
Residents At Risk:

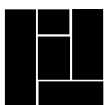
A Profile of Ida B. Wells and Madden Park

July 2003

Prepared for:

The Ford Foundation

Prepared by:



The Urban Institute

2100 M Street, NW • Washington, DC 20037



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A profound change is sweeping through the Ida B. Wells community. Once one of the Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) largest properties, with 3,200 units in four adjacent developments, Wells is being demolished to make way for a new, mixed-income community. As the old buildings come down, it remains unclear whether the remaining residents will fit into this new community. A real concern for policymakers and administrators is that the residents who were easy to relocate have already moved, while many of those who remain may be at risk of losing their housing. However, other than anecdotal evidence, little information is available to help CHA administrators assess the true number of residents who may need special housing options or are at risk of losing their housing assistance. The purpose of this study is to help inform the city, the CHA, community groups, and private agencies involved in planning and implementing relocation plans for Wells and CHA's other public housing developments by systematically documenting the characteristics and needs of remaining Wells residents.

Meeting the challenge of housing these residents—families with special needs, lease violators, illegal residents, and the truly homeless—will require a coordinated response on the part of the housing authority, city agencies, private service providers, and the philanthropic community in Chicago. Only such a focused effort can meet the urgent need to both develop creative options for families with special housing needs and dramatically increase the supply of supportive and transitional housing, substance abuse programs, single-room occupancy hotels (SROs), and shelters in the city of Chicago. Currently, the housing market and the emergency shelter system are ill equipped to handle the needs of these at-risk residents. If the problems are ignored, the city risks enormous increases in the homeless population as Wells and other CHA developments are demolished.

Study Methods

This report draws on information collected between October 2002 and May 2003, using three methods: a survey of the full population at Wells (resident census), a count and survey of all squatters living in vacant units at Wells, and in-depth interviews with both legal residents and squatters. These data provide both hard numbers about Wells residents and their characteristics and personal stories of the challenges they face.

Study Findings:

A high percentage of residents have special housing needs. We interviewed 569 households remaining in Wells. Our census shows that in these households there are 1,587 individuals. Many of the residents who remain need enhanced housing solutions. About 40 percent of Wells households report someone in the household with a disability and nearly 45



percent are large families—34 percent need four-bedroom units. Finally, 16 percent are elderly (older than 65), and our census indicates that 42 households are custodial grandparents.

Pearl took custody of her three grandchildren after her daughter's drug abuse problem grew out of control. She is nearly 80 and is having trouble taking care of her grandchildren, but they have no where else to go. Annie is a grandmother with no good choices (p.3).

Loretta has lived in Wells for most of her life. Ten years ago, her daughter died, leaving her to raise her eight-year old grandson. She also shares custody of two-year old Anthony, who was born prematurely and has special medical needs. Loretta has tried to put Anthony on the lease, but the housing authority has refused (p.12).

Recommendation: Construct senior buildings and supportive housing units for families with special needs and large households. Expand resources in the Housing Choice Voucher program to identify landlords with units that are both large and accessible. Options such as providing bonus payments to landlords with large and/or accessible units should also be considered. HOPE VI developers also should be required to include a substantial number of large units among the subsidized units in the new mixed-income developments.

Lease compliance issues are widespread. Common problems included unpaid rent (21 percent), unpaid electric bills (14 percent), household members with criminal records (15 percent), household members not listed on the lease (10 percent), and households not having a lease (9 percent). Altogether, approximately 22 percent (127 households) reported at least one lease violation. Five percent reported two lease violations, and 14 percent reported three or more.

Linda's apartment was never intended to house a family of six, but five years ago, her daughter-in-law and three grandchildren moved in when they had nowhere else to go. Linda is afraid to add them to the lease because she owes back rent payments (p. 14).

Irene is a frail senior citizen. Her son Harold recently moved in to help take care of her. Harold used to be on the lease when he was younger, but now that he has a criminal record he cannot be added to the lease (p.10).

Recommendation: Grant current residents who are otherwise lease compliant amnesty to add *all* current household members to their lease and amnesty for all back rent and/or utility payments. These types of amnesty programs have been implemented by housing authorities in other cities as part of their relocation plans. The CHA should review adding ex-offenders to the lease on an ad hoc basis.

Squatting—that is, people who are living in vacant units or hallways illegally—is a significant problem in Wells. During a period of two weeks in early spring 2003, our interviewers counted 388 squatters (294 adults and 94 children) living in Wells. Most (90 percent) consider themselves homeless. Our survey indicates that in Wells, there are 37 squatters who are living in vacant units with their children, 52 of whom are under age seven. Unlike many homeless people who tend to move around from night to night, squatters at Wells



have lived in the development for a long time. More than a quarter (28 percent) have lived in Wells for more than a year, and more than half (57 percent) of the squatters we interviewed sleep in Wells seven nights a week. Squatters have strong connections to Wells—more than half (67 percent) have lived in a CHA building as legal residents. When we asked what they will do when Wells is demolished, about a third (32 percent) reported they “didn’t know,” and 28 percent said that they planned to move to another CHA building. Squatters living in Wells are in desperate need of transitional programs and other services. Most (82 percent) said they would accept a referral to a drug or alcohol rehabilitation center. About 4 percent of those we interviewed said they were returning to the community from prison.

Mary recently turned 41, and she has so much to be proud of. She has a college degree and is the mother of three children. Mary even has a home where her children and sister live. Then Mary became addicted to heroin. She has lived in a vacant unit at Wells for the past eight months (p.27).

Vanessa has been to prison twice, both times for drug related offenses. Each time she was released, a vacant unit at Wells was the only place she knew to return to (p.24).

Joseph is a Vietnam vet, a father of two, has been married and divorced three times, and has spent time in prison. He is a drug addict who says that he has been squatting for so long that he’s not worried about the buildings coming down; he just lives day by day (p.25).

Dionne is a working-class woman who has never been a drug addict. She has no “street network” to provide support or information. Her family lived in Wells when she was growing up. When she got into trouble, it was the only place she knew to come. When she and her children cannot find a vacant unit, they sleep in the park (p.17).

Recommendation: These squatters need shelter, certainly, but also access to effective drug treatment, transitional housing, programs for ex-offenders, and decent SROs that will provide safe, stable environments that can help them avoid slipping back into addiction. The CHA and the city should set aside some of the millions of dollars slated for mixed-income developments to create a significant number of transitional units so that as the buildings come down, there will be a compassionate and effective plan for the squatters who, over the years, have become CHA residents.

The story this study tells is one of immense human suffering—hundreds of official CHA residents in difficult situations that place them at risk of either being unable to find new housing or losing their right to replacement housing altogether, and an equal number of squatters in dire straits relying on Wells as a shelter of last resort. Currently, the housing market and the emergency shelter system are ill equipped to handle the needs of these at-risk residents. If the problems are ignored, the city risks enormous increases in the homeless population as Wells and CHA’s other developments are demolished.



INTRODUCTION

A profound change is sweeping through the Ida B. Wells community.¹ Once one of the Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) largest properties, with 3,200 units in four adjacent developments, Wells is being demolished to make way for a new, mixed-income community. Vast tracts of vacant land have replaced high-rise buildings and rowhouses. The four towers of the Darrow Homes are gone. Madden Park, which stood across the street from Wells, is gone too. With the demolition, the gang war that raged for years between the two developments has ended, but as the shooting has subsided, Wells has become a haven for drug dealers and now houses a thriving open-air drug market. The school, which stood on the street between the two developments, is slowly being demolished. Dozens of apartments in the remaining buildings of Wells and the Wells Extension—mostly six flats and mid-rises—are boarded up. Although hundreds of people still live there, the development has the feel of a ghost town.

The area surrounding Wells is changing, too. For decades one of Chicago's—and the nation's—poorest communities, the neighborhood is now rapidly gentrifying. Two other enormous public housing developments, Stateway Gardens and the Robert Taylor Homes, are also being demolished; another development, the long-vacant Lakefront Properties, is already gone and being replaced with new housing. South Lake Shore Drive, once the seediest part of Chicago's lakefront, is undergoing a complete makeover, being widened, resurfaced, and decorated with the concrete planters that now mark Chicago's more elegant communities. The city has refurbished the nearby parks and added new playgrounds and recreational facilities. Market-rate townhomes and rehabilitated brownstones are selling for hundreds of thousands of dollars to affluent and middle-income African-American families. The mixed-income development slated to replace Wells will be part of this transformation.

As Wells comes down, there is growing concern that many of the remaining residents may end up worse off as a result of these changes. Whether the remaining residents in Wells—or CHA's other developments—will fit into this new community is unclear. A real concern for policymakers and administrators is that the residents who were easy to relocate are already gone, and that many of those who remain may have family circumstances that make them hard to house in Chicago's tight rental market or even in replacement public housing. Another large group may have significant lease violations—problems such as illegal tenants or family members with criminal records—that leave them ineligible for replacement housing. However, other than anecdotal evidence, little information is available to help CHA administrators assess the true number of residents who may need special housing options or are at risk of losing housing assistance.

