Is the Grass Always Greener…?
Destination Characteristics and Former Public Housing Residents’ Views Six Months after Relocation

Georgia State University Urban Health Initiative*

August 10, 2011

“I like my new home…the carpets are new and there’s a screen on every window.”

Acknowledgements: Support for this study was provided by National Science Foundation (NSF) grant # SES-0852195. Other support was provided by University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research, the American Sociological Association Funds for the Advancement of the Discipline, and a GSU University Research Services and Administration Interdisciplinary Team Grant Award. Opinions reflect those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the grant-making organization. We thank graduate students Renee Alston, Angela Anderson, Amanda Dorrington, Alexa Goidel, Marcie Ham, Christopher Pell, Nia Reed, Brittney Terry, Chandra Ward, and G. Elton Wilson for their hard work and dedication to this project. We also thank all the undergraduate interns (too many to name) who have spent countless hours out in the field and behind the phones back at the office. Last, but not least, we thank all the residents who have made this study possible.

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Executive Summary

By early 2011, with the last public housing developments earmarked for demolition gone, Atlanta became the first city in the nation to eliminate traditional public housing. Initiatives like Atlanta’s are part of an ongoing national shift in low income housing policy, begun almost two decades ago, and designed to deconcentrate poverty. The underlying assumption is that poverty deconcentration will mitigate the assumed negative social and health consequences associated with public housing. In Atlanta, qualified residents were relocated with the help of a voucher (Housing Choice Voucher, formerly Section 8) subsidy to private market rental housing. The Georgia State University Urban Health Initiative has been following over 300 former public housing residents across four family communities and two senior high-rises which have since been demolished. We interviewed residents before they were relocated and then again six-months-to-a-year after relocation. This report provides some highlights from our six month post-move follow-up survey concerning destination neighborhood characteristics and residents’ views.

Destination Neighborhood Characteristics

- Residents have not moved very far from their previous public housing neighborhoods. The average distance moved is three miles. Almost 90 percent have remained within Atlanta’s city limits. There are 660 census tracts within the Metro-Atlanta region. Residents have moved to 88; 68 of which are within the city. Almost all the residents in our study have moved along a main public transportation route. Aside from being dependent on public transportation, residents typically moved along the major routes because of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority’s (MARTA) reduction in services.

- Destinations neighborhoods have, on average, 10 percent less poverty than the public housing neighborhoods, but the poverty level is still high (about 30 percent). While the extent of neighborhood poverty varies by the number of former public housing residents received, all receiving neighborhoods have proportionally more poverty than those that did not receive any public housing residents. Destination neighborhoods are also modestly safer in terms of non-violent and violent crime rates. However these neighborhoods are just as racially segregated as the public housing ones.

Residents’ Views

- Over 70 percent of the residents said that they moved to their first choice of new homes, and a little over 50 percent stated that they were satisfied with their new place. Reasons for dissatisfaction included not receiving a voucher, failed HUD inspections, and being farther away from their healthcare providers. Primary reasons for choosing their new place included being comfortable and familiar with the neighborhood, as well as convenience of location. Access to public transportation was key to moving decisions – 85 percent reported not owning a car or having access to one.

- About 80 percent indicated that their new home and neighborhood were improvements over public housing. Residents talked a lot about having updated appliances, more space, and being in a quiet neighborhood.

- Fear of crime decreased significantly among the families, but not among the seniors. However, among the families, there was little change in the specific fear of a violent attack.

- Residents reported that they continued to face challenges concerning financial security. While residents reported decreases in putting off purchasing food and other needed items, cutting meal sizes, and getting emergency food; they reported increases in borrowing money to pay bills, and experiencing mild-to-moderate financial strain.
Overview

In early 2007 the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) announced plans to demolish all remaining family public housing as well as two senior high rises. Qualified residents were relocated with a voucher subsidy to private market rental housing. By early 2011 the AHA had accomplished this goal, making Atlanta the first city in the nation to eliminate traditional public housing. Initiatives like Atlanta’s are part of an ongoing national shift in low income housing policy, begun almost two decades ago, and designed to deconcentrate poverty. The underlying but untested assumption is that poverty deconcentration will mitigate the presumed negative social and health consequences associated with public housing. But previous research has demonstrated that residents are often relocated into equally, or somewhat less, poor neighborhoods, which are just as racially segregated as public housing. At the same time, much of this research does not adequately take into account relocated residents views about their new homes and neighborhoods. This brief is based on a longitudinal study of public housing relocation in Atlanta that includes information on such views six months-to-a-year after residents were relocated.

