

History of the Lincoln Housing Authority

The Housing Authority of the City of Lincoln, Nebraska, was created on June 3, 1946 by City Council resolution in response to a housing shortage in Lincoln following the end of World War II. During the first few years of its existence, Lincoln Housing Authority (LHA) operated a housing referral desk, purchased its first housing units (10 surplus trailers placed in a city tourist park), and converted army barracks (located on the abandoned World War II Lincoln Army Air Field) to housing for returning veterans. During the 1950's, LHA operated almost 800 units of housing on the site of the old air field in addition to providing facilities for religious services, a grocery store, drug store, barber shop, beauty shop, laundry, nursery and movie theater. Thus, early in its history, LHA made a commitment not only to provide tenants with decent, safe and sanitary housing but also support services and community facilities—a tradition which continues today.

In 1966, the focus of LHA's activities expanded beyond the old air field with city-wide voter approval of LHA's participation in the federal Section 23 Leasing Housing Program (now defunct), the forerunner of today's Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program which was established later in the 1970's. Both programs enabled low-income families to lease privately-owned housing at rents they could afford. Currently, LHA administers over 3,000 vouchers under the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program.

The most significant event in the history of LHA resulted from the deactivation of the Lincoln "Cold War" Air Force Base in 1966. In 1970, LHA purchased 1,000 units of former Air Force Base housing (Arnold Heights) for \$5.5 million. Approximately half of the 1,000 units were resold to private owners to pay off the mortgage. The remaining units have provided an important resource of affordable housing for the Lincoln community. Most of the Arnold Heights units are rented at what is referred to as conventional or affordable market rents, that is, rents that are set at rates lower than what could be obtained on the open market. Two apartment complexes near the University of Nebraska, Northwood

Terrace and Heritage Square, acquired by Lincoln Housing Authority in the 1970's, are also rented at conventional rents to lower-income tenants.

In 1973, LHA built a high-rise for senior citizens, Mahoney Manor, under the federal Public Housing program. The project was Lincoln's first housing for low-income households built with federal funds and satisfied a long-pursued goal of providing housing especially built for the elderly. A second high-rise for the elderly, Burke Plaza, was built in 1979 with funding from the Section 8 New Construction program. LHA also owns and manages a third high-rise building for senior citizens, Crossroads House. Once a downtown hotel, the upper stories of Crossroads House were renovated under the provisions of the federal low-income housing tax credit program. All of the units are now leased utilizing project-based vouchers. Through Aging Partners, individual support services and a meal program are offered to elderly residents of Mahoney Manor, Burke Plaza and Crossroads House to ensure they retain their independence as long as possible.

During the 1970's and 80's, the Lincoln Housing Authority established a strong commitment to the construction and acquisition of scattered site, single-family or duplex housing for families using the federal Public Housing program and the Section 8 New Construction program. LHA-owned units are scattered through the city of Lincoln rather than concentrated in one area; the casual passerby is unable to identify them as subsidized housing units.

During the 1990's, LHA greatly expanded its support services and collaborative relationships with other community organizations. The Family Self-Sufficiency program was created in September 1993 to give support to families as they further their education and find jobs on the road to independence from welfare. LHA built the Carol M. Yoakum Family Resource Center in Arnold Heights in 1995. The roughly 6,600 square foot facility houses a child care facility, police substation, health clinics, computer center, and meeting room space available for family support and educational programs. Adjacent to the Family Resource Center, the LHA-owned Lincoln Army Air Field Regimental Chapel is available for use by the general public.

Additionally, LHA entered long-term partnerships with Friendship Home and Fresh Start to provide transitional housing and homeless programs for women. Recognizing the need for additional homeless programs, LHA provides a homeless voucher program. This special allotment of vouchers is managed in partnership with the Lincoln Homeless Coalition.

Lincoln Housing Authority offers two home ownership programs: the Down Payment Assistance program and the Lease/Purchase program. Homes sold through the Lease/Purchase program are built by students from Northeast High School through a cooperative relationship with Lincoln Public Schools.

Lincoln Housing Authority strongly believes that affordable housing should be available in all parts of the city. In recent years, Lincoln Housing Authority has undertaken the development of mixed-income apartment/townhome communities on sites in south Lincoln, a rapidly growing area of the city with little or no affordable housing.

The first of these projects, Wood Bridge, was completed in 1998; the second, Summer Hill, was completed in 2004, and Prairie Crossing was completed in 2008. Half of all units in each development are rented at market rate rents; the other half are rented at reduced rents. A portion of the Wood Bridge and Summer Hill projects was financed using the federal low-income housing tax credit program.

Lincoln Housing Authority has two “sister” non-profit organizations: Lincoln Civic Housing, Inc. which serves as general partner for any tax credit development, and Lincoln Housing Charities, Inc. which can access grant opportunities available only to 501(c)(3) corporations.

The Lincoln Housing Authority has been consistently designated a high performing housing authority in recent years by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and was selected as one of 39 housing authorities nationwide to participate in a HUD demonstration project call “Moving to Work” (MTW). The MTW program allows LHA more local control and flexibility in the

Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs by providing waivers from certain provisions of federal housing law. The goals of the demonstration are to: (1) increase housing choices for families; (2) provide incentives for work; and (3) increase administrative efficiencies.

In 2005, LHA expanded its service to families in the Arnold Heights neighborhood by becoming the lead agency in the Arnold Elementary School Community Learning Center. The initiative focuses on improved student learning and youth development, strengthening and supporting families, and strengthening and engaging neighborhoods. The Carol Yoakum Family Resource Center service coordinator leads the program and works with school and community agencies to offer before and after school programs for all students.

LHA believes providing affordable housing also means educating renters. LHA is a lead partner in the Lincoln RentWise Network, a group of agencies and landlords who offer the Nebraska RentWise program in Lincoln. Nebraska RentWise uses a standardized curriculum and certified trainers to offer a six-module tenant education program to help ensure a successful landlord/tenant relationship. Topics include how to find a rental unit, how to take care of and maintain a unit, how to improve communication and reduce landlord/tenant conflict, how to improve the rental experience, manage money, and information on legal rights and responsibilities. Graduates of the program may receive a higher priority on the housing voucher waiting list. Since 2008, RentWise has educated thousands of lower-income renters in Lincoln.

LHA will continue to expand the supply of affordable housing in Lincoln and provide services to help people succeed.