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CHA's "Plan for Transformation": A Status Report

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gious institutions, both faith-based and secular agencies continue to feed the hungry, employ the jobless, shelter the homeless, educate the disadvantaged and empower the disabled; and while the competition for grants may have grown, the more important question is how to serve so many disadvantaged people.

"There are more groups trying to do more with less," said Nelson of Bethel New Life. "There are drastic and unacceptable shortages of affordable housing for low-income families and seniors. What is really important is that HUD and the federal government have fewer dollars for any kind of programs or efforts with low-income people, whether they be faith-based or not."

In 1995, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) began to relocate public housing residents in order to rebuild CHA buildings. The CHA sought to renew the physical structure of their properties and promote self-sufficiency for public housing residents by replacing high-rise structures with mixed-income town homes and low-rise buildings. Using Section 8 vouchers, public housing residents vacated high-rise structures and were relocated under the CHA’s “Plan for Transformation.” Roughly 3,200 families were relocated from the high-rises to private housing units using Section 8 vouchers. One of the primary goals of the CHA’s plan is to end racial and class isolation, but critics argue that these families are being relocated to areas that are overwhelmingly African-American and poor.

In October 1999, the CHA enacted a Relocation Rights Contract, an initiative that is part of the Plan for Transformation that grants CHA residents the right to return to their communities after the demolition and rehabilitation process is complete. Approximately 25,000 families have relocated under the Relocation Rights Contract, however the same pattern of relocation into disproportionately poor communities with an overwhelmingly African-American racial composition is apparent with this group as well. Many public housing residents were enraged with what they perceived as a “perpetuation of segregation” and filed a class action lawsuit in 2003 to confront the CHA on their empty promises, Wallace, et al. v. The Chicago Housing Authority.8

According to the CHA, the Plan for Transformation "represents a new beginning for public housing in Chicago and it provides an opportunity to change the stigmas of the past and create a new culture of success and hope" for CHA residents. The CHA formed partnerships with other city agencies to offer residents services including employment assistance, substance abuse counseling, and guidance on how to become lease compliant. The demolition of the CHA high-rises to create mixed-income communities and rehabilitation of dilapidated CHA low-rises will ideally provide CHA residents with greater economic opportunities and a safer and more prosperous living environment. Also, all individuals who remain lease compliant and pass the CHA’s screening process will have an unequivocal right to return to these newly constructed areas. To pass the CHA’s screening process, all individuals over the age of eighteen that are listed on the lease must pass a drug test, undergo credit

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5. E-mail from Mary Nelson, President and CEO, Bethel New Life, Inc, to Katherine Licup (Jan. 23, 2004) (on file with the author).
checks, obtain employment, and pass a criminal background check.

Under the Section 8 voucher program, 94 percent of relocatees moved to areas with an 80 to 100 percent concentration of African-Americans and 97 percent were relocated to the South Side or West Side.11 These areas are characterized by economic despair with low median incomes and high poverty rates.12 In addition, these neighborhoods host high crime rates, poor school systems, and inadequate municipal services.13 This is a difficult situation for the CHA since more affluent communities, which could provide CHA residents with increased opportunities, fear the arrival of CHA structures in their community due to the negative stigma that plagues public housing. Also, Cabrini Green, which is surrounded by areas of economic prosperity and development, is being converted into mixed-income communities and those individuals wish to return and have complied with the CHA's requirements will have the opportunity to do so.

Unfortunately, though, the CHA residents who were relocated prior to the enactment of the Relocation Rights Contract do not have the right to return to their communities. Similarly, those individuals that were relocated after the Contract still have to comply with rigorous requirements in order to be eligible to return. Ideally, CHA's requirements are meant to assure that those who will be returning to these mixed-income and newly renovated areas will be able to maintain their communities and become more self-sufficient, but is this may not be a realistic goal. The rate of incarceration for African-American males between the ages of 15 and 25 coupled with a lifetime of living in an impoverished area that harbors crime and drug use may make it difficult for families to return.

Approximately 91 percent of all CHA residents relocated after October 1999 want to return to their communities now that they are going to be revitalized and turned into viable mixed-income communities.14 However, the average rate of return of residents who are relocated from public housing is a mere 12 percent.15 Still, the requirements that are set forth by the CHA are meant to protect the residents moving back to their communities by assuring these people that they will no longer be surrounded by drug users, gangs, and criminals. Those people that are able to comply with the CHA requirements will now have the opportunity to live in a community that will be sure to prosper and this is the primary objective of the Plan for Transformation.

Rajesh Nayak, a Staff Attorney at the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, is one of the attorneys representing the CHA residents in the Wallace class action. He explains “to build successful mixed-income housing, it is necessary to look at the surrounding areas. A more affluent community long period of time. The CHA estimates that the 25,000 projected units will be completed by 2009.16 Once these are complete, those who have complied can move back and be
Illegal Mahogany Lands Greenpeace in Federal Court

Mary E. O’Malley

The environmental group Greenpeace has a new, albeit unwanted label: criminal defendant. United States of America v. Greenpeace, Inc. marks the first time that a public-interest organization must defend itself against criminal charges for the protest activities of its members. Greenpeace claims the government action is a “heavy-handed attempt” aimed at punishing prior protests against the Bush Administration. Assistant U.S. Attorney Cameron Elliott claimed in court papers that Greenpeace simply broke the law.

Civil Disobedience or Sailor Mongering?

On April 12, 2002, Jade, a cargo ship carrying seventy tons of Brazilian-cut mahogany, lowered its fifty-foot ladder three miles off the Miami coast. Exporting or importing Brazilian mahogany is illegal. A harbor pilot climbed aboard to steer the ship into the Port of Miami, but he was not alone. Reacting to intelligence that indicated mahogany was on board, Scott Anderson and Hillary Hosta, hired by Greenpeace, leapt from inflatable boats to climb aboard Jade. Toting a banner stating “President Bush, Stop Illegal Logging,” the two activists climbed up the ladder.

However, the activists were stopped before they could unfurl the banner. They and fellow demonstrators pled no contest to a misdemeanor charge of “sailor mongering” and paid fines between $100 to $500. “Just another day at the office for Greenpeace,” said Scott Paul, one of the arrested protestors. But that was only the beginning.

In July 2003, fifteen months after the arrests, a federal grand jury indicted Greenpeace. The government charged Greenpeace with violating a 19th century federal law originally intended to stave off brothel owners from climbing aboard ships “about to” dock. Owners used to row out to incoming ships and persuade sailors to patronize the brothels upon docking. Responsive sailors were soon parted with their money.

The government likens Greenpeace and its protestors to those brothel owners. The indictment announced that Greenpeace supplied money and people to facilitate the Florida protest. The user of a single Greenpeace corporate credit card rented the rafts and small boats used to stop the Jade.

The Danger of Mahogany

The Jade occurrence evolved from Greenpeace’s work in protecting forests, such as the Brazilian Amazon. Mahogany is the only Amazonian wood valuable enough to entice loggers into the rainforest. Roads built by mahogany loggers cause the Amazon’s destruction. Clean air and water, animal and plant species, and people and cultures are all threatened by deforestation.

Dealing in mahogany contraband also requires playing a dangerous game. Large criminal enterprises