

Mixed-Income Development Study

University of Chicago

Research Brief #6: Why Do So Few Residents Return to Mixed-Income Developments? Insights into Resident Decision-Making¹

February 2012

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overall Question:

What factors influence public housing residents' decisions to return or not return to mixed-income developments?

Research Overview:

Three developments: Jazz on the Boulevard, Oakwood Shores, and Westhaven Park

In-depth interviews: 46 residents who returned to a mixed-income development and 69 residents who chose not to return

Findings:

Attachments to Place and People Are Important

- Most residents who returned to a mixed-income development cited their ties to the neighborhood (including connections to area schools, knowledge of public transit, and closeness to family and friends) as a primary motivating factor.
- Residents who chose not to return also described important connections to their new neighborhoods.

Time and Other Pressures Limit Options

- Desire to leave public housing and barriers to using vouchers led some residents to choose to return to a mixed-income development.
- Both returners and non-returners described confusion over the relocation process and time pressure.

Some Residents Are Attracted By the Potential Benefits of Mixed-Income Developments

- Returners valued the design and look of the new mixed-income developments, as well as the possibility of broader neighborhood improvements.
- While most believed that higher-income residents would attract new businesses and promote a higher standard of behavior, returners did not expect to interact or form relationships with these new neighbors.

Anticipated Risks Keep Some from Returning

- Residents who chose not to return (as well as some who did) cited concerns about new rules and responsibilities and stricter monitoring in the mixed-income developments.
- Concerns that problematic behavior would continue in the new developments and that residents would not be welcomed by their higher-income neighbors were also common.

Implications for Consideration:

- Residents value their connections to neighborhoods and personal support networks. What can be done to preserve ties and ease transitions during and after relocation?
- Many residents describe constraints on their decision-making processes. What can be done in the future to ensure that residents have sufficient time and information to make fully informed decisions?
- Concerns about new responsibilities and stricter monitoring of behavior keep some from returning to mixed-income developments. What strategies and supports can be used to address these concerns, and how can residents be better informed of new expectations and consequences?

¹ This brief is based on a longer paper, "Mixed-Income Developments and Low Rates of Return: Insights from Relocated Public Housing Residents in Chicago" (Joseph and Chaskin, forthcoming, *Housing Policy Debate*). For more information about the Mixed-Income Development Study at the University of Chicago, please contact Sara Voelker at svoelker@uchicago.edu. This study is funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, with additional support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation.