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Publisher: Routledge

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Housing Policy Debate

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rhpd20>

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Published online: 23 May 2012.

To cite this article: Mark L. Joseph & Robert J. Chaskin (2012) Mixed-income developments and low rates of return: insights from relocated public housing residents in Chicago, *Housing Policy Debate*, 22:3, 377-405, DOI: [10.1080/10511482.2012.680479](https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2012.680479)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2012.680479>

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Mixed-income developments and low rates of return: insights from relocated public housing residents in Chicago

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In the largest poverty deconcentration effort in any city in the US, all high-rise public housing family developments in Chicago have been demolished and are being replaced by mixed-income developments. Advocates for public housing residents have worked hard to negotiate a “right to return” to the new mixed-income developments. Yet, as in other cities across the country, the rates of return to the new developments have been very low. Little is understood about residents’ perceptions of their options or the factors that drive their relocation decisions. This article examines relocation decisions using data from in-depth interviews with a panel of relocating residents and a sample of “returners” at three mixed-income developments in Chicago. Our findings about relocation decisions include the relevance of attachment to people and place, challenges to the notion of resident “choice,” conceptions about the anticipated benefits of mixed-income communities that refute popular theories about the value of higher-income neighbors, and anticipated trade-offs and risks associated with a move to a mixed-income development.

Keywords: HOPE VI; public housing; mobility

Introduction

I’m getting ready to leave the projects and the old environment and things, but I was scared. I mean I was having knots in my stomach. I was scared. I was literally scared to move. . . . I wanted to move but I didn’t want to move. . . . It was a strange mixed emotion.

Resident of the new Oakwood Shores mixed-income development who had relocated there after living in the Ida B. Wells public housing development for over twenty years

In 1999, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) launched a “Plan for Transformation” (the Transformation) in order to end the concentration of poverty in the high-rise public housing for which the city had become notorious (Chicago Housing Authority 2009, 2010; Polikoff et al. 2009; Popkin 2010; Snyderman and Dailey 2000). Most of the largest public housing developments are being replaced with mixed-income developments, built and managed by private developers.¹ Individuals and families residing in public housing have been given a choice to move into the

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¹For more on mixed-income development generally, see Brophy and Smith (1997); Cisneros and Engdahl (2009); Joseph (2006); Joseph, Chaskin, and Webber (2007); Kleit (2005); and

private market with a housing choice voucher, move to a rehabbed public housing development, or, if they are eligible, move into a new mixed-income development. The immense scale of the effort in Chicago, with almost 25,000 households being temporarily or permanently relocated, sets it apart from relocation efforts in other cities and countries.

At the heart of the CHA's Plan for Transformation (as well as the Federal HOPE VI program and Choice Neighborhoods initiative currently being rolled out to succeed it²) is the strategy of mixed-income development. Building new developments with homes for households from an array of socioeconomic backgrounds is seen as key to revitalizing formerly isolated places and reconnecting formerly marginalized residents to mainstream society (Joseph, Chaskin, and Webber 2007).

Fearing a repeat of the urban renewal efforts in the 1950s and 1960s that resulted most often in a wholesale displacement of the urban poor (in many case to the very public housing complexes now being demolished), advocates for public housing residents have worked hard to negotiate a "right to return" for those living in public housing at the beginning of the Transformation. Although a detailed relocation-rights contract outlines a pathway for residents to return to new units in mixed-income developments, a set of site-specific criteria – employment requirements, background checks, drug tests – limit which residents are eligible to return. This has set up a complicated dynamic. On the one hand, low-income households that have been trapped in some of the most isolated, unsafe, deteriorated housing in the city for generations are being given options to move to a (potentially) better environment. On the other hand, with limited information, constrained choices, pressure to move spurred by demolition schedules, and high distrust of the CHA and other public agencies, many public housing residents have found this involuntary relocation disorienting and difficult. Drawing on data from interviews with a panel of relocating residents and case studies at three of the new developments in Chicago, this article investigates how residents who were relocated from public housing in Chicago perceived their options and make their decisions about whether to return to a mixed-income development or not.

Expectations among local stakeholders at the beginning of the Transformation were that there would be high demand for units in the mixed-income developments among those CHA residents who were eligible for a unit. Indeed, almost 90 percent of residents elected to keep their right to return when initially surveyed by the CHA about their housing preferences (Metropolitan Planning Council 2003; Williams, Fischer, and Russ 2003). While the "right to return" included a range of possible return destinations such as rehabbed low-rise public housing developments and scattered-site public housing, a major focus of the redevelopment was the creation of mixed-income developments. However, CHA data (see Table 1) suggest that by the end of 2010, less than 11 percent of relocated CHA family households³ (1,896 out of 16,846) were living in new mixed-income developments (Chicago Housing Authority

Smith (2002). For more background on the mixed-income transformation in Chicago, see Bennett, Smith, and Wright (2006); Joseph (2010); and Levy and Gallagher (2006).

²For more on the HOPE VI program, see Popkin et al. (2004) and Cisneros and Engdahl (2009) and for more on the Choice Neighborhoods program, see www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/ph/cn/, last accessed November 30, 2010.

³The category "family households" excludes seniors (residents aged 62 and above) living alone, who the CHA aimed to move into senior housing buildings with services targeted to that population.

Table 1. Location of relocated family households in December 2010.

Location/status	Number (<i>n</i>)	Percent (%)
Mixed-income	1,896	11.25
Traditional CHA development*	3,395	20.15
Housing choice voucher*	4,097	24.32
Attrition after relocation ¹	1,307	7.76
Living without CHA subsidy, retaining right to return	1,240	7.36
Evicted	1,488	8.83
Deceased	1,221	7.25
Lost Contact	2,202	13.07
Total	16,846	100.00

Note. Source: Chicago Housing Authority, 2011. *Includes residents who have yet to make their final housing choice. ¹Attrition includes deceased, evicted, and voluntary exits from CHA housing after satisfying right to return.

2010, 2011).⁴ Thus, relatively few relocated public housing residents are benefiting directly from the major investment that is being made in mixed-income housing.

One part of the explanation for the current low return rate is the major delays in unit construction. Over 10 years into the transformation, a little over one-third of the intended units for relocated public housing residents have been completed.⁵ But even the units that have been completed have been unexpectedly challenging to fill (Bushey 2008; Joseph 2008, 2010; Olivo 2005a,b; Rogal 2005).

The relocation and return challenges experienced in Chicago have also been encountered in other cities across the US that are implementing federal HOPE VI public housing redevelopment grants (Cisneros and Engdahl 2009; Popkin 2007; Popkin et al. 2004). Comey (2007) reported that the average return rate was 5 percent across the four housing developments in the Urban Institute HOPE VI Panel Study; the development with the highest rate reported only 14 percent of former residents returning. It should be noted that none of the four developments were fully complete at the time of the survey; yet Comey (2007, 2) suggests that, based on national trends, the rates at these four sites “will remain relatively low.” Similarly, Buron et al. (2002) reported that across the country, rates of return to revitalized HOPE VI developments averaged 14 percent (see also Marquis and Ghosh 2008).

These low rates of return substantiate the concerns of critics of public housing transformation who see this as a means of displacing the poor and reclaiming valuable central-city land for the middle class (Bennett, Smith and Wright 2006; Fraser and Kick 2007; Goetz 2003; Imbroscio 2008). It raises questions about the

⁴The maximum return rate, if all projected units in mixed-income developments allocated for relocated public housing residents are completed and filled by “original” residents, would be only about 46 percent since 7,704 such units are planned. A more realistic maximum projection at this point would be 30 percent, given that 52 percent of relocatees have exercised their final housing choice and 28 percent are deceased or currently ineligible, leaving about 3,300 households to make a final choice, according to the most recent CHA relocation report. A further constraint on the return rate is the match of household size to unit size: with relocated households’ sizes larger on average than the subgroup of those returning to mixed-income developments (see Table 4), the relatively smaller units and lower bedroom count units being built in the mixed-income developments has likely reduced the return rate as well.

