

**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Policy Development and Research**



**Families in Transition:
A Qualitative Analysis of the MTO Experience**

Final Report

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**Families in Transition:
A Qualitative Analysis of the MTO Experience**

Final Report

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Preface

This report looks at the detailed experiences of 97 MTO participants. Those experiences may or may not be representative of the overall impacts of the MTO program. Nonetheless, the selected families' experiences do offer an interesting detailed look into how the MTO program affected a few of the families who signed up to participate.

The qualitative analysis found in this report was intended to inform both the design of the quantitative data collection and help explain the outcomes from the quantitative analysis. At the time of this writing, data were still being collected for the quantitative report. The quantitative report will use data from interviews with nearly the entire MTO population (more than 9,000 interviews), administrative data on earnings, assisted housing, welfare, and arrest, and direct academic testing of children. With those data, analysts will be able to provide robust estimates of outcomes by directly comparing the treatment groups to the control group. HUD plans to release the quantitative report in the first quarter of 2003.

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This qualitative examination of MTO families' experiences was a large and complex project. Many people from both The Urban Institute and Abt Associates have made significant contributions to its completion. Special credit should be given to the outstanding field work team members, who conducted complex interviews in a variety of settings, and even dangerous conditions. In addition to the authors of this report, Jenny Berrien, Ricardo Sanchez, and Alina Perez-Smith (from Abt Associates) and Robin Smith, Carla Herbig, Daryl Dyer, Claudia Aranda, and Diane Levy (from The Urban Institute) all conducted interviews for this project.

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Finally, we wish to thank the adults and children in the *Moving to Opportunity Program* who so generously shared their stories with us.

The contents of this report are the views of the contractor and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development or the U.S. Government.

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Executive Summary

The Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing Demonstration Program (MTO) provides a unique opportunity to test the premise that changing an individual's neighborhood environment can change his or her life chances. Further, it allows us to test our theories on *which* mediating factors in an individual's neighborhood may lead to such changes.

The MTO demonstration provided housing subsidies (vouchers) to public housing families, to assist them in moving out of extremely poor neighborhoods. One group of program participants received additional help so they could move to areas with much less poverty.

This report is part of the MTO interim evaluation. It is based on in-depth interviews conducted in early 2001 with adults and children in each of the five cities where MTO operated. These interviews were designed to expand on the main evaluation design, exploring in more depth the participants' experiences with MTO and the nature of the mediating factors that can influence outcomes for participants. In each city, we conducted approximately 12 pairs of interviews with adults and children. Some families were living in private housing in low-poverty neighborhoods, others in private housing in moderate-poverty neighborhoods, and some in their original public housing developments.

This qualitative research can make three broad contributions to the overall evaluation of MTO. First, the interviews help us understand the complexity of participants' lives and the variations in their experiences since joining MTO. Second, these contextualized examples suggest hypotheses to test using the larger-scale quantitative data being collected for the evaluation. Finally, these data enrich the overall evaluation, allowing us to tell a more comprehensive story of how this program has affected participants' lives.

Purpose of the Qualitative Research

The main hypothesis underlying the MTO program and evaluation is that relocation of families to low-poverty neighborhoods will lead to improved well being for adults and children. The evaluation is collecting evidence on possible MTO impacts in six domains:

- housing mobility and assistance;
- adult education, employment, and earnings;
- household income and cash assistance;
- adult, youth, and child physical and mental health;
- youth and child social well-being, including delinquency and risky behavior; and

- youth and child educational performance.

The interim evaluation is also designed to contribute to our knowledge about the mechanisms by which the neighborhood environment affects the futures of resident adults and children. The qualitative component of this research had four main goals:

- to put faces on the families in MTO, helping us to understand what it has been like for them to experience this program;
- to help enrich our understanding of how neighborhood affects families and help illuminate the mechanisms that underlie such effects;
- to contribute to the final survey design for the interim evaluation; and
- to assist in the interpretation of the quantitative findings from the analysis of the survey and administrative data.

These qualitative data do not permit a direct analysis of program effects, because of the qualitative sample design and the small sample size. The survey and administrative data being collected for the evaluation will be the basis for findings about program effects, since they will allow for statistical tests of neighborhood effects on adults and children. Still, the researchers analyzing those data can draw on information from these in-depth interviews for developing hypotheses to explain significant findings.

MTO Background

The Moving to Opportunity demonstration was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and was conducted in five cities—Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York—between 1994 and 1998. Eligible applicant families (very low-income residents of high-poverty public housing developments) were randomly assigned to one of three groups. The **MTO experimental group** received Section 8 certificates or vouchers that could be used only in census tracts with 1990 poverty rates below 10 percent. In each city, a nonprofit organization (NPO) under contract to the local public housing authority (PHA) provided mobility counseling to the MTO experimental group families to help them locate and lease suitable housing in a low-poverty area. Families were required to remain in these locations for at least one year. The **Section 8 comparison group** received regular Section 8 certificates or vouchers, which could be used anywhere; these families did not receive any mobility counseling. The **in-place control group** received no certificates or vouchers but continued to receive project-based housing assistance. Most of the households that moved as part of MTO received their vouchers four to seven years ago. Some of the households have been in the same neighborhoods and housing units the entire time, while others have made one or more subsequent moves.

The MTO Interim Evaluation

A team of researchers from Abt Associates, the National Bureau of Economic Research, and The Urban Institute is conducting the Interim Evaluation of the MTO program for HUD, examining what kinds of effects the program has had on the lives of these families and investigating what types of neighborhood factors have been important to them.

The overall interim evaluation has several components, including: a survey of the heads of household; a survey of children 8-11; a survey of youth 12-19; educational tests with children and youth ages 5-19; and in-depth interviews with a small sample of households. The interim evaluation involves the first attempt since MTO program entry to interview sample members about a broad range of topics, using common instruments across all sites. HUD expects to conduct the final evaluation data collection in 2005 or 2006, which will be 8 to 11 years after program entry for the families.

Qualitative Research Methods

The qualitative research uses in-depth interviews with adults and youth to explore MTO participants' experiences. The interviews may vary in the degree of structure and the amount of latitude respondents have in answering questions. But they are always less structured than survey interviews, allowing for more detailed probing and freer exploration of the research topics. In-depth interviews allow respondents to tell their own stories, providing data on their opinions, experiences, and perceptions and generating individual stories that can illuminate quantitative findings.

The design for the MTO qualitative study called for talking with two respondents in most of the sampled families—the head of the household and a youth between the ages of 12 and 17. In households with only young children (under 12), we interviewed just the adult. The interviews with the adults lasted between one and two hours, while the interviews with the youth generally lasted about 45 minutes. Pairs of trained interviewers went to each household to conduct the interviews. Each interviewer used a set of standard topic guides to guide respondents through the conversation. In addition, each team completed a Neighborhood Assessment, a Post-Interview Summary Form, and a Post-Interview Checklist and Respondent Demeanor Form. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Qualitative Sample Design. To sample participant families for the qualitative interviews, we identified four specific groups within the interim evaluation sample:

- ***MTO Experimental Group Movers in Low-Poverty Areas*** - MTO experimental group mover households currently in low-poverty neighborhoods (less than 10 percent poverty in 1990 according to census tract data).
- ***MTO Experimental Group Movers in Higher-Poverty Areas*** - MTO experimental group households that originally moved to low-poverty areas but are now living in areas with poverty rates greater than 10 percent.

- **Section 8 Comparison Group Movers** – Families assigned to the Section 8 comparison group who moved during the demonstration, regardless of their current neighborhood poverty rate.
- **In-Place Control Group** - In-Place control households still living in their original public housing developments.

Note that these four sampling strata do not cover the full MTO population. They exclude non-movers in the MTO experimental and the Section 8 comparison groups, as well as in-place control group families who have moved from their original developments (or whose developments have been transformed through the HOPE VI program). In addition, we excluded families who had lived in their current neighborhoods for less than six months and families with no children under 18 at the time of the interviews.

Families were sampled from each of the above four groups in each city. In the majority of households, we interviewed the adult head of household and one youth (between the ages of 12 and 17). However, in order to obtain information about families with younger children, we also included one family in each sampling stratum that only had children under 12, completing only one adult interview for that household. Exhibit ES-1 shows the final qualitative sample by stratum.

**Exhibit ES-1
Completed In-depth Interview Totals**

	Adults	Children
MTO Experimental Group Movers in Low-Poverty Areas	21	15
MTO Experimental Group Movers in Higher-Poverty Areas	9	6
Section 8 Comparison Group Movers	19	14
In-Place Control Group	9	4
Total:	58	39

Qualitative Analysis. The in-depth interviews were transcribed into basic text files, then entered into NUD*IST,¹ a software application for qualitative data management and analysis. A team of five researchers read the transcripts and coded them for relevant themes and issues. The codes consisted of major themes identified prior to analysis (e.g., housing quality, interactions with neighbors) and themes that emerged from summaries of field work (e.g., location of schools). The coded transcripts were then sorted, and the output for key themes for each of the hypothesized mediating factors was analyzed, with researchers comparing responses across sites and the four sample strata.

¹ NUD*IST stands for Non-numerical Unstructured Data * Indexing Searching and Theorizing.

Findings from the Qualitative Research

The analysis of these qualitative interviews can help to enrich our understanding of the possible pathways of important mediators that may lead to particular outcomes. These pathways suggested by the qualitative research can be tested with the quantitative data from the interim evaluation survey. We have included a few quotes from respondents here to provide a sense of how MTO families perceive the changes in their lives since program enrollment. The full report contains many more comments that illustrate the broad range of perspectives on the MTO experience.

Physical Environment (Housing and Neighborhood)

Like the findings of the early, single-site studies of MTO,² the results of this research indicate that MTO movers (whether in the experimental group or the Section 8 comparison group) have experienced significant changes in their physical environments as a result of leaving public housing. In general, respondents reported living in better housing in dramatically safer neighborhoods. These interviews clearly indicate that most respondents perceive increased safety as the major benefit of their moves.

Lola, an experimental group mover in Baltimore, talked about the differences between her public housing development and her current neighborhood.³

[It's] totally different. It's a totally different neighborhood because there is no drug activity, no kids hanging on the corner, no kids fighting each other. It's totally different from the city. It's somewhere you can call home. You can just sit down and be comfortable and have no worries at all. (1A146)

Many respondents report living in housing that is substantially better than where they lived when they were in public housing. Those who have found good landlords and decent housing in safer neighborhoods may experience significant mental and physical health benefits as a result of reduced stress and improved physical conditions.

However, our results also point to some of the challenges that face these families in the private market and that may diminish the potential benefits of living in lower-poverty communities. All of these factors can lead to housing instability, which may have repercussions for families' overall well-being. These challenges include:

- Rising rent and utility costs, which make it difficult for families to continue to afford housing in better neighborhoods and sometimes prompt moves back to lower-cost units in higher-poverty neighborhoods;

² See Katz, Kling, and Liebman (2001); Hanratty, McLanahan, and Petit (1998); Ludwig, Duncan, and Hirschfield (1999); Ludwig, Duncan, and Pinkston (1999); Rosenbaum, Harris, and Denton (1999).

³ All respondent names used in this report are pseudonyms.

- Tight rental markets that sometimes lead to substantial rent increases and booming housing markets that encourage individual landlords to consider selling their properties; and
- Renting from small landlords, which requires adjustments on the part of tenants. While some tenants have formed good relationships, others have had personal conflicts. In addition, small landlords vary considerably in their responsiveness to maintenance problems.

For example, Olivia, a respondent from Boston who had moved back to a higher-poverty area, has experienced problems with maintenance and with rent increases. She said her current unit had many problems, but her landlord still had recently raised her rent:

...[H]e high. He raised the rent from, from, What were we paying? Nine hundred, and then he raised it to a thousand three hundred. I don't think it's worth it. He's not keeping it up, either. (2A267)

Further, despite perceiving clear and important benefits, movers in the experimental group also reported some disadvantages to their new communities. Children sometimes complained of being bored, of missing having easy access to playmates and free recreational facilities. A number of adults talked about the lack of convenience, and some adults and children complained about lack of transportation. However, these movers generally felt that the gains in safety outweighed these disadvantages.

Social Environment

A central hypothesis of the MTO demonstration is that participants would benefit from forming new connections in low-poverty neighborhoods. In these communities, working neighbors would provide role models for adults and children and would enforce norms of acceptable social behavior. The qualitative interviews offer some support for this hypothesis: movers in both the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups often commented on their new neighbors' positive behaviors, especially in contrast to the behavior of their neighbors in public housing. Our data also highlight the complexity of MTO families' social worlds, and the advantages and potential risks of maintaining close ties to their pre-existing social networks.

- Experimental group movers were particularly likely to comment on the differences between the social world in their new neighborhoods and their public housing communities.
- Movers in both the experimental and Section 8 comparison groups talked positively about their new neighbors, often citing the contrast to the uncivil—and sometimes criminal—behaviors of their neighbors in public housing.

Jordan, a 16-year-old boy living in a suburban community near Baltimore, commented at length on how much better he liked his current neighbors than the residents of his former public housing development:

Well, the people here, you'll probably get to like them. It's a lot of good, friendly people here. The neighbors are real good. When we first moved here, they helped us move and kept in good contact with us....People at Murphy Homes are probably more rude, probably because of the drug activity, people would come up, ask you questions about where to find drugs at, so people would get real antsy when you'd be around them, and too close to them...Around here, people are not really used to that, so you can really talk to someone, ask them a question, they'll help you out, no problem. (1C172)

- To date, relatively few movers have formed deep connections in their new communities. Some simply preferred to keep to themselves, while others reported that they had little opportunity for interaction because their neighbors work and are gone during the day.
- Racial, language, and cultural barriers sometimes prevent respondents from forming relationships, and they often leave them feeling isolated and lonely. Isolation is more of a problem for adults than youth; most youth have made at least some connections in their new communities.
- Moving to low-poverty areas had some impact on respondents social networks: experimental group movers commented on the distance that prevented them from seeing family and friends, while Section 8 comparison group movers were more likely to be living near family and friends. But many respondents in both groups still maintained close ties to friends and family from their former communities.

Maria from Boston, who spoke little English, talked about feeling isolated in her new neighborhood. She said that she liked her neighbors but could not communicate with them:

My neighbors here are really good...the only thing is that I don't speak much English so I can't communicate as much with them. But we greet each other...

Maria went on to say that, even though her new neighbors were very nice, in this respect she felt she was better off in her public housing development, Mission Hill:

In terms of knowing people, I think I was better off there because there were a lot of Hispanics there. If you didn't know anyone....you would meet people. You talk to your neighbors about anything that was going on...anything that you needed. We all spoke the same language. But since I don't speak English that well, I can't do that with the people here. Sometimes I get the kids to ask the neighbors for things for me. (1A251)

Ongoing connections to their public housing communities clearly have benefits for MTO families, providing them with support and assistance in times of need. However, such close ties may reduce

families' motivation to seek new friendships in their current neighborhoods. They may also reduce exposure to new peer groups for children. At worst, they may expose youth to danger and death.

Educational Opportunities for Children

One of the major hypothesized benefits for MTO families moving from distressed public housing is that they will experience gains in the quality of their children's education and school environments. In theory, over time, these gains will lead to improvements in educational outcomes for the children. The qualitative findings suggest some limited support for this model. Some families in the sample, particularly those who moved to suburban school districts, commented on improved school environments and their children's better school performance and behavior.

Veronica and Roberta, a mother and 15-year-old daughter from Los Angeles, spoke about how much they liked the schools in their low-poverty neighborhood. Veronica approved of the fact that the teachers were "vigilant" about the children and let her know when there were problems. She also said she liked the fact that the schools were racially diverse. Roberta also said she liked the teachers at her middle school and talked about the difference in safety:

I would say Louise Archer is the best school I ever been to because they have no uniforms, we have a choice to be dressed....it's not [as much fun], but at Louise Archer, it's a much safer school....I like the teachers at Louise Archer. I never forget the teachers that taught me things.... (1C441)

But the qualitative interviews also point to an unexpected fact that must be taken into account in the analysis of educational impacts of MTO. A substantial number of children in this sample attend school outside of their local area, and some even travel to attend schools near their original public housing developments. Marianne, an experimental group mother in Chicago, said she felt her children were not doing well in the schools in their low-poverty community and chose to put them back in the school near her public housing development where she was a volunteer.

...when they were going to Stenwood [their public housing school], they were all honor roll students. The teachers worked with them. Whatever problem they had, they was being worked with. When they got there [to the new school] they just totally fell off... And I had to get my kids out of there. Because they wasn't getting no learning. They were falling off their honor roll....But after that happened, I put them back in Stenwood, and that's where they're at now. (1A342)

It is difficult to know whether higher standards, more competition, adjustment problems (or all of these factors) were at work in this situation. Nevertheless, respondents cite both personal preferences and children's special needs as reasons for making these choices about school:

- Some parents have chosen to place children in private, charter, or magnet schools in other neighborhoods, because of their own concerns about school quality.

- A number of families have chosen to place their children in school near their original public housing developments. Some of these children were older teens with strong ties to the public housing community, but others were younger children who were in these schools because of childcare needs or because their mothers simply had more confidence in the familiar schools.
- Some children were in schools for developmentally disabled children, while others were in alternative schools for children with severe behavior problems.

In addition to the fact that a number of children were attending schools outside their new neighborhoods, MTO's potential education effects may be influenced by two other patterns evident in our data:

- A number of families in the sample moved within the cities rather than to a suburban school district. Even if these children were in new schools, the schools were often little different than their public housing schools.
- Behavior problems were common among the children in the sample. Many children reported having received detentions or suspensions, some had been expelled, and a few had more serious problems that resulted in arrests. Like children with special needs, children with serious behavior problems may not benefit as fully from an improved school environment.

Economic Opportunity

Our findings suggest some of the economic benefits that MTO families have gained as a result of moves to lower-poverty communities. Several respondents in the experimental group cited increased access to job opportunities and the influence of neighbors' behavior as factors that encouraged them to either seek work or obtain further education or training.

For example, Veronica, a respondent from Los Angeles, said that when she moved, she did not know any math and had trouble reading even in Spanish, her native language. She was going to school and trying to improve her English so she could find work:

Everyone goes to work here. I'm the only one who's here. You can imagine how discouraged I feel. That's why I help at the schools. I write that I am a school volunteer on my resume. I can do anything and what I don't know how do I can learn to do. I've written everything that I can do on my resume. I even know how to use the computer..... I haven't had any luck yet. (1A441)

However, two powerful factors—the economy's strength in early 2001 and the unfolding of welfare reform—made it difficult to assess the strength of these possible neighborhood effects. Respondents in all of our program groups were working. Some in each group reported having found jobs through welfare-to-work programs.

Our findings also highlight the importance of individual differences in characteristics that may either facilitate or impede employment. Some respondents clearly have more motivation to succeed than others do—our data provide several examples of parents going to great lengths to improve their families' situations. Other respondents face significant challenges that made it more difficult—and in some cases, impossible—for them to take advantage of any new opportunities even during an economic boom.

Physical and mental health problems appear to pose the greatest challenges. A surprising number of respondents in our sample reported very serious health problems that prevented them from working. Often, families had more than one member with major health problems. Some individuals face multiple barriers, including lack of education and skills, drug addiction, or criminal backgrounds.

Manuela, a respondent from Boston, talked about the multiple barriers—health, lack of skills, and childcare costs—that prevent her from working:

...there isn't anyone to take care of the little one because he has asthma. I have my mother, but she's very busy and takes care of other children.... I want to work, but the problem is that...I don't understand how the system works, because if I work, they will raise my rent and cut off my stamps. I would probably make around \$150 in a week. After working four weeks, one week's pay would be mine and the other three weeks would go to paying bills. I wouldn't even be able to save my money. I want to get out of the system so that one day I won't need housing or stamps....If I work, I have to pay for babysitting and I won't have anything left. I don't know how to get ahead. Maybe when my kids grow up, they will be able to help, so maybe there's hope. (3A249)

Summary

Taken together, these findings suggest that, five years into the demonstration, MTO experimental group and Section 8 comparison group movers have experienced important incremental changes, particularly increases in neighborhood safety. Most movers view leaving their distressed public housing for lower-poverty communities as a life-changing event that has enhanced the life chances for both adults and children. Experimental group movers consistently stress the increase in safety and the contrast between neighbors in their new communities and those in public housing. Some, particularly those in suburban communities, cite improvements in schools and access to new economic opportunities. Although some movers have encountered difficulties in the private market, and others talk about the difficulties of maintaining social ties and complain of isolation, for most participants the advantages for their children clearly outweigh the costs.

The comments of Nadine, an experimental group mover from Boston, reflect the views of many adults and youth we interviewed about the ways that moving has changed their lives:

It gave me a better outlook on life, that there is a life outside of that housing. Like I said, all my life, I grew up in the area, and sometimes you just think you'll never be able to have the opportunity to move into a nicer area, or you won't be accepted into a nicer area. Whereas I

had a totally different experience when I moved here. I got a warm welcome... Overall I think I was more happy to be in this area because of my kids and I didn't want them to grow up around seeing gangs.... I think it was a great, great opportunity and I was one of the fortunate ones.... (1A262)

Most Section 8 comparison group movers we interviewed also believe that moving has improved the quality of their families' lives. However, their reports are less consistently positive. Some live in dangerous neighborhoods with many of the same problems as their original public housing developments. These movers face the challenges of negotiating the private market, and some have had quite negative experiences with landlords and poor-quality housing. Still, most believe they have benefited from moving—and they have not generally paid the price in distance from their social networks that has affected families in the experimental group.

However, our findings also indicate that MTO participants may face significant challenges in taking full advantage of the resources of their new communities. The findings illustrate the complexity of their experiences: the difficulty of forming social networks in the new neighborhoods; the personal preferences that lead families to choose non-local schools for their children; and the personal barriers that inhibit families' abilities to make positive changes and take steps to achieve self-sufficiency.

The quantitative analysis will examine further the pathways illuminated by this qualitative exploration of MTO families' experiences. The full interim evaluation will allow a rich and complex analysis of the ways in which neighborhood environments lead to specific outcomes for individuals and families.

Chapter One

Introduction

The Moving to Opportunity Demonstration Program (MTO) provides a unique opportunity to test the premise that changing an individual's neighborhood environment can change his or her life chances. Further, it allows us to test our theories on *which* mediating factors in an individual's neighborhood may lead to such changes. The MTO demonstration provided housing subsidies (vouchers) to families in public housing to assist them in moving out of extremely poor neighborhoods.

This report is part of the MTO interim evaluation. The report is based on in-depth interviews conducted in Spring 2001 with adults and children at each of the five cities where MTO operated. These interviews expand on the main evaluation design, exploring in more depth the participants' experiences with MTO and the nature of the mediating factors that influence outcomes for participants. In each city, we conducted approximately 12 interviews with adults and children. Some families were living in private housing in low-poverty neighborhoods, others in private housing in moderate-poverty neighborhoods, and some in their original public housing developments.

The qualitative data collected through these interviews provide opportunities to understand how neighborhoods affect people's lives, and help illuminate the mechanisms that underlie such effects. In addition, the qualitative data contributed to the final survey design for the interim evaluation and will assist in the interpretation of the quantitative findings from the analysis of the survey and administrative data.

The interviews enrich our understanding of how a neighborhood affects a family. Further, they put faces on the families in the sample, helping us to understand what it has been like for them to experience this program. Certain sensitive issues, such as relationships with family or friends and experiences with racial discrimination, can be explored more easily using qualitative techniques. Further, findings in the qualitative research highlight key issues and unexpected patterns that can be investigated further with the quantitative survey data.

However, these qualitative data do not permit a direct analysis of program effects, because of the sample design and the small sample size. The survey data will allow for statistical tests of neighborhood effects on households, and may rely on information from these in-depth interviews for developing hypotheses to explain the significant findings.

MTO Background

The Moving to Opportunity demonstration was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and conducted in five cities—Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York—between 1994 and 1998. Very low-income families with children living in public housing developments or project-based Section 8-assisted housing in high-poverty areas (census tracts in which more than 40 percent of all households were living in poverty in 1990) were eligible to

participate in the demonstration. The public housing authorities (PHAs) in each city conducted outreach to all eligible households, and all those interested were given the opportunity to apply for this special program.

Eligible applicant families were randomly assigned to one of three groups. The MTO experimental group received Section 8 certificates or vouchers that could be used only in census tracts with 1990 poverty rates below 10 percent. In each city, a nonprofit organization (NPO) under contract to the PHA provided mobility counseling to the MTO experimental group families to help them locate and lease suitable housing in a low-poverty area. The Section 8 comparison group received regular Section 8 certificates or vouchers, which could be used anywhere; these families did not receive any mobility counseling. The in-place control group received no certificates or vouchers but continued to receive project-based assistance.

The MTO Interim Evaluation

Most of the households that moved as part of MTO received their vouchers about five years ago. Some of the households have been in the same neighborhoods and housing units the entire time, while others have made one or more subsequent moves. A team of researchers from Abt Associates, the National Bureau of Economic Research, and The Urban Institute are conducting the Interim Evaluation of the MTO program for HUD, examining what kinds of changes have happened in the lives of these families and investigating what types of neighborhood factors have been important to them.

The interim evaluation is the first effort to assess outcomes for the entire sample. However, HUD has funded teams of local researchers to conduct small scale studies at the individual sites. These studies vary in scope and methodology and have been used to inform the interim evaluation design, as well as to shed light on the early impacts of the MTO demonstration.

The overall interim evaluation has several components, including: a survey of the heads of household; a survey of children 8-11; a survey of youth 12-19; educational tests with children and youth ages 5-19; and in-depth interviews with a small sample of households. The evaluation will examine many facets of family life that may have been affected by MTO participation from four to seven years after program entry. The interim evaluation involves the first attempt since MTO program entry to interview sample members in-depth, using common instruments across all sites. HUD expects to conduct the final evaluation data collection in 2005 or 2006, which will represent 8 to 11 years after program entry.

The data collected with the interim evaluation survey instruments will be used by Abt Associates and its team of researchers to measure and assess MTO's impacts in six primary domains:

- housing mobility and assistance;
- adult education, employment and earnings;
- household income and cash assistance;
- adult, youth, and child physical and mental health;
- youth and child social well-being, including delinquency and risky behavior; and,

- youth and child educational performance.

The main hypothesis underlying the MTO program and evaluation is that relocation of families to low-poverty neighborhoods will lead to improved well-being for adults and children in these six domains. The interim evaluation is also designed to contribute to our knowledge about the mechanisms by which the neighborhood environment affects the futures of resident adults and children. The qualitative component of the evaluation is intended to provide a more detailed exploration of these neighborhood mechanisms, to identify key issues for the quantitative analysis, and to provide a picture of MTO families' experiences since enrolling in the program five years ago.

Key Research Questions for the Qualitative Research

The most important goal of the qualitative interviews is to explore the mechanisms by which families' lives may have been changed by the context of their new neighborhoods. Exhibit 1-1 shows the key research questions that are addressed with the qualitative data.

Exhibit 1-1 Qualitative Research Questions

- ❖ How do families perceive their neighborhoods?
- ❖ How are the changes between the old and new neighborhood important to families?
- ❖ Why did some MTO experimental and regular Section 8 families make subsequent moves after the initial program move?
- ❖ Do families see links between their moves and the study outcomes (such as health, delinquency and risky behavior, employment and earnings, school achievement, cash assistance status, housing assistance status)? If so, what links do they see?

Qualitative Framework

Exhibit 1-2 shows the overall hypothesized model linking environmental factors to outcomes for the interim evaluation. The qualitative component of the interim evaluation explores how, for the families studied, each of the community-level mediators associated with moving to a new neighborhood has led, or not led, to the outcomes of interest. Exhibit 1-3 summarizes the key questions for each community-level mediator and how those questions relate to various outcomes.

Exhibit 1-2 Hypothesized Model

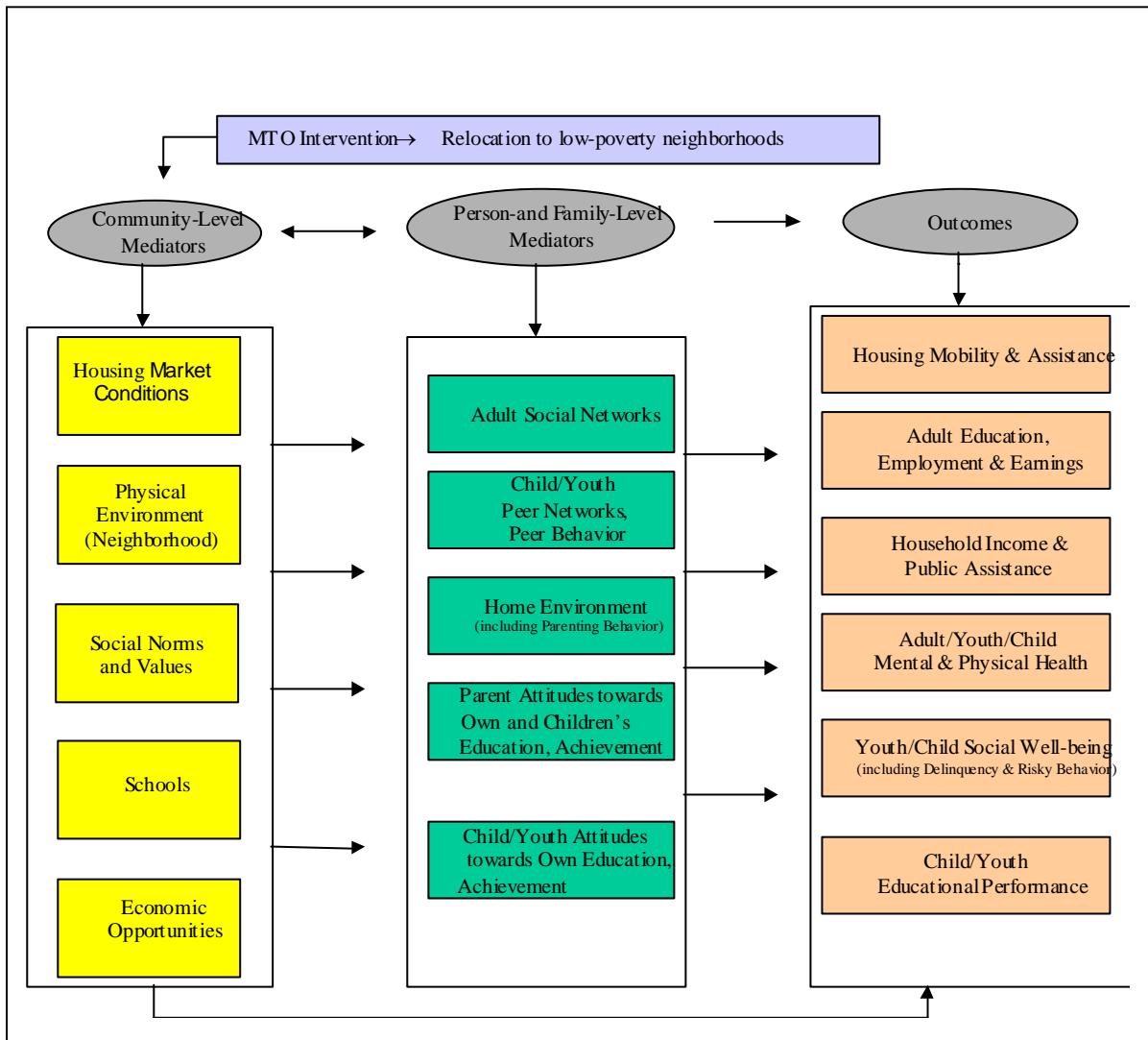


Exhibit 1-3

Community-Level Mediators Explored in the Qualitative Study

SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Housing Quality and Market Conditions. How does housing unit quality affect health outcomes? How do rental market conditions affect participants' type and quality of housing? Do participants face more challenges in low-poverty areas where rental markets are tight? How do participants perceive their housing choices?

Physical Environment (Neighborhoods). How do participants perceive the social and physical characteristics of their neighborhoods? This dimension also includes neighborhood features and amenities, crime, signs of social disorder (drug dealing, visible gang activity, prostitution), signs of physical disorder (cleanliness, maintenance, trash, graffiti, and abandoned buildings), and violence. What types of institutional resources (schools, recreational programs, childcare, medical facilities, employment, shopping, parks, etc.) do participants look for from their neighborhoods? Where are these resources located? Do they feel they have access to these institutions in their neighborhoods, or do they need to look elsewhere? How do these compare to the institutional resources in their public housing locations?

COMMUNITY NORMS AND VALUES

Social Norms. What types of relationships do participants form in their neighborhoods (including informal support networks of friends and family and formal networks such as faith-based groups or neighborhood associations)? Do participants who moved form new relationships in the neighborhood? How soon, and with whom? How much do they rely on relationships and networks from their old neighborhoods? How do participants identify and respond to social norms in their neighborhoods? This includes norms about work, school, and deviant (i.e., criminal) behavior. Do participants believe community members take responsibility for maintaining order (collective efficacy)? Do community members work together to control child behavior, delinquency, crime, drugs, etc.?

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Schools. How do participants perceive the schools in their community? Are they able to access higher quality schools with more resources in their new communities? How do they perceive their teachers and other students? Do students get placed in special education or other alternative programs?

Economic Opportunities and Overall Well-Being. Are participants able to use the location and relationships in their new communities to access resources, including jobs? Do they believe they have access to formal networks in their new communities?

See Ellen and Turner (1997); Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000).

Understanding Neighborhood Effects

Poverty in the United States has become increasingly concentrated in high-poverty areas (Jargowsky, 1997). A growing literature suggests that such concentration has a variety of detrimental effects on the residents of these areas, in terms of both their current well-being and their future opportunities.

See, for example, Wilson (1987, 1996); Jencks and Mayer (1990); and Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, and Sealander (1993). The deleterious effects of high-poverty areas are thought to be especially severe for children, whose behavior and prospects are particularly susceptible to a number of neighborhood characteristics, such as peer group influences, school quality, and the availability of supervised after-school activities.

There is a large literature on the harmful effects of living in concentrated-poverty neighborhoods, but less has been written about whether and how other neighborhood environments exert *positive* influences on behavior and life changes. Ellen and Turner (1997) summarize the literature in this area, citing various theories about the mechanisms by which middle-class (often predominantly white) neighborhoods shape or re-shape the lives of their residents.

Until recently, such effects could only be studied by comparing the behavior and life outcomes of low-income residents of high-poverty areas with those of poor families in low-poverty neighborhoods. Such comparisons potentially confused the effects of neighborhood with the effects of the characteristics specific to families who lived in those two types of residential areas. The Moving to Opportunity (MTO) demonstration was designed to support direct analysis of neighborhood impacts by employing an experimental design (random assignment) to provide the first opportunity to measure the effects of neighborhood without these confounding factors.⁴ The experimental design will provide the basis for the analysis of the surveys being conducted on the full sample of MTO participants.

The in-depth interviews in this interim evaluation were designed to contribute to our knowledge about the mechanisms by which the neighborhood environment affects the futures of resident adults and children. Other research has looked qualitatively at the issue of how neighborhood environments shape residents' lives. For example, Patillo-McCoy (1999) explores the influences on teens growing up in a moderate-income African-American neighborhood in Chicago, looking at both the positive aspects of the community and the ways in which proximity to poorer neighborhoods poses risks for youth. Bourgois (1995) uses his portrait of drug dealers in New York to show how, in many troubled neighborhoods, a different set of social rules apply that lead youth to become involved in deviant behavior. Two qualitative studies of Chicago's public housing (Popkin et al 2000; Venkatesh 2000) describe how residents in public housing in Chicago cope with the extreme dangers of their environment and the key role that gangs play in the community. Other ethnographic researchers have documented the importance of social networks for low-income families, focusing on systems of mutual help that allow families to cope with extreme poverty and manage to support their families (c.f. Stack 1974; Edin and Lein 1997). However, these studies have also documented the ways in which these relationships may undermine an individual's attempts to get ahead.

Documenting MTO Families' Experiences

Through in-depth interviews with MTO participants, we can examine some of the complex pathways through which neighborhoods influence residents. We analyze the neighborhood mechanisms that

⁴ It should be noted the families were randomly assigned to program groups, not neighborhoods.

appear to have facilitated changes as well as the barriers that have inhibited change for families in the sample. We look at five specific aspects of MTO families' experiences: housing, neighborhood, social environment, education, and economic opportunity. To explore how neighborhood influences may have affected respondents' lives, we asked respondents in different types of neighborhoods (based on neighborhood poverty rate) a range of questions about how they perceived their experiences since their moves from public housing. We asked adults and youth in the same families about many of the same topics, allowing us to compare their responses and to see how perceptions of the neighborhood differ for different family members. We summarize the key hypotheses in each of the five areas, the existing research evidence, and the types of questions we asked families about these issues below.

Housing. Because the conditions in the families' original developments were generally so bad, it was expected that MTO families would substantially improve their housing conditions by moving to the private market. Most distressed public housing developments meet the formal definition of substandard housing (Fitzpatrick and LaGory 2000). Residents of distressed public housing are exposed to a range of hazards, including: lead paint; asbestos; cockroach and rodent infestations; exposed electrical wiring and pipes; broken plumbing; unscreened windows; unlit halls and stairwells; and broken elevators (Scharfstein and Sandel 1998; National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing 1992). Conditions in high-rise developments are particularly bad; in some developments, it is common for young children to play in front of unprotected windows or for asthmatic mothers and children to have to climb many flights of stairs on a daily basis.

To learn about MTO families' experiences with housing since program entry, we asked adults in the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups to compare their current housing to their original public housing unit. Next, we asked about what they could recall about their experiences in searching for housing in the private market, conditions in their current unit, and relationships with landlords. Finally, we asked those who had moved since their initial MTO placement about the factors that had prompted them to move again and the effects these multiple moves had had on their families. In-place control group adults were asked to describe their housing and whether it had changed over the past five years.

Neighborhood. As discussed above, the central question of MTO is how changes in neighborhood environment affect the life chances of very low-income families. There are two sets of hypotheses about how the improved environment in lower-poverty neighborhoods might affect MTO families:

- ***Absence of problems:*** Greater neighborhood safety could have a range of benefits for families. Overall, increased safety could reduce stress and improve general well-being. The reduction in stress could improve physical and mental health; improve children's performance in school; reduce the risk that children will become involved in delinquent behaviors; and increase labor market participation.
- ***Presence of resources:*** More affluent neighborhoods have more community resources. These include labor market opportunities, greater school resources, and possibly a larger range of "positive" recreational and extracurricular activities. By moving to such neighborhoods, MTO families will gain access to these resources.

Research on the Gautreaux program in Chicago and the early phases of MTO have shown that gains in neighborhood safety are one of the most important benefits for families leaving public housing. Even many years after their initial moves, Gautreaux participants still spoke about the violence in their public housing developments and the comparative safety of their new, suburban locations (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000). Many of the developments where MTO families moved from had extremely high crime rates, exposing residents to constant violence. Findings from the early, single-site studies of MTO have documented that increased safety has been one of the major benefits for both experimental and Section 8 comparison group movers (Katz, Kling, and Liebman 2001; Hanratty, McLanahan, and Pettit 1998; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2001; Rosenbaum, Harris, and Denton 1999). The New York and Chicago studies find that the increases in neighborhood quality and satisfaction have been significantly greater for the experimental group.

For this study, we asked respondents to describe their current and former neighborhoods, including community amenities, sense of safety, and views about crime and disorder and the police. For MTO experimental group families, we also asked about the neighborhood to which they first moved under MTO, if they were not still living there. Finally, we asked respondents in the in-place control group to compare the public housing development now with what it was like living there around the time of MTO enrollment.

Social Environment. Another hypothesis to be tested through the MTO demonstration is that the social environment in lower-poverty areas will have major impacts on outcomes for families. There are several hypotheses about the mechanisms through which these benefits will occur:

- New social networks: A basic assumption is that MTO families will interact with neighbors in their new neighborhoods, forming new social networks. The children will form peer groups with more affluent children, who are less likely to engage in delinquent or risky behaviors. As a result, children who relocate to lower-poverty neighborhoods will be less likely to engage in these behaviors than those who remain in higher-poverty communities.
- Presence of role models: Neighbors in more affluent communities may act as role models for adults and youth. Community norms in low-poverty areas are likely to be more supportive of work and less supportive of welfare, influencing adults to increase their labor market activity. More affluent adults may act as role models for youth, demonstrating that success is possible if you “play by the rules.” Further, more affluent neighbors may act as “enforcers” who help to maintain social order.

