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Public Housing in the United States and Stark County

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Abstract

In our nation's history, public housing has come to mean many different things. It evolved from a returning veteran's program following World War I to what it is today: a project designed to assist those in poverty through housing projects or Section 8 housing vouchers. Stark County did not have its first public housing project until the early 1960's. One of the most significant factors of this difference from other communities was that Stark County was able to learn from other's mistakes. As a result, public housing was not concentrated in high rises or dense projects. This still continues to affect people who live in public housing in Stark County today. There are several different themes revealed in this qualitative analysis designed to answer the question: how do residents of Stark Metropolitan Housing Authority assign meaning to their experience in public housing? Several themes emerged from the research: differences and similarities in the role of SMHA in the resident's lives, the identification and connection with community, the reasons for coming to public housing and the dreams of the future.

Public Housing in the United States and Stark County

Public Housing Policy in the United States

In his article entitled *The Evolution of Low-Income Housing Policy, 1949-1999,* Orlebeke states, "Shelter is one of the three basic human needs, and a responsible society has an obligation to prevent people from dying out in the cold" (2000, 489). In 1949, Congress decided to take a step towards this obligation. It defined a goal for the nation that every family have "a decent home and a suitable living environment" (Orlebeke, 2000, 489). Since that time, low-income housing initiatives have explored a variety of solutions, including voucher programs, tax credits, and block grants for the creation of low-income housing projects. All of these have had various levels of success and failure (Orlebeke, 2000).

Within the Federal government today, debate continues regarding the best approach to meeting the goal of a decent home for every citizen. Politicians and policy makers are philosophically divided over whether the government should even consider housing assistance as an option. Providing public housing is in conflict with the American ideal of individuals working for and owning their own home. Vale (2000) notes, "Public housing exposes a central tension in American culture. It raises uncomfortable questions about how Americans should live, where they should live, and with whom they should live, and forces government leaders to decide how to answer" (6). Even those who agree that public housing should be provided are divided over the extent of involvement and the most effective measures for addressing the issue.

> Some conservative critics argue that low-income housing assistance should be abolished, thus allowing the law of supply and demand to regulate rents and, eventually, to drive down prices… [While] some liberal critics contend that because housing is a necessity and the demand is relatively inelastic, marketplace laws should not be allowed to dominate (Karger & Stoesz, 2002, 458).

Whatever one's position on the issue, the United States does provide public housing for some poor individuals, and shows no signs of ending this provision.

Before housing was a Federal or even a state-wide issue, there were small yet significant ways that the government was involved in this concern. In 1776, in New York, a building regulation was adopted that created a "fire zone in which houses had to be made of stone or brick and roofed with tile or slate" (Marcuse, 1986, 250). Nearly a hundred years later, in 1876, the Tenement House Act went into affect in New York. While it sought to create meaningful building regulations, those it did create were "largely unenforceable and wholly unenforced" (Marcuse, 1986, 250). It did, however lead to the creation of the Tenement House Act of 1901, which, unlike its predecessor, "created both meaningful standards and an adequate enforcement mechanism" (Marcuse, 1986, 250). While on the surface these measures appeared to be significant signs of the government's concern for the poor and their housing issues,

> they were a continuation of the use of state power to prevent any disturbance – physical, social, or political – of the private conduct of economic affairs. That they also benefited the poor, and that persons of philanthropic motivations supported them, was neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause of their enactment (Marcuse, 1986, 252).

Not only that, but there was still an absence of involvement from the Federal level. All of these regulations were on the State and local levels.

Many of the housing reformers who fought for housing regulations believed that it was not a good idea of the government to get directly involved in housing people.

"Almost all of the early U.S. reformers agreed that 'it was 'bad principle and worse policy' for municipalities 'to spend public money competing with private enterprise in housing and the masses'' (Lubove, 1962, 104; see also Jackson, 1976, 121)" (Marcuse, 1986, 252). It would not be until World War I that the United States government would publicly own housing projects, and not until the Great Depression and World War II that these would be geared towards those in poverty.

The first publicly owned housing units were built to assist in production for the war effort. The US Housing Corporation was formed with the purpose of "help[ing] 'such industrial workers as are engaged in arsenals and navy yards of the United States and in industries connected with and essential to the national defense, and their families' (Friedman, 1968, 95)" (Marcuse, 1986, 253). Governmental housing units were built to assist war industries in housing their increase in employees. These units were publicly owned during the war and sold to the private industry as soon as it was over (Marcuse, 1986).

Following World War I, several states enacted Veteran's Housing programs. These programs "assisted returning veterans to purchase single-family homes, regardless of the quality or suitability of their existing housing" (Marcuse, 1986, 254). Poverty was still not a factor in the government's provision of housing to its citizens.

During the Great Depression, President Hoover established the Home Owners Loan Corporation "to rescue distressed homeowners and mortgage lenders" (Ford, 1989, 3). Following Hoover, President Roosevelt's actions in housing were two-fold: slum clearance in poor neighborhoods with the Housing Act of 1937 (Karger & Stoesz, 2002) and the "Federal Housing Administration's (FHA) mortgage insurance for the middle

class" (Ford, 1989, 3). The 1937 Act was passed, albeit with significant opposition. It was opposed by private real estate (Orlebeke, 2000), the United States Chamber of Commerce, the United States Savings and Loan League, conservative members of Congress who saw public housing as socialist, and even "President Roosevelt himself had to be coaxed: A large-scale public housing program had not been part of the first phase of the New Deal (Friedman, 1968)" (Bratt, 1986, 336).

While it was the first national housing program to address issues of poverty, this act

> stemmed from concerns about social unrest among unemployed city workers; it hoped to deal with that unrest, not so much through the provision of better housing, but through the provision of jobs. The expansion of the supply of housing was not its goal; indeed, the demolition of an equivalent number of units (of substandard housing) was mandated in the U.S. Housing Act of 1937" (Marcuse, 1986, 254).

It was an act dealing with housing, however, its main goals were centered on employment for workers hit by the Great Depression. It did not try to increase housing supply; for every unit of public housing built, another unit was required to be torn down so that rents in the private market were not affected. "The argument that public housing should not interfere with the private market logically led to the view that public housing should be clearly differentiated" (Bratt, 1986, 337). This meant that the housing looked different than the housing in the private market. By 1944, the government had turned most of its focus to World War II, and production of public housing stopped (Bratt, 1986). Instead the focus was directed to the creation of housing for war workers. Even projects that had been started and not yet completed were redirected to serve as war housing. In 1940, the government passed the Lanham Act, "which paved the way for the implementation of a large-scale program of building federally subsidized housing for civilian war employees"

(Welling, 2003, 134). Under this act, war housing was to be kept separate from other subsidized public housing units. "One million units of defense and emergency housing were completed between 1940 and 1947" (Welling, 2003, 134).

Even though production of traditional public housing was stopped on the 1937 Act, the ramifications of the administrative structure that it put in place impacted every housing program to follow. It created a decentralized structure in which localities were able to participate in the housing programs on a voluntary basis.

> This meant that decisions about public housing – whether to build it and where to locate it – would be made by local officials, who would be under significant pressure from their constituents. The decentralized structure also reduced the potential for the Federal government to either enforce more progressive policies or to override local decisions (Bratt, 1986, 340).

This resulted in the restriction of public housing projects to the cities, as well as their exclusion from the more affluent parts of the community.

While the 1937 act was a first step towards the government's involvement in housing, significant attempts at public housing first emerged in America following World War II. The goal for public housing at that time was "for helping low-income families cope with the postwar housing shortage and for replacing housing in cleared slums" (Orlebeke, 2000, 492). The first major Federal legislation aimed at solving the housing crisis was the Housing Act of 1949 (Orlebeke, 2000), otherwise named the Urban Redevelopment Act (URA) (Ford, 1989), which was an amendment to the Housing Act of 1937 (Karger & Stoesz, 2002). It, like its predecessor of 1937, also had sharp opposition from the private real estate industry. Opponents claimed it was a socialist program and would hurt private industry. "Ultimately, proponents of public housing

prevailed, but the legislative intent was clear: Public housing was to serve only those people who could not compete for housing on the private market" (Bratt, 1986, 337).

The Housing Act of 1949 "authorized the construction of 810,000 units of public housing over the next six years" (Orlebeke, 2000, 493). The only problem was that while 810,000 units were authorized, during the 1950's only enough appropriations were made to build about one fourth of these units over a ten-year period, rather than the original six-year time period (Orlebeke, 2000). In addition, localities incorrectly interpreted the bill's wording to mean only half of the new development had to be for low-income housing. "Inadvertently, the Federal government created a policy that encouraged urban redevelopment at the expense of existing low-income housing" (Karger & Stoesz, 2002, 440). Not only that, but on the local level the money was used to put public housing "in the least desirable parts of town where poor families were already concentrated" (Orlebeke, 2000, 493). This new wave of public housing was different from the Great Depression efforts in that instead of targeting those who were temporarily poor and deemed worthy to receive housing, it targeted those who were very low-income. "Once public housing was reactivated, and could no longer claim to be a depression-stimulated support for the temporarily poor, it became clearly defined as permanent housing for people who were more or less separated from society's mainstream" (Bratt, 1986, 339).

The next piece of legislation aimed at housing was the Housing Act of 1954, which was an amendment to the 1949 Act. While the focus of the 1949 act was "urban redevelopment," the focus of this act was "urban renewal." It mostly included the clearance of slums. "Using renewal projects, localities tried to revitalize inner cities by attracting middle- and upper-income families at the expense of displaced poor families"

(Karger & Stoesz, 2002, 440). Between the years of 1949 and 1963, roughly 243,000 housing units were removed. These were replaced with 68,000 new housing units. Only 20,000 of these 68,000 were for low-income families (Karger & Stoesz, 2002).

During the 1960's, different approaches to low-income housing were examined. There were four significant pieces of legislation, the Housing Acts of 1961, 1964, 1965, and 1966. These acts were "initiated during Kennedy's New Frontier and enormously expanded during President Johnson's Great Society" (Ford, 1989, 4). While these did not significantly increase the production of low-income housing, they did "test the political and administrative waters for subsidy alternatives that could augment the always troubled public housing program and engage the interest and energy of the private sector" (Orlebeke, 2000, 493). The 1961 act used a "BMIR (below-market interest rate) loan at 3 percent" (Orlebeke, 2000, 493). This loan was given to developers to build housing, who in turn could offer people a lower rent because their development costs were lower. This ultimately failed because there were not enough developers who would participate, there were not enough sites available, and because of certain cost constraints imposed by the government. The 1965 act put into place a program that used rent supplements. It gave housing projects payments "to make up the difference between 25 percent of tenant income and a fair market rent" (Orlebeke, 2000, 494). Congress did not appropriate any money the first year, and the second year they only appropriated half of the money authorized, as well as requiring that the local governments approved each site. Five years after the Act was in place, only 31,000 units had been developed (Orlebeke, 2000).