⁵For an explanation of the delays, see Joseph (2010) and Polikoff et al. (2009).

ways in which the policy has been implemented with selection criteria that exclude or deter a significant proportion of original residents from returning to mixed-income sites (Levy and Gallagher 2006; Marquis and Ghosh 2008; Pattillo 2007, 279–286; Popkin 2010; Venkatesh 2002). Indeed, research on the relocation effort in Chicago suggests that as many as 80 percent of residents do not meet the selection criteria (Joseph 2010; Venkatesh 2002; Venkatesh and Celimli 2004). The policy of mixed-income development is at least partly based, in theory and according to policymakers, on the anticipation of the benefits that would be experienced by low-income families living among a socioeconomically diverse population (Joseph 2006; Joseph, Chaskin and Webber 2007; Kleit 2005). The low proportions of relocated public housing residents returning to the new mixed-income developments, however, calls into question the value of this policy to that constituency. Furthermore, evidence suggests that many of the residents choosing *not* to return have been relocated to racially segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods that may be improvements over the public housing developments but are not necessarily environments that will support stability and economic mobility (Buron et al. 2002; Chaskin et al., forthcoming; Kingsley, Johnson, and Pettit 2003; Metropolitan Planning Council 2003; Popkin 2010; Popkin, Levy, and Buron 2009).

These circumstances also raise financial, political, and implementation concerns. For a period of time earlier in the Transformation in Chicago, available units remained vacant for several months because eligible and interested public housing residents could not be found to occupy them (Bushey 2008; Olivo 2005a,b; Rogal 2005). These extended vacancies at brand new units reserved for relocated public housing residents caused both financial and political problems for public housing authorities and their private developer partners. Financially, developers are penalized for tax-credit subsidized units that are not occupied by set deadlines. Politically, the CHA and the city have come under tremendous criticism from affordable housing advocates and others for the travesty of having had brand new units sitting vacant in the midst of a regional affordable housing crisis.

The difficulties of filling units have also generated strategic tensions between the private developers and the CHA, which suggest that there is more than the wholesale displacement of the urban poor at play here. The private developers have pushed to make the public housing-eligible units available to a broader population of low-income families across the city. However, the CHA has until recently held firm to its commitment, formalized in a residents' relocation rights contract, to prioritize those units for residents who lived in public housing in October 1999, when the Plan for Transformation was launched.⁶

Within this broader policy context of urban revitalization, poverty deconcentration, and involuntary resident relocation, little is understood about residents' perceptions of their options or the factors that drive their relocation decisions. Given the high proportion of public housing residents who initially opted to keep their right to return, why is the actual number returning so low? To what extent is this a function of choice or constraints? What factors drive their relocation decisions?

⁶In July 2010, the Chicago Housing Authority opened its family housing waitlist for the first time since the start of the Transformation. While those residents covered under the Relocation Rights Contract still have priority status when it comes to filling units in mixed-income developments, households from the waitlist may be offered these units if a returning family can not be identified that matches the unit size and responds to an offer of housing.

What are residents' perceptions of mixed-income developments as a potential residence for themselves and their families? What specific benefits and challenges do low-income families anticipate from living there?

The article is structured as follows. First, we review available literature on involuntary public housing relocation. We then describe our methods and respondent sample and provide more background details on the relocation process in Chicago. We then share our findings about residents' relocation decisions.⁷ Finally, we consider implications for mixed-income relocation practice and policy.

Literature review

The most consistent findings from existing research on involuntary relocation are that public housing residents' choices from among their relocation options are driven strongly by attachment to place and attachment to neighbors (Clampet-Lundquist 2004; Gibson 2007; Kleit and Galvez 2011; Kleit and Manzo 2004; Manzo, Kleit, and Couch 2008; Vale 1997; Venkatesh 2002). Through both household surveys and in-depth interviews, residents express an overarching preference to remain in their neighborhood if possible and not leave the environment with which they are most familiar. Research by Goetz (2010) on resident relocation outcomes suggests that those residents who are more attached to their original development report lower neighborhood satisfaction and safety improvements after their move. The majority of residents move to nearby locations (Popkin et al. 2004). Residents who decide not to move away from a particular development site also often cite social ties and proximity to family as a key rationale for staying (Clampet-Lundquist 2004; Kleit and Galvez 2011; Kleit and Manzo 2004; Vale 1997). These relationships are key to providing various forms of informal social support such as childcare, bartering, informal credit from local storeowners, and connections to resources from churches and other nonprofits (Venkatesh and Celimli 2004).

When residents do make a decision to move to a different location, their decision is highly "place-dependent," to use Kleit and Manzo's (2004) term. Residents who decide to move indicate that they are seeking an opportunity to improve neighborhood quality (Clampet-Lundquist 2004; Comey 2007; Kleit and Manzo 2004) and a sense of community (Gibson 2007). The safety of the neighborhood is often a primary concern as is the quality of local amenities such as schools, shopping, and transportation (Clampet-Lundquist 2004; Gibson 2007; Smith et al. 2002).

On the other hand, some research suggests that relocatee "preferences" supposedly revealed through their relocation decisions may actually be less about personal choice and more about market and personal constraints (Boyd 2008; Goetz 2003). For example, dependence on public transportation largely shapes residents' choices and limits the options they can consider or even learn more about (Clampet-Lundquist 2004). In their study of public housing residents in Atlanta, Brooks et al. (2005) found that 90 percent of those living in public housing rely on public transportation and that housing choice voucher holders were four times as likely to have an automobile. Other research finds that residents' decisions are heavily driven by logistical realities such as the availability of suitable housing given their family

⁷To learn more about Chicago residents' experiences and reflections after having moved into the new developments, see Chaskin and Joseph (2010, 2011, forthcoming) and Joseph and Chaskin (2010).

size and the ease of relocation (Kleit and Manzo 2004; Smith et al. 2002). Using a sophisticated discrete choice statistical model, Kleit and Galvez (2011) found evidence, at least among a highly ethnically diverse respondent sample relocated from a public housing development in the Pacific Northwest, that personal preferences and social networks appeared to play a more important role than housing market constraints.

Furthermore, some researchers have found evidence of pressure from relocation staff for residents to select a relocation destination from among readily available options, rather than more fully exploring possibilities throughout the metropolitan area (Comey 2007; Goetz 2003). This research suggests that in many cases, residents' choices may be more influenced by relocation staffs' need to move residents quickly rather than an emphasis on understanding and fulfilling resident preferences. Residents often refer to the short time constraints within which they had to identify a unit and make a relocation choice (Clampet-Lundquist 2004; Smith et al. 2002; Venkatesh 2002).

Research further suggests that other factors that influence decision-making include concerns about the challenge of finding landlords who will accept housing choice vouchers (Clampet-Lundquist 2004), a lack of knowledge about options, misinformation about the housing choice voucher program, more stringent screening criteria in the HOPE VI program, and the limited availability of relocation services (Smith et al. 2002).

Based on their research on the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) poverty deconcentration program, Briggs, Popkin, and Goering (2010) question the very notion of "choice" that undergirds an increasing number of social programs not only in housing but also in areas such as education and healthcare. Although MTO was a voluntary mobility program that aimed to generate residential choice for families that had been trapped for decades in high-poverty neighborhoods, the researchers found that a number of factors constrained and shaped the families' relocation decisions. As a "major lesson" of MTO, they conclude:

For poor people who have lived segregated lives in dangerous, high-poverty neighborhoods, conventional choice programs offer little room to maneuver, thanks to the choosers' information poverty, the limited comparisons they are equipped to make, and a logic of choice focused simply on avoiding violence and other risks—not necessarily on garnering "opportunity" (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering 2010, 19).