However, there is also one hypothesis about potential negative outcomes for families because of the change in social environment:

- Disruption of social networks: Moving may disrupt MTO families’ social networks, reducing their access to social support and mutual help. This disruption may make it more difficult for families to become self-sufficient, particularly if they relied on their social networks for help with child care.

Qualitative data are particularly well-suited to exploring complex issues like social networks, which are difficult to measure well in a survey. Ethnographic researchers have documented the importance of social networks for low-income families, focusing on systems of mutual help that allow families to cope with extreme poverty and manage to support their families (Stack 1974; Edin and Lein 1997). However, other studies have also documented the ways in which these relationships may undermine individual's attempts to get ahead. In many troubled neighborhoods, a different set of social rules applies (Bourgois 1995). In poor communities—and even some moderate income neighborhoods—drug dealers and gang members may be the only people in the community with power and resources; therefore even law-abiding residents tolerate their presence (Patillo-McCoy 1999). Further, because the criminals have resources, children may find them appealing role models. Taking steps to break away from this social world brings great risks and some residents find it is safer to cope by “minding their own business” and keeping to themselves (Popkin and Cunningham 2000).

The empirical evidence on the effects of mobility efforts on participants' social networks is limited. Research on Gautreaux participants found that they did make connections with neighbors in their new, suburban communities. But the research was not able to examine the intensity of these connections or their potential impact on socio-economic outcomes (Rosenbaum and Popkin 1991). Qualitative interviews with Gautreaux participants indicated that many mothers felt they had endured feeling isolated and lonely in order to provide their children with a safer environment (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000). A study of the Yonkers scattered-site housing program found little evidence of the expected gains; movers did not have significant interaction with their new neighbors or gain access to social capital. In fact, a number of movers maintained ties to their previous neighborhoods, returning on a regular basis to attend church or socialize with friends (Briggs and Darden 1997).

For the most part, the early studies of individual MTO sites have not devoted much attention to the issue of social networks, although all have documented the characteristics of neighbors in movers' new communities. A study of the Los Angeles site found that movers were just as likely as those who remained in public housing to be involved in children's school activities and other organizations, but that they had fewer friends or family members in their neighborhoods. Findings for children were different: movers were not socially isolated and appeared to have made friends in their new communities (Hanratty, McLanahan, and Pettit 1998). In contrast, research on New York MTO participants found that experimental group movers were less likely to be involved in their children's schools than those who had moved to higher-poverty communities (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2001).

To learn about MTO families' social networks, we asked respondents a range of questions about relationships with neighbors, friends, and family. For movers, questions about relationships focused on their sense of social integration and acceptance in the new community, including any experiences of overt racial harassment or discrimination. Because racial issues are very difficult to ask about in conventional surveys they were a special focus here. In addition, we asked about respondents' linkages to social networks in their original public housing community, the extent to which they continue to rely on these networks, and the extent to which they have been able to form new ones. Where respondents have formed new networks, we asked about whether these networks have helped them to become integrated into their new communities (e.g., helped them get access information about jobs, schools, transportation, community events). Finally, we asked about relationships to formal support structures such as local churches and neighborhood organizations.

Asking questions about social norms was more challenging. We asked both adults and youth general questions about their neighbors and their communities, such as whether most adults work, what kinds of jobs they have, whether there were a lot of children who drop out of school or get into trouble, whether many girls become teen mothers. We also asked about the dimensions of collective efficacy (Sampson et al. 1997), such as whether people in the community trust each other and whether adults stop children from doing dangerous or delinquent activities. Finally, we asked about the level of interaction with neighbors and their participation in neighborhood organizations.

Education. There are several hypotheses about why moving should improve educational opportunity—and ultimately educational outcomes—for children.

- Schools with more resources: Research has shown that schools in higher-income communities perform better and offer students more resources. Better schools are hypothesized to have a positive effect on the educational outcomes of students in those schools (Connell and Halpern-Felsher 1997).
- Safer environments: Children’s school performance may improve as a result of the overall improvement in their environment. Specifically, children who feel safe in their physical environments are more likely to flourish academically and personally. The safer environment may also lead to changes in parenting behavior that lead to better outcomes for MTO children. McLoyd (1990) has argued that restrictive and authoritarian styles of parenting are linked with the mental health stresses associated with poverty. These parenting styles have been shown to be associated with poorer educational outcomes for children.
- Increased economic opportunity: In more affluent communities may lead to better employment opportunities for MTO parents. If families have more resources this may lead to improved educational outcomes for children. Further, increased economic self-sufficiency for parents may lead to greater familial support for achievement in general.
- Improved behavior: Changes in peer groups, positive influences from adult neighbors, greater community resources, and greater neighborhood safety may all act to increase children’s involvement in positive activities and decrease the likelihood that youth will engage in risky behavior.

There are also two hypotheses about potentially negative outcomes for children:

- The MTO children may be more likely to be placed in special education, either as a result of improved diagnosis of their needs or as a result of discrimination in their new schools.
- It is possible that relocating families in affluent neighborhoods and sending children to new schools could have a negative effect on school achievement for MTO children, because of higher standards, or increased competition for grades. MTO students might develop lower-self confidence as a result of comparing themselves to more affluent, higher-achieving peers. Models of relative deprivation suggest that poor youth living in

higher-income areas may become resentful and frustrated and more likely to engage in deviant behaviors.

Although the results from the research on Gautreaux program participants were encouraging, they do show that children who moved to white, suburban communities initially experienced a decline in school performance. In addition, suburban movers appeared to be somewhat more likely to be placed in special education post-move. However, ultimately these children seemed to do somewhat better than those whose families moved within the city do do (c.f. Kaufman and Rosenbaum 1992, Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000).⁵

Early findings from MTO show mixed results thus far, with some indications of both positive and negative effects for movers in both the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups. A study on the Baltimore MTO program using administrative data found that younger children in the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups experienced a lower rate of decline on national test scores as they grew older than children in the in-place control group, suggesting that the move might have helped to prevent the kinds of dramatic decline in test scores often found in inner-city schools. However, teens in the experimental and Section 8 comparison groups were more likely to experience grade retention and to be suspended or expelled (Ludwig, Ladd, and Duncan 2001). Research in Boston found boys in both the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups had lower levels of reported behavior problems than boys in the in-place controls (Katz, Kling, and Liebman, 2001). A study in Chicago that looked only at movers suggests some gains for both the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups, but that parents of children in the experimental group were more likely to report that their children's grades were better since they had moved. However, their findings also suggested that children in the experimental group were more likely to be suspended (Rosenbaum and Harris 2000). Finally, research on the New York MTO program finds that moving out of public housing had a beneficial impact on parenting behavior and involvement in school activities for both the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2001).

In the interviews for this study, we focused on children's school experiences, asking about school quality, school environment, children's school performance, interactions with teachers and other students, and any behavioral problems or other issues at school. We also asked about school location, school choice, and children's special needs. Finally, we asked about racial issues at school and whether children feel they have experienced any discrimination at school.

Economic Opportunity. Along with enhancing educational opportunities for children, another of the main goals of the MTO demonstration was to offer greater access to economic opportunities to adults in hopes that they would be more likely to achieve self-sufficiency. Residential mobility might affect employment and earnings through any or all of the following casual mechanisms:

- Low-poverty areas are likely to have lower unemployment rates and faster job growth. As a result, MTO movers may experience increases in employment and earnings. Living

⁵ It should be noted that these Gautreaux findings were based on a very small sample (69 households) and that the studies only included those families who remained in their new, suburban communities.

near potential sources of employment may reduce job search and commuting costs and offer a broader range of employment opportunities.

- Living in a safer neighborhood may lead to reduced stress and anxiety and a greater sense of control over their lives. This improvement in mental health may lead to increased employment and earnings.
- Community norms in low-poverty areas are likely to be more supportive of work and less accepting of welfare than those in public housing projects.
- Relocation may result in improved physical health, either through a reduction in environmental hazards or through better health care. Improved health may improve MTO participants' ability to seek and retain employment.

Research on the Gautreaux program (Popkin, Rosenbaum, and Meaden 1993) found that participants who had moved to white suburban areas were significantly more likely to report having had a job since they moved than participants who moved to neighborhoods in the city.⁶ However, preliminary research on MTO has shown more mixed results. The only short-term study to show any evidence of employment effects for the MTO experimental group was on the Baltimore sample. Using administrative data from Unemployment Insurance and public assistance records, the researchers found evidence of an initial decrease in welfare receipt for both treatment groups. However, while the gap between experimental group members and in-place control group members continued to grow, the difference between the Section 8 comparison group and controls leveled off after the first year (Ludwig, Duncan, and Pinkston 1999). In contrast, a study of the Boston MTO program found no evidence of effects on employment, earnings, or welfare receipt (Katz, Kling, and Liebman 2001). Research on movers in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles found increases in employment for both treatment groups, but no special advantages for experimental group movers (Rosenbaum and Harris 2001; Hanratty, McLanahan, and Petit 1998; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2001).

For this research, we asked adult respondents about their current and former employment experiences, their reasons for working or not working, and their perceptions of how moving had affected their access to opportunity. We also asked about their use of public assistance and the impact that changes in the welfare system had had on their families. Finally, we asked about respondents' physical health and other personal challenges.

Overview of Report

In this report, we use the qualitative interviews to paint a picture of the MTO families experiences since relocation and how they perceive the changes in their environment have affected—or not affected—their lives. In Chapter 2, we describe the sample and research methods. Chapters 3 and 4 present the analysis of how MTO families assess the impact of the changes in their physical

⁶ It should be noted that these findings are based only on a survey of participants who remained in their suburban community.

environment. Chapter 3 addresses housing, including MTO families' assessments of their housing, the challenges they have faced negotiating the private market, and the factors that have motivated some to make subsequent moves. In Chapter 4, we examine their perceptions of their neighborhoods and their views about the local factors that have most affected their lives. Chapter 5 presents the analysis of how the respondents perceive their social environment, including interactions with neighbors, their adjustment to their new communities, and their ties to friends and families. In particular, we examine the issue of movers' continuing ties to their former public housing communities. In Chapter 6, we examine children's educational experiences since relocation, including school choice, school performance, and children's special educational needs and behavior problems. Chapter 7 addresses respondents' assessments of how relocation has affected their labor market participation. Finally, in Chapter 8, we allow the MTO families in the sample to sum up their views about how their families have fared since relocation and conclude with an assessment of the mechanisms that have facilitated positive change and the barriers that have prevented respondents from being able to take advantage of new opportunities.

Chapter Two

Methods

The experimental design of the MTO demonstration offers a unique opportunity to test the premise that neighborhood environment affects the life chances of residents. The in-depth interview data we analyze in this report allow us to probe the mediating factors through which neighborhood environment may influence an individual's behavior and/or life chances. The qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews provide powerful illustrations of how these mechanisms play out in the lives of MTO families. These data help us understand how neighborhoods affect their residents and what neighborhood attributes are (or are not) important is critical to devising ways to target housing mobility programs more effectively, correct their weaknesses, assess their applicability to other populations, and identify potential alternatives.

Strengths of In-depth Interviews

The qualitative research uses in-depth interviews with adults and youth to explore MTO participants' experiences. In-depth interviewing is a qualitative technique that can be described as "a conversation with a purpose" (Marshall and Rossman 1989, 82). The interviews may vary in the degree of structure and the amount of latitude respondents have in answering questions. They are less structured than survey interviews, allowing for more detailed probing and freer exploration of the research topics. Ethnographic observations and interviews allow for even more intensive probing and exploration of individual issues, but these require a lengthy field period and opportunities to make repeated visits to a single family or site. In contrast, individual in-depth interviews generate a great deal of information fairly quickly on a range of topics: they are particularly appropriate for descriptive and exploratory research (Marshall and Rossman 1989).

In addition, in-depth interviews generate individual stories that can illuminate quantitative findings (c.f. Popkin et al., 2000; Edin and Lein, 1997). In-depth interviews allow respondents to tell their own stories, providing data on their opinions, experiences, and perceptions. Typically, a skilled interviewer asks the respondent a series of open-ended questions and follows up with probes to elicit more information on key issues. This format allows the participants to describe their experiences in a more narrative manner, without the limitations of structured questions with only yes/no or multiple choice answers. Although qualitative interview data are not statistically representative of the general population being studied, they do generate common themes as well as in-depth data on specific sub-groups. Quantitative analysis can then be used to determine whether or how these themes apply to the sample as a whole. In the context of the MTO interim evaluation, the data from the in-depth interviews are being used to describe the experiences of families in different types of neighborhoods and to explore their perceptions of how the neighborhood and larger community have affected their lives, as well as to help interpret findings from the larger quantitative analysis.

Data Collection Instruments

Our design for the qualitative study called for talking with two respondents in most of the sampled families: the head of household and a youth between the ages of 12 and 17 (more details on sample in next section). The interviews focus on the experiences of the parent and the youth since they joined MTO and (if appropriate) since their initial move from public housing. The interviews with the adults lasted between one and two hours, and the interviews with the youth generally lasted about 45 minutes. Respondents received a monetary incentive for their participation (\$50 for parents and \$25 for children). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Respondents signed a consent form indicating that they understood their rights as a study participant and agreed to the audio-recording.

Each interviewer used standard topic guides to guide respondents through the conversation. Three separate guides were developed for the adults: a guide for MTO experimental group and Section 8 comparison group households still living in the type of neighborhood to which they originally moved under MTO; a guide for MTO experimental group households no longer living in low-poverty neighborhoods; and a guide for In-Place Control group families still living in public housing. Each guide had a version for the parent (adult) and a version for youth ages 12 to 17. The version for the adult asked about their children of all ages. The guides were pre-tested in December 2000 with six families in Baltimore and Boston. The draft guides were then revised to reflect the reviewers' comments and the pre-test results, and each of the guides was translated into Spanish. Copies of the final guides (English versions only) are included as Appendix B.

After each interview, the interviewer completed a Post-Interview Summary Form (also included as Appendix C). This form required that the interviewer summarize the main issues discussed during the interview and provide contextual information about the home and neighborhood. In households where we interviewed both an adult and child, a form was completed for each respondent. Topics included: information on major changes in the family's life since signing up for MTO; the respondent's definition of the neighborhood; his/her general perceptions of the neighborhood; key features of the neighborhood; what he/she discussed about children and schools; relationships with friends, families, and neighbors; the respondent's perception of how the neighborhood affected his/her family life; and the most important positive and negative aspects of the neighborhood.

The interviewers also wrote brief descriptions of the condition of the interior and exterior of the homes they visit. For example, an interviewer might note that the MTO tenant's home was indistinguishable from other homes on the block or that it was clearly different because (e.g.) it had the best-kept lawn and plantings. The interviewer might also note that the MTO tenant appeared to be living in a pocket of low-income housing, such as a lone multi-unit building in a neighborhood of single-family homes or a particularly dilapidated block relative to surrounding areas.

In addition to the Post-Interview Summary Form, interviewers completed a Post-Interview Checklist and Respondent Demeanor Form. This form contained a checklist on which the interviewer indicated whether the respondent reported using a range of different types of resources and services in their neighborhood (i.e., parks, schools, supermarket, doctor's office), whether he/she reported using facilities that are further away, or did not mention a particular type of facility. The data from the checklist, along with the Qualitative Memo, were used to help inform the final survey design. In

addition, the form included a brief Respondent Demeanor checklist, asking interviewers to rate the respondent on level of cooperation, honesty, and difficulty in understanding questions. This information was used as a check on the validity of each individual interview. From this information, we determined that all of the interviews would be used.

Finally, to complement the narrative in the Post-Interview Summary Form, interviewers conducted a formal visual assessment of the neighborhood around each family's home, observing approximately a four-square-block area. The Neighborhood Assessment Form was adapted from windshield surveys used in other Abt Associates research (included as Appendix D). Interviewers rated building and grounds maintenance, land use distribution, and the age and type of residential structures, as well as the general condition of the housing. They noted positive and negative neighborhood features (e.g., major industrial activity or nearby shopping or commercial areas), and assessed the overall quality of the neighborhood as a residential area. This form provided some objective measures of neighborhood in the area immediately surrounding the respondents' homes and gave a context for interpreting respondents' descriptions of and views about their neighborhoods. Together, the Post-Interview summary form and the Neighborhood Assessment were used to supplement statistical information from the Census about the respondents' neighborhoods, allowing us to note any discrepancies between 1990 Census information and our own current observations about local conditions.

Interviewers completed the Neighborhood Assessment either just prior to or just following the interview (depending on the time of day) and the Post-Interview Summary and Checklist and Respondent Demeanor forms as soon as possible after each interview. The information from these forms was used to prepare the Qualitative Memo and may be used to provide contextual information for the later analyses of the qualitative and quantitative data⁷.

Sample Design

The overall sampling strategy for the qualitative study called for interviewing twelve households at each of the five MTO sites. In the majority of households, we interviewed the adult head of household and one youth (between the ages of 12 and 17). However, in order to obtain information about families with younger children, we also included one family in each sampling stratum that only had children under 12, completing only one adult interview for that household. The total sample goal was approximately 100 interviews from 60 households.

The mechanisms of neighborhood influence may vary in different types of settings. In order to be able to generate common themes about the effects of different types of neighborhoods on families, we included families living in low-poverty neighborhoods (defined the same as MTO program guidelines, less than ten percent poverty) and middle- to high-poverty neighborhoods. For the qualitative interviews, we divided the MTO sample into four groups (the three basic program groups,

⁷ The "qualitative memo" was prepared approximately one month after the field work was completed. This memo was intended to provide feedback quickly to the research team developing the survey instruments to be administered to the full MTO sample. The memo was based on data from the Post-Interview Summary Forms, the Post-Interview Checklist, and the Neighborhood Assessment form, but not on the full transcripts from the in-depth interviews.

with the experimental group further divided by those currently living in low-poverty neighborhoods and those who do not). Exhibit 2-1 provides brief definitions of each of the four groups we use for analysis in this report.

We sampled separately from MTO experimental group families who currently live in low-poverty areas and those who had moved back to higher-poverty areas. We sampled from among Section 8 comparison group families that moved under MTO regardless of the poverty rate of their current locations. Finally, in each site, we included two families from the in-place control group who were still living in their original public housing developments (as long as the developments had not changed significantly as a result of programs like vacancy consolidation or HOPE VI).⁸

Exhibit 2-1 Summary Description of Groups for Analysis

- ❖ ***MTO Experimental Group Movers in Low-Poverty Areas*** - MTO Experimental mover households currently in low-poverty neighborhoods (less than 10 percent poverty from 1990 Census tract data)
- ❖ ***MTO Experimental Group Movers in Higher-poverty Areas*** - MTO Experimental mover households, currently living in poverty rates with greater than 10 percent poverty rates
- ❖ ***Section 8 Comparison Group Movers*** - Section 8 Comparison mover households, regardless of neighborhood poverty rate
- ❖ ***In-Place Control Group*** - In-Place Control households, still living in public housing

It is important to note that these sampling strata do not cover the full MTO population. They exclude households who were non-movers in the MTO experimental and the Section 8 comparison groups. The main purpose of talking to non-movers would be to try to understand why they failed to move when given the opportunity through MTO. However, due to the time that has lapsed since these families entered the program, answers would be unreliable at best and would be likely to reflect what has happened to them in intervening years. It would have been ideal to interview these families shortly after their failure to lease up. The passage of time and the lack of a qualitative baseline also means that such interviews would not be useful for informing the participation analysis. If we did find differences between movers and non-movers, it would be impossible to tell whether they were due to differences at the time of random assignment or to differences that arose afterwards, perhaps due to the effects of the MTO move.

In addition to non-movers, the qualitative sampling design excluded two other groups of potential respondents. First, we did not select participants who have been in their current neighborhood for less than six months. The purpose of the qualitative interviews was to understand how individuals

⁸ This constraint only eliminated a few households we had sampled in Baltimore, who were living in public housing that has undergone revitalization as part of the HOPE VI program.

interact with their neighborhoods and how the community environment affects adults and children. Participants making a transition to a new community would not likely be familiar enough with this area to talk in any detail about it. Second, because the focus of the research is on understanding the effects of neighborhoods on families with children, we excluded households with no children under 18 currently living in the home.

We randomly ordered the lists of MTO families falling into each of the four strata being used for the qualitative study. However, respondent selection was not simply random from each group, as we needed to recruit and screen families for participation in the interviews. We selected respondents who were willing to take the time to participate in the interview (both parent and youth). We attempted to sample from as broad a range of respondents as possible, sending out letters to all respondents before trying to contact them by phone. The initial letters included a toll-free number for potential respondents to leave updated telephone information if they were willing to participate in an interview.⁹

Sampling for the qualitative study followed these steps:

- Identify all MTO experimental, Section 8 comparison group, and in-place controls in each site;
- Determine whether each MTO experimental group family that moved under MTO was currently living in a low-poverty area or had moved back to a higher-poverty area;
- Screen out all households that had not lived in the same neighborhood for the last 6 months;
- Indicate presence or absence of children ages 12-17 living at home;
- Randomly order the list of households that meet these criteria (by group, neighborhood category, presence of older children, and site);
- Make calls for screening and recruitment; and,
- Select those who are willing and able to participate.

In each household, we interviewed the adult who was the MTO applicant. For these interviews, we chose only parents and children who moved with the original household. For the youth interview, if there was more than one youth in the household between the ages of 12 and 17, we selected the youth with the most recent birthday. If that youth was not available, we substituted the one with the next most recent birthday.¹⁰

⁹ Detailed procedures for recruiting participants are specified in Feins et al. 2001.

¹⁰ We were unable to interview the randomly chosen child only two times in our recruiting efforts.

The research design called for interviewing a total of twelve households in each of the five MTO sites. At each site, we scheduled more interviews than we needed to reach our projected sample goals, anticipating a few cancellations would occur. Ultimately, we completed 58 interviews with adults (out of a goal of 60), and 39 interviews with children (out of a goal of 40). Exhibit 2-2 shows the breakdown of the completed sample size for each group.

Exhibit 2-2
Completed In-depth Interview Totals, by Stratum

	Adults	Children
MTO Experimental Group Movers in Low-Poverty Areas	21	15
MTO Experimental Group Movers in Higher-Poverty Areas	9	6
Section 8 Comparison Group Movers	19	14
In-Place Control Group	9	4
Total:	58	39

Analytic Strategy

The in-depth interviews were transcribed into basic text files,¹¹ then entered into NUD*IST,¹² a software application for qualitative data management and analysis. Each transcript retained its unique ID and basic demographic information (program group, sample strata, age, race, and site), but personal identification information including last names and street numbers was removed, to ensure protection of interview respondents’ identities.

A team of five trained researchers read the transcripts and coded them for relevant themes and issues. The codes consisted of major themes identified prior to analysis (e.g., housing quality, interactions with neighbors) and themes that emerged from summaries of field work (e.g., location of schools). During the field work, researchers developed a coding ‘dictionary’ that identified and defined each code (see Appendix A for the Coding Dictionary). After coding some initial transcripts, the team compared their work to ensure consistency. Also, the coding dictionary was edited slightly to accommodate issues researchers encountered during the coding process.

Once the transcripts were coded, researchers analyzed the data to answer the research questions detailed earlier in this chapter. After coding was completed, NUD*IST reports were created that included all output from the interviews that included the coded segments on particular topics from all of the transcripts. Within each NUD*IST report, responses were sorted by program group. We systematically analyzed the output for key themes for each of the hypothesized mediating factors, comparing responses across sites and the four sample strata.

¹¹ For interviews that were conducted in Spanish, we hired bilingual transcribers, who translated the interviews as they transcribed them.

¹² NUD*IST stands for Non-numerical Unstructured Data * Indexing Searching and Theorizing.

This analysis produced a description of MTO families' perceptions of how relocation has affected their lives over the last five years. In addition, to illustrate some of the themes discussed in each chapter, we present family profiles that bring together the adult and child interviews in some of the households.

Chapter Three

MTO Families in the Private Housing Market

MTO participants moved from some of the most distressed public housing developments in the country. These developments were generally poorly constructed, poorly maintained, and extremely dangerous. Although not a formal hypothesis, a central assumption underlying the MTO demonstration was that it would be possible for participants to find better quality housing in the private market. In particular, families searching with Section 8 certificates and vouchers would have to find units that met the program's Housing Quality Standards in order to be able to use the rent subsidy.¹³ Housing market conditions are thus a community-level mediator expected to influence outcomes for participants.

Recent research has indicated that public housing residents searching for housing in the private market often face significant challenges that make it difficult for them to succeed in finding a unit (Popkin and Cunningham 2000, 2001; Smith et al. 2001). These include structural barriers such as tight rental markets, discrimination (against minorities, families with children, and former public housing residents), and landlords' reluctance to rent to tenants with Section 8. In addition, individual-level barriers such as lack of experience in the private market, fear of moving to an unfamiliar area, and personal problems (e.g., disability, mental illness, and substance abuse) make leasing up more difficult. The relatively low lease-up rates for MTO families in both treatment groups (47 percent for the experimental group and 60 percent for the Section 8 comparison group) reflect the range of challenges that public housing residents face when attempting to make a transition to the private market (Goering et al. 1999).¹⁴

The early single-site studies of MTO did not address the question of changes in housing quality or experiences with housing search systematically. The MTO interim evaluation will measure differences in housing quality and explore the relationships between these differences and outcomes for residents.¹⁵ In this chapter, we use our in-depth interviews with MTO families to explore what it has been like for them to negotiate the private market and find—and keep—acceptable housing.

In general, we find that many of the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison group families we interviewed feel that their housing conditions have improved as a result of leaving public housing.

¹³ The MTO experiment could only lead families to move to different neighborhoods if they were able to lease-up with Section 8. Otherwise, the families would stay in their subsidized developments.

¹⁴ During the early 1990s, national success rates for Section 8 holders were relatively high in large metropolitan areas (81 percent overall). However, recent research has shown that success rates have declined to an average of 69 percent. Success rates in New York City remained comparatively low (about 60 percent) throughout this period (Finkel and Buron 2001).

¹⁵ The full evaluation will examine outcomes for all participants, including those who did not succeed in finding a unit. As discussed in Chapter 2, the MTO qualitative sample includes only respondents in both treatment groups who did move from public housing.

Experimental group movers tended to live in single-family homes or townhouses, in less dense and quieter neighborhoods. Comparison group families were more likely to be living in apartment buildings or complexes. Still, we heard numerous accounts of problems with maintenance, some of which motivated these families to make subsequent moves. Further, our analysis also highlights an issue that emerged unexpectedly from these interviews: the challenges that face these families in the private market and threaten their housing stability. Most significantly, rising rent and utility costs make it difficult for families to continue to afford housing in the private market, particularly in better neighborhoods where housing costs are often higher and may increase faster. Further, many residents rent from small landlords, which creates a range of risks for tenants and sometimes forces subsequent moves. Finally, renting from a small landlord makes personal relationships with them critical; while some tenants have formed good relationships with their landlords, others have had serious personal conflicts.

Conditions in MTO Families' Original Public Housing Developments

Most of the respondents we interviewed who had left public housing described their former developments as dangerous and unpleasant. When asked to talk about what it had been like for them to live in public housing, most respondents focused on safety issues. But when they did discuss physical conditions, they often mentioned problems with building maintenance. Respondents from high-rise developments in Chicago, New York, and Baltimore reported that there had been problems with broken elevators. Some said that their health problems—such as asthma or arthritis—made walking up several flights of stairs painful or impossible. Others mentioned serious maintenance problems that were never addressed. For example, Nicolasa from Boston talked about the unhealthy conditions in her public housing unit that she believed had contributed to her daughter's asthma:

In comparison to living at Old Colony, I feel better living here because where I lived there were these pipes that emitted dust and I didn't like that and I had to wash the walls. They [the housing authority] said they would fix it but they never did it the way they were supposed to. And my youngest daughter suffers from asthma and I think that it comes from inhaling all that dust the pipes emitted.
(3A274)¹⁶

Alexis, from Baltimore, described being stuck in a broken elevator in her high-rise building:

But, I mean, other than the elevator being broke—time to go to the market, and I lived on the 6th floor, oh my God. Those steps! One time I got caught in the elevator. It broke down and it like dropped below the basement when the door

¹⁶ Respondent ID numbers contain four pieces of information: the first number is the qualitative sampling stratum (1=experimental, low-poverty; 2=experimental, moderate-poverty; 3=comparison; 4=in-place); the letter indicates whether this is an adult (A) or child (C); the next number is the site (1=Baltimore; 2=Boston; 3=Chicago; 4=Los Angeles; 5=New York); and the last two numbers make the ID unique.

opened. It was nothin' but a brick wall. [I thought,] How am I gonna get out of this elevator? (2A170)

In contrast, a few respondents had more favorable things to say about their former public housing developments. Lola, a respondent from Baltimore talked about the positive aspects of her former unit, particularly the free heat and water:

They [the housing authority] keep the property up. They came out and checked the residence, make sure everything was working properly in the house. The heat, the water is free there. ... They would come out and inspect the unit and make sure the unit was kept clean and everything was working properly. (1A146)

As discussed in Chapter 2, we interviewed two in-place control group households at each site to document the current conditions in the original MTO public housing developments. These interviews suggest conditions have improved little and that residents of these developments continue to cope with the hazards of substandard housing. Ebony, an in-place control group respondent living in Baltimore's Somerset Court, said that noise is a big problem for her family. She said she is able to hear everything that goes on as people come and go from neighboring apartments. She also had complaints about unresponsive management:

I love the space. I wish I had a basement and a backyard where I could have my own privacy and I wouldn't always go out the front and deal with this out there. I love the space, but they just don't do the repairs like they are supposed to. (4A164)

Mildred, who lives in Chicago's Stateway Gardens, complained about the problems with her building:

I don't like that they don't come fix things. They actually need to paint practically every six months because of the pests. It helps keep them down. As you can see, water comes from the upstairs and they don't help to come and fix it up or anything. The rent that I pay, it's not worth it for living up here. A lot of people say they pay \$68 or \$50, some don't pay nothing. But I pay \$365 and it's not worth it. I wish that I could live somewhere else. It's horrible. I try to make the best of it and do what I can. (4A317)

Overall, respondents' memories of their original developments reflect the deteriorated conditions and poor management common in distressed public housing. Respondents described serious problems that often threatened their own and their children's health. Interviews with in-place control group respondents indicate that the situation in these developments has changed little over time.¹⁷

¹⁷ We did purposely eliminate households in developments that had changed because of HOPE VI or other major reconstructions. In such places, residents might be more likely to discuss improvements in their developments.

MTO Families' Current Housing

MTO families in the qualitative sample moved from large public housing developments to a variety of housing types, including single-family homes, duplexes, townhouses, and apartment complexes. Experimental group movers were more likely to live in single-family homes or townhouses.¹⁸ Most of the experimental group respondents we spoke to rented from small landlords rather than large management companies. To a great extent, their perceptions of their housing depended on the quality of their relationships with building owners. It is difficult to know from the respondents' accounts whether their perceptions of their landlords are based on the landlords' actual management skills or are rather a product of their face-to-face relationships with the landlords.

As we will discuss in Chapter 4, the respondents in the sample frequently commented on the improvement in safety as the most important aspect of their new move. Movers' perceptions of changes in housing quality were more mixed. Some movers clearly felt that their new homes were a significant improvement, while others who had less responsive landlords complained about problems like poor maintenance, noise, and lack of privacy.

Several movers said that they appreciated living in a lower-density area, with more privacy and space. Vanessa, an experimental group respondent in Los Angeles, talked about how much she enjoyed living in a single-family home in the suburbs:

Over there [in public housing], we didn't have any privacy from the neighbors because we lived in an apartment. We didn't have any privacy at all. I live very peacefully here. I like this house, the location, everything. (1A494)

Francisca, in the Section 8 comparison group in Boston, said she appreciated the space and amenities in her new apartment.

It has a lot of room. [It] has three bedrooms. There's a big hallway. It's good to have a back porch here, too. It has access to the basement. I can do my laundry up here. If I want to, I can go to the basement to get something or put something in the basement. ... I have my own washing machine in the house. (3A260)

Rachel, a Section 8 comparison group participant from Baltimore, also talked about how much she liked her current unit.

I think it is nice and pretty and the walls are nicely painted and everything is in good working order—refrigerator and stove, and the electric is good. The electricity and stuff is good. No electric problems or nothing. ... The only thing, it's a little too small. (3A125)

It is important to remember that these MTO families moved from developments with serious maintenance problems; what appeared to an outside observer to be a modest improvement might feel

¹⁸ This information comes from the Neighborhood Assessments that interviewers completed.

like a significant change to them. For example, Vivian, a Section 8 comparison group mover in New York, said she was happy for a very basic reason:

We always have heat and water, and that's the best thing. (3A516)

Other movers in the qualitative sample were less happy with their current housing situations. Patricia, an experimental group respondent in Chicago who lived in a large apartment building, said that she had to be careful to keep her children from making too much noise. The high-rise public housing development she had lived in was constructed of cinder block, so that noise did not travel easily from floor to floor. In her current apartment, her children had little space where they could play without disturbing the neighbors. As Patricia said:

I want my kids to have a place where they don't have to worry about running over somebody's head. They always gotta sit down. That's what I like least about living in an apartment, period. (1A323)

Vanessa, the experimental group mover in Los Angeles who liked the benefits of living in a single-family home, complained that her house had problems with heating and air conditioning. She eventually hoped to move her family to an even better place:

I'd like to move to a more comfortable house. I want a house that's more comfortable for my children as well, because one of my children suffers from asthma and the cold is not good for him. The rooms are very cold in this house. The heat affects us too, since we don't have air conditioning (1A494)

Olivia, an experimental group mover who had moved back to a higher-poverty neighborhood in Boston, reported multiple maintenance problems in her current apartment:

The toilet, it's not working properly. This faucet here it's like completely... we have to shut the cold water because cold water just floods. It's terrible. (2A267)

Private Market Challenges

Moving to the private market presented various challenges to MTO families. One of the biggest challenges was being responsible for gas, electric, and water bills. In areas with tight rental markets, rising rents were a problem for some families. Finally, most of the respondents rented from small landlords and maintaining those relationships was key to succeeding in the private market.

Housing Costs. Respondents from all sites and program groups mentioned rising housing costs and utilities as a major problem. Households in public housing generally pay 30 percent of their income towards rent, which includes utilities. When households qualify for Section 8 vouchers, if the contract rent does not already include utilities, utility payments are figured in to the amount that the household will have to pay for rent, so that the rent payment and utilities together should be 30 percent of a household's income. However, the utility allowances are based on average units, and adjustments to them always lag changes in energy costs. Spikes in utilities, like those seen in the

winter of 2001, are particularly problematic for low-income renters like households using Section 8 vouchers. Public housing authorities and other public agencies have payment programs that are supposed to help households pay utilities in such circumstances, but these programs do not always work as quickly as necessary.

Heating bills can be particularly high, especially for households who moved to single-family homes, duplexes, or townhouses. Some respondents reported that they received help from utility assistance programs, but that this help was not sufficient to cover additional heat costs, especially as energy prices rapidly increased. Other respondents reported that even their basic electricity bill for lights and cooking was quite high.

Nicolasa, the Section 8 comparison group mover in Boston, said that high utility costs had motivated her to make a second move:

I moved here because our bills were really high. If you can't find a house with the utilities included, you have to pay for electricity, gas, everything. And it was very hard. My brother's house [where I first moved in MTO] had gas heat, which was really expensive during the winter time. That's why I moved here, because I couldn't cover all my expenses on my own. ... That's the only reason why I moved. (3A274)

Carolyn, a respondent from the Section 8 comparison group in Los Angeles, said that her rent and utility costs had increased because she had begun working. Even though she lives in Southern California, winter heat costs made a significant difference in her monthly budget,¹⁹ especially combined with the increase in her rent.

They use all income against you. ... [The higher your income,] the higher your rent goes. But it does help me a lot because I would rather pay \$250 than \$700 or \$800. So I thank the Lord for that. The only other thing I don't like about it is how high your gas bills can get come winter. Summer it is \$20 or \$30, but this winter my gas bill has been like from \$145 to \$161. (3A431)

Deborah, a Section 8 comparison group mover from New York, described how she and her family conserved electricity during the day and heat during the night, in an effort to lower her bills.

When I took the papers and everything for the apartment, they was like, you have to pay for your heat. How are you going to do this? And my attitude was, the Lord will provide. They didn't want to hear that. They wanted to know how you're going to pay these bills. I'm like, the Lord will provide. But then, like I said, I just had to come to terms with it being either/or. You can't have both. During the day, I really don't use no lights because of the daylight, but during the night, I may like

¹⁹ During the winter of 2000-2001, California experienced significant problems with their electricity system. Hardship problems among respondents from Los Angeles should be considered in this light.

turn them on, like if they're taking a shower or what have you, just to warm it up enough to get in and out of the shower, and turn it off and all go to bed.

Conserving electricity was not enough to make the bills affordable. Several respondents described how they juggled bills to make ends meet. Deborah went on to say:

It was like taking from Peter to pay Paul. You know, it was like – eenie, meenie, miney, moe. I'll pay ConEd this week, rent this one. I had to work it out like that. (3A509)

Tight Rental Markets. In recent years, rental markets have tightened in many large cities, including the five metropolitan areas where most MTO families still live. Tight rental markets have several consequences for Section 8 holders: landlords may be less willing to rent to Section 8 recipients because of the high demand for their units; rent levels may rise, often above the Fair Market Rent allowed with Section 8;²⁰ and, some landlords may choose to convert their rental property to condominiums or to sell altogether. Several of the MTO respondents reported that they had been affected by these changes.

Olivia, the respondent from Boston who complained of poor maintenance, said that her landlord had still raised her rent.

...he high, he raised the rent from, from, What were we paying? Nine hundred, and then he raised it to a thousand three hundred. I don't think it's worth it. He's not keeping it up, either. (2A267)

Several other respondents reported that they had moved, or were about to move, because the landlords were selling their buildings. Some amount of turnover is expected, but in tight housing markets and gentrifying areas, there are real concerns about whether the stock of affordable rental housing will disappear.

Relationships with Landlords. For many respondents, the MTO move was the first time that they had rented from an individual landlord. Some had very good relationships with their landlords and were pleased with the way they maintained their units. Others had landlords who were hostile, unresponsive about maintenance problems, and raised their rents. Some owners sold their buildings with little warning. Our interviews suggested that those who had good relationships with landlords were more likely to stay in their new communities, while those who were less satisfied were more likely to make subsequent moves. Bertina, an experimental group mover in New York, talked at length about how happy she was with her apartment and her landlord. He owned a dry cleaning business in the first floor of the building and was friendly with both her and her daughter. Bertina raved about how well he maintained the building:

²⁰ In the section 8 voucher program, the Fair Market Rents do not prevent participants from leasing more expensive units, but they do limit the subsidy amount, so the renter pays more out of pocket.

My landlord, anything that breaks, he up here the next day. He's very helpful. ... He keeps up with everything. The exterminator comes in once a month. He's fabulous. He's very helpful. (1A514)

Other respondents said that they developed positive relationships with their landlords over time. Marianne, a member of the experimental group in Chicago who had lived in the Robert Taylor Homes, described the challenges of convincing her current landlord to rent to her and her family. Now, after five years, she feels that he trusts her.

And then, of course, [my landlord] was like real paranoid because here I am coming from Robert Taylor, and I've got six kids and I guess he was like, Oh my God. He was asking me all kinds of questions, and then I got scared. I was like, 'God, things have been going so fine, please don't fail me now.' And he was asking me a lot of questions, which is fair because this is his house and the area it's in, and six kids coming from the projects.

