

# Robeson County Housing Authority



Live



Work



Play



Grow



## Moving to Work (MTW) Plan

Fiscal Year 2020

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## **I. Introduction and Vision for RCHA's MTW Program**

“Live, Work, Play, Grow” is the vision Robeson County Housing Authority (RCHA) has for the residents living in our four housing communities throughout Robeson County. It is our quest to fulfill this vision by providing affordable, decent, safe, and sanitary housing opportunities to low and moderate-income families, including elderly and handicapped persons, while supporting programs that foster economic self-sufficiency. We create pathways out of homelessness through empowerment, education, and advocacy.

The vision of RCHA's Moving to Work (MTW) Program aligns with the overall vision of the agency. It is the goal of the RCHA's MTW Plan to achieve greater cost effectiveness in the use of federal resources, assist families with becoming self-sufficient, and expand affordable housing choices in Robeson County for all qualifying persons regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, and familial status.

Robeson County Housing Authority is located in Robeson County, North Carolina, known as “Rural Robeson.” Our county of 133,442 residents is extraordinarily diverse, with minorities comprising over 75% of our total population (42.3% Native American, 23.6% African American & 9.2% Hispanic). According to the NC Department of Commerce, Robeson County's unemployment rate is 11.2% compared to the state rate of 8.8% (July 2020). The high school drop rate in Robeson is 23% and North Carolina's is 13%. Communities in Robeson County have been inundated by floods related to Hurricanes Matthew (2017) and Florence (2018). Recovery efforts remain ongoing.

There are several challenges to program delivery in rural areas. Ensuring access to affordable, adequate childcare and convenient, reliable transportation is especially difficult in geographically isolated areas. Encouraging economic development in these areas is also a challenge. Rural

communities often lack the infrastructure needed to attract businesses, and the expenses associated with development can be high; both factors limit job opportunities. Less commercial development and lower per capita incomes limit local tax revenue in rural areas, which may mean fewer resources for social services.

Equally, there are adequate opportunities to meet those challenges. The community buildings at each of our public housing sites provides the RCHA with an opportunity to offer programming directly to residents in their communities and decreases the need for transportation. The RCHA has a strong network of partners that can help “Bridge the Gap” between the barriers present in Rural Robeson and RCHA family needs. These partners are a part of RCHA’s Community Engagement Taskforce and have signed Memorium of Agreements (MOAs) outlining their commitments (See Appendix 4). The RCHA also plans to widen its network by reaching out and forming partnerships with non-traditional, for-profit organizations. These relationships will allow the RCHA to broaden the services and programs offered to our residents, as well as create meaningful dialogue and change from a business perspective.

The RCHA was awarded the Resident Opportunities Self-Sufficiency Service Coordinator (ROSS-SC) Grant in 2020. The goals of MTW and ROSS-SC complement each other. The full-time Service Coordinator will be an asset to the RCHA’s MTW program. The Coordinator will work closely with RCHA residents and help link them to the proposed strategies outlined in the RCHA’s MTW Plan.

In addition to the partnerships, the RCHA has committed itself to creating an entrepreneurial program for residents. This program will not only address and reduce unemployment, but also create resident businesses that can conceivably cater towards the needs of the RCHA and Rural

Robeson. Learning free enterprise is a life skill that can transcend circumstances and give RCHA residents benefits that are otherwise not available to them.

Participating in the MTW program will give RCHA the authority to implement innovative policies and the flexibility to combine Federal funds into a "Block Grant" which will allow the RCHA to create projects that fits the needs of Rural Robeson. Ultimately, MTW will help ensure RCHA's residents achieve the greatest level of self-sufficiency of which they are capable, while at the same time ensuring the financial viability of our portfolio of affordable housing properties and creating cost efficiencies for its federal programs.

## **II. Plan for Future Community/ Resident Engagement**

The RCHA will continue engaging our residents, the community at large, and stakeholders in our low-income and affordable housing programs and the MTW program by hosting periodic in-person, online, and teleconference forums. Furthermore, the RCHA will use technology, via our website and social media, to update the community as events happen. Surveys will be created and distributed through social media avenues for residents to give their input regarding the RCHA's MTW efforts. The benefits of the MTW program and how it will best serve the RCHA community will be conveyed wherever possible, and open dialogue will be urged on all outlets. These opportunities will allow the RCHA to receive feedback and suggestions assuring the RCHA's MTW program is a multilateral community effort.

Racial and ethnic minorities comprise the majority of the RCHA residents; therefore, all outreach is considered affirmative. The RCHA has gone further to actively involve our Native American residents through our partnership with the Lumbee Tribe and our mentally disabled residents through a potential partnership with the Monarch Vocational Program.