Background

About six months after the AHA’s 2007 announcement, members of the Jurisdiction-Wide Public Housing Resident Advisory Board (RAB) met with us to discuss conducting a survey of residents’ views about relocation and how relocation ultimately impacts their lives and overall well-being. The Georgia State University (GSU) Urban Health Initiative was formed to conduct this study. Of the 12 public housing communities slated for demolition, five were almost vacant and one was inaccessible when we began developing the survey in early 2008. Thus, we targeted communities that would not begin relocation until September 2008. A sample of 382 public housing residents was collected from seven public housing communities (four family developments and three senior/disability high rises) in Atlanta. The four family developments were Bankhead Courts, Bowen Homes, Herndon Homes, and Hollywood Courts. The two relocating senior high rises were Palmer House and Roosevelt House. We also included Cosby Spear, a senior high-rise not slated demolition, in our sample so that we would have a non-relocating comparison community for our post-relocation survey. To supplement these data, we conducted a series of pre- and post-move focus groups, administered a semi-structured questionnaire on the first 200 residents to move, and gave 13 residents handheld tape recorders and cameras to document their relocation experience.

We conducted the baseline (pre-relocation) survey over the summer of 2008. Due to constraints beyond our control, we were unable to collect our full random sample and opened the study up to volunteers. Thus, our final sample consists of 223 randomly chosen respondents (50% response rate) and 159 non-randomly chosen respondents. While the random sample’s response rate is a limitation, we tested for differences between the random and the non-random portions of the sample on all variables included in the study, and found no significant differences. All respondents were age 18 or older, more than 90% were the leaseholder, and only one member per household participated. Sampling weights were created to adjust for the complex sampling design. We re-interviewed our respondents six-to-twelve months post-relocation from November 2009 to September 2010. The survey was essentially the same as the baseline in order to assess pre- and post-relocation change. As of September 2010, when we ended the six-month follow-up window, we had achieved an 87 percent response rate.

The baseline and post-relocation surveys covered multiple aspects of the residents’ lives while living in public housing and in their new homes. Many questions were adopted from prior public housing relocation studies for comparison purposes. Specifically we asked about current neighborhood, home and fear of crime characteristics, household composition, social support, transportation, demographic, income,
and other socio-economic issues. In addition, we included health questions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Study (BRFSS).

**Sample Demographics and Relocation Preferences**

Table 1 shows the population, household composition, public housing tenure, socioeconomic, and baseline moving preferences for our initial sample matched to our six-month post-move follow-up sample. Though we were unsuccessful in locating 13 percent of those who participated in the baseline survey, and another six percent passed away, the population characteristics between the two survey periods are very similar. For the purposes of the present report we do not include the residents from Cosby Spear, the non-relocating comparison site, in this table. The vast majority of our sample is Black (96 percent) and female (85 percent). Forty-six percent are between the ages of 18 and 44 years, another 39 percent between 45 and 64 years, and 15 percent 65 years or older. Almost three-quarters reported living in public housing for between two to eight years. Only five percent reported being married, and the average number of children under 18 in the household was two. Only 55 percent reported having a high school degree or GED, and the average monthly income is below $1,000, putting these households, regardless of size, well below the federally established poverty line.