But I really proved him wrong. Now, I don't have a problem with him. I don't hear from him unless I'm ready to pay his rent. I keep up with his house. A lot of things I do, I do myself because I don't wait for him to do it. ... And when I first moved in, he used to pop up all the time, all the time. I was like, why does this man keep popping up? He came in my house one day and that was the last time that man ever popped up. (1A342)

Like Marianne, Rose—another experimental group mover from Chicago—said that her landlord was initially nosy but gradually accepted her:

When I came here, I was, I had had a baby and I had been drawing my unemployment. ... It took her a while to accept me because she kinda was nosy for a whole year. ... 'Cause she thought I was gonna have like wild parties and people coming in and out of her property and stuff like that. But it wasn't like that, so, then after that, she got used to me. (1A334)

In contrast, some other respondents complained about problems with their landlords. Indeed, landlord problems frequently were the factor that prompted a subsequent move. For example, Shirley, a woman in the experimental group in New York, reported a range of maintenance issues with her private market unit, including rats and rodents, problems getting exterior lights repaired, and paper-thin doors. She said her landlord was unresponsive about making repairs:

Before the tenant upstairs moved up there, we had rats and rodents a couple of months. Three or four months 'fore he send the exterminator. ... The landlord is the pits! ... He's one step from being a slumlord. Nothing gets fixed. Nothing. He does absolutely nothing. (1A569)

It is impossible to tell whether respondents' reports of landlords behavior are accurate, since we are only getting one side of the story. Tenants' relationships with their landlords are often a product of

their business relationship as well as the compatibility of their personalities. However, it is evident from these accounts and from interviewer observation that there are still significant problems in some units, despite the fact that they have been inspected and approved by HUD's Housing Quality Standards.

Struggling in a Tight Rental Market

New York: Section 8 Comparison Group

When Crystal was selected for MTO, she did not get the "special voucher," so she had to find a place on her own. It was difficult to find a unit in New York's tight rental market. Crystal has five children: Owen (15), Leslie (12), Jackson (7), Dee (6), and Julie (1). After a long search, she found an acceptable unit. A year and a half later, the landlord sold the building, so she was forced to move. Crystal was pregnant with her fifth child at the time. She had difficulty finding another unit in a safe neighborhood. She contested the eviction in court, but lost and had to stay in a shelter for three months. Her daughter, Julie, was born during the second month in the shelter.

The Section 8 program held her voucher for her while she was living in the shelter. After searching for three more months, she finally found the apartment where she currently lives. She admits she felt under pressure to take the place because of her situation in the shelter. The apartment was not really ready for tenants. The floor was not ready, and the appliances were not fully operational. The landlord sanded the floors and applied a coat of polyurethane after they had moved in. Crystal was very concerned about the effect this might have on her newborn.

There are other maintenance problems with the unit—a hole in the floor in one room, and problems with rats and roaches. The neighborhood has a very high crime rate, and Crystal worries about safety. To make matters worse, her current landlord has just defaulted on his mortgage, and she now has to move again.

Despite all the problems the family has had, Crystal's oldest daughter, Leslie, remains in the same school she has attended since third grade (she is entering 7th this year). Her father pays for her to attend a private school that is located about an hour away from her neighborhood. Leslie seems to do well in school. She gets good grades and gets along with her teachers. Sometimes, however, she gets detention for talking too much.

Leslie's older brother Owen recently switched schools because he was having trouble with gangs. He would get into fights or get jumped while walking home from school. About two months ago, Crystal moved him to a school in Harlem. Things appear to be getting better, but Crystal remains concerned about his problems. Crystal's other children are both young (7 and 6) and are just starting off at local public schools.

Now approaching her third move in less than four years, Crystal has many regrets about choosing to move from public housing and wishes she had chosen instead to apply for housing in a different development. For her, Section 8 has brought instability and substandard units in a neighborhood little different from where she lived in public housing.

Multiple Movers

A central premise of the MTO demonstration is that living in better neighborhoods may improve the lives of poor families moving from distressed areas. However, for positive outcomes to occur, families must stay in their new communities for some time.²¹ Most of the families in the qualitative sample had not made multiple moves; indeed, many were still in the same unit that they moved to through MTO. Overall, about 27 percent of the MTO experimental group movers have since moved from their initial low-poverty neighborhoods to a unit in a higher-poverty community.²²

Understanding how families make subsequent moves and the factors that shape these decisions is key to determining the long-term potential of mobility strategies. Further, knowing why families choose to leave their initial low-poverty neighborhoods is key to understanding how they have experienced MTO.

Qualitative research is particularly useful for understanding complex issues such as decisions about housing choice. As discussed in Chapter 2, we designed the sampling strategy to include two families per site who had moved back from low-poverty to higher-poverty areas in order to examine some of the issues associated with these types of moves. In this stratum, all but a few of the households had moved only two or three times since living in public housing (which was about five years ago, on average). The exception was a family in Baltimore that had moved six times.

We also examined the factors that prompted subsequent moves among the other sample groups. Only a few experimental group movers had moved to a different unit in another low-poverty neighborhood. Among the Section 8 comparison group respondents, about half were still in their original units, while the rest had moved at least once.

Families have moved for a variety of reasons, including: problems with their current housing unit or landlord; housing costs; desire to be closer to (or further from) friends and family; lack of adequate public transportation; and distance from shopping, school, or employment. Often, these decisions are complex. Sometimes they appear driven by personal motivations that are difficult to explain.

The family in Baltimore that has moved six times since the initial MTO move, did so for many different reasons. According to Cynthia, the mother, these reasons included conflicts with landlords, lack of transportation, problems with maintenance, problems with the neighborhood, and conflicts with other neighbors. Cynthia told the interviewer directly that she moved every time she felt uncomfortable with any situation, even though she knew these moves were difficult for her family. Cynthia said transportation problems motivated her first move from her original low-poverty neighborhood in the suburbs to the city. But the house she rented was too expensive, and the neighborhood was too dangerous, so she wound up moving back to the same low-poverty area—into the same apartment complex where she had been before. However, the management had changed,

²¹ The full MTO Interim Evaluation will explore the length of time necessary for neighborhoods to affect specific outcomes.

²² Calculated for the full population (not just the qualitative sample), using MTO 2000 Canvass location data. All neighborhood poverty rates are measured on 1990 census tract data.

and she almost immediately decided to move again. Cynthia described the sequence of events that caused her to move from the city back to her original low-poverty neighborhood:

[That place in the city] was a big old barn. It had five bedrooms. It was a mess. ... To make it for my amount, it had to be a piece of junk. So you get in there, they promise you it's this, this and this; got up in that place, the gas and electric bill was like \$500 something a month, cold. I could understand paying a bill like this if your house was warm, you freezing cold, you putting plastic up in your door which our old landlord had just got me so I'm stuck in this for a year. Oh, it was the worst place I could ever live. The people next door were addicts. They children - I can't see children suffering so I'm trying to help, you going to school, you are on a fixed income, how you gonna help them?

... I gots to get away from here. This is not the spot for me. So I was glad and I went back to [to the first apartment development]. The same apartment. Back to the same address, everything was back [there]. ... I could not take the city. I wind up at [the same apartment complex], back at [the same place]; different management. I don't know where they found these people at, but they was, I did not like the management. (2A127)

A respondent from Boston, Kerrienne, described problems with several landlords that had led to subsequent moves. In one instance, her move was triggered by the landlord's decision to terminate her lease. At the time of the interview, she was about to have to move again and had not yet found an apartment, even though her lease was up in one week.

I wouldn't call it a home, because the landlord was giving me a lot of problems and stuff like that. And if my kids play outside, it was just like – it was hectic. My kids can't play outside, we can't sit on the front porch, the neighbors complain, and I just couldn't take it for normal. I just wanted to keep my one year, and after that, I kept my one year, and I moved back to Boston.

... I lived up there for two years [in the second apartment]. The landlord was a slumlord; he wasn't fixing anything. We didn't have no heat. We had mices, I had roaches. I couldn't deal with it no more. He took me to court to make me leave. I don't mind it, I went to court. I did what I had to do. So he gave me enough time to move, and I moved. I was trying to find an apartment, couldn't find anything, so I went to a real estate for them to help me, and this lady helped me out to move here. And now I'm in this house, and I'm in hell. I can't take it no more. I got to move, if you notice my boxes all around.

... I love the neighborhood. The neighborhood's nice. The kids love it. Nobody don't bother no one around here. My kids love it. My son loves it. My baby loves it; she's got, man, friends around here, but the landlord, she doesn't like kids...It's the mother and the daughter live downstairs. ... They're the landlords, and they complain, and they, don't run and don't do this. I can't – if I play music, turn my music off. If my kids run, they can't even play in the back yard. My kids have to

play in the street. It's like I reach a point I can't take it no more . I just have to find somewhere else where my kids can play in the back yard more than on the street. (2A259)

Summary

While the MTO families in the qualitative sample who moved have escaped the extremely distressed conditions in their original public housing developments, their experiences in the private market have been mixed. Some have found good landlords and decent housing. These movers may experience significant physical and mental health benefits as a result of reduced stress and improved physical conditions.

However, not all movers are likely to benefit. Even though all of their units initially have to meet Section 8 Housing Quality Standards (HQS), some respondents still complain that their units have serious maintenance problems. Some of these problems are bad enough to threaten the families' health and well-being. Further, living in the private market has posed many challenges for these families, including rising rent and utility costs, tight rental markets, and the difficulties of maintaining relationships with landlords. All of these factors can lead to housing instability, which may have repercussions for families' overall well-being.

Implications for MTO Quantitative Research. One purpose of the qualitative research is to inform the larger, quantitative analysis. We have used the data from these interviews to identify key mechanisms of change and possible causal pathways that can be explored qualitatively to better understand the process of neighborhood effects. The pathways delineated in Exhibit 3-1 illustrate the potential relationships described above, showing the ways in which housing quality and housing market conditions may affect a range of outcomes for participants.

Exhibit 3-1

Hypothesized Mediators – Housing Conditions and Markets

Moving to the private market and better quality housing units

- Asthma reductions, fewer injuries
- Improved physical health
- Less stress from housing problems
- Improved mental health
- Increased satisfaction with housing
- Housing stability

Moving to the private market and lower-density housing units

- Increased privacy, more space
- Improved mental health for adults and children

Moving to the private market

- Increased Cost burden (*rent, utilities*)
- More stress
- Housing instability
- Children change schools more often
- Worse educational outcomes

Problems with housing quality (overall quality, landlord maintenance)

- Dissatisfaction with housing unit
- Housing instability
- More stress
- Worse health for adults and children
- Children change schools more often

Good relationship with landlord

- Housing stability
- Reduced stress
- Improved mental health
- Improved school performance and behavior

Bad relationship with landlord

- Housing instability
- More stress
- Children change schools more often

Note: Primary mediators are shown in bold. Primary mediators leading to potentially negative outcomes are shown in bold italics.

Note: It is difficult to determine the direct causal order of these mediators, as they are likely to affect each other simultaneously. These statements are nested to represent hypothesized causal pathways of mediators.

Chapter Four

The Neighborhood Environment

MTO families joined the demonstration program in order to leave their distressed public housing communities. The problems afflicting these communities included concentrated poverty, crime, and inadequate public services, particularly police, schools, and sanitation (Popkin et al. 2000). A complex layering of problems in public housing and poor neighborhoods had left the people who lived in these developments mired in what Blank (1997) has called the most destructive kind of poverty. The neighborhoods that surrounded these developments were often equally distressed and had few services, stores, and jobs. Given these conditions, it is not surprising that more than three-quarters of MTO applicants said that “getting away from drugs and gangs” was their first or second motivation for wanting to move (Goering et al. 1999).

MTO movers in both the MTO experimental and the Section 8 comparison groups left these distressed developments for better neighborhoods. For the experimental group, who were required to move to census tracts that were less than 10 percent poor, the differences in neighborhood environment were often dramatic. The changes for the comparison group were generally not as marked, but it was still substantial. Most families in the in-place control group still live in their public housing developments.²³ But even for these respondents, conditions may have improved because of initiatives like HOPE VI and overall reductions in crime, which have brought about profound changes in some public housing communities.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the central question of MTO is how changes in neighborhood environment affect the life chances of extremely low-income families. Two hypotheses of how the improved environment in lower-poverty neighborhoods might affect MTO families are examined in this chapter:

- greater neighborhood safety could have a range of benefits for families, including effects on physical and mental health and overall well-being; and
- more affluent neighborhoods have more resources and offer greater economic opportunity. By moving to these neighborhoods, MTO families will gain access to these opportunities.

Research on the early phases of MTO showed that improvements in neighborhood safety were one of the most important benefits for experimental and Section 8 comparison group movers. Further, studies of the New York and Chicago programs found that the increases in neighborhood quality and satisfaction had been greatest for the experimental group. The interim evaluation will examine various aspects of neighborhood environments that may affect outcomes for MTO families. But in

²³ Families no longer actually “in-place” may have moved out on their own (ordinary turnover) or may have been relocated by the housing authority due to reconstruction or demolition of their developments.

order to understand how these environments might have their effects, it is first important to understand what these neighborhoods are like and what factors the families view as important.

In this chapter, we explore how MTO families perceive their neighborhoods, particularly the differences between their former public housing developments and the communities where they now live. First we use data from the Census and from interviewer observations to provide a general description of the neighborhoods where the families in this sample live. Like the early, single-site studies of MTO, we find that movers in both the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison group are living in better neighborhoods. The analysis of 1990 Census data shows that movers in our sample are living in substantially lower-poverty areas, and our interviewer observations suggest they are living in neighborhoods with lower density and more single-family homes.

We draw on the data from in-depth interviews with adults and children to probe how respondents view their neighborhoods and the factors they see as important, such as safety and convenience. Respondents' comments highlight the key importance of increased safety. Experimental group movers, in particular, talked about the peace and quiet in their new communities. Some of the youth who had moved back to higher-poverty areas spoke poignantly about the loss of safety and how it affected their lives. Section 8 comparison group movers also felt their new neighborhoods were dramatically safer than their public housing communities and respondents in both groups felt that the improvement in safety had had important benefits for their families. In contrast, respondents who still lived in public housing talked about the continuing problems with drugs and violent crime in their communities and the restrictions these dangers placed on their lives.

Despite perceiving clear benefits, movers also reported some disadvantages to their new communities. The youth we interviewed complained of being bored, of missing the easy access to playmates and free recreational facilities. Adults talked about the lack of convenience, and both adults and youth complained about lack of transportation. Many families reported returning to their former neighborhoods for services such as health care and to attend church, suggesting that these families may retain strong ties to their former public housing communities.

Neighborhood Characteristics

In order to get a sense of what MTO families' current neighborhoods are like, we looked at an objective indicator of neighborhood—neighborhood poverty rate—across the program.²⁴ Exhibit 4-1 shows the distribution of all MTO program movers by the poverty rate of their most recent address.²⁵ A majority of the households in the MTO experimental group currently live in low-poverty neighborhoods, though not necessarily in their original housing unit. The majority of households in

²⁴ We use 1990 Census data here because the 2000 Census tract-level data with poverty levels have not been released yet. There are two caveats to keep in mind when using 1990 Census data as a source of information about the neighborhoods where MTO families live. First, these data are now 11 years old, and the neighborhoods may have changed over time. Second, the data are based on census tracts, which may not correspond to how residents think about their neighborhood.

²⁵ Based on the 2000 canvass, for those families that moved using MTO certificates and vouchers.

the Section 8 comparison group currently live in neighborhoods with poverty rates between 10 and 40 percent. This information provides some context for the qualitative sample, indicating that the neighborhood characteristics reported by each group in the qualitative sample seem consistent with neighborhood poverty levels for the total sample of MTO mover households.

**Exhibit 4-1
Neighborhood Poverty Rate for All MTO Program Movers**

Poverty rate of current address	Experimental Group	Section 8 Comparison Group
10% or less	64.0%	12.8%
10-40%	28.9%	66.7%
40% + poverty	6.1%	18.8%
<i>Missing</i>	1.0%	1.7%
Total Number	819	718

Source: 2000 MTO Canvass, 1990 Census

Exhibit 4-2 uses Census data to show poverty-rate information for qualitative sample, by the four strata. The sample size in each group is small, but these figures show how much difference there is between the types of neighborhoods that will be discussed throughout this report. The average neighborhood poverty rate for the experimental households who are in low-poverty neighborhoods is 7 percent, and the figure for those experimental households who no longer live in low-poverty areas is 21 percent. The average for the Section 8 comparison households we interviewed was 29 percent. Finally, the in-place group sample consists of households who continued to live in their original development, which by definition had at least 40 percent neighborhood poverty. The locations of the eight households we interviewed had an extremely high average poverty rate of 65 percent.

**Exhibit 4-2
Neighborhood Poverty Rates for the MTO Qualitative Sample, 2001 Address**

Poverty rate of current address	Average 1990 Poverty Rate	N	Minimum	Maximum
MTO Experimental Group Movers in Low-Poverty Areas	7.2%	20	2.4%	10.0%
MTO Experimental Group Movers in Higher-Poverty Areas	21.4%	9	11.7%	40.2%
Section 8 Comparison Group Movers	28.6%	20	14.6%	59.5%
In-Place Control Group ²⁶	65.4%	8	42.6%	86.2%

Sources: Qualitative sample data, 1990 Census

²⁶ We conducted interviews with nine in-place households but determined later than one household had moved from the original development to a different development. We excluded that household from this table.

To get some sense of how well these poverty rates for the households in the sample match current conditions, we asked interviewers to observe the neighborhoods’ characteristics and to comment (in the Post-Interview Summary they completed) on whether the respondent’s home appeared to be in a “pocket of low-income households” within their neighborhood. (Anecdotal evidence from MTO and other mobility programs has suggested that even when households relocate to neighborhoods with low-poverty, they may live in the worst parts of these neighborhoods.) Overall, interviewers reported that the visible neighborhood characteristics seemed consistent with 1990 poverty rates. Based on interviewer ratings, it seems that only in New York were experimental group households likely to live in a visible “pocket of poverty.” A few families in LA reportedly lived on a main thoroughfare, which seemed less desirable because of the busy traffic running in front of the homes. In several sites, families were living in areas with higher density than the rest of the surrounding neighborhood, either in or near large apartment complexes or high-rises.

Interviewers also completed a Neighborhood Assessment Form, documenting the presence of different types of housing, other buildings, and visible signs of disorder near the homes occupied by qualitative sample respondents. Exhibit 4-3 shows selected neighborhood characteristics from this assessment. Again, these figures are illustrative of the neighborhood differences that are evident across the four groups in the sample. Experimental group families live in neighborhoods that, on average, are more residential and have newer housing, more single-family housing, and fewer large buildings with ten or more units. On the other hand, families in the in-place control group, on average, live in neighborhoods that have older housing, fewer single-family homes, and more large buildings.

These differences are not surprising, but they do serve to reinforce the picture of better neighborhood quality attained by households in the MTO experimental group who have remained in low-poverty areas. However, the indicators for the MTO experimental group families in this sample who have left low-poverty areas resemble those for the in-place control group and are less favorable than those for the comparison group families. While this pattern is not statistically representative of the full MTO population, it provides important context for the respondents’ views analyzed in the rest of this chapter.

**Exhibit 4-3
Selected Neighborhood Characteristics for Families in the Qualitative Sample**

	Average % residential	Average % pre-1945 housing	Average % single-family	Average % 10+ unit buildings
MTO Experimental Group Movers in Low-Poverty Areas	77%	17%	48%	3%
MTO Experimental Group Movers in Higher-Poverty Areas	63%	35%	24%	28%
Section 8 Comparison Group Movers	74%	39%	33%	12%
In-Place Control Group	68%	27%	7%	41%

Source: Neighborhood Assessment Forms

Defining Neighborhoods. One objective of the qualitative research was to examine how the respondents defined their neighborhoods. It was thought that we might be able to determine definitional patterns that could be translated into geographical units more appropriate than census tracts or block groups for describing neighborhood characteristics. This did not prove realistic, however.

Respondents gave a wide range of answers when asked to define their neighborhoods. Some of their definitions included only the residential areas immediately surrounding their homes. Others gave the name of the town or larger community. Usually the block surrounding someone's home was the salient area in terms of discussions about safety, neighbors, and children's peers. When asked about shopping and access to transportation in their neighborhoods, respondents generally referred to a larger area – mostly places within a 15-minute walk. Those who lived in public housing developments or apartment complexes usually referred to the development name as their neighborhood. Families in single-family housing tended to describe larger areas that were several square blocks, whereas those in more densely populated areas might well describe a smaller area.

Memories of Public Housing

When movers talked about their former public housing developments, they generally contrasted the relative peace in their current neighborhoods to the violence in their former locations. Consistent with the findings from the MTO baseline survey, some mothers said that their main motivation for moving was to get their children away from the many dangers there.

Bertina, an experimental group mover in New York, described the conditions in her former public housing neighborhood this way:

It was like being in a war zone. It was really bad. ... A lot of drug dealings. Shoot-outs. Girls getting beat up by their boyfriends. Young girls. The language. The cursing. Everybody has such low self-esteem and no regard for each other. Nobody looked out for each other. It was horrible. (1A514)

Section 8 comparison group movers also remembered their public housing developments as terrible places. Karen, a Section 8 comparison group mover in Los Angeles, talked about how she had feared for her sons while they lived in public housing:

.... They [my sons] were more housebound than anything because I'm just so protective over them, because I had a brother I lost when I was eight months pregnant with my second one. I seen what my mom went through and it was the same, they want him to join a gang, so they killed him. And I didn't want my boys to get to that point, where if you don't join, we're gonna kill you. (3A439)

Deborah, in the Section 8 comparison group in New York, described the squalid conditions in her former development:

And the cleanest the premises stayed is when the maintenance men came in the morning. After 10:00, it's like it hadn't been touched. Urine, feces, everything, everywhere. I used to cry, I used to go to the housing management, they had a victim's services thing over there, and I'd say, come on, I lived over here thirty-two years. I know what it's like here. I had a cousin that was raped over there. The thing was, if you didn't have a police report or this and that, you wasn't getting any [help]. You wasn't needing anything. (3A509)

Lola, an experimental group mover in Baltimore, contrasted the safety at her former public housing development and her current neighborhood, focusing on basic issues of drugs and violence:

[It's] totally different. It's a totally different neighborhood because there is no drug activity, no kids hanging on the corner, not kids fighting each other. It's totally different from the city. It's somewhere you can call home. You can just sit down and be comfortable and have no worries at all. (1A146)

Teenagers also recalled and talked clearly about the differences between their former developments and their current neighborhoods. For example, Jordan, a 16-year-old boy from Baltimore living in a low-poverty neighborhood, said:

Yes, it's definitely better here [low-poverty neighborhood] than at Murphy Homes. Some examples, not too much drug activity over here, cops patrol here every, they patrol here mostly all day. There's not too many people out vandalizing things. We've got good places here that's not touched with any graffiti. (1C172)

Safety Is the Key Difference Between Neighborhoods

We asked both adults and youth in our sample to describe their current neighborhoods. Given the dangerous public housing developments they came from and their initial motivations for moving, it is not surprising that respondents emphasized safety more than any other neighborhood characteristic. Still, there were clear differences across the program groups in our sample. Respondents in the experimental group described their new neighborhoods as “quiet” and “peaceful.” Section 8 comparison group movers commented on the relative improvement but still complained about problems with crime and drugs in their current neighborhoods. Experimental group respondents who had moved back to higher-poverty areas—especially the youth—often talked about the loss of safety as a cost of their subsequent moves. Finally, in-place control group respondents described developments that had changed little in the past five years.

Experimental Group Movers. Like the single-site studies of MTO, in this sample, movers in the experimental group usually cited safety as the most positive aspect of their new communities. For example, Patricia in Chicago said that her new neighborhood was generally quiet. In the summer, the teenagers got a little noisy, but she did not face the problems with gangs and shootings she had experienced in Stateway Gardens:

It's quiet. Every neighborhood has its ups and downs, but I feel safe over here and it's a good place to live. There's always better, but it's quiet. (1A323)

Bertina, an experimental group respondent from New York, said that she loved her new neighborhood, but initially had a hard time getting used to the differences.

It's quiet. I mean, the first week we moved in we couldn't get used to the quietness. It was so quiet. I'm not kidding. (1A514)

A few adults even described their neighborhoods as *too* quiet, especially for their children. For example, Juanita in Boston said that she liked the peace in her new neighborhood, but that there were not a lot of other children with whom her daughter, Monique, could play. Monique had gained weight since they had moved because she spent so much time indoors:

Like I say, it's too quiet. I like that, but it's not good for my daughter because there's no playgrounds close to where we at. If she want to go to the park, she have to catch a bus to go to the park. And she's too young to do that by herself. (1A279)

Comments from youth in the experimental group echoed the same themes: respondents consistently reported feeling safer but also talked about their new neighborhoods being “too quiet” or “boring.” While complaints of boredom are common among children, the reported loss of social networks, easy access to playmates, and free activities like the Boys and Girls Club, appeared to be a persistent problem for the children in our sample who were living in low-poverty neighborhoods. Like Kucheria, a 14-year-old girl in the experimental group in Chicago, respondents were reflective about the trade-off:

Like, OK you can wake up every day and we're not worried about seeing anybody getting shot and no gang members, nothing like that and it's quiet and it's cool and calm up here. In the city there's a lot of activities that's going on that's negative. Here there's a lot of positive. Yeah, the only thing is, it's like too quiet out here. Um, it's boring but it's good that I'm safe, rather be bored than unsafe. (1C334)

Kieanna, another 14-year-old respondent in the Chicago experimental group, talked about missing her friends in her old neighborhood:

“..it's just that all my friends are down there [public housing]. That's it; I didn't like nothing else about it.” (1C342)

Still, despite missing friends or access to resources, the improvement in safety was clearly perceived as a significant benefit by experimental group movers—and a reason to stay in their new communities.

Section 8 Comparison Group Movers. Section 8 comparison group movers in our sample also mentioned safety as the most valuable aspect of their current neighborhoods. However, some still complained about problems with drugs and crime, describing their neighborhoods as safe during the

day but unsafe at night. Others talked about problems like graffiti or “a few bad teenagers.” But because the public housing developments they came from were so dangerous, to most movers the reductions in violent crimes felt like a substantial improvement.

Nicolasa, a respondent from Boston, lives in a neighborhood with a 1990 poverty rate of 32 percent (still a relatively high rate). Yet, she talked about how she enjoys her neighbors and the comparative quiet and safety of her neighborhood.

I'm happy here. I've been here for three years. I'm not thinking of moving. If I do move, it'll be because I found something even better. But for now, I'm not thinking of moving. I get along with the people in the house, and, more importantly, the street is quiet, especially for the kids. If I want to go downstairs, walk around with them or sit outside, I can do that and feel safe. (3A274)

Shelly, a Chicago respondent, said there were some problems in her mid-poverty (26 percent) neighborhood, but that it was definitely less chaotic than her public housing development:

I just, when I first saw it, it's not livin' in the project. I lived there so many years, I thought I would never get out. But I just like it, and in the summertime, I got a lot of friends over here, over there. We get together, sit on the porch and talk. I try to get 'em to go to church but most of 'em don't want to go to church. It's not all good. It's a lot of things that's negative, a lot of these young teenagers, but it's not as bad. Because most of the people owns they own home. (3A393)

Sheryl, from Baltimore, complained about conditions in her neighborhood, an area with 29.1 percent poverty, but said that the convenience—and the reasonable rent—were why she chose to stay there:

It's not really too many positive things going on in the area as you can kinda tell. We come through the building with the writing on the walls. You can kinda just get an idea of where the people's mind frame is at. But I stay for a couple of reasons. It's convenient for the day care, for the kids in school, and for financial reasons—it's reasonable. (3A150)

In general, the youth in our sample talked more openly about problems with crime and drugs than their parents. While both adults and youth in the Section 8 comparison group spoke about crime in their current neighborhoods, the descriptions from youth provided a more complete picture of how serious these problems were and how they affected their lives. For example, Paulette, Sheryl's 13-year-old daughter, was more blunt about the neighborhood conditions than her mother:

The drugs on the corners. The way it look outside. I dislike everything about it. They be spitting on the sidewalks and stuff. They always out late at night and stuff making noise. You can't get no sleep around here. I be so tired. (3C150)

Neighborhood Changes Benefit the Whole Family

Baltimore: MTO Experimental Group

Leroy and Donna McDonald, a couple in their late 60s, lived in a Baltimore public housing development for 15 years. They watched the development deteriorate into a place where they were worried to be seen returning from the market or from cashing a check. The level of drugs and violence steadily increased, and they saw young boys mature into drug dealers. The McDonalds were worried, not only for themselves but also for their 35-year-old daughter and one-year-old granddaughter both of whom lived with them. When the McDonalds received a notice about the MTO program, they eagerly signed up.

The McDonalds were required to attend a number of workshops on apartment maintenance, budgeting and finance, and a description of the Moving to Opportunity program. The counseling agency assigned the McDonalds a counselor, and they found an apartment for the four of them far outside of Baltimore. At first, the elderly couple felt isolated living so far away in an unfamiliar and less populated area, but they now appreciate the quiet and peacefulness of their new neighborhood. More friends moved into the neighborhood as the years went by, and now, six years later, they associate with a few people there. Most of the McDonalds' neighbors in this racially mixed community are friendly but keep to themselves. Their granddaughter, Tina, has made friends, especially through her school.

The McDonalds and their daughter all agree that Tina has greatly benefited from her new school. She has received one-on-one counseling for a motor development problem, and she has participated in an intensive after-school reading program to improve her skills. Tina's mother Wanda also believes that she herself has benefited from moving away: when she moved she had a nursing certificate, but she has since acquired a banking certificate and has taken computer literacy courses at a nearby university.

The elder McDonalds enjoy the quiet of their new neighborhood. Leroy is retired and spends most of his time attending to Donna's health. (She suffers from diabetes and has had two cataract operations.) All of the adults in the McDonald household are pleased with their choice to leave public housing, especially for Tina's sake.

LaShawna, a girl from the comparison group in Boston, said that her new neighborhood (19 percent poverty) was not really very different than her public housing neighborhood; it just had "different gangs." LaShawna described getting into fights with other people:

No, I don't feel safe in this neighborhood. This neighborhood, if you stay in your house you will feel safe... you really gotta watch your back. To see who's up behind you and stuff like that. You know somebody might be up behind you and try to rob you for your stuff. With this neighborhood right here usually there is a policeman 24-7, doing a drug bust, or trying to see who's doing this here, who's doing that there, and usually people have to call the police because of fights and stuff like that. People getting hurt. (3C242)

It is interesting that youth and parents differed so much in their perceptions of dangers. It may be possible that parents were less directly threatened or simply less aware of problems with gang

activity. Parents may also have focused more on issues like convenience or affordability, making tradeoffs, while youth were more conscious of the social environment.

Families Who Moved Back to Higher-Poverty Areas. As described in Chapter 2, in all five cities we interviewed families in the MTO experimental group who had initially moved to low-poverty neighborhoods, but subsequently relocated to neighborhoods with greater than 10 percent poverty. We interviewed only two such households per site, and we talked with children in only half of the families. But these children spoke poignantly of having lost the sense of safety they had gained from their initial move to low-poverty areas.

Shameka, a young girl from Chicago, initially moved with her family from the Ida Wells public housing development to a low-poverty neighborhood in Chicago. Then, when her grandmother became ill, her family moved nearby so they could care for her. Shameka commented on the differences between her low-poverty and her current neighborhoods. As she explained, she had to re-adjust to the violence because she got “un-used” to feeling unsafe:

[Our first apartment] was in a nice neighborhood. It was always quiet. They weren't any shooting or nothing. [here] it's a little more, it's like they shoot around here and I had got un-used to it because we lived on Rice Street for so long

She went on to say:

They don't shoot a lot. They just shoot; it's not a lot. It's every once in awhile, every few months, somebody get shot ... [or] shoot something. Don't nobody really never get hurt but...it's still bad for them to shoot... [I]t's like a gang on that block and a gang on that block over there, so...it's like this block is the block where ain't no gang at and then they come on this block to do bad stuff. (2C360)

Section 8 Housing in a Dangerous Neighborhood

Baltimore: Section 8 Comparison Group

Although happy to have a Section 8 voucher, Sheryl has seen little improvement in her quality of life since participating in the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program. After living in a Baltimore public housing project for less than a year, she was offered a Section 8 voucher through MTO. Searching for an apartment was challenging—she recommended that the housing authority provide assistance to relocatees in the future—but she finally found a single-family unit in the city. However, drugs and violence were prevalent in the neighborhood.

For reasons that Sheryl chose not to reveal, she moved again two years later to a multi-unit building. This neighborhood has an even higher crime rate; drug-using and -dealing neighbors congregate on their apartment steps and even in the hallway. Only persistent complaints and 911 calls have reduced the problems. The family has moved among three different apartments within the building during a three-year stay, in an attempt to reduce the amount of noise and traffic near their doors and windows.

While Sheryl and her daughter have a number of substantial complaints about their neighborhood, they recognize that it is convenient for a number of reasons. Bus transportation is easy and accessible. Within walking distance of their home is a corner store, health clinic, and Sheryl's son's day care center. The close proximity to the day care allows Sheryl to work as a laundry aide at a hotel, a job that she found through a welfare-to-work program. Sheryl's elementary school-aged children can easily walk to school.

Sheryl's children have developed a string of disciplinary problems in school. The oldest daughter was expelled and switched to a school with stricter discipline. The second oldest daughter has been suspended, and one of Sheryl's twin sons was actually suspended from first grade. The teacher suspects ADD, and he is being tested. Sheryl reported that her children have only a few friends in the neighborhood; it is not very safe for the children to be out, and Sheryl attempts to keep the family to themselves. Sheryl's oldest daughter said that one of the older friends she made in the neighborhood was the cause for her getting in trouble and expelled. She reported that she no longer associates with the older girl.

Bronson, a teenaged boy from Los Angeles, talked about the “quiet” in the suburb where he and his family had first moved:

I liked Recita better. It was really quiet. The school was right across the street. There was a big back yard to play in. (2C431)

Ricky, a 14-year-old respondent from Baltimore whose family had made multiple moves, talked about how living in his current neighborhood (with a 19 percent poverty rate) was affecting his younger brothers. He explained that the low-poverty neighborhood where his family previously lived would have been better for his siblings:

[Living in this neighborhood has] affected my younger brothers. They see a lot of stuff they don't need to be seeing around here. ... That [our first apartment] was more healthier and better environment for 'em for the simple fact they didn't have to see none of that. Drugs are miles and miles away from there and didn't have to worry about a bunch of stuff you have to worry about [in this neighborhood].
(2C127)

"Unlearning" Feeling Safe

Chicago: Section 8 Comparison Group

When Pamela signed up for MTO, she had been living in the Ida B. Wells development in Chicago for her entire life. She used her MTO voucher to move to a suburb of Chicago and lived there for four years. Pamela did not really know anyone in the neighborhood. She traveled to her job at a Chicago hospital every day and mostly kept to herself. She had some conflicts with a white neighbor. When her grandmother became ill, Pamela quit her job and returned to Chicago so she could live close by (near Ida Wells) to take care of her. After moving back to the city, Pamela gave birth to a son, who is now two years old.

While Pamela was living in the suburbs, her daughter Shameka stayed in Wells with Pamela's mother during the week so she could continue attending the same school. Pamela picked her daughter up on Fridays, and Shameka would spend the weekends with her in the suburbs. Although Pamela expressed concern about the violence in Wells, she did not feel comfortable putting Shameka in an unfamiliar school.

Pamela says her suburban and city neighborhoods are not much different. Shameka tells a different story. She described her neighborhood in the suburbs as quiet and safe, though it was tough for her to make friends. In the city, there are a lot of shootings and problems with gangs. She said it was an adjustment to "unlearn" feeling safe all the time. Despite her fears, Shameka likes where she lives. She has lots of friends, is close to her family, and can walk or take the bus to stores, the movies, and restaurants. Shameka draws a certain amount of strength and confidence from the familiar. She returns to Wells to visit her grandmother and friends often. She explained "It's okay because I know a lot of people and I know nobody will hurt me. I got a lot of protection."

Shameka likes school. Her favorite subjects are math and science; her grades are Bs and Cs. After school she spends her time at play rehearsals. Shameka also takes African and Caribbean modern dance after school. When she grows up, Shameka would like to be a cosmetologist.

Recently, Pamela's grandmother passed away. Pamela is looking for a job and recently put in an application for a telemarketing position. Like Shameka, Pamela is comfortable in her current neighborhood. She is close to public transportation and the doctor who cares for her son. In five years she would like to live in a house and own a car. But for now, she is thinking about moving somewhere else in the neighborhood because she needs a bigger apartment.

In-Place Control Group Families. Our interviews with families from the in-place control group indicate that their neighborhoods, the original developments from which these MTO families were recruited, remain extremely distressed. These communities still have very high poverty rates and routinely experience gang violence and shootings. Respondents' descriptions make clear how much

more dangerous these communities are than the neighborhoods to which the experimental and even Section 8 comparison group families have moved.

Anita lives in the Wagner Houses in New York. She talked about how difficult it had been for her and her mother to get into public housing years ago. She was thankful to have an apartment then; now she wants to move out.

The thing I like least—the drugs, the drugs, the gangs, the small apartment. We need a bigger apartment. ... Wow, I guess me and my mother went through such a struggle to get this apartment. We was in the shelter system for four years, and we went through so much to get this apartment [when I was twelve]. ... So, when we got this apartment, it was like the best thing. This was like a mansion to us. And now I feel like it's a jail. I just can't get out of here for some reason. It, they just don't want me to get out. But the most I like about this apartment is this is what my mother gave me and my brother. She gave us a roof over our head, but this is a jail. Really, this is a jail. I can't seem to get out of here, first of all. And second of all, you see the bars around and the gates, and you see the gates on the window. This is just a jail. (4A558)

Ebony, who lives in Baltimore's Somerset Court, described the violence there and its effects on her children.

I dislike it a lot. There's a lot of killing, drugs. I seen my children just change in front of my eyes. [W]here they was going to school every day, [there are] so many negative kids that don't go to school, parents just gave up on 'em, so I basically had to get my children back on track and focused that school is important. I don't like it. It's my first time living in a project. That's a big thing. It's just serving its purpose for me. If I could move somewhere else, I would. (4A164)

Children from these families talked openly about not feeling safe in their neighborhoods. Some described staying inside their homes to avoid problems with gangs or stray bullets. Ebony's son, Barnaby, was one of the children who said he generally stayed inside:

...It's all right. I like living around here because of my friends and it's fun sometimes. I don't like living around here 'cause people getting killed for nothing. My mother is trying to move 'cause she don't like it, but it's all right sometimes but sometimes it's bad cause they be doing stuff for nothing. Getting little kids to sell drugs and stuff like that and the environment. That's why I stay in house or go play with my friends in the playground or at their house. I don't be outside a lot...It wasn't this bad when we first moved here. (4C164)

Gregory, a boy growing up in Chicago's Stateway Gardens, talked about the dangers in his community and how they had affected his outlook on life. He spoke of the many negative influences and his longing to "be somewhere else:"

....because it's getting me ready for the real world. I know the real world is not easy and there's many dangerous places more than Stateway Gardens. So, it's taught me how drugs are. That's why I'm not really associating with these people. So I know how, I know many bad people are in the world. So it's kind of getting me ready for who's like this and who not and ready to take the peer pressure. In a good way, well, in a bad way, it, it's just that, I would rather be somewhere else. I think I deserve better than here. (4C317)

Coping with Distressed Public Housing

Chicago: In-Place Control Group

Mildred cannot remember when she signed up for MTO. It was so long ago, and—because she was assigned to the in-place control group—she did not get to move. Instead she remained in Stateway Gardens, where she has lived for her entire life. Mildred has two children: Gregory (6) and Leanne (13).

Mildred has numerous complaints about her current housing. Water leaks through the roof from the upstairs. Roaches, rats, and other pests invade every room in her apartment. When she calls “Housing,” she says it takes “forever” to get a response.

Mildred works from 7:45am to 4:00pm everyday as a mail room clerk. She pays \$365 a month in rent. She does not think her apartment is worth that much money, but she feels she has no choice, because she cannot afford more than what she already pays. The little money she has left over each month she saves so she can move someday.

Drugs and gangs are an ever-present force in Stateway Gardens. While Mildred feels safe because she knows everyone, she also knows that “bullets have no names,” and she—or worse, her children—could be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Most of the time her children remain indoors. Mildred is also worried that when her son gets older, the gangs will try to recruit him to push drugs. At six years old, Gregory is a difficult child. He cannot sit still and tends to be hyperactive. He is entering the first grade. Mildred wonders about how he will do in school.