Gibson's (2007) study at Columbia Villa is one of the few available studies that has focused in some depth on resident decisions about their return to a mixed-income development. Her findings support previous research findings about the importance of place attachment. In addition, she uncovered the prime importance for residents of seeing the actual completed new units before making a decision and thus being better-informed about the environment to which they were committing (see also Smith et al. 2002). Buron et al. (2002) suggest that reasons for the low rates of return to mixed-income developments include a preference for the flexibility of a housing choice voucher and a comparison of housing quality at other public housing developments, affordable rental units available in the private market, and housing at the revitalized sites.

Thus, the picture emerging from the literature on resident decision-making in involuntary relocation initiatives is one in which residents balance their preferences for maintaining connections to social networks and place assets with the opportunity

to make improvements in housing and neighborhood quality while struggling within numerous constraints including time, information, transportation, and family needs and circumstances. This study leverages access to residents' pre- and postrelocation decision-making to explore these dynamics in the context of the country's largest public housing redevelopment and relocation initiative.

Data and methods

The analysis presented here is drawn from in-depth interviews with three categories of respondents: a panel of relocating public housing residents, a sample of public housing residents who returned to three mixed-income developments, and a sample of key informants directly involved with the Transformation process. These in-person interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and covered topics including residential history, relocation decision-making and experience, and expected benefits and challenges to living in a mixed-income development. Follow-up interviews focused on an assessment of early experiences in their new location. The relocating residents panel was drawn from a list of residents who were "potential returners" to a new mixed-income development called Jazz on the Boulevard. Between February 2005 and February 2006, 69 residents who had not yet been "permanently" relocated were interviewed about their status and plans.⁸ Follow-up interviews were conducted with 24 of these residents between September 2009 and April 2010 to learn about their current location and perspectives on the relocation process. We interviewed a total of 46 residents who returned to mixed-income developments, including 23 residents at Jazz on the Boulevard interviewed between November 2005 and January 2007, 12 residents of the Westhaven Park development interviewed between June and October of 2007, and 11 residents at Oakwood Shores also interviewed between June and October 2007. Table 2 provides a summary of the sample. While most of the residents who moved to mixed-income developments were interviewed within a year or two of their relocation, the panel of residents who did not return had a longer period between relocation and their follow-up interview and thus may have had less detailed and accurate recollections of their relocation experience. Contextual data about the implementation of the relocation and redevelopment process are also drawn from 47 key informant interviews with an array of stakeholders, including private developers, service providers, property managers, and housing agency staff.

Jazz on the Boulevard (Jazz), on the south side of the city, provides replacement housing for a development called Lakefront Properties that was demolished in 1998 prior to the start of the Plan for Transformation. The development is the first of the Transformation sites to be fully completed and occupied; it is also the smallest in the city, with 137 units. Oakwood Shores, also on the south side of the city, is being built in place of the Ida B. Wells/Madden Park development and will ultimately be one of the largest mixed-income developments in Chicago with 3,000 projected total units. Westhaven Park is the second phase of the redevelopment of Henry Horner Homes on the city's west side, the first phase of which was completed prior to the launch of

⁸Efforts were made to reach as many of the approximately 180 households on the "potential returners" list as possible. Due to incorrect or missing contact information and other challenges establishing contact with residents, a convenience sample of 69 who had not yet completed their relocation was ultimately interviewed.

Table 2. Respondent sample.

	Jazz potential returners	Jazz on the Boulevard returners	Oakwood Shores returners	Westhaven Park returners	Key informant stakeholders
Sample size	69	23	11	12	47
Total population	127	24	200 ¹	293	
Dates interviewed	Feb 2005–Feb 2006 Sept 2009–April 2010	Nov 2005–Jan 2007	June–Oct 2007	June–Oct 2007	Feb 2005–Oct 2007
Selection method	Convenience	Census	Random selection	Random selection	Convenience

Note. ¹Estimate.

Table 3. Mixed-income development descriptions.

	Jazz on the Boulevard	Oakwood Shores	Westhaven Park
Developer(s)	Thrush Development, Heartland Housing, Granite Development	The Community Builders, Granite Development	Brinshore Michaels
Total projected units	137	3,000	1,317
RPH units ¹ (n/%)	30/22%	1,000/33%	824 ² /63%
Affordable units (n/%)	36/26%	680/23%	132/10%
Market-rate units (n/%)	71/52%	1,320/44%	361/27%
For-sale units (n/%)	98/72%	810/27%	303/23%
Social service providers	Heartland Human Care Services	The Community Builders, UJIMA	TASC, Project Match, Near West Side CDC

Note. Source: Chicago Housing Authority, 2008. ¹Units reserved for relocated public housing residents. ²Include off-site, scattered-site units and a pre-Transformation phase of 100% public housing.

the Transformation. When complete, the development is projected to have 1,317 total units (see Table 3).

Relocation procedures differed at the three sites in a few key ways. Unlike the other two developments, the Jazz development was not built on the footprint of a demolished housing development from which residents had been recently relocated. Jazz was built on vacant land owned by the city and the CHA, including land from a public housing complex vacated and demolished well before the start of the Transformation (see Pattillo 2007), and was made available to relocating public housing residents from across the city who had expressed an interest in moving to one of two lakefront mixed-income developments that were replacement housing for the Lakefront Properties (Lake Park Crescent was the other option).⁹ While many of the relocatees at Oakwood Shores had been temporarily relocated away from the development while the new units were being constructed, the Westhaven Park redevelopment was phased in such a way that public housing residents were able to remain on site and move directly into the new mixed-income development. Furthermore, due to a legal consent decree in place at Westhaven Park that was the result of a housing discrimination lawsuit brought against the CHA on behalf of Horner Homes residents, screening criteria such as employment verification and drug testing that were in place at Jazz on the Boulevard, Oakwood Shores, and other new developments were not in place at Westhaven Park (see Wilen [2006] for a history of this lawsuit and the subsequent redevelopment at Horner Homes).

The Jazz respondent sample represents all but one of the 24 public housing residents who had relocated to the development by October 2006. Given the larger resident populations, interviewees at Oakwood Shores and Westhaven Park were randomly selected from developer occupancy lists in each site. Respondents were contacted by mail, phone, and in-person visits where necessary. Interviews were

⁹For more details on the controversial demolition and replacement housing of the Lakefront Properties, see Pattillo 2007.

guided by a semistructured interview instrument that comprised primarily of open-ended questions covering a broad range of topics and some closed-response questions. Interviews were recorded digitally, transcribed, and coded for analysis based on a set of deductively derived thematic codes and refined based on inductive interim analysis. Interviews were initially double-coded to ensure intercoder reliability, and then a periodic sample of coded interviews was reviewed to ensure continued reliability.

Our sample of “potential returner” residents is fairly representative of the population of all relocated Chicago public housing residents, with a slightly lower percentage of female heads of household and a slightly higher average household size and number of children (see Table 4 for all comparisons). Our sample of relocated public housing residents in the three mixed-income developments appears to be representative of the larger group of public housing residents who had returned to mixed-income developments throughout the city around that time, with a few exceptions: heads of households in our sample were more likely to be female, younger, and had lived in public housing longer.¹⁰

Background on the relocation process

To place our findings about resident perspectives of their relocation experiences in context, it is necessary to provide a little more detail about the nature of the relocation process in Chicago. In this section, we provide a brief description of the process, discuss some of the main challenges we uncovered in our stakeholder interviews, and describe resulting modifications to the process.