**Table 1. Weighted Sample Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline (Pre-move)</th>
<th>Completed Baseline and 6-Month Post Move Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of cases weighted</td>
<td>311+</td>
<td>248++ (80 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>263 (85 %)</td>
<td>216 (87 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>298 (96 %)</td>
<td>238 (96 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 18–44</td>
<td>142 (46 %)</td>
<td>113 (46 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 45–64</td>
<td>122 (39%)</td>
<td>101(40 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 65 +</td>
<td>47 (15 %)</td>
<td>34 (14 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure in Public housing: 2 years or less</td>
<td>106 (33 %)</td>
<td>84 (34 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure, 2–4 years</td>
<td>58 (19 %)</td>
<td>45 (18 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure, 4–8 years</td>
<td>66 (21 %)</td>
<td>57 (23 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure, 8 or more years</td>
<td>81 (26 %)</td>
<td>62 (25 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have high school degree or GED</td>
<td>170 (55 %)</td>
<td>136 (55 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15 (5 %)</td>
<td>12 (5 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Income</td>
<td>$832.41</td>
<td>$832.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to Fix up Projects than Relocate</td>
<td>121 (40 %)</td>
<td>94 (39 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to Move</td>
<td>171 (57 %)</td>
<td>140 (58 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*+Does not include the non-relocating control group.
++24 respondents died prior to the six-month interview giving us an 87 % response rate based on eligibility.

When asked during baseline whether they would prefer to have their public housing homes fixed up rather than relocate, 40 percent said they preferred this option. At the same time, 57 percent stated that they wanted to move and viewed relocation as a positive opportunity. It should be noted that these preferences varied by age, with the older residents (regardless of being in a family community or a senior high rise) preferring that their public housing homes be fixed up.
Destination Neighborhood Characteristics

“How did I find my new place? I just caught the bus and looked in the rent book.”

While the overall objective of demolishing public housing developments is to deconcentrate poverty, questions remain as to whether or not this can be achieved. It is possible that defacto poverty reconcentration may result. Findings from our six-month post-move survey reveal that of the 660 census tracts in the Metro-Atlanta region, former public housing residents moved to only 88, with 68 within the city limits. This is suggestive of a reconcentrating destination pattern rather than one of dispersion.

Map 1 shows the census tracts where the residents in our study have moved. About 88 percent of the residents in our sample received a voucher, although there is no difference between the destination neighborhood characteristics for voucher holders and non-voucher holders. Based on the relocated residents’ distribution across census tracts we categorized them by (1) non-receiving; (2) low receiving (1 to 4 households); (3) medium receiving (5-12); and (4) high receiving (more than 12). There is evidence of geographic clustering especially on the southwest and southeast sides of the city. About 10 percent moved outside the city limits and those who did typically relocated to tracts adjacent to the city boundaries with relatively similar neighborhood characteristics to the destinations within the city. The average moved distance is only three miles. Thus, the vast majority are not far from their former public housing locations.
There are several structural factors driving these relocation patterns. When asked why they chose the area that they moved to, most talked about being familiar with the neighborhood and ease of access to the places they needed to get to on a daily basis. Of particular concern among the residents was access to public transportation. Over 85 percent reported that they did not own a car or have access to one. Public transportation in the Atlanta region is sparse. In many suburban areas it is non-existent. Within the city and in adjacent municipalities public transportation is available (although less so to the north). This includes north-south and east-west train lines and connecting bus routes. Map Two shows the proximity of residents’ destinations to the public transportation lines. The map clearly shows that almost all the residents are on, or very close to, a bus line; and in some cases close to one of the train lines.

![Map 2](image)

Despite this consistent decision-making framework, the characteristics of the varying levels of receiving census tracts differ. In addition, on average all the receiving tracts differ substantially from the non-receiving tracts. Table 2 shows the city-wide population, socioeconomic, and crime characteristics compared to the averages for the receiving tracts, non-receiving and public housing tracts. Population and socioeconomic characteristics are taken from the recently released American Community Survey (ACS) 2005-2009 estimates. The crime statistics come from the Atlanta Police Department (APD) 2009 Crime Incident Reports.