Leanne (who is in 8th grade) is thriving, even though her future is unclear. She does not like going outside and spends most of her time in the apartment. She was proud to show her clean room and the desk where she completes her homework. She is doing well in school, but the school she attends is at risk of losing its accreditation. On the weekends she takes college preparatory courses through a program at the University of Chicago and plays basketball. She also spends a lot of time with her father. When they are together, they listen to music, surf the Internet, and joke around.

Although most of the in-place control respondents described dangerous neighborhoods that had changed little in the past five years, Ebony in Baltimore thought that her community had improved somewhat. Her family lived in a low-rise development next to the notorious Lafayette Courts high-rise development. Lafayette Courts was demolished in 1995 with a HOPE VI grant and has since been replaced by new townhouses and a senior building. The new development is named

Pleasantview Gardens. As a result of the redevelopment, Ebony believed her neighborhood was notably safer.

It's done calmed down a lot 'cause most of the people that was involved is either dead or in jail, but now it's the younger generation. They were the older ones, now it's the younger ones doing the same thing. It calmed down for like three years, then it just started to escalate back up. ... They was tearing it [Lafayette] down 'cause there was a lot of vacant buildings. They was moving people out. People taking people over there and killing them, raping them, using it for drugs. It just wasn't safe. ... [Now,] you don't see as many drugs addicts as you used to before that was knocked down. That's all they used to do, go up in the buildings and sell and do drugs and you see people from all over the world, I mean all over the city, just running over there to get it. The traffic is better. You don't see as many drug needles and the little vials that they use on the ground. It's done changed a lot.
(4A164)

In sum, while respondents from the in-place group are still contending with the challenges of living in dangerous, high-poverty communities, both adult and youth respondents from the experimental group feel that they are living in substantially better neighborhoods that provide significantly better environments. Indeed, the improvement in safety is one of the main reasons that these movers are satisfied with their new communities. Some of the experimental group youth whose families had moved back to higher-poverty communities noted the loss of safety as one of the negative consequences of their subsequent move. Most respondents from the Section 8 comparison group also noted a gain in safety, although some still live in troubled neighborhoods that have many of the same problems as their original public housing developments.

MTO Families' Perceptions of the Effects of the Changed Environment

Previous studies have examined how living in dangerous neighborhoods affects residents' lives. These studies generally find that living in violent communities has negative effects on adult and child mental health, can have long-term developmental consequences for children, and reduce social cohesion.²⁷ One of the central hypotheses of the MTO interim evaluation is that increased safety is one of the key mediating variables that lead to better outcomes for experimental group movers.

We used the qualitative data to explore how MTO families themselves perceive the effect of differences in safety on their day-to-day lives. Movers in our sample described how they perceived moving to safer neighborhoods had affected their lives, pointing to reduced stress and other benefits for themselves and their children.

²⁷ See for example Garbarino et al. 1991, Popkin et al. 2000.

Despite complaining about boredom in their new neighborhoods, almost all of the youth who had moved—both experimental and Section 8 comparison group respondents—talked about ways their lives had improved. Kucheria, a 14 year-old experimental group mover from Chicago, explained what moving out of public housing has meant for her:

I think if I had stayed in Ida B. Wells I'd be a different person than what I am now. I'd be a wild person; I'd probably be in a gang or something like that 'cause even if some people, it's just like grown women, all the people around them doing their stuff. That's what I think. Since I've moved out here, I think I got a better chance than I do out there. (1C334)

Stephanie, in the Section 8 comparison group in Chicago, had moved from the Stateway Gardens development, part of Chicago's notorious "State St. corridor," a four-mile long strip of public housing. Even though her new neighborhood had a moderate poverty rate of 20 percent, Stephanie perceived it as being much safer and talked about how living there had reduced her level of stress and anxiety:

I can lay down and have peace. You know what I'm saying? What if I have to jump up and look out the window and see what's going on? People shooting, people running. I wonder what's going on. I can't leave the building. I'm scared to go to the store. They are going to shoot over here by me. I don't have to go through all that. I can walk down the street and go to the store. I can send my little son up there on the corner to the store. And knowing he's going to come back safely. ... I feel like we can go out in the street and be safer over here than we could over there. Because I remember one time that we were at the swimming pool in Stateway and they just got to shooting. My son, right here, I must have went crazy on those people. Are you all crazy? Shooting and my baby is right here. I said, Jesus, let me leave here. ... I love being away from Stateway. I love it. I feel like I can just wake up. I don't have no stress on my back. I feel great. (3A303)

Kimberlynn, in the Section 8 comparison group in Los Angeles, said that she feels like she is a better parent since she moved to her new neighborhood. After she moved, she took some parenting classes she learned about through a social service agency:

[I] wasn't really close to my kids like I am now. I feel like I became a better mother since I attended a parenting class. Got a certificate for that and it opened my eyes because I was pretty mean to my kids. The class really, really helped me 'cause I used to say a lot of bad things to them. My mother wasn't really there for me and living over there was all I knew. I just really didn't know how to love. Like ... [in public housing] I could go next door to my home girl, what's up, and she's popping a can or firing up a joint. Now I'm here I can think. I got a car now which I didn't have that over there. I'm in my house. I made up with my kids, got beds and TVs and things like that. (3A405)

While movers in both the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups talked of the benefits of living in safer neighborhoods, respondents from the in-place control group still had to cope with

the stresses of living in a dangerous environment. Mildred, who lives in Stateway Gardens, described her concerns about her son:

Because he's a boy, and like I said, they have the little gangs and stuff and the selling drugs and when he comes, it's bad 'cause I have to tell him to turn, and it shouldn't be like that. I think it's bad for my kids. (4A317)

Linda, who still lived in public housing in Boston, said that the violence in her neighborhood made her feel “pressured.”

There is drugs going around. Like I said, I don't see but I hear. Then I hear about people being beaten up and killed. It's like no end to hearing scary things on me and I can't handle the pressure, and I don't like bad news. (4A226)

Movers clearly feel they and their families have benefited from living in safer neighborhoods, citing reduced stress and anxiety and improved life chances for themselves and their children. Like Kimberlynn, some movers felt that the changes had allowed them to change their parenting styles. Further, as will be discussed in later chapters, movers sometimes drew direct connections between their reduced fear for their children and their willingness to seek employment opportunities. Some also felt that their children's new schools offered substantially safer learning environments. Youth commented poignantly on their changed prospects, with some boys saying that “they might have been dead” if they had stayed in public housing and girls talking about friends who had already become pregnant. In contrast, the in-place control group parents still feared for their children, and the youth respondents in that group actively worried about negative influences and limited opportunities.

Other Aspects of MTO Families' Neighborhoods

MTO Experimental Group Movers. While movers in both the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups perceived clear benefits from having left their public housing developments, some also talked about disadvantages. In particular, experimental group respondents often said that their new communities were less convenient and offered less access to services. Respondents spoke about the lack of transportation as a particular drawback. As Juanita, an experimental group mover in Boston, put it:

So if you don't have a car, this is a bad neighborhood for you to be in... Which the neighborhood I was in before, I didn't have to worry about havin' a car because everything was like basically right there in my reach. I could take five minutes and go to the store and be right back. It was easy, but this is not so easy here. (1A279)

Youth in low-poverty neighborhoods also mentioned lack of transportation as a problem. Juanita's 14-year-old daughter, Monique, talked about the difference between living in the public housing in the city—within walking distance of parks and stores—and living in a neighborhood where she has to rely on the bus:

There's more freedom [there]...more moveable. I could just walk to a corner store instead of taking a bus to go out to a store. Like up the streets on American Legion Highway, there be stores up there. So it won't be that far...it's like about ten or five minutes. That's all that it takes to get there so it won't be that far. (1C279)

Some youth from the experimental group reported returning to the city for health care. And most of the youth respondents who reported attending religious services return to their old neighborhoods to attend church—often with their grandmothers.²⁸ Still, youth who had moved to low-poverty areas described using a number of services in their new communities. They talked about going shopping for groceries, to the mall or local clothing stores, and to the movies, bowling, parks, or recreation facilities. Jordan, a 16-year-old boy living in Baltimore County, said his new neighborhood had many appealing amenities:

The lake got us. Really, to tell you the truth, the lake out back, because we never had seen a body of water right in back of our house, so we really liked that. And we had a [basketball] court right up the street. The school wasn't too far. It had a bunch of restaurants. We had to take buses in the city to where we needed to eat. (1C172)

Given that one of the major complaints of low-poverty movers was the lack of convenience, it is not surprising that respondents in the group of experimental group movers who had moved back to higher-poverty areas often said that what they liked best about where they lived now was easier access to resources. When asked what she liked best about her neighborhood, Pamela in Chicago said she liked the fact that she could walk to most of the places she needs to go.

The hospital is right there and I take my son to the doctor. And I actually walk. I like the neighborhood. It's pretty cool. (2A360)

Section 8 Comparison Group Movers. In contrast to the MTO experimental group movers, respondents from the Section 8 comparison group generally viewed their neighborhoods as convenient. For example, Rachel from Baltimore said that she enjoys easy access to neighborhood services.

The schools is right down the street and the stores, you just walk to the store and the hospital is walking distance. Bus transportation is no problem at all. You can get around and stuff. (3A125)

Monica, in the Section 8 Comparison group in Boston, described many neighborhood amenities that were convenient for her. When asked what she liked best about living in her neighborhood, she talked about all of the recreational activities for her children:

²⁸ We will discuss the issue of ties to public housing communities in Chapter 5.

Everything. Oh man, it's so much. It is so much. First of all, you got big parks around here. It's Roxbury. How I love Roxbury. ... Malcolm X Park, which used to be Martin Luther King Boulevard, was right here, and that's another huge park. The Shelbourn is right there – that's a recreation center. And they play softball. They have a big huge field and play softball. So they can play football, they can play basketball, they've got like four or five courts. They can play tennis with two courts. (3A242)

Families in Public Housing. Although they held generally negative views of their neighborhoods, respondents in the in-place group often saw location as a major advantage. The majority of these public housing developments are located in or near downtown and are close to shopping, medical facilities, and public transportation. For example, Yolanda from Baltimore had those positive things to say about her current location:

I like the convenience around here. They have stores, they have a mall. ... They have schools, daycare, bus stops. Downtown is in walking distance from here. Different hospitals, the courthouse, it's so many conveniences around here that I like about the place. (4A195)

Likewise, Faye, who lived in Chicago's Stateway Gardens, said that her neighborhood is convenient and seems to be improving:

Actually, I think it's a nice area. The lakefront is not too far away. Public transportation is great. It's not too far from downtown. In the last couple of years, I've seen a lot of improvement in the neighborhood, it's going up, not down. The two worst things in this neighborhood is Stateway Gardens and Ida B. Wells, but I think things can be fixed without necessarily knocking down all these buildings and displacing a lot of people. But the neighborhood itself is pretty good. We got two different hospitals. We got public schools, three academies, restaurants. It's a pretty nice neighborhood. (4A363)

Summary

Our analysis clearly shows that respondents in both the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups believe that they are now living in better, safer neighborhoods. The differences are most marked for the experimental group, who were required to move to areas that had poverty rates of less than 10 percent. Adults and youth feel that the gains in safety have had important benefits for their families. Respondents spoke of reduced stress and anxiety and of reduced risk that children would either be harmed or would become involved in delinquent activities. Parents spoke of changing their parenting behavior and youth described changes in their outlook for the future.

However, some households in low-poverty neighborhoods have experienced a loss of convenience to convenient transportation, free recreational activities, health care, shopping, and church that those in more central locations enjoy. As we discuss in the following chapters, increased safety may also have implications for educational and employment outcomes, if children are better able to focus on their

school work and parents feel safer leaving their children to go to work. In contrast, some respondents who are living in higher-poverty neighborhoods did not experience these gains in safety; without this change, they may not benefit as much from leaving public housing.

Implications for MTO Quantitative Research. The MTO interim evaluation will explore the issue of neighborhood environment further, examining the ways in which changes in safety may lead to improved health and socio-economic outcomes for movers. The pathways delineated in Exhibit 4-4 below illustrate the ways in which neighborhood characteristics may affect a range of outcomes for participants. (Neighborhood characteristics specifically related to social norms, employment, and schooling are discussed in subsequent chapters.)

Exhibit 4-4

Hypothesized Mediators - Neighborhood Safety, Amenities, and Neighbors

→Move to lower-poverty neighborhood

- Increased sense of safety
 - Less stress, less victimization
 - Better parenting
 - Better school performance and behavior
 - Employment outcomes
 - Improved physical and mental health outcomes
- Exposure of children to positive peers and role models
 - Higher self-esteem, improved future outlook
 - Positive activities, less delinquency
 - Better school performance and behavior

→Move to lower-poverty neighborhood

- Lack of transportation
 - Less access to health care and religious activities
 - Subsequent moves, likely to higher-poverty areas
- Reduced access to social networks and friends
 - Subsequent moves, likely to higher-poverty areas
- Less access to recreational facilities
 - Isolation
 - Increased delinquency

→Move to moderate- or high-poverty neighborhood

- Little improvement in safety
 - No change in stress or other outcomes

Note: Primary mediators are shown in bold. Primary mediators leading to potentially negative outcomes are shown in bold italics.

Note: It is difficult to determine the direct causal order of these mediators, as they are likely to affect each other simultaneously. These statements are nested to represent hypothesized causal pathways of mediators.

Chapter Five

Social Environment

MTO families have moved into a range of types of neighborhood environments. Some are living in low-poverty neighborhoods in cities and suburbs that are radically different than their public housing communities, with dramatically lower levels of crime and disorder.²⁹ Others are living in cities in moderate-poverty neighborhoods that have some problems with drugs and crime, but are still much less dangerous than their original public housing communities. Finally, some remain in high-poverty public housing developments, which most believe have improved little in the past five years.³⁰ In this chapter, we turn to the social environment for MTO families: the types of people who live in their communities; their interactions with these neighbors; and their larger social networks.

As discussed in Chapter 1, a central premise of the MTO demonstration is that, like the changed physical environment, the different social environment in lower-poverty areas will have major impacts on outcomes for families. Families are expected to benefit from forming relationships with neighbors in their new communities—neighbors who may act as role models for adults and youth and enforce social norms. Further, community norms in low-poverty areas may be more supportive of work and less supportive of welfare, and there may be less tolerance of delinquent or risky behaviors for youth. However, families may suffer from the disruption of existing social networks.

Empirical evidence on the effects of mobility efforts on participants' social networks is limited, and the results to date are mixed. Generally, studies of the Gautreaux, MTO, and Yonkers demonstrations have found some evidence that participants make at least some connections with neighbors in their new communities (Rosenbaum and Popkin 1991; Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000; Hanratty, McLanahan, and Pettit 1998; Rosenbaum, Harris, and Denton 1999). However, these interactions may not be significant or lead to gains in social capital. Further, participants may maintain their ties to their previous neighborhoods (Briggs and Darden 1997; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2001).

Here, we use data from the in-depth interviews with MTO families to examine how successful they have been in forming connections in their current neighborhoods, how they describe their social networks, and whether they feel their relationships with friends and family were affected by the move. In addition, we examine the extent to which respondents rely on ties from their old public housing communities, the reasons they give for maintaining or not maintaining these relationships, and the ways in which these long-standing relationships may have helped or hindered their adjustment to their new communities.

Analysis of these qualitative interviews offer some support for the hypothesis that participants would benefit from forming new connections in low-poverty neighborhoods. Movers in both the MTO

²⁹ The full MTO interim evaluation will include an analysis of small-area crime rates.

³⁰ The full evaluation will include some respondents who have moved back to developments renovated under the HOPE VI program where conditions may have changed substantially in the past five years.

experimental and Section 8 comparison groups often commented on their new neighbors' positive behaviors, especially in contrast to their neighbors in public housing. However, as we describe below, the data also highlight the factors that may limit the extent to which participants form new connections. First, even if they have positive attitudes toward their neighbors, some respondents said that they prefer not to socialize with their neighbors. Second, in a number of communities, participants reported that they had few opportunities to interact with their neighbors. In some cases, the neighbors worked and were simply gone during the day or there were not many other families with young children. In a few cases, racial, cultural, or language barriers made it difficult for respondents to form relationships, and sometimes left them feeling isolated and lonely.

Even though many respondents viewed their former public housing developments as dangerous, unhealthy places, we found that more than half of our respondents maintained close ties to friends and family in public housing. These connections clearly have many positive benefits for MTO families, providing them with support and assistance in times of need. However, these close ties may also have some negative repercussions. In particular, close ties to other communities may reduce families' motivation to seek new friendships in their current neighborhoods, particularly for teenagers. Families that spend most of their free time visiting their old public housing developments simply have less time to form new relationships—or to use the resources in their new communities. They also may be more likely to choose high-poverty areas in subsequent moves.

MTO Families' Perceptions of their Neighbors

In general, respondents in the qualitative sample had positive comments about their neighbors, describing them as friendly, even when they do not know many of them very well. However, there were some patterns of differences, with experimental group movers and Section 8 comparison group movers in moderate-poverty neighborhoods being more likely to comment on neighbors' positive behaviors, while respondents still living in high-poverty neighborhoods made more negative assessments.

MTO Experimental Group. Lisa and her son Jordan had moved to a Baltimore suburb far from their original public housing development. Both of them talked of their neighbors in very positive terms. Lisa said that she liked her new neighbors much better than those in her former public housing development:

It's much better here. ... You don't really want to be bothered with people in Murphy Homes, because it's like they're not in your best interest. In my opinion, it's good to live in a neighborhood where the people are working to better themselves. If you're in a situation where it's like nobody knows what's going on, and they're like living from day to day, or they're on like fixed incomes. I mean, you're on a fixed income when you work, but I mean if you're not working then that's a big difference, because you're not really progressing. You're like regressing. So this is definitely different.... (1A172)

Jordan, her 16-year-old son, also commented at length on how much better he liked his current neighbors than those in his former public housing development:

Well, the people here, you'll probably get to like them. It's a lot of good, friendly people here. The neighbors are real good. When we first moved here, they helped us move and kept in good contact with us....People at Murphy Homes are probably more rude, probably because of the drug activity, people would come up, ask you questions about where to find drugs at, so people would get real antsy when you'd be around them, and too close to them...Around here, people are not really used to that, so you can really talk to someone, ask them a question, they'll help you out, no problem.

Like his mother, Jordan talked about the fact that most of his neighbors work:

I'd say it's overall better than back in Murphy Homes. People at Murphy Homes would rather steal a car than to buy one. Out here, everyone's just working, has a job.

Further, he explained, people really count on each other in his new neighborhood:

Like I said, the neighbors know each other real well, so you could most likely go down and knock on their door if you need something, ask them anything. Say their dog run out of the yard or something, you could knock on their door, bring it back. They'd do something like that for you, so you'd do it back for them. (1C172)

LaKeisha, a girl from an experimental group family in New York whose family had moved from low-poverty area to a moderate-poverty neighborhood, also talked about the positive aspects of her new community, noting that people were friendly and helped each other out.

Mostly all you see is old people, and there are two day care centers so you see little kids. You see the babysitters around with the little kids. The woman over here...she goes to her yard...you see people fixing their gardens. There's another old lady that orders flowers and people come to do her yard for her. She just comes and takes care of it. Sometimes they just sit and talk about the flowers. My mother plants flowers too, so most other neighbors in the summer time...everybody plants flowers...everybody comes out with water pots....They are very friendly, especially the old people. I go and talk with them. Sometimes I help them. I help the old lady from there...she has helped me too with some stuff. ...[T]hey're old but they can help you. Most of the old people that I've seen here go to a retirement center...it used to be a school but they turned it into a retirement center for old people. They go there, and people come and visit them. So that's really nice. (2C588)

In essence, these movers view their new neighbors as positive role models, providing a more positive atmosphere than their public housing community. Their new neighborhoods are cohesive, and they can rely on their neighbors for mutual help.

Section 8 Comparison Group. Respondents from the Section 8 comparison group also had positive things to say about their new neighbors. Stephanie, a Section 8 comparison group mover from Chicago, contrasted the situation in her former public housing development to her new neighborhood, where the streets are peaceful and most of her neighbors are employed:

You got to listen to the shootings [in Stateway]. Just the commotion. The people around you were violent, period. It was just bad for my kids. I'm glad I got a chance to get moved out, to leave the projects, so I can see how life feels outside the projects. ... We don't have to duck and dodge the bullets. They ain't doing nothing with their lives down there. But wasting it. To go to jail or to hell, one of the two. Yes. [The new neighborhood is] 100 percent better. They [the new neighbors] are doing something with their lives. At least where I live at, they are trying to do something with their lives. In Stateway, they doing nothing. (3A303)

Carolyn, a Section 8 comparison group respondent in Los Angeles, said she had grown up in the neighborhood where she was now living. When she was younger, the population was mostly African-American like herself. Now, the neighborhood is predominantly Hispanic, but she is very comfortable there:

To me, they [the Hispanic neighbors] are generally nice. They are nice people. They looking for no problems. Because I'm not in that gang bang, because I'm a mother with kids. So people I do run into, nice people, speak. Some of them probably cannot even speak English. I walk my daughter to school, identify them every day. They identify me. If I happen to see one of their kids walking by, going to school by themselves, I can identify that he is and even though he's by himself I might walk behind him and make sure you do go in that class. Because I can just identify him from the little route. I like the neighborhood.

Carolyn went on to talk about the contrast between the residents in her new community and the people she knew in public housing. In public housing, she said, young people had little incentive to work because they could get money through illegal activity:

It's fewer with jobs in the projects but not young people. Anybody that's able to work say from age 18 to 25, they don't start working until they are 25 because there are other ways to get in their money. In the projects, you don't gotta have a job to get your money in the projects, you know what I'm saying? If you don't live in a project, you will work quicker. (3A431)

Even some respondents who had moved to relatively high-poverty communities liked their new neighbors better than the people they lived near in public housing. For example, Rochelle, a Section 8 comparison group mover in Baltimore, had moved to a relatively high-poverty neighborhood (poverty rate of 40 percent), but she thought her new neighbors were more respectful and helpful than those in her former public housing development:

People here in this complex, they are more courteous. I mean, when I was living the Flag [House], they didn't care what they say. They didn't give respect to the kids. I don't know whether or not it's the elderly [people who live here] or whatever, but they give respect to kids here. They watch out for you, like if you have to go to the store, if you got to go to the corner. If I can help them, I will go to the store for them. Because I'm about the youngest one here, because I'll be 47 tomorrow. (3A117)

While respondents in all four qualitative sample strata had positive things to say about their neighbors, there were some differences between those who lived in lower- and higher-poverty neighborhoods. Although a few respondents who were living in high-poverty communities had positive comments about their neighbors like Rochelle (quoted above), others complained that their neighbors' behavior created a dangerous and stressful environment.

Sheryl, a Section 8 comparison group respondent living in a neighborhood with a 30 percent poverty rate in Baltimore, said that her neighbors were only interested in drinking and getting high:

Their lack of wanting anything better for themselves or their neighborhood. Their mind frame seems to be about the street, running the streets, getting high, hanging out. Not really anything positive. Not too much positive. ... If you don't want anything better for yourself, you can't produce anything better for your neighborhood, and they don't even seem to start there. As long as they can get high and drink and hang out and cuss, they seem to be fine and happy. (3A150)

Tyson, a 15-year-old boy from Chicago, said that many public housing residents displaced by demolition have moved to his neighborhood and were creating problems for other residents:

Well, like I said the next block, it's people that it, they totally lost in the drugs. And they'll come, they'll start something or it be people that just moving from the projects that come out here and they mad—they still got that ghetto life. [T]hey haven't adapt to the environment and...they only act like they still in the projects. (3C336)

In-place control group. Many respondents in the in-place control group viewed their neighbors as a negative influence, citing problems with drug use, drug trafficking, and gang activity. Still, there were some families in the sample who still lived in public housing who talked about the positive characteristics of some of their neighbors. Faye, who lives in Chicago's Stateway Gardens, said that there are some people who are really involved in the community, making a difference:

Basically, you've got some pretty good people around here in this area. You have like college students, the ones that believe in working. You have those that get involved in the community. You have a lot of volunteer programs around here, which you have in a lot of black neighborhoods, even though this neighborhood isn't totally black actually. (4A363)

Taking Advantage of Opportunity

Baltimore: MTO Experimental Group

Lisa, a single mother with four children, lived in public housing for two years before she volunteered to participate in MTO and was randomly selected for the MTO experimental group. Lisa chose a neighborhood in a far suburb, for two reasons: the neighborhood met her and her children's requirements (e.g., safe, friendly, many recreational opportunities, and close to manufacturing jobs); and, more importantly, Lisa wanted to distance herself from her fellow public housing residents. As she explained, "...if you're going to move to opportunity, it better be the best opportunity you can get, and leave the other stuff behind."

Originally, her family and friends were concerned about the distance, and Lisa discovered that the public transportation was inadequate. The lack of transportation made it difficult for her to get to her new night-shift job. Lisa solved her problem by purchasing a car, so she could drive to work and to visit her family.

Lisa describes her neighborhood as racially mixed and mostly homeowners. Her neighbors are very friendly and organized: there are neighborhood awareness parties, clean-up days, and informal block parties and cook-outs. Within the past year drug dealing activity nearby became a problem, and Lisa hopes that the neighbors and police can stifle the activity. Otherwise, she will feel forced to move again.

Lisa's oldest son, Jordan, a high school junior, has only glowing things to say about the neighborhood and his school. He reported having no problem making friends—he has many in the neighborhood—and he participates in sports and music after school. Lisa agrees that the local schools are considerably better than the public city school system however, her daughter has had some behavioral problems at school, and she feels the counseling she has received has not been adequate.

Overall, Lisa believes that moving to the low-poverty neighborhood has benefited her children immensely. They have more positive role models, access to more resources, and are no longer exposed to violence and crime. She reports benefits for herself too: Lisa appreciates the quiet, friendly neighborhood, and she is able to juggle a night-shift job, going to school, and designing clothes for her own small business.

Relationships with Neighbors

While most of the MTO participants in this sample mostly had positive views of their neighbors, describing them as friendly and pleasant, relatively few had formed strong relationships with them. Some respondents said that they simply preferred not to socialize with their neighbors. Others, especially those in the experimental group who lived in neighborhoods with large numbers of working people, talked about having little opportunity to form new friendships. They would say that they had not gotten to know their neighbors well, because most were gone during the day and had little time for interaction. Respondents were particularly likely to mention the lack of interaction when they lived in neighborhoods with large numbers of single-family homes.

Wanda, an experimental mover in a low-poverty neighborhood, said that her neighborhood in New York was nice but her neighbors “stick to themselves:”

I really don't like this place as far as hanging around or to be out. But as far as staying in the housing, the neighborhood is good, people's nice around here, very nice. Everybody stick to their self, but I would prefer my mom's [public housing] neighborhood. I really would. (1A507)

Lola, an experimental group mover from Baltimore also said that her neighbors got along but were not very welcoming:

They all seem to get along. They are all fine with me and with everyone else that's up in this neighborhood. They didn't really welcome me to the neighborhood, but they did come over and introduce themselves to me and my kids. (1A146)

Likewise, Dorothy, a Section 8 comparison group mover in Los Angeles, said that most of her neighbors were friendly, but all went to work early:

Because people go to work around here early. ... Everybody speaks, but it's a lot of everybody coming and we be going. (3A454)

Other respondents cited their own preferences as a reason for not forming friendships, saying that they preferred to “keep to themselves.” Sheryl, the experimental group respondent from Baltimore who talked about how much better she liked her new neighbors, also said that she preferred to limit her interactions with some:

Neighbors are neighbors all over the place, I guess. They never change. They're still the same. Some you love, some you love to hate, I guess. It's the neighbors. But, I think on my behalf, I get along with all my neighbors. And the ones that I think are like over-bearing, I kind of like stay away from. But I still say hi, and I know I've gotta go my way, go and come.

Similarly, Kerrienne, an experimental group mover from Boston who had subsequently moved to a higher-poverty neighborhood said she preferred to keep to herself:

I love this neighborhood, too, because when I moved here, I'm the type of person, I stay to myself. I didn't want to have no friends or nothing. I'm that type of person. I stay to myself all the time. (2A259)

While most of the respondents in our sample did not report many strong connections in their new communities, many had formed at least some relationships, and a few had made good friends. Carrie, an African-American experimental group respondent from Boston, had formed a close friendship with her white neighbor:

My next door neighbor, we're real friendly. She's just moved here two years. I was here three years. We're real close. We go to each other's house, kids, we just got close.

She went on to say:

[S]ee, I have the white kids. We joke about them next door because she's white..... She have the black kids going over her house, and I have the white kids coming over here. (1A257)

Nicolasa, a Section 8 comparison group mover from Boston, described close relationships with the other residents in her building:

... With my neighbor on the first floor...if I need her for something, I can just knock on her door and she can do the same for me. Anything that I need for the house. We trust each other. I say that neighbors are part of the family.... You have to depend on your neighbors and that's why it's important to get along well with your neighbors. If something happened to me here and I died, or something happened to my children, who would I go to? My brother lives far away in Roslindale and my mother's in Santo Domingo. You have to depend on your neighbors, and that's why it's important to get along with your neighbors. (3A274)

In contrast, virtually all of the youth we interviewed said that they had made at least some friends since they moved. Still, some who had moved to areas where there were few families with children had difficulty finding playmates in their neighborhoods, even if they were able to make friends at school.

In-place control group. Respondents from the in-place control group lived in public housing developments with large numbers of families—and often with their own relatives. Both adults and youth often spoke of high levels of interaction and of depending on their neighbors for mutual help. For example, Gregory, a 13-year-old boy living in one of the toughest public housing developments in Chicago—Stateway Gardens—described how neighbors would help each other with small things:

Like, like say for instance she [neighbor] needed some sugar or some garbage bags or anything, we would help her out, need a mop or if she had a flood, we'd help her out or help him out. (4C317)

At the same time, the negative behaviors cited by many in-place control group respondents drove them to keep to themselves. Julia, a girl from the in-place control group in New York, talked about the fear that kept her and her mother confined to their apartment:

I'd like to move to another area that I could know more people and I could go out more without my mother worrying about me, because my mother don't go outside much. So she don't know how the area is. I want to move to another area that my mother knows is good and she knows a lot of people there. That way she would let me go out more and know that I'm safe and everything. (4C549)

In sum, while most of the movers we interviewed said that they had at least some interactions with their neighbors in their new communities, relatively few had formed close friendships. Sometimes, this was due to respondents' personal preferences, but often it was due to the fact that in neighborhoods with large numbers of working adults, neighbors rarely had opportunity to interact.

Isolation

As noted above, one of the findings from the qualitative interviews with Gautreaux participants was that although many mothers felt that the moves had benefited their children, they themselves felt lonely and isolated (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000). Our analysis finds similar results. Adult respondent in the MTO experimental group, even those who reported good relationships with neighbors, often mentioned feeling isolated. In contrast, Section 8 comparison group movers rarely complained of isolation, often saying that they still lived near friends and family. Youth were less likely to report being isolated, and most had at least some friends. However, some youth reported being lonely, and older teens tended to maintain relationships with friends from public housing.

Some experimental group members said their family members still lived in the city and that they no longer saw them as often as they liked. For example, Geneva from Baltimore said she liked her neighbors and had made some friends, but that her sister was the person she relied on most. Though they talked on the phone often, Geneva rarely saw her any more because she lacked transportation:

Too far away. We just far away from each other. She's all the way over there [in the city] and I'm all the way over here. And she always complain about how far I live. I told her, well when I get a car, I'm gonna come and get her. (1A118)

Lisa, who liked her suburban Baltimore neighborhood so much and had gotten a car, told a similar story. She said that she had made some friends in her new neighborhood, but that all of her close friends were in the city. Like Geneva, she said she was very close to her sister, but rarely got to see her because they lived so far away. Now, Lisa only saw her on special occasions like holidays and birthdays, although they talked regularly on the phone. Lisa said that her family had not wanted her to move so far away:

They didn't want me to come, and they asked me why I was coming so far. ...I've been here so long they come out and see me now. (1A172)

A few experimental group respondents, particularly those who had moved to areas where their neighbors were of different races or ethnic backgrounds, reported feeling especially isolated and lonely. Maria from Boston, who spoke little English, said that she liked her neighbors but could not communicate with them:

My neighbors here are really good...the only thing is that I don't speak much English so I can't communicate as much with them. But we greet each other...

Maria went on to say that, even though they were very nice, she was better off in her public housing development, Mission Hill:

In terms of knowing people, I think I was better off there because there were a lot of Hispanics there. If you didn't know anyone....you would meet people. You talk to your neighbors about anything that was going on...anything that you needed. We all spoke the same language. But since I don't speak English that well, I can't do that with the people here. Sometimes I get the kids to ask the neighbors for things for me. (1A251)

Nicolasa, an Hispanic Section 8 comparison group mover from Boston, said that not being able to communicate with her neighbors motivated her to make a second move to a neighborhood where most people speak Spanish. She talked about how her current neighbors compared to those in her first neighborhood:

I would say that they are better because I can communicate better with them. We communicate, we share, we stop and talk. The problem with South Boston [her previous neighborhood] was that the majority of the people were American and spoke English. I don't know a lot of English, so I couldn't communicate very much with them. But here I communicate more. And the people here are very friendly. The people are of the same race and don't have problems communicating. (3A274)

Even when there were not language barriers, cultural differences made some respondents feel uncomfortable and isolated. Shirley, an African-American experimental group mover from New York, was in her 60s and had lived in public housing most of her adult life. She had moved to a low-poverty neighborhood with two children, one her grandson and the other a boy she had adopted. The neighborhood was predominantly West Indian, and while Shirley thought it was a better place for the children, she felt as if she had moved to a foreign country, saying "I'm livin' among them and that's 'bout it." She said she had gone to one block party and left right away because she felt uncomfortable. Shirley described not being able to find the kinds of food she liked in the grocery store:

Yeah I like shoppin' over there at the supermarket [in my old neighborhood], cause they carry basically the things that I like to eat. Where in the supermarkets over here [they] carry basic things that the foreigners like to eat. And I feel left out.

She went on to say that she felt like an outsider:

My landlord's an African. They, they hire their own kind. ... So basically like I'm an outsider. I'm American Black, see? ... I really don't like the foreigners. I told ya, I feel like an outsider. ... They don't understand me too well, and I don't understand them at all, so I feel like an outsider majority of the time. (1A569)

Few youth reported feelings of isolation and loneliness and clearly had an easier time forming friendships than adults. For example, while Shirley complained of feeling like an outsider, her 13-year-old grandson Donte had formed a large social network and preferred his new friends to his old

friends from public housing. He spent his afternoons doing homework at friends' houses, and one of his friends' fathers waited for the school bus with the children every morning. However, some youth who were living in neighborhoods where there were few other children did report feeling isolated. Monique, who is 14 and living in a low-poverty neighborhood in Boston, said that there was only one other teenage girl in her neighborhood with whom she spent time. The neighborhood was too far from her old neighborhood for her to go there alone to visit friends.

In contrast, a few experimental and comparison group respondents said that they were actually *less* isolated now that they lived in lower-poverty neighborhoods, because their relatives were now willing to visit them. Bertina, an experimental group mover from New York, said that her mother and sister were afraid to visit her when she lived in public housing, but they were willing to come more often now that she lived in a safer neighborhood:

She [my mother] went maybe twice and I would have to go downstairs. She would call from the corner...I'm here. Come downstairs to get me. And I would have to go down to get her. She was afraid. And my sister...I think she went there once. She hated it. 'Cause she lives in a house in Jersey...and she saw all the craziness, and it was too much for her. (1A514)

These interviews indicate that distance, as well as language and cultural barriers, have left some adult movers feeling isolated. Some Spanish-speaking respondents found themselves simply unable to communicate with their new neighbors. Conversely, some respondents who moved to Hispanic or West Indian neighborhoods felt isolated and excluded. In some cases, the isolation was difficult enough to prompt participants to make—or at least consider—subsequent moves.

Racial Issues

Another risk for MTO movers to low-poverty areas was that they might encounter racial or economic discrimination in their new communities. Discrimination and racial harassment were problems for some Gautreaux movers, at least initially (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000). More recently, research on Section 8 voucher holders searching for housing has found that participants often cite racial and economic discrimination—or the fear of encountering discrimination—as a factor limiting their housing search options (Popkin and Cunningham 2000; Turner, Popkin, and Cunningham 2000; Cunningham, Sylvester, and Turner 2000; Smith et al. 2001). However, the first Gautreaux families moved more than 25 years ago; their experiences might be very different from those of MTO participants. MTO families often moved from segregated developments to more racially diverse communities, although some did move to areas with few people of color.³¹

The analysis of data for the full MTO sample may show that those who moved to predominantly white areas do report discrimination. However, our analysis of the qualitative interviews shows little

³¹ At baseline, the MTO population lived in areas with a median 1990 percent Black of 64.7 percent. About half the movers in the MTO experimental group initially chose areas that were less than 20 percent Black. For the Section 8 comparison group, the corresponding figure was 47 percent Black.

evidence that these respondents encountered serious problems of this kind. Indeed, a number of respondents spoke very positively about living in more diverse communities. For example, Bernice, an African-American woman in the experimental group in Los Angeles, said that the residents of her public housing development had been either African-American or Mexican, but her new community had residents of many different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

It's a mixture. We have a lot of different races—Armenians, Orientals, Blacks, Hispanics. They have El Salvadorans, so it's a lot of mix. I think that's a good thing for my daughter, too. She gets to learn about other races and languages. (1A424)

Likewise, Francisca from Boston talked about the different ethnic groups in her community as being “nice.”

They're pretty nice, you know. They'll talk to you. If you need any help, they'll help you. A lot of Jamaicans on this street. Second, there are Puerto Ricans in this area that I notice. Those are the two people in this area. (3A260).

Some respondents were more negative about living in neighborhoods where they felt “different.” While she had not experienced conflicts with her neighbors, Isabella, a 14-year-old Hispanic girl in the experimental group in Boston, said she felt uncomfortable in her predominantly white neighborhood. The neighborhood around her former public housing development had been more diverse:

Like here there's only white people. If you go to Mission Hill you can see black, white, Hispanic, Dominican. But here there's only white people. There's not so many people that I can talk to from other cultures, 'cause I like listening about other cultures. If I haven't gone to that place they can tell me about it. I already know everything about white people. I think it's pretty good being white. I think it's pretty good being Irish and other stuff. I've learned so much about it that I want to go to other cultures and learn about other people to see how fun it is...how the country is. (1C251)

Some respondents did encounter problems with racial issues in their new neighborhoods. Elizabeth, an African-American respondent in Chicago, complained that that her neighbors, who were mostly Mexican, were extremely unfriendly:

It's okay to speak. That's all I'm asking for is to speak or something like that. That's about all. But they're not friendly enough on that basis. ... Well, maybe 'cause I ain't a Mexican. (1A338)

In Boston, the situation appeared to be more complex. Race seems to have been an issue both in low-poverty neighborhoods to which people moved and in public housing—where racial conflict has plagued public housing developments like Old Colony since serious racial integration efforts began in the early 1990s.

The most extreme incident we heard about was reported by Rashaad, a 15-year-old African-American experimental group mover from Boston. He described his neighbors as “Chinese, white, Irish, Italian, black, a lot, Polish.” Despite the diversity in his community, it was difficult for Rashaad to adjust to his new low-poverty neighborhood because, as he put it, “*I feel like I’m different. Cause I was like born in the ghetto and I still talk that way than they do.*” Rashaad described an incident where one of his neighbors used racial epithets and threatened him:

Some dude, I never seen him before, drives up and gets out of the car to give me something. He gave me a paper and he’s all like ‘you n——s will be the target.’ All you n——s are gonna die. And then he jumped in and he took off. I didn’t bother reading the paper until my mother said let me see what it said. It said this guy was with the Ku Klux Klan, we want you to come. (1C257)

Kerrienne, a African-American experimental group mover from Boston, said that racial discrimination had motivated her to make a subsequent move to a higher-poverty neighborhood:

Some of them was, like, prejudiced. They don’t like black people.... Because when I go into the stores and stuff like that, they treat me like I’m a piece of dirt, and that’s not fair. Everybody’s just [the] same to want. They have different colors, but we all want. You know what I mean? (2A259)

These interviews indicate relatively little evidence of overt discrimination or harassment, but some respondents did report racial tensions or feeling uncomfortable in their new communities. As was the case with isolation, these tensions were sometimes sufficiently uncomfortable to prompt families to make a second move.

