, has a job interview in a retail store in Severna Park. Her daughter, an honor roll student, quickly made friends in the neighborhood, and is attending one of the best middle schools in Anne Arundel County, where she signed up for the band and other activities.

McDonald says she feels less safer, less stressed and healthier, mostly because she no longer has to worry so much about her daughter's safety. When they lived in the city, Ms. McDonald would not let her daughter go outside to play.

"I was stressed before—every day, all day. It is especially stressful when you have to confine your child to the house because you're terrified. She's the most important thing in my life....She didn't understand why she had to be inside all day, everyday. She would say 'You don't want me to be a kid!' When I told her she could go outside here, her face lit up. That was worth it right there." ■



Children of MBQ participant. Photo: Andy Cook.

Yes, it is much better than regular public housing & section 8. They give you a choice to live in better neighborhoods.

—Program participant

School Bus Driver Gets to Raise Her Kids in the Community Where She Works

Lenora Jones is enthusiastic about her new neighborhood in Columbia and the promise it brings. When Jones learned about the housing mobility program, she was living in a west Baltimore neighborhood she describes as “nothing but boarded up houses” and “drug addicts partying every night”—not the setting she wanted for her daughters, one of whom has special needs. She moved her family to a house in Columbia in Howard County, in a neighborhood with a pool, playgrounds, a lake, and a skate park. She responded to an ad seeking bus drivers for Howard County schools. They trained her, helped her get a commercial driver’s license, and hired her as a school bus driver, a position which works well with her daughters’ school schedules and gives them more time together. Although the “life changing” move was at first difficult for her younger daughter, who had done well in her city school but was having trouble keeping up with her peers in the more challenging suburban school, she moved fast so her daughter would not have to repeat a grade. Jones enrolled her in summer school math classes and worked with her at home. ■

Howard County has so much to offer. We love living here. The community and neighborhood is great and we feel safe here.

—Program participant



Participating family. Photo: Amanda Boggs.

New Optimism for Her Kids Motivates Mom to Find Work

Michelle Starks doesn't need a statistician to tell her things have changed for her and her family since they left their former public housing complex in Baltimore's Cherry Hill Homes, a sprawling complex of more than 1,500 public housing units, for a home in Harford County's Bel Air community. She joined the mobility program because she "wanted more for my kids," who are ages 9, 8, and 3 years old. Now that she has moved, she says she feels more motivated, noting that although she was unemployed when she lived in Cherry Hill, she has obtained a job as a cashier in a "big box" retail store less than a mile from her new home. She is involved in the PTA at her children's new school in Bel Air and says she is optimistic for her children, who are doing better in school.

"Living in the projects you feel like you're stuck," she explains. "You do what you gotta do for your kids regardless. I wanted to get out so bad, I just couldn't do it by myself." ■



Participant's child. Photo: Amanda Boggs.

I would recommend this program to anyone seeking better housing assistance. This program has been very helpful to me with the informational workshops and very helpful housing counselor. The move to my new neighborhood has been a great success!

—Program participant

Family of Four Boys Reach Their Potential in Suburban Schools

Candice Brown may have moved her family to Columbia in Howard County just in time. Brown's second eldest was doing well academically in his city middle school but had begun to misbehave and to hang out with "the wrong type of kids," she says. When they moved and he had to start high school in a new community, he had a hard time, but Brown found him a counselor and a tutor and now, age 15 and in the 10th grade, he is doing well, she says. Her two youngest boys, one of whom had problems in his city elementary school, are both doing well and in higher level classes in their Columbia elementary school. Her youngest, who is 9, is in the school choir, and her other boy, 10, plays drums in the band. Her oldest son, who failed 9th grade in a city high school, is on track to graduate from high school and wants to go to college. Brown, who works as a retail clerk at a big box store in Columbia did not attend college herself but is determined to help him reach that goal. ■

This is the best housing program I've ever experienced. When I have any concern about the smallest thing my housing counselor is right on it. I appreciate her and all the effort she put into making my transition go so smoothly.

—Program participant



Home in suburban county. Photo: Tom Gunn.

Stable Housing Paves Path to Nursing School

After moving under the mobility program (from Upton to Perry Hall in Baltimore County and subsequently to Columbia in Howard County), Candice Nelson ended a 10-year break from school. She completed her high school education and enrolled in Baltimore City Community College, where she is pursuing an associate degree in nursing. After she attains her associate degree, she plans to work full time at a local hospital while completing a bachelor's program in nursing at Coppin State University, specializing in pediatrics. Nelson, who won a \$500 scholarship from the Maryland Association of Housing and Redevelopment Agencies toward her bachelor's program, has further ambitions: to work towards buying her first home. ■

Me and my children live in a beautiful house that is in a mixed ethnic community. They have an opportunity to become productive citizens, a product of a good environment.

—Program participant



Participating family. Photo: Andy Cook.

Working Mom Moves Her Boys out of the Shadow of the City Jail

For seven years, Andrea Preston lived with her family in East Baltimore's Latrobe Homes public housing complex, literally in the shadow of the state penitentiary and Baltimore City Jail. Preston, who works as a shift supervisor, says she wanted better housing, but also a safer neighborhood for her two boys, now ages 6 and 11.

"I didn't want to stay in public housing forever," she says.

Through the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, Preston moved her family to Hampden, a former industrial area of north Baltimore that is being reborn as a trendy neighborhood with art galleries, shops and restaurants.

She plans to stay.

"I like the area and my boys are happier now," she says. "I believe everyone deserves a chance at a better living environment." ■

Poverty & Race Research Action Council (PRRAC)
1200 18th St. NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
202/906-8023 • Fax 202/842-2885
www.prrac.org

Baltimore Regional Housing Campaign (BRHC)
C/o Citizens Planning & Housing Association
3355 Keswick Rd. Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21211

410/539-1369 • 410/625-7895
www.cphabaltimore.org