



The Bulletin

News about the SHA Housing Choice Voucher program · Published quarterly for landlords & service providers

www.seattlehousing.org

Announcing a free new listings service for landlords and voucher holders

I AM PLEASED to announce the debut of a free service for landlords to list their rental properties in Seattle and King County. Called HousingSearchNW.org, this new service is now live and available to you to register properties. Go to www.HousingSearchNW.org to sign up.

Seattle Housing Authority is partnering with others to support this new service.

Our partners include King County, the City of Seattle, the King County Housing Authority and

United Way. Both the Rental Housing Association and the Tenants Union have also been involved in getting it off the ground.

The goal of the new service is to provide a free one-stop resource helping people to list and find affordable homes anywhere in King County. There is no charge to landlords or tenants to use the service. The site allows landlords to upload pictures and provides links to maps and many of the bells and whistles common on other housing sites. The cost is being underwritten by the HousingSearchNW partners.

Seattle Housing will be providing our landlords' contact information to Socialserve.com, the operator of the site. In the next few weeks, you will be contacted by phone or e-mail by Socialserve to help you learn more about this service and register your properties. We hope that you will take advantage of this opportunity. We are

working closely with Socialserve to make sure that they accurately represent your properties.

What is Socialserve? It's a nationwide service that provides housing locator services to more than 125 housing authorities across the country. It operates in more than 30 states. HousingSearchNW partners carefully screened Socialserve during the development process and we are convinced they will do a great job for us.

Socialserve provides a fully-staffed toll-free call

center that helps landlords list and helps tenants search for properties while monitoring the availability and accuracy

HousingSearchNW.org
Open the door to housing you can afford

of listings. You can list your properties through the Socialserve.com website or by toll-free phone or fax. Visit www.HousingSearchNW.org or call **1.877.428.8844** toll-free.

The new website is now live for you to register as a user and add details about your property. Once your property has been registered on the website, it is easy to go in and indicate that you have a vacancy. New listings are posted in real time, as are removals of listings for units you've rented and no longer want to advertise.

The website will be available for tenants to use in searching for housing beginning in February 2012.

Eventually we will phase out our own listing service for Section 8 units and refer voucher-holders to this new site.

Look for more information on this transition on our website at www.seattlehousing.org under "Landlords."

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I take this opportunity to thank you once again for your participation in our program, and to wish you a happy and prosperous New Year.



Lisa Wolters

DIRECTOR OF HOUSING ADVOCACY
& RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
206.239.1523

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An all-around winner: Direct deposit is good for you and your tenants alike

SEATTLE HOUSING HAS MADE great strides in implementing direct deposit of Housing Assistance Payments (HAPs) for landlords. We are determined to go paperless to the greatest extent possible, with all landlords receiving HAPs by direct deposit and, soon, with payment advices (and *Bulletins* – this publication) sent electronically.

To accomplish our goal, we need everyone to fill out the required Direct Deposit Request form, a copy of which is enclosed.

If you haven't already sent us this form, all you need to do is fill it out completely, sign it and return it along with a deposit slip or a voided check to—

Seattle Housing Authority
Attn: Section 8 Accounting Supervisor
120 6th Avenue N
P. O. Box 19028
Seattle WA 98109

Or you may fax the form and attachment to
206.615.3427

or e-mail them to

jharstad@seattlehousing.org

Feedback from those of you whom we pay via direct deposit confirms that you're receiving HAPs by the second of the month (or a day or two later when the second falls on a weekend or holiday).

The chief benefits of having your HAP checks automatically deposited are these:

- Direct deposit is safer than receiving a hard copy check. Checks can be lost in the mail or stolen from a mailbox. It takes time and effort to replace them.
- Paying via direct deposit is the most efficient way for us to provide your monthly payments. (We want as much of our assistance money as possible to be used for program purposes, not for administrative costs.)
- Even when you receive HAP payments by direct deposit, we will mail you an advice for payments deposited into your account. (However, to save paper and the costs of printing and postage, we are looking into a way to notify you of your HAP payments instantly via e-mail.)
- There will never be a delay in payment owing to a bad address or an error on the U.S. Postal Service's part.