### Table 2. Average Characteristics of Destination Census Tracts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>City-Wide</th>
<th>Non-Receiving</th>
<th>Low Receiving</th>
<th>Medium Receiving</th>
<th>High Receiving</th>
<th>Public Housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Violent Crime Rate</td>
<td>96.97</td>
<td>106.22</td>
<td>95.83</td>
<td>67.88</td>
<td>94.69</td>
<td>97.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Crime Rate</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>18.96</td>
<td>23.79</td>
<td>16.96</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>26.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>4511</td>
<td>4467</td>
<td>3841</td>
<td>6115</td>
<td>5278</td>
<td>3001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Non-Hispanic Black</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>46.00</td>
<td>71.10</td>
<td>75.14</td>
<td>95.21</td>
<td>73.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>31.00</td>
<td>44.00</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>16.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hispanic</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>6.01</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Vacancy</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>24.08</td>
<td>21.27</td>
<td>25.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Rental Household</td>
<td>41.24</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>43.50</td>
<td>39.02</td>
<td>61.58</td>
<td>54.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Homeowner Household</td>
<td>37.00</td>
<td>41.46</td>
<td>32.00</td>
<td>37.00</td>
<td>17.14</td>
<td>21.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Poverty</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>33.54</td>
<td>26.10</td>
<td>29.00</td>
<td>41.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Census Tracts</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In terms of racial composition, low and medium receiving, as well as public housing census tracts range from 71 to 75 percent Black. High receiving ones are, on average, 95 percent Black. In contrast, non-
receiving tracts are 46 percent Black and the citywide percent is 51. Thus, a clear pattern of racial segregation is apparent: former public housing residents are not moving to more racially-integrated neighborhoods and, in fact, for those moving to high receiving tracts, the level of racial segregation is much higher than in the public housing census tracts.

Non-receiving neighborhoods have the lowest vacancy and renter household percentages, but across the other categories there is not much difference, with the exception of the high receiving tracts which have about 20 percent more rental housing. Likewise, homeownership percentages are lower across all levels of receivership and public housing than non-receiving tracts, with high receiving at 17.14 percent being the lowest. Poverty percentages across all receiving and public housing tracts are higher than the city-wide and non-receiving ones. Specifically while the city-wide rate is 21 percent, and non-receiving 25 percent, the percent for the low receiving tracts is 33.5, for medium receiving 26, and for high receiving 29. This translates into a 30 percent poverty average across all three levels of receivership. At the same time this represents between a 7.5 and 12 percent decrease compared to the public housing tracts. Similar to previous studies, our findings reveal that residents are moving to neighborhoods with less poverty than public housing. However, the widely accepted definition of low poverty neighborhoods is 20 percent or less. All levels of receivership neighborhoods in our study exceed this threshold by between 6 and 13.5 percent. Thus, if the purpose of deconcentrating poverty is to allow people in very poor neighborhoods to move to lower poverty places with greater access to opportunities for upward mobility, then it is not clear from our findings whether that goal has been accomplished. In other words, does moving to a neighborhood with about 10 percent less poverty afford residents better opportunities for economic viability, as well as overall improvements in life quality?

Crime trends (shown in Table 2) indicate an alternative arrangement of social organization – and perhaps have implications for quality of life improvements, particularly for those who relocated to medium receiving neighborhoods. Specifically, the non-violent crime rate per 1000 is highest (106.22) in the non-receiving tracts and lowest in the medium receiving ones (68); while city-wide, low and high receiving rates are almost equivalent (95 to 96), public housing is slightly higher at almost 98. Similarly, the violent crime rate is lowest (17) in the medium receiving neighborhoods even compared to the citywide rate (21) and the non-receiving one (19). Low receiving neighborhoods have a rate of 24 and high, a rate of 26. The rate in the public housing tracts is the highest at 27. These trends suggest that public housing residents in low and high receiving tracts are in somewhat safer places than public housing. But those in medium receiving census tracts are in neighborhoods that, on average, have the lowest non-violent and violent crime rates in the city despite a relatively high level of disadvantage. It may be that medium receiving tracts have both informal and institutional supports in place that mitigate crime and that other areas do not.

Taken together, findings indicate that while residents are moving to neighborhoods with modestly less crime and poverty, these neighborhoods are clearly not low poverty. In fact, they are still poor and racially segregated -- just less poor than public housing neighborhoods. Contrary to the assumption which undergirds poverty deconcentration, these destination neighborhoods are unlikely to provide improved access to upwardly-mobile job and education opportunities. What complicates this further is the now infamous Atlanta public school cheating scandal. In fact, many of the schools implicated are located in the vicinity of the destination neighborhoods. This has raised concerns among residents with children.
Resident Views of Post-Move Housing Quality

“I like it good. Well I have a back porch and enjoy myself the sunshine and I get to have plants to take care of.”