Links to Family and Friends

Social networks are a complex phenomenon, affected not only by location but also by individual characteristics and preferences. Even though some respondents had made new social connections, most movers in both the experimental and Section 8 comparison groups said that their closest ties were to people who lived outside their current neighborhoods.

Most respondents reported that they had at least one close family member or friend on whom they could rely and with whom they socialized regularly. When we asked about the important people in their lives, adults were likely to mention relationships with family members—mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, adult children and with boyfriends or their children’s fathers (as people who helped them regularly). Like their mothers, some youth mentioned relationships with their fathers or step-fathers, grandparents, siblings, and other relatives. Some spent most of their time outside school with family, playing with cousins or step-siblings, while others had more extensive friendship networks.

Respondents from all program groups spoke of strong family networks that helped them in times of need. For example, Rose, an experimental group mover in Chicago who lived in the suburbs, had been very ill. Her mother came to live with her for two months to care for Rose and her children. Typically, respondents talked about how their mothers or siblings helped them—or they helped their

siblings—with food, childcare, or simply with companionship and moral support. Manuela, a Section 8 comparison group mover from Boston, described a common situation:

They [my mother and siblings] lend me money or anything that I need. My mother takes care of children so she makes more money than I do.... [I visit my mother] almost every day or three times a week. My sisters comes on the weekends and my mother cooks and we spend time together. (3A349)

Yolanda, a respondent from the in-place control group in Baltimore, described her family's system of mutual help. Yolanda's adult children mostly lived nearby. Her daughter had also joined MTO and had been assigned to the MTO experimental group but ended up dropping out of the program.³² She had gotten married and bought a house not far from the public housing development. Yolanda's mother also lived nearby, and she spoke about sometimes helping her with groceries and other things. Yolanda said she babysat for her own grandchildren regularly and even had custody of two of them for a while. As she said:

Well, my oldest daughter will usually, "Mom do you need something?", and she'll sometime go to the store and bring me food. Especially like during the winter time, they [my children] tell me not to go out because of my leg. I might fall and do more damage to it. My daughter will help. My mother will offer to help. I usually turn my mother down the majority of the time. Sometime when I need something done around here, I might ask my son to do it or one of my brothers to come here. (4A195)

Many respondents described close networks of extended family and reported that the children spent time with aunts, grandmothers, and cousins. For example, Donte, whose grandmother Shirley complained of isolation, said he spent most weekends in the suburbs with his aunt and her children. Another child in Chicago said that she spent all of her free time playing with cousins who lived nearby. Pamela, a Chicago experimental group respondent who had moved back to a higher-poverty neighborhood, left her daughter with her grandmother in public housing during the week while she was working, because she did not have child care in her new community. Pamela was very unhappy about the situation, and she was relieved when she moved back to a higher-poverty neighborhood close to the development. The move allowed her to reclaim her daughter:

I didn't want my daughter growin' up there [in Ida Wells]. Even though she still go to school down there and she communicate with some of the people down there. ... I just didn't want her, the guys down there. ... It was like, during the summertime, it's like a lot of shootin' and it's a lot of gang bang and it's always been like that. Not when I was little. It's changed since I was little. It was peaceful when I was little, but as of now you have to run outside to get your kid. They shootin' over here, they shootin' over there. And it's like every summer. I didn't want my daughter to grow up down there even though we really down there

³² That is, she did not move. All families that went through random assignment remain in the program for research purposes.

still. But that was one of the best things [about moving again]. That's why, even though my grandmother got sick, it was good for me to come back here 'cause then now I got my daughter back. ... I loved the old neighborhood because all my friends are down there. All my friends are still down there. (2A360)

Pamela's comments reflect many respondents' ambivalent attitudes toward their former public housing developments. While they maintain close ties to the neighborhood and often rely on family and friends for help, they hold very negative views of the larger social environment and worry about its effects on their children.

Fathers. Relationships with fathers and boyfriends were complex, with some respondents like Pamela (above) reporting receiving much support and other families having little or no contact. As discussed in Chapter 2, just 10 of the 58 families in the qualitative sample are two-parent households. In seven of those 10 families, the father lives in the home; in the other cases, the second parent is the mother's boyfriend. Many more children said they have at least some regular contact with their fathers, and some of these relationships are quite close. One mother in the in-place control group in Chicago described how she and her daughter's father were helping their child to make good choices about applying to high schools. In the experimental group in Los Angeles, Rosa, a single mother with six children (including a newborn baby) received much help from her children's father. He did not live with them, but he saw them regularly. Manuel, her 16-year-old son, described the relationship:

I see him regularly. Sometimes I see him all week, or sometimes every two days. He comes by with the car to see what we need. Sometimes we go to a party with other family, or go to play sports. (1C463)

The situation for one comparison group family in New York was more complicated, illustrating the intricacies of many MTO families' lives. There were five children in the household, and Crystal, the mother, said that they had been fathered by three different men. The father of Crystal's three youngest children came by regularly and helped with childcare while she worked. The oldest daughter (our youth respondent) spent every weekend with *her* father and his new family in Yonkers. The oldest child, a 16-year-old boy, had no contact with his father. Leslie, the oldest daughter, spoke positively about her relationships with both of her parents and considered her father's step-daughter in Yonkers to be her best friend:

My father's girlfriend's daughter is my best friend. Even though we fight a lot, she's still my best friend. We talk to each other about every day. (3C575)

Other families described troubled relationships with fathers. Some children said that they saw their fathers only a few times a year at most. In a few cases, children mentioned having cut off contact with their fathers altogether. Two children in Los Angeles said that their fathers were in jail; one said his father had been in and out of jail most of his life, but that when he was out, he went regularly to visit him in his home in public housing.

In sum, our findings indicate that most respondents have strong social networks, even though they may not have formed strong ties in their new communities. These networks provide social support, and mutual help, particularly with childcare. As we will discuss in more detail in the next section,

sometimes the need for this support keeps families closely tied to their former public housing communities.

Ties to Public Housing

More than half of the movers in the qualitative sample—in both the MTO experimental and the Section 8 comparison groups—described strong continuing connections to their public housing neighborhoods. As noted above, some Section 8 comparison group respondents still lived relatively close to their old developments. When respondents spoke of going to church, almost all talked of attending the same church they belonged to when they lived in public housing. Respondents in both groups have friends or family who still lived in the development, and they went back frequently to visit. A few respondents said they spent most of their free time in the public housing development, and many spoke of older children who either remained in the development or spent most of their time visiting friends or relatives there.

Many of the children we interviewed reported visiting their former developments on a regular basis to see relatives or friends. The only exception was in Baltimore, where most of the public housing developments these families moved from had been demolished. But even there, families maintained close ties to extended family and friends who lived in the city.

In Boston, Juanita, an experimental group respondent, had an older daughter who still lived in her own unit in public housing. Both of her younger children spent most of their weekends there; her son spent most of his time hanging out with his friends there during the week:

On the weekends, she's [my younger daughter] with her sister. She's with her sister. And like I said, her sister stay in Franklin Hill so she have a lot of, she have a lot of her friends up there and she be with her friends. (1A279)

Her 14-year-old daughter, Monique, said she frequently stayed in her sister's apartment:

...I'll stay some weekends. On vacations, I'll go there and stay, because on vacations I don't go back home or sometimes I'll stay home. (1C279)

Isabella, the 14-year-old girl in the experimental group in Boston who spoke about feeling isolated in her white suburban neighborhood, also talked about how she and her family still had strong ties to their former development and visited there regularly. The family was about to have to move (because the landlord was converting their apartment building into condominiums), and she thought they were likely to move back to Mission Hill because her mother was lonely living in their current neighborhood.

We want to [move back] because we have to move out, because the owner wants everybody from the three apartments to move out, so we have to move out to Mission Hill. At the same time, we want to move somewhere safe...my mother like the quiet.. she wants to move around here, but at the same time she wants to move over there for the reason that over there she's not so lonely. Her mother just died two years ago, in 1999. So my mother now is alone. My grandmother used to

come from Puerto Rico and they used to talk and stuff ... But now she's alone and thinking about my grandmother and stuff. If we go to Mission Hill, we know all the people and everybody knows each other, so she can feel better. That's why I want to move her there. (1C251)

Respondents from Chicago also reported maintaining close ties to friends and family in public housing. Marianne, an experimental group respondent, said she had little contact with her family, but still had many friends in the Robert Taylor Homes and spent many weekends “sitting out” with them. She spoke of one special friend who had helped her through some very tough times:

Actually, to be very honest with you, I'm not really close [to] my family. I'm a baby girl out of 10 of us. I've got a sister that's out-of-town, I've got a brother on the west side, and another brother out-of-town, two brothers in the penitentiary, and basically my whole family was like on drugs so by me being the baby, I felt out. I felt like, “Man, my mom is gone, my father is gone, the kids' fathers gone” ...And then my nephew is gone, ...My family on drugs doing they own thing, I felt lonely, I felt like I didn't have nobody. So it was this older lady that stayed in Robert Taylor on the same floor was like a mother [to me], she was always there for me, always be around her, I still stay in contact with her so I still go over there and sit with her. And that's what I do. (1A342)

Wanda, an experimental group respondent from New York, said that she spent most of her free time visiting her mother and her friends in public housing. She said she preferred that neighborhood; at the time of the interview, she was in the process of leaving her low-poverty neighborhood for an apartment near her mother’s public housing development:

... We [me and my children] don't hang in this neighborhood, we go to my mother's neighborhood [in public housing], see we like that area better. See when I ... got into this Moving to Opportunity, they told me I had to move in an area that was like 10 percent [poor]. So I was like ok, that leaves my mother's area out....So in the summertime I take my kids to my mother's area and we go to the park around there, sometimes people play music in the park. It's a nice area for the kids to play and everything, got a lot of friends, peoples more friendly around there. (1A507)

Older Youth. While more than half of the families in our sample had at least some contact with friends and relatives in public housing, most of the youth we interviewed were young teens and spent most of their time with their parents in their new communities. However, our interviews indicated that the situation for our respondents’ older brothers and sisters could be quite different. As in the Boston family (described below in text box), some older children never moved from public housing, moving instead into their own public housing units when the rest of the family left. Others reportedly spent most of their time with friends and family in public housing, only occasionally visiting their parents.

In one instance, a girl in Chicago told the interviewer that her brother returns to their former public housing development for weeks at a time to sell drugs. In another instance, an older child’s continuing public housing connections had tragic consequences. The younger children all reportedly

were able to make a successful transition and were doing well, but the oldest son did not make a break from public housing and was killed there a few months prior to the interview. As Jacob, his 13-year-old brother, told it:

In September, it happened down there at Murphy Homes. He went down there and these boys didn't like him, they were jealous of him and so they shot him, they shot him four times. (IC146)

Thus, while respondents' networks in public housing provided social support, the ties sometimes posed real risks for older teens. Their reports indicate these youth were more likely to become involved in delinquent activity, and girls were more likely to become pregnant. As Jacob's brother's case illustrates, parents' fears about the potential risks for their older children were often justified.

Strong Public Housing Ties

Boston: MTO Experimental Group

Even though Juanita moved to her low-poverty neighborhood three years ago, she still has not fully adjusted. While Juanita and her 12-year-old daughter Monique appreciate the quiet and safety of the new neighborhood, the lack of nearby shopping and recreational activities is problematic. Typically, Juanita needs to catch a bus to reach neighboring stores, and it takes at least an hour to reach the stores she prefers in her old neighborhood. Her apartment has many maintenance problems, and the landlord is slow to fix leaks that drip through to the downstairs neighbor's unit. Only pressure from the housing authority Section 8 program gets the landlord to make even minimal repairs.

Juanita's neighbors are mostly older, retired homeowners who are friendly but rarely socialize. There are few children living in the neighborhood, and Monique has only one friend on the block. So, Monique spends weekends and holidays with Juanita's oldest daughter, Keisha (age 18), who lives in public housing. Juanita's son Malcolm, a junior in high school, technically lives with his mother, but he attends school near the housing project and spends most of his time there. Unlike Juanita, her son owns a car.

After a year of living in the suburbs, Juanita began exploring moving. However, her mother moved in with her, and the housing authority will not allow her to increase her Section 8 subsidy to cover an apartment with four bedrooms instead of three. Juanita has diabetes and does not work, so for now Juanita spends most of her time in her apartment. This would make it hard to move.

Juanita believes her daughter is receiving a better education in her new school, and she likes the fact that Monique is being exposed to different cultures and languages. Monique has had some problems at school such as not turning in homework; however, the daughter reports that she is buckling down and working harder.

While she is not entirely happy with her situation, Juanita believes she made the right choice in participating in MTO. She feels that she and Monique needed to leave the project due to drugs and violence. Still, she would prefer to move back to a neighborhood close to her previous housing project, where many of her family's activities remain centered.

Summary

Social networks and relationships are inherently complex. Analysis of these qualitative interviews highlight the ways in which these MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison group families' social relationships have been affected by moving. Movers in both groups talked positively about their new neighbors, often citing the contrast to the uncivil—and sometimes criminal—behaviors of their neighbors in public housing. Still, relatively few had formed deep connections. Some respondents simply preferred to keep to themselves, others reported that they had little opportunity for interaction, and some described racial, cultural, or language barriers that made it difficult for them to form relationships. Youth were more likely than adults to have formed new connections, and only a few youth complained of loneliness or isolation.

Some experimental group movers talked about not being able to see their family and friends as often as they wanted, but most had managed to maintain these ties. Section 8 comparison group movers were more likely to be living near family and friends. Despite these differences, respondents from all program groups cited family and close friends as the people they relied on for social support and for help in times of need.

More than half of the respondents who had moved through the MTO program reported maintaining close ties to friends and family in public housing. These findings suggest that, while families value the physical safety of their new neighborhoods, they still long for the emotional safety of their relatives in public housing. These ties may provide important social support. But they also may have negative consequences. Families that maintain these close contacts may be less able to take advantage of the economic and social opportunities that their new, lower-poverty neighborhoods offer. Youth who maintain close ties to public housing are particularly at risk of becoming involved in delinquent behavior and of sustaining physical harm.

Implications for MTO Quantitative Research. The pathways delineated in Exhibit 5-1 illustrate the ways in which the social environments of MTO participants' current neighborhoods may affect a range of outcomes for participants.

Exhibit 5-1
Hypothesized Mediators – Social Environment

Move to lower-poverty neighborhood

- Develop new social ties
 - Enhanced social network
 - Successful adaptation to new community
- Neighbors exhibit more positive behaviors
 (working, neighboring)
 - More satisfaction with neighborhood
 - Higher social cohesion
- Safer environment
 - Less isolation, friends and family willing to visit
- Observe working behavior
 - Conventional employment
- Youth develop new social networks
 - Positive peer influences
 - Less delinquent behavior
 - Better school performance and behavior
- Maintain ties to old neighborhood
 - Maintain support network

Move to lower-poverty neighborhood

- Maintain ties to old neighborhood***
 - Do not form new social networks***
 - Teens maintain ties to old peer group***
 - Involvement in delinquent activity***
- Transportation problems***
 - Isolated from friends and family***
 - Increased depression***
 - Moves back to higher-poverty neighborhoods***

Note: Primary mediators are shown in bold. Primary mediators leading to potentially negative outcomes are shown in bold Italics.

Note: It is difficult to determine the direct causal order of these mediators, as they are likely to affect each other simultaneously. These statements are nested to represent hypothesized causal pathways of mediators.

Chapter Six

Educational Opportunities for Children

In this chapter, we turn to the question of how moving has affected educational opportunities for children and youth in the MTO program. School is the key element of children's social worlds and may have as large an impact on their lives as their neighborhood surroundings. One of the main expectations for the MTO demonstration was that moving children to better neighborhoods would provide access to greater educational opportunities.

As discussed in Chapter 1, there are several hypotheses about why moving should improve educational opportunity—and ultimately educational outcomes—for children and youth. Schools in higher-income neighborhoods perform better and offer students more resources. MTO children would have access to these higher-quality schools, which might positively affect educational outcomes. Children might also benefit from attending schools in a safer environment; reduced stress might improve mental health and allow them to focus on their studies. Increases in parental labor force participation and changes in peer groups might also enhance school performance. Finally, children's behavior might improve as a result of relocation.

Some hypotheses suggest the opposite effect. Moving to a lower-poverty area might have negative effects if children became discouraged by higher standards and increased competition. The MTO children may also be more likely to be placed in special education, either as a result of improved diagnosis of their needs or as a result of discrimination by their new schools.

Research on Gautreaux program participants was encouraging with respect to education, indicating that after an initial decline, children who moved to the suburbs ultimately seemed to do somewhat better than those whose families moved within the city (c.f. Kaufman and Rosenbaum 1992, Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum 2000). As the review in Chapter 1 indicates, early findings from MTO show mixed results, with some indications of both positive and negative effects for movers in the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups. The only study to focus extensively on educational outcomes was of Baltimore MTO. Analysis of administrative data there suggested that moving from public housing might have helped to prevent the kinds of dramatic decline in test scores often found in inner-city schools. However, teens in the experimental and Section 8 comparison groups were more likely to experience grade retention and to be suspended or expelled (Ludwig, Ladd, and Duncan 2001).

The findings from in-depth interviews with the qualitative sample of MTO families help to illustrate factors that may facilitate change and others that present barriers for movers. But, MTO children's educational experiences since program assignment are more complex than anticipated, because many children attend schools outside their immediate communities and therefore are not being as affected by neighborhood environments as one might expect. The reasons for these out-of-district placements range from parental and child preferences to children's special needs. More generally, there is far more school choice available now, compared to 20 or even 10 years ago. And in further contrast to Gautreaux, many families in the MTO sample moved to a different city neighborhood rather than to

the suburbs, so that—even if the children attended a new school—they were still in the same school system.

We use data from the interviews with both adults and youth to describe how MTO families make choices about school, their feelings about the comparison to the schools in public housing neighborhoods, and their perceptions of school quality and environment. Although we do not examine grades, we do discuss the issue of school performance generally, especially placement in special education programs or grade retention, and any behavior problems the children are having, at school or elsewhere.

School Location and Family Choice

Examining children’s school experiences qualitatively highlights how much family and individual characteristics influence children’s experiences within the larger neighborhood environment. Parents—and sometimes teenagers—make choices about whether the children attend schools in or out of the home district, and whether they attend public, charter, magnet, or private schools. Further, children’s special needs or behavior problems may lead to their being placed in particular schools.

As a result, a substantial number of our sample households have children who do not attend their local neighborhood school. Every experimental group household we interviewed in Boston and Chicago (12 in all) had at least one child travelling out of the neighborhood to school. And this was true for several experimental group families in Los Angeles and New York, as well. This fact makes it difficult to detect patterns across different neighborhood environments in the data, as it is possible for families to live in a low-poverty neighborhood while their children attend school in a high-poverty environment. Because of the complexity of MTO families’ school choices, we have focused much of our discussion in this section on trying to understand the reasons why so many children in our sample attend out-of-area schools.

In some respects, school choice for MTO families is analogous to decisions about making subsequent moves. Sometimes families or children make decisions because of their individual preferences, e.g., preferring to attend school with friends or to have children attend a school with which the mother is familiar. Sometimes, placement is shaped by external constraints such as location, child care needs, school district rules or children’s special needs.

One factor that needs to be kept in mind is that school systems have changed substantially since the Gautreaux research was completed in the late 1980s. Many urban school systems now allow children to apply citywide for special programs or schools and even offer charter schools as alternatives. School choice at the high school level appears to be particularly common, with families in Chicago, Boston, and New York all reporting that their children could apply to attend different high schools throughout the city. Families in our sample from Boston and Chicago were more likely to put their children in out-of-district schools than families in Baltimore and Los Angeles. Finally, some Chicago families (five of the ten movers interviewed) have chosen to keep or place their children in schools near their former public housing developments.

Factors in decisions about school. Families cited many different reasons for placing children in out-of-area schools, including ties to friends or previous communities, school quality, and children's special needs. For example, in Boston, a mother reported that one of her sons did not get into the high school he wanted, so he had to go elsewhere. She chose to put her other son in private school because she did not think the local public school was adequate.

Monique, a 14-year-old girl in the MTO experimental group from another Boston family, had chosen to go to a high school near her old public housing development. She said she wanted to be near her friends:

They give you this slip and you have all different kinds of schools and you can pick your first, second, and third choice ...I wanted to go to some schools that all my other friends were going to. Even though I wanted to make new friends, it was hard for me to leave my old friends, too. (1C279)

Another Boston experimental group parent said that her oldest son had chosen to stay in high school near his former public housing development and had eventually dropped out. Her daughter, who was younger, also chose to attend school near the public housing development.

In Chicago, many children in the qualitative sample still attended school near public housing.³³ Since MTO families came from extremely distressed, high-crime public housing developments, it is truly surprising that so many of these families have chosen to place their children in schools near these dangerous environments. The reasons mothers in Chicago gave for making these choices included concerns about the quality of schools in their new communities, fear of unfamiliar schools, and the need to rely on child care by a grandmother who still lived in public housing. In one case, an experimental group family had their children in a private school near the development before the family moved. Patricia, the mother, said she had tried placing her children in two different schools in her low-poverty community. But she felt her children were not doing well and, further, that they were not safe:

...I put them in a public school... The school was great.... but they grades, it's like they wasn't trying as hard as when they was at St. Johns.... so that was like a bad, bad mistake on my behalf cause I should have never done that, I should have just dealt with the commute....They went to [another]...school here ...I mean that was the worst. They fought everyday, the kids wanted to beat them up every day. I used to have to leave work and come home to get them, cause the kids were gonna jump on them when they got in school. After that, that was like the last straw. That's when I sent them back to St. Johns... I just dealt with the commute. (1A323)

Marianne, another experimental group mother in Chicago, said she felt her children were not doing well in the schools in their low-poverty community and chose to put them back to the school near her public housing development where she had been a volunteer.

³³ The names of the children's schools have been changed.

...when they were going to Stenwood [their public housing school], they were all honor roll students. The teachers worked with them. Whatever problem they had, they was being worked with. When they got there [to the new school], they just totally fell off... And I had to get my kids out of there. Because they wasn't getting no learning. They were falling off their honor roll....But after that happened, I put them back in Stenwood, and that's where they're at now. (1A342)

If higher standards, more competition, or adjustment problems led to this situation, Marianne may have acted too hastily. But Shannon, a Section 8 comparison group mother in Chicago, saw clear deficiencies in the new school. She had tried to put her daughter in school in her new neighborhood but several problems had arisen. First, the school was “too rowdy.” Second, it did not have the resources (e.g., new computers) of the school she had attended near public housing. But most of all, “...at [the new] school, it wasn't safe for my child.” So she decided to put her daughter back in school near Stateway Gardens. (2A343)

It is difficult to know in these instances why it was that the children were not doing well in their schools in their new communities. It may be that more time was needed for adjustment to the change. It may be that these new schools were more rigorous, and therefore the children's grades declined. It may be that the children's grades were simply declining as they got older. It may also be that, as these mothers believed, the new schools were actually inferior to the ones their children had attended previously. Patricia's children had attended private school before moving. Some schools in extremely distressed neighborhoods near public housing may have received special grants or resources that made them preferable to schools in other, relatively low-income neighborhoods. Finally, as Shannon stated, the schools may have been unsafe for their children because of problems with gang territories or other conflicts.

In addition to children not doing well in school, one mother chose to put her daughter in school near public housing because of child care needs. Pamela is an experimental group mother who had moved back to a higher-poverty neighborhood in Chicago. Because of her work schedule and her fears about finding help in her new community, she had opted to leave her daughter with her mother in the Ida B. Wells development:

I never took her out there [to the new neighborhood] and put her in school. 'Cause like I say, I didn't know nobody. I didn't know nothin' about the school, how the school was gonna keep her while I was at work.... So she stayed there [in Wells] and went to school at my mom's house. And I got her on Fridays through Sundays. (2A360)

Based on other research we have conducted in Chicago (Popkin and Cunningham 2000, 2001), we believe that this pattern of school choice in Chicago may also appear in the full interim evaluation survey sample. Chicago's public housing is undergoing a dramatic transformation; all of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA's) distressed family housing is scheduled to be demolished over the next decade. Most of it will be replaced with mixed-income developments, and at least 6,000 families will receive Section 8. This transformation has brought with it tremendous confusion and fear for residents, many of whom have lived in the developments for decades. These residents have survived the dangerous world of the CHA's developments by relying on networks of friends and family and

are extremely reluctant to break these ties (Popkin et al. 2000). Further, research on relocatees from the Robert Taylor Homes is also finding that families are choosing to keep their children in school near public housing (Venkatesh 2000).

Although it was less common at other sites, children in Baltimore, Los Angeles, and New York also reportedly attended schools outside their neighborhoods. In New York, one child from an MTO experimental group family attended a charter school in Manhattan, and a Section 8 comparison group child attended a private school about 40 minutes away from her very high-poverty neighborhood. A teenager in Los Angeles, whose family had moved multiple times, chose to stay in the high school in his previous community. One girl in Baltimore had been expelled from her local school and had to attend school in a neighboring district.

Finally, across the sites, a number of children attended special programs of various sorts. As noted above, a few of the MTO children in the qualitative sample are in special magnet or charter programs or private schools—because they are doing exceptionally well in school or because their parents have made a special effort to select better schools. Individual families in Boston, New York, and Chicago have chosen to put their children in private schools. Several children are in charter schools or magnet programs, and one family in Baltimore and another in New York said that their children were in “gifted and talented” programs. In addition, some children are in special education settings, such as alternative schools for behavior problems, vocational education schools, or special education programs in a separate school.

Multiple Moves and School Changes

Another factor that affects these accounts of children’s school experiences is that a number of families in our sample have made multiple moves since enrolling in MTO. As discussed in Chapter 3, 27 percent of the MTO experimental group families have made at least one subsequent move since their initial move from public housing and some families have moved multiple times. These moves have clearly affected children’s school experiences, with a few children having changed schools every year.

Parents and children alike spoke about the difficulties of making these changes and the disruption they caused for children’s friendships and for school performance.³⁴ Often, new schools were following different curricula and schedules than the previous school. Cynthia, the Baltimore mother who had moved her children six times since leaving public housing, clearly worried about the effects of all of these moves on her children:

And that's what I didn't like. I don't like that I had to pull them from school to school.... So it's like they have to adjust again. That's my biggest problem with all the moves. They have to adjust all over; learn what these teachers expect of them,

³⁴ Katz, Kling, and Liebman (2001) found that households with boys who had problems at Baseline were more likely to move. Thus, the selection bias in the sample of movers contrasts with the common notion of the families with the fewest problems making successful moves.

and that's a lot. I mean I know, I went to school too and I know I wouldn't have liked it. (2A127)

Making Choices About Schools

New York: MTO Experimental Group

Bertina moved from a public housing development in Brooklyn to the Sedgwick Homes in the Bronx to escape domestic violence. The new development was very dangerous, and after four years, Bertina leaped at the opportunity to sign up for MTO. She was assigned to the MTO experimental group.

Bertina and her 15-year-old daughter, Carmen, moved to a small apartment building in a neighborhood of mostly single-family homes. She knows all the families who live in her building, including her landlord, who operates a dry cleaning business downstairs. Bertina is very happy with her apartment, describing it as a little small but “cozy.” Most important, she feels she and her daughter are safe. She explained, “I don’t have to worry that somebody’s gonna rob me. That somebody’s gonna grab me and strangle me when I walk out the door. I just don’t have those worries. I know when I get home Carmen is going to be safe.”

Right now Carmen attends a magnet school in Manhattan. Before starting there, Carmen graduated from an intensive charter school where she was involved in numerous activities. She played the violin, was active in the writing club, and was an honor roll student. Carmen dislikes her high school. She no longer plays the violin because the school does not offer music—for that matter, any other activities. Carmen’s grades have been declining, and she has asked her mother to let her transfer. Her former teachers are helping to get Carmen transferred to the best regular high school in her area.

Bertina has two older children and several grandchildren, but she does not see them often. Most of her friends are affiliated with the church she attends in the Bronx. She works as a registration clerk at a hospital, a job she got through a welfare-to-work program. Since moving, she has earned a two-year degree in gerontology and would eventually like to go back to school for a bachelor’s degree in social work. Bertina hopes that Carmen will also attend college. Carmen agrees with her mother’s plans and hopes to attend the University of Hawaii.

Because of the stresses of changing schools, some of the children from other families that made multiple moves have elected to stay in the school in their previous neighborhood rather than make another transfer. Kerrienne, the experimental group mother from Boston who had moved multiple times, said she felt it was simply too hard on her children to have to keep changing schools. She said she had left them in the school in their last neighborhood:

They don't want to go back to East Boston. They don't want to go back to Staunton. They want to stay in Boston. My kids are in Boston now, and they're going to public schools down here. I don't want to take them out of the school. I can't deal with taking them out of this school, taking them out of this district. (2A259)

Changing Schools is Hard

Los Angeles: MTO Experimental Group

Rosa's motivation for joining MTO was to remove her five children from the hazards of the East Los Angeles housing project, her home for seven years. She was particularly concerned that her oldest son, Manuel, who was 13 years old at the time, would be recruited by a gang. Rosa, described receiving her Section 8 voucher as "winning the lottery." She moved her family, even though her siblings were concerned that it was too far away and her children wanted to remain with their friends.

The family's first move was to a single-family home in a bustling, family-centered neighborhood. Rosa socialized with her neighbors, and her children made friends there. However, the landlord refused to renew Rosa's lease after two years because her children were too boisterous. Rosa had some difficulty finding her current home, because she said that landlords were leery of renting to a single mother with so many children. Rosa likes the new house, which they have lived in for more than two years. However, it is situated on a busy street, and she worries about the safety of her children. Still, the neighborhood is relatively free of gangs and violence. The neighborhood is almost too quiet for Rosa: neighbors keep to themselves, and she barely knows the people living around her.

Rosa actually spends little time at home. She had been commuting a long distance to her full-time job caring for the elderly, but recently she quit her job because of the birth of her sixth child. The children's father is an integral part of the family. He moved closer to the family when Rosa first left the public housing development. He visits every few days, assists Rosa by shuttling her to shopping or doing other errands, and actively participates in disciplining their children.

Manuel, originally resisted the move from public housing, but now he enjoys his new friends and believes the environment is better for his brothers and sisters. However, he felt the experience of having to make new friends the first time was so painful that he refused to transfer schools when his family moved again. He now travels about an hour each way to get to the high school in their previous community. Manuel has had some recent disciplinary problems in school, and his grades have slipped, which Manuel himself attributed to normal teenage angst. He hopes after finishing high school to attend a technical school to study computers.

Special Education Programs

Another notable factor affecting whether changes in neighborhood environment will change educational opportunities is that so many of the families we interviewed report having children in special education. Placement in special education programs or alternative schools often seems to result in youth attending schools outside of their local district. Just under half the parents we interviewed reported that one or more of their children was receiving special education services; eight

of these families reported that their child had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).³⁵ Some families reported having multiple children with problems, and some had children who are or have been in alternative schools for children with behavior problems.

Several mothers described how their children were having severe problems in school until their ADHD was diagnosed and treated. Wanda, an experimental group mother from New York whose son was eventually placed in a special school in a different neighborhood to get help with his ADHD and learning disabilities, said:

They [the teachers] tried to say he was a problem... when we moved up here when he was in first grade, how he was fighting all the time, and how he was hyperactive, he wouldn't sit in his chair, teacher talk to him and if some kid made fun [of him], instead of telling teacher, he would just get up and hit him. So I had him evaluated. (1A507)

Rose, another experimental group mother from Chicago, said that her daughter, Kucheria, was doing well in school until her own health problems prevented her from getting Kucheria to the doctor to get her medication for ADHD:

...they wouldn't know if she had attention deficit disorder that...makes her forget. She used to forget something in her homework assignment every day, but you couldn't tell 'cause she's a straight A student. But it went untreated so long then it started throwing her focus and everything off. But if she took the medicine no one would know....I'm just getting ready to get her back on, and if I can get the right dosage and the right medicines, they wouldn't never be able to know [that she has ADHD], 'cause she's a straight A student. (1A334)

A small number of families in the qualitative sample reported having a child who is currently or has recently attended an alternative school for children with behavior problems. One family in the experimental group in Boston has two very troubled children, both of whom had been diagnosed with ADHD. Rashaad, the older child, a 15-year-old boy, has been arrested multiple times for violent incidents at home and school. As Rashaad says,

[I've been in the program] a long time because I'm ADHD and ADD, which is attention deficit disorder. I just get in a lot of trouble. I take my behaviors out...when I get to the point I get aggravated. They [the school] finally got rid of me. (1C257)

He was expelled from his high school because of his behavior problems, which he says included throwing things at and hitting teachers. He now travels to an alternative school where students are closely regulated.

³⁵ There is much controversy over the proper diagnosis of ADHD, and we cannot verify whether these children had been evaluated properly. Here, we only counted a child as having ADHD if his or her parents used that term in talking about special education needs or described having a child on the medication Ritalin.

In sum, a substantial proportion of the families we interviewed had at least one child with special needs, either learning disabilities or behavioral problems. These needs sometimes meant that children were placed in special schools or in special classes within their regular school. Because of these placements, it is possible that these children may not gain the full benefit of being in an improved school environment. On the other hand, it is also possible that better schools may be able to more effectively diagnose problems and provide children with the services they need in order to succeed in school.

School Environments

One of the major findings from the research on the Gautreaux program was that families who had moved to the suburbs perceived their children's schools as much safer and generally superior to the city schools (Kaufman and Rosenbaum 1992). Early research on MTO shows the same pattern, with at least some studies finding that parents perceive substantial improvements in school environments (c.f. Rosenbaum and Harris 2000; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2001). While it is possible that the survey of the entire MTO sample may find similar results, we generally do not see such clear distinctions regarding school environments in these qualitative interviews.

Parents and children from all groups in the qualitative sample complain about dangerous schools and inadequate teachers. At the same time, some parents and children from each group are very pleased with the schools and have no complaints about safety or disruptive students. The only clear pattern is that parents from the in-place control group seem to be more likely to say that their children's schools are dangerous, "too strict," and sometimes harmful to their children. For example, Ebony from Baltimore said that the schools were waiting for the children to "self-destruct:"

....The schools are not good at all. It's more so they just pushing your children along in the schools. That's just basically it. It's just waiting for people to self-destruct. If you're not strong, that's what will happen to you around here.
(4A164)

Although not as negative about the school and teachers, Angela in Los Angeles worried about the influence of other students on her daughter as she gets older:

She's changing to the neighborhood. Because she was really quiet and her grades were perfect; she was a straight A student....But she's changing now that she's hanging around these girls 'cause now she even has the girls from school come over and be with her.... (4A437)

Among the movers, views about contrasts between public housing schools and schools in the new community varied considerably across sites. Families from Baltimore and Los Angeles were the most likely to say that they thought that their children's new schools were safer, while families from Boston, Chicago, and New York often said that the new schools were about the same or sometimes even inferior to their public housing schools.

Families who thought their children's schools were better after the move often mentioned improvements in both safety and resources. Lisa and her 16-year-old son Jordan, from Baltimore, both agreed that the schools in their suburban community were much better than those the children attended when they lived in public housing. Lisa said that her children's teachers seemed to care more about the children and were more likely to let her know when there were problems:

They're better than the city schools, because I think ...some of the teachers do care about what the kids do...if the kids are absent or something, they always inform me that the kids are missing a day, what's going on? That's cool, because in the city, when the kids missed a day, I don't even think they really cared. (1A172)

Her son agreed, saying:

It's a good school. Teachers are really into the students, want to know you a little bit more personally so they can help you out. They know every student by what they do...so they know who you are, and they know how much you can do, and what they can help you with. I like that better than in the city, where you have a whole bunch of students crammed into one school, and they're just teaching and don't really care—just putting the work out there, you don't do it, they don't care.... (1C172)

Veronica and Roberta, a mother and her 15-year-old daughter from Los Angeles, also spoke about how much they liked the schools in their low-poverty neighborhood. Like Lisa in Baltimore, Veronica approved of the fact that the teachers were “vigilant” about the children and let her know when there were problems. She also said she liked the fact that the schools were racially diverse. Roberta (the daughter) reported that she liked the teachers at her middle school and talked about the difference in safety:

I would say Louise Archer is the best school I ever been to because they have no uniforms, we have a choice to be dressed...it's not [as much fun], but at Louise Archer, it's a much safer school...I like the teachers at Louise Archer. I never forget the teachers that taught me things.... (1C441)

Kimberlynn, a Section 8 comparison group mother from Los Angeles, also stressed the difference in safety, stating that she felt she had rescued her children by getting them out of their public housing developments and the poor neighborhood schools:

The projects...I still go back there because I have friends there, but I look at the little girls over there [and] I thank God every day for this program, because now my daughters are teenagers and I let them go visit....They sit up and tell me how such and such is pregnant, now she's got two kids, this girl done had a baby...I'm just close to my daughters, we sit down and we talk, and I ask them, “Are you happy y'all are out of the project?”...I stayed to myself over there and I didn't have no fights over there, but my kids would get into fights. As far as the schools, they don't teach the kids nothing, because when my daughter moved out here...they did an [assessment] on her and she was just poor. (3A405)

In contrast, some respondents from both Chicago and New York said that they thought that the schools near their public housing developments were actually better than the schools in their new neighborhoods. As discussed above, Chicago movers in both the experimental and Section 8 comparison groups had opted to put their children in schools near their old developments, most after having tried new schools for at least some period of time. Kucheria, who is 14 years old and one of the few Chicago children attending school in her new community, complained that her new school was less fun and that the work was too easy:

It was like a lot funner at [my old] school. I had a lot of friends and stuff at that schoolWhen I came to [my new school], they weren't doing all the stuff that my other school was doing...Like we did a lot of stuff like [at my old school]...that we doin' now. Like my sister, she's in first grade. When I was in first grade, I had to do vocabulary tests and spelling tests and stuff every week. It was real hard and I'm wondering why she's coming home, she only got to turn in her work every Thursday and I had to turn mine in every day. Had to learn cursive, so I learned cursive in first grade. It was a lot different from out here. (1C334)

In New York, three families (two in the experimental group and one in the Section 8 comparison group) had children who had attended a special, corporate-sponsored charter school called “KIPP Academy” (Knowledge is Power Program) while they lived in public housing. KIPP is an unusual, very intensive program for middle-school students (grades 5 to 8). Children attend school from 7:30 to 5 p.m. every day plus half a day on Saturdays. Teachers are available 24 hours a day, and children are rewarded for good performance with incentives such as gifts and trips. The program deliberately places its schools in the lowest-performing districts in a city, so it is not surprising that some of the MTO children were enrolled.³⁶ One grandmother in New York said that KIPP was like “private school” and that the schools in her new community were failing to challenge her grandson. Bertina, whose daughter had graduated from KIPP, said:

We loved it. The teachers were on top of her all the time. They were on top of all the children. They made sure that they got everything done. They had twenty-four hour access to the teachers. They were like friends...the teachers and the kids. It's very small. (1A514)

Claudia, a girl in the Section 8 comparison group who had attended KIPP, complained that the teachers in her new school “don’t explain things,” that the environment was not as good, and that the new school did not offer as many activities. At KIPP, she said:

...They had us more in control. Because it was a small group. It was like at the most 300 kids, it was like academy. And we would start at 7:30 in the morning and

³⁶ In addition to the program in the Bronx, there is a KIPP Academy in Houston, and there are plans to open more in several other cities, including Washington, D.C. and Memphis. For more information on KIPP, see Samuel Casey Carter, *No Excuses: Seven Principals of Low-Income Schools Who Set the Standard for High Achievement*. The Heritage Foundation. <http://www.noexcuses.org/report/>

*end at 5...and had Saturday classes. All the sports, dance, music, and drama.
(3C526)*

Racial issues in schools. As we discussed in Chapter 4, the qualitative sample of 58 households reported relatively few instances of racial hostility or harassment in their new communities. Further, those who did talk about racial tension were generally not discussing harassment from white residents but rather tensions between African-Americans and Hispanics residents of their new communities. We see the same pattern when we look at how families talk about their children's school experiences. The few racial incidents at school that our respondents mentioned generally did not involve serious harassment or violence, but rather were instances of name-calling or perceived unfairness from teachers or other students. Rose, whose family lived in a Chicago suburb, said that her daughters had had no racial problems in elementary school, but that her older daughter was complaining about problems in her middle school:

She said that they treat the whites different from the blacks...She said how when they won't allow the black girls to wear shorts and stuff and...the white girls will have shorts up to here, real short, and they won't send them home and stuff like that...And in her school, there's only two blacks [teachers], the social worker and there's one black teacher and all the rest are white. And I know the principal, she does have a problem....She tries to hide it, but I know she does. [1A334]

Respondents in both Boston and Los Angeles talked about African-American/Hispanic tensions. For example, Claudia, a Section 8 mover from New York, said: "Black people over here like to start problems." (3C526). Francisca, a Hispanic mother in Boston, said she liked the students at her children's old school better:

They're Spanish. Most of them have Spanish [parents]—they're mixed, but they get along. God forgive me, but some colored people, they'll be your friend, then they'll stab you in the back. They push you to do stuff, and I tell my son, you can have friends, I don't mind, but you can't be too friendly with people. You can't trust them, because one day they're your friend, the next day they're your enemy. Like the kids that beat him up, supposedly they're his friends...real good friends, and look what they did to him. They put him in the dumpster. (3A260)

Dorothy, an African-American woman in the Section 8 comparison group, complained that the white and Hispanic teachers and students at her daughter's school in a Los Angeles suburb were prejudiced against African-American students:

I don't think all people are prejudiced. Some people are, some people aren't. I'm not prejudiced, I'm not racist, I get along with all my cultures. It's just that in my daughter's school, in all the years she's been going there, there is no more than two black kids in the classroom. No more...and then the teachers want you to speak Spanish, the blacks. (3A454)

She went on to say that the school did not offer classes for students like her daughter who wanted to learn to speak Spanish, so that her daughter was left to try to learn Spanish by watching soap operas on TV.