It was not until the Housing Act of 1968 that Congress began to seriously address the low-income housing issue. It said, "'this national housing goal…can be substantially

achieved within the next decade by the construction or rehabilitation of twenty-six million housing units, six million of these for low- and moderate-income families'" (Orlebeke, 2000, 495). This differed from past legislation in that it required the president to produce a schedule for meeting the housing production goal and to report back to Congress each year regarding progress. The goals for this legislation were "stunningly ambitious" (Orlebeke, 2000, 495). Housing production had never been more than 2 million per year, and never more than 71,000 for low-income housing. The goal of this Act was to have 2.6 million units produced per year, 600,000 of these being low-income. "The 1968 act intended to move beyond rhetoric to a serious run at a quantified goal and a disciplined timetable" (Orlebeke, 2000, 495). Section 235 of the Act provided eligible home purchasers with one percent rate subsidized mortgages insured by the Federal Housing Administration. Section 236 provided developers subsidized mortgage financing at the same rate as section 235 and also insured by the FHA, "thus enabling them to offer below-market rents to low- and moderate-income tenants" (Orlebeke, 2000, 495). Both of these programs were fully funded by Congress.

By 1971, however, some began questioning whether simply producing mass quantities of housing was really the key to addressing the issue. It seemed that there was not an actual shortage of shelter where the housing was being built. Many middle-income whites were leaving the cities and heading to the suburbs, leaving whole city neighborhoods practically abandoned. One of the things that was thought to contribute to this "white flight" phenomenon was new subsidized housing. It became clear that "a physical shortage of shelter was not the problem" (Orlebeke, 2000, 497). One of the problems of the housing issues was cost. "Inflation continued to boost operating

expenses, and many buildings that were, by then, 20 or more years old began to show signs of aging and the need for major repairs. At the same time, rental revenues were either declining or, at best, not keeping up with expenses" (Bratt, 1986, 339). Another issue was that of equity. Because the housing problem was so expansive, not everyone could be helped. This meant that some were being assisted, and some with the exact same qualifications were not being assisted. The poorest in the nation were being overlooked completely in these housing programs. The last problem with the existing housing program was the environments that the housing projects were creating. In the President's Third Annual Report (1971), Nixon describes the housing projects as being, "'drab, monolithic housing projects, largely segregated, which still stand in our major cities as prisons of the poor – enduring symbols of good intentions run aground on poorly conceived policy, or sometimes simply a lack of policy" (Orlebeke, 2000, 498).

By the time the president issued his report in 1971, opposition to the mass production of low-income housing was mounting, pointing to problems such as "high cost, shoddy construction, poor administration, inapplicability to big-city housing problems, failure to help low-income families, and a lack of planning on a metropolitan scale" (Orlebeke, 2000, 499). In 1973, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) budgeted a moratorium for the programs under sections 235 and 236. While it did not completely shut down these programs, it drastically reduced the funding allocated (Orlebeke, 2000).

The Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 was not an act aimed specifically at creating low-income and public housing, but it was still significant in relating to housing issues. It "included provisions for urban renewal, neighborhood

development, model cities, and water and a sewer projects; there were neighborhood and facility grants, public facilities and rehabilitation loans, and urban beautification and historic preservation grants" (Karger & Stoesz, 2002, 440).

Housing vouchers were considered as an option for public housing from its emergence, however it was not until the Housing Act of 1965 that vouchers were used in any significant way. Section 23, the Leased Housing program "allowed public housing authorities to lease standard housing units from private landlords and sublease them to their clients" (Orlebeke, 2000, 502). Basically, housing authorities paid a market rent to the landlord, and the low-income family paid what they could to the housing authority. The Housing Act of 1970 authorized 20 million for Section 504, the Experimental Housing Allowance Program (EHAP). The research findings of this program allowed an "allowance like component" in the newest subsidy program, Section 8. Section 8 had two components: allowance and production. By 1975 no units were produced under Section 8, and the focus was completely on allowances. However, in the 1977 appropriations act, Congress required "HUD to spend a bigger share of Section 8 on production (Harney 1976)" (Orlebeke, 2000, 504).

The emphasis in public housing policy was still on production until the Reagan administration. In 1982, "Reagan called for repeal of the production components of Section 8 and Congress complied, leaving Section 8 certificates as the only large-scale form of Federal housing subsidy" (Orlebeke, 2000, 505). By 1985, there were two different programs, the voucher program and the certificate program. The voucher program allowed renters to rent properties that were above the "HUD approved fair-market rent" (Orlebeke, 2000, 505), if they paid the difference. The certificate program

allowed them to rent at fair market rates. Supporters of the voucher programs said they were better than "production programs, which seem forever burdened with the weighty baggage of blighting projects, excessive cost, social pathologies, bureaucratic bungling, and outright scandal" (Orlebeke, 2000, 505). They claimed that the problem of housing was not a physical lack of housing, but a problem with the incomes of those looking for housing (Orlebeke, 2000).

As new policies were tried and implemented, tensions between local needs and initiatives and Federal regulations were constant.

> By the mid-1970's, the pattern of national housing initiatives had become familiar: the fanfare accompanying enactment, the implementation scramble, the analysis of result, the counting of costs in budget and social terms, the second thoughts and recriminations, and finally the search for a new model. At the heart of this tiresome cycle was the tension between the pretense of Federal policy control and the messy realities of local implementation (Orlebeke, 2000, 507).

Because of this conflict, many advocated for the creation of block grants to be given to localities. While these were initially considered during the Carter administration in the 1970's, it was not until the Reagan administration in the late 1980's and early 1990's that it was implemented in the form of the HOME Investment Partnerships program. This program was "funded at $1.5 billion, with 15 percent set aside for community-based nonprofits" (Orlebeke, 2000, 510). The Federal government recognized that most of their projects were in ruins, and "enthusiasts for local control believed that state and local government could do better; almost everyone agreed that they could do no worse" (Orlebeke, 2000, 510).

In 1986 Congress instituted the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. "After a slow start, it 'has become the primary production vehicle for low-income housing in the United States' (Wallace 1995, 793)" (Orlebeke, 2000, 511). It works in the following way:

companies or individuals who wish to invest in housing specifically for low-income individuals can receive a tax credit that is equal to their investment. This credit is "a dollar-for-dollar offset against other taxes" (Orlebeke, 2000, 511). They receive it in ten installments. In order to receive the tax credit, 20% of their housing units have to be reserved for those at or below 50% of the area median income, or no less than 40% of their housing units reserved for those at or below 60% of the area median income. Rents cannot be more than 30% of the resident's income. Not only do they have to meet these qualifications, but they must also remain in business under these qualifications for 15 years. Under the law established in 1986, the Federal government can only allocate $1.25 per resident of each state. "State housing agencies distribute the credits to local housing agencies or directly to sponsors of low-income developments" (Orlebeke, 2000, 512). It is unclear exactly how many units were created using LIHTC, but estimates range from 224, 446 units between the years of 1990-1994, and a million units in the first eleven years of the program. "However one sorts out the production numbers, the LIHTC is a very substantial contributor to the low-income housing stock" (Orlebeke, 2000, 513). It differs from previous tax credits in that it acts as a block grant of sorts to states to distribute the money. Critics of the LIHTC see this as a drawback, because a portion of the money is lost in transaction costs. It also does not target the nation's poorest who need housing. However, many argue that it has been the most effective at successfully addressing the low-income housing needs of America (Orlebeke, 2000).

In more recent years the HOPE VI program has been a major development in the government's housing policies. This program is designed to eliminate the most derelict

public housing, but critics point to the fact that there is no replacement made for the displaced residents of these housing units.

Another recent development is HUD's Mark-to-Market program. It was established in 1997, and is run by the Office of Multifamily Housing Assistance Restructuring (OMHAR), a part of HUD. OMHAR was scheduled to end in 2001, but was extended until 2004. The Mark-to-Market program was also extended until 2006. As various subsidy contracts that public housing projects had with the government begin to expire, it seeks to "reduce rents to market levels and […] restructure existing debt to levels supportable by these rents [… because] many of these contracts set rents at amounts higher than those of the local market" (http://www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/omhar/index.cfm). This program accomplishes this by working with "property owners, Participating Administrative Entities (PAEs), tenants, lenders, and others with a stake in the future of affordable housing" (http://www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/omhar/index.cfm).

From vouchers, to tax credits, to block grants to housing production, the United States has tried many different approaches to addressing the housing needs of the nation. While these policies are made on a national level, their implications affect communities and people on a local level, including Stark County.

Public Housing in Stark County

Unlike many places in the United States, Canton did not have its first traditional public housing project until the early 1960's. Prior to 1900, Canton was historically comprised of primarily German-Americans. Near the turn of the previous century it made a major shift to an industrialized steel town. The population grew at a very fast

rate, mostly with Greek and Italian immigrants who wanted to work in the steel mills. Most of them settled on the Southeast side of Canton.

> [The immigrants] transformed this relatively homogeneous community of long-established Britons and Germans who came to the region beginning in the early nineteenth century to a fragmented community in which nearly every ethnic group was, in turn, ghettoized in the southeast section of Canton before gradually moving into industrial and residential neighborhoods in southwest and northeast Canton (Welling, 2003, 2).

With this change in demographic and rapid growth came many tensions, which were exemplified in several union strikes of the steel mills, some of which became violent. Because of these events, relationships between the business leaders of the community and the workers were "characterized by angry conflict between industrial labor and Canton's economic elite" (Welling, 2003, 2).

The Canton Housing Authority was founded in 1938. Appropriations and funding for the new agency were held up by a legal loophole. By the time it was discovered that the loophole could be avoided, enough opposition to the program had built up, despite widespread public support, and the appropriations were able to be defeated in the City Council. "Without the necessary approval from Council for a cooperation agreement between the city and CMHA, the federal government withdrew in October 1939 the funds that it had earmarked for housing in Canton and disbursed them elsewhere" (Welling, 2003, 81).

Opposition to public housing in Canton and Stark County were centered around several arguments. Business leaders and politicians were wary of too much Federal control. "Such a program ran counter to deeply-held ideological notions about the role of the national government and added to the traditional Germanic fear of government" (Welling, 2003, 83). They were also concerned about the threat of socialism and

communism. Even during the Great Depression, the leaders of Canton were still skeptical of all of the New Deal Programs, including public housing.

> Council and leading Cantonians, particularly those representing the construction and real estate industries, maintained that the private sector could adequately meet the shelter needs of ill-housed and poor residents […] Public housing, labor discontent, and socialism became intertwined within the minds of many high profile residents in the years to follow, making it difficult to garner support for a low-rent shelter proposal (Welling, 2003, 82).

There were several reasons why these arguments were so successful in the Canton. First, with the exception of the Southeast quadrant of Canton, housing was generally not in poor condition. There were also no respected advocates or reformers fighting to bring public housing to Canton, though many in the Southeast quadrant supported it. While the unionists were strong supporters of public housing, they were largely ignored after the strikes that occurred in the years before. A weak support for public housing, and strong opposition from the private housing sector greatly contributed to its defeat. The political climate was also instrumental in the early rejection of public housing in Canton. In the crucial years that the City Council was deciding on public housing, there was a shift from a mayor who supported it to one who did not support public housing (Welling, 2003).

In the 1940's, with an increase in the war effort, Canton became in desperate need of some type of war worker housing. While there was talk about the Canton Housing Authority managing the construction of the housing and then converting the housing to low-income housing following the war, it was never granted permission to participate. The program was administered by the national government. A location for the housing units was hard to locate. Citizens of Canton were not generally opposed to the housing units, but they did not want them constructed anywhere near their homes (Welling, 2003).