In 2002, all 16,846 heads of household who had been residing in Chicago Housing Authority family household units when the Plan for Transformation was initiated in October 1, 1999, were asked to fill out a housing choice survey to designate their relocation preferences. First, they had to decide whether to take a housing choice voucher with which they could move permanently into the private rental market or retain the option to return to a unit in a new mixed-income development or rehabbed public housing development. As described earlier, relatively few residents elected to leave public housing permanently and almost 90 percent elected to retain their “right to return” (Metropolitan Planning Council 2003). Those selecting a temporary relocation were then given a number of temporary housing options including relocating to another unit on-site, transferring to another public housing development, or taking a temporary housing choice voucher for a rental unit in the private market. These households were also asked to indicate their top three choices for their “permanent” housing from among the range of developments that would be rehabbed as traditional public housing, demolished and replaced with mixed-income housing, or preserved as scattered-site housing throughout the city. Households that retained their right to return were randomly assigned a lottery number which designated the order in which they would be offered a newly constructed or rehabilitated unit that met their household size requirements.

Then, over the course of the next few years, public housing buildings were emptied for demolition, and residents were relocated to their temporary placements across the city. Social service providers were contracted by the housing authority and

¹⁰For more information on differences between residents who relocated to different types of CHA-subsidized housing, see Chaskin et al., forthcoming.

Table 4. Household Characteristics of Relocated Public Housing Residents.

	Jazz potential returners (2005–2006), <i>n</i> = 69	Jazz on the Boulevard returners (2005–2007), <i>n</i> = 23	Oakwood Shores and Westhaven Park returners (2007), <i>n</i> = 23	All mixed-income returners (2008), <i>N</i> = 1,278	All relocated CHA residents (2008),* <i>N</i> = 9,980
Head of household is female	85.5	95.7	95.7	89.3	88.9
Mean age of household head in years	47.2	47.0	41.3	49.6	48.1
Mean number of household members	3.3	1.7	2.6	2.7	3.0
Mean number of children	1.9	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.3
Mean number of years in CHA housing	10–19 years (42.0%) Over 20 years (46.4%)**	10–19 years (21.7%) Over 20 years (73.9%)**	10–19 years (39%) Over 20 years (57%)**	16.3	15.9

Note. *Source: data provided to the authors by Chicago Housing Authority. **Data only available on year ranges.

by private developers working on the new developments to conduct outreach to relocated residents, assess their social and economic status and eligibility to return to a new development, provide information about their housing options, refer residents to support services that could address their individual or family needs, and help them try to rectify any issues that would make them ineligible to return to the new mixed-income developments. As new units became available, property managers at the developments would make offers to households based on their lottery order, match of household size to unit size, and eligibility. The eligibility criteria that have been established for public housing residents to qualify for units in the new developments include, in most cases, lease compliance, 30 hours a week employment, no unpaid rent or utility bills, passing a drug test, and a three-year criminal background check.¹¹ While the selection criteria are certainly dramatically limiting the pool of residents who are eligible for the new housing, residents *can* be accepted to the developments if they are engaged with service providers to address those issues on which they do not qualify and can be designated as “working to meet” these requirements. Residents are then given one year to meet the criteria.¹² However, previous research suggests that service providers and housing authority representatives have had difficulty even attracting residents who *are* eligible (Joseph 2010; Levy and Gallagher 2006).

The relocation process in Chicago came under fierce criticism from resident advocates and ultimately resulted in litigation (Metropolitan Planning Council 2003; Polikoff et al. 2009; Williams, Fischer, and Russ 2003). The major criticisms in the early years of the process included the rushed pace of demolition and relocation, limited and constantly changing information provided to residents, and inadequate relocation counseling which resulted in many residents being relocated to high-poverty, racially segregated neighborhoods or public housing units in buildings and developments in as bad physical shape as the ones they were leaving. CHA was criticized for implementing a model that predominantly used off-site rather than phased on-site relocation, thus requiring more disruption for residents. Although there were many causes beyond the control of policymakers, the long multiyear delays between initial relocation and unit availability also greatly complicated the relocation process. Administratively, CHA was criticized for the ineffective tracking of residents, which led to the loss of contact with thousands of residents, making outreach and recruitment difficult and labor-intensive. CHA also failed to anticipate the severe barriers to engagement and mobility that existed among a substantial proportion of the families and the agency struggled through the first few years of the Transformation with a grossly underfunded social service system and unmanageable caseloads (for more on the barriers to relocation faced by a substantial proportion of the public housing population, see Cunningham et al. 2005).

Our interviews with developers, service providers, and property managers have provided additional insights about the challenges of the relocation process from the perspectives of “move-in providers” charged with recruiting residents to return to

¹¹For more detail on the resident relocation process in Chicago, see Joseph (2010); Polikoff et al. (2009); Levy and Gallagher (2006); Popkin (2010); Venkatesh 2002; Venkatesh and Celimli 2004; and Williams, Fischer, and Russ (2003).

¹²In practice, the decision about what to do if the resident fails to meet the criteria after a year has been left to the discretion of the property managers at each site and it appears that, in most cases, as long as the household is not causing problems for other residents at the development, their lease is extended.

the mixed-income developments. The challenges, including administrative complications and resident noncooperation, shed additional light on the dynamics generated in a context of large-scale involuntary relocation. The housing offer process, an unprecedented attempt to manage the relocation of more than 16,000 households, was described by one of our respondents as an “administrative nightmare.” Inaccurate resident contact information, stringent bureaucratic protocols, and often-changing procedures all made it very difficult for those attempting to determine which residents were interested in returning. Service providers complained that resident noncooperation – failure to respond to outreach attempts, lack of follow-through on preparations for relocation – was driven by many factors including distrust of the CHA and other public agencies, lack of belief in the reality of the impending changes, emotional or physical inability to engage, and the lack of time and information to be fully prepared for the relocation process. Respondents surmised that many residents were avoiding being subjected to the screening procedures out of a fear of the discovery of an individual or family condition that would cause them to lose their housing entitlement.

In response to acknowledged shortcomings in the relocation and social service support processes, the CHA made a series of major modifications over the first 10 years of the Transformation.¹³ As part of the relocation rights contract, an independent monitor was retained by the CHA to provide objective oversight and documentation of program challenges and improvements. A relocation program manager was placed at each site for easier access and more in-depth relationships with residents. The pace of the relocation process was slowed, residents were engaged much earlier in the process, and information was provided in multiple forms. The housing offer process was also reformulated so that unresponsive residents could be moved from the priority list and other residents with lower lottery numbers could be recruited.

As the Transformation proceeded, CHA realized that more resources would need to be dedicated to social services to support residents through the relocation process. The original “service connector” system was ultimately replaced by a program called FamilyWorks. FamilyWorks emphasizes performance outcomes over contact outcomes and direct service over referrals, prioritizes clinical case management where required, and includes a focus on employability for all residents who can work (Chicago Housing Authority 2007, 2009, 2010). Through a partnership with a local philanthropic consortium called the Partnership for New Communities and the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development, an employment-focused initiative called Opportunity Chicago was launched to focus on getting low-skill public housing residents with limited work experience onto a path toward sustained employment.

Much has been learned and modified over the course of the first 10 years of the Transformation to try to improve the resident relocation process, but in the meantime thousands of residents have had to make high-stakes decisions about their future in a context of limited information, options, and often time. We now turn to what we learned from residents about the factors that influenced their decisions.

¹³It should be noted that the CHA has had four different CEOs in that period and while this has added to the instability and sense of constantly changing policy, the leadership changes have provided opportunities for reshaping strategies that were not working.