It's time to sign up for Direct Deposit of your HAP checks if you haven't already done so. Here's how...

It is important that you keep us current on your mailing address, phone number and e-mail address. We need this information to notify you of inspections at your rental properties, to tell you about any changes in our payments on behalf of your tenants, to send year-end tax documents, and to contact you should questions or concerns arise about one of your subsidized tenants or units.

A reminder

Changes to your contact information need to be submitted in writing to Mike Jung, owner liaison. You may write Mike at the Porchlight Building, 907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200, Seattle WA 98107. Changes to your contact information may also be faxed to Mike at **206.239.1760** or e-mailed to him at **mjung@seattlehousing.org**

Our next free landlord workshop

Tuesday, February 21, 2012
from 5:30 until 7 p.m.

Porchlight Building Community Room
 907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200, Seattle

The Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program: An overview

- How the voucher program works and why it might be a good fit for your rental units
- How to list your units via our new listings service, **www.HousingSearchNW.org**
- What to do when a voucher-holder wants to lease a unit
- How much rent can you charge?
 The Voucher Payment Standards
- Who pays for utilities? Seattle Public Utilities' policy on not allowing tenant accounts
- Lease renewal and enforcement issues:
 How Seattle Housing can assist you
- Your questions answered

To learn more, contact Mike Jung,
 owner liaison, at 206.239.1672

The next following free workshop will be
Tuesday, March 20, 2012

Bridging differences in language

Even at the best of times, housing providers and renters often think they speak completely different languages. So imagine the complications when the two parties to a rental contract really *do* speak different languages.

Here's what we've heard from some landlords and managers about communicating with people from other cultures:

"It's difficult when an applicant can't read the rental application forms" ... "It bothers me when a resident is casual about being on time for meetings" ... "I don't know what to do with a resident who just doesn't understand or follow the tenancy rules and regulations" ... "I'm worried that I might inadvertently offend someone's culture when I don't know anything about it."

And here's what people from other countries tell us:

"When some leasing agents see how we dress, they won't allow us to fill out a rental application" ... "My apartment manager is put off by foreign accents" ... "The landlord often acts like she doesn't understand what I'm saying" ... "I get the impression that my manager thinks I'm dumb just because my English isn't perfect."

Differences in perspective between managers and residents can become virtual walls, making the exchange of information seem impossible. What can housing providers do to maximize communication in the application process and beyond with immigrants and others whose culture or language differs?

- *Speak slowly and use simple words with those who do not speak English very well.* If someone does not speak English well, don't assume that person is unable to communicate or that they are uneducated. If necessary, rephrase complex words or sentences into uncomplicated, clear language. Communicate by using simple words with longer pauses, repeating important information and avoiding legal jargon.
- *Do not be put off by actions that may be part of a person's cultural behavior.* Learning American culture takes time. Many immigrants practice cultural norms that can be misinterpreted by Americans. For example, in many cultures, it is inappropriate to look someone in the eye while speaking. Someone who looks down or away from you while speaking may be showing respect, not rudeness or disinterest. Be alert for situations where interactions with others may be impacted by cultural differences.
- *American culture is very time-driven and punctuality is important, but some cultures are event-driven, and other people's concept of time may be different.* If

Differences in perspective between managers and residents can become virtual walls, making the exchange of information seem impossible

someone is fifteen minutes late to an appointment or a day late on the rent, it may be because that person is unaware of American norms.