With the exception of the substantially lower crimes rates in the medium receiving census tracts, our neighborhood level analysis mirrors that of the previous research. Specifically, public housing residents are relocating to close-by neighborhoods that are somewhat less poor and somewhat safer than the public housing ones. At the same time the destination neighborhoods are just as racially segregated.

But what do the residents think of their new homes and neighborhoods? Resident views are typically left out of policy decisions even though they are the ones directly affected. We asked residents about what they thought of their new homes and neighborhoods. Figure 1 shows the percentages of residents who were able to move to their first choice, as well as the percentage who said they liked their new place.

**Figure 1. Choice and Views of New Place**

Just over 70 percent of both family and senior residents stated that they were able to move to their first choice. This finding is important, as there have been many concerns expressed in policy and advocacy circles about the constraints of moving with a voucher. Specifically, because private market landlords are not required to lease to voucher holders, concerns have been raised that resident choices may be limited. While this varies from city to city based on how tight the private rental market is, in the case of Atlanta, where rental housing is readily available, residents were able to find places quite easily. However, it should be noted that the poor economy probably contributed to more landlords being willing to take voucher tenants. It is unclear how this may change as the economy improves. Since landlords are only required to sign a one-year lease, it is possible that landlords could opt-out of voucher leases if there is more demand from market-rate renters.
About half of both families and seniors indicated that they liked their new place. Of those who expressed various levels of dissatisfaction, reasons included not qualifying for a voucher subsidy, failed HUD inspections (which meant multiple moves), and, for those with very poor functional health, the added burden of having to travel farther to get to routine medical care.

We also asked residents about their main reason for choosing their new place. Figure 2 shows these reasons.

![Figure 2. Main Reason for Choosing Place](image)

For families the primary reasons included liking (feeling comfortable) with the neighborhoods and convenience of location. For seniors the neighborhood was not as important as convenience of location, and moving to the destination for health reasons. However, for families and seniors, convenience of location was very important primarily because of their dependence on public transportation. Additionally, our findings show that by-and-large seniors have moved to places from which they can get to their healthcare providers quickly and easily.

While about 50 percent of the families and seniors stated that they liked their new place (see Figure 1), far more indicated that the quality of their new homes were a big improvement over public housing. Figure 3 illustrates these findings.

![Figure 3. Perceptions of Housing Quality](image)

Prior to relocation a little less than 10 percent of families and about 25 percent of seniors stated that their public housing homes were in excellent condition. Another 30 percent of families and 40 percent of seniors said their public housing homes were in good condition. About 70 percent of seniors and almost 60 percent of families said pests were a problem in their public housing homes. The most widely complained about pest was the cockroach, and in fact, Roosevelt House, one of the senior high-rises, had...
a serious infestation. About 40 percent of the families also indicated that broken furnaces were a problem. Post-relocation we see improvements in both family and senior residents’ views across all categories. A little over 80 percent said that their relocated home was in good or excellent condition. In addition, complaints about the presence of pests decreased by about 30 percent, and among families, complaints about broken furnaces fell to nine percent.

Clearly, at six months post-move residents viewed their new homes as an improvement over their public housing ones. Yet, it is important to situate these findings within the context of what the housing conditions were like in public housing. While these buildings had structural integrity with adequate electricity and plumbing, they had not been updated in decades. In fact, these buildings had no central air (which most residences in the south have had for two decades now). Plus, individual units had no dishwashers, washing machines, or clothes dryers. In addition, stoves and refrigerators hadn’t been replaced since the 1970s, and the carpeting had aged. It was also not uncommon for the windows to be missing screens. Thus, it is not surprising that residents would view their relocated homes as an improvement, as most have the updated amenities that public housing lacked. Nevertheless, one important question, which unfortunately can never be answered, is what the residents would have thought of their relocated homes had public housing been equipped with updated features.

**Neighborhood Satisfaction and Fear of Crime**

"I like my new neighborhood. It’s quiet...boring quiet."