Findings

Our interviews with relocated public housing residents revealed several insights about their perceptions and decision-making rationale. Whether the respondents had decided to return to a mixed-income development or not, there were some common issues that shaped their decision-making. First, we gained a more nuanced understanding of the power of attachment to people and place for public housing residents faced with a relocation decision in the context of tremendous disruption and uncertainty. Second, as Briggs, Popkin, and Goering (2010) found in their MTO research, what we learned greatly problematizes the notion of resident “choice” that is a major premise of the Transformation. Third, we discovered a conception among relocatees, particularly among those who chose to return to mixed-income developments, about the anticipated benefits of mixed-income communities that refute popular theories about the value of higher-income neighbors. Finally, respondents articulated anticipated trade-offs and risks associated with a move to a mixed-income development that helps explain the resistance of some of the residents who have opted not to return.

The power of attachment to place and people

Residents had strong preferences to be in an area of the city with which they were already familiar and wanted to maintain proximity to friends and family. This was the case for those who had thus far not returned and those who had moved to all three mixed-income developments. The most common explanation given by mixed-income returners for why they ended up in a mixed-income development was their ties to their current location. Over two-thirds of the Oakwood Shores respondents and about half of the Westhaven Park respondents mentioned their local connections as key to their decision. Unlike the Westhaven Park residents who all remained on-site during the construction period, some of the Oakwood Shores residents had been temporarily relocated off-site and thus may have given greater consideration to staying away. At Jazz on the Boulevard, which was not built on the site of a recently occupied public housing complex, all residents moved from another location. However, even there, over a quarter of the Jazz movers indicated that they had a strong familiarity with the area, and several mentioned a previous stint living in that neighborhood. Among the nonreturners, a majority mentioned some kind of connection to the area where they were currently living.

Respondents who talked specifically about attachment to place talked about two different types of connections to the community. A few talked about an affective connection to the local community: having lived there for so long they felt an emotional attachment to the area. As a resident who had moved into Westhaven Park put it, “I’ve been here all my life so it’s like I couldn’t see me being anywhere else, seeing that I’ve been so adapted to this area.” A resident who had moved into Oakwood Shores said:

It feels like a big world out there. I somewhat feel sheltered here. I know the people. I know the community. . . . I had no doubts in my mind that I [did not want] to go anywhere else but this area. . . . I’ve been living in this particular area for 30 [years], this is all I’ve known. I came here when I was a little girl . . . so I’ve been here like practically all my life. . . . I love the area. So I basically chose Oakwood Shores to stay in the area.

Her statement suggests that despite the ongoing changes around her, her expectation is that enough will remain familiar in the area around her for her to continue to derive some sense of, in her words, “shelter.”

For the majority, however, place attachment was less emotional and much more pragmatic. A sense of “this is all I know” and “this is where I know how to function” permeated respondents’ framing of their rationale for their choices. Despite the shortcomings of these areas, respondents had figured out where and how to get their needs met in their current neighborhood. These respondents mentioned local amenities like public transportation routes, local schools, and other local resources that they relied on for their families. As one respondent who had not returned to a mixed-income development explained in detail:

‘Cause living in the city and you’re low-income and you don’t have the income like that to own a car, then (you have to consider what location) would be best for me when I do start working? Not only that, for schools and childcare . . . where I am I’m accessible to a lot of CTA transportation . . . The aid office is not far. The Post Office is not far. I have so many, you know, accessibilities to anywhere I need to get to. I’m no more than 15 minutes from (downtown). . . . If I come home late, even if the buses stop running, I can always get home.

Some respondents seemed to question whether other areas to which they had access would really be that much of an improvement: “I figured I would stay with an area I knew *wasn’t so bad*,” was the way one respondent put it (emphasis added). Those who had ended up in unfamiliar areas when their old developments were demolished had worked hard to develop connections and attachments to the new place – transportation, schools, stores – and, having learned to function in new area, were not interested in going through that process all over again. This also indicates the relevance of the “sunk costs” of a relocation move that leads relocatees to be resistant to additional moves, even the option to return to better quality new housing.

Social ties were also of primary importance in shaping resident decisions. An involuntary relocation from a public housing development might hold the promise of an improved physical environment, but it also threatened to disrupt social support networks. About half of the respondents who talked about their attachment to the place also made specific reference to people associated with that place. In other cases, respondents talked generally about personal relationships that they had in the surrounding area. One respondent at Oakwood Shores said:

I didn’t [want to leave] because I’ve been on this land for over 30 years, and so I’m comfortable here. . . . You really don’t want to be anywhere strange where you don’t know anyone, and my family lives close.

A respondent at Westhaven Park explained:

Honestly just growing up here and . . . wanting to be around family and friends – an area you are familiar with. And I didn’t really wanna leave because this was really just where family and friends were.

These statements suggest that despite the massive relocation and disruption at both the development and the neighborhood around it, these respondents expected their family and friends to remain in the area.

Because the Jazz development tried to attract residents from all around the city, the low “return” rates in that particular development are in many cases due to the individual wanting to stay where they were and not move all the way across the city to an unfamiliar area. As one nonreturner told us:

I wanted to come where my family and where I knew I would be safe and I moved back to [my original public housing development]. . . . I’ve been here all my life. I mean I don’t have to worry about no one breaking into my home, no one really harassing me. I can walk the streets at night safely because everybody in the area knows me.

Others invoked their social networks much more instrumentally in their decision-making process, in effect ensuring that within a context of uncertainty, they would retain some social ties in their residential location. Respondents talked about a family member or a friend who had moved into the new mixed-income development first, and through whom they were able to get a sense of what living there would be like. For example, a respondent at Oakwood Shores who returned to the site after having moved away temporarily told us: “My friend moved over here first, so I got a chance to see how it looked and stuff. Then my sister moved over here. Then I . . . moved over here.” Similarly, a respondent at Westhaven Park who moved directly from one of the remaining high-rises in Henry Horner Homes said: “I wanted to see how things was going to go first with the first group they moved in. They liked it, it was nice, so I decided just to [move here].” Some respondents had family needs that required them to stay close to familial support. As one nonreturner stated: “I have a disabled daughter and I don’t want to move far away from family members who are there to help me.”

In general then, a very pragmatic, instrumental focus pervaded respondents’ descriptions of their attachment to people and place. While there were certainly those with emotional attachments to places where they have lived for so long, far more often respondents described practical factors such as access to public transportation and proximity to work and family supports as factors in their decision about where to live.

Problematizing the notion of “choice”

It is important to remember that these decisions were taking place under very difficult circumstances: deteriorating physical and social conditions in the old developments, public housing residents facing numerous economic and health challenges, and a public agency building a massive relocation system on the fly while racing to get units demolished and rebuilt. While eligibility criteria certainly prevented or deterred many residents from returning to mixed-income developments, the choices of relocatees who may have been interested and eligible to return were constrained. Even beyond the question of eligibility, numerous respondents expressed that they felt pressured into a particular choice due to circumstances beyond their control, rather than having made careful, well-informed decisions. Constraints expressed by respondents in our sample included time pressure, bureaucratic hurdles, family needs and circumstances, lack of information, and steering from relocation counselors.

About a third of the respondents at each of the three sites explicitly mentioned time pressures or other constraints that made them feel that their options were limited and they had to settle for whatever options were available quickly. For some

respondents, the situation in their former public housing development had become so unbearable that they wanted to, as one respondent put it, “take the first thing” that came available. These respondents wanted to move as soon as possible. One respondent from Oakwood Shores explained further:

My whole focus was just moving. You know, I’m just like, anything has to be better than where I’m staying right now. That’s all – I mean, to be honest, that’s what I was thinking. And that was my whole just focus . . . I have to get out of here.

A nonreturner described a similar challenge of time pressure:

The time of my Section 8 . . . was running out, and they said that I had to make a quick move. So I found a place . . . I had to accept it and I ended up in the basement of a building, apartment building over there. . . . I really, really, really think you know it would’ve been more suitable for my disabled daughter [to move somewhere else], but again we had to accept what they gave us because I didn’t have any more time on my voucher and I was led to believe that if I didn’t do it in the time that I had left that I wasn’t entitled to get another extension. So it’s like you know we were running against time.