Even with the construction of the initial 300 war housing units, "in 1941, Canton was one of the fastest growing industrial cities in the United States" (Welling, 2003, 139-140), and housing was still greatly needed. The private market finally conceded that they could not keep up with the demand of the war, and by the time all was said and done "the federal government eventually constructed four permanent and three temporary housing projects in the Canton-Massillon area" (Welling, 2003, 141). The housing projects were scheduled to either be sold or demolished, but as veterans returned from war it became clear that the housing need was increasing, rather than decreasing. "The housing crisis was so great and the problem of finding shelter for returning serviceman so troublesome that Council passed a resolution to resurrect the Canton Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) on November 25, 1946, to prevent the demolition of defense housing units" (Welling, 2003, 151).

Even though the Housing Authority was working once again, they were only charged with managing the war housing and denied any attempts to create more housing. "By the mid-1950s, only Jackson Park-Sherrick Court Homes remained as a part of the housing authority's management portfolio" (Welling, 2003, 152). Jackson Park-Sherrick consisted of 320 units of housing.

Over time, the residents of the housing units also began to change. "As private alternatives became available to moderate-income and working-class whites, veterans and their families moved out of public housing, and war housing units gradually became the province of the persistently poor and African Americans, constituent groups with little political leverage in Canton" (Welling, 2003, 199).

Following the war, leaders in the professional and business spheres in Canton became concerned with the problems the Canton government was facing, "including labor disputes, persistent crime, seemingly ineffective leadership in City Hall, and economic stagnation, among other crucial concerns" (Welling, 2003, 203-204). To address these issues these leaders formed the Citizen's Committee, which "was a watershed event in Canton's history because it changed the way in which leading private citizens interacted with and thought about local, state, and federal governments" (Welling, 2003, 209). For the first time the business community was active in the political and social realms, not just issues of economic well being. While initially opposed to public housing, it became clear to them that in order to improve Canton, funds for the urban renewal program from the Federal government were necessary, through the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954. This was because the citizens of Canton would not support paying for urban renewal out of their local tax money. Because the creation of public housing was a stipulation for receiving the funds, the Citizen's Committee began to support public housing, but only "to secure additional funding to rejuvenate the city's economy and infrastructure, not because affordable housing for the poor was a high priority" (Welling, 2003, 268). Even with the support of the Citizen's Committee, the citizens of Canton rejected the proposal for public housing in 1957.

Those who supported the urban renewal project in Canton were aware that they needed a public housing program to secure the funds, but after 1957 it became clear that the public housing needed to be uncontroversial among Canton's citizens for it to pass.

> Canton officials redrafted its master urban renewal plan that would satisfy the federal government without raising the ire of its citizenry. The city followed the pattern of other communities by finding a solution at the expense of its most vulnerable citizens, the economically and racially disadvantaged. They did so in

> large part because its leaders felt there were no other alternatives (Welling, 2003, 332-333).

With this new urban renewal plan in hand, Canton moved forward to construct 100 units of public housing, and "in June 1963, thirty-two families moved into Sherrick Court Homes, the first conventional public housing development built in Canton" (Welling, 2003, 1). This housing was located in the Southeast quadrant of the city where the former war housing had been (Welling, 2003).

The industrial park was constructed in the Southeast quadrant of Canton as part of the urban renewal project, and displaced many people without providing adequate replacement housing for those who lost their homes. Because most of these people were African American, and African Americans were discriminated against in terms of where they could find housing and what kind of loans they could receive, the limited public housing that was created became a ghetto for the African American community in Canton. This "meant that public housing increasingly became a shelter of last resort for chronically impoverished minority peoples, particularly blacks" (Welling, 2003, 273).

This fact did not escape the African American residents of Canton, and they decided to take action.

> As CMMHA was establishing a timeline for the completion of the final phase of Jackson Park-Sherrick Court Homes, the HRC, Canton Urban League, and the Stark County branch of the NAACP filed charges of housing discrimination against the City of Canton and Canton-Massillon Metropolitan Housing Authority with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission in September 1967 (Welling, 2003, 327).

They charged that African Americans were stuck in certain parts of the city, with little if any hope of relocation to a different part of town.

While these charges did not stop the completion of the Jackson-Sherrick homes, it did get a promise from the Canton-Massillon Housing Authority that it would not build

any more housing units in the Southeast quadrant following Jackson-Sherrick's completion. True to its word, additional projects were placed in the Northeast and Southwest quadrants of Canton.

In 1968, CMMHA requested additional monies from HUD to build more public housing projects to house those displaced by the Route 30 highway project. In 1971, Linwood Acres opened, followed by three more housing projects in Canton. When these were completed, housing was distributed throughout the city instead of being concentrated in one area.

In 1971, the "Stark Metropolitan Housing Authority, formerly known as the Canton-Massillon Metropolitan Housing Authority, owned 326 family units and 262 elderly units" (Welling, 2003, 350). Ten years later those numbers had grown to over 2,000 units in Alliance, Canton, and Massillon.

> Cantonians' resistance to government-assisted programs, including housing, was rooted in a nineteenth-century vision of community, a reluctance among the economic elite to get involved in the political arena, mounting tensions between labor and management, and, eventually, concerns about a shift in the racial and economic composition of the residents of public housing – from white working-class families to the chronically poor and people of color (Welling, 2003, 336).

However, once Jackson-Sherrick was completed there was little resistance to public housing in Canton and Stark County, which can be seen in its growth in the years following. Because Canton was so late in developing public housing, as compared to other cities, it was able to avoid many of the mistakes that had been made in the area of public housing. Canton had no high-rise apartment buildings, and after completing a few "projects" it opted for Section 8 and scattered sites for housing (Welling, 2003).

Currently in Stark County and the City of Canton, there are many organizations set up to address issues of homelessness and housing. Various organizations have set up

a continuum of care that includes: outreach, intake and assessment, emergency shelter, homelessness prevention, supportive services, transitional housing beds, permanent housing units (subsidized and special population) and permanent supportive housing continuum of care units (ICAN, 2002, Stark County Continuum of Care Application Narrative). Housing and homelessness issues are still evident, however. On March 6, 2003, a homeless count was taken that totaled 532 persons. Not only that, but according to the 2000 census, 28.3% of renters in Canton are paying more than 35% of their household income towards rent. Affordable housing is considered 30% or less of household income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, Table DP-1). The same census reported that renters occupied 40.3% of occupied housing units in Canton (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, Table DP-1). 15.4% of the families in Canton were below the poverty level, and 19.2% of individuals were below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, Table DP-3). This does not take into account low or moderate-income earnings.

Public housing in Stark County is operated through the Stark Metropolitan Housing Authority. All funding for SMHA comes from the Federal level through HUD and from revenues of rents from tenants. Their jurisdiction is all of Stark County, except Hills and Dales. The majority of the public housing is concentrated in Canton, with some concentrations in Alliance and Massillon (Amanda Fletcher, personal communication, May 12, 2003). Their mission statement reads:

> The Stark Metropolitan Housing Authority (SMHA) provides eligible residents of Stark County with quality affordable housing in decent, safe, and nourishing neighborhoods. By working in partnership with the public and private sectors, the SMHA provides families with housing choice and the opportunity to achieve self-sufficiency (www.starkmha.org).

This is accomplished through several programs. The two most common programs are the Family Housing program and the Section 8 housing program. SMHA also provides housing for the elderly, homeless housing programs, and other support services (Amanda Fletcher, personal communication, May 12, 2003). This overview will focus on Section 8 Housing and Family Housing.

Section 8 is comprised of two different programs: the voucher program, or tenant based rental assistance, and the project based rental program. The voucher program "provides renters with rent vouchers that can be used across the country […] The tenant pays the difference between the property rent and the SMHA portion determined by a calculation using local Payment Standards" (www.starkmha.org). The rents are approved if they are comparable to unassisted rents for the specific type of unit. The income limits for eligibility for Section 8 as a percent of Median income can be seen in table one. Rent is set in the following manner: first the Payment Standard is established: $459 for one bedroom, $586 for two bedrooms, $734 for three bedrooms, and $825 for four bedrooms. Then 30% of the family's adjusted income is subtracted from the Payment Standard. This number is what SMHA will pay towards their rent. Income is adjusted for children who are minors, heads of the

Table 1 (SMHA, Section 8 Brochure)

Section 8 Income Limits % of Median Income			
# Per.	30% Ex Low	50% Very Low	80% Low
1	$10,900	$18,150	$29,050
2	$12,450	$20,750	$33,200
3	$14,000	$23,350	$37,350
4	$15,550	$25,950	$41,500
5	$16,8000	$28,050	$44,850
6	$18,050	$30,100	$48,150
7	$19,3000	$32,200	$51,500
8+	$20,550	$34,250	$54,800

household who are elderly or disabled, and childcare expenses. "If a family chooses a unit that rents for more than the applicable payment standard, the family is limited to a rent portion not to exceed 40% of their adjusted income" (SMHA, Section 8 Brochure).

The project based rental assistance differs from the vouchers in that "the subsidy is tied to a specific rental unit and the family is only assisted under Section 8 while they live in that particular unit" (Brochure). These properties are not managed by SMHA, but the housing authority has contracts with the landlords to use their housing for Section 8 subsidies.

There are 1,500 Section 8 certificates allocated each year. The majority of Section 8 vouchers are given to people below 30% of the median income for the area. As of May 2003, there were 1,617 waiting for a Section 8 voucher. If the family or individual chose to be on the Section 8 waiting list alone and not the family housing list, the wait is around 2-3 years to receive a voucher.

The other program that will be examined in more detail is Family Housing, otherwise known as public housing projects. Admission into these housing units is based on a different income unit than the Section 8 requirements, as seen in table two. To apply for housing, applicants must go to the central office on a Tuesday or Wednesday starting at 9:00 AM. Applications are accepted on a first come, first serve basis for the first twenty received (Amanda Fletcher, personal communication, May 12, 2003).

Table 2 (SMHA, Family Housing Brochure)

# Persons	Income Limits
1	$29,050
2	$33,200
3	$37,350
4	$41,500
5	$44,850
6	$48,150
7	$51,500
8+	$54,800

Once applicants have applied, they are placed on a waiting list. Where they are on the waiting list depends on the date and time of application. Preferences are given to those who live and work in Stark County, are currently homeless or in substandard housing, veterans, or to those currently in school. To be given a preference only means that an applicant is placed on the top half of the list (Amanda Fletcher, personal communication, May 12, 2003).

Currently in Stark County, there are 2,429 occupied housing units, out of 2,554 units total. There are 983 households on the waiting list for public housing. For those on the waiting list, getting a place to live can take anywhere from six months to one year, depending on their willingness to accept offers (Amanda Fletcher, personal communication, May 12, 2003).