Families are more satisfied with their new neighborhoods than seniors. However, both view their new neighborhoods with greater satisfaction than their public housing ones. Figure 4 on the next page illustrates these increases. Specifically, while residing in public housing only 20 percent of families indicated that they were satisfied with their neighborhoods. Post-relocation this percentage jumped to 73, representing an increase in satisfaction of just over 50 percent. On the other hand, 40 percent of seniors were satisfied with their public housing homes versus 50 percent post-relocation, indicating an increase in satisfaction of 10 percent. One of the reasons for these varying views between families and seniors is that senior public housing was centrally-located in neighborhoods that were not distinguished by concentrated poverty or racial segregation. In fact, the location of this housing bordered gentrifying areas, as well as Georgia Institute of Technology, and a major public transportation train station. This housing was also co-located with Centennial Place, the first public housing community to be redeveloped in the mid-1990s to house the 1996 Olympic village. On the other hand, family public housing was typically located farther out where residents had to take buses to get to the nearest train station. These neighborhoods were characterized by concentrated poverty, racial segregation, and a fair amount of crime.
Figure 4. Neighborhood Satisfaction and Fear of Crime

Change in Neighborhood Satisfaction and Fear of Crime Pre and Post Relocation

With the exception of violent attacks, fear of crime indicators (Figure 4) indicate a similar trajectory with seniors expressing less fear pre-relocation and little change in these perceptions after they moved. Families expressed the greatest decreases in fear of crime. While 82 percent agreed that there was too much crime in their public housing neighborhood, after relocation only 25 percent did. Likewise, 62 percent agreed that police were not available when needed prior to relocation, but post-relocation 20 percent did.

For the families, fear of burglary, and, in particular, fear of violent attacks, tells a different story. First, fear of burglary decreases less than the two previous indicators – from about 60 to 40 percent. More pronounced are the findings about violent attacks. Specifically, prior to relocation 65 percent of family residents expressed concerns about violent attacks. Post-relocation this percentage only decreases by five percent.
percent. What this implies is that, even though overall perceptions about crime have been reduced post-relocation, there are still similar fears about violent crime.

“I felt safer at Bowen – the dope boys rob old ladies out here. But I don’t want to go back.”

Financial Security

“Our baseline findings indicated that, in general, public housing residents got by with just enough money to take care of needed expenses from month-to-month. Figure 5 on the next page provides information comparing pre to post relocation financial security.”
Findings present somewhat of a mixed picture. In terms of borrowing money to pay bills, seniors experienced a slight drop from about 27 percent to 19 percent. On the other hand, families experienced an increase from 41 to 60 percent. At the same time, both families and seniors experienced decreases in putting off buying something needed, food running out, cutting size of meals, getting emergency food, paying rent late, and severe financial strain. Nonetheless, both families and seniors also indicated increases in mild-to-moderate financial strain. The take home message here is that residents continue to face challenges in terms of financial security.

**Conclusion**

Overall, our findings reveal modest but positive improvements for former public housing residents. However, the picture is nuanced and complex, and thus continues to raise questions about the on-the-ground reality for relocated residents. While residents have ended up in poor nearby neighborhoods that are just as racially segregated as public housing, the majority view their new homes and neighborhoods as an improvement over public housing. At the same time, specific categories of fear of crime such as burglary and violent attacks continue to be of great concern among the family residents. In sum, self reports indicate that by-and-large residents perceive that they are in better homes and neighborhoods, despite the objective reality that destination neighborhoods have multiple indicators of disadvantage.

So, while it is evident that there are slight improvements concerning destination neighborhood characteristics, and bigger improvements in terms of how the residents view the quality of their new homes and neighborhoods, the overall bottom line does not match the ideal scenario put forth by the poverty deconcentration imperative. That isn’t to say that those in policy circles should ignore these modest improvements – for one thing it means that those residents who qualified for vouchers are, in a numbers of ways, better off than when they were in public housing. However, it should be noted that our study does not adequately capture the destination fates of those who did not quality for a voucher. Of the few in our study that did not, the residential outcomes are not positive – these residents report staying with relatives, extended stay hotels, and illegal boarding houses. And for those who are paying market rate for an apartment, they indicate running out of money every month and going hungry. As one resident who did not receive a voucher stated:

"How’d you know I was hungry?! Are these Chicago dogs? Yeh, I’m going to Turner Field tonight for my Xmas dinner. They give you plates to take home. For Thanksgiving I took home six plates. You have to come see my apartment – it’s nice. I don’t have much there now – I sleep on the floor. But I got some blankets from some local churches. I got some plates and forks from the Family Dollar Store. I got this winter coat from..."
one of the churches – do you like it? The Legal Aid worker is trying to help me get a voucher. I’ve never been this poor in my life.”