School Performance and Behavior

We asked all of the parents and youth in our sample about how the children were doing in school. While the survey analysis will examine the question of differences by program group, the qualitative data show that many of the youth in our sample are doing fine, getting at least average grades and enjoying school. As noted above, a few are in honors programs or magnet schools. Some parents believe their children's new schools are substantially better than their public housing schools, and others have moved their children into schools they believe are superior to those in their immediate neighborhoods.

Two of the early single-site studies of MTO have already noted higher incidences of suspensions, grade retention, and expulsions among the experimental group (Ludwig, Ladd, and Duncan 2001; Rosenbaum and Harris 2000). While many of the youth—even those in special education programs—are reportedly doing well, a substantial number have had problems. Most of the youth in our sample say that they have had in-school detention, and some have been suspended. According to the respondents, some of these suspensions are for relatively minor infractions (one girl in New York said her private school suspended her for “sucking her teeth”), but others are for more serious problems like fighting or conflicts with teachers. A few families have children or teens who have been held back a grade or have dropped out of school altogether. Some children attend alternative schools because of severe behavior problems, and others have been expelled. Two families reported that their sons have spent time in jail. Again, our sample is small and not statistically representative, but these findings suggest patterns to explore the evaluation's survey data.

Marianne, an experimental group mother from Chicago, said her daughter had been suspended for minor problems such as talking back to teachers. Her son had been expelled and is in an alternative school:

...[she was suspended for] her mouth. It's like she can joke all day long but when it's time to get serious she thinks somebody's doing wrong....[My son is in a different school] for his behavior. You know how you can start off maybe when you're 15, then you keep working when you're 16, 17 they haven't got to hold you anymore. That's how the schools do it. You turn 17, behavior problem, eventually they don't have to deal with you anymore. And that's where he's at now, for his behavior. He thought a lot of things were funny in school, to where it added up, and now they put him in alternative school. (1A342)

Sheryl, an experimental group mother from Baltimore, said that three of her children were having behavior problems. Her daughter Portia, whom we interviewed, was very bright and got good grades but had a lot of trouble in school. Indeed, her mother said she had been in honors classes at her old school but was expelled for behavior problems. Both mother and daughter agreed that she was doing better in the new school.

Tyson, a child from the Section 8 comparison group in Chicago, described how he had gotten into serious trouble a year ago but had decided to turn himself around:

When, the last thing I got suspended for was I picked up... like a bullet or something... I was on the bus with it and I dropped it and some other person picked it up, she told the bus driver and I got suspended when we got in school. And I had a 10-day suspension and then almost got arrested, and I thought about this like, I mean, just, just picking up this thing I could've got expelled, I could've got arrested, too. And I have to, I had to think, I had to focus, and I just thought ahead in life and started hitting the books more, and by 7th grade, I raised my scores over, over normal, above average and...and just kept on. You have to work hard. (3C336)

Not surprisingly, older children had more trouble rebounding from problems than younger children. As discussed in Chapter 5, some teens retained strong ties to public housing; in some cases, they never moved with the rest of the family. Some youth respondents mentioned older siblings who had children and lived on their own, often in or near public housing. Some older teens had serious problems; a few mothers mentioned children who had dropped out of school and several ended up in alternative school—in at least two cases, as an alternative to a jail sentence.

Behavior Problems and Schools

Boston: MTO Experimental Group

Carrie is a recovering drug addict who has been clean for nine years. She has three children, Rashaad (15), Lisa (16), and Shawnise (18). When she lived at the Cathedral public housing development, Carrie's mother had custody of her children because of her drug problem. When she turned 27, she quit drugs and got her children back. About two years later, she "won" the MTO lottery and was offered a Section 8 voucher. It was hard for Carrie to leave Cathedral; she had lived in public housing her entire life. When she first got her voucher, she thought long and hard about whether or not she wanted to take it. "I almost let it go," she said. Life at Cathedral was tough, though. There were shootings, drugs, and gangs. Carrie knew she wanted something different for her children.

Carrie moved to a three-bedroom apartment in a low-poverty area. The adjustment was difficult at first, particularly for her children. For a while, the whole family returned to Cathedral every day to see friends and family.

Carrie and her family lived in the first apartment for about four years and then moved to a bigger place because her oldest daughter, Shawnise, became pregnant. Shawnise no longer lives with Carrie; she returned to Cathedral not long after the second move, to live with friends. At the time, she was just 15 years old. Shawnise did not graduate from school, and she has been having a lot of problems that Carrie did not want to talk about. Carrie now has custody of her three-year-old granddaughter, who has severe asthma.

Carrie's son also had some trouble adjusting to the new neighborhood. Rashaad has attention deficit disorder. He attended his local high school until he was expelled for fighting. Right now he attends a school for children with behavior problems; he's working on getting back to "regular" high school. Rashaad has also been arrested multiple times for drug use and violent incidents. Carrie's other daughter, Lisa, is in 10th grade. When the family moved, Lisa was tested and placed in special education classes.

Carrie's biggest complaint about her current housing is her landlord, who she described as "cheap." When things need to be fixed, her landlord is unresponsive. In the past, the housing authority has had to stop payment on the Section 8 check. When the housing authority did this, the landlord asked Carrie to move. That was about four months ago.

Today, Carrie does not return to Cathedral as often as in the past. Carrie does not have many friends in her current neighborhood. Her church is back in the South End, but if she needs something, she can call her pastor. Carrie just "takes one day at a time," but she still has hopes that someday her children will go to college.

Summary

One of the major hypothesized benefits of the MTO demonstration is that families moving from distressed public housing will experience improvements in the quality of their children's schools and

improvements in the school environment. In theory, over time, these gains will lead to improvements in educational outcomes for children. Our findings suggest some support for this model. Some families in the qualitative sample, particularly those who moved to suburban school districts, comment on improved school environments and their children's improved performance and behavior.

These qualitative interviews also illustrate factors that may make analyzing educational outcomes more complex. In particular, for reasons of personal preference and individual needs, many of the children in our sample attend schools outside their neighborhoods. Some parents have chosen to place children in private, charter, or magnet schools. A number of families have chosen to place their children in school near their original public housing developments. Some of these children are older teens who have strong ties to the public housing community, but others are younger children whose mothers feel more confident placing their children in familiar schools. Further, some families moved within the city instead of to a suburban school district; even if these children are in a new local school, it is often little different—and sometimes reportedly worse—than their public housing school.

Special educational needs also result in children attending schools outside their local district. A substantial proportion of the families in the qualitative sample report having a child in special education. Some of these children are in schools for developmentally disabled children, while others are in alternative schools for children with severe behavior problems. Because of their special needs, even children who attend their local school may not be gaining the full advantage of the available resources. However, we see no evidence in our data of differences between program groups in special education placements—or of any systematic racial discrimination.

Finally, consistent with several of the early MTO studies, we find that child behavior problems are common among our sample. Many children report having received detentions or suspensions, some have been expelled, and a few have had more serious problems that have resulted in arrests. Like children with special needs, children with serious behavior problems may also be less likely to gain the full benefits of an improved school environment.

Implications for MTO Quantitative Research. The pathways described in Exhibit 6-1 illustrate the ways in which school and peer characteristics may affect a range of outcomes for children and youth in the MTO program.

Exhibit 6-1
Hypothesized Mediators – Schools and Peers

Move to lower-poverty area

- Transfer to better school
 - Improved education
 - Improved peer influences
- Safer environment
 - Fewer behavior problems, delinquency
- Child diagnosed for special education
 - Improved academic performance
- Attends special education class/school
 - Improved academic performance

Move to lower-poverty area

- Transfer to better school
 - Child performs worse than in old school
 - Child performs worse than other students
 - Conflict with other students
- Change schools (or return to original school)
- Transfer to worse school
 - Reduced educational quality
 - Conflict with other students
- Change schools(or return to original school)
- Loss of childcare
 - Change schools(or return to original school)
- Racial/class discrimination
 - Child put in special education
 - Does not gain full benefits of new school
- Behavior problems (previously existing)
 - Child put in special education
 - Lower achievement

Note: Primary mediators are shown in bold. Primary mediators leading to potentially negative outcomes are listed in bold Italics.

Note: It is difficult to determine the direct causal order of these mediators, as they are likely to affect each other simultaneously. These statements are nested to represent hypothesized causal pathways of mediators.

Chapter Seven

Economic Opportunity

Along with enhancing educational opportunities for children, another of the main goals of the MTO demonstration was to offer greater access to economic opportunity to adults, in hopes that they would be more likely to become self-sufficient. Residential mobility might affect employment and earnings through any or all of the following casual mechanisms:

- Low-poverty areas are likely to have lower unemployment rates and faster job growth. As a result, MTO movers may experience increases in employment and earnings. Living near potential sources of employment may reduce job search and commuting costs and offer a broader range of employment opportunities.
- Community norms in low-poverty areas are likely to be more supportive of work and less accepting of welfare than those in public housing projects.
- Living in a safer neighborhood may lead to reduced stress and anxiety for adults and to a greater sense of control over their lives. This improvement in mental health may lead to increased employment and earnings.
- Relocation may result in improved physical health, either through a reduction in environmental hazards or through better health care. Improved health may improve MTO participants' ability to seek and retain employment.

Research on the Gautreaux program (Popkin, Rosenbaum, and Meaden 1993) found that participants who had moved to white suburban areas were significantly more likely to report having had a job since they moved than participants who moved to neighborhoods in the city.³⁷ However, preliminary research on MTO has shown more mixed results. The only short-term study to show any evidence of employment effects for the MTO experimental group was on the Baltimore sample. Using administrative data from Unemployment Insurance and public assistance records, the researchers found evidence of an initial decrease in welfare receipt for both treatment groups. However, while the gap between experimentals and in-place control group members continued to grow, over time, the difference between the Section 8 comparison group and controls leveled off after the first year (Ludwig, Duncan, and Pinkston 2000). In contrast, a study of the Boston MTO program that included the entire sample for that site found no evidence of effects on employment, earnings, or welfare receipt (Katz, Kling, and Liebman 2001). Research on movers in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles found increases in employment for both treatment groups, but no special advantages for experimental group movers (Rosenbaum and Harris 2001; Hanratty, McLanahan, and Petit 1998; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2001).

³⁷ It should be noted that these findings are based only on a survey of participants who remained in their suburban communities.

Employment

Because employment is a major focus of the MTO interim evaluation, we used data from the qualitative interviews to explore some of the factors that respondents perceive as either facilitating or impeding employment. Approximately one-third of the adults we interviewed were working when we spoke to them; more had had jobs recently. Some respondents in each program group reported working. Some were enrolled in welfare-to-work training or job readiness programs. Others said that their health problems prevented them from working and that they were receiving disability benefits.

There were few obvious differences by program groups, making it difficult to determine to what extent the change in location had affected employment outcomes. Since the beginning of MTO, welfare reform had changed the public assistance program in all of the sites. It should also be noted that these interviews took place in January through March 2001, when the national economy was still very strong. These two powerful factors may simply be overwhelming any neighborhood effects. Two other studies of public and assisted housing residents for the same period (Bliss and Riccio 2001; Buron et al. 2001) have also found very high levels of labor force participation among a group that had previously shown high welfare dependence.

For the most part, respondents in our sample were working in low-wage jobs such as Certified Nurse's Assistant, janitorial, or clerical positions. Some had been working before they moved and simply continued in the same job afterwards or found a similar job in their new community. A few respondents from each program group said they had recently started working through welfare-to-work programs.

MTO experimental group. In Baltimore, Los Angeles, and New York, some experimental group respondents did cite the move as an event that had opened up new opportunities. One Baltimore respondent said that she had found her most recent job at a local college through a friend in the neighborhood. She had had to stop working because of health problems, but she anticipated returning to work in the near future. Lisa, a Baltimore respondent who had moved to the suburbs, had worked steadily since her move. In addition, she continued to run a fashion design business she had begun in public housing, and she was also going to school to get her college degree—as well as raising four children on her own. She said that in her community, she thought that it was easy to find a job:

Temp services, or you can just walk in and get a job if you've got good credentials, or good background, you can get a job. Mostly here it's factory; not nothing pertaining to my major, but it's factory, so I mean it's easy to get a job, I would think. (1A172)

Lola, another Baltimore respondent, had worked in hotels since she lived in public housing. She said that she had been able to find better hotel jobs since moving to the suburbs, gradually moving up to a supervisory position:

Yes, it's more, much more [responsibility]. I was room attendant and then I worked in the laundry and then I became a laundry supervisor. Then floor inspector. (1A146)

One Los Angeles respondent said that both she and her husband were employed. They had worked before they moved as well, but were now both employed in better-paying jobs in factories. Another Los Angeles respondent, Veronica, did not work but described her discomfort at being the only person in her neighborhood who was unemployed. Veronica said that when she moved, she did not know any math and had trouble reading even in Spanish. She was going to school and trying to improve her English so she could find work:

*Everyone goes to work with the except the old man who lives over there. But even he goes to throw out newspapers sometimes...it's not very often but sometimes he goes out at four or five in the morning. Everyone goes to work here. I'm the only one who's here. You can imagine how discouraged I feel. That's why I help at the schools. I write that I am a school volunteer on my resume. I can do anything and what I don't know how do I can learn to do. I've written everything that I can do on my resume. I even know how to use the computer..... I haven't had any luck yet.
(1A441)*

Yvette, an experimental group respondent from New York who now lives in a moderate-poverty neighborhood, said she had been working part-time and was looking for full-time work. She said the main reason that she had decided to find work was because she feels safer than when she lived in public housing.

I feel more secure. I can feel like the babysitter could come to my home and she don't feel like she's in danger. 'Cause in the projects, there was always shooting, and I had a big fire in my house. (2A588)

Bertina, another experimental group respondent from New York, also cited safety as one of the reasons she felt comfortable working. She had not worked for “a long time” but had recently found a job as a registration clerk at a local hospital through a welfare-to-work job club program.

These comments suggest that there may, in fact, be real benefits from the new locations, particularly access to better jobs and increased safety. However, because of the economic conditions and welfare system changes occurring during the period when these interviews were conducted, it is difficult to assess how important the moves were in leading to employment. As noted above, respondents in every program group in our sample were working. Some had been working all along, while others had recently found jobs through welfare-to-work programs. For example, Linda, an in-place control group respondent from Boston, said that she had gotten her first job—at Burger King—through the welfare system three or four years ago. She had recently started a job at the airport, cleaning planes. Again, this finding suggests that the effects of the strong economy and welfare reform likely had overwhelmed any neighborhood effects.

Personal Motivation. A striking finding of the qualitative interviews was the lengths to which some of the respondents were going in order to provide a better life for their families. Differences in personal motivation are likely to affect the life chances of these families, regardless of where they live and may prove an important mediator of employment outcomes. Such differences ought to be distributed randomly across the two treatment and one control group. But it is possible that great

motivation can have more effect when families move to lower-poverty areas or when they are able to move out of distressed public housing.

Like Lisa described above (1A172), several other respondents reported working more than one job or attending school while working and caring for children. For example, Crystal, a Section 8 comparison group respondent from New York, continued to work steadily as a home care aide and study for her GED despite having to overcome many barriers, including having five children, no high school diploma, and an unstable housing situation. At the time of the interview, she was about to start a new part-time job working for UPS:

I gotta take care of my kids. I can't just sit home and just depend on welfare. I've never been the one to just sit home and wait for stuff to come to me, wait for things to happen. I always go out there and make my own stuff happen. (3A575)

Everyone in Veronica's Neighborhood Works

Los Angeles: MTO Experimental Group

Veronica is from Mexico City, Mexico. All of her children, Alberto (15), Felipe (11), and Camilo (7)—were born in the United States. When Veronica was living in public housing in Watts, she had a lot of problems with her neighbors. Veronica is Hispanic and felt that her neighbors, who were predominantly African-American, “felt like they owned the place.” Her children were often harassed and called “ugly” by the other children in the neighborhood. She also found the constant violence that plagued her public housing development was extremely stressful. She was happy to move when she received her MTO voucher in 1997. She has been living in her new apartment for about three years.

Since moving, things have gone fairly well for Veronica and her family. She studied hard and became a U.S. citizen. Although she is 51, she would like to get her GED. Meanwhile, she is actively looking for a job. Right now she spends her day at the job corps where she is receiving training to prepare her for employment. In the past, she worked in *pacadora* (packing). So far, she has not been able to find a similar job or, for that matter, any job for which she is qualified. Everyone in Veronica’s neighborhood works, and she feels discouraged.

Veronica’s lack of English is the main factor preventing her from moving ahead with her plans. The only thing Veronica knows how to say in English is, “I am looking for a job and I need an application.” She has trouble filling out applications but does it anyway. To get by, Veronica receives a \$700 dollar TANF check each month and Food Stamps. To make up for her unemployed status, she volunteers at her children’s school.

Veronica’s oldest son, Alberto, is doing well in school. When he gets home in the afternoon, he tutors his brothers who are in danger of failing some classes. Alberto reports he has lots of friends in the new neighborhood. He is happy that there is less violence, but he complained of the presence of graffiti and trash. Like most children, Alberto likes to play with his gameboy and watch cartoons on the weekends. When his mother has money, the whole family goes out together on the weekends. When we asked Alberto what he wanted to be when he grew up, he said “I want to make an impact on this country.” He feels that, since he has moved from Nickerson Gardens, he has “more hope for the future.”

The Los Angeles experimental group family described earlier, in which both the husband and wife were working, also illustrates the extent to which adults were willing to sacrifice for their families. The husband worked two jobs during the day, and the wife worked nights, because they hoped to save enough money to move out of state. As a result, their lives were very constrained. As Vanessa said, “I work at night in Valencia.... I have to take [the bus] because I don’t know how to drive.” (1A494) Finally, Melissa, a Section 8 comparison group respondent from Baltimore had been working as a special education “one-to-one” aide since before she moved. But now she is going to school and working full-time so she can become a phlebotomist. (2A148).

These differences in drive or motivation may be an important factor in how well families do in their new communities. Certainly, these types of differences affected whether or not respondents were able to make a successful move initially. But this personal resilience may also determine whether individuals are able to negotiate the challenges of living in a new community and to take advantage of new opportunities. Participants who are less motivated may find simply adapting to the new environment and negotiating relationships with landlords and neighbors enough of a challenge. But, like the respondents described above, those with a greater sense of personal efficacy may make the move as a starting point for making other types of changes in their lives.

Barriers to Employment

While a substantial proportion of respondents were working, and a few exceptional respondents were apparently able to manage the multiple demands of work, child raising, and pursuing further education, others in the qualitative sample faced barriers that prevented them from being able to take steps toward becoming self-sufficient. Some, respondents’ stories reflected complex lives and an accumulation of challenges that made it difficult for them to manage. As we will discuss below, health problems posed the greatest challenge for many of the respondents in our sample. However, our respondents also cited a range of other impediments, including lack of access to transportation, not being able to find a job that paid enough to support their families, and their own criminal histories.

Some respondents complained about the lack of regular public transportation in their new communities. Inadequate service meant that they might be limited in the hours they could work or, like Vanessa above, have long commutes to get to their jobs. Some respondents, like Lisa in Baltimore, had managed to acquire inexpensive cars. However, these cars were often unreliable, and maintaining them imposed additional costs for these households.

Juggling Jobs and School

Chicago: MTO Experimental Group

Patricia first moved into one of the notoriously dangerous Chicago public housing developments when she was 19 years old, with a two-year-old daughter and an infant son. She had been living with her mother, but they had a poor relationship and her mother put Patricia and her children out. Patricia decided she needed to find her own apartment and had no choice but to turn to public housing. She lived in the public housing project for almost six years before she had the opportunity to sign up for MTO. She wanted to move to provide a better environment for her children; in her development, gang wars would keep tenants inside their homes for one to two weeks at a time because the shooting and violence were so severe.

Patricia moved twice before settling in her current apartment. Her first move out of public housing was into a single-family home in a quiet neighborhood in Chicago. She loved the neighborhood; however, her landlord decided to reclaim the house for his own use a year later. The second apartment was a temporary two-month location, but she has lived in her current apartment in the city for two years. Her apartment is satisfactory: the landlord keeps up with maintenance and her downstairs neighbor is friendly and helps Patricia on occasion. However, Patricia would like to live in a single-family home, preferably her own, and be located slightly closer to shopping and her relatives.

Patricia and her live-in boyfriend Raymond juggle family responsibilities. Patricia has three children now, and her boyfriend has a toddler. The couple drops off the three older children at a Catholic elementary school and the toddler at day care before going off to their separate jobs each day. Patricia works for a computer-related company and takes college classes for an associate's degree in computer science. When Patricia first left public housing, she signed up for GED classes and passed the GED pre-test with flying colors. This qualified her for a college scholarship, and she takes four classes every other semester. She ultimately hopes to get her bachelor's degree.

She and Raymond are very attentive to their children's needs. The older children have flourished in the Catholic school. Both parents are very involved in the children's education and ensure that they approve of their friends. The children have few friends in the new neighborhood. However, they have an extensive family network of cousins with whom they play and visit.

Patricia proudly reported that she has never received welfare, and she is trying to move her family off housing assistance. Her goal is to own her own single-family home where her children can run and play in their own back yard.

Other respondents said they were unable to find jobs that would adequately support their families. For example, Manuela, a Section 8 comparison group respondent from Boston, talked about the problem of being able to earn enough to afford childcare and still meet her other expenses:

...there isn't anyone to take care of the little one because he has asthma. I have my mother, but she's very busy and takes care of other children.... I want to work, but the problem is that...I don't understand how the system works, because if I work, they will raise my rent and cut off my stamps. I would probably make around \$150 in a week. After working four weeks, one week's pay would be mine and the other

three weeks would go to paying bills. I wouldn't even be able to save my money. I want to get out of the system so that one day I won't need housing or [food] stamps....If I work, I have to pay for babysitting and I won't have anything left. I don't know how to get ahead. Maybe when my kids grow up, they will be able to help, so maybe there's hope. (3A349)

Several other respondents also said that lack of child care—or having to pay for child care—was a problem. Some respondents talked about their lack of education, job skills, or English as a barrier. One talked about her embarrassment over not being able to read. Shirley, a grandmother from New York raising one grandson and an adopted child, said she wanted to work but could find nothing because she was over 60.

Lack of Education and Skills

Boston: In-Place Control Group

Nancy is embarrassed to live in the Old Colony public housing development. When people ask her where she lives, she makes a face and says the “projects.” In her view, the people around her do not care about the property. The children throw trash wherever they want, residents do not take care of their hallways, and there’s garbage all over the place. It makes Nancy depressed. She knows that there are drugs around—that people get beaten up or killed, but she tries to ignore the bad things because she “can’t handle the pressure.”

During the 1970’s and 1980’s, Old Colony was a “white” development. But after desegregation efforts in the early 1990’s, many white families fled. Nancy’s is among the ones who remained. Although Nancy talks about racial problems, she says she does not have any problems with her neighbors because she mostly keeps to herself. Nancy has four children: two older sons, - ages 26 and 27—both live on their own—and two younger daughters, Julie (13) and Sarah (16). Nancy’s oldest son and youngest daughter, Julie, are both hearing-impaired. The whole family knows sign language.

Julie attends a school for the hearing-impaired about thirty minutes away from her home. Sarah attends a high school in the neighborhood. Sarah does not like school. She explains that the metal detectors do not work (she knows children with knives who have made it past them) and the bathrooms are filled with smoke. Despite her disdain, Sarah does well in school. She is technically in the 9th grade, but because she passed the benchmark test for her level she takes 10th grade classes.

School did not come as easy for her mother. Nancy cannot read; she attended school until 12th grade but describes herself as “not too smart.” Her lack of confidence and lack of basic skills have prevented her from searching for a job. Previously she worked as a housekeeper, but now she supports her family with a monthly disability check she receives from the government. She knows she should get a job, but she cannot read the want ads or fill out applications. She tries not to think about it too much. “It’s just that I’m afraid, and if pressure comes on me I get very sick and depressed about it. And I get very embarrassed that I don’t know how to read.”

Nancy would like to move her family out of public housing, but has no real plans to do so. By now, Nancy is used to things going badly. As she says “if it doesn’t happen, it doesn’t happen. I try to pick myself up and I always get let down.”

Other problems also limited adults' employment prospects. Some respondents said that they were recovering drug addicts, and two women mentioned their criminal records as barriers to employment. The accumulation of problems makes life very difficult for some MTO families. As described in Chapter 3, Cynthia had moved her family six times since her initial MTO placement, because of what she says was a series of conflicts with landlords and what she viewed as unsatisfactory units. One conflict involved an arrest that Cynthia said occurred when she got into an altercation with a police officer who was threatening to arrest her son. Cynthia was required to do community service and now has a criminal record, which she said prevented her from being able to get a good job in a hospital. Instead, she was working at a check-cashing service. As Cynthia told it:

But it's [the arrest] still on my record when I go to a job and they pull my record, all this on there: resisting arrest, assault to a police. Come on, that kind of stuff, don't nobody want to hire nobody with....(2A127)

Health

Physical and mental health problems were by far the biggest barriers to employment for the respondents in the qualitative sample. Another central hypothesis of the MTO demonstration is that helping families to move to lower-poverty areas will lead to improvements in their physical and mental health because of reduced stress and less exposure to environmental hazards. The preliminary study of MTO families in Boston found that mothers in the experimental group suffered less from depression than respondents in the other program groups and that they and their children had fewer problems with asthma (Katz, Kling, and Liebman 2001). In theory, these improvements in physical and mental health could lead to gains in employment.

The MTO evaluation survey will measure the incidence of selected health problems (asthma, depression, obesity). Because of time constraints, it will not be able to explore their severity or the limitations these conditions may impose on residents' lives. The in-depth interviews allow us to probe these issues in more detail, examining the nature and extent of the health challenges that face many of the families in all program groups. Further, the qualitative data highlight the ways in which these health problems pose barriers to families' ability to take advantage of resources in their communities and, ultimately, to become economically self-sufficient.

Serious health problems were common among the adults we interviewed, affecting half of the families we interviewed. These problems reached across all sites and program groups, with no obvious patterns. Approximately one-fourth of the sample mentioned that someone in the household had asthma. Often this asthma was quite severe, requiring frequent hospitalizations. Several respondents described debilitating arthritic conditions, like rheumatoid arthritis or lupus, that had forced them to stop working; others mentioned suffering from diabetes. A few respondents mentioned that they or their children were in therapy, including some who identified themselves as recovering drug addicts. Finally, individual respondents reported extremely serious problems, including one respondent who suffered from debilitating migraines and strokes, another who had had repeated surgeries for tumors on her spine, and one respondent who had lost both her parents to AIDS and had custody of her HIV-positive brother.

Families with multiple members suffering from serious health problems were common. Carrie, a Boston experimental group respondent, and herself a recovering drug addict, had custody of her granddaughter whose asthma was so severe that she was often out of school for days at a time. A Section 8 comparison group respondent from New York said that she had developed arthritis and that she and all three of her daughters had asthma.

Generally, respondents with health problems did not say that their condition had been affected by the move. The exception was that a few respondents in both the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups said that their own or their children's asthma symptoms had improved since leaving public housing. One was the woman cited above, who had asthma herself as well as three daughters with the disease. Felicia said that their symptoms were better simply because they no longer had to worry about climbing 27 flights of stairs when the elevators in their building broke down: "By the time you got to there [her floor], you are already sick, you couldn't breathe or whatever." (3A526)

Bertina, a New York experimental group respondent, said that since she and her daughter had moved out of public housing, her daughter's asthma had "calmed down quite a bit" and that they had not had to go to the emergency room as frequently. Likewise, Nicolasa, a comparison group respondent from Boston, said that her daughter's health had improved after they moved away from the environmental hazards, including dust-emitting pipes, in her public housing development. These reports of improvements in asthma are intriguing; the issue will be explored further in the larger survey data collection.

It is clear that a substantial proportion of the families in this sample have members who suffer from debilitating conditions that may inhibit their ability to take advantage of opportunities. Not surprisingly, given our information about the extent and severity of health problems in our sample, a number of respondents cited their own or their children's health problems as factors that kept them from being able to seek work.

Yolanda, an in-place control group respondent in Baltimore, described how her severe health problems have prevented her from working:

When I first signed up for it [MTO], my youngest daughter that was here she's a diabetic, so she had her health problems. I used to have to take care of her. In '93, I started getting sick. By '95, I was going to a hospital...and they was tryin' to run tests to find out why I was having pain every day. By '96, I knew something was really wrong, so I went up to Johns Hopkins Hospital.... and found out I had a ... tumor right here. So I had to have major surgery in '96. I was working a full-time job even when I was having pain, I was going to work. And I was working on my days off and holidays. I used to love to work. Then I thought I would be able to go back to work, but I couldn't. The next year, '97, I had another tumor...and then I had to have radiation...so I couldn't go back to work. Now I'm disabled. They say I can work, they allow you to go back to work, I don't know if it's part-time or what, but if I decide to go back to work, I would have to do something like office work. I used to do clerical work....The last job was housekeeping....I couldn't go back to that type of work... (4A195)

Shannon, a Section 8 comparison group respondent from Chicago who suffered from acute lupus, said that the side effects from the medications she had to take to manage her pain forced her to stay in bed:

Sleep, I sleep. 'Cause in the daytime I'm on muscle relaxers, trying to fight off the pains, but then I get up when it's time to come pick them [my kids] up until their dad get off from work. (3A343)

Thus, some respondents had health problems that prevented them from even attempting to enter (or re-enter) the labor market. Barriers like these would prevent them from being able to take advantage of any opportunities their new communities may offer.

Public Assistance

A substantial proportion—three-quarters—of all MTO families were receiving public assistance when they joined MTO. The welfare system has changed dramatically since then. In all five states, welfare recipients face work requirements, requirements to participate in job training or job readiness programs, requirements for participation in seeking child support payments, sanctions for noncompliance, and time limits. The qualitative, in-depth interviews allow us to see how these changes have affected some MTO families' lives.

We noted above, in the section on employment, that many respondents mentioned participating in welfare-to-work programs. Some, like Linda from Boston who now works for an airline or Bertina from New York who works as a registration clerk in a hospital, mentioned finding jobs through these programs. More often, they were in training programs and hoped to be able to find work in the near future. Veronica, an experimental group respondent from Los Angeles was taking classes to learn English—and said:

....I depend on the government, and I don't want to depend on the government...I don't care anything about their father. He left us. We didn't love each other. We didn't get divorced, because we were never married. He went through a depression because he couldn't find a job. I appreciate seeing him go through that depression because ...the same thing happened to me, and I pray to God that depression doesn't take over me. That's why I go back to school. I look for work... (1A441)

A woman in the Section 8 comparison group in Los Angeles said that she had been through the GAIN program (California's welfare reform program) and "had been given" a part-time job. She was anticipating being cut off from TANF:

I'm going to be off, because the government set up a thing called GAIN that trains you and put you in a job, but they give you five years....I know that by the time my son gets 16 and a half or 17, which is the next year and half, I'm going to be cut off. Because I've been with GAIN my five years. They have trained me, they have gave me a job. (3A431)

Again highlighting the complexity of the problems that affect many MTO families, Anita, in the in-place control group in New York, described the hardship that she and her family experienced after she lost her benefits. She had three children of her own and was caring for her teenaged brother who was HIV-positive. Anita had been working as a Certified Nurse's Assistant and had been cut off from TANF:

Well, [before I turned 18], the rent was still being paid. Everything was still the same until now, until welfare cut me off. I started working, and welfare cut me off. And I was backed up in rent for a while....It was like \$2,000 I owed in rent...and I just paid off all my rent....I started working in March of last year and they cut me off. They was like, 'we can't give you any more money,' because I'm getting survivor's benefits from my son. His father passed away. So I'm getting \$480 a month. But since I've been getting that, they like, 'we can't support you,' and I'm like, well, how can I live off of \$480 a month with three kids and I'm raising my brother? I don't know, charities helped me out and the welfare helped me too, for paying off my rent. (4A558)

She went on to say that she had been required to go through a welfare-to-work program when she lost her last job: *"I lost my job in March, I reapplied for welfare in April and they sent me to this program..."* At the time of the interview, she had just started a new job that she had found through a friend, a job that paid somewhat better than being a nurses' assistant.

Finally, a substantial number of respondents—about a fourth of this sample—said that they received either SSI or disability benefits. Some had been on SSI before they moved, and others had applied after their health problems became too debilitating. For example, a woman in the Section 8 comparison group in New York said her doctor had told her to apply for SSI because of her asthma and arthritis. Others received SSI because their children were disabled, like a respondent from Chicago who said that two of her children received SSI and two got Social Security survivors' benefits:

Actually, I don't get public aid. I just get stamps...both of my sons get SSI. And [my daughters] are receiving Social Security from their daddy. So they [Public Aid] said that's enough to take care of the other kids with. (1A342)

Summary

Our findings suggest that some MTO participants may experience economic benefits from moving to lower-poverty communities. Several respondents in the experimental group cited increased access to job opportunities and the influence of neighbors' behavior as factors encouraging them to seek work or obtain further education or training. However, two powerful forces—the strong economy in existence until early 2001 and welfare reform—affect all MTO participants and make it difficult to assess the strength of possible neighborhood effects. Because of these two forces, respondents in all groups were working and some in each group reported having found jobs through welfare-to-work

programs. The fact that the economy had softened by the end of 2001 may make it easier to detect neighborhood effects in the survey data, which will be collected in early 2002.

Our findings also highlight the importance of individual differences that may either facilitate or impede employment. Some respondents clearly have more motivation to succeed—the data provide several examples of parents’ heroic efforts to improve their family’s situation. Other respondents face challenges that make it more difficult—and in some cases, impossible—for them to take advantage of any new opportunities. For many of these respondents, physical and/or mental health problems pose the greatest difficulties. Some face multiple barriers, including lack of education and skills, drug addiction, criminal histories, and illiteracy. The MTO evaluation will need to explore the extent to which these personal barriers affect employment outcomes for the full sample.

Implication for MTO Quantitative Research. The pathways delineated in Exhibit 7-1 illustrate the ways in which differences in local economic opportunity—as well as in other conditions—may affect employment and earnings outcomes.

Exhibit 7-1 Hypothesized Mediators –Economic Opportunity	
Strong economy	→More job opportunities →Seek job
Welfare reform	→TANF time sanctions →Seek job
Move to lower-poverty area	
	→More local job openings, more employment growth, higher wage levels →Get a better job
	→Neighbors work →Positive peer effects →Seek job
	→Safer environment →Safe to leave children in afternoons →Seek job
Move to lower-poverty area	
	→Inadequate transportation →Unable to take advantage of new employment opportunities
	→Personal barriers (health, low education, little job experience, low efficacy, criminal record, drug problem, etc.) →No change in employment status
<i>Note: Primary mediators are listed in bold. Primary mediators leading to potentially negative outcomes are in bold italics.</i>	
<i>Note: It is difficult to determine the direct causal order of these mediators, as they are likely to affect each other simultaneously. These statements are nested to represent hypothesized causal pathways of mediators.</i>	

Chapter Eight

Conclusions - Assessing the MTO Experience

In this chapter, we summarize our respondents' views of how leaving public housing has affected their lives. MTO participants joined the demonstration in order to escape severely distressed public housing developments. Movers in both the experimental and Section 8 comparison groups still vividly recall the conditions that motivated them to leave: overwhelming problems with drugs and violent crime, and filthy, deteriorating buildings that created hazards for them and their children. Respondents in the in-place control group describe developments that have changed little in the intervening years. These developments remain threatening and oppressive environments in which to raise their families.

The movers in our sample, in both the MTO experimental and Section 8 comparison groups, have experienced substantial changes in their neighborhood environments as a result of the MTO program. The gains have been most dramatic for the experimental group movers who have remained in low-poverty communities. However, given that they started out in troubled developments with extremely high poverty rates, even the Section 8 comparison group movers who moved to moderately high-poverty neighborhoods perceive significant improvements.

The full MTO interim evaluation will address the question of how these changes in neighborhood environment have affected outcomes for participants, four to seven years after program entry. The qualitative interviews allow us to understand how families themselves perceive these effects. Our analysis also examines some of the mechanisms that appear to promote change and some of the factors that may inhibit positive effects. Drawing on the qualitative data, we have identified pathways of mediators that seem to lead to particular outcomes. Finally, our findings highlight some unexpected phenomena that may affect whether and how families experience benefits as a result of relocation. In particular, our findings about children's school experiences suggest a complexity that needs to be reflected in the larger evaluation.

In this chapter, we first allow the MTO families to sum up their experiences since the initial moves from public housing. Then we draw on our analysis to summarize the neighborhood mechanisms that appear to have facilitated change, the barriers that have inhibited change for many families, and the implications of our findings for the full evaluation.