All of the following statistics are taken from the residents of Stark County public housing in the month of May 2003 from the 2,429 households in public housing at this time. Of all households, 41.95% were single person households, 38.58% consisted of two to three people, 17.21% had four people, and 2.26% had six or more living together. 84.40% of the households had one adult living there, 13.17% had two, 2.14% had three, and .29% had four or more adults in one household. 46.77% of the households had no children living there, 21.16% had one, 16.80% had two, 9.96% had three, and 5.31% had four or more children living there. Out of the 5,496 people living in public housing, 47.63% of them were below the age of 18. 9.44% were over the age of 65. This means that 42.92% of the 5,496 people in public housing were between the ages of 18 and 65 (Amanda Fletcher, personal communication, May 12, 2003).

Of the 2,429 households, 59.86% were non-elderly, 16.01% were disabled or handicapped, 16.39% were elderly, and 7.74% were both elderly and disabled or handicapped. Racial composition is as follows (by heads of household): 55.04% are white, 43.97% are black, .74% are American Indian/Native Alaskan, .25% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.00% are Hawaiian. Ethnicity, also measured by heads of household, is .91% Hispanic and 99.09% non-Hispanic (Amanda Fletcher, personal communication, May 12, 2003).

Of the total 2,429 households, 68.09% have no employed adults, 28.82% have 1 employed adult, and 3.09% have 2 or more employed adults in the household. 59.70% have an income between $0 and $8,790, 24.04% have an income between $8,791 and $14,650, 11.28% have an income between $14, 651 and $23,400, and 4.98% have an income above $23,401. Sources of income are shown in table 3 (percentages do not add up to 100% because households could report multiple sources of income). All of these numbers are self reported by the residents of Family Housing (Amanda Fletcher, personal communication, May 12, 2003).

Table 3 (Amanda Fletcher, personal communication, May 12, 2003)

Reported Source of Income	
Assets	5.27%
Own Business	.12%
Child Support	10.46%
Federal Wage	.99%
General Assistance	.86%
Military Pay	.12%
Other Non-Wage Source	1.52%
Pension	8.77%
SSI	21.37%
Social Security	30.71%
TANF	14.82%
Unemployment	1.19%
Other Wage	34.13%
Imputed Welfare	.21%

5.64% of the total households lived in zero bedroom units, 31.25% lived in one bedroom units, 25.73% lived in two bedroom units, 31.08% lived in three bedroom units, 4.98% lived in four bedroom units, and 1.32 % lived in five bedroom units. 44.20% of the 5,496 people in public housing were reported as the head of the household, 2.67%

were reported as a spouse, .49% were reported as a co-head of the household, .47% were reported as foster children, 47.09% were reported as youths, 1.40% were reported as full-time students, .09% were reported as live-ins, and 3.58% were classified as other adults (Amanda Fletcher, personal communication, May 12, 2003).

Interviews

While the history and current demographics of public housing in Stark County give facts relating to the community, they say little about resident's experiences with public housing. To get behind the facts and experience those person's stories – how they articulate meaning to their housing experience – is what gives these facts and histories meaning and relevance.

There has been no previous research regarding the experience of residents in Stark Metropolitan Housing Authority. Narrative analysis is a logical means for conducting this research. It allows for stories to be told from the perspective of the person living in public housing, while still allowing for analysis of the interviews.

Research Methodology

Between the dates of November 25, 2003 and December 11, 2003, I conducted fifteen interviews with current residents living in public housing in Stark County. The only requirements were that they be a person currently living in the SMHA housing and above the age of eighteen who would be willing to speak to me voluntarily.

At the request of SMHA, the volunteers for my study were selected through Tammi Clark, resident case manager for Stark Metropolitan Housing Authority. She contacted various case managers who in turn gave her names and contacts of people that

would be possible interviewees. Tammi contacted those people and set up the date and time for each interview.

The research plan was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Malone on November 5, 2003. The interviews were conducted at the SMHA building in downtown Canton in a conference room. They lasted for approximately thirty minutes; some being more and some being less. The interviewees were not paid or compensated for their time. Twelve out of fifteen of the interviews were tape-recorded. The interviews not tape-recorded were at the request of the interviewee. Those that were tape-recorded gave written consent. All direct quotes in this study were taken from the transcription of the tapes.

It is important to note the following flaws in the research design. The way the interviews were set up and the location that they were conducted in could and most likely did have an impact on the answers that people gave and therefore the research that I gathered. It is also significant to note that the interviewees were not selected randomly, which also impacts the research results. For the purposes of this research none of those conditions could be avoided, however any future research should try to avoid those circumstances.

I interviewed three males and twelve females. This compares to 51.97% of the total Stark County population being female and 48.03% of the population being male (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, *Census 2000 Summary File 1, Matrices P13 and PCT12*). All of the interviewees were over the age of eighteen. One was over the age of sixty-five (6.67%). Everyone else was between the ages of twenty and fifty-four (93.33%). In the population of Stark County over eighteen, 63.63% of the population is between the ages

of twenty and fifty-four and 20.08% are over the age of sixty-five. Seven out of the fifteen I interviewed were Caucasian (46.67%), compared to 91.59% of the total population of Stark County which is Caucasian. Six were African American (40.00%), one was African American/Native American (6.67%), and one was Native American (6.67%). In Stark County, 7.30% of the population is African American, 1.45% are two races, and .25% are American Indian/Native Alaskan (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, *Summary File 1, Matrices P1, P3, P4, P8, P9, P12, P13, P,17, P18, P19, P20, P23, P27, P28, P33, PCT5, PCT8, PCT11, PCT15, H1, H3, H4, H5, H11, and H12*).

The first questions I asked the interviewees were demographic in nature: age, sex, race/ethnicity, marital and family status, number of years in SMHA, number of units lived in during that time, and amount of time the interviewee was on the waiting list to get into SMHA. I then asked six narrative analysis questions:

1. Tell me about your experience in public housing; what has it been like?
2. What led you to need public housing?
3. What do you think are some common characteristics of people living in public housing?
4. Can you think of a story about a way that living in public housing has been helpful for you?
5. In five years from now what kind of housing would you like to be living in?
6. What would you like people to know about public housing? Anything else you would like to add?

Each of the interviewees was free to answer the question as they interpreted it, or to ask for clarification.

Narrative Themes of the Research

There were several themes that arose in interview after interview. These include the following: the role that SMHA played in his or her life, the way the interviewee identified community, the stories of how each person came to be in public housing, and the dreams that each interviewee had for the future. Some identified the role of SMHA in a positive light, either as a source of stability or a way to regain dignity. Others identified more negative aspects of SMHA, seeing it as an invasion of privacy and a regulatory body. Those I interviewed also identified community in different ways. Some associated themselves as part of public housing and sought to identify with their community, while others saw themselves as an outsider and sought to distance from community. Most of those that I interviewed came into public housing as the result of some type of crisis; whether divorce, sickness, death, or loss of employment. Finally, each interviewee had a vision for the future. Most identified that public housing was only a stepping-stone to owning a house, while a few identified SMHA and public housing as his or her permanent housing for the future. The following is an analysis of these themes as they occurred in the interviews.

Role of Stark County Metropolitan Housing

Different people in public housing in Stark County view of the role of SMHA in different ways, however there seemed to be several themes among all those who shared their stories. For many, living in Stark County Metropolitan Housing provided stability for them to be able to get a handle on other crisis points in their life and not have to worry about having a roof over their heads. For others, SMHA not only provided stability, but was a resource for additional services such as support for school, programs for children,

case management, etc. These services allowed them to improve and grow in areas in their lives above and beyond housing. For others, living in public housing and working with SMHA gave them a renewed sense of worth and self-esteem, allowing them to work and improve in ways that they would not have been able to otherwise.

There were other roles that the residents saw SMHA filling in their lives and in their housing experience. Many identified SMHA as taking a part of their privacy and invading their personal lives. Others saw it as a regulatory body, whether viewed in a negative or positive light.

Susan is a 34-year-old Caucasian woman who has lived in public housing for almost five years. She has four children, and is divorced. For her, public housing has provided her stability and much needed services.

> It's helped me get back on my feet. (In what way?) Um, I was able to provide a roof over my kid's head […] I dropped out of high school, so, they helped me receive my GED. I went into nursing school, and they helped me, financially they helped me pay for that. Um, I had a car problem and they provided bus passes for me. And now I'm continuing my education and they're still, they're still there for me. They've helped me with uniforms, school books (personal communication, November 25, 2003).

Susan also has benefited from the help of the staff of SMHA. They helped her with building a résumé and developing goals (personal communication, November 25, 2003).

Andrew is a 37-year-old Caucasian man who has lived in public housing for seven years. He is married and has two children – ages three and six. For him, public housing is many things: stability, helpful services, a listening ear, a motivator, and a source of self-esteem and dignity.

> It gives you, uh, I think public housing, uh, gives you a, a stability as far as, um, having a good, safe place to live [...] Its, uh, its kinda helped me, uh, you know, I said, it, um, kinda motivates you to you know, um, want to, you know like I said with the different rules and things, uh, like things for your kids, like I said you

> know kinda motivates you to, to work harder to try to, you know, better yourself. Um, which, you know that's what I'm trying to do now with going to school, getting all these (chuckles), getting all these degrees trying to, just trying to better myself to, you know, um, maybe eventually have my own, you know a home of our own, you know? So that's, it's just a great motivator, um, to, uh, you know get you, you know, get you off the couch and wantin to get out there and do something. Like I said it's not, you know it's not having, it's nothing to do with, uh, the housing or anything like that it's just, uh, that you know, you're, you're, you're living in this apartment and you're thinking to yourself well, you know, my kids are growing up, I'd like to have a nice house or a bigger house, or... so that gets you motivated to do that (personal communication, November 25, 2003).

Andrew also has been helped by the services that Stark Metro Housing offers. He has had a consistently good relationship with those that work for SMHA.

> And the people I've encountered through metropolitan public housing, are, I mean they're just excellent. I haven't, I haven't, uh, I haven't really a bad word to say about anybody. They uh, you know if you have a problem, it doesn't matter if, uh, its, its, uh, what it is they you know they try to help you right away, and uh, everybody's been, you know, everybody's been friendly. Uh, they go out of their way, you know, sometimes to try to do what they can for you, that's, that's really nice. You don't get that very much these days anymore. (Laughs) Everybody's out for themselves. And it's, uh pretty nice to have somebody, to, you know, you can talk to like that (personal communication, November 25, 2003).

Not only has living in public housing been a source of stability and help in Andrew's life, but it has helped him improve his self-esteem. "You know instead of living in a broke down, you know, trailer, you know it gives you a little bit of self-esteem knowin that you, you know, you got a nice apartment to live in" (personal communication, November 25, 2003).

Tiffany is a 40-year-old African American woman who is divorced with two children. She has been in public housing for close to one year. For her, public housing has given her a place to lay her head. "Well, I would say, they gave me a place in time for me to have for me and my children to lay our heads, when I could no longer afford

staying the apartment. I mean, that was very helpful, very, very much so" (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Sarah is a 33-year-old African American woman who is currently separated from her husband and has two children; one that lives with her and one that does not. She lived in public housing for five years, left it, and has been back in public housing for four months. Public housing offers stability in Sarah's life, and also provides her with much needed services.

