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HHA WORKING WITH SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH GROUP MDRC ON ENHANCED ECONOMIC MOBILITY INITIATIVE FOR HOUSING SUBSIDY RECIPIENTS

HOUSTON – As part of a collaborative effort to increase economic independence and job skills for low-income residents receiving rent subsidies from public housing agencies, the Houston Housing Authority (HHA) is partnering with MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research firm, to test a new employment initiative called “*MyGoals* for Employment Success.” The program’s design is based on research showing that coping with day-to-day survival when living in poverty can drain a person’s cognitive resources in ways that make it more difficult to plan for the future, succeed in school or training, and succeed in the labor market. The program features an innovative workforce coaching model, combined with new financial incentives, to support participants over a three-year period in getting and keeping jobs, acquiring skills that employers need, and moving up career ladders. The *MyGoals* initiative, which is also being tried in Baltimore, Maryland, is supported with anchor funding from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation. The Houston Endowment has in addition provided a three-year grant to help support the program in Houston.

HHA residents participating in *MyGoals* will be paired with specially trained coaches who will work with them to set employment and training goals that are a good fit, and to identify steps to attain those goals, including, when appropriate, making connections with local schools, training, and social service agencies. The coaches will also work with participants to improve their financial capabilities so that they can reduce debts, improve credit scores, and build savings. The coaches will provide ongoing support (gradually reduced over time) to help participants learn strategies to overcome the many hurdles that poverty can put in the way of success.

An important feature of the *MyGoals* model is a set of financial incentives to reward and support participants’ sustained engagement in the program and the coaching process, and their attainment of employment goals. Examples of milestones to be rewarded include completion of personal assessments, development of written plans and goals, securing employment, and sustaining employment for 3-month and 6-month intervals. By providing these financial incentives, the program seeks to reward participants for making strides in their career path while working to their improve job skills.

“Economic mobility is a vital component in the betterment of individuals and families,” says HHA President and CEO Tory Gunsolley. “We look forward to working with MDRC to streamline this program so it can be a model for improving the job skills and livelihoods of people in Houston, and in other cities.”

The *MyGoals* program will be evaluated using a randomized controlled trial to measure the program’s effectiveness on a variety of outcomes, including employment, earnings, the receipt of housing subsidies, and possibly state-offered safety net programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program. Participants in the program will be compared against a control group not receiving coaching or employment incentives, and three to five years of outcome data will be analyzed.

ABOUT THE HHA:

The Houston Housing Authority provides affordable homes and services to more than 58,000 low-income Houstonians, including over 17,000 families housed through the Housing Choice Voucher Program and another 5,700 living in 25 public housing and tax credit developments around the city. HHA also administers one of the nation’s largest voucher programs exclusively serving homeless veterans. More information about the Houston Housing Authority can be found at www.housingforhouston.com.

ABOUT MDRC:

MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization, is committed to finding solutions to some of the most difficult problems facing the nation — from reducing poverty and bolstering economic self-sufficiency to improving public education and college graduation rates. MDRC designs promising new interventions, evaluates existing programs using the highest research standards, and provides technical assistance to build better programs and deliver effective interventions at scale. For more information, visit www.mdrc.org.

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