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Bridging the Gap: NestQuest's Innovative Approach to Section 8



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By Michael Miller and Zach Quimby | September 14, 2022 |

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In Houston, one organization is finding ways to change the future of apartment living — one family at a time.

Housing providers come in all shapes and sizes, and some follow a more unconventional model of delivering a safe and happy community for residents to call home. One organization in particular is finding ways to change the future of apartment living, one family at a time.

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"It's the corporate lease model where the nonprofit is the organization that takes on the lease and financial responsibility," says Hannah Mannion, Interim Executive Director with NestQuest. She sees the work of NestQuest as trying to close the gap between voucher holders and rental housing providers.

"For the property, it helps speed up the payment and the process they typically have to go through with the housing authority while giving them additional support and financial protection.... For voucher holders, it's properties that they might not have access to." She continued to say that voucher holders can sometimes be in neighborhoods and zip codes that don't necessarily have supportive services and are zoned into underperforming schools.

"Our industry is always looked at by the public or the government to solve the low-income housing problem," says Gary Blumberg, NestQuest Board Treasurer, Houston Apartment Association BoardMember and past Texas Apartment Association President. "In Houston, there aren't enough voucher units available. This is a partial solution to bridge this gap. If we can get our numbers up to several hundred, that's a lot cheaper than building an apartment property for low-income housing in a part of town where [residents] might not want to live."

The foundation of the organization is to provide children with housing and educational stability that they would typically not have access to. NestQuest has never had an eviction and every child has graduated to the next grade level. More than 75 families have been moved in, with nearly 50 actively housed families.

Overcoming Barriers

NestQuest's work comes at an opportune time. As the nation grapples with affordability challenges, unique and innovative approaches like these can make a real difference for families and communities. "We're a big part of addressing housing and the challenges that can come with housing," says Dav Lewis, NestQuest Board President.

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...housing providers rent the program every year from 2015 to 2019.

In short, duplicative requirements and lengthy leasing processes, which often leave units empty for months, disincentivize rental housing providers from participating in the HCV program.

That's where NestQuest's unique model bridges the gap: They help a prospective resident find an apartment and then pay the housing provider while they navigate the HCV process, working alongside the local public housing authority (PHA) all throughout. In fact, Blumberg says that Houston's public housing authority was even involved in the development of NestQuest.

More than a dozen PHAs from across the U.S. have reached out to NestQuest to replicate what the organization is able to produce. This includes greater Charlotte, N.C., which recently saw the Charlotte City Council adopt a new policy to protect prospective residents from disqualification of renting with a subsidy program.

NestQuest's model seeks long-term effects. As Mannion puts it, it's "long-term solutions to [help families] come off of housing supports altogether." And their holistic approach—involving residents, housing providers and management companies and PHAs – is key to that.

As NestQuest looks to expand, Mannion spends much of her time grant writing. The health, energy and financial industries are supporting NestQuest because they understand affordable housing and education are part of solutions for the next generation of the workforce and its leaders. "Housing and education are the foundation for a child to leap into the future," she says.

Michael Miller is Managing Editor and Zach Quimby is Communications Specialist for NAA.

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