Due to years of high vacancy rates, Wells has become home to a large population of squatters whose housing needs are even more complex than those of the legal residents. But there is even less information about the size of this population, their characteristics, and their



links to the Wells community. Some observers speculate that these squatters may be “refugees” from other demolished CHA developments, but they may also be former Wells residents or other people from the community who have been displaced by gentrification. Without accurate information, it is difficult for policymakers to know whether the situation in Wells represents a relatively isolated problem or a more systemic problem likely to be duplicated in CHA’s other remaining developments.

The stated goal of CHA’s relocation services is to prevent homelessness, and the city has recently launched a new initiative to end homelessness in Chicago.² The purpose of this study is to help inform the city, the CHA, community groups, and private agencies involved in planning and implementing the relocation plans for CHA’s developments. This study provides the first systematic evidence about the actual numbers of residents with special circumstances that make them hard to house, about the numbers at risk for losing their rights to replacement housing, and about the numbers of homeless men, women, and children who are currently relying on Wells as a shelter of last resort.

Transforming Wells

The changes in Wells are just a small part of the radical transformation of Chicago’s public housing that has been underway since 1999. Under its *Plan for Transformation*, the CHA intends to redevelop or rehabilitate 25,000 units of public housing; however, the plan called for a substantial reduction in family public housing units (a net loss of 14,000 units). The original plan also called for the relocation of as many as 6,000 families³ with Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8).⁴ This plan, including relocation and revitalization, was initially estimated to cost at least \$1.5 billion over 10 years.⁵

Since the plan was first approved in 1999, the CHA has demolished nearly 7,000 units, including 2,199 in FY 2002. The authority has rehabilitated more than 2,000 units, primarily in senior buildings, and begun construction on several small, mixed-income developments.⁶ Nearly 2,400 families have been relocated, about half within public housing and half with vouchers (Metropolitan Planning Council 2003).

**PEARL****A grandmother with no good choices, a family with special needs**

Pearl ended up with custody of her three grandchildren after her youngest daughter's drug abuse problem got so bad that Pearl felt compelled to report her to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). DCFS insisted that Pearl move from the apartment where she had lived for many years, because it was too small for her and the children. Keisha, the youngest grandchild, was profoundly disabled and required constant care. After she had struggled for several years to pay for her private market apartment, rent increases and the difficulty of carrying Keisha up and down stairs finally forced Pearl to apply for public housing on an emergency basis. The CHA placed her in a rowhouse in Wells, where she and the children have lived for nine years.

Pearl is now nearly 80 and is suffering from heart disease and emphysema. Keisha is 17 and still needs help with all her basic needs—feeding, bathing, toileting, dressing. She cannot talk, but Pearl says she is “the sweetest child,” and communicates through hugs and kisses. Keisha's older brother, Robert, is learning disabled and at 19, is still in high school. Their older sister now has children of her own and has moved out of state.

Pearl dearly loves her grandchildren, but can no longer manage on her own. Pearl wants her older daughter, Betty, to be able to move in with the family to help. Pearl says she got a doctor's note explaining their situation and the need for another adult to help care for Keisha. The property manager agreed that Betty could stay, but would not put her on the lease officially.

Technically, Betty's presence means that Pearl is in violation of her lease and could put the family at risk for losing their right to replacement housing. But even if the housing authority disregards the lease violation—which seems likely given the extreme circumstances—there is no obvious solution for this family. What they need is an accessible unit with three bedrooms, very hard to come by in the private market and nonexistent in public housing. Pearl and Keisha could potentially move into a senior/disabled building, but not with Robert and Betty. Pearl says she has no idea where she and her family will go when her building closes; she just hopes the housing authority lets her stay in her unit as long as she can.



James

Teetering on the edge of disaster: From working class to CHA squatter

In a period of just two years, James has gone from renting a one-bedroom apartment for \$500 a month to squatting in Wells. He hopes that his life will be on track before the development is completely demolished, but then quickly acknowledges that things do not always work out as planned.

James grew up in Douglas and Oakland, the two community areas that surround Wells. For most of his adult life he lived in apartments in Hyde Park, a nearby middle-class neighborhood. He supported himself, and his four children from a previous marriage, by working as a janitor and a delivery truck driver. Then in the late 1990s, the company James worked for closed, and he has struggled to find a steady job ever since.

When James first lost his job he thought another would eventually come his way, but it never did. After his unemployment benefits ran out, he found part-time work through a publicly funded program that paid a little under \$300 a month. He was able to pay partial rent to family members who would take him in. But when James turned 50, he was no longer eligible for the program. With no money to help pay rent or utility bills, he does not want to impose on family or friends. James spent a short time living off the lease in the Robert Taylor Homes, but eventually moved to vacant units in Wells, where he has both family and friends.

He typically stays with a “partner” in a vacant unit for a few weeks to a few months at a time. James says you need a partner to look out for you when squatting because it can be dangerous. Local police officers often overlook James’s squatting because they are sympathetic to his situation and he does not cause any trouble in the neighborhood. It is the property management staff that eventually comes through and forces James and his partner to move, though he says they, too, are sometimes sympathetic.

James continues to look for work, but concedes that a drinking problem he has developed in the past two years makes it even more difficult to find work. He said that after several months of despair:

“You get down on yourself. You think there’s no hope... no escape. You just give up. And that leads to negative activities... so now you’re drinking too much. But it’s hard when you think ‘today, what am I gonna do? I’ve gotta wear these blue jeans for the next five or seven days. Same shirt. Still ain’t got no deodorant.’ See what I’m saying?”



The Wells/Madden site received the first HOPE VI grant awarded after the *Plan for Transformation* was approved. The plan for Wells/Madden, which proposed to replace the existing 3,200 public housing units with 3,000 mixed-income units, was intended to revitalize the entire neighborhood. A thousand of the new units were to be set aside for public housing residents, including 750 units of rental family housing, 150 units of senior housing, and 100 for-sale units (Urban Design Associates et al. 2001). The master plan called for redevelopment to take place in five phases over a period of several years.⁷ In addition to the redevelopment of the Wells/Madden public housing sites, the master plan called for the revitalization of more than 20 acres of adjoining, blighted vacant property.⁸ As of 2003, relocation and demolition at the Madden Park, Ida B. Wells, and Wells Extensions were well under way. All Madden Park Homes residents had been relocated and the buildings demolished. Relocation at Ida B. Wells was ongoing, with the next phase scheduled for 2004.

Relocation has been CHA's biggest challenge, and the process has not gone smoothly.⁹ Because of the problems encountered during the early phases of relocation, CHA's main resident organization, the Central Advisory Council (CAC), negotiated a formal contract to spell out CHA's obligations to residents during the transformation process.¹⁰ The Relocation Rights Contract officially defines "lease compliance" as being up to date on rent and utility payments; being in compliance with the August 15, 2000, lease (including one-strike requirements); having no unauthorized tenants in the unit; and having a good housekeeping record. The contract also spells out the steps residents can take to "cure" their lease violations and remain eligible for replacement housing. Finally, the contract specifies the services that will be offered to residents during the transformation, including supportive services, relocation assistance, and mobility counseling. Following the signing of the Relocation Rights Contract, the CHA substantially reorganized its counseling services.

However, even with these changes in relocation procedures, substantial challenges remain, not the least of which is the fact that as time goes on and the "stable" families move on with vouchers, the population that remains in CHA's developments becomes increasingly needy. There is growing concern among those involved in the transformation process that an unknown proportion of these remaining households may be at risk for losing their housing assistance and even for becoming homeless.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to provide systematic, reliable information about CHA residents at risk: those with special needs that make them hard to house; those with potential lease violations that may leave them ineligible for replacement housing; and those who are literally homeless. This report draws on data collected through three methods¹¹: a survey of the full population at Wells (resident census), a survey of the squatters living in vacant units at Wells, and in-depth interviews with both legal and illegal residents.¹²



Resident Census. From November 2002 to February 2003, our interviewers, who were a mix of public housing residents, residents of the surrounding neighborhood, and professional interviewers, conducted face-to-face surveys with the full population of residents living in Wells. We used two strategies to ensure that we counted all households living in the development. First, we obtained an official list of all occupied units from the property manager, and attempted to interview every head of household. Second, our interviewers knocked on the doors of all units that were officially listed as vacant to ensure that we did not miss households who might have been living in the unit. Our response rate was 85 percent.¹³ The survey lasted approximately 15 minutes and included questions about housing status, relocation, household composition, legal status in the household, lease compliance, employment, and hardship. Respondents received a \$10 gift certificate to a local grocery store for their time.

Squatter Survey. For two weeks in March 2003, our team of interviewers counted and surveyed the homeless residents squatting in Wells, specifically, those sleeping in vacant units or living in other spaces within buildings (trash rooms, hallways, and other communal spaces).¹⁴ Interviewers worked as a team, sweeping through specified sections of Wells each day. The team worked primarily in the early mornings and early evenings, in order to catch squatters as they were leaving or returning. Checks were instituted to ensure that these squatters were not double counted and were actually staying in Wells at least one night a week. Any suspect interview was discarded.¹⁵ As in the resident census, respondents received a \$10 gift certificate for their time.