The RCHA will work with Native American (Lumbee) residents that desire homeownership and refer them to the Tribe’s homeownership program. The ROSS coordinator will be a support system and help these residents through the process. The RCHA will assist with down payment or other expenses that are needed to obtain homeownership.

The RCHA will partner with the Monarch Vocational Program to assist mentally disabled residents with gaining employment skills. For those mentally disabled residents that can work, Monarch will assist these people, because Monarch believes that a job can help everything else fall into place, including self-sufficiency.

### III. RCHA Operating and Inventory Information

Presently, the RCHA only offers public housing, which encompasses four complexes located throughout the county.

Site	Location	Housing Type	Number of Units	Bedroom Sizes	Amenities
Benton Court	100 Martin Luther King St Rowland, NC 28383	Family	40	1-4	Community Room
Morgan Britt	100 Oxendine Circle Lumberton, NC 28360	Family	110	1-3	Community Room and Playground
McColl Page Plaza	426 North Second Street St. Pauls, NC 28384	Family	40	1	Community Room
Westgate Terrace	103 McManus Street Red Springs, NC 28377	Family	100	1-5	Community Room and Playground

As a small rural PHA, RCHA does not anticipate any major changes to the demographics of the households we serve. The RCHA is considering the idea of disposing 100 public housing units at Westgate Terrace and implementing project-based voucher assistance at those units, which will facilitate rehabilitation needs, de-concentrate poverty, increase housing choice, and streamline management efficiencies.

With an occupancy rate of 98%, the RCHA does not foresee a challenge leasing units. Although COVID-19 and subsequent unemployment may affect our tenant's ability to pay rent, which would lead to expulsions and reduce occupancy, the RCHA has a hardship policy in place to address such issues as a preventative measure.

#### **IV. Plan for RCHA's MTW Program**

Considerable thought has gone into how the RCHA can best alter our operations and create programs using MTW flexibilities upon entry into the demonstration.

The RCHA purports to reduce cost and achieve greater cost effectiveness in federal expenditures by implementing an alternative reexamination schedule, offering a good housing rebate, and employing technology to streamline our processes.

The RCHA will reduce the frequency of tenant reexaminations from annually to biennially for all families and from annually to triennially for families on fixed-incomes. If a household's gross income has decreased by 10% or more, the RCHA will allow one interim adjustment per year, at the request of the household. The RCHA will also consider becoming paperless through the use of electronic records and online reexaminations. The RCHA will streamline unit inspections for public housing residents and offer rebates for good housekeeping as a way to preserve the housing stock and reduce maintenance costs. The MTW regulatory relief will allow the RCHA to further explore efficiencies that can be achieved through technological systems to reorganize internal processes.

The RCHA intends to give incentives and promote economic self-sufficient by implementing rent reform and creating resident driven programs and services. The RCHA residents that achieve self-sufficiency, and subsequently leave the program, will allow the RCHA to assist as many

underprivileged households as possible on an ongoing basis. Our services and programs will address the issues that cause destitution.

The RCHA will construct a stepped rent model that will increase household rent on a fixed schedule in both frequency and amount. The increased revenue will afford the RCHA the necessary funds to modernize operations and augment resident services and programs.

The RCHA will introduce the DRIVE Program, which is a basic skill set program for self-sufficiency in tandem with our community taskforce. This program will provide skills assessment and job readiness training, health assessment and services referrals, basic financial literacy and credit education, ready read-to-rent training, and remedies to obstacles such as transportation and childcare. Incentives will be offered to encourage participation, such as travel and childcare vouchers for the first month once a tenant has gained employment.

The RCHA will create a series of programs aimed at the youth with the objective of reducing intergenerational poverty. To decrease the high school drop-out rate and increase graduation rates, the RCHA will provide supportive and financial aid through school supplies, school and extracurricular fees, and scholarships, for example. The RCHA may create, with our community taskforce, a sports program with the intention of providing positive outlets for the youth.

A family planning program, including teen outreach, will be created with RCHA and our community taskforce to address physical and mental health issues. It has been widely documented that family planning programs significantly reduce childhood poverty rates and, later, poverty rates in adulthood. The RCHA is passionate about educating the youth regarding life issues that could potentially unlock or limit their futures.

The RCHA population includes several mentally disabled residents. The RCHA will offer special services, such as the T.I.D.Y Program, to help these residents with good housekeeping and

other basic needs. The T.I.D.Y Program is available to the entire RCHA residential population, as the RCHA recognizes that both mental and physical issues can contribute towards the lack of essential home care.