Although some were willing to move anywhere to get away from their current development, some mixed-income returners said that they would have actually preferred to have taken a housing choice voucher, but could not due to bureaucratic hurdles and the length of time that it would take to get approved for the voucher and then find a rental unit where they could use it. For others, the constraining issues were personal circumstances such as health or lack of transportation. For those in poor health, it was not possible to visit numerous apartments around the city in order to find one that would work. Some respondents talked about how important access to public transportation was to their choice, given that they did not own a car. A respondent at Westhaven Park said: “Now if I would’ve had a car, I would’ve chosen Section 8, which I kinda regret. . . . I’ve always wanted to move away from the neighborhood ’cause I’ve been over here so much.” This raises an important point about the need to interpret the decision to move or not move and the ultimate choice of location as a revealed preference *within very real constraints*. This particular respondent, unlike others who were seeking to stay put, wanted to seize this opportunity to move away but could not. Of those residents who expressed a strong desire to exit the public housing environment, some aimed to cut as many ties as possible, but more looked to distance themselves and their families from specific negative and harmful people and circumstances while maintaining access and proximity, where possible, to supportive social connections.

Finally, confirming the concerns of advocates and observers about the nature of the administrative processes underway, there were a substantial number of respondents who did not seem to be fully aware of the range of choices that they could have made or who exercised no deliberate choice at all. One nonreturner said “I really didn’t know too much about none of (the options), I just randomly picked.” Another nonreturner described the challenge of limited or conflicting information:

We never have enough information. . . . When you ask your neighbors, if you ask five people, you’ll get five different things. You’ve got to draw conclusions from that there. [But] you want to hear from the reliable source.

Almost half of the nonreturners expressed feeling like they had not made a fully informed choice from an array of options either due to administrative mistakes or complications, lack of information, or being steered into their decision by a staff member. When asked to explain their rationale for their decision, a few of our respondents indicated that the relocation staff with whom they worked had filled out the form for them. For example, a nonreturner told us:

I never had a chance [to move back] . . . I should've waited. It seems like the lady who was working with me said, she was telling me 'Go ahead and take something now,' but I wish I should've, I wish I'd waited. . . . [Instead] I picked the first one that came available.

Another nonreturner explained:

I didn't know what I was picking. I don't know. I don't even remember picking. Yeah, I just remember that when something comes available, they offer you. And if you take it, then you're permanently there. But then if not, I think you get it. I'm not sure. I'm not even sure.

Sometimes this did work out in favor of the respondents. One Westhaven Park returner, who was very pleased with the outcome but apparently unaware of her options, stated: "They picked this for me. I just said it was by the grace of God. They picked this for me, which I'm glad because, like I said, most of the buildings around here don't have what we have." When asked if she considered taking a housing choice voucher, she replied: "I didn't even know nothing about no voucher."

For others, it did not work out so well. One nonreturner said that she was appealing her relocation, and she described her recollection of the process as follows:

The guy that was doing the relocation out here already placed me as being housed, and I didn't choose that, without my knowledge, so they're investigating that in how I can receive my Section 8 back because he housed a lot of residents out here that didn't want to be housed permanently. . . . He was the relocation man, 'cause he was trying to place people out here, so he went on and housed me and a couple of other residents without our knowledge or our consent.

So, for many respondents, their actual choices about when and where to move were actually quite limited. Among nonreturners, problems with time pressure, family needs and circumstances, a lack of information, and relocation steering constrained their opportunity to fully consider a move back to the mixed-income development.

Place not people: anticipated pathways to benefits in the mixed-income developments

The dominant policy narrative about the rationale for creating mixed-income developments is to provide low-income residents with the opportunity to live in proximity to higher-income households through whom they can derive a number of benefits, including access to networks providing information and resources (particularly employment), better models of behavior, and a more socially organized and better-resourced neighborhood. However, when respondents discussed their rationale for moving into a mixed-income development, the revitalized "place" was

the dominant aspect of the mixed-income environment that attracted most of the respondents, not necessarily the presence of higher-income people.

Almost every respondent at Oakwood Shores and about half of the respondents at Westhaven Park and Jazz on the Boulevard mentioned the opportunity to live in new, well-designed, and well-maintained housing as the major attraction of the mixed-income developments. For some, the “clean” and well-functioning units and buildings themselves were the draw. Lower density and moving from high-rise to lower-rise buildings was mentioned by several. As respondent from Westhaven Park described it: “I figured it was going to be a better environment [than] the project[s]. Anything is better than that. We are not stacked on top of each other no more like sardines.” For some, the overall development had an attractive feel to it. Some commented that it felt like an affluent neighborhood. As another respondent at Westhaven Park said: “It was totally different, something that looked more like something where rich folks live there. That brought [it] to my attention, so I liked it and I love it now.” A nonreturner described with some regret deciding to stay in her original development due to transportation access and described her main attraction to Jazz as the revitalized neighborhood:

I did have my mind on Jazz on the Boulevard, because when you walk into the neighborhood, it had changed and it was so beautiful how they had things set up. . . . I felt stuff was going to change for the better [where I chose to stay], and in actuality it didn't. It just got worse. So I mean and now I wish I had of really dug deeper and thought about it on a higher note, just not as far as transportation, because if I could do it again I would leave. I wouldn't be here.

Turning to the question of the importance of the people who would populate the new place, about half of the respondents at Oakwood Shores and Westhaven Park and about three-quarters at Jazz referred to the mixed-income nature of the population in describing why they chose to return to a mixed-income development. However for most of them, their interest in living in an environment with a mixed-income population was not for direct interaction benefits but because they believed that the presence of more affluent residents would mean social and economic revitalization for the area. As a respondent from Oakwood Shores put it:

If everybody is low income or no income, the only thing they're doing is just building new buildings – there's not gonna be much of a difference. But when you have people from the university and hospitals that are gonna be [living] there . . . in my mind, my idea of it was that things are gonna get better. So I figure with it being mixed-income, things will get better.

Some figured that the changes would come as the market and other external forces responded to the new incoming population. As one respondent, who ultimately decided not to return, put it simply: “I think that diversity brings on more opportunity for better stores.” Others anticipated that the higher-income residents would take direct actions to promote a different kind of local environment. A respondent at Oakwood Shores shared her expectation that the more affluent residents of mixed-income development would not tolerate problematic behavior from others:

You're moving in something really beautiful so [higher-income residents] don't want you in here getting high [or acting] ignorant. . . . I mean people don't want you tearing up their property, you can't blame them for that.

A Jazz returner echoed that sentiment: “Because these people paying all of this rent, they’re not going to have people over there just destroying everything. Do you understand? I just feel it will be better.” Respondents explained their hope that they were getting away from the noise, loitering, drug dealing, and other problematic behavior that often characterized their former developments. Several expected to feel much safer among the mixed population. As one put it:

It does feel good to just be somewhere where . . . they bring in other types of all individuals into the neighborhood. That just makes you feel better, because you feel more safer, like who you’re living next to.

Contrary to the policy rhetoric about the benefits of direct interactions among people of different income levels, most of those respondents who did talk about the benefits of being around higher-income residents talked about what it would mean for the general environment as opposed to ways it would change their own individual patterns of behavior. For example, a respondent at Oakwood Shores talked about the chance for what she called a “new beginning”:

So for me, it was something that I felt like I was gonna improve. I felt like . . . my neighbors could be someone that’s making [a lot of money], I’m like, wow, I’m really excited. My lifestyle, my way of living is about to change, *not meaning personally inside my apartment but my environment is about to change*. . . . I was excited to hear that we would be living in a mixed-income market rent-paying environment [emphasis added].