> They [SMHA] helped me out a lot, to get on my feet, and, um, and that was a big blessing, um, (pause), especially with the young mom's program, um, because once I had got finished my schooling for EMT, and when I had got a job at the EMT, regardless of how much money I was making, I was makin close to nine somethin, well I guess like nine somethin an hour, my rent still stayed at forty-five dollars for eighteen months, that way I was able to save money, buy stuff for my home, house, and get it paid off, and, you know, kinda broke that catch 22 type thing, so... I have great experience with public housing (personal communication, December 2, 2003)!

She started out in the young mom's program, and SMHA paid for her to get her EMT and firefighting license. When the City of Canton started a hiring freeze, SMHA hired her to work for them. "I have a good income, um, a job with excellent benefits, holidays, and little things like Columbus day, Federal holidays off with pay, insurance, um, dental, vision, I'm no longer on, I haven't been on welfare in years, so, they have helped me (chuckle)" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). There is also the stability in Sarah's life of not having to worry about losing her job and not being able to cover rent.

> I don't have to worry about gas, um, water, or, um, uh, garbage, I just pay my rent and um, electric bill, then I have that stability to where if something was to happen, like if something was to happen and I lose my job, Lord forbid, that, or, something folds, my position folds, and I don't have an income, I don't pay any rent (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Housing has become a constant in her life and is no longer dependent on other factors; she always knows she'll have a roof over her head (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Karen is a 54-year-old African American Indian woman who has lived in public housing since 1974. She is divorced, and has two adult children. She has experienced many of the same things that others I interviewed have. "If I need something, pretty much, if I call em [SMHA] they're there, ya know" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). She has also received a sense of stability from living in public housing. "I got hit by the flood in July and I got behind in my rent because, um, my basement, I lost like almost twenty thousand dollars worth of stuff, and you know, but they have been really working with me, you know, on my rent and stuff. Cause really, they could have, you know, evicted me, but I can't complain" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). This is not the first time that public housing has been a source of stability in Karen's life.

> In my situation it really has been helpful because, um, I was a firefighter, and uh, I got injured on my job several times, due to not my fault, but, um, you know, the van went through the light and hit where I was sittin in the back of the fire engine, and I had a concussion and so on but, by me livin in metropolitan, you know, my income has stopped or dropped down and this has really helped me, you know, being able to adjust and continue on with my family going on, because had it not been, if I had been livin in just a regular apartment I would not have had my rent, you know, I would have gotten evicted, so it's a big, you know, advantage, you know, if you need help, if you don't have it, you know they're there to help you. So, this is really to me a great advantage (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Over the years they have also helped her pay for schooling, and to become a counselor for the AFL-CIO in Canton (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Mary has had a similar experience to others in terms of the role public housing plays in her life. She is a 53-year-old African American woman, single, who has lived in public housing for close to seven years.

> Um, I love my apartment. The snow is shoveled, um, it's salted, the sidewalks are salted, um, I don't have to go to the dumpster, I have my own garbage can behind where I live, which is a plus. Uh, I have a porch, which I love, parking, which I love, (laughs) right at my door. And the price isn't bad either (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Public housing has been more than just a nice place to live at a good price, however. "It [SMHA] (P) reinforced strengths of being able to live alone, without family, sometimes without friends, and it draws me closer to Jesus [...] Um, I've become self-sufficient. I enjoy (laughs) being by myself, with respect to cooking, cleaning, washing, you know that type of thing" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). She has also been helped financially; the credit union for SMHA financed her car (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Patricia is a 32-year-old African American woman. She is single and has one child. She has been living in public housing for one year. A huge part of her experience has been the stability that she is able to maintain as a result of being there. Before coming to public housing, she was paying close to 90% of her income to rent and utilities. Her mother and grandmother helped her out, but

> Public housing helped me in that way where I can be independent, without havin to get financial help from anybody. Outside of what, you know, livin beyond my means, I don't have to live that way. My rent was 650, and now it's (p)... much less than that. It used to be $650 plus all my utilities and gas collection, I'm sorry, garbage collection. I used to have to pay to get my trash picked up (chuckles), you know, so, it benefits me now that I don't have to pay for that. It makes me really, I can really appreciate it. I can really live within my means now, and be able to buy my son a pair of shoes cause he needs them, you know, size 14 feet (laughs)... so (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

She lives in a scatter site, but she is appreciative of how well she is kept updated on programs that are happening in which she could get involved. "I was living by the skin of my teeth, and so they've [SMHA] been very helpful for me" (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Diane is a 46-year-old African American woman who is separated from her spouse and has no children. She has been living in public housing for four years. For her, public housing is a way to "establish yourself," because "once you get into the, uh, Stark Metropolitan Housing, there's different programs that can help you build your self-esteem, you know build yourself up" (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Emily is a 45-year-old Caucasian woman who is single with no children. She has been living in Stark Metropolitan Housing for two years. Public housing has been a support in her life. SMHA has helped her look for employment, provided her with bus passes, gotten her computer training, and if she has any problems with her unit SMHA has taken care of it. They have given her stability as she has tried to find employment (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Abby is a 31-year-old African American woman who is married with three children. She has been living in public housing since September 2003. She recently moved to Ohio from California. She had a baby in June and was "not ready to go back yet to work [...] Um, the fact that I'm unemployed right now and my income is, is low, um, [SMHA] has been very, very helpful. I'm glad I had the opportunity, to, um, get the housing, and, due to my circumstances of trying to pay for rent for the housing, it's kinda hard even though it's a lot cheaper than California (Laughs)" (personal communication, December 4, 2003)!

Joseph is a 48-year-old Caucasian man who has been living in public housing since June 2003. He is divorced and has two children. For him, public housing has been a source of stability and restored for him a sense of having a place to call his home.

> I mean, you know, like, my apartment just has basically a living room, a kitchen, and uh a little bath and a, a bedroom, and it's very, very small, I mean, the bed takes up the majority of it, so there isn't that much room, and, I don't even have a dresser, but it's nice just to *have* a place a place, to, to be able to have a place to sit down, you know, its just, you know, there's so many things that you do, have done without for so long, that, I mean I have one fork, and just to be able to wash that fork is really a uh, a real blessing (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

Not only that, but having housing has given him a sense of self-esteem and worth that was not present before. "I was so, uh, emotionally, physically, everything drained, when I came, and its taken several months [...] I feel like I'm getting built back up again, ready for a new challenge, a new, new start" (personal communication, December 11,2003). Through the stability of housing, and classes that he has been taking at Stark Community Action College he has been able to regain a sense of having something to give and contribute to society (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

For Elizabeth, housing has meant not only that she and her daughter had a place to live, but that she did not lose her daughter. She is a 38-year-old Caucasian woman who is divorced and has one daughter. She has been living in public housing for close to three years. "The apartment, I don't know what would have happened if I had lost my daughter, ya know, I guess it's just another step of life up the ladder, and I think everyone who lives in housing is thankful that they got their apartment and their place too" (personal communication, December 11,2003).

I interviewed Lisa and Jeff together. They are 20 and 24, respectively. They are both Caucasian; Lisa has lived in public housing for six months, Jeff for one year. They

do not have any children. For them, public housing provides a place for them to live even though they have no money. SMHA was going to help Lisa go back to school, and they were going to buy her books (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

While SMHA provides a large amount of stability, through not having to worry about where to live and being provided with services, there are some other roles that people see it taking in their lives. Some see the housing authority as invading privacy. Others see it as too lenient with whom they let in and whom they let stay. Still others, even while recognizing the need for regulations, become frustrated by what they can and cannot do with their housing. Finally, some see SMHA as being negligent in taking care of the units.

Andrew says that "The only drawback, the only kind of drawback I see in public housing is that you're not allow to have, uh, uh, toys, you know like swing sets and things like that in the yard for the kids, which I understand their reasoning, but that's, you know, I mean, um, especially for little kids like I have." He still recognizes the need for rules. "I mean there's rules and stuff you have to follow, you know for, uh, public housing but that's only for, I, you know, to me that's for the safety of yourself, and, you know, your kids, and everybody that lives in public housing" (personal communication, November 25, 2003).

Tiffany identified in her interview that she thought that SMHA should screen people more tightly. She also does not like her privacy being taken away from her.

> Now the only negative thing I can say about public housing, the only negative thing, and I say this *over* and *over*. They can enter your home to fix things or to do things in your home. But if you're, like if you're in the shower and you don't hear the door they can come on in while you in the shower, and you just don't hear the, that's the thing I don't like, that's the only thing I don't like. And that right there shows to me that my privacy is being taken away, you know. I don't

> know. That's why I always wanted my own home, cause no one can come in unless I want them in, unless I let them in (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

While Tiffany feels an invasion of privacy, Mary feels as though SMHA needs to be going into people's homes on a consistent basis.

> Um, residents become angry when management has to enter their apartment, um, for various reasons, to place bait, to do repairs. I think it's the idea of someone else having a key to your home other than you, and in a resident's mind that gives them... [Stops and starts over] In a residents mind management has the authority to enter whenever they want, but that's not so. And some of these apartments management need to be going in them every day, as nasty as they are (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

To her, SMHA's role needs to be one that enforces the regulations, whereas others see that role as invasion of privacy.

Abby would like to live in a place where she can do what she wants to the unit. She understands the regulations to be necessary, but would like to live in a place that does not have them. "I do, I like the housing we're in, the house we're in now, and I know we're limited in things that we can do... to the kitchen or to the house or to the basement. Like, sometimes it makes it a little hard to do what you want to do, but it's completely understandable why" (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Joseph felt as though things were not taken care of as they should be on his unit.

> You know, kinda interesting trying to get things fixed, um, you know, when I moved in the place was really, really dirty. Um, they had all the blinds closed, and, and um, and told me there was new carpet on the floor (while saying that, laughs bitterly/sarcastically), and then when you really get in there you find there was no new carpet, um, when they cleaned it they waxed, like right over hair, and, and I mean, just, it was really amazing to me, you know, windows weren't clean, nothing was really done, and so I spent a lot of time just trying to get it clean, but, uh, they had sent somebody in there to try to do some things, but um, no body watches over those things (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

To him, SMHA was negligent in ensuring that his unit would be up to the quality that they had assured him it was.

Community

Everyone that I interviewed identified community in different ways. They also had different ideas about how the Stark County community viewed public housing, and how they themselves either identified with or distanced themselves from what they saw as the "typical" public housing resident.

Five out of the fifteen people that I interviewed said that they do not interact much with the community, whether they lived in a housing project or in a scattered site. Susan said, "I've been livin there five years but I don't, I don't mingle. I kinda keep to myself, so" (personal communication, November 25, 2003). Sarah (personal communication, December 2, 2003) and Elizabeth (personal communication, December 11, 2003) also identified that they did not have much interaction with the community in which they lived. Tiffany went even further and identified *why* she kept to herself.

> I don't believe everyone in public housing is bad, I don't believe that. But I believe it is easy to get caught up *in* things that are bad when you are in public housing, if you don't keep your head on straight, and teach your children, you know, it's easy to get caught up in it. And, I guess that's why I keep to myself, I just keep to myself. Cause I don't want to get caught up in it, and I definitely don't want my children caught up in it (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Joseph also explained why he kept to himself in his community. "In the area where I'm at, um, they call me Mr. Ice Cream man, and, cause I'm different than everybody else, I guess, and, um, but it's just um, there's a real hesitation, a real trust, they don't trust me at all, and um, so I pretty much stay to myself" (personal communication, December 11, 2003). Tiffany felt that because of the negative things

going on in her housing community, she needed to keep to herself, while Joseph felt as though he was isolated from the community by others.

