

Immigrants' Challenges with the Section 8 Housing Program

Sauti Yetu Center for African Women serves immigrant African women, many whom are undocumented. One of the primary obstacles for procuring Section 8 vouchers for our undocumented clients is the eligibility criteria. Section 8 vouchers are limited to US citizens. A major challenge to immigrant clients accessing section 8 is the lack of accessibility to speak to a housing representative by phone. Immigrant clients who called the section 8 phone number are often faced with two scenarios, either no one picks up the phone or the housing representative hangs up the phone. Another hurdle immigrant clients have undergone with section 8 housing is that the gas and electric bills were their responsibility to pay for since the section 8 voucher covered a portion of their rent. Often the immigrant clients could not find landlords who included gas in the rent and given the immigrant clients' limited income this would cause more financial constraints. In addition, immigrant clients expressed feeling anxious about the re-certification process knowing that there is a chance that their section 8 housing may not be renewed and they could be facing the ordeal of finding alternative housing options in a climate of already limited affordable housing. Lastly, one of the biggest impediments for immigrant clients with section 8 vouchers is meeting the deadline for the re-certification process (2 weeks) especially for illiterate clients to get the affidavit of income filled out and the ensuing legal assistance that has to be sought if the deadline is not met.

Some of the aforementioned challenges immigrant clients face with section 8 housing is highlighted in the case below:

A client who was able to obtain legal status had applied for and received a section 8 voucher, but experienced several issues with her section 8 housing. After looking at her apartment in June 2009, the client moved in Sept 2009. For some reason the client had been charged an extra \$1000 (rough estimate) for the months in between her looking at the apartment and her actually moving in. The shelter where the client had been living blamed Section 8, because they stated that the client was not able to move in until September, even though the client was able to. On the other side, Section 8 blamed the shelter, stating that the client should have moved in earlier, and the client needed to pay more because she only acquired legal status in August 2009. Therefore, the client had to pay more for the earlier months because she was not eligible for the program.

Another problem arose during the re-certification process of the client's section 8 housing because the client is illiterate and did not know whom her exact employer was. As a result, the client didn't know whom to give the Affidavit of Income form to fill out. The client tried to give someone at her workplace the Affidavit of Income form to fill out, but no one would fill it out or direct her to the appropriate person thereby leaving the client in an increased state of confusion. The client's unfortunate circumstance of not being able to get the Affidavit of Income form filled out by the deadline caused her re-certification package for section 8 to be denied. Consequently, the client needed to attend a fair hearing with proof that she is working full-time through the welfare office therefore, a letter was sent to the Section 8 office indicating that the client would like to contest this decision with a fair hearing.