



Berkeley Housing Authority

Section 8 HAP'nings – Participant Newsletter

June 2015



[Earn a Leasing Bonus!](#)

In this tight rental market, we are always looking for a unit to add to the S8 program.

As a responsible S8 participant yourself, **you are a great marketing tool.** If you see a “for rent” sign, notice someone moving, or otherwise learn about a vacant unit – share the information with us. If the owner agrees to rent the unit to a family with a S8 voucher, we will reward you with a \$25 gift card (if the unit is not in our unit listing and wasn't previously in the program). If the unit was previously in the program, and you convince the owner to keep the unit in the program, you will earn a \$15 gift card. Get busy, involve your family member and friends - and start earning your incentive pay! And the great news is – you'll be helping a family in need of a place to call home AND the awards will not be included in your household income.

[Reporting Changes](#)

Your rental subsidy (the amount we pay to your landlord each month) is determined based on your annual income, and certain deductions. It is important that you report to us, in writing, and within 14-calendar days of a change in (a) who is living in the unit; (b) the income of any household member (salary, benefits, self employment); and (c) qualification for deductions (full time student, medical expense, child care expense); AND attach proper documentation. Failure to report these changes within 14-days could result in an overpayment that you would have to repay BHA back, or in the worst case, termination of your S8 Voucher. If you're not sure if a change should be reported, call your Housing Specialist to confirm.

[And then there were...none](#)

Landlord participation in the S8 program is decreasing at an alarming rate. In the past our “available unit listing” contained on average 10-15 units for families looking for a unit. Sadly, the 20 families that just recently received a Voucher were given a Unit Listing Report with 1 studio unit! There isn't much we can do about the rental market – but you can help us retain owners by being a good, responsible renter:

- a. Pay your rent on time every month
- b. Take care of the unit like it is your own
- c. Be reasonable in asking for upgrades. The unit must be safe, decent and sanitary, but it doesn't have to be in “new condition.”
- d. Cooperate with your landlord; show respect.

You are the best advertisement we have!

[Family Self Sufficiency](#)

Ever dream of the day when your income is enough to cover your living expenses – and you no longer need S8 rental assistance? That dream can become a reality! Later this year we will begin enrolling families in our Family Self Sufficiency Program. The program is designed to help you develop a plan to increase your earned income; possibly even become a home owner. Watch for more information.

[Energy Resources](#)

Another year of drought conditions. An ever decreasing supply of water, and threats of rising water rates promised by EBMUD. When every drop and every dime matters – it is important that we conserve water, and eliminate all waste. One drippy faucet left unaddressed can leave you with an astronomical water bill. EBMUD offers tips on checking your fixtures for leaks, and water restricting devices to help reduce your usage, with minimal disruption to your comfort and convenience. It is also a good time to look at reducing reliance on gas and electricity. If your unit lacks the latest in energy efficiency – now is a good time to talk with your landlord about programs/benefits you may qualify for – that will bring energy efficiency to your unit. Finally, if you haven't already done so, sign up for PG&E's Care Program and enjoy reduced rates. Be sure to use an application form available at BHA Office.

[Equal Opportunity](#)

Berkeley is the “disabled capital of the world,” and we pride ourselves on working to make sure our clients with disabilities are able to enjoy the full benefit of program participation. The three most frequent accommodations are (a) an additional bedroom for a live in aide, (b) an additional bedroom for storage of medical equipment, and (c) an increase in the utility allowance to provide enhanced heat and/or power equipment. **IMPORTANT:** If you have a live-in aide, the person must live in the unit and not have any other address; if you are approved for medical storage, BHA reserves the right to inspect (confirm) the use of that room every year; if you need an enhanced utility allowance, submit a copy of your PG&E bill to your Housing Specialist showing you are enrolled in the Medical Baseline Rate program, and we will take it from there.

[ALERT](#)

Don't let Domestic Violence become a silent killer! If you are being victimized by someone you love/care for – it is time to take a stand. BHA works closely (and confidentially) with Berkeley Police Department and we can help you get the assistance you need, AND preserve your S8 rental assistance. For more information on HUD protections visit our website www.cityofberkeley.info/bha: read more about VAWA - (Violence Against Women Act).