To inspire self-sufficiency through homeownership, The RCHA will provide down payment assistance for first time home buyers. Homeownership education and counseling services will be made available to residents through the DRIVE program to ensure their independence upon release from the public housing program.

While maintaining consistency with the statutory requirements, the RCHA will expand HUD's requirement that families participate in community service if they are not working, elderly, or disabled to public housing residents and include them in the family's plan as a way to encourage work, skill development, and community participation.

The RCHA proposes to increase housing choices for eligible low-income families by offering short-term assistance, seeking non-profit status, and increasing our housing portfolio.

The RCHA will create a short-term housing assistance program with supportive services by designating up to two (2) units at Westgate Terrace as emergency housing. Participants can stay a maximum of 6 months; and, afterwards qualifying participants will be given the opportunity to transfer into the public housing program.

Currently, the RCHA is a for-profit entity. We endeavor to obtain non-profit status to link us to resources, both public and private, that will provide operational advantages. The RCHA will be able save money, in the form of taxes, which will increase our MTW Fund, and we will be able to receive tax deductible donations, which will ultimately help our residents.

To create a housing continuum and a range of housing choices to low income families and individuals, the RCHA is considering the idea of disposing 100 public housing units at Westgate

Terrace and employing project-based voucher assistance at those units. This change will facilitate rehabilitation needs, de-concentrate poverty, increase housing choice, and streamline management efficiencies.

## **V. Proposed Use of Funds**

Through the acceptance into the MTW Cohort 1, the RCHA requests the authority to combine public housing Operating Fund Program grants, HCV HAP and Administrative Fees, and public housing Capital Fund Program grants together into the MTW Fund to flexibly use as set forth in the Operations Notice (HUD PIH Notice 2020-21). The RCHA proposes to use MTW funds to change in-house procedures, create resident services and programs, offer resident incentives, convert public housing into project-based voucher units, apply pertinent technology, and become a non-profit 501(c)(3) entity. As a current administrator of only public housing, RCHA will not be using funds in a fungible manner across the traditional Section 8 and Section 9 programs at this time.

## **VI. Evidence of Significant Partnerships**

Significant partners of the RCHA include Robeson County Health Department, Department of Social Services, The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program and Partnering Agencies, Family Domestic Violence Center, University of North Carolina at Pembroke, Robeson Community College, Public Schools of Robeson County, Robeson County Health Department, Parks & Recreation, Lumbee Tribe, Lumbee Tribe/Vocational Rehab, United Way of Robeson County, Lumbee Regional Development Association, Lumber River Council of Governments, The Staffing Alliance/Kiwanis, NC Cooperative Extension, Alpha Kappa Alpha Inc., Robeson County Church & Community Center, State Employee Credit Union, Drug Court, UNCP Office of

Regional Initiatives, NC WIAO, Robeson County Arts, AARP Foundation, UNCP Youth Start, Robeson Health Care Cooperation, and United Health Care. Please see our Memorandum of Agreements (MOAs) in Appendix 4.

## VII. Dates and Milestones for RCHA’s MTW Program

Milestone	Dates
Received HUD’s invitation to submit full MTW application & Operations Notice	August 28, 2020
Notified residents of intention to participate in the MTW Demonstration Program	September 24, 2020
Resident Meeting 1	September 23, 2020
Resident Meeting 2	October 6, 2020
Publish Public Notice	October 7, 2020
Public Comment Period	October 7 - November 6, 2020
MTW Plan Public Hearing	November 9, 2020
MTW Plan Approval by Board of Commissioners	November 25, 2020
Submit MTW Plan to HUD	December 1, 2020
Become a MTW agency	January 2021
Evaluate and implement technology needs	January and February 2021
Adjust accounting structure and financial reporting	January and February 2021
Ensure compliance with the MTW Five Statutory Requirements	Monthly beginning January 2021
Research and apply to become a Non-Profit entity	March 2021
Create short-term housing at Westgate	March 2021
Examine and implement resident services and programs (DRIVE, Family Planning, Homeownership, Youth Programs, & Community Service)	March 2021
Resident’s Meeting	March 2021
Analyze rent reform & biennially/triennial tenant reexaminations	July 2021
Resident’s Meeting	July 2021
Assess the PBV program at Westgate	August 2021
Craft FY23 MTW Supplement	October 2021
Resident’s Meeting	October 2021
Publish Public Notice	Week of January 10, 2022

Public Comment Period	January 17, 2022 – March 4, 2022
MTW Supplement Public Hearing	March 4, 2022
MTW Supplement Approval by Board of Commissioners	April 1, 2022
Submit MTW Supplement to HUD	Friday, April 15, 2022
Implement rent reform & biennially/triennial tenant reexaminations	July 2022