The neighborhoods residents are moving to may still be disadvantaged and segregated, but they don’t look or feel like “the projects”. Thus, the objective realities of destination neighborhood conditions as defined by the census data do not necessarily match how the relocated residents view and experience them. There is a relativity here that must be acknowledged. Indeed, it is far too easy for those of us who have never lived in public housing to interpret the modest improvements in destination neighborhood characteristics gleaned from the Census as little change for the better. But clearly, from what the residents are saying there is some change for the better.

Nonetheless, such improvements need to be understood within the realities of living in abject poverty. For example, there is the “I like it, it’s ok…uuh…it’ll do” effect, which speaks directly to the agency and adaptability of managing daily life with very little financial resources -- in other words, the capability of making do. An alternative way of looking at this is the “God gave me another day” effect. Specifically that the day-to-day challenges of being poor mean a greater awareness of mortality and feeling lucky just to get through another day.

The implications of our findings for former public housing residents in the long term are unclear. For one thing, there is the unanswered question of how stable voucher rental housing is – i.e. prevalence of failed HUD inspections and landlords opting out of voucher leasing on a year-to-year basis. As of the writing of this report, we had just begun the 24-month post-move interviews (also funded by NSF). So far we know that about 20 percent of our sample has moved more than once. However, we will not have the full picture of residential moves until we complete the 24-month post-move interviews. This interview includes a number of additional questions about landlords, HUD inspections, and how residents’ views of their new homes and neighborhoods may have changed since our six month post-move interviews. Hopefully this next wave of data collection will yield new information about how former public housing residents are faring in the longer term.

“I got nothing to complain about, God gave me another day.”
**How to you like your new place so far?**

“I love it. It’s spacious, convenient and quiet. It has a washer machine downstairs but it is for everyone in the building to use. The neighborhood is near transit and it is walking distance to a shopping area and it is near H E Holmes train station. Well, my new place is renovated… they changed the mail boxes and the swimming pools and they put appliances and new carpet and it is wall-to-wall. I am in and out of the hospital but where I am I do not have any problems and if I stay here long enough I will be happy.”

“I really don’t like it. They said it was one thing and it was something else. (Can you give me an example?) I really don’t want to get into it here. They don’t complete work orders like they say. I really don’t want to get into it here. (How is transportation?) Transportation is really good.”

“So far so good; like the location because it’s located in the Midtown area between Midtown and Buckhead area, and within walking distance from train station and has a Publix and Target up the street and several restaurants.”

“I like it.”

“So far it’s nice. I don't have any problems. I love my master bathroom and laundry area. I can't live without my laundry area…I have only had one hardship so far. I recently had a high water bill. The people in the housing authority don’t really care. They only care about paying their portion of the rent and that’s it. There was no one to really talk to and they threatened to take my voucher. The bill was $750. They told us to change bills into our name but I wish they would have told us more, because in apartments you don’t have to pay a water bill. It all worked out in the end though.”

“Loving it. It's spacious and clean, has a balcony and pool.”

“I really like my place…but these Caucasians, they don't want to talk to you. They don't like Black people. I mean a few do, but most don’t. I mean they just turn their heads when you try and talk. But I like my place, it's quiet and nice. I lost weight because there’s a swimming pool I used all summer. I really don’t want to move…I’m comfortable in my apartment”

“I would rather be back in Midtown. The community is full of nosy people who tell lies and have put me in this bad situation. I was accused of smoking marijuana and was threatened with losing my voucher opportunity. I believe that the reason this happened is I got a two-bedroom apartment and the owner wanted to put a second person in to make more rent money and therefore made stuff up about me. I stick to myself because of this. There is a cemetery across the street and I spend most of my time in there. The neighborhood is safe; there are always police around. There is a grocery store within a mile that I can get to in my wheelchair but there are lots of cracks in the pavement and it can be hard and scary that I might turn over. I would rather be back in Midtown. I don't know how to safely get my wheelchair on the bus here.”

“It is great so far but I plan to move again in the next month or two to find a bigger place.”