Some of those that I interviewed engaged the community, and found strength in identifying themselves with their neighbors. Andrew, who lives in a scattered site, says that his neighborhood is a safe and nice place to live (personal communication, November 25, 2003). Karen was perhaps the person who most identified a strong sense of community and belonging when she lived in Underhill. At the end of her comments, she briefly mentions that things have changed since that time.

> Well, when I lived, I was married, you know, when I lived, uh in Underhill, uh, but um, I was, uh, head of, you know they had like a 4-H program and then they had, uh, I was coaching, you know, some of the boys for softball. And, um, I was more or less, uh, mother of the apartments down there. Everybody came to me, you know, when they needed something. And, uh, everyday mostly I had kids, and every time I had practice all the kids in the neighborhood was at my house my, uh, husband and I we were takin them around places to parks and summertime we had things for the kids. We'd get donations and we'd have block parties for em. And, uh, I lived on the end apartment, so we put up a basketball court for the kids to have somethin to do [...] every day they was there, ya know, even in the snow out there shootin the basketball. And, um, in the spring and summer, I got out there with em and they played football they played, you know baseball and softball right in the back, because where I lived at there was a big area there, ya know, and the children and I, we, uh, made sure we kept, uh, the project clean down there, ya know [...] I wanted to more or less spend time with those kids to keep em out of trouble, you know, I, I you know I had two of my own and I just wanted to make sure that they didn't get in to anything. Hardly ever fights down there. You know people pretty much got along. Completely different then than it is now (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Mary also identified a strong sense of belonging, and being open to the community in which she lives.

> I have no fear, living in the projects. In the summer, fall, my doors are normally open till about oh, three to four AM front and back door. I have a little reputation (laughs). But, you know, I feel very comfortable. I'm not afraid, like I said again, I'm not afraid uh, my brother who lives in Europe is more afraid for me to leave my door open than I am, I said you're over there, what do you care, you're

> all the way over there ya know? But, um, I've had no trouble with anybody (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

One of the things that she appreciates about living in the projects is that "I have a, a clearer understanding of project dwellers [...] they're not all waitin on a welfare check. They do want to become self-sufficient, they are college graduates, and want a better life for their children" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). This is her first experience living in public housing, and through it she has gained a clearer sense about others in the community.

Patricia says that she is happy with the community that she is living in; that it is a "really nice area in a real *nice* community, and I've had pretty good experiences with, with living there" (personal communication, December 4, 2003). Patricia also lives at a scattered site. She identifies with the community in which she lives, but says later in the interview, "I can't say I know a lot of people that live in public housing, though" (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Diane not only connects with the community that she lives in, but articulates her gratefulness for that community.

> Yes it, uh, it's helped me to get to know people, you know, because, um, by livin in a place like that you got all different type of people, as well as in the army but it's more in, in a housing you know you uh, you, you can kinda more like be yourself, than in the army you got rules, you know. Even though in there you got rules too, but you can talk more freely to people, you know. It's, it's a great, great help. [...] It's more elderly people than it is, you know, young people. And me, I get attached to em quick, and I spoiled half of em there (laughs) and, um, it's like having a lot of little mothers, you know. Cause I mean, that's, that's, that's how they are, you know? They, they, they like little mothers to me. They easy to get attached to, very easy (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Living in public housing, she is able to connect to people in ways that her life in the army was unable to provide.

For Emily, community has been a source of comfort and strength. She said that most of the people living in public housing were friendly, and even if they had a problem they were still lighthearted about it. She says her neighbors say hello to her, and they sit outside in the summer. She planted flowers one year all around their building, and one of her neighbors gave her tomatoes. She feels safe where she lives, and knows that the neighborhood will look out for her if she needs something. She attended meetings that SMHA had, and also went on social events with others in public housing (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Ruth, who is another resident that lives in a scattered site, is pleased with her neighbors and enjoys the community in which she lives (personal communication, December 11, 2003). Joseph, despite his isolation from the community, communicated that there were some people with whom he was able to make a connection. "But then some other, I have, I'm around some older ladies, and they, they're really kind and, I'll check in on them, and things like that" (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

Elizabeth, as well, who said earlier that "everybody pretty much stays to themselves," says that this is only "unless you really need help or somethin ya know, [and then] the neighbors help. We all get along great right where I'm at there ain't no fightin or nothin. [...] It' s pretty quiet. I was surprised when I moved in there, how it's been, real quiet." She also says that where she lives there are, "kids for my daughter to play with," which she likes (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

While many of the people that I interviewed identified a strong connection with community, almost all of them had something they did not like about others who lived in their community. Almost universally, as soon as they would identify what they did not

like, it would be followed with how they perceived themselves as fitting into that, most often being how they were not like whatever quality they were pointing out.

Susan says that she sees people who live in public housing as inconsiderate. "I mean if it was their yard, they wouldn't just throw trash on it and leave it there, you know, but they do" (personal communication, November 25, 2003). She goes on to say how she keeps to herself in response to the inconsideration.

Andrew says that even though he likes the community in which he lives, every so often a car does get broken into. In regards to how people maintain their property, he says, "Unfortunately some of our neighbors don't keep their yards up like they should," but then qualifies that with, "I try to keep ours up and make sure our place looks nice" (personal communication, November, 25, 2003). He also points out that he is happy that he is living in a scattered site, because originally the home they had for him was "a project type thing," and that he, "*really* didn't like the area" (personal communication, November 25, 2003).

Tiffany expresses that she feels others who live in public housing are ignorant.

> For one, I have neighbors that play their music too loud. I think that's rude and ignorant. I, um, for some reason trash, there's trash everywhere. People don't want to put their trash inside the, you know, trash dumpster. They put it on top or on the side and I think that's ignorant [...] I always said it doesn't matter where you stay, if you have ignorant folks there that have no respect for one another, it's not going to be a peaceful place to stay regardless (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

She goes on to say that people in public housing have no respect or concern for anything. "The people [in public housing], once they've, I don't know, people just, I guess nowadays people just don't care, they don't respect. Like I said before, they don't care. They get in a place and just don't care about doing any work. They don't have respect

for other people's property" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). Tiffany also identifies a tension of community that no one else did. She says that people in the community see wanting to do better as the same as wanting to leave the community.

> I know you hear a lot of people saying they're gettin out of it. And it's not that they're tryin to get out of the *community* that they're in, it's that they want to get out of the *situation* that they're in, there's a difference. [...] A lot of people think when you want to do better you want to leave your community, and no, it's not that. Everyone wants to do, to do better. And, I mean, if you don't want to do better, what' wrong with you? Somethin has to be wrong with you (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

She states that many people in public housing in fact do *not* want to "do better," and she alludes to the fact that if someone does want to "do better," they are looked upon as wanting to "do better" than those already in public housing which is resented (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

The way that Sarah looks upon people in public housing is slightly different than everyone else. She sees them as a single category: low-income, and she includes herself in that category. "I would have to answer that [a common characteristic of people in public housing is] basically low-income. And not really low income, but, you know people that struggle with income and necessarily people with good, decent income, because now I have a decent income but I enjoy the benefits of public housing" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). To her this income struggle could not be classified as "good" or "bad," but simply as a reality, of which she was a full participant.

Karen identified strongly with the housing community, and as "mother of the apartments," she saw her role in the community as setting an example for others living in public housing.

> Good Lord, I found out for myself, to live in public housing if everybody take time to spend with their families and to teach their self respect, then you would

> never have problems, but one thing I know it's a lot of to me envy and jealously of different, you know homes there, um, people getting in other people's business. And to me it's not necessary. If you take care of your own self, you would not really have time to be in other people's business. And this I don't like. As long as I have been living in, uh, Stark Metropolitan Housing, I don't think nobody can ever say that I got in their business. So, if people would just have respect for each other, and if you wanna, and don't say nothin negative, say something positive, then you won't have no problems. And this year, you know, was really bad. And, and another thing – and what you have, take care of it! Just because it belong to somebody else, it's still you're home. Take care of what you have! Just don't let, you know, your children tear up somethin or you tear up somethin, you know, you've got to take care of what you have. You have to teach em. And this is one of the reasons why I spent so much time with those children teachin them, and as they grew up and to this day they're grown, and they still, you know, they come around and still respect me because they are respecting themselves. (Anything else?). My motto was "I don't loan and I don't borrow. If I don't have it I do without." This is a big problem. Just because you live in Metropolitan don't mean that you can't have somethin in life. And, uh, individuals, they figure they get into metropolitan homes, and it's like, you know, oh, we're down, you know. But you can bring yourself up. Cause life owes you a lot but you have to work hard to get it. So, you know, when you just wanna just lay back and just do nothin, then this is what you gonna end up with is nothin. Cause I feel that I have accomplished a lot even living in metropolitan housing. You know, I have accomplished a lot. This is not for, like, some would say poor people, you know. It's for the needy at the time. But you can, you know, you can make it (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

She presents what she sees as the problem with people who live in public housing, what they could do to fix the problem, and then how she herself avoided that problem in her own life.

Mary says that when she was first in public housing her neighbors were very nosy. They reported that she had an overnight visitor to her house because the car out front had dew on it. She was contacted by the management and then presented proof that the car was in fact, her own. This was the end of any "trouble" that she had with the management. "Why they would bother me with such crap, I don't understand, but I followed procedure, and I never heard another word. No one ever bothered me about a thing" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). She also says that the community

was quiet until they renovated the family units and more families moved in to the neighborhood. Mary notices that "there seems to be an oversupply of baby's daddies, you'll have to put that in quotes; 'my baby's daddy,' (laughs), uh, married men seem to be attracted to females who live in the projects" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). Mary does not connect herself to any of these observed characteristics. In fact, earlier in the interview when she states that she appreciates that she has a clearer sense of "project dwellers," she establishes a distinction between herself and the "dwellers."

Diane also points out some characteristics of the residents in her community with which she does not necessarily agree. However, she approaches it in a somewhat affectionate way. When I ask her what some common characteristics of people living in public housing are, she laughs and says,

> Oh, that's a good one. Nosy, for one. They is in everybody else's business but their own, you know. And, to sum it all up, a group of just little old cackling hens (laughs). I mean, cause, oh, man. If I tell them, you know, their little cliques. Every, and everybody, every, [stops and starts over] No matter where you go, you're gonna run into a little clique. Everybody got their little clique, you know. And this little clique get together and they talk about this little clique and, you know, everybody in everybody else's business. But other than that they're just everyday little people that, you know, have nothing else better to do, I guess. Somethin to keep em goin. Humph. But I, you know, I really can't say nosy. I guess it's their way of show, of showing concern. But they're, it's over concern. It gets to the point where they wants to know your business, and if they don't know your business then they'll create somethin. It just, yeah, you know. (Chuckles). Overly concerned, I'll put it. Scratch nosiness. Overly concerned (laughs). Oh, boy (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

She seems to accept their nosiness as just something you deal with because it is who they are, and she appreciates them for it.

Ruth is another person who identified with some of the more negative aspects that she identified.