In-depth Interviews. In May 2003, we conducted in-depth interviews with residents who have household members living off the lease and with squatters living in Wells. The purpose of these interviews was to identify the reasons why legal households did not put some members on the lease, what off-the-lease members planned to do after relocation, and how relocation affected household stability. For the squatters, we wanted to identify the factors that led them to become homeless and seek shelter in Wells.¹⁶

Our study will continue to track a sample of Wells households over the next year, to determine how their lives and the compositions of their households are affected by relocation.

“Official” Wells Residents

CHA’s property managers provided a list of 750 legally occupied units in Wells in the spring of 2003, and we interviewed 569 households. Our census shows that in these households there are 1,587 individuals—most of them reportedly official residents (Table 1). As is typical in CHA developments, nearly all of these households (87 percent) are headed by women.

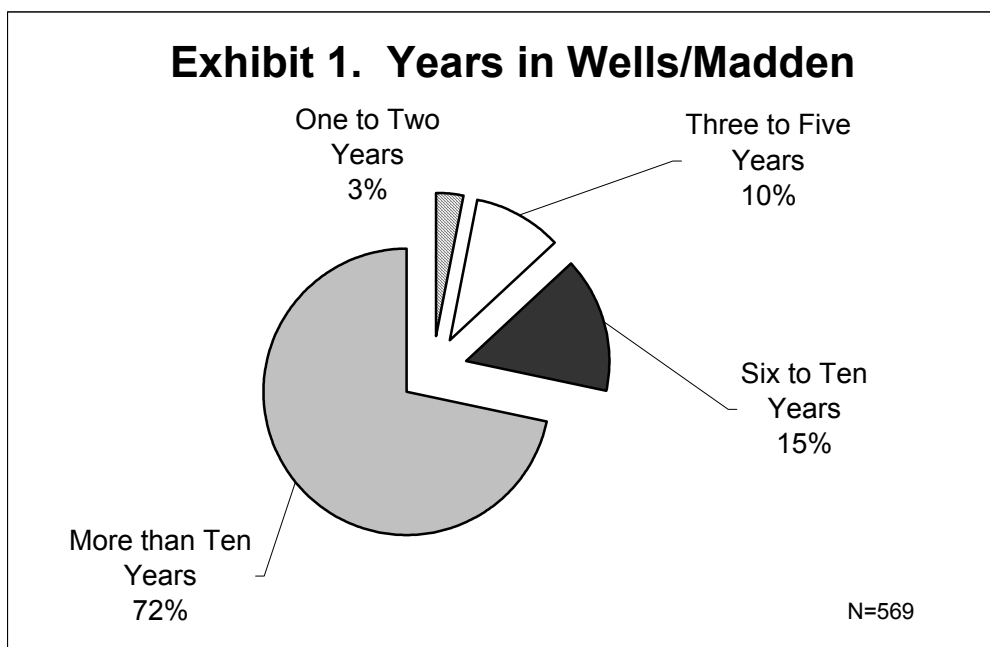
**TABLE 1. OFFICIAL WELLS RESIDENTS**

Households	569
Adults	817
Children under seven	501
Children over seven	269
Men	12%
Women	88%
Household Size	
Live Alone	28%
Two or Three People	43%
Four or Five People	21%
Six or More	8%
Age of Head of Household	
Under 35 Years Old	25%
35 to 55 Years Old	48%
55 to 62 Years Old	8%
Greater than 62 Years Old	19%
More than ten years living in CHA	82%
More than ten years living in Wells	71%
More than ten years living in the same unit	32%
Income	
Less than \$5,000	52%
\$5,000-\$10,000	32%
More than \$10,000	16%
Average Rent	\$157
TANF	18%
Food Stamps	52%
Head of Household Employed	23%
HS/GED	55%

The profile of the heads of household suggests a population that has aged in place in this family development. Only a quarter of these women are 35 or younger, half are between 36 and 55, the remaining quarter are 56 or older. More than 25 percent report that they live alone, and almost half report that they have no children under 18 living with them. In the remaining households, there are a total of 770 children; more than half of these (501) are between the ages of 7 and 17 and the rest (269) are 6 or younger. Nearly all of the heads of household are long-term CHA tenants; about three-quarters say they have lived in the neighborhood for more than a decade, 82 percent have also lived in CHA housing for more than 10 years, and 72 percent have lived in Wells/Madden for more than 10 years (Exhibit 1). Despite the demolition and relocation going on, most have also been in the same unit for many years—about a third



have been in their apartments for more than ten years and another third have been in their apartment for five to ten.



Not surprisingly, Wells residents are profoundly poor. More than half of the households report a household income of less than \$5,000, and the average rent, which is based on income, is only \$229 per month. More than a third of Wells households report receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), while only 18 percent receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); about half (51 percent) report receiving food stamps. Only 23 percent of the heads of household reported being employed. Just 55 percent report that they have a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma (GED).

Families with Special Housing Needs

Many Wells households have family characteristics that will make it hard for them to find housing in the private market—or even replacement public housing. As noted above, these residents have aged in place; relatively few are the young mothers with children who used to make up the majority of CHA's population.

About 40 percent of Wells households report someone in the household with a disability (Table 2); if the disability is severe enough, some of these younger families or individuals may also qualify for senior/disabled buildings. Most of the 16 percent of residents who are 65 or older will probably move to senior/disabled housing, which generally consists of studio and one-bedroom units for individual seniors or married couples.

**TABLE 2. FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

Disabled Head of household	32%
Household with one disabled member	32%
 with two disabled members	5%
 with three or more disabled memebers	2%
Elderly residents	18%
Custodial Grandparents	7%

But there are a small but not insignificant number of older women in Wells—grandmothers, aunts, foster mothers—who are the primary caretakers for young children or who live with younger adults. Often, they have custody of the grandchildren because their adult daughter or son has a drug addiction. Our census indicates that there are 42 custodial grandparents, and about half of these households also include a disabled person. A small number—seven—report an “off-the-lease” family member in their unit. The housing needs of these families are complex. They cannot move to a senior building and keep their family intact. As the stories of the residents we interviewed demonstrate, what they often need is an accessible unit with multiple bedrooms, virtually nonexistent in either the private market or public housing. Younger women with disabilities—or children or other household members with disabilities—will face the same dilemma.

Large families often have difficulty finding housing because there is a limited supply of apartments with three or more bedrooms in the rental market (Metropolitan Planning Council 1999). For decades, CHA housing has been one of the few reliable sources of large units for low-income families. Occasionally, families can find a large single-family home to rent, but locating large units is a consistent challenge for Housing Choice Voucher and mobility programs (cf. Feins, McGinnis, and Popkin 1997; Popkin and Cunningham 2000). Wells’ remaining population includes a substantial number of large families: nearly half (45 percent or 258 households) need at least a three-bedroom home. Even more of a concern, most of these (193 households or 34 percent of the total population) need at least a *four-bedroom* home (Exhibit 2).¹⁷



Irene

Scared to lose her family and neighborhood

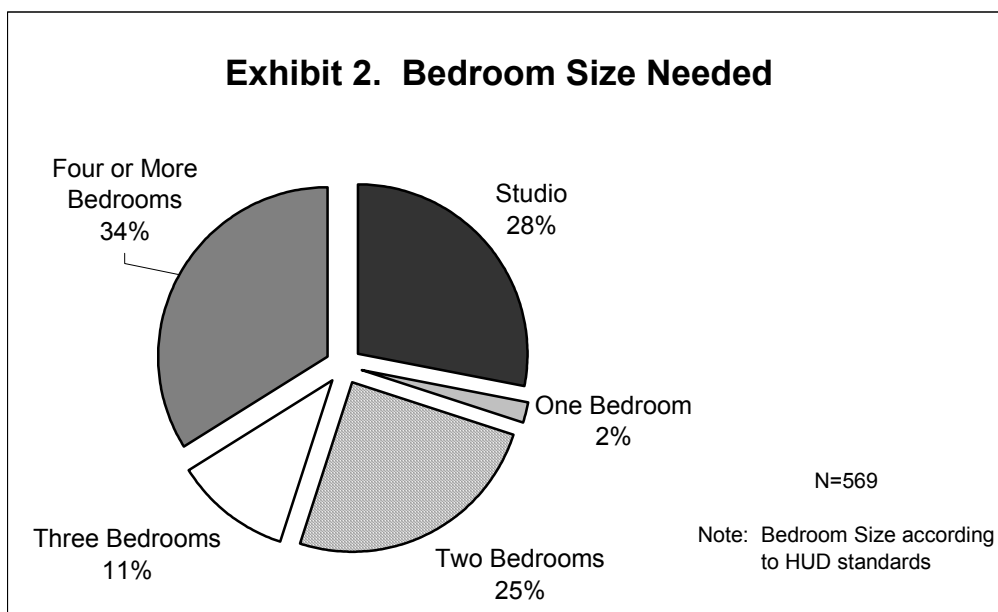
Irene is a frail senior citizen who is terrified of leaving her family and the neighborhood she has lived in for the past 50 years. She depends on her son, Harold, to take care of her. With the Wells demolition looming, a relocation counselor told Irene that she will be relocated into senior housing, where she will have to live alone.