- *Be sure your new renters understand what they are signing.* To bridge the communication gap, managers should consider procuring an interpreter for negotiation and lease-signing with non-English speaking residents.
- *All legal contracts may remain in English.* Managers need not prepare legal papers in a resident's first language. On the other hand, it just might be good business to arrange printed translations of important policies and procedures, such as rent payment policies, pet and noise rules, maintenance information, etc.
- *Be prepared and willing to help prospective residents complete their applications.* Often an applicant will have all relevant information available among their personal papers, but may not be able to read the application well enough to know how to fill it out without help.
- *Give applicants the opportunity to take their application and/or rental agreement to a social service agency that helps immigrants with translation and interpretation.* There are a number of governmental and private social service agencies and many churches which assist new residents who settle here. These agencies are also available to owners and managers who are having difficulties communicating with applicants or residents. Some provide translation services and publish flyers and pamphlets on apartment rules and care of units in several languages.
- *Be prepared to be flexible about rules governing rental history and residential references.* Some people may not have lived in the United States long enough to acquire the necessary references. In some cases, an applicant can substitute the appropriate general references where residential references are unavailable.

Most importantly, always treat others with kindness and respect. Every member of society is a teacher. Immigrants learn how American society works by observing the way others treat them. —COURTESY KING COUNTY OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS

See p. 4 for resources to facilitate communication with tenants who speak a language other than English.



Housing Choice Voucher Program

Model documents now available

Columbia Legal Services and the Garvey Schubert Barer law firm recently represented the Tenants Union in discussions with the City of Seattle, the Rental Housing Association and other stakeholders regarding the fund created by the settlement agreement in *City of Seattle v. Margola*.

In settling the case, the parties created a fund to help address substandard housing concerns in multifamily housing and set up a committee to decide how best to use the fund's proceeds. The committee decided to underwrite the creation of model documents that landlords and tenants alike could use to address common issues.

These documents have been developed and approved by the City of Seattle, tenant advocates, and landlords, and are adjudged to be fair, legal, and unbiased.

These documents include a *summary of basic rights*, a *model lease*, a *repair policy and request form* and *security deposit forms*. Intended for use by tenants, landlords, and management companies, each of these three documents is available in 14 languages:

Amharic
Cambodian
Chinese (traditional)
English
Korean
Laotian
Oromo
Russian
Somali
Spanish
Tagalog
Thai
Tigrinya
Vietnamese

You can access and download these documents by going to www.columbialegal.org/margola

* * *

A resource we employ a good deal at Seattle Housing in talking with participants, tenants, landlords, and members of the public is The Language Line, which provides real-time interpretation in any of 170 languages. You can set up an account with the firm, but you can also avail yourself of one-time interpretation. Information about the firm's services and charges is at

www.language.com

Porchlight Building
907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200
Seattle WA 98107-4637

E-mail porchlight.info@seattlehousing.org
Fax 206.239.1770
www.seattlehousing.org

GENERAL QUESTIONS

To speak with a customer service agent about any Housing Choice Voucher program issue, call 239.1728 and press 'o'

TO LIST AVAILABLE UNITS

Call 239.1663 or go to www.seattlehousing.org and click on 'Rental Listings' under the 'Landlords' menu

OWNER INFORMATION

Note: Changes must be submitted in writing
Fax 239.1770, attention Mike Jung
E-mail: mjung@seattlehousing.org
Questions? Call Mike at 239.1672

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM MANAGER

Jodi Speer 239.1620

OWNER LIAISON

Mike Jung 239.1672

OCCUPANCY SUPERVISORS

'Aa' through 'Malerba' 239.1619
'Malf' through 'Zz' 239.1636
Mod Rehab & Project-based 239.1649

NEW MOVE-IN TEAM

Status of tenancy approvals, initial inspections and contracts and leases 239.1635
New move-in team supervisor 239.1621
New move-ins fax number 239.1760

INSPECTIONS

Annual inspections & reinspections 239.1645
Judy Huertas, HQS supervisor 239.1621

HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS INSPECTORS

Bill Francis 721.1457, ext 10
Paul Gimmi 239.1632
Sue Nigg 239.1639
Jason Shirley 239.1646
Nancy Shutes 770.6880
Lora Wait-Hoy 721.1457, ext 11