> Well, usually they can't afford anything else. A lot of em I know is single, parents. (Anything else?) I think that's most probably of the people. Some of em just get stuck there. Seems like they never find a way out. So far I haven't, I haven't found a way out, so I don't know [...] Sometimes they can't afford, you know, anything more expensive (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

Those in public housing are there because they simply cannot afford anything better, herself included. She also identifies drug use as a problem that she sees in public housing, but then expresses her gratefulness that SMHA does not tolerate the drug use, and generally comes down hard on those who do (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

Joseph has a lot of things that he does not like about those living in his community. He also feels as though there are a lot of things they do not like about him. "They think that I'm in there, um, spying for the, um, housing authority I guess. And, they'll be talking and all the sudden they'll say 'Ice cream man is coming,' and um, it's just been, um, interesting" (personal communication, December 11, 2003). He is frustrated by the way others "throw things down," and have no concern for taking care of things. He also does not like the noise: either through loud car stereos, yelling from other units, honking horns, etc.

> And the tires spin, and motorcycles, and, um, very, very, loud, um supposed talking, but it seems like they're just yelling and screaming all the time, but you just learn to tune it out, and to, to let it go, but in the beginning it was very, very, um, obnoxious to me, and you want to just go out and tell em, cause you know if you did that *in your own neighborhood* it wouldn't be tolerated [emphasis added] (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

Joseph does not identify this neighborhood as his own, and tells a story about how he is made fun of for keeping things nice and picking up his trash.

> I'm thankful for that, I'm really thankful, and so, I'm trying to take care of the place, trying to look after the outside, um, watching my neighbors, helping

> wherever I can, to me that's a, I don't know about a duty, but I just, I just do it. And its just a difference whereas, um, some of the others, "you crazy, um, man you gotta get all you can get, don't do that," you know its just a different mindset. So, that's what I see (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

Through both of these statements he makes a distinction between the rest of the neighborhood and his own person. He not only makes the distinction between "him" and "them," but feels as though "they" make the same distinction.

Elizabeth identifies things that she does not like about those in her community, but also points out the conditions that lead to a lot of the things she does not like. When I ask her about common characteristics of residents in public housing, she replies,

> Um, lots of divorce, single mothers, um, lots of guys who don't got no jobs or license ya know end up in some kind of trouble with the law. No vehicle to get anywhere ya know. Makes it hard to get a job, ya know, get back and forth. Then they have no reason to try or get their lives better, ya know. Just the little things people take for granted, ya know, that we don't have. I mean, ya know, things mean a lot more to you, ya know (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

She also includes herself in the group of people she is referring to: "that *we* don't have." She recognizes that circumstances play a role in the issues she sees in public housing.

When I asked those I interviewed about common characteristics of those living in public housing, many of them gave an answer that sounded like "it just depends on the person." Some would not give me an answer because they did not want to stereotype or lump people together. Many times this insistence that it depends on the person, and the hesitancy to categorize people in public housing in any way, seemed to be a reaction to what they perceived as the stereotypes that the broader community has of public housing.

Andrew outlined what he saw as the misconceptions about public housing from the wider community, and how he basically saw it as depending on the individual.

> Well I'll tell you what, there's a lot of misconception about, uh, people that live in public housing, because I know people that are live in public housing, that are,

> um, you know they're not rich or anything, but they're well, you know I mean they, uh, you know have good jobs and everything. I think the conception that people have that, of people that live in public housing are, uh, people who don't work and people who don't, uh, uh, don't have anything, you know what I mean. Like homeless, homeless type people that they give housing to and that's, that's the misconception I think that people have of, of public housing. I, uh, I myself, like I said, I've, I've encountered, uh, like I said people that, you know, are, that don't have anything and I've encountered people that, uh, you know that have good jobs, and, uh, you know they still live in public housing (personal communication, November 25, 2003).

Andrew was certainly not the only one to try to bridge the gap between what he saw as the public's ideas about public housing and the reality that he lived with. Tiffany sees general society as assuming that those who live in public housing are lazy, unwilling to do anything, and that they chose to be there. She resists this view "because I myself have been trying, trying my hardest and still trying and gonna get there [...] And, um, people need to understand that public housing do have it's up and downs, but it's not the, it's the people that is in public housing it's not the organization itself" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). She tries to counter stereotypes, not necessarily because she observes that they are not true, but because she does not see herself fitting into them.

Throughout Sarah's interview, she brought up again and again that it really just depends on the person.

> It's all what you, you know, make of it. That's it; it goes down to each individual. Some people don't care for it, don't take advantage of the opportunities, some people, they might take advantage of it. It just... depends on the person. [...] You know a lot of people have a stereotype of public housing and they just want to stereotype what they think it is. That basically, all it is, is a bunch of black people that's on welfare, or that they poor white trash or this and that, and, and, um, they don't want to do anything, and of course you've got people like that, but that does not make up all of public housing, its just what people, that percentage that people choose to reflect on. [...] It's no different from livin anywhere else. Some people keep their yard clean, they plant beautiful flowers, and keep the trash out, and put

> decorations, and beautiful landscape, you got some that will leave beer bottles, you know, its the person (personal communication, December 2, 2003)!

She emphasizes that the individual people that comprise public housing should not represent SMHA or public housing as a whole. She also makes the point that it is no different than anywhere – there are lazy and hardworking, clean and dirty, and all different kinds of characters wherever you live, no matter what community. That there are these types of people in public housing does not mean it is any different from anywhere else; in fact it connects public housing to other communities.

Karen rejects the stereotype that children who grow up in public housing never make anything of themselves. "And all the children that grew up when my children grew up down there, they are all have made something of themselves. They've gone to school and you know, or are doing something really good, and, and I am very proud of them, you know" (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Others feel like the stereotypes of public housing in Stark County are going away. Mary says, "But housing has come a long way. In Stark county we no longer have the slums, the projects like some major cities. I think the stigma in Stark county that you're not gonna be safe, uh, in public housing is being put under, you know, being, the flames are being put out, so to speak" (personal communication, December 4, 2003). While she thinks that the stereotypes are going away, she identifies another stereotype that if not currently present, has been so in the past: people are not safe in the public housing communities in Stark County.

Patricia says that she does not want to comment on any common characteristics of those living in public housing because she does not feel she knows enough people in

public housing to make a judgment. However, it would seem that she also is trying to resist stereotypes she feels from the general community.

> Um, I would hope that people would have an open-minded opinion instead of a stereotypical opinion of, what public housing is. It's not a project or a (p) you know, a, a, slum type living. There are different types of, you know, uh, government housing and they're not all run down or bad places to live, or scary places to visit. There are a lot of very nice homes provided by the SMHA. They're well taken care of. Mine are anyway, I mean, you know, I can only speak for where I live (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

She does not want to speak for everyone, but she feels that there are certain ways public housing is perceived, and she does not want to be a part of believing or creating that perception.

Elizabeth perceived many not in public housing as thinking of themselves as better than those living in public housing. "Um, ya know a lot of people think it's bad and that ya know that you're, that they think they're better than, ya know, people who live in housing. Ya know all those things we struggle through life, it's just the facts of life ya know" (personal communication, December 11, 2003). She makes a connection that struggling through life is a human experience, not a public housing experience, and should never be used to think that someone is better than a resident of public housing.

Coming to Public Housing

Of everyone I interviewed, all had different reasons for coming to need public housing. Some simply did not make enough money in their jobs, others went through a divorce, and others simply wanted a nicer place to live than where they were. Many times the transition to public housing was either as a result of, or coupled with a crisis point in someone's life.

Susan, like four others that I interviewed, was divorced. In one sentence, she sums up her entire reason for needing public housing: "I was divorced... I didn't know where else to turn" (personal communication, November 25, 2003).

Andrew was injured at work and was out of work for two and a half years. He was married and his wife had an income, but on the small income that they had they could only afford to live in a small trailer. When they had their first child they had no room for the baby, so it had to sleep with them. They decided to sign up with SMHA, and got a unit with four bedrooms, which Andrew is thankful for because they had another baby soon after moving in.

> Um, like I said, we just, uh, we looked, we looked all over for ourselves, you know trying to find something, and there was just um, everything was so expensive, and you know like I said with me not working at that time, and my wife just working, you know just a little bit here, you know little bit, you know, that she was working we just couldn't really afford to get our own place, so we were kind of lucky that they have a program like this to get into (personal communication, November 25, 2003).

Tiffany's husband left her and her children. She and her family are used to living a military life, and are unaccustomed to civilian life and living in poverty. "My ex, he just left me and my kids out in the street. And we had nowhere to go. And, I could no longer afford the apartment that I was renting from the, I could no longer afford it, and metropolitan gave me housing" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). When she talks about how she ended up in public housing, she is frustrated that a spouse can leave another spouse and children out on the street with nowhere to go, and she is also frustrated that the military does not provide for the transition to civilian life.

> Hmmm, for one, we're not really used to staying in public housing, me and my family, or my family and I. We're not used to it. Coming from living a military life to a civilian life, it's, it's different, but, I can say, we didn't live in poverty when we were in military, but we're living in poverty now. Definitely in poverty.

> You know, it don't seem like it, but that's what we're doing. And that's the way it is. And you would think that the military would make sure that the soldier's exits were treated fairly, but they don't make sure. They don't care where they put people anymore [...] The situation that we were thrown into, and I'm not saying that this was our decision to be where we at, we were thrown into this situation, and I believe that's where a lot of single parents end up, is in public housing because of the situation they were thrown into and nothing was done to prevent them from being thrown into this situation to make their lives, the life that they had, it should have been continued, you know, not stopped and thrown into another, you know. I guess, I don't want to say poverty, but it is, it is poverty. And just because of one person decides I want to take all the money and do this and do that and leave you and the kids, that's not right, that's not right. What gives that person to throw, you know, it can be a woman that do it too, a woman could do it to a man too, but what gives that person the right to throw the other people into poverty? What gives them that right? They think someone gave them that right, and that's what happened to us (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

For Tiffany, living in public housing is a series of unfair life events that have forced her into a life she has not chosen for herself.

Sarah became pregnant with her daughter without the father's involvement then or now. She needed a way to provide for her daughter, so she started off on welfare and then moved into public housing. Her main concern was that she would have a roof over her daughter's head (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Karen moved into public housing because she wanted a nicer place to live. "At the time I had my daughter, um, and, um, I was renting but I wanted to get a better place. The apartment was nice, but you know, I wanted to get a better place. And when they were building them, I just applied. That's all" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). She was one of the first people to move into Underhill when it was built.