The brand new physical environment and general social and economic improvements in mixed-income developments appear far more compelling to residents than the hope of new instrumental interpersonal relationships with higher-income families. Only a handful of respondents across the three sites seemed to be anticipating more direct benefits of being around a different mix of people. These respondents talked generally about looking forward to being around people of different races and backgrounds but were not very specific about any actual benefits they thought they could get from being around more affluent neighbors. As one respondent at Oakwood Shores described, it is better to have a mix of neighbors: “because you get to meet more peoples. You get to talk, have fun and kinda communicate with one another.” A respondent who did not return described her vision of the benefits of being around a mixed-income population:

I’d like to know about other cultures. . . . I’d like to know about those people. I’d want to know. See what makes others tick. And they’re people, they’re just like me. So that, because I’m interested, and I love people, *from a distance* . . . it might be a good time in this era in America for us to get to know other – you know, so that’s how I feel about that. It’s an education for me. [Italics added.]

Overall then, for those who did not return and those who did, the attraction of the mixed-income population was what that would mean for the general environment, physically, economically, and socially, and not how they as individuals might benefit from interactions with their new neighbors. While many were interested in learning about their neighbors, who they are and how they live, they did not anticipate forming relationships that would be of instrumental value.

Anticipated trade-offs of moving to a mixed-income development

The fundamental policy challenge that motivated this study is the low rate of return of relocated public housing residents back to newly developed mixed-income housing and, in particular, why even many of those residents who could meet eligibility criteria seem uninterested in returning. All respondents, both returners and nonreturners, talked about anticipated challenges and the trade-offs that they thought would come with a move into a mixed-income development. Respondents expressed two general kinds of concerns. There were concerns about the expectations and rules in the new environments and uncertainty about how much of a risk they were taking by seeing if it would work for them and their family. There were also concerns about the population that would emerge to replace the former public housing community, how different it would really be from the old community, and how welcome the relocated public housing residents would feel in the new environment.

About a third of the respondents at Oakwood Shores and Westhaven Park shared very practical concerns about some of the specific requirements and characteristics of the new developments. The proportion of those with concerns was slightly higher among nonreturners. One requirement that raised anxiety was that residents would now be responsible for paying their own utility bills. As a part of the Chicago Housing Authority's desire to promote greater tenant responsibility and encourage self-sufficiency among residents, this was a major change from the old public housing developments. As one respondent put it: "[there was the] the addition of light and gas that we were unaccustomed to paying. That was another bomb that was kinda dropped on us." While some respondents claimed to have taken this change in stride, especially those who had previously lived in the private market and had experience budgeting and paying for utilities, others were quite concerned about whether they would be able to stretch their budgets to include the new expense.

Another practical concern was the rules in the new developments. In particular, respondents mentioned stringent policies about the behavior of their guests and about activities that were allowed in the old developments, such as barbecuing, that were no longer allowed in the mixed-income developments (see also Chaskin and Joseph, forthcoming; Pattillo 2009). As one nonreturner described it: "they have all these rules and regulations and stuff, so you're like on pins and needles with everything." A respondent from Oakwood Shores explained:

And there's certain things that they allow you to do and certain things that they don't allow you to do. Like sayin' I got company, like one of my grandbabies come, and like she leave out of here and drop something, that's a fine. That's like a \$25.00 fine [for littering].

Another concern that we heard mainly from nonreturners was about the small size of the units and bedrooms in the new developments, which were a poor fit for those with larger families, and considerably smaller than their units in the old public housing developments.

For about a third of the nonreturners, these concerns led to a preference to "keep their options open" and avoid the choice of a mixed-income development which would pin them to a choice they were unsure about. As one nonreturner explained:

When you return back you lose your voucher, and it's like that's the last place for you to, you know, stay. . . . And then I don't want to look at it like I'm just going back to live

and die, you know, like that's my last place of living, you know, so that's why I chose to hold on to my voucher a little longer . . . because they take your rights as far as having a voucher when you can move whenever you like.

The second type of concern that we heard involved questions about what the social environment would be like. The overarching message promulgated by the CHA about the new mixed-income communities was that a different standard of behavior and self-sufficiency would be expected from all residents. Respondents had different reactions to this. Some respondents wondered if this standard could really be achieved. A concern expressed by just two respondents at Oakwood Shores and three who returned to Jazz, but by about half of the respondents at Westhaven Park and about a third of the nonreturners, was whether the move to a mixed-income development would really be an escape from the problematic environment of their former public housing developments. Would the social environment really be different and better than what they were used to? A respondent who had moved into Westhaven Park explained:

I just didn't want it to turn out like what we just came from. I didn't wanna go back to that but just new buildings. . . . You got [some of] the same people, you're gonna have the same environment. And if they don't know how to change their whole attitude and their thought process and the way they are, personally – if they don't change themselves, then you're gonna have the same situation.

A respondent who decided to move to Jazz explained that her selection of Jazz over Oakwood Shores was driven by her concerns about the proportion of public housing residents:

Then like they was placing a lot of people from [the old public housing development] in Oakwood Shores. And I said, "Well, okay. I really don't want to be around them like that anymore." So then Jazz sent me an invitation and I went there. You know, I just decided to go with Jazz because they don't have a lot of units for the CHA residents . . . And I said, "You know, they've got condos and all of this." So they're not going to have all this mess over here.

The apparently more broadly shared concerns about this issue at Westhaven Park may be driven, at least in part, by the continued presence of a 200-unit "superblock" of traditional public housing, built prior to the Transformation, that is now located in the middle of the new mixed-income development, as well as by the less stringent screening criteria due to the consent decree in place at that development (for more on the unique aspects of the Westhaven Park context and residents' experiences there see Joseph and Chaskin 2010).

For some respondents, particularly Jazz returners among whom about a third expressed this concern, a key question was whether they themselves would fit comfortably into the new environment. Respondents wondered how they would be welcomed by their new affluent neighbors. There was a sense among these respondents that their presence in the mixed-income developments had been forced upon their higher-income neighbors and might even be just a temporary arrangement. A respondent at Westhaven Park said:

Some places have a problem [with] low-income [residents] living with them . . . Because it's like, "They come from [public housing]." They think that we might do the same

thing we was doing out there. But they [will hopefully] see and they got to know us, and we do things better, and now they know how we is.

Several anticipated that the fact that residents from different income levels were in the same development but paying different amounts would create resentment. As a returner at Jazz stated: “Some people figure they’re paying all that rent and we ain’t paying nothing. So there might be a possible conflict.” A respondent from Oakwood Shores framed the concern in much more stark racial terms and referred to the historically black demographics and identity of the broader community:

I thought [mixed-income redevelopment] would be cool as long as they’re not trying to push out all the black people and push the white people in. That’s what a lot of people was thinking about. That’s what the people were upset about. Because it was, black people have lived on this land more than 100 years. This was Bronzeville, this was a historic district.

Thus, besides heightened expectations and monitoring in the new developments, uncertainties about the new social environment is a key issue, in particular whether a balance can be struck between excluding problem neighbors and controlling antisocial behavior but at the same avoiding stigmatizing low-income African-American families and accommodating those relocated residents seeking to be a part of a very different living environment.

Differences between returners and nonreturners

We found that whether respondents chose to return to a mixed-income development or not, their decisions were influenced by some common factors, such as familiarity with place, social connections, and practical issues such as access to public transportation. They were also constrained in similar ways, such a feeling of time pressure, a lack of reliable information, and personal constraints such as health or other family circumstances. For many of the nonreturners, the storyline seems to be one of a move made under some urgency, with limited options and limited information. One nonreturner’s reflections are illustrative of many:

We were pressured into doing it and getting it over with. So I’m not really unhappy about it or don’t think I really made the wrong decision because it was the only decision to make at the time. . . . If they just hadn’t been pushing us so hard to get out, maybe I could’ve found something different, but you know it was a push, so . . .