Irene was born in Mississippi, but moved to Chicago's south side in the 1950s and has lived there ever since. In 1980, she moved to Wells, where she finished raising her two children and nephew. After her children moved out, she was moved to a one-bedroom unit.

However, around this time her daughter, who had an apartment on the floor above, was relocated out of the development. Irene felt vulnerable living in a new part of Wells with no one to help her. Her health was becoming increasingly poor, and she asked for a larger apartment so that a family member could live with her. When the property manager refused officially to permit the move, she moved herself into a nearby vacant two-bedroom unit. When she informed her property manager of the move, he agreed that it had been the right thing to do.

Harold moved in to the two-bedroom apartment to help care for her. Harold used to be on Irene's lease when he was younger, but he now has a criminal record, so CHA will not let him back on. Irene says that Harold has spent no time in jail, but was charged for a crime several years ago. Nor has Irene been able to get her nephew on the lease. When she took her nephew in more than ten years ago, the property manager repeatedly told her it was not necessary to have him added to the lease. Now with relocation imminent, Irene is finding it difficult to have the nephew added, although she is not sure why. He is now 18 and attending college, but Irene fears that he will have no place to come home to when he graduates.

Irene says she will refuse to move to senior housing because she wants to stay with her family and she wants to stay in familiar surroundings. She says she does not need senior housing, because her family helps care for her. And while she does not like the violence that still occurs in and around Wells, she does not want to leave the neighborhood where she has spent most of her life.



Finally, despite the recent CHA efforts, the Wells population still seems relatively uninformed and confused about the plans for development. Only 25 percent say they know when they are scheduled to be relocated; the rest are either unsure or say they do not know. This apparent confusion may reflect residents' fears of or resistance to being relocated.

Residents with Lease Violations

A significant number of households are not lease compliant, and thus at risk of losing their right to replacement housing (Table 3). In order to assess how many households might be at risk, we asked respondents about a range of potential lease violations, including off-the-lease residents, unpaid rent, unpaid electric bills, housekeeping problems, a member with a felony or drug arrest or conviction, and property damage. Altogether, 22 percent (127 households) reported at least one lease violation. Five percent reported two lease violations, and 14 percent reported three or more. Common problems included unpaid rent (21 percent), unpaid electric bills (14 percent), and household members with criminal records (15 percent).



Loretta

Taking in her infant nephew made her a lease violator

Loretta has lived in or near Wells for most of her life. Ten years ago, Loretta's daughter died, leaving her to raise her 8-year-old grandson. Dushawn is now 18 and has just graduated from high school. Loretta and her brother also share custody of his son, 2-year-old Anthony. Her brother works the night shift and leaves the boy with Loretta while he works. Anthony was born prematurely and requires regular visits to speech therapists and other health care providers. Loretta takes him to his appointments and makes sure he is getting the care he needs.

Loretta says that she tried to put Anthony on her lease, but the housing authority refused, saying she should have told the property manager right away when she took him in. Because she hopes to get a voucher, she told her brother she would have to come to his home at night to care for Anthony instead of keeping him at her apartment.

Loretta has lived in Wells for many years and now says she hopes to use her voucher to move to the suburbs. She has mixed feelings about taking Dushawn with her, but thinks he probably will need to stay with her, at least for a little while longer. But because she had Anthony staying in the household, she may risk losing her right to replacement housing. Even if the CHA pronounces her lease violation "cured," with a male teenager in the household, she is likely to have great difficulty finding a unit in the private market.

**TABLE 3. HOUSEHOLDS WITH LEASE VIOLATIONS**

Violations Reported By A Household	
Off-the-lease member	11%
Unpaid Rent	21%
Unpaid electric bills	14%
Household Members with Criminal Records	15%
Number Of Lease Violations	
One Lease Violation	5%
Two Lease Violations	5%
Three or More Lease Violations	13%
Property manager talked to household about not having a lease.....	9%
Off-the-Lease Members	
Resident's Children	28%
Grandchildren	20%
Partner	15%
Other	37%
Reason for not adding to the lease	
"temporary status"	22%
Criminal record or Not being Allowed on Lease	15%

Because of the implications of the issue for relocation, we looked at the issue of family members living off the lease in several different ways. Our data point to real reasons for concern about the extent of this problem. Overall, 10 percent (60 households) reported an off-the-lease member in their household; this constituted 90 individuals or 6 percent of the total population in Wells. However, this number is likely an underestimate, since respondents may have been reluctant to admit directly to a known lease violation. One indication that the 10 percent figure is too low is that 13 percent of all households (including 55 that did not report an off-the-lease member in the census) reported that the property manager had talked to them about having illegal residents in their unit in the past year. This finding suggests that the number of households at risk of losing their right to replacement housing because of an off-the-lease member is probably closer to 100.



Linda

Afraid to put her family on her lease

Linda's apartment was never intended to house a family of six. But about five years ago, her daughter-in-law, Denise, and her family moved in when their own apartment in Wells became uninhabitable. The toilet in Denise's apartment stopped working, the sink fell apart, and the tub ran continually. The roof leaked when it rained, the locks did not function properly, and the windows were insecure, making it easy for people to break in. Denise knew that these conditions were too dangerous for her children. But when she asked to be relocated to a safer unit, the property manager refused. With nowhere else to turn, Denise was forced to move in with Linda.

With Denise and her children there, Linda's apartment is overcrowded. One of the children has a learning disability and another has serious asthma. Denise is unemployed, and receives TANF and SSI for her children. Since SSI is counted as income in calculating rent, Linda was afraid that asking to put Denise and her family on her lease would raise their rent to a level she could not afford. Also, Linda did not want to leave her apartment before she had to, and she knew that if the CHA knew there were six people in the house, she would be forced to move. So she decided that the best option was to keep her daughter-in-law and her family off the lease.

The family operates on a day-to-day basis. Right now, Linda spends a lot of time taking care of her father, who is recovering from a stroke and sleeps most nights at his house. Linda still spends a lot of time at her apartment, however, as she is concerned about it getting messy and fearful that something will happen to it while she is away.

While she is uncertain about the future, Linda admits that she is ready to move. Ideally, she would like Denise and her children to leave, so she could get a temporary Housing Choice Voucher. Eventually, she hopes to move back to the area because she knows "it's going to be beautiful."



Another indication that the 10 percent figure is an underestimate is that although our census figures indicate that nearly half of Wells residents need at least a three-bedroom unit, just 26 percent of households are currently living in units with three or more bedrooms. These numbers imply that off-the-lease members are living with legal tenants in units that are too small to adequately house their families.

Finally, 9 percent of respondents (49 households) said that the property manager had talked to them in the past year about “not having a lease.” This finding suggests that some of the households that appeared to interviewers to be “official” tenants—living in a furnished unit—were actually long-term squatters. These residents may have been unofficially subleasing a unit from a lease-holding resident or had simply moved into a habitable unit—one with running water, electricity, and heat—when the original tenant was relocated. **Irene’s** story of how she and her family moved into a larger unit down the hall is an example of this phenomenon. These long-term squatters, who have no right to replacement housing or relocation assistance, face the prospect of becoming truly homeless once Wells is demolished.

The profile of off-the-lease residents indicates that most are relatively young—about half are residents’ children (28 percent) or grandchildren (20 percent). Eight of these children are wards of the state. The rest are the leaseholders’ partners, adult relatives, or friends. Most residents said that they considered these illegal household members to be “temporary” residents, although 50 percent of these temporary residents had been living in their household for more than two years. For the 40 percent of households with an off-the-lease member, the most common reason cited for not putting these illegal members on the lease was their “temporary” status; the second most common reason was having a criminal record or not being allowed on the lease (15 percent). These off-the-lease residents are clearly often an important asset to the family, contributing to the household in various ways, including financial support (rent, buying food, and other items), child care, and elder care.

Wells Squatters

Squatting—that is, living in vacant units or hallways illegally—is a serious problem in Wells. Over a period of two weeks in early spring 2003, our interviewers counted 388 (294 adults and 94 children) squatters living in Wells (Table 4).¹⁸ Most (90 percent) consider themselves homeless. There is no single agreed-upon definition of homelessness, although there are a number that are accepted by researchers and practitioners. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines a homeless individual as someone “who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and who has a primary residence in a temporary shelter, an institution, or a public or private place not designated for regular sleeping.” The definition also includes individuals about to be evicted or released from an institution with no subsequent residence identified.