MTO Families Assess Their Experiences

We asked the adults and children we interviewed to give us their perceptions of how moving from public housing had affected their lives. For the most part, our respondents were very upbeat about their experiences, viewing the move as a life-changing event. In particular, experimental group movers were likely to feel strongly that relocating had truly provided new opportunities for them and their children. For example, Lola, from Baltimore said:

I just got promoted to a higher position ... Moving has done wonderful things for me and my family. It has given me an outlook on things that I'm surrounded by. Better neighborhood, better schools for my kids, a better job, great things for me. (1A146)

Nadine from Boston said that leaving public housing showed her that there was a different way to live:

It gave me a better outlook on life, that there is a life outside of that housing. I mean like I said, all my life I grew up in the area, and sometimes you just think you'll never be able to have the opportunity to move into a nicer area, or you won't be accepted into a nicer area. Whereas I had a totally different experience when I moved here. I got a warm welcome... Overall I think I was more happy to be in this area because of my kids and I didn't want them to grow up around seeing gangs... I think it was a great, great opportunity and I was one of the fortunate ones. A lot of people didn't accept, didn't want to move, they were under the impression it was a conspiracy thing to move all the black people [out of the] city neighborhood, to move Caucasians down there to be closer to town and stuff like that.... I woulda did anything at that time to move outta the area and, at the time I wouldn'ta been able to do it on my own.... (1A262)

Many respondents said that they felt they had literally saved their children by getting them out of public housing. As Patricia from Chicago put it:

I got them away from all the violence; the shooting and the gangs. Now I'm looking forward to getting a house somewhere they can be stable, so we don't have to do a lot of moving. Cause moving is just not good for kids. And it stresses the parent out, too. (1A323)

Although their comments were not as consistently positive as those of the MTO experimental group movers, most of the Section 8 comparison group movers we interviewed also felt that their own and their children's lives had been profoundly affected by leaving public housing. This comment from Dorothy in Los Angeles reflected her assessment of the significance of having received her Section 8 voucher:

I see myself would have been in jail, homeless probably, no skills, no goals cause that's how it is out there if you don't push yourself.... [My daughter] would be very bad, disobedient, failing in school cause the kids up there don't listen to their parents. They selling drugs, smoking drugs. I didn't want that type of environment for my baby. (3A454)

Shelly from Chicago also felt that she and her grandchildren had been rescued by moving from the projects:

It's changed my life, 'cause it's great to say I don't live in the projects, 'cause when you said projects, people sorta look at you 'cause they know where you come

from. They're thinking drugs, they thinkin' bad, 'cause that's what everybody think of the projects....So I feel great to say no I don't live in the projects. I'm not downing it, 'cause I spent 28 years there, but I just thank the Lord I got out. I sure wish some more of my friends could get out....[My grandchildren] was gladder than I was, 'cause they had to battle and battle. They were glad to get out of 'em. (3A393)

Still, individual differences in outlook were evident in respondents' assessments of how MTO had affected their lives. While some viewed receiving a voucher as a life-changing event, others saw the MTO program as something that simply aided them as they worked to achieve their personal goals. For example, Alexis in Baltimore bought her own home in the city several years after receiving her voucher. As she put it, the MTO program helped her to attain her goals more quickly:

Just thank you, 'cause they helped me out a lot. I think without that, I would still have advanced but probably not as quickly with the help of the MTO program. 'Cause that got me. Like some people apply for Section 8 and 20 years later they still sittin' around waitin'. I'm like are you just gonna wait on that forever, or are you gonna try to do somethin' yourself? But the MTO got me the Section 8 quicker and got my foot in the door. Just thanks. (2A170)

Some movers had more mixed feelings about how relocation had affected their lives. Often, they talked about the new financial burdens they faced as a result of living in the private market. For example, Rosa, an experimental group mover from Los Angeles, said that—although the move has clearly benefited her children—she often worried about making ends meet:

As I was telling you at the beginning. I had a lot of doubts. I went to bed with a negative outlook and I woke up feeling more positive. I wasn't happy until I started filling out the papers for the program. I wasn't sure if I was doing the right thing, and the neighbors were commenting maybe because they didn't want me to leave. But finally I decided that I would try it. If there are a lot of people like me who have doubts, I would say try it. Do it even though it's difficult sometimes. For example, living in a house is financially difficult if there is only one income, because the bills are high. But if you don't want your family going down the wrong path, you find that 300 dollars is nothing when you see positive results in your family...that's where it pays off in the end. It doesn't matter. We might have to live day-to-day, and sometimes we won't be able to go to the movies, but the kids are healthy and that's what matters. So I would say to those people who have doubts that they should try it. Maybe there were times when I regret my choice because of the money, but when I see how the children are improving. For example my friend has a teenage son, and she says that the problems that I have with Mario are minimal compared to what she's going through with her son. She tells me not to complain about him getting one bad grade, because there are kids that are getting all D's and F's. (1A463)

Some respondents who had made multiple moves commented on the loss of stability that resulted from leaving public housing. Crystal, in New York, had experienced a spell of homelessness when

her first unit was sold, and she was about to have to move again because her landlord had lost his mortgage. She said that she regrets having left public housing.

Like I said, I kind of regret moving from the projects now, to tell you the truth, but there's not no way I can turn back the clock, because I'm having such a hard time now. This Section 8 is not what I thought it was going to be..... If I could change it, I don't know, maybe I would change it. Like, as far as going back to the projects, just not those particular projects, like another one, because they do have some nice projects that are decent. It's just that I wasn't in one of them. If I could change that, I would probably try to switch back. Because at least the housing authority is stable. That's one thing. If your rent is paid, you are stable. You're not from here to there. No one is not going to come and tell you that we're selling the house. (3A575)

Children's Perspectives. Like the adults, the children we interviewed were very clear about how their life chances had changed as a result of leaving public housing. Their assessments are very powerful. For example, Roberta, a 15-year-old experimental group mover from Los Angeles, talked about how feeling safe in her new community allowed her to think about going to college and making a difference for other children:

[L]iving in Watts I felt like I was like a bug. Watts was like a big overgrown shoe that wants to crush me. But since like, in Carson, it's like...I don't feel like a little bug no more. I feel like a real person. I feel safe here. I want to make a difference in my life. (1C441)

Tyson, a 16-year-old Section 8 comparison group mover from Chicago, talked about how he had changed since he had moved:

I was thinking about that a couple of days ago. When I first came here I was all excited. I still had some of that ghetto life in me. I didn't trust nobody...and I figured I probably be getting into some fights, so I got ready for that, yeah. I came here and people they nice to me. It was, this was in the summer time, people that they, they introduced themselves. They actually came up to the door. I never seen that before. They came up to the door. They introduce they self and I kind of let go there. I was like, these people are actually nice. So I came out and met some friends., I came out here, I matured. This life matured me, from the city life I used to live, and it calmed my nerves. I used to have a lot of stress. It calmed me. I am able to meditate...And it's quiet, it's very quiet out here. That's what I like. I'm like, I can sit outside and look at the stars. Ghetto, you can't sit outside and look at the stars. Somebody think you dead, you know....

Q: If you were still living in Wells...what would you be about?

A: Well, I'd be dead. (3C336)

Alberto, a Section 8 comparison group mover from Los Angeles, thought he would probably have ended up in a gang if he had stayed in public housing:

At Nickerson, it was cool. But now when I go to visit over there I probably would have ended up in a gang or smoking or something. So I'm glad that I moved from over there. (3C431)

In sum, the majority of movers—both in the experimental and Section 8 comparison group—view leaving public housing as a very positive event that has improved quality of life and life chances of both adults and children. Adults believe that they have literally saved their children by removing them from the dangerous environment in public housing. Youth are particularly reflective about the differences, with boys often saying they would have become—or continued—to be involved in delinquent activity that would have placed them at risk of injury or death. Experimental group movers were more likely to comment on enhanced opportunity, but clearly movers in both groups have perceived important benefits. Some movers have had less positive experiences, facing new difficulties as a result of having moved into the private market. Still, as Rosa's comments illustrate, even most of those who have encountered hardship believe the benefits of escaping the dangers of public housing outweigh the costs of negotiating the private market.

Lessons From the Qualitative Research

The analysis of these qualitative interviews helps to highlight the mechanisms that promote positive change and the structural and individual factors that create barriers for participants. It also has helped to identify possible pathways of important mediators that may lead to particular outcomes. These pathways suggested or supported by the qualitative research can be tested with the quantitative data from the interim evaluation survey.

Physical Environment (Housing and Neighborhood)

Like the early, single-site studies of MTO, our results indicate that movers have experienced significant changes in their physical environment as a result of leaving public housing. In general, respondents reported living in better housing in dramatically safer neighborhoods. As the comments above indicate, these interviews clearly indicate that most respondents perceive increased safety as the major benefit of their moves. Respondents who have found good landlords and decent housing in safer neighborhoods may experience significant mental and physical health benefits as a result of reduced stress and improved physical conditions.

However, our results also point to some of the challenges that face these families in the private market and that may diminish the potential benefits of living in lower-poverty communities. All of these factors can lead to housing instability, which may have repercussions for families' overall well-being. These challenges include:

- Rising rent and utility costs, which make it difficult for families to continue to afford housing in better neighborhoods and sometimes prompt moves back to lower-cost units in higher-poverty neighborhoods;
- Tight rental markets that sometimes lead to substantial rent increases and encourage individual landlords to consider selling their properties; and
- Renting from small landlords, which requires some adjustments on the part of tenants. While some tenants have formed good relationships, others have had personal conflicts. In addition, small landlords vary considerably in their responsiveness to maintenance problems.

Further, despite perceiving clear and important benefits, movers in the experimental group also reported some disadvantages to their new communities. Some children sometimes complained of being bored, of missing having easy access to playmates and free recreational facilities. A number of adults talked about the lack of convenience, and many adults and children complained about lack of transportation. However, these movers generally felt that the gains in safety outweighed these disadvantages.

Social Environment

A central premise of the MTO demonstration is that participants would benefit from forming new connections in low-poverty neighborhoods. Neighbors would provide role models for adults and children and would enforce norms of acceptable social behavior. Our qualitative interviews offer some support for this hypothesis: movers in both treatment groups often commented on their new neighbors' positive behaviors, especially in contrast to their neighbors in public housing. Our data also highlight the complexity of MTO families' social world, and the advantages and potential risks of maintaining close ties to their existing social networks.

- Experimental group movers were particularly likely to comment on the differences between the social world in their new neighborhoods and their public housing communities.
- Movers in both the experimental and Section 8 comparison groups talked positively about their new neighbors, often citing the contrast to the uncivil—and sometimes criminal—behaviors of their neighbors in public housing.
- To date, relatively few movers have formed deep connections in their new communities. Some simply preferred to keep to themselves, while others reported that they had little opportunity for interaction because their neighbors work and are gone during the day.
- Racial, language, and cultural barriers sometimes prevent respondents from forming relationships and leave them feeling isolated and lonely. Isolation is more of a problem for adults than youth; most youth have made at least some connections in their new communities.

- Moving to low-poverty areas had some impact on respondents' social networks: experimental group movers commented on the distance that prevented them from seeing family and friends, while Section 8 comparison group movers were more likely to be living near family and friends. But many respondents in both groups still maintained close ties to friends and family from their former communities.

Their ongoing connections to public housing communities clearly have some benefits for MTO families, providing them with support and assistance in times of need. However, these close ties may reduce families' motivation to seek new friendships in their current neighborhoods. They may also reduce exposure to new peer groups for children. At worst, they may expose youth to danger and death.

Educational Opportunities for Children

One of the major hypothesized benefits for MTO families moving from distressed public housing is that they will experience gains in the quality of their children's schools and school environment. In theory, over time, these gains will lead to improvements in educational outcomes for the children. Our findings suggest some limited support for this model. Some families in our sample, particularly those who moved to suburban school districts, commented on better school environments and their children's improved performance and behavior.

Our qualitative interviews point to an unexpected pattern that must be taken into account in the analysis of educational impacts of MTO. A substantial number of children in this sample attend school outside of their local area, with some attending schools near their original public housing developments. Respondents cite both children's special needs and personal preferences for making these choices about school:

- Some parents have chosen to place children in private, charter, or magnet schools in other neighborhoods, because of their own concerns about school quality.
- A number of families have chosen to place their children in schools near their original public housing developments. Some of these children were older teens with strong ties to the public housing community, but others were younger children who were in these schools because of child care needs or because their mothers simply had more confidence in the familiar schools.
- Children also attend schools outside their home districts due to special educational needs. Some children were in schools for the developmentally disabled, while others were in alternative schools for children with severe behavior problems.

In addition to the fact that a substantial number of children were attending schools outside their neighborhoods, MTO's education effects may be influenced by two other patterns evident in our data:

- A number of families in our sample moved to another city neighborhood instead of a suburban school district. Even if these children were in new schools, these were often

little different—and sometimes were reportedly worse—than their public housing schools.

- Consistent with several of the single-site MTO studies, behavior problems were repeatedly common among the children in our sample. Many children report having received detentions or suspensions, some had been expelled, and a few had more serious problems that resulted in arrests.

Economic Opportunity

Our findings suggest some of the economic benefits that MTO families have gained as a result of moves to lower-poverty communities. Several respondents in the experimental group cited increased access to job opportunities and the influence of neighbors' behavior as factors that encouraged them to seek work or obtain further education or training. However, two powerful forces—the strong economy in existence in early 2001 and welfare reform—made it difficult to assess the strength of these possible neighborhood effects. Respondents in each of our program groups were working, with some in each group reporting having found jobs through welfare-to-work programs.

Our findings also highlight the importance of individual differences in characteristics that may either facilitate or impede employment:

- Some respondents clearly have more motivation to succeed than others—our data provide several examples of parents going to great lengths to improve their families' situations.

Other respondents face significant challenges that made it more difficult—and in some cases, impossible—for them to take advantage of any new opportunities even during an economic boom:

- Physical and mental health problems appear to pose the greatest challenges. A surprising number of respondents in our sample reported very serious health problems that prevented them from working. Often, families had more than one member with a major health problem.
- Others adults face multiple barriers, including lack of education and skills, drug addiction, or criminal history, as they try to make their way toward economic self-sufficiency.

Summary

All told, the findings of this qualitative research suggest that, five years into the MTO demonstration, families have experienced important incremental changes, particularly increases in neighborhood safety. Most movers view leaving their distressed public housing for lower-poverty communities as a life-changing event that has enhanced the life chances for both adults and children. Experimental group movers consistently stress the increase in safety and the contrast between neighbors in their new community and those in public housing. Some, particularly those in suburban communities, cite

improvements in schools and access to new economic opportunities. Although some movers have encountered difficulties in the private market, and others talk about the difficulties of maintaining social ties and complain of social isolation, for most participants, the advantages for their children clearly outweigh the costs.

Most Section 8 comparison group movers we interviewed also believe that moving has dramatically improved the quality of their families' lives. However, their reports are less consistently positive. Some live in dangerous neighborhoods, areas with many of the same problems as their original public housing developments. These movers face the same challenges in negotiating the private market and some have had quite negative experiences with landlords and poor-quality housing. Still, most believe they have benefited from moving—and they have not generally paid the price in distance from key social networks that has affected many families in the experimental group.

However, our findings also indicate that many participants face significant challenges in taking full advantage of the resources of their new communities. The findings illustrate the complexity of their experiences: the difficulty forming social networks in new neighborhoods; personal preferences that lead families to choose non-local schools for their children; and the personal barriers that inhibit families' abilities to make positive changes and take steps to achieve self-sufficiency.

The quantitative analysis will explore the pathways illuminated by this qualitative exploration of MTO families' experiences. The full interim evaluation will allow a rich and complex analysis of the ways in which neighborhood environments lead to specific outcomes for individuals and families.

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Appendix A

Analytical Tools: Coding Dictionary and Reports

MTO Codebook

**Use bold headings as "Supercodes", to code large sections that capture the context of the story. Use the more specific codes within the "Supercodes" for more specific issues.*

Code	Description
<u>PUBLIC HOUSING</u>	Everything about public housing and life in public housing, except school-specific comments
PH pos	Old public housing dev. - pos. and neutral descriptions
PH neg	Old public housing dev. - neg. description (crime, safety, maintenance)
<u>HOUSEHOLD</u>	Any description of who lives in the household
Two-parent	Two-parent families
Father	Mentions father – presence or absence, boyfriend
<u>HOUSING</u>	Any description of housing qualities or housing-related issues
HQ pos	Housing quality (apartment) positive or neutral
HQ neg	Housing quality (apartment) negative
Cost	Rent, utilities
Landlord	Relationship with landlords
Move history	Original move from public housing, subsequent moves
Wants to move	Wants to move, plans to move
<u>NEIGHBORHOOD</u>	All descriptions of neighborhood (except SCHOOLS and RESOURCES)
Define	Define neighborhood boundaries
Neighbors pos	Description of people living in neighborhood, positive relationships
Neighbors neg	Negative relationships/interactions with neighbors
N pos	Positive things (and amenities) in current neighborhood
N neg	Negative things in current neighborhood (code crime separately)
N safety	Safety, crime, gangs in current neighborhood (both pos. and neg.)
Racial pos	Racial composition (pos., neutral comments) in neighborhood, schools
Racial neg	Racial tension or discrimination (incl. police if incident is racial)
<u>RESOURCES</u>	Resources <i>inside or outside</i> the neighborhood (except schools)
Transportation	Cars, buses, trains, subways, convenience of any mode
Recreational	Parks, sports, bowling, movies, community centers, teen centers
Health care	Doctors, dentist, health centers (presence or access, not visits)
Shopping	Food, clothes, malls
Church	Services, church groups
Other resources	(anything not captured in above groups)

Code	Description
<u>JOBS</u>	Any discussion of jobs – current, past, future, barriers, opportunities
J current	Current job, how they found it, type of job, how long they have had it
J opps	Job opportunities or barriers in new neighborhood or elsewhere
J train	Job training, school (for adult), college, welfare-to-work programs
J previous	Previous job(s)
<u>PUBLIC ASSISTANCE</u>	Any kind of welfare receipt
Welfare	Currently receiving welfare, problems with time limits, etc.
SSI	Currently receiving SSI or other disability payments
<u>SCHOOL</u>	School quality, performance, and environment
Teachers	Experience with teachers at children’s schools
L disability	Learning disability, special education, occupational/physical therapy
B problem	Behavior problem – child, delinquency, arrest
S performance	School performance, grades, promoted, held back, failed a grade
S change	Changed schools when moved initially or anytime since
S quality	Quality of schools
S friends	Children’s friends, peer groups
S racial	Racial composition in school, race relations, discrimination
S location	In neighborhood or elsewhere
S safety	Safety at school, other kids acting up, disruptions, gangs
Child care	Child care provider
PH school	Mentions PH school or compares to PH school
<u>NETWORKS</u>	Social support from family, friends, neighbors (<i>mostly for adults</i>)
Family	Family
Friends	Friends (use this code for adults – use S friends for children's friends)
Isolation	Expressed feelings of isolation
PH connection	Visiting, socializing, talking, depending or relying on
<u>HEALTH</u>	Any issues around past or current health, changes in health status
C health	Children’s current health or changes in health, visits to doctors
A health	Adult’s current health or changes in health, visits to doctors
<u>PROGRAM EFFECT</u>	Any changes attributed to move or since move. Include the last questions about how the program affected family, 5 years from now, and overall program comments or recommendations

Appendix B

Final Guides

MOVING TO OPPORTUNITY INTERIM EVALUATION INTERVIEW GUIDE

Adult

MTO EXPERIMENTAL GROUP IN HIGHER-POVERTY NEIGHBORHOODS

INTRODUCTION

Hello. My name is ___(interviewer name) I work at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C/Abt Associates in Cambridge, MA. The Urban Institute/Abt Associates is an independent research organization. I do not work for the [local] housing authority.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has asked The Urban Institute/Abt to conduct a study to try to understand the effects the Section 8 program has on families. The purpose of this interview is to understand more about what it has been like for families who live in public housing. We want to know about your neighborhood and how things have changed for you and your family since you first signed up for Moving To Opportunity Program.

During the interview I want you to remember that we're interested in your experiences and opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential; your name and the names of your family members will not be linked to anything you tell me. Nothing you say will affect your housing assistance or any other assistance you may receive. I hope you'll feel comfortable opening up. If at any time I ask you a question and you don't feel comfortable talking about the topic, feel free to say so.

The interview should last about two hours and we will pay \$50.00 in cash for your time and participation.

I will be taping the interview with this recorder. The reason why I need to tape the interview is because I want to make sure I have your opinions and experiences recorded accurately. No one outside the research team will be allowed to listen to the tapes and they will be destroyed at the end of the study.

CONSENT FORM:

Before we begin, I need to go over this consent form with you. It gives you more information about the study and a telephone number you can call if you have questions later. I will give you a copy to keep.

Do you have any questions or comments before we go on?

I am going to turn on the tape recorder now, and we will get started. **[START TAPE]**

I. RECONSTRUCTION OF MOVES AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Just to get us started, these are the main things that we are going to talk about during the interview:

- 1) How did you end up in this apartment/house?
- 2) What is it like to live here? For you? Your children?
- 3) How do you use your neighborhood/larger community?
- 4) How does this neighborhood compare to where you used to live?

I am going to ask you some specific questions about different things about your neighborhood and your family, but these are the things we'll be coming back to.

Let's start off by talking about how you got to this apartment. Thinking back to about five years ago, when you first signed up for the Moving To Opportunity Program, and got a housing voucher, you were living in [insert name of development].

What do you remember about moving out of [name of public housing development]?

- Note: Try to reconstruct events using respondent cues and background info
- How long did you live in public housing?
- What was it like living in the development?
- What did you like about living there?
- What did you dislike about living there?

Tell me about the places you have lived since you moved from [name of public housing development].

Note: Reconstruct number of moves and different neighborhoods, how they found each unit

Tell me about the places you have lived since you moved from [name of public housing development].

Note: Reconstruct number of moves and different neighborhoods, how they found each unit

Have there been any big changes for you and your family since you moved?

Probe for big changes in life (changes in family's health, source of income, activities, etc.)

I would like to ask a few questions about you and your family so I can get to know you a little better. This information will also help me ask questions later on in the interview. Could you please tell me about the people who live with you now?

- How many children live in your household? Are all of these your own children, or do they include other relatives (grandchildren, nieces, nephews) or foster children?
- How old are the children?
- Besides you, are there other adults in your household? How many? Are they related to you? How?

II. CURRENT NEIGHBORHOOD AND HOUSING

As we mentioned in the beginning, when you first joined the MTO program you may remember you were required to move to a low-poverty neighborhood to use your Section 8 voucher. Since that time you have moved to a different neighborhood. I would like you to think back to that first neighborhood.

Tell me some of the main reasons you decided to move from that neighborhood.

- What are some the things you disliked about the neighborhood?
- What are some of the things you liked about the neighborhood?
- What types of decisions did you make when you considered moving?
- Do you have any regrets about leaving that neighborhood?
- How has moving from that neighborhood affected you? Your children?

Tell me why you chose to move to this neighborhood.

- What did you like about this neighborhood?
- How did you find the apartment you are living in now? Was it difficult?
- Do you think you will move again?

Tell me about your current apartment/house.

- What do you like about your current apartment/house?
- What do you dislike about your current apartment/house?
- How is your landlord? Do you deal with a management company or an individual? Is he/she responsive when you need repairs or other help (e.g., rent issues)?

We want to understand more about how people think about their neighborhoods. What do you consider your neighborhood? [major intersections and blocks or miles from home]

- Does this neighborhood have a name?
- Are there any rivers, parks, highways, etc., nearby?
- Are there areas close by that you do not consider part of this neighborhood?

How would you describe this neighborhood to someone who has never been here?

- What sort of buildings and businesses exist here (factories, grocery stores, restaurants, clothing stores, liquor stores, etc.)?
- What types of services are available here (health care, schools, recreation for children, youth, adults, child care, library, and transportation)?
- Are there churches or other religious institutions here? Hospitals? Schools universities? Community organizations? Social service agencies?

What do you like best about living in this neighborhood?

What do you like least about living in this neighborhood?

Do you feel safe in this neighborhood?

- During the day? At night? Why/Why not?
- Are there places in your neighborhood that feel threatening to you?

Are there problems with drugs or gangs in this neighborhood? If yes, what kind of problems?

- Are there problems with shootings and violence?

How does this neighborhood compare to your old public housing development? To the first neighborhood you moved to after you left public housing?

III. NEIGHBORS

Let's now talk about the people who live in your neighborhood.

Describe your neighbors to someone who isn't from the neighborhood.

- What race or ethnicity are most of your neighbors?
- What income range would you put most of your neighbors in?
- Working, not working, retired
- Older or younger
- Comparison to old public housing development.

How well do people in this neighborhood know each other?

- Do people stick together or do they mostly go their own ways?
- Are there any differences between you and your neighbors? Have these differences affected your relationship with them?
- Do people sit outside and visit?
- Do people help each other out? In what ways?
- Do people watch out for each other's children?
- Are there any neighborhood events (block parties) or neighborhood organizations?
- How does this compare to your old public housing neighborhood?
- How would you describe racial and ethnic relationships in the neighborhood?

Do you ever socialize with your neighbors?

- Do you have friends that live in the neighborhood?
- Do you ever turn to your neighbors for help or help them?
- If so, what types of help (babysitting, watching houses while away, keeping keys, shopping)?
- How does this compare to when you lived in public housing?

IV. NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCES

Let's talk about some of the things you do during a typical week.

Note: We want to know what people do during the week (work, other activities, shop, etc.) and most importantly if these activities take place in their 'new' neighborhood, in their public housing neighborhood, or outside these neighborhoods.

Do you work?

Yes:

- What type of work do you do? How do you like your job?
- How did you find out about the job?
- Where is your job located? How do you get there? How long does it take?
- Has your employment changed from when you lived in public housing?

No:

- What are the main reasons you are not working right now?
- Are you looking for a job? If yes, what type?
- What do you rely on for income?
- Do you participate in any welfare work programs?
- Do you go to school?

What are some of the other things you do during the week?

- Where do you go to shop?
- Where do you go for health care?
- Where do you go for recreation?
- Who do you do these activities with?
- Do your friends live in or near the neighborhood?
- Do you do any of these activities with your children? With friends?

What kinds of things do you do in the evenings?

How about on the weekend? What kinds of things do you do?

- What are the activities?
- Where are they located?
- Are they in your neighborhood?
- Who do you do these activities with?
- Do you do any of these activities with your children?
- Do they live in the neighborhood?
- What about community activities (church, neighborhood assoc., sports, etc.)?

How do the things you do in a typical week compare to what you did when you lived in public housing?

- Did you work? Same job?
- Use same health care, schools, recreation?
- Spend more/less time with friends, family, neighbors?

Do you go back to your old public housing neighborhood for anything (see friends, shop, etc.)? If yes, why? If not, why not?

V. CHILDREN

We talked a bit about your family at the beginning of the interview. Now I want to talk more about your children. How many children do you have living at home now?

Note: make sure you have the household composition straight and ask questions about each child. Focus on children under 18.

- What are their first names?
- How old are they?
- Do they live with you?

Tell me about your children's friends.

- Who do they spend most of their time with?
- What kind of influence do you think they have on your children?
- Where do your children's friends live?
- How did you children meet their friends?
- Is it hard for them to find friends in this neighborhood?
- Do they still have friends in the public housing neighborhood?
- How do the friends they have now compare to the friends they had in public housing?

Tell me about the schools your children attend.

- Where are the schools located?
- Are they located within the neighborhood?
- What are some of the features you like (and dislike) about the schools your children attend?
- How would you rate the quality of the schools?

Do you feel the schools teach the kinds of things you want your child to learn?

- What kinds of subjects do they teach?
- Do they offer any special programs or electives?
- Are there other subjects you think are important that they do not teach (e.g., Black History, foreign language, music, art)?
- Do they offer extracurricular activities (sports, drama, music, etc.)? Do your children participate?

How do you feel about the way the teachers treat your child?

- How does your child and get along with their teacher? With a principal?
- Has your child ever experienced any racial discrimination at school?

How do you feel about the school environment?

- Does the school encourage achievement?
- How do you feel about the size of your children's classes?
- Are there any problems with disruptive children? With fights? With safety?

How is [each child's] performance in school?

- What types of grades do each of your children usually receive?
- What level is your child in? Does your child take special education classes? Enrichment/gifted classes?

How would you describe the behavior of each of your children in school?

- How well adjusted is your child in school? Do they like school?
- Have your children ever won any special awards or recognition?
- Have your children ever gotten in trouble with a teacher?
- Are your children ever absent when they are not sick? If so, why?
- Have your children ever been suspended or given detention? Been expelled?

Has your children's experience in school changed since you moved out of public housing? If so, in what ways?

- Experiences with teachers
- School environment
- School performance
- Child's behavior
- Friendships

What do you do for childcare? For your younger children? For your older children?

- What type of childcare provider (family, center, etc.)
- Where is your childcare provider located?
- Are your childcare needs being met?
- Do you have any difficulties with childcare?
- How did you find out about the childcare provider?

VI. RELATIONSHIPS

Now I want to know more about the rest of your family and your friends. Can you tell me a little about the family members you feel closest to?

- Who are they (e.g., spouse, partner, mother, father, sister, etc.)?
- What types of activities do you do with these family members?
- Do you rely on them for certain things? Do they rely on you?
- If so, what types of support do they give you/you give them?
- Where do these family members live?
- How often do you see them?
- Did moving out of public housing affect your relationships with family? If so, how?

Think about your closest friends. Can you tell me a little about them?

- How do you know them?
- What types of activities do you do with your friends?
- Where do they live?
- Do you rely on them for certain things? Do they rely on you?
- Did moving out of public housing affect your friendships? If so, how?

Are there other people in your life that are important to you?

- Who are they?
- How do you know them?
- What types of activities do you do with these people?
- Where do they live?
- Do you rely on them for certain things?
- If so, what types of support do they give you?

VII. WRAP UP

We've talked a lot about different things about your neighborhood.

Overall, do you think living in this neighborhood has affected your family life? Why/Why not?

If you had it to do over again, would you still sign up for the MTO program? Why/Why not?

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

Where do you see your children five years from now?

Do you have anything else you would like to add?

MOVING TO OPPORTUNITY INTERIM EVALUATION INTERVIEW GUIDE

Child

MTO EXPERIMENTAL GROUP IN HIGHER-POVERTY NEIGHBORHOODS

INTRODUCTION

Hello. My name is (interviewer name) I work at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C/Abt Associates in Cambridge, MA. The Urban Institute/Abt Associates is an independent research organization. I do not work for the [local] housing authority.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has asked The Urban Institute/Abt to conduct a study to try to understand the effects the Section 8 program has on families. The purpose of this interview is to understand more about what it has been like for families who live in public housing. We want to know about your neighborhood and how things have changed for you and your family since you first signed up for Moving To Opportunity Program.

During the interview I want you to remember that we're interested in your experiences and opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential; your name and the names of your family members will not be linked to anything you tell me. Nothing you say will affect your housing assistance or any other assistance you may receive. I hope you'll feel comfortable opening up. If I ask you a question and you don't feel comfortable talking about the topic, feel free to say so.

The interview should last about two hours and we will pay you \$25.00 in cash for your time and participation. I will be taping the interview with this recorder. The reason why I need to tape the interview is because I want to make sure I have your opinions and experiences recorded accurately. No one outside the research team will be allowed to listen to the tapes and they will be destroyed at the end of the study.

CONSENT FORM:

Before we begin, I need to go over this consent form with you. It gives you more information about the study and a telephone number you can call if you have questions later. I will give you a copy to keep.

[Go over consent form.]

Do you have any questions or comments before we go on?

I am going to turn on the tape recorder now, and we will get started. **[START TAPE]**

I. OPENER AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Just to get us started, these are the main things that we are going to talk about during the interview:

- 1) How did your family you end up living in this apartment/house?
- 2) What is it like to live here?
- 3) How do you use your neighborhood/larger community?
- 4) How does this neighborhood compare to where you used to live?

I am going to ask you some specific questions about different things about your neighborhood and your family, but these are the things we'll be coming back to.

Let's start off by talking about how you got to this apartment. Do you remember much about when you lived in [public housing development]? About moving out of there? What kinds of things do you remember?

- What did you like about living there?
- What did you dislike about living there?

What do you remember about where you moved when you left public housing?

- What did you like about living there?
- What did you dislike about living there?
- How did you feel about moving again?

I would like to ask a few questions about you and your family so I can get to know you a little better. This information will also help me ask questions later on in the interview. Could you please tell me about the people who live with you now?

- How many children live in your household? Do you have any brothers or sisters?
- How old are they?
- Who are the adults in the household?

II. CURRENT NEIGHBORHOOD

Now I would like to get your opinions about your current apartment/house and neighborhood.

Tell me about your current apartment/house.

- What do you like about your current apartment/house?
- What do you dislike about your current apartment/house?

We want to understand more about how people think about their neighborhoods. What do you consider your neighborhood? [major intersections and blocks or miles from home]

- Does this neighborhood have a name?
- Are there any rivers, parks, highways, etc., nearby?
- Are there areas close by that you do not consider part of this neighborhood?

How would you describe this neighborhood to someone who has never been here?

- What sort of buildings and businesses exist here (factories, grocery stores, restaurants, clothing stores, liquor stores, etc.)?
- What types of services are available here (health care, schools, recreation for children, youth, adults, child care, library, and transportation)?
- Are there churches or other religious institutions here? Hospitals? Schools universities? Community organizations? Social service agencies?

What do you like best about living in this neighborhood?

What do you like least about living in this neighborhood?

Do you feel safe in this neighborhood?

- During the day? At night? Why/Why not?
- Are there places in your neighborhood that feel threatening to you?
- Are there any places in your neighborhood you feel particularly safe?

Are there any problems with drugs or gangs?

How does this neighborhood compare to your old public housing development?

III. NEIGHBORS

Let's now talk about the people who live in your neighborhood.

How would you describe your neighbors to someone who isn't from the neighborhood?

- What race or ethnicity are most of your neighbors?
- What income range would you put most of your neighbors in?
- Working, not working, retired?
- Older or younger?

How well do people in this neighborhood know each other?

- Do people stick together or do they mostly go their own ways?
- Are there any differences between you and your neighbors? Have these differences affected your relationship with them?
- Do people sit outside and visit?
- Do people help each other out? In what ways?
- Do people watch out for each other's children?
- Are there any neighborhood events (block parties) or neighborhood organizations?
- How does this compare to your old public housing neighborhood?
- How would you describe racial and ethnic relationships in the neighborhood?

Do you ever socialize with your neighbors?

- Do you have friends that live in the neighborhood?
- Do you ever turn to your neighbors for help or help them?
- If so, what types of help (watching you after school, help if you get locked out)?
- How does this compare to when you lived in public housing?

IV. NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCES

Let's talk about some of the things you do during a typical week.

Note: We want to know what people do during the week (work, other activities, shop, etc.) and most importantly if these activities take place in their 'new' neighborhood, in their public housing neighborhood, or outside these neighborhoods.

Do you go to school?

Tell me about your school.

- Where is your school? Is it in this neighborhood?
- How would you describe your social life at school?
- How do you get along with other kids? With teachers?
- Are you involved in any extracurricular activities?
- Is this a new school for you? If so, how are you adjusting?

What are some of the things you like about your school?

What are some of the things you don't like about your school?

How do you feel about your teachers?

- Do they treat you fairly? Why/Why not?
- Do they push you to do your best? Why/Why not?
- Have you ever had problems with a teacher? With a principal? What happened?
- Have you ever experienced any racial discrimination at school?

How do you do in school?

- What types of grades do each of you usually get?
- Are you in any special education classes? Were you in any before you moved?
- Are you in any gifted/enrichment classes?

How would you describe your behavior in school?

- Have you ever received any special awards or recognitions?
- Have you ever gotten in trouble in school? With a teacher? With a principal?
- Do you ever skip classes?
- Have you ever been suspended or given detention? Expelled?

What do you do after school?

- Do you have a job? If Yes: What kind? How did you find it?
- Do you belong to any clubs or organizations?
- Are you on any sports teams?
- Do you go to any after school programs
- Do you play/hang out with other kids?
- Do you hang out at home?

How about on the weekend? What kinds of things do you do?

- What are the activities?
- Where are they located?
- Are they in your neighborhood?
- Who do you do these activities with?

How do the things you do in a typical week compare to what you did when you lived in public housing?

- Use same health care, schools, recreation?
- Spend more/less time with friends, family, neighbors?

Do you go back to your old public housing neighborhood for anything (see friends, shop, etc.)?

- If yes, why? If not, why not?

V. RELATIONSHIPS

Now I want to know more about the rest of your family and your friends. Can you tell me a little about the family members who are most important to you?

- Who are they (e.g., mother, father, sister, brother, etc.)?
- What types of activities do you do with these family members?
- Do you rely on them for certain things? Do they rely on you?
- If so, what types of support do they give you?
- Where do these family members live?
- How often do you see them?

Think about your closest friends.

- How do you know them?
- What types of things do you do with your friends?
- Where do they live? (Check if they live in old public housing neighborhood)
- Do you rely on them for certain things? Do they rely on you?

Are there other people in your life that are important to you?

- Who are they?
- How do you know them?
- What types of activities do you do with these people?
- Where do they live?
- Do you rely on them for certain things?
- If so, what types of support do they give you?

VI. WRAP UP

We've talked a lot about different things about your neighborhood.

Overall, do you think living in this neighborhood has affected your life? Why/Why not?

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Do you have anything you would like to add?

MOVING TO OPPORTUNITY INTERIM EVALUATION INTERVIEW GUIDE

Adult

MTO EXPERIMENTAL GROUP SECTION 8 COMPARISON GROUP

INTRODUCTION

Hello. My name is ___(interviewer name)_. I work at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C./Abt Associates in Cambridge, MA. The Urban Institute/Abt Associates is an independent research organization. I do not work for the [local] housing authority.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has asked The Urban Institute/Abt to conduct a study to try to understand the effects the Section 8 program has on families. The purpose of this interview is to understand more about what it has been like for families who live in public housing. We want to know about your neighborhood and how things have changed for you and your family since you first signed up for Moving To Opportunity Program.

During the interview I want you to remember that we are interested in your experiences and opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential; your name and the names of your family members will not be linked to anything you tell me. Nothing you say will affect your housing assistance or any other assistance you may receive. I hope you'll feel comfortable opening up. If at any time I ask you a question and you don't feel comfortable talking about the topic, feel free to say so.

The interview should last about two hours and we will pay \$50.00 in cash for your time and participation. I will be taping the interview with this recorder. The reason why I need to tape the interview is because I want to make sure I have your opinions and experiences recorded accurately. No one outside the research team will be allowed to listen to the tapes and they will be destroyed at the end of the study.

CONSENT FORM:

Before we begin, I need to go over this consent form with you. It gives you more information about the study and a telephone number you can call if you have questions later. I will give you a copy to keep.

Do you have any questions or comments before we go on?

I am going to turn on the tape recorder now, and we will get started. **[START TAPE]**

I. RECONSTRUCTION OF HOUSING AND MOVES AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Just to get us started, these are the main things that we are going to talk about during the interview:

- 1) How did you end up in this apartment/house?
- 2) What is it like to live here? For you? Your children?
- 3) How do you use your neighborhood/larger community?
- 4) How does this neighborhood compare to where you used to live?

I am going to ask you some specific questions about different things about your neighborhood and your family, but these are the things we'll be coming back to.

Let's start off by talking about how you got to this apartment. Thinking back to about five years ago, when you first signed up for the Moving To Opportunity Program, and got a housing voucher, you were living in [insert name of development].

What do you remember about moving out of [name of public housing development]?

Note: Try to reconstruct events using respondent cues and background info

- How long did you live in public housing?
- What was it like living in the development?
- What did you like about living there?
- What did you dislike about living there?

Tell me about the places you have lived since you moved from [name of public housing development].

Note: Reconstruct number of moves and different neighborhoods, how they found each unit

Have there been any big changes for you and your family since you moved?

Probe for big changes in life (changes in family's health, source of income, activities, etc.)

I would like to ask a few questions about you and your family so I can get to know you a little better. This information will also help me ask questions later on in the interview. Could you please tell me about the people who live with you now?

- How many children live in your household? Are all of these your own children, or do they include other relatives (grandchildren, nieces, nephews) or foster children?
- How old are the children?
- Besides you, are there other adults in your household? How many? Are they related to you? How?

II. CURRENT NEIGHBORHOOD AND HOUSING

Now I would like to get your opinions about your current apartment/house and neighborhood. First, tell me about your current apartment/house.

- What do you like about your current apartment/house?
- What do you dislike about your current apartment/house?
- How is your landlord? Do you deal with a management company or an individual? Is he/she responsive when you need repairs or other help (e.g., rent issues)?

We want to understand more about how people think about their neighborhoods. What do you consider your neighborhood? [major intersections and blocks or miles from home]

- Does this neighborhood have a name?
- Are there any rivers, parks, highways, etc., nearby?
- Are there areas close by that you do not consider part of this neighborhood?

How would you describe this neighborhood to someone who has never been here?

- What sort of buildings and businesses exist here (factories, grocery stores, restaurants, clothing stores, liquor stores, etc.)?
- What types of services are available here (health care, schools, recreation for children, youth, adults, child care, library, and transportation)?
- Are there churches or other religious institutions here? Hospitals? Schools universities? Community organizations? Social service agencies?

What do you like best about living in this neighborhood?

