

## Need outpaces housing agency resources

Over 30,000 on waiting lists to get homes

By Diana Sholley  
Staff Writer

On the plus side, the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino is helping more than 30,000 individuals who have affordable housing through the agency. These are low-income people, the disabled, children and seniors. Many would be out on the streets without the Housing Authority.

On the down side, however, there are another 30,000-plus county residents on the Housing Authority's waiting lists — with calls coming in every day.

With the economy falling and unemployment on the rise, the need for affordable housing is increasing.

While the agency waits for additional funding and donations, it continues to offer its residents quality programs and the chance at a brighter future.

"We all work together to help those in need," said Susan Benner, executive director of the Housing Authority. "Right now we have no immediate housing, every individual we help comes from a waiting list."

Kamil Woods, a 26-year-old single mother of two, is one of the agency's many success stories. She is an administrative assistant for the Housing Authority at its Waterman Gardens complex in San Bernardino.



Photos by Frank Perez/Correspondent

Kamil Woods, 26, an administrative assistant for San Bernardino County's Housing Authority, answers a phone at the agency's Waterman Gardens complex in San Bernardino on Thursday. Woods, a single mother of two, is also one of the housing agency's beneficiaries.

In June of 2005, after a three-year wait, Woods got the call saying there was a place available for her family.

Since 2001, after a career-ending knee injury caused her medical discharge from the U.S. Army, Woods had been living with her grandmother.

Although she was grateful to her grandmother for all her help, three generations living in such close quarters was putting a strain on the relationship.

A friend suggested she apply to the Housing Authority, and Woods took her advice.

"I was so used to being on my own and doing things for myself," said Woods, who lives in a Redlands duplex. "I was so excited to get the call. I love having a place of my own. I was finally able to have family gatherings at my house."

Ricardo Marin and his wife, Melida, were part of the Housing Authority's public housing program for three years, but not any more.

The couple and their five children have graduated from the program and are in the process of house hunting.

"I was falling down," said Ricardo, who is still perfecting

his English. "They helped me get stabilized. Gave me the opportunity to work. I am able to put my feet on the ground."

The Housing Authority offers two primary programs: The Housing Choice Voucher Program, Section 8, and The Public Housing Program.

Section 8 is a federally funded program that provides vouchers to very low-income individuals. The vouchers can be used for the rental of their choice with the family's portion being between 30 and 40 percent of their adjusted gross monthly income.

At the time of this writing,



Ricardo Marin, a groundskeeper for the Housing Authority, works on an air-conditioning unit Thursday.

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— Kamil Woods, single mother of two

the Section 8 waiting list is closed.

Those who meet the income requirements can still be put on the waiting list for the Public Housing Program. It maintains 1,669 units in 21 cities. Rent is dependent on income. Wait time varies, but about a year is typical.

The dedicated team at the Housing Authority are proud to assist their clients with housing needs, however, they provide much more than just housing.

Through partnerships and donations such programs and benefits provided include community resources, family advo-

cacy, after-school programs, computer lab, glasses, transportation and child care.

The organization is always looking for ways to offer additional services. It accepts donations, community partnerships, computers, tutors and more.

One service on Benner's wish list is dental screenings and check-ups.

"Having dental care should not be a luxury, it should be a given," she said. "But then, so should having a safe place to live."

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