Mary did not speak much to why she went into public housing, only that, "I needed to move from where I was living, I was living with my girlfriend and her mom, and it was time for me to move on" (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Patricia was disabled in 1994, but did not receive any benefits until 1999. She says that, "I still tried to work until I just, I couldn't work anymore. I was declared disabled, so it, that's what happened" (personal communication, December 4, 2003). She was offered a place in Massillon and she turned it down because she did not want her son to have to change schools. When a person turns down a unit, their name is moved to the end of the list. However, a week later she got a phone call asking her if she would like a unit in Canal Fulton that no one else wanted. "Because when you refuse a place they put you on the bottom of the list, so, when he called me back and said 'okay, I got a place in Canal Fulton, nobody else wants it,' I said, 'I want it!'" (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Diane was in the army. When she got out, she worked for a little while, but then was laid off. She had to leave the house she was living in, and because she had no place to go she went into the homeless shelter. They signed her up for public housing, and she was moving into a unit two weeks later (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Emily was laid off from her job and was looking for work. She was evicted from her apartment and did not have a place to live. She went to the "Y," and lived there while she tried to find work. It was a very emotional time. She went on interviews and was not getting any positions. Her mother, whom she was very close to, was very ill and she did not know what was going to happen to her. When she went to the "Y," all she had was her car and the clothes in her car. She was able to be close to her mother while she lived there. Even now, to talk about going into public housing is painful for Emily, because it brings up hard memories. SMHA found her a place to live and the "Y" helped her get some furniture for her new place (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Abby just moved to Ohio from California. She is married but her husband is still in California. She came to Ohio to be closer to her terminally ill father, who passed away in August.

> Um, (p) I just moved out from California, and I'm unemployed, and I had my baby, and I'm not ready to go back yet to work. I am married but my husband is still in California... an unusual situation. We came out, um, my father was diagnosed with cancer, so, we came out here to be with him. He passed away in August, so, it really seemed to work out. I'm thankful for, for getting it, for the housing (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Her public housing experience was similar to Emily's in that both were connected to the illness of a parent.

Ruth moved into SMHA because "I was divorced I had two children, a newborn and a nine year old at the time. I don't think an apartment's a good place to raise little ones. I want, you know, a house with a yard, things like that" (personal communication, December 11, 2003). She moved into public housing because that was the only thing she could afford.

Joseph was also touched by divorce, though in a different way.

> Um, I had gone through a divorce, and, uh, left with bills, and uh, couldn't even, child support was so high I just couldn't make it, and uh, took a, I had a lost my business, and um, through restraining orders and things like that, and, um, so I took a job as a janitor, but made too much to get into public housing, I only had like sixty-five/seventy dollars a week to live on, but that still was too much to get into public housing, and um, they said they couldn't help me but if I'd ever quit my job they'd give me a place. And, um, the place that I was working at was asking me to leave, I had no place to go, and um, so I had to quit my job, and that's how I got into public housing. It was only by making the application so far in advance that I was able to get in. Even the Y was filled, everything was full, there was no place for me to go or stay, so that's why I was in my car, and, and even had been living in a church van for a couple years, lived in a church for about a year, quite a difference from what I was used to, let me tell you that (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

He was homeless, and still today has debt for child support. He had a major life crisis with the loss of his marriage, family, and job all at once.

Elizabeth also moved into public housing as the result of a divorce. "Um, I was married for 15 years and he kicked me out of the house and then I lived in my car for a while and then I moved into the Y and my daughter moved in with me. They helped me get a place to live. No where to go" (personal communication, December 11, 2003). Elizabeth keeping her daughter became dependent on receiving housing through SMHA.

In Jeff and Lisa's situation, Jeff moved into public housing because he did not have enough money to pay for housing. Lisa, his girlfriend, moved in with him six months later because she needed a place to live (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

Future Plans

All but two of the people that I interviewed said they would like to own their own home in the future. Some dreamed of huge mansions, while others simply wanted to buy the home they were living in while participating in public housing. Either way, it was probably the strongest theme throughout the entire interview process. Ruth summed it up best when she said, "I guess most people want their own home" (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

Initially Susan said that she was waiting on her Section 8 again. She had been offered Section 8 before, but if she had accepted it she would have lost her grant money for school, so she decided to have her name put on the bottom of the list again. As she kept talking, however, she concluded that "I'm hoping that in five years I won't even need section 8; that I'll be on my own" (personal communication, November 25, 2003).

Andrew would also like his own home. "In five years from now I'd like to be living in a three-bedroom home with a nice backyard in the country (laughs)." He has no other requirement, only that. "You know, you're, you're, you're living in this apartment and you're thinking to yourself well, you know, my kids are growing up, I'd like to have a nice house or a bigger house, or... so that gets you motivated to do that" (personal communication, November 25, 2003).

Tiffany not only identified what kind of house she would like to be living in, but where she would like it to be located.

> I would love to be over there, not really in the Belden Village area, but in an area somewhat like that. And, um, I would love a ranch style home, with I think two and a half baths, cause I would like a bathroom in the master bedroom, and a, and a single, (starts over), I would like a bathroom in the master bedroom with an entrance door, that I could enter the master bedroom instead of coming in the front door, you know? And, um, I want at least a, I'd say a, four bedrooms, four bedroom, including the master bedroom I guess that would be five, five bedroom ranch style home. Four to five bedrooms. Very nice inside, you know, very nice, you know. [Anything else?]. And once you get the home you can always decorate it the way you want it to be, you know? Cause you're not quite sure how you would want to decorate it until you, you know, get it. And I would like you know bedrooms, dining room, front room, living room. And I want, for one I don't want the bedrooms small, though. The master bedroom cannot be small, has to be large (chuckles), has to be large. And the other bedrooms have to be medium sized, they can't be small. But that's about it. Not much, is it? Simple (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Tiffany has a specific idea of where she would like to live someday.

Sarah is one of the two people that said they would not like to own their own home. She does not want to move from where she is currently living. She has a house with a garage, a picture window, two bedrooms, a basement that is redone and has a playroom for her daughter, a TV room, and a washer and dryer hookup, a living room, a bathroom, two bedrooms, big back yard and front yard, and is located down the street from Perry High School. "I say, why would I want to move when I have a whole house

in a great area?" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). She also has the stability of still having a place to live even if she loses her job; her income will be adjusted accordingly. If she lived in a different place she would not have that same assurance. "I'm not tryin to put that stress added, okay" (personal communication, December 2, 2003).

Karen would like nothing more than to have her own home. She would like to buy the one in which she is currently living. When I ask her where she would like to be living in five years, she replies, "My own. My *own* home. Something to call my own home. [...] I would love to have the home I'm living in now, you know, and at one time they had talked about possibly you know, the scatter sites they would sell you. I don't know if they're still doin that anymore, so. But I would like to have my own home" (personal communication, December 2, 2003). Karen does not want anything fancy or big, just something to call her own.

Mary, however, knows exactly what she wants in a home.

> Five years from now I would love to be living in my own, four bedroom ranch, with a marble foyer with a chandelier hanging down in the center, double doors, library, music room, heated pool, gourmet kitchen, oh honey I got it all planned, I mean (laughs). Preferably a house that vacuums itself, I saw one in Palm Springs, okay? Many years ago, uh (laughs). And it has to have a spiral staircase, ***must*** have a spiral staircase. Did I mention three baths? [huh-uh]. Okay, three full baths. Okay. Preferably I would like a terrace overlooking the Mediterranean. (Laughs). I mean, you asked! You know (personal communication, December 2, 2003)!

Even though she has big plans, the echo of owning one's own home still is present in her dreams.

Patricia may not have the elaborate dreams of others in public housing, but does know one thing: she wants to own her own home. "Um, I'm not sure. At some point I'd

really like to own my own home. And I think that they do offer some kind of programs where at some point you can get into something like that, so that'll be something I'll be looking at, especially when I'm able to start saving" (personal communication, December 4, 2003). She has not started saving for the house yet, but it still is a future goal that Patricia has.

Some, like Diane, are bound and determined to someday own their own place. "In five years from now? I would *love* to have my own home. Not with a little picket fence as everybody says (laughs), no. My own home, you know, and (p) car. And that I will have. That I will have, by the grace of God that – I – will – have. I'm determined. Nobody make me doubt it, I will have it" (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Emily is another person I interviewed that likes where she is living. She does not have a garage, but neither does she have a car to drive. Her living room and kitchen are combined, and someday she expressed a wish to have two separate rooms for them. However, to her five years was a long ways away, and she was happy where she was living (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Abby wants a house with a big yard, both front and back. "Five years from now (P) Um, I think I'd like a house, with a yard, front and back, a full basement, um, big kitchen (laughs)" (personal communication, December 4, 2003). She also wants a place that she can decorate the way that she wants to decorate. She recognizes why the regulations for what can and cannot be done in the units are in place, but she wants her own place that she can do what she wants to it (personal communication, December 4, 2003).

Others have dreams of owning their own home, but because of what they can afford they do not believe that it will ever become a reality. Ruth says, "I'd like to be on my own. Who knows I might win the lottery. I've always wanted a farm; I grew up on a farm. We had animals, gardens and things, you know, I miss in the city" (personal communication, December 11, 2003). Her concept of what it means to own her own home comes from her childhood and her past, but other than winning the lottery she does not see anyway that this would be able to become a reality in her life.

To Joseph, owning his own home means more than just having a place to live. When I asked him where he would like to be living in five years, he replied, "My own. [Anything more specific?] My own house, I mean, somehow, someway to get back up on my feet again" (personal communication, December 11, 2003). To him, owning a house not only is a roof over his head, but also represents a return to a time when his life was more stable and he was more in control of his circumstances.

Elizabeth wants to be building a Habitat house in five years down the road. While her answer was slightly different from the "I just want to own my own home," answer, she still wanted her own home, just saw a different way to achieve it than most others that I interviewed (personal communication, December 11, 2003).

Jeff and Lisa, similar to Ruth, have dreams but do not see them becoming a reality. Jeff would like to live in Detroit some day, and Lisa would like to live in a mansion, even though she does not see it happening. She does say that everyone starts out rough. Jeff adds that he would like twenty cars and a racetrack.(personal communication, December 11, 2003).

Conclusion

From this analysis of ways that people assign meaning to their experience in public housing, one can speculate as to the relationship of all these themes to one another.

It seems to me that the longer people lived in public housing, the more invested they were in the community, similar to how others living in stable housing might relate to their community. The contrast of Karen and Joseph's respective experiences in public housing offer a good picture of this distinction. Karen lived for many years in public housing, and raised a family there. She was invested in the lives of others in her community and SMHA itself. Even though she said she would like to own her own home in the future, she would like to buy the home in which she is currently living. She might not see herself in public housing in the future, but she does not see herself leaving her community.

Joseph, on the other hand, sees SMHA as a stepping-stone to being independent. He is not as invested in his community, and this could have a relationship to this view of what public housing is for him. He has not had the long-term investment that Karen has had, and therefore might not be able to see community in the same way that she does.

Even in the way that they each talk about how they view the negative aspects of community is different. Though Karen certainly has things that she does not like about her community, she talks about them in a "motherly lecture" type of way. She is concerned about the people that she lives with and the ways she sees them living their lives, and wants them to make a change for what she sees as better. Joseph, on the other hand, makes a "me" and "them" distinction between himself and those he lives with in his community.

Future Questions

The above analysis is an initial effort to explore stories of those in living in Stark Metropolitan Housing Authority units. It raises the question of the relationships of the role people see SMHA playing in their lives, the amount of time they have spent in public housing, their identification of community, and how they view others in their community. This could be a good thing for further research.

Additional research might also be completed regarding stories shared by those who live in scattered sites and those who live in housing "projects." Initial analysis indicated a pattern emerging between where people lived and how they identified with community, but it was not enough of a pattern to fully explore in this analysis.

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