What do you like least about living in this neighborhood?

Do you feel safe in this neighborhood?

- During the day? At night? Why/Why not?
- Are there places in your neighborhood that feel threatening to you?

Are there problems with drugs or gangs in this neighborhood? If yes, what kind of problems?

- Are there problems with shootings and violence?

How does this neighborhood compare to your old public housing development?

III. NEIGHBORS

Let's now talk about the people who live in your neighborhood.

Describe your neighbors to someone who isn't from the neighborhood.

- What race or ethnicity are most of your neighbors?
- What income range would you put most of your neighbors in?
- Working, not working, retired
- Older or younger
- Comparison to old public housing development

How well do people in this neighborhood know each other?

- Do people stick together or do they mostly go their own ways?
- Are there any differences between you and your neighbors? Have these differences affected your relationship with them?
- Do people sit outside and visit?
- Do people help each other out? In what ways?
- Do people watch out for each other's children?
- Are there any neighborhood events (block parties) or neighborhood organizations?
- How does this compare to your old public housing neighborhood?
- How would you describe racial and ethnic relationships in the neighborhood?

Do you ever socialize with your neighbors?

- Do you have friends that live in the neighborhood?
- Do you ever turn to your neighbors for help or help them?
- If so, what types of help (babysitting, watching houses while away, keeping keys, shopping)?
- How does this compare to when you lived in public housing?

IV. NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCES

Let's talk about some of the things you do during a typical week.

Note: We want to know what people do during the week (work, other activities, shop, etc.) and most importantly if these activities take place in their 'new' neighborhood, in their public housing neighborhood, or outside these neighborhoods.

Do you work?

Yes:

- What type of work do you do? How do you like your job?
- How did you find out about the job?
- Where is your job located? How do you get there? How long does it take?
- Has your employment changed from when you lived in public housing?

No:

- What the main reasons you are not working right now?
- Are you looking for a job? If yes, what type?
- What do you rely on for income?
- Do you participate in any welfare work programs?
- Do you go to school?

What are some of the other things you do during the week?

- Where do you go to shop?
- Where do you go for health care?
- Where do you go for recreation?
- Who do you do these activities with?
- Do your friends live in or near the neighborhood?
- Do you do any of these activities with your children? With friends?

What kinds of things do you do in the evenings?

How about on the weekend? What kinds of things do you do?

- What are the activities?
- Where are they located?
- Are they in your neighborhood?
- Who do you do these activities with?
- Do you do any of these activities with your children?
- Do they live in the neighborhood?
- What about community activities (church, neighborhood assoc., sports, etc.)?

How do the things you do in a typical week compare to what you did when you lived in public housing?

- Did you work? Same job?
- Use same health care, schools, recreation?
- Spend more/less time with friends, family, neighbors?

Do you go back to your old public housing neighborhood for anything (see friends, shop, etc.)? If yes, why? If not, why not?

V. CHILDREN

We talked a bit about your family at the beginning of the interview. Now I want to talk more about your children. How many children do you have living at home now?

Note: make sure you have the household composition straight and ask questions about each child. Focus on children under 18.

- What are their first names?
- How old are they?
- Do they live with you?

Tell me about your children's friends.

- Who do they spend most of their time with?
- What kind of influence do you think they have on your children?
- Where do your children's friends live?
- How did you children meet their friends?
- Is it hard for them to find friends in this neighborhood?
- Do they still have friends in the public housing neighborhood?
- How do the friends they have now compare to the friends they had in public housing?
-

Tell me about the schools your children attend.

- Where are the schools located?
- Are they located within the neighborhood?
- What are some of the features you like (and dislike) about the schools your children attend?
- How would you rate the quality of the schools?

Do you feel the schools teach the kinds of things you want your child to learn?

- What kinds of subjects do they teach?
- Do they offer any special programs or electives?
- Are there other subjects you think are important that they do not teach (e.g., Black History, foreign language, music, art)?
- Do they offer extracurricular activities (sports, drama, music, etc.)? Do your children participate?

How do you feel about the way the teachers treat your child?

- How does your child and get along with their teacher? With a principal?
- Has your child ever experienced any racial discrimination at school?

How do you feel about the school environment?

- Does the school encourage achievement?
- How do you feel about the size of your children's classes?
- Are there any problems with disruptive children? With fights? With safety?

How is [each child's] performance in school?

- What types of grades do each of your children usually receive?
- What level is your child in? Does your child take special education classes?

How would you describe the behavior of each of your children in school?

- Enrichment/gifted classes?
- How well adjusted is your child in school? Do they like school?
- Have your children ever won any special awards or recognition?
- Have your children ever gotten in trouble with a teacher?
- Are your children ever absent when they are not sick? If so, why?
- Have your children ever been suspended or given detention? Been expelled?

Has your children's experience in school changed since you moved out of public housing? If so, in what ways?

- Experiences with teachers
- School environment
- School performance
- Child's behavior
- Friendships

What do you do for childcare? For your younger children? For your older children?

- What type of childcare provider (family, center, etc.)
- Where is your childcare provider located?
- Are your childcare needs being met?
- Do you have any difficulties with childcare?
- How did you find out about the childcare provider?

VI. RELATIONSHIPS

Now I want to know more about the rest of your family and your friends. Can you tell me a little about the family members you feel closest to?

- Who are they (e.g., spouse, partner, mother, father, sister, etc)?
- What types of activities do you do with these family members?
- Do you rely on them for certain things? Do they rely on you?
- If so, what types of support do they give you/you give them?
- Where do these family members live?
- How often do you see them?
- Did moving out of public housing affect your relationships with family? If so, how?

Think about your closest friends. Can you tell me a little about them?

- How do you know them?
- What types of activities do you do with your friends?
- Where do they live?
- Do you rely on them for certain things? Do they rely on you?
- Did moving out of public housing affect your friendships? If so, how?

Are there other people in your life that are important to you?

- Who are they?
- How do you know them?
- What types of activities do you do with these people?
- Where do they live?
- Do you rely on them for certain things?
- If so, what types of support do they give you?

VII. WRAP UP

We've talked a lot about different things about your neighborhood.

**Overall, do you think living in this neighborhood has affected your family life?
Why/Why not?**

If you had it to do over again, would you still sign up for the MTO program? Why/Why not?

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

Where do you see your children five years from now?

Do you have anything else you would like to add?

MOVING TO OPPORTUNITY INTERIM EVALUATION INTERVIEW GUIDE

Child

MTO EXPERIMENTAL GROUP SECTION 8 COMPARISON GROUP

INTRODUCTION

Hello. My name is (interviewer name) I work at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C/Abt Associates in Cambridge, MA. The Urban Institute/Abt Associates is an independent research organization. I do not work for the [local] housing authority.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has asked The Urban Institute/Abt to conduct a study to try to understand the effects the Section 8 program has on families. The purpose of this interview is to understand more about what it has been like for families who live in public housing. We want to know about your neighborhood and how things have changed for you and your family since you first signed up for Moving To Opportunity Program.

During the interview I want you to remember that we're interested in your experiences and opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential; your name and the names of your family members will not be linked to anything you tell me. Nothing you say will affect your housing assistance or any other assistance you may receive. I hope you'll feel comfortable opening up. If I ask you a question and you don't feel comfortable talking about the topic, feel free to say so.

The interview should last about two hours and we will pay you \$25.00 in cash for your time and participation. I will be taping the interview with this recorder. The reason why I need to tape the interview is because I want to make sure I have your opinions and experiences recorded accurately. No one outside the research team will be allowed to listen to the tapes and they will be destroyed at the end of the study.

CONSENT FORM:

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[Go over consent form.]

Do you have any questions or comments before we go on?

I am going to turn on the tape recorder now, and we will get started. **[START TAPE]**

I. OPENER AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Just to get us started, these are the main things that we are going to talk about during the interview:

- 1) How did your family you end up living in this apartment/house?
- 2) What is it like to live here?
- 3) How do you use your neighborhood/larger community?
- 4) How does this neighborhood compare to where you used to live?

I am going to ask you some specific questions about different things about your neighborhood and your family, but these are the things we'll be coming back to.

Let's start off by talking about how you got to this apartment. Do you remember much about when you lived in [public housing development]? About moving out of there? What kinds of things do you remember?

- What did you like about living there?
- What did you dislike about living there?

I would like to ask a few questions about you and your family so I can get to know you a little better. This information will also help me ask questions later on in the interview. Could you please tell me about the people who live with you now?

- How many children live in your household? Do you have any brothers or sisters?
- How old are they
- Who are the adults in the household?

II. II. CURRENT NEIGHBORHOOD

Now I would like to get your opinions about your current apartment/house and neighborhood.

Tell me about your current apartment/house.

- What do you like about your current apartment/house?
- What do you dislike about your current apartment/house?

We want to understand more about how people think about their neighborhoods. What do you consider your neighborhood? [major intersections and blocks or miles from home]

- Does this neighborhood have a name?
- Are there any rivers, parks, highways, etc., nearby?
- Are there areas close by that you do not consider part of this neighborhood?

How would you describe this neighborhood to someone who has never been here?

- What sort of buildings and businesses exist here (factories, grocery stores, restaurants, clothing stores, liquor stores, etc.)?
- What types of services are available here (health care, schools, recreation for children, youth, adults, child care, library, and transportation)?
- Are there churches or other religious institutions here? Hospitals? Schools universities? Community organizations? Social service agencies?

What do you like best about living in this neighborhood?

What do you like least about living in this neighborhood?

Do you feel safe in this neighborhood?

- During the day? At night? Why/Why not?
- Are there places in your neighborhood that feel threatening to you?
- Are there any places in your neighborhood you feel particularly safe?

Are there any problems with drugs or gangs?

How does this neighborhood compare to your old public housing development?

III. NEIGHBORS

Let's now talk about the people who live in your neighborhood.

How would you describe your neighbors to someone who isn't from the neighborhood?

- What race or ethnicity are most of your neighbors?
- What income range would you put most of your neighbors in?
- Working, not working, retired
- Older or younger

How well do people in this neighborhood know each other?

- Do people stick together or do they mostly go their own ways?
- Are there any differences between you and your neighbors? Have these differences affected your relationship with them?
- Do people sit outside and visit?
- Do people help each other out? In what ways?
- Do people watch out for each other's children?
- Are there any neighborhood events (block parties) or neighborhood organizations?
- How does this compare to your old public housing neighborhood?
- How would you describe racial and ethnic relationships in the neighborhood?

Do you ever socialize with your neighbors?

- Do you have friends that live in the neighborhood?
- Do you ever turn to your neighbors for help or help them?
- If so, what types of help (watching you after school, help if you get locked out)?
- How does this compare to when you lived in public housing?

IV. NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCES

Let's talk about some of the things you do during a typical week.

Note: We want to know what people do during the week (work, other activities, shop, etc.) and most importantly if these activities take place in their 'new' neighborhood, in their public housing neighborhood, or outside these neighborhoods.

Do you go to school?

Tell me about your school.

- Where is your school? Is it in this neighborhood?
- How would you describe your social life at school?
- How do you get along with other kids? With teachers?
- Are you involved in any extracurricular activities?
- Is this a new school for you? If so, how are you adjusting?

What are some of the things you like about your school?

What are some of the things you don't like about your school?

How do you feel about your teachers?

- Do they treat you fairly? Why/Why not?
- Do they push you to do your best? Why/Why not?
- Have you ever had problems with a teacher? With a principal? What happened?
- Have you ever experienced any racial discrimination at school?

How do you do in school?

- What types of grades do each of you usually get?
- Are you in any special education classes? Were you in any before you moved?
- Are you in any gifted/enrichment classes?

How would you describe your behavior in school?

- Have you ever received any special awards or recognitions?
- Have you ever gotten in trouble in school? With a teacher? With a principal?
- Do you ever skip classes?
- Have you ever been suspended or given detention? Expelled?

What do you do after school?

- Do you have a job? If Yes: What kind? How did you find it?
- Do you belong to any clubs or organizations?
- Are you on any sports teams?
- Do you go to any after school programs
- Do you play/hang out with other kids?
- Do you hang out at home?

How about on the weekend? What kinds of things do you do?

- What are the activities?
- Where are they located?
- Are they in your neighborhood?
- Who do you do these activities with?

How do the things you do in a typical week compare to what you did when you lived in public housing?

- Use same health care, schools, recreation?
- Spend more/less time with friends, family, neighbors?

Do you go back to your old public housing neighborhood for anything (see friends, shop, etc.)?

- If yes, why? If not, why not?

V. RELATIONSHIPS

Now I want to know more about the rest of your family and your friends. Can you tell me a little about the family members who are most important to you?

- Who are they (e.g., mother, father, sister, brother, etc)?
- What types of activities do you do with these family members?
- Do you rely on them for certain things? Do they rely on you?
- If so, what types of support do they give you?
- Where do these family members live?
- How often do you see them?

Think about your closest friends.

- How do you know them?
- What types of things do you do with your friends?
- Where do they live? (Check if they live in old public housing neighborhood)
- Do you rely on them for certain things? Do they rely on you?

Are there other people in your life that are important to you?

- Who are they?
- How do you know them?
- What types of activities do you do with these people?
- Where do they live?
- Do you rely on them for certain things?
- If so, what types of support do they give you?

VI. VII. WRAP UP

We've talked a lot about different things about your neighborhood.

Overall, do you think living in this neighborhood has affected your life? Why/Why not?

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Do you have anything you would like to add?

MOVING TO OPPORTUNITY INTERIM EVALUATION INTERVIEW GUIDE

Adult

IN-PLACE CONTROL GROUP

INTRODUCTION

Hello. My name is (interviewer name) I work at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C/Abt Associates in Cambridge, MA. The Urban Institute/Abt Associates is an independent research organization. I do not work for the [local] housing authority.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has asked The Urban Institute/Abt to conduct a study to try to understand the effects the Section 8 program has on families. The purpose of this interview is to understand more about what it has been like for families who live in public housing. We want to know about your neighborhood and how things have changed for you and your family since you first signed up for Moving To Opportunity Program.

During the interview I want you to remember that we're interested in your experiences and opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential; your name and the names of your family members will not be linked to anything you tell me. Nothing you say will affect your housing assistance or any other assistance you may receive. I hope you'll feel comfortable opening up. If at any time I ask you a question and you don't feel comfortable talking about the topic, feel free to say so.

The interview should last about two hours and we will pay \$50.00 in cash for your time and participation.

I will be taping the interview with this recorder. The reason why I need to tape the interview is because I want to make sure I have your opinions and experiences recorded accurately. No one outside the research team will be allowed to listen to the tapes and they will be destroyed at the end of the study.

CONSENT FORM:

Before we begin, I need to go over this consent form with you. It gives you more information about the study and a telephone number you can call if you have questions later. I will give you a copy to keep.

Do you have any questions or comments before we go on?

I am going to turn on the tape recorder now, and we will get started. **[START TAPE]**

I. RECONSTRUCTION OF HOUSING MOVES

Just to get us started, these are the main things that we are going to talk about during the interview:

- 1) How did you end up in this apartment/house?
- 2) What is it like to live here? For you? Your children?
- 3) How do you use your neighborhood and your larger community?

I am going to ask you some specific questions about different things about your neighborhood and your family, but these are the things we'll be coming back to.

Now I would like you to think back to about five years ago, when you first signed up for the Moving To Opportunity Program in [date]. At that time, you were living in [name of public housing development]. Is that the same place you live now?

[IF HOUSEHOLD HAS MOVED:] Tell me about the places you have lived since [date] and why you moved.

Note: Reconstruct number of moves and different neighborhoods.

- **Were moves due to HOPE VI or other redevelopment activity?**

How did you come to live in this development?

- How long have you lived here?
- Have you always lived in public housing? If not, what other kinds of places have you lived?

Have there been any big changes for you and your family since you moved?

Probe for big changes in life (changes in family's health, source of income, activities, etc.)

I would like to ask a few questions about you and your family so I can get to know you a little better. This information will also help me ask questions later on in the interview. Could you please tell me about the people who live with you now?

- How many children live in your household? Are all of these your own children, or do they include other relatives (grandchildren, nieces, nephews) or foster children?
- How old are the children?
- Besides you, are there other adults in your household? How many? Are they related to you? How?

II. CURRENT NEIGHBORHOOD AND HOUSING

Now I would like to get your opinions about your current apartment/house and neighborhood. First, tell me about your current apartment/house.

- What do you like about your current apartment/house?
- What do you dislike about your current apartment/house?
- How is the management in your development? The building maintenance?

We want to understand more about how people think about their neighborhoods. What do you consider your neighborhood? [major intersections and blocks or miles from home]

- Does this neighborhood have a name? Is it different from the name of the development?
- Are there any rivers, parks, highways, etc., nearby?
- Are there areas close by that you do not consider part of this neighborhood?

How would you describe this neighborhood to someone who has never been here?

- What sort of buildings and businesses exist here (factories, grocery stores, restaurants, clothing stores, liquor stores, etc.)?
- What types of services are available here (health care, schools, recreation for children, youth, adults, child care, library, and transportation)?
- Are there churches or other religious institutions here? Hospitals? Schools universities? Community organizations? Social service agencies?

What do you like best about living in this neighborhood?

What do you like least about living in this neighborhood?

Do you feel safe in this neighborhood?

- During the day? At night? Why/Why not?
- Are there places in your neighborhood that feel threatening to you?

Are there problems with drugs or gangs in this neighborhood? If yes, what kind of problems?

Are there problems with shootings and violence?

Has your neighborhood changed since you signed up for MTO? If so, how?

- Have there been any changes in your development? Demolition? New construction?
- Have there been any changes in crime and safety?
- Has the community around your development changed? If so, how?

III. NEIGHBORS

Let's now talk about the people who live in your neighborhood.

Describe your neighbors to someone who isn't from the neighborhood.

- What race or ethnicity are most of your neighbors?
- What income range would you put most of your neighbors in?
- Working, not working, retired
- Older or younger
- Has this changed at all in the last five years? If so, how?

How well do people in this neighborhood know each other?

- Do people stick together or do they mostly go their own ways?
- Are there any differences between you and your neighbors? Have these differences affected your relationship with them?
- Do people sit outside and visit?
- Do people help each other out? In what ways?
- Do people watch out for each other's children?
- Are there any neighborhood events (block parties) or neighborhood organizations?
- Has this changed at all in the last five years? If so, how?
- How would you describe racial and ethnic relationships in the neighborhood?

Do you ever socialize with your neighbors?

- Do you have friends that live in the neighborhood?
- Do you ever turn to your neighbors for help or help them?
- If so, what types of help (babysitting, watching houses while away, keeping keys, shopping)?
- Has the amount of time you spend with neighbors changed at all in the last five years? If so, how?

IV. NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCES

Let's talk about some of the things you do during a typical week.

Note: We want to know what people do during the week (work, other activities, shop, etc.) and most importantly if these activities take place in their 'new' neighborhood, in their public housing neighborhood, or outside these neighborhoods.

Do you work?

Yes:

- C What type of work do you do? How do you like your job?
- C How did you find out about the job?
- C Where is your job located? How do you get there? How long does it take?
- C Has your employment changed from when you lived in public housing?

No:

- C What are the main reasons you are not working right now?
- C Are you looking for a job? If yes, what type?
- C What do you rely on for income?
- C Do you participate in any welfare work programs?
- C Do you go to school?

What are some of the other things you do during the week?

- Where do you go to shop?
- Where do you go for health care?
- Where do you go for recreation?
- Who do you do these activities with?
- Do your friends live in or near the neighborhood?
- Do you do any of these activities with your children? With friends?

What kinds of things do you do in the evenings?

How about on the weekend? What kinds of things do you do?

- What are the activities?
- Where are they located?
- Are they in your neighborhood?
- Who do you do these activities with?
- Do you do any of these activities with your children?
- Do they live in the neighborhood?
- What about community activities (church, neighborhood assoc., sports, etc.)?

Have the things you do in a typical week changed in the past five years? If so, how?

- Did you work? Same job?
- Use same health care, schools, recreation?
- Spend more/less time with friends, family, neighbors?

V. CHILDREN

We talked a bit about your family at the beginning of the interview. Now I want to talk more about your children. How many children do you have living at home now?

Note: make sure you have the household composition straight and ask questions about each child. Focus on children under 18.

- What are their first names?
- How old are they?
- Do they live with you?

Tell me about your children's friends.

- Who do they spend most of their time with?
- What kind of influence do you think they have on your children?
- Where do your children's friends live?
- How did your children meet their friends?
- Is it hard for them to find friends in this neighborhood?
- Have the kinds of friends they have changed in the past five years? If so, in what ways?

Tell me about the schools your children attend.

- Where are the schools located?
- Are they located within the neighborhood?
- What are some of the features you like (and dislike) about the schools your children attend?
- How would you rate the quality of the schools?

Do you feel the schools teach the kinds of things you want your child to learn?

- What kinds of subjects do they teach?
- Do they offer any special programs or electives?
- Are there other subjects you think are important that they do not teach (e.g., Black History, foreign language, music, art)?
- Do they offer extracurricular activities (sports, drama, music, etc.)? Do your children participate?

How do you feel about the way the teachers treat your child?

- How does your child and get along with their teacher? With a principal?
- Has your child ever experienced any racial discrimination at school?

How do you feel about the school environment?

- Does the school encourage achievement?
- How do you feel about the size of your children's classes?
- Are there any problems with disruptive children? With fights? With safety?

How is [each child's] performance in school?

- What types of grades do each of your children usually receive?
- What level is your child in? Does your child take special education classes? Enrichment/gifted classes?

How would you describe the behavior of each of your children in school?

- How well adjusted is your child in school? Do they like school?
- Have your children ever won any special awards or recognition?
- Have your children ever gotten in trouble with a teacher?
- Are your children ever absent when they are not sick? If so, why?
- Have your children ever been suspended or given detention? Been expelled?

Has your children's experience in school changed over the past five years?

- Experiences with teachers
- School environment
- School performance
- Child's behavior
- Friendships

What do you do for childcare? For your younger children? For your older children?

- What type of childcare provider (family, center, etc.)
- Where is your childcare provider located?
- Are your childcare needs being met?
- Do you have any difficulties with childcare?
- How did you find out about the childcare provider?

VI. RELATIONSHIPS

Now I want to know more about the rest of your family and your friends. Can you tell me a little about the family members you feel closest to?

- Who are they (e.g., spouse, partner, mother, father, sister, etc)?
- What types of activities do you do with these family members?
- Do you rely on them for certain things? Do they rely on you?
- If so, what types of support do they give you/you give them?
- Where do these family members live?
- How often do you see them?

Think about your closest friends. Can you tell me a little about them?

- How do you know them?
- What types of activities do you do with your friends?
- Where do they live?
- Do you rely on them for certain things? Do they rely on you?
- Did moving out of public housing affect your friendships? If so, how?

Are there other people in your life that are important to you?

- Who are they?
- How do you know them?
- What types of activities do you do with these people?
- Where do they live?
- Do you rely on them for certain things?
- If so, what types of support do they give you?

VII. WRAP UP

We've talked a lot about different things about your neighborhood.

Overall, do you think living in this neighborhood has affected your family life? Why/Why not?

Are you still interested in moving out of public housing? Are you still interested in getting Section 8?

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

Where do you see your children five years from now?

Do you have anything else you would like to add?

MOVING TO OPPORTUNITY INTERIM EVALUATION INTERVIEW GUIDE

Child

IN-PLACE CONTROL GROUP

INTRODUCTION

Hello. My name is (interviewer name) I work at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C/Abt Associates in Cambridge, MA. The Urban Institute/Abt Associates is an independent research organization. I do not work for the [local] housing authority.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has asked The Urban Institute/Abt to conduct a study to try to understand the effects the Section 8 program has on families. The purpose of this interview is to understand more about what it has been like for families who live in public housing. We want to know about your neighborhood and how things have changed for you and your family since you first signed up for Moving To Opportunity Program.

During the interview I want you to remember that we're interested in your experiences and opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential; your name and the names of your family members will not be linked to anything you tell me. Nothing you say will affect your housing assistance or any other assistance you may receive. I hope you'll feel comfortable opening up. If I ask you a question and you don't feel comfortable talking about the topic, feel free to say so.

The interview should last about two hours and we will pay you \$25.00 in cash for your time and participation. I will be taping the interview with this recorder. The reason why I need to tape the interview is because I want to make sure I have your opinions and experiences recorded accurately. No one outside the research team will be allowed to listen to the tapes and they will be destroyed at the end of the study.

CONSENT FORM:

Before we begin, I need to go over this consent form with you. It gives you more information about the study and a telephone number you can call if you have questions later. I will give you a copy to keep.

[GO OVER CONSENT FORM.]

Do you have any questions or comments before we go on?

I am going to turn on the tape recorder now, and we will get started. **[START TAPE]**

I. OPENER AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Just to get us started, these are the main things that we are going to talk about during the interview:

- 1) What is it like to live here?
- 2) How do you use your neighborhood/larger community?

I am going to ask you some specific questions about different things about your neighborhood and your family, but these are the things we'll be coming back to.

Let's start off by talking about how you got to this apartment. Do you remember moving here? How long have you lived here?

- What did you like about living there?
- What did you dislike about living there?

I would like to ask a few questions about you and your family so I can get to know you a little better. This information will also help me ask questions later on in the interview. Could you please tell me about the people who live with you now?

- How many children live in your household? Do you have any brothers or sisters?
- How old are they
- Who are the adults in the household?

II. CURRENT NEIGHBORHOOD

Now I would like to get your opinions about your current apartment/house and neighborhood.

Tell me about your current apartment/house.

- What do you like about your current apartment/house?
- What do you dislike about your current apartment/house?

We want to understand more about how people think about their neighborhoods. What do you consider your neighborhood? [major intersections and blocks or miles from home]

- Does this neighborhood have a name?
- Are there any rivers, parks, highways, etc., nearby?
- Are there areas close by that you do not consider part of this neighborhood?

How would you describe this neighborhood to someone who has never been here?

- What sort of buildings and businesses exist here (factories, grocery stores, restaurants, clothing stores, liquor stores, etc.)?
- What types of services are available here (health care, schools, recreation for children, youth, adults, child care, library, and transportation)?
- Are there churches or other religious institutions here? Hospitals? Schools universities? Community organizations? Social service agencies?

What do you like best about living in this neighborhood?

What do you like least about living in this neighborhood?

Do you feel safe in this neighborhood?

- During the day? At night? Why/Why not?
- Are there places in your neighborhood that feel threatening to you?
- Are there any places in your neighborhood you feel particularly safe?

Are there any problems with drugs or gangs?

III. NEIGHBORS

Let's now talk about the people who live in your neighborhood.

How would you describe your neighbors to someone who isn't from the neighborhood?

- What race or ethnicity are most of your neighbors?
- What income range would you put most of your neighbors in?
- Working, not working, retired
- Older or younger

How well do people in this neighborhood know each other?

- Do people stick together or do they mostly go their own ways?
- Are there any differences between you and your neighbors? Have these differences affected your relationship with them?
- Do people sit outside and visit?
- Do people help each other out? In what ways?
- Do people watch out for each other's children?
- Are there any neighborhood events (block parties) or neighborhood organizations?
- How would you describe racial and ethnic relationships in the neighborhood?

Do you ever socialize with your neighbors?

- Do you have friends that live in the neighborhood?
- Do you ever turn to your neighbors for help or help them?
- If so, what types of help (watching you after school, help if you get locked out)?

IV. NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCES

Let's talk about some of the things you do during a typical week.

Note: We want to know what people do during the week (work, other activities, shop, etc.) and most importantly if these activities take place in their neighborhood, or outside these neighborhoods.

Do you go to school?

Tell me about your school.

- Where is your school? Is it in this neighborhood?
- How would you describe your social life at school?
- How do you get along with other kids? With teachers?
- Are you involved in any extracurricular activities?
- Is this a new school for you? If so, how are you adjusting?

What are some of the things you like about your school?

What are some of the things you don't like about your school?

How do you feel about your teachers?

- Do they treat you fairly? Why/Why not?
- Do they push you to do your best? Why/Why not?
- Have you ever had problems with a teacher? With a principal? What happened?
- Have you ever experienced any racial discrimination at school?

How do you do in school?

- What types of grades do each of you usually get?
- Are you in any special education classes? Were you in any before you moved?
- Are you in any gifted/enrichment classes?

How would you describe your behavior in school?

- Have you ever received any special awards or recognitions?
- Have you ever gotten in trouble in school? With a teacher? With a principal?
- Do you ever skip classes?
- Have you ever been suspended or given detention? Expelled?

What do you do after school?

- Do you have a job? If Yes: What kind? How did you find it?
- Do you belong to any clubs or organizations?
- Are you on any sports teams?
- Do you go to any after school programs
- Do you play/hang out with other kids?
- Do you hang out at home?

How about on the weekend? What kinds of things do you do?

- What are the activities?
- Where are they located?
- Are they in your neighborhood?
- Who do you do these activities with?

V. RELATIONSHIPS**Now I want to know more about the rest of your family and your friends. Can you tell me a little about the family members who are most important to you?**

- Who are they (e.g., mother, father, sister, brother, etc)?
- What types of activities do you do with these family members?
- Do you rely on them for certain things? Do they rely on you?
- If so, what types of support do they give you?
- Where do these family members live?
- How often do you see them?

Think about your closest friends.

- How do you know them?
- What types of things do you do with your friends?
- Where do they live?
- Do you rely on them for certain things? Do they rely on you?

Are there other people in your life that are important to you?

- Who are they?
- How do you know them?
- What types of activities do you do with these people?
- Where do they live?
- Do you rely on them for certain things?
- If so, what types of support do they give you?

VI. WRAP UP

We've talked a lot about different things about your neighborhood.

Overall, do you think living in this neighborhood has affected your life? Why/Why not?

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Do you have anything you would like to add?

Appendix C

Post-Interview Summary Form

MOVING TO OPPORTUNITY INTERIM EVALUATION POST-INTERVIEW SUMMARY FORM

FAMID		
Adult or Child Interview		
Interviewer's name		
Date		
Sample Category (mark one)		(Qstrata=1) MTO, low-poverty
		(Qstrata=2) MTO, move- back
		(Qstrata=3) Section 8 Comparison
		(Qstrata=4) In-Place Control

(*Please complete this form as soon as possible after completing the interview.)

Answer these questions based on the information from the interview. Information from this form will be used to write the Qualitative Memo, which will provide some of the early results from our interviews. The interviews will be coded and analyzed later, but this form will be the basis for our first report/memo. Please think about the issues that were discussed in the interview, and which issues seemed most important *to the respondents*.

It is best if you can write down brief answers to each of the following questions immediately following the interviews - in the car, back at the hotel, or wherever is convenient for you.

Please fill out the electronic version as soon as you can, and e-mail it to Laura Harris. (There is a Word file you use to fill out this form electronically, either in the field or when you return to the office.)

RESPONDENT'S ANSWERS

1. What were the main issues that struck you in this interview? (Provide a basic overview of the household composition here.)
2. Summarize the information you got on key areas:
 - Changes/major events in family's life since signing up for MTO
 - How respondent defines the neighborhood
 - General perceptions of neighborhood
 - Key resources/features of the neighborhood
 - Children and schools
 - Relationships with family, friends, neighbors
3. What did the respondent say about how the neighborhood has affected his/her family life?
4. According to the respondent, what was the most important positive aspect of the neighborhood?
5. According to the respondent, what was the most important negative aspect of their neighborhood?
6. According to the respondent, what was the main reason the family has made any subsequent moves?
7. Did the respondent raise any other important issues (especially ones that were not captured in the interview guide)?

ENVIRONMENT

The information in this section is based on your observations during the interview.

8. Describe the condition of the home (i.e., general housekeeping and condition of the unit, furniture, etc.).
9. Describe the exterior of the unit (i.e., type of unit, condition of the yard, comparison to other units in building or block).
10. Are there pockets of low-income households in the neighborhood (e.g. a few multi-unit buildings in a neighborhood of single-family homes)?
11. Is there anything else interesting/different/unique about the area around the respondent's home?
12. Additional notes:

Appendix D

Neighborhood Assessment Form

MOVING TO OPPORTUNITY INTERIM EVALUATION NEIGHBORHOOD ASSESSMENT FORM

FAMID # _____
City/Town _____

(Complete the remainder of this page if respondents are living in a public housing development or an apartment complex. Otherwise, skip to the next page.)

1. Name of development or apartment complex:

2. Is this a:

- Public housing development
- Private rental complex
- Other type of project (SPECIFY: _____
_____)

3. Overall quality of building interior and envelope maintenance

- Excellent
- Good
- Poor

4. Overall quality of grounds maintenance

- Excellent
- Good
- Poor

5. Is there excess accumulation of garbage or debris (whether inside or out)?

- Little or no accumulation
- Isolated area with excess accumulation
- Widespread garbage/debris accumulation

Comments: _____

6. Overall condition of the development

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Comments: _____

7. Are there any signs of:

- Recent renovation? Yes No
Major rehabilitation? Yes No

WINDSHIELD SURVEY

In this part of the form, make summary observations about the neighborhood as a whole, including the development.

1. Land use distribution:

Residential _____ %
 Commercial _____ %
 Industrial _____ %
 Institutional _____ %
 Other: _____ %
 100%

2. Age of most residential structures:

Pre-1945 _____ %
 1946-1960 _____ %
 1961-present _____ %
 100%

3. Type of residential structures:

Single-family detached _____ %
 Garden/Row/Townhouses _____ %
 Multifamily (2-4 units) _____ %
 Multifamily (5-10 units) _____ %
 Multifamily (10+ units) _____ %
 100%

4. Type of construction:

Wood frame _____ %
 Masonry (brick or block) _____ %
 Mixed/Other: _____ %
 100%

5. General condition of the housing

Sound _____ %
 Minor/Some deterioration _____ %
 Major deterioration _____ %
 Dilapidated/Abandoned _____ %
 100%

6. Adequacy of owner housekeeping (side yards, backyards, porches, garages, sheds)

Excellent Fair
 Good Poor

7. Presence of refuse, litter, abandoned cars or lots

Major problem
 Minor problem
 Not a problem
 Specify problems: _____

8. Condition of municipal property such as streets, sidewalks, curbs, gutters

Excellent Fair
 Good Poor

9. Municipal maintenance of street lighting, trash containers, signs and other municipally owned amenities

Excellent Fair

Good Poor

10. Neighborhood features that might have a negative impact on residential rental values (Check all that apply)

None
 Major industrial activity
 Open dumps/excessive refuse
 Environmental hazards
 Boarded-up retail/commercial areas
 Other (Specify:) _____

11. Neighborhood features that might have a positive impact on residential rent values (Check all that apply)

None
 Parks or playgrounds
 Natural areas (lakes, wooded areas)
 Nearby shopping/commercial area
 Close to schools, churches, social institutions
 Other (Specify:) _____

12. What is your overall assessment of the quality of this neighborhood as a residential area?

Excellent Fair
 Good Poor

13. Would you classify this neighborhood as a:

Well-kept city neighborhood
 Dilapidated city neighborhood
 Gentrifying city neighborhood
 Well-kept suburban neighborhood
 Dilapidated suburban neighborhood

14. Is this neighborhood located in:

The central (inner) part of the center city?
 The outlying part of the center city?
 A smaller city near the center city?
 An older suburban community?
 A newer suburban community?

15. Check the poverty rate of this area from the contact sheet.

Record poverty rate here: _____ %

Does the overall visual impression of the area from this windshield survey appear to "match" this figure?

Yes (Why?) _____

 No (Why not?) _____

GENERAL NOTES

The *Neighborhood Assessment (Summary Project Observations, if appropriate, and Windshield Survey Form)* will be completed after the adult and youth interviews. For the Summary Project Observations, give your overall assessment of the development, based on observations you made during the visit.

PROJECT SUMMARY ITEMS

3,4: Building Interior and Envelope Maintenance, Grounds Maintenance, Maintenance of Mechanical and Electrical Systems

Excellent: Development practices preventive maintenance; maintenance has been routinized so that potential problems are addressed before they develop.

Good: Maintenance done on as-needed basis; small maintenance problems tend to be put off until they become more serious, then are fixed.

Poor: Evidence of serious under-maintenance; action on serious maintenance needs appears to be delayed.

5. Excess garbage or debris within the development (either in buildings or on the grounds)

Accumulated garbage and debris include litter, overflowing bins and dumpsters, animal droppings, abandoned cars or furniture, and natural debris such as leaves or branches.

6. Overall condition of the development

Excellent: Little or no capital repair action is required.

Good: Only minor repair is required of the development's building exteriors, interiors, mechanical and electrical systems, and site-level systems.

Fair: Substantial repair or replacement is required for some but not all of the development's building exteriors, interiors, mechanical and electrical systems, and site-level systems.

Poor: Substantial repair or replacement is required of the majority of the development's building exteriors, interiors, mechanical and electrical systems, and site-level systems.

7. Signs of renovation or major rehabilitation:

Signs of renovation could include construction trucks, dumpsters, builders' advertising signs, and the like.

WINDSHIELD INSPECTION ITEMS

For the Windshield Survey, first define the neighborhood. In general, most neighborhoods are considered to be larger than the few blocks the property is located on, and smaller than a square mile or 100 city blocks (10 blocks by 10 blocks).

Spend approximately 15-30 minutes driving around the neighborhood to gather information on the *Windshield Inspection* items. Be sure to identify and observe other affordable rental housing in the neighborhood. Where the form asks for percentages, it is usually easiest to determine the predominant category and its relative percent, and then to allocate the balance to the other categories according to their relative frequency. Percents should sum to 100.

1. **Land Use Characteristics** □Institutional□ land uses include, for example, hospitals or schools. □Other□ land uses include parks and vacant lots.

2. **Age of Residential Structures** Clues to the age of residential structures include the architectural style and type of materials used, the location of the neighborhood (those closest to the city center tend to be the oldest, unless the neighborhood has undergone major renovation), and the statements of residents or managers.

3. **Type of Residential Structures** □Garden/Row/Townhouses□ are buildings with private entrances, regardless of the number of units; □Multifamily□ structures have common entrances.

4. **Type of Construction** □Mixed/Other□ includes manufactured homes (e.g., mobile homes), or corrugated metal homes.

5. **General Condition of Housing**

Sound: in good condition, well cared for, no signs of deterioration such as broken windows, deteriorated roofs, major areas of peeling paint, rotted porches.

Minor/some deterioration: some areas of peeling paint, some cracked windows, worn or missing gutters, cracked sidewalks; but generally all right.

Major deterioration: units are occupied but show extensive signs of decay such as broken windows, missing gutters, worn out paint, rotted wood trim, uneven or rotted porches, chimneys falling down, or other major signs of deferred maintenance.

Dilapidated/abandoned: units no longer lived in, buildings or homes boarded up or without windows, property completely run down.

6. **Adequacy of Owner Housekeeping** Check the condition in which property owners maintain the outsides of their properties. Signs of good housekeeping include a lack of rubbish, well-maintained lawns and landscaping, kept-up fences, sheds, and play areas, etc.

7. **Presence of Litter** Specify what kinds of problems are observed (e.g. abandoned cars, serious litter/refuse)

10. **Negative Features** Examples of neighborhood or development features that may *detract* from residential values include major pollution, vacant or run-down buildings, heavy industry, lack of transportation, signs of drug activity, graffiti, or evidence of gangs.
NOTE: These are negative features that would reduce rent values.

11. **Positive Features** Examples of neighborhood or development features that may have a *positive impact* on residential values in the area include new transportation facilities, new construction, investments in rehabilitation, parks, new or rehabilitated commercial properties and shopping areas, proximity or access to the center city.
NOTE: These are positive features that would increase values.

12. **Neighborhood Quality** Answer this question taking into consideration your responses on items 6-11.

13. **Neighborhood classification** For well-kept vs. dilapidated, take into consideration your responses to items 6-12. For gentrification, use your own knowledge of other areas as the basis. For central city vs. outlying, use distance from city center and density. For city vs. suburban, use political jurisdiction (are you in the city or outside it?).

14. **Neighborhood location** Check maps before your visit, and also consider your answer to item 13.

15. **Correct neighborhood classification?** MTO uses this 3-way classification based on poverty rates to distinguish excellent from OK from poor living environments. Does what you have seen in this neighborhood fit those distinctions? Why, or why not?