**TABLE 4. WELLS SQUATTERS**

Total Number of Squatters	388
Squatters Interviewed	294
Children living with squatters	94
Consider themselves homeless	90%

In many ways, squatters living in Wells are similar to most homeless people—they have little or no income, they have no permanent housing, and some suffer from drug addiction and mental illness (Chicago Coalition for the Homeless 2002; Regional Roundtable on Homelessness).¹⁹ The homeless people living in Wells are a mix of adults, families with children, and young adults. However, the homeless people in Wells typically report not using homeless shelters and sleep outside only when the weather is forgiving. They have been using CHA buildings as shelter for years. In a sense, they have become residents of the development. They move into vacant units, cook meals, sleep, and blend in—some even buy locks for their doors. However, unlike legal households, squatters do not have a right to relocation assistance or permanent housing assistance. The squatters living in Wells have nowhere else to turn; even though they currently have shelter, they are among the city's vast homeless population.²⁰

These residents have a strong connection to CHA developments—they were once legal CHA residents or have family and networks currently living in CHA buildings. They lack the resources to develop alternative housing plans as the buildings are demolished. They are the unnoticed, the overlooked, and the most needy residents of Chicago.

Profile of Wells Squatters

The typical Wells squatter is a single male in his 40s, who has a substance abuse problem. Many of these men have grown up in Wells (Table 5). However, not all Wells squatters fit this profile: a little more than a third (36 percent) are women, and some, like Dionne, are single women with children to care for. Citywide, 8 percent of the homeless are custodial parents—meaning that they have sole custody of their children (Regional Roundtable on Homelessness 2001).



Dionne

Nowhere else to turn: Turning to the CHA for temporary shelter

Dionne is an attractive woman in her late 30s. Her family lived in Wells for a time when she was growing up; several of her relatives still live in the area. When she got into trouble, it was the only place Dionne knew to come.

Dionne used to have a regular job. She had even worked her way up to a supervisory position and was making decent money—enough to support herself and her three children. But for the past three years she has been in what she calls a “downward trend.” First, her mother died, and then she went into a profound depression. She says she felt so bad she could barely function. Getting out of bed each day was a major challenge. Her employer granted her a leave, but it was not long enough for her to recover. She lost her job and her apartment. Her father had a Housing Choice Voucher, and she and her children ended up becoming “illegal” members of his household.

Dionne cared for her father until he died about six months ago, plunging her and her children into even worse circumstances. She says she had hoped that the housing authority would transfer his voucher to her, but for reasons she does not understand, that did not happen. She and her children have been staying off and on with various relatives who live in and near Wells, but Dionne says none of them are interested in helping them long term. Her youngest child is having trouble in school and she does not know how to help him.

As working-class woman who has never been a drug addict, Dionne has no “street network” to provide support or information, and she does not know where to go to get food or shelter. Her oldest child, Lamont, has a job, which helps a little. But lately things have gotten so bad that Dionne has been reduced to begging on the street and sleeping in vacant units with her children. When she cannot find a vacant unit, she and her children sleep on park benches. Dionne feels terrible about what is happening to her “beautiful children,” but by now is so depressed that she simply has no idea how to reverse her “downward trend.”

**TABLE 5. PROFILE OF WELLS SQUATTERS**

Age	
18-29	10%
30-39	29%
40-49	44%
50-62	17%
62+	1%
Male	64%
Female	36%
Children under seven	55%
Children seven and older	45%
N=94	
Employed	9%
Graduated HS/GED	54%
Disabled	18%
1-\$5,000	71%
More than \$5,000	29%
SSI	6%
TANF	4%
Food Stamps	33%

Our survey indicates that in Wells, there are 37 squatters who are living in vacant units with their children; there are 94 children altogether—52 are under 7 and 42 are between 7 and 17. Interestingly, 16 of those households are male-headed and 19 are female-headed. Homelessness can have devastating effects on children. Studies have shown that homeless children tend to move frequently and often miss days of school or change schools, which can have detrimental effects on their academic standing (Chicago Coalition for the Homeless 2002). Dionne's story of sleeping with her children in the park vividly illustrates the terrible possibilities for what can happen to these children.

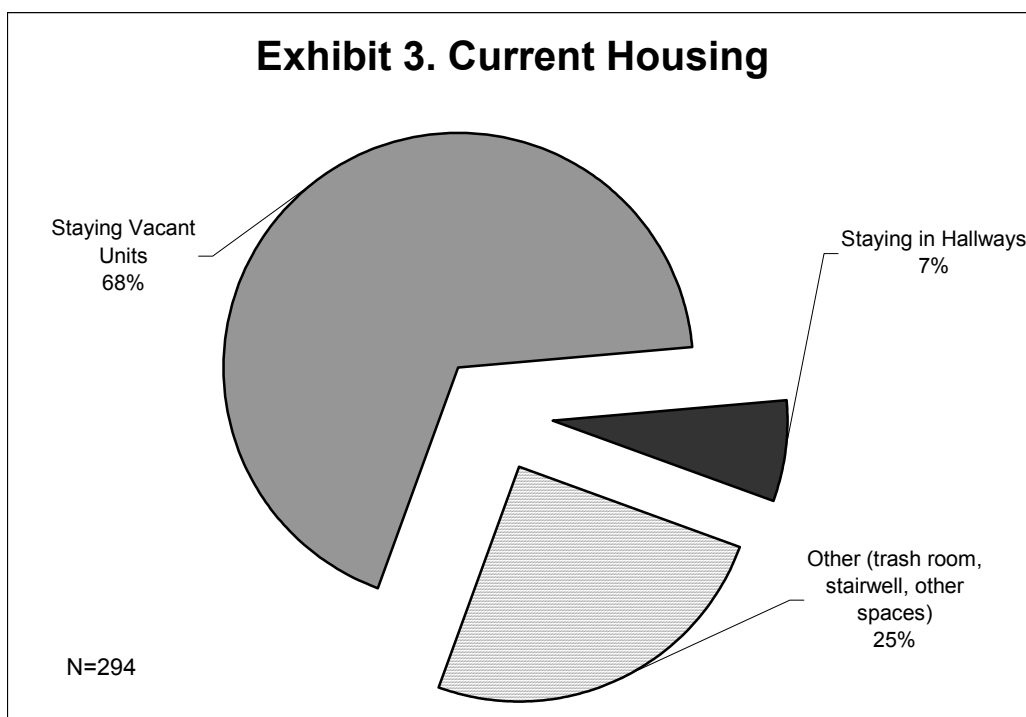
Most of the squatters living in Wells are not employed; only 9 percent of our respondents reported that they are currently working. Only 54 percent of squatters living in Wells graduated from high school or have a GED. Almost one in five (18 percent) has a disability that prevents them from working. With few or no skills and no permanent address, most squatters find it extremely difficult to find employment.

Not surprisingly, squatters living in Wells are extremely low-income, and are not receiving public assistance. About three-quarters (71 percent) have annual incomes of less than \$5,000 (most of those report zero income), and about 15 percent report income of \$5,000



to \$10,000. Squatters typically employ nontraditional means of earning income—“hustling.” Many collect cans, act as lookouts for drug dealers, resort to prostitution, or sell stolen items. Most squatters are not receiving any cash assistance (Social Security, SSI, or TANF), and only about a third (33 percent) receive food stamps. These findings are not surprising, given that they lack a permanent address, which is required for most types of cash assistance, while food stamps can be handed out on an emergency basis.

Most of the squatters we interviewed live in vacant units (68 percent); some lived in hallways (7 percent) and other spaces such as the trash room or stairwell (Exhibit 3). Squatters living in Wells tend to stay in groups, or at least pairs. Most of the squatters we interviewed stay with at least one other person regularly—nearly 75 percent live with someone else, 54 percent live in two- or three-person households, and 18 percent live in a household of four or more.



Unlike many homeless people, who tend to move around from night to night, squatters at Wells have lived in the development for a long time. More than a quarter (28 percent) have lived in Wells for more than a year (Table 6). More than half (57 percent) of the squatters we interviewed sleep in Wells seven nights a week. Our data show that most squatters secure a vacant unit and remain there for as long as they can—typically until the police come and clear them out. Only 5 percent sleep in other areas in Wells, and 10 percent sleep in other public housing buildings. Other sleeping areas include the home of a friend (10 percent), home of a relative (17 percent), and homeless shelters (12 percent). Less than 1 percent sleep in SROs.



Most of the squatters we interviewed said they viewed sleeping in a vacant unit at Wells as a step above staying in a homeless shelter. There is less hassle involved in breaking into a vacant unit than enduring the intrusive intake process at a homeless shelter. They can come and go as they please, and for the most part, there are no rules and regulations. One woman we interviewed explained that staying in a homeless shelter meant dealing with people that she thought were “below her.”

