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WORCESTER HOUSING AUTHORITY JOB TRAINING PROGRAM
EARN HONOR FROM STATEWIDE PUBLIC HOUSING GROUP

The Worcester Housing Authority (WHA) has been recognized by the statewide public housing association for an innovative employment training program aimed at providing housing authority residents with the necessary skills to compete in the public and private job sectors.

The WHA was presented with an “Outstanding Agency Award” by the Massachusetts Chapter, National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials (MassNAHRO) at its annual conference in Falmouth. These awards recognize local housing authorities for outstanding achievement in innovative housing and community development projects.

Alex Corrales, Executive Director of the Worcester Housing Authority, said the Step-Up Apprenticeship Program is a two-year state training program that provides a technical training curriculum and on-the-job training experience for participating WHA residents. Its purpose is to give them access to education, job skills and employment opportunities. Step-Up focuses on four areas of the job market – landscaping, custodial, apartment prep and clerical services. The program operates at WHA’s Great Brook Valley Gardens and Curtis Apartments, two adjacent family developments totaling almost 1,000 units where the unemployment rate was 80 percent four years ago.

Corrales explained that Step-Up is the first job for many of the program participants. As a result, it focuses on basic skills such as punctuality, following directions, accountability, conflict resolution in the workplace, and other skills that may be lacking. Each participant is assigned a Family Life Coach who helps guide them toward becoming self-sufficient with the end goal of enabling them to move out of public housing. Each coach and participant works together in five specific areas: Education, employment, finances, health and personal.

So far, 35 apprentices have graduated from the Step-Up Apprentice Program and found full-time employment in both the public and private sectors in the last five years, including 15 at the Worcester Housing Authority, and another 23 are currently working toward similar goals in the program. The Step-Up program was initially started with a federal grant and funded through WHA’s Capital Fund, and the WHA recently absorbed the cost of the program into its operational budget. All apprentices start at \$11 per hour and receive quarterly increases as they complete their program hours and make progress toward achieving their goals,

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“The Step-Up Program provides residents the opportunity to improve their work skills but also a path towards self-sufficiency,” said Corrales. “Aside from learning technical aspects of the job, they also learn the soft skills necessary to thrive in the work industry today. We couldn’t be prouder of the accomplishments they have achieved so far.”

The WHA operates approximately 3,000 housing units at 24 separate developments in the City of Worcester and is the second largest local housing authority in New England.

“We are pleased to honor this great program developed by the Worcester Housing Authority,” said Donna Brown-Rego, Executive Director of MassNAHRO. “These Outstanding Agency Awards provide an opportunity to inform the public of the innovation and creativity employed by local housing authorities all across the state. They also create a resource for housing authorities to replicate these programs locally.”

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