Think Twice Before Porting “Out”

As a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher holder in good standing (no outstanding debts to BHA), you get to choose where to live! Berkeley is a wonderful place to live, great public schools for your children (or yourself), vibrant arts & cultural communities, not to mention, all our parks and recreational activities. We’re finding that many families who port out to other jurisdictions, looking for greener pastures are coming back “home” after only a year or two. So, please put a lot of thought into that very big decision about where you would like to live. In the current rental market, it’s possible that your unit (or any available unit) may not be there when you decide to come back to Berkeley.

Don’t Delay Submission of Required Documents

Just a reminder to be timely in submitting your annual and interim reexaminations quickly! When you are slow to submit an annual or interim reexamination and/or supporting documentation, *increases* in your share of the rent will be applied retroactively, to the scheduled effective date of the annual reexamination. That means you will be responsible for any overpaid subsidy, though it’s possible you could be offered a repayment agreement. If your income decreases and you do not submit your interim reexamination and supporting evidence in a timely manner (within 14 days of change), the decrease in your rent share will not be made retroactively. Please submit what we ask of you by the deadlines.

Family?

There are a lot of definitions for “family.” Sometime we are referring to “Mom or Dad or our kids or sisters or brothers”, other times it includes other relatives and sometimes, it includes our closest friends. When determining your voucher size – the typical family (household) is you and your spouse, or parents and children – people who share the financial resources and responsibility for the home (rent, utilities, groceries, cars, etc). We realize there are other family combinations, and will work with you to see if they can be added to your Voucher, and if so, how many bedrooms we will authorize. **IMPORTANT:** only the individuals approved by BHA can live in the unit, or use the address for any official business including receiving mail, registering for work or government benefits, school enrollment, etc. If you’re not sure who is included in your voucher, call your Housing Specialist. Before agreeing to do someone a favor ~ remember, it could result in you being terminated from the Section 8 Program.

Utility Reimbursements: Bring in Your PG&E and EBMUD Bills!

When the BHA subsidy for a family exceeds the rent to owner, the family is due a utility reimbursement. BHA will begin to make direct payments of the utility reimbursements to Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) and/or East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) on behalf of the family. Note: the family must establish and

maintain service in the name of the head of household or spouse/partner in order for the reimbursement to happen. **Please bring in your June PG&E and EBMUD Bills before July 19 so our Finance Department can confirm your service, and set up the accounting with the utility company.**

Got Loan? BHA is pleased to have been able to help so many families move into their Berkeley homes with the assistance of a Security Deposit LOAN. If you entered into a loan agreement with BHA for a security deposit and you still have not paid us back, we will be looking to you for paying back your debt. If you do not pay off your loan, you will not be able to move out of the City of Berkeley with your S8 Voucher. Plus, returning the money you were loaned is the right thing to do: it will give those on the waitlist getting a voucher the opportunity to do the same you did: move in with a little help from BHA. Without the security deposit LOAN, where would you be now?

City of Berkeley Information Tidbits...

ORGANIZE YOUR BLOCK FOR NATIONAL NIGHT OUT. Start planning for National Night Out, an effort to build healthier and safer communities through a simple act: getting to know your neighbors. Use the night of August 4th to organize your block, join a gathering in your Berkeley neighborhood, or meet nearby residents. Some neighbors simply turn on their lights and have conversations on their porches. Many areas throw block parties. http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/City_Manager/Press_Releases/2015/2015-05-22_Organize_Your_Block_for_National_Night_Out.aspx

REPORT CRIMES ONLINE. Berkeley Community members can report certain crimes online, a service that's particularly helpful when victims need to document crimes for insurance purposes. The Berkeley Police online reporting service is to be used when there are no leads, witnesses or suspect descriptions. It can be used to report harassing phone calls, identity theft, theft, auto burglaries, and vandalism to a home or vehicle. http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/City_Manager/Press_Releases/2015/2015-05-11_Report_Crimes_Online.aspx.

Safety: Take it Seriously

PLEASE do not let this happen to you—we hear it on the news all too often: “a family perished last night in a fire that ravaged their home while they were sleeping. There were no working smoke detectors in the home.” Prior to you moving in, BHA inspects each unit. One of the most important parts of our inspector’s job is to confirm working smoke detectors in each bedroom plus one in the common area of each floor of the unit. When you: (a) remove a battery; or (b) remove the smoke detector, *you are putting your family at risk.* PLEASE for your safety and that of your family & neighbors: replace batteries when a smoke detector is chirping and do not remove any smoke detectors from your unit. *The life you save may be your own!* A missing or non-functioning smoke detector is also a “fail” item – so our Inspector has to visit your home again.