TABLE 6. CURRENT HOUSING

Staying in a Vacant Unit	68%
Staying in the Hallways	7%
Staying in Other areas (trash room, stairwell, other spaces in buildings)	26%
Lived in Wells for over a year	28%
Lived in Wells for More than six months	13%
Lived in Wells for at least three months	13%
Number of nights a week sleep at Wells	
Seven	57%
Six	10%
Five	7%
Four	7%
Three	10%
Two	11%
One	4%
Other Sleeping Places	
Other units in Wells	5%
Other Public Housing units	10%
Home of a Friend	10%
Home of a Relative	17%
Homeless Shelter	12%
SROs	1%

Strong Connection to Development and CHA

Squatters have strong connections to Wells and to the surrounding neighborhood. Two-thirds (67 percent) have lived in CHA buildings as legal residents, and 75 percent lived in Wells/Madden Park as legal residents at one time (Table 7). Many of the squatters who are former legal residents lost their housing as a result of estrangement from their families, or because of problems with drug or alcohol addiction. These former residents have nowhere else to turn for shelter. Further, they have family and social networks in Wells who help them



survive. About half of the squatters living in Wells have family living in Wells as legal residents, and 87 percent have friends living in the development.

Some squatters apparently move into vacant units and take care of them as if they were legitimate tenants. Again highlighting their connections to the development, our in-depth interviews suggest that Wells squatters have worked out a system of deals with property managers, the police, and legal residents so that they will look the other way.

Before becoming homeless, most Wells squatters said they lived in CHA housing or with friends or family. More than a quarter (29 percent) lived in another unit in Wells or Madden Park, and 10 percent lived in a legal unit in another CHA building. Some lived with friends or family (26 percent), who could also live in Wells or Madden Park, and only about 12 percent rented an apartment in the private market. A number of factors may have led to squatters losing their permanent housing. The most common response reported was “building torn down.” About 18 percent reported that they had to move because they could not afford the rent and 12 percent because they lost their job. Others moved because of drug addiction (8 percent) or eviction (12 percent).

TABLE 7. CONNECTION TO CHA

Lived in CHA as a legal resident	67%
Lived in Wells/Madden as a legal resident	75%
Has friends living in Wells	52%
Has family living in Wells	88%
Previous Housing	
Another unit in Wells/Madden	29%
In a legal unit in a CHA building	12%
Rented an apartment on the private market	12%
Reasons “lost” permanent housing	
Building torn down	21%
Could not afford rent	18%
Lost their job	12%
Problems with Drug addiction	8%
Evicted	12%
Released from prison	4%
Police Raid	5%



Marcus

Former CHA resident turned squatter

Marcus is a tall, well-spoken man in his early 40s. He grew up in Wells and many of his friends and relatives still live there. He has moved around more than many residents—he is a veteran and has traveled around the United States. He lived for a number of years in another CHA development with his wife and children, until his wife left him because of his drug addiction. Now he sleeps in a vacant unit in Wells, staying with another homeless man. He says the regular tenants tolerate him because his presence makes them feel safer. Besides, everyone knows him and knows that he does not make trouble.

He has tried many times to get clean and has been in drug rehab programs in VA hospitals around the country. He says that something always makes him come back to Wells and that when he comes back he knows why he is there—to get high. He says he has no one to blame but himself for his problems and that the drugs make him do “wrong things” like sleeping in vacant units and stealing from stores. Still, he is luckier than most of the homeless men in Wells—he has never been incarcerated, he can get help from the VA, and he still has relatives who will give him food and let him stay for a couple of weeks.

Marcus says he gets depressed a lot. When he feels really bad, he goes to the VA and checks himself into rehab. But then when he is clean and his mind is clear, he feels even worse, thinking about his family and sleeping in a vacant unit. And eventually, he ends up using drugs again.

Marcus has no plan for what he’ll do when the development is gone, other than trying rehab again. He knows that the housing authority is much stricter than it used to be about illegal tenants and that he cannot stay with his relatives who have moved out with vouchers. He says that like him, many of the homeless people in Wells are people who used to stay with their families. He worries about what will happen to all of them over the next couple of years.



Only about 4 percent of the squatters we interviewed said they were returning to the community from prison. However, prison reentry is likely to become a more prevalent problem as more ex-offenders are released. In 2001, 30,068 men and women were released from Illinois prisons (La Vigne et al. 2003).²¹ One study of the homeless in Chicago found that almost 18 percent of the homeless population had been incarcerated and were released from prison “with no place to go” (Chicago Coalition for the Homeless 2002). Like Vanessa, most ex-offenders have no place to turn when they leave prison. They have no money, no job, and likely no skills. Left without options, most ex-offenders return to the communities they came from, which are concentrated on the south side of Chicago.

As the buildings are demolished, many squatters find it more difficult to find a place to stay. When we asked what they would do when Wells was demolished, about a third (32 percent) reported they “didn’t know,” and 28 percent reported that they planned to move to another CHA building (Exhibit 4). Some (19 percent) planed to move in with family or friends living in CHA units. Likewise, during our in-depth interviews a few mentioned that they had “no idea” what they would do when the buildings were gone. Most of our respondents (72 percent) plan to sleep in Wells for “as long as they can.” Although they realize that at some point the development will be demolished, none of the squatters we interviewed were making any plans to find alternative housing.

**Vanessa****From prison to Wells: Reentering the community**

Vanessa has been to prison twice, both times for drug-related offenses. Each time she was released, Wells was the only place she knew to return to. Vanessa is in her late 30s and is a long-term heroin addict—as she talks, she periodically “nods out” from the drugs. She has lived in the Madden/Wells community since she was a small child. Her mother lived in Madden Park, and when Vanessa became a mother at the age of 16, she moved into her own apartment in Wells.

Vanessa spent most of her youth “running wild.” Her mother kept her children most of the time. Her son just graduated from high school; her older daughter has a child of her own and lives with “some boy;” and her 16-year old daughter stays with Vanessa’s niece, a leaseholder in Wells. Vanessa sometimes stays there, too, but spends most of her nights staying in “vacancies” with a group of other homeless women.

Vanessa’s history of moving from apartment to apartment reflects the chaotic nature of the Wells community—the fluid way in which apartments and leases were traded and presence of illegal tenants tolerated by both tenants and the housing authority. She says she “gave” her first Wells apartment to her cousin, who had eight children, and moved into a different apartment with her boyfriend, who had “inherited” it from his “auntie.” They lived together until he got locked up; she stayed in the unit for a while longer until she was arrested herself. When she came back, she began staying in vacancies. She managed to stay in one for several years, even putting her own lock on the door. She was arrested a second time, convicted of drug possession, and spent about a year in jail. When she got out, she still had a key to her illegal unit and simply moved back in. Since demolition began at Wells, she has been moving from unit to unit with a group of fellow addicts.

Vanessa wishes her life were different. Her children are ashamed of her and her daughter has never let her see her grandchild. She talks about knowing she needs to get into a drug rehab program so she can help raise her grandchild, but says she knows the motivation has to come from within. In the meantime, she gets by begging and acting as “security” for the local drug dealers. She says she does not understand why the housing authority won’t let her and the other homeless people in Wells stay in the vacant units—she says they keep them up better than the legal tenants and keep the “young boys” from getting in and vandalizing the units. Like the other squatters in Wells, Vanessa has no idea what she’ll do when Wells is gone and still hopes that the fact that she once had a lease means that she is entitled to a new apartment.



Joseph

Living day by day at Wells

Joseph is 47 years old and is staying with a friend in what should be a vacant unit at Wells. Joseph, a father of two, married and divorced three times, has a past that includes active military service, time in penitentiary, and sporadic residence at Wells. Joseph is a drug addict and says that he has been squatting for so long that he's not worried about the buildings coming down. He just lives day by day.

Joseph grew up just a few blocks from Wells, but at age 17 he moved out west. He entered the military during the Vietnam War. Joseph's time in the service was marked by drug, alcohol, and discipline problems, which he says ultimately led to his discharge. When he was discharged, he came back to Wells. As he puts it, "Reason I came to Wells, to be truthful, because it's more convenient for me to get my drugs." Over the years, he has tried several times to kick his addiction. He several months at a halfway house in the Chicago suburbs trying to get clean and has checked himself into rehab programs in a Veterans Administration (VA) hospital.

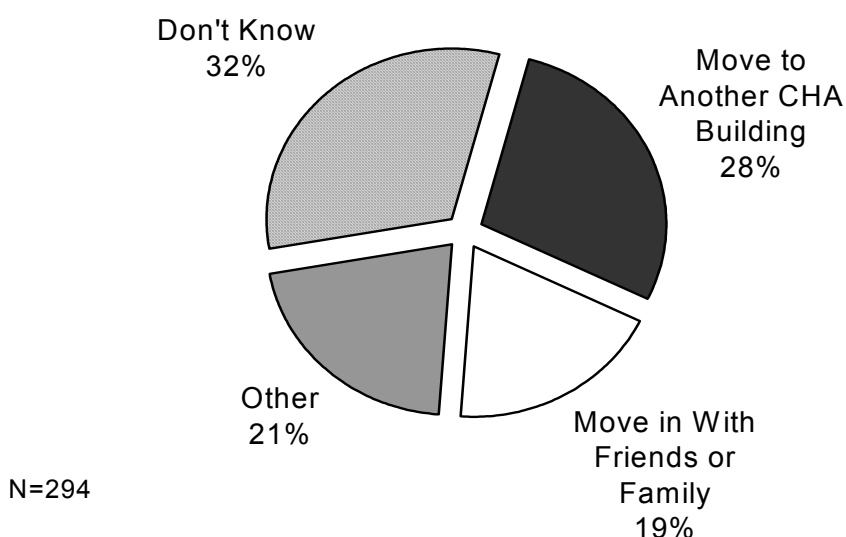
For the past five years, Joseph's living arrangements have been anything but stable. He has moved between his mother's house, a friend's house, and his aunt's house. He has also slept at O'Hare Airport, on the El, and stayed about two to three nights a week at Wells. About six months ago, a building became vacant at Wells, and Joseph has been living consistently in his friend's daughter's former apartment. She and her boyfriend were caught selling drugs in the building and evicted, but Joseph's friend kept the keys to the apartment, which allows them to stay in the building.