For most, not returning to one of the mixed-income developments was largely a function of settling in and growing familiar with what was initially intended as a temporary location. Some are explicit about reasons for not returning to a mixed-income development including small unit sizes and bedroom counts in the new developments as well as concerns about the social environment there, including both stigma from higher-income residents as well as possible ongoing challenges from other public housing residents. A notable difference is the higher level of concern expressed by nonreturners about the downsides and exigencies of moving to a mixed-income development, including the rules and monitoring and the risks of losing housing benefits if it did not work out. In numerous cases some other factor – an administrative problem, the influence of a relocation staff person – was the deciding factor in their relocation.

Policy and practice implications

In Chicago, with thousands more units reserved for relocated public housing residents to be built in mixed-income developments and thousands of temporarily relocated residents who have still not exercised their right to return, it remains critically important to understand residents' decision-making and, for those who are eligible, to determine how best to support and inform their consideration of the option to return to a mixed-income development. Across the country, the low return rates at HOPE VI developments have generated a debate about whether this is an indication that relocated residents have been successfully settled in other locations or whether this should raise concerns about a lack of information, access, and support for relocated residents. Our findings here suggest that while there are certainly many relocated residents who feel that they have benefited from the opportunity to move out of public housing, there are many others who are dissatisfied with the process and the eventual outcome. It does not appear that the low rates of return can simply be interpreted as a successful fulfillment of the stated commitment to increasing choices for residents. While much has been done to provide an array of options for relocating residents, as we have shown, the story has been much more complicated than that. Given the stated emphases of public housing redevelopment initiatives on increasing "choice" and "opportunity," given the considerable proportion of the redevelopment investment that goes into the new, mixed-income developments, given the high proportions of nonreturners who move to high poverty, racially segregated neighborhoods, and given the dissatisfaction expressed by a substantial proportion of relocatees about the process and outcomes, it seems imperative that much more is done to address the low rates of return. The recent legislation authorizing the federal Choice Neighborhoods initiative includes requirements – for example that any relocated public housing tenant who has remained lease compliant shall have the right to return – obviously geared to increase the return rate. Our research suggests that modifying the return criteria is just one of a number of strategies that might be considered.

Several implications for this policy and practice challenge emerge from our findings here. Despite the major physical and social changes taking place in these neighborhoods, there are residents who still feel a strong sense of connection to the place and to people who are still living in the area. In fact, if anything, the response by the residents in our sample to the uncertainty of the broader relocation process was to seek to remain connected to a familiar area of the city and connected with personal support networks. This suggests that there would be demand for more opportunities to remain in the local area if made available through strategies such as phased on-site relocation and temporary vouchers in nearby housing. Personal networks appear to play a key role for many residents in informing and influencing their move decisions, with several of our respondents having followed a friend or family member into the development. While considerable investment has been made in formal contracts with social service providers to find and recruit residents for the new developments (including, in some cases, professional "people-finder" companies), there may be a value in more creative use of personal networks – for example, finding ways to incentivize residents who have already moved into the new development to spread the word about the benefits of their move and to make an intentional effort to invite a broader circle of friends and family to view their new living conditions (see also Venkatesh 2002). To address the desire of potential residents to see and experience what living in the new development would be like,

property managers have held open houses and provided tours of model units. Perhaps there are ways of including current residents more fully in this process to help describe the benefits of life in a mixed-income development.

We gained several insights about residents' expectations and concerns regarding mixed-income developments. In addition to the physical revitalization and chance for a brand new unit, residents were attracted by the opportunity to live among a racially and socioeconomically diverse population. However, population diversity was not necessarily seen as having direct personal benefits but was thought to be indirectly beneficial through the anticipated improvements that would follow in the social and economic conditions of the area. Given this interest in broader improvements in the neighborhood, it may be worthwhile to disseminate more information about the types of social, economic, and physical improvement projects that are underway and planned, and how those improvements will benefit low-income families in the revitalizing neighborhood. The Choice Neighborhoods initiative places an emphasis on the concurrent revitalization of the broader neighborhood, including investments in economic development, schools, and transportation. Greater communication and engagement of public housing residents in these revitalization processes might also help generate interest in returning.

Respondents anticipated that there would be trade-offs from moving into mixed-income developments. Managing the responsibility of utility payments and adhering to the new rules and standards were the anticipated challenges most frequently mentioned. To the extent that there is support available for residents who may have difficulty transitioning to their new responsibilities to pay utilities, such as financial management advice, guidance on how to reduce utility bills, and early intervention with utility providers to arrange payment plans, that information should be well-disseminated to potential residents. Clarity is important, not only about the rules and expectations in the new development but also about how and by whom those rules are established, the consequences of a violation, and the extent to which there is room for discussion among residents about modifying rules and standards. In general, lack of information and changing policies and procedures created challenges for relocatees, and so accurate and readily available information is a premium for relocation efforts.

Finally, considerable time has passed since this cohort of residents was interviewed about their housing decisions and at least two major developments may be changing the nature of decision-making and reducing some of the resistance to a return to a mixed-income development. First, the economic recession has made life more unstable for residents using housing choice vouchers to rent in the private market, as a growing number of rental buildings that had been available to voucher users have been falling into foreclosure (Dobies 2008; Dobies and Halasz 2008; Illinois Assisted Housing Action Research Project 2010). Second, while the recession has delayed progress, the developments are now further along and it is easier for potential residents to get a sense of what the development will be like when it is fully complete. There is also much more experience among those residents who have moved in about what life is really like in a mixed-income development. As has been described elsewhere (Chaskin and Joseph 2010, forthcoming; Joseph 2008; Joseph and Chaskin 2010), this experience includes areas of high satisfaction as well as significant disappointments, so it is not clear whether word-of-mouth descriptions from current residents is primarily serving to attract or deter other residents. Indeed, beyond attending to strategies like those outlined above regarding information,

assistance, and marketing, facilitating return is likely to require addressing some of the complications of community dynamics that are emerging in the new mixed-income developments and that temper relocated public housing residents' experience of benefits with feelings of alienation, exclusion, and stigma.

Although it will be some time before conclusions can be drawn about the value to relocated public housing residents of living in a mixed-income development, it is very clear now that a lower proportion of original residents than intended is gaining access to this opportunity. In Chicago, as the remaining units are constructed and outreach to original residents continues, there should be a priority focus on understanding the perceptions, interests, and constraints among those residents who have not yet been permanently placed. More should be understood about how the current economic and housing conditions in the city are affecting residents' decision-making and whether the progress on constructing and populating the new developments might make it easier to attract those residents who can meet the site specific criteria.

Ending concentrated urban poverty is a worthy and necessary goal but creating pathways to the new opportunities being created has proven much more difficult than expected. In Chicago and in national public housing transformation initiatives such as HOPE VI and Choice Neighborhoods, even greater attention should be paid to how best to inform residents about their options, creatively using personal networks and informal channels as well as formal administrative means of communication. Designers and implementers of the relocation process must move well beyond aspirations of providing greater "choice" and "opportunity" to carefully analyze and address the numerous constraints encountered by relocatees as they consider their options.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported with funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. We are grateful to our research team led by Amy Khare and Sara Voelker that has included Naomi Bartz, Rachel Boyle, Moon Choi, Brenda Copley, James Crawford, Michael DiDomenico, Marnie Flores, Ranada Harrison, April Hirsh, Jung-Eun Kim, Danielle Raudenbush, and Florian Sichling. We thank four anonymous reviewers for their comments. We also want to thank the many individuals who have helped facilitate this research project including representatives of the Chicago Housing Authority, development staff at the study sites, community leaders, and most importantly, the relocated public housing residents who shared with us their experiences and contributed their insights.

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