Joseph repeatedly talks about the negative lifestyle that is perpetuated in public housing. He says that there are many squatters throughout Wells, each pairing up with another and taking over different units. He says that it is a dangerous lifestyle, and that in certain buildings, dealers are selling drugs all the time. For this reason, Joseph is especially "glad they got police."

Having had children and grandchildren who grew up in public housing, Joseph laments being a part of the destructive lifestyle he associates with public housing. Regardless of his expressed desire to change, Joseph fears he will never be able to escape his past. "Once a drug addict makes up his mind that he wants help, he doesn't want to hear about no six-month waiting list--it took him maybe six years to get the point where he wants help." Surprisingly, although Joseph lacks the supportive services to curb his drug addiction and has nowhere to go, he still thinks "it's smart to tear them [the Wells public housing units] down."



Exhibit 4. Where Squatters Will Go After Wells Demolition



When we asked what type of housing they would like to have, almost all of our respondents said they would consider a public housing unit (82 percent), and 85 percent said they would accept a Section 8 voucher (Table 8). About three-quarters said they would consider sleeping in a homeless shelter, and 76 percent said they would live with friends or family. Finally, 79 percent said they would consider living in an SRO. However, given their histories of substance abuse, the restrictions on former felons, and the limited supply of SROs and shelters, these choices reflect Wells squatters' hopes rather than realistic possibilities.

Homeless people need numerous comprehensive services to get back on their feet. These services typically are more basic than services typically offered to low-income households—such as job training or job referral services. For example, almost all of the squatters we interviewed (95 percent) said they needed basic medical and dental care. Drug and alcohol addiction is widespread among the homeless population. Not surprisingly, most Wells squatters (82 percent) say they would accept a referral to a drug or alcohol rehabilitation center. A few of the squatters we interviewed during our in-depth interviews were on waiting lists for methadone clinics.



Mary

No support networks: Nowhere else to turn

Mary recently turned 41 and has much to be proud of. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science and is the mother of three children: an infant, a 10-year-old, and a 16-year-old. Mary even has a home where her children and sister live on the west side of Chicago. But, because of her drug addiction, she no longer stays there.

Mary, struggling with an addiction to heroin, now lives in a vacant unit in Wells. She has been there for about eight months. Her day-to-day existence is not unlike that of other squatters living in Wells; she has to move every few months when the property managers chase her out. Luckily for Mary, she and her girlfriend, also addicted to drugs, seek shelter together. For Mary, Wells not only offers a place to live but helps support her habit as well—Mary acts as a “lookout” for the drug dealers who supply her drugs. However, it is harder for her to find food, and Mary admits that some days she just does not eat, and she is painfully thin.

Mary has never been a legal Wells resident, but she has a long-term connection to the development. About seven years ago, she and her boyfriend were looking for drugs and found their way to the development. Before long, Mary not only became a familiar face at Wells, but she became addicted. She started dealing, but was ultimately arrested, convicted, and sent to prison. When Mary left prison, she was unable to return to her job as a corrections officer, but did finally find a job as a legal assistant. Mary remained sober for four years.

Mary eventually fell in love with another drug addict and relapsed. Since that time, her life has become increasingly difficult. Recently she had a baby, but her ex-boyfriend does not want to see her anymore and has taken custody of their child. Mary says she does not feel connected to anyone. As the tears roll from her eyes, she explains that she has no one to turn to. Her mother is too old. She refuses to involve her kids because she is aware of how bad she looks and is ashamed to have them see her.

Three months ago, Mary put herself on a waiting list for a methadone clinic. She says she is waiting eagerly. She is determined to kick heroin for good this time and to get her life back on track.



Leonard

HIV positive and in desperate need of services

Leonard is 50 years old, a small man with a lost look in his eyes. He is an ex-drug addict who has spent much of his adult life locked up in jail or prison for burglary and other crimes. Like many other squatters, he has lived nowhere besides Wells and prison. When his mother was alive, she helped him out, sending money to him in prison and providing him a place to sleep when he was out. But she died about a year ago, leaving him on his own. His niece who still lives in Wells will occasionally give him something to eat, but he says she wants nothing to do with him.

Leonard moves from vacant unit to vacant unit, breaking in where he can. He says the floors are so hard that he only gets a few hours sleep a night, if he's lucky. He has no regular place to sleep, no buddy to hang out with, not even a place to keep a change of clothes. He apologizes for "not smelling too good."

Leonard says he no longer uses drugs. He is HIV-positive and his ex-girlfriend has died of AIDS. He is hungry and desperate and has no idea where to turn for help. He says he goes to a clinic where he gets AIDS medication, but with no regular place to stay, he has stopped trying to take the pills. Leonard says "it might be nice to be incarcerated right now." When asked why, he says that at least he would have enough to eat and someone to talk to. Leonard has no idea what he'll do when Wells is gone.



This study cannot determine whether Wells is typical or whether the problems of off-the-lease residents and squatters are worse there than in CHA's other developments. Wells has some characteristics that may make it more appealing—a large number of smaller buildings, a long-term, stable resident community, a thriving drug market, and right now, no active gang war. However, several factors suggest that similar situations exist elsewhere. First, most of the off-the-lease residents and squatters we identified have strong connections to the Wells community. They are not, as some observers have speculated, “refugees” from Robert Taylor Homes or Stateway Gardens who have been displaced by demolition. Second, many of the squatters stay in the Wells Extension, the mid-rises on the north side of the development that are similar in layout to those in other CHA developments. Finally, Venkatesh's (2002) study of Robert Taylor, while not a complete census, found comparable numbers of off-the-lease residents in the buildings he studied. Based on this evidence, our assessment is that the situation in Wells is likely repeated, at least to some degree, in all of CHA's remaining developments and that it is imperative that the city and the housing authority immediately begin planning to meet the challenge of housing these vulnerable households and individuals.

Table 8. Housing Options and Services Needed**What types of housing options would you consider?**

Public housing unit	82%
Section 8 voucher	85%
Homeless Shelter	75%
Live with Friends or Family	76%
Live in an SRO	79%

What types of services do you currently need?

Job Referral	94%
Job Training	94%
Medical Care	96%
Dental Care	95%
Domestic Violence Services	40%
Drug and alcohol Rehabilitation	82%

MEETING THE CHALLENGE: HOUSING FOR WELLS RESIDENTS

The story this study tells is one of immense human suffering—hundreds of official CHA residents in difficult situations that place them at risk of either being unable to find new housing or losing their right to replacement housing altogether, and an equal number of squatters in dire straits relying on Wells as a shelter of last resort. Our findings from this first round of data collection suggest three avenues for policy, each targeting a different population that lives in Wells: families whose circumstances make them hard to house, residents at risk of losing their



housing or right to return due to lease violations, and residents who are squatting in Wells and are already homeless.

Families with Special Needs

For families who do not fit easily into existing housing options—custodial grandmothers, elderly women living with adult caretakers, and families with physically disabled members—there needs to be a concerted effort to both identify suitable existing housing and develop new types of housing that can serve this population. CHA’s relocation agencies and its Housing Choice Voucher program already invest considerable effort in identifying units for large families in the private market. Substantial additional resources for landlord outreach might allow them to intensify these efforts and expand their focus to include identifying units that are both large and accessible. Options such as providing bonus payments to landlords with large and/or accessible units should also be considered. Further, the various relocation agencies must coordinate their efforts so that they are not competing for the same small number of units—one option might be selecting a single provider to target families with special needs.

But even with all of these efforts, it is unlikely that there are enough accessible or large units in the private market to meet the need (Great Cities Institute 1999). The housing authority has received millions of federal dollars to redevelop its HOPE VI sites, and many of these plans call for the construction of senior buildings. Policymakers should consider adding to their plans developing permanent family supportive housing to serve custodial grandparents and other families with special housing needs. Developers also should be required to include a substantial number of large units among the subsidized units in the new mixed-income developments to accommodate families who cannot find housing in the private market.

Households with Lease Compliance Problems

The housing authority has already identified lease violators as a key problem. The official Relocation Rights Contract defines lease compliance and spells out the steps residents can take to “cure” their violations. CHA has stated that a major purpose of its Service Connector program, which is intended to link residents to supportive services available in the community, is to help current residents become lease compliant. The city’s most recent request for proposals (RFP) explicitly targets the problem of off-the-lease household members. However, CHA’s efforts to date have been widely viewed as ineffective, and our data indicate that the number of residents still at risk for losing their right to replacement housing is substantial (Fischer 2003; Snyderman and Daily 2002; Sullivan 2002; Venkatesh 2002).

In addition to revamping its supportive services, as the housing authority is currently proposing, CHA needs to consider other options. One possibility would be to grant current residents who are otherwise lease compliant amnesty to add *all* current household members to



their lease. Our data indicate that some residents who have tried to add members in recent years have been denied permission to do so. Technically, residents who opt for vouchers can add household members when they complete their paperwork, but if this policy is official, our findings indicate that residents are unaware of it. CHA should require its counseling agencies to explicitly encourage residents to add off-the-lease members. Another possibility to address the problem of lease violations would be to allow amnesty for all back rent and/or utility payments. Finally, the CHA should consider granting amnesty to at least some of the many ex-felons on a case-by-case basis. These types of amnesty programs have been implemented by housing authorities in other cities as part of their relocation plans (Buron et al. 2002).

Expanding Service for the Homeless

The city of Chicago has made ending homelessness a priority and launched a major initiative to address the needs of homeless families and individuals. Finding solutions for the homeless population of CHA's developments—both the unemployed and the many drug addicts and ex-felons—must be part of this initiative. The mothers and children who are on the street or sleeping in vacant units in CHA need options such as family shelters and, over the long term, permanent family supportive housing. It may be harder to muster sympathy for the drug addicts and ex-felons. But these individuals represent the fallout from the concentration of poverty, crime, and violence that has wreaked havoc on CHA developments and created a culture that has long tolerated drug addiction and the unstable lifestyle that goes with it. These squatters need shelter, certainly, but also access to effective drug treatment, transitional housing, programs for ex-offenders, and decent SROs that will provide safe, stable environments that can help them avoid slipping back into addiction.

CHA has announced plans to use some of its HOPE VI funds to construct 75 units of transitional housing for the homeless. Our findings indicate that 75 units will not be enough to meet the needs of either the squatters in Wells or of the households at risk of losing their housing assistance because of lease violations or complex personal situations. CHA and the city should also set aside some of the millions of dollars slated for mixed-income developments to create a significant number of transitional units—at least three times as many as proposed.

The city should also expand its efforts to help ex-offenders. Currently, there are very few programs that provide any kind of services for these ex-felons and certainly no coherent plan for what to do about their housing. Addressing the needs of ex-felons will help not only CHA residents, who face the risk of having their families destabilized and their rights to housing assistance jeopardized, but also the larger community; without help, these ex-felons are likely to commit other offenses (LaVigne et al 2003).

Meeting the challenge of housing the remaining CHA residents—families with special needs, lease violators, illegal residents, and the truly homeless—will require a massive,



coordinated response on the part of the housing authority, city agencies, private service providers, and the philanthropic community in Chicago. Only such a focused effort can meet the urgent need to both develop creative options for families with special housing needs and dramatically increase the supply of supportive and transitional housing, substance abuse programs, SROs, and shelters in the city of Chicago. Currently the housing market and the emergency shelter system are ill equipped to handle the needs of these at-risk residents. If the problems are ignored, the city risks enormous increases in the homeless population as Wells and CHA's other developments are demolished.

ENDNOTES

¹ This study was supported by the Ford Foundation. However, the views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of either the Ford Foundation or the Urban Institute.

² <http://www.cityofchicago.org>, accessed July 18, 2003.

³ Based on its experience with the first three years of the plan, CHA now believes that this figure will ultimately be lower than originally estimated.

⁴ The Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998 merged the Section 8 certificate and voucher program into one to create the Housing Choice Voucher program.

⁵ Chicago, with its extraordinary number of distressed public housing developments, has been by far the biggest beneficiary of the federal HOPE VI program, the HUD program that funds the demolition and revitalization of public housing (Popkin et al. 2000b). Since 1994, CHA has received 8 HOPE VI redevelopment and 27 demolition grants, totaling more than \$327 million.

⁶ The Chicago Housing Authority, *MTW Annual Report FY2001*, March 2002.

⁷ The plan for Phase 1 includes the construction of 496 units; 136 units will be reserved for public housing residents with the remaining 360 for private market tenants (Metropolitan Planning Council August 2002). The units will include a mix of architectural styles. Multifamily (9–24 units) and mixed-use/elderly housing will dominate this area, with single-family homes and townhomes interspersed among them.

⁸ For an overview of the implementation of the Wells Revitalization Initiative, see M.K. Cunningham and W.T. Woodley, *HOPE VI and Neighborhood Revitalization: Community Perspectives*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 2003.

⁹ For a complete review of the problems encountered during the early phases of relocation, see Popkin and Cunningham 2001, 2002.

¹⁰ See CHA Leaseholder Housing Choice and Relocation Rights Contract, November 2000.

¹¹ For a detailed description of our methods, please see Appendix A.



¹² This research was conducted in partnership with the University of Illinois at Chicago's Survey Research Laboratory (SRL) and Ujima, a resident-run nonprofit based in Wells. Sudhir Venkatesh, an ethnographer and principal investigator of a relocation study at Robert Taylor Homes, acted as an advisor to the project.

¹³ See Appendix A for a full discussion of response rates. Nonresponse is a problem only when the respondents are different from nonrespondents. With an overall 85 percent response rate, the sample has approximately 15 percent nonresponders. By definition, we know very little about those who refuse or who we cannot locate. However, during data collection we took great care to interview residents at different times of the day and evening to ensure that we didn't miss residents with similar characteristics (such as those who work during the day).

¹⁴ We implemented a number of strategies to avoid double counting. Please see Appendix A for a full description.

¹⁵ See Appendix A for a description of quality control checks for the squatter survey.

¹⁶ Because these interviews were conducted in May 2003, we have not yet fully analyzed the transcripts. The full analysis will be included in the final report for this project.

¹⁷ We used HUD standards to determine the number of bedrooms needed by each household. They are as follows: one bedroom (min. one person, max. two persons); two bedrooms (two persons min., four persons max.); three bedrooms (min. three person, max. six persons); four bedrooms (min. four persons, max. eight persons); five bedrooms (min. five persons, max. ten persons).

¹⁸ Our count of squatters living in Wells is likely an underestimate of the number of homeless people who live in Wells year-round. Counting the number of homeless people living in Wells during the winter months would most likely produce a substantially higher number.

¹⁹ According to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, approximately 48 percent of Chicago's homeless are single men, 38 percent are families, 14 percent are families, and 5 percent are youth. About 29 percent experience "crisis homelessness," 42 percent experience episodic homelessness, and 28 percent report they experience persistent homelessness. In a survey conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago, homeless people were asked to identify the factors that contributed to their homelessness. Responses include inability to pay rent, job loss, drug or alcohol problem, being cut off from public aid, overcrowding, release from prison or other institutions, and domestic abuse.

²⁰ According to the Chicago Coalition to End Homelessness (2002) Homelessness is a persistent problem in Chicago. Approximately 166,000 people experience homeless in the Chicago metropolitan region and each year 6,100 people utilize Chicago's homeless shelters and services on any given day (University of Illinois at Chicago 1999). Like most major cities, Chicago's emergency shelter system does not meet the current need. According to the Department of Human Services there are approximately 125 shelters in Chicago that provide 6,000 beds.

²¹ According to LaVigne (2003), About half (51 percent or 15,488) of these prisoners returned to Chicago, and 34 percent of them returned to six communities on the west or south side (Austin, Humboldt Park, North Lawndale, Englewood, West Englewood, and East Garfield Park).



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APPENDIX A RESEARCH METHODS

This appendix describes methods used for the Ida B. Wells Relocation Fall-Out Study. We describe three different data collection methods: resident census, squatter survey, and in-depth interviews.

Resident Census

From November 2002 to February 2003, our interviewers, who were a mix of public housing residents, people from the neighborhood, and SRL interviewers, conducted face-to-face surveys with the full population of residents living in Wells at the time. The survey lasted approximately fifteen minutes and asked questions about housing status, relocation, household composition, legal status in the household, and lease compliance, employment and hardship. Data collection for the census started on December 23, 2002 and ended on April 18, 2003.

Sample

SRL received a list of unit addresses, including apartment numbers from the property managers at Wells and Madden Park. The list included information on whether the unit was occupied or vacant. We attempted interviews even with those units listed as vacant since people may be living in such units “off the lease” or the list may not be up-to-date. For the unit interviews, we asked for a head-of-household or lease-holder. All respondents had to be at least 18 years old.

The list provided by the property manager identified 2,022 units remaining in Wells and Wells Extensions. According to the property managers, 750 were occupied. After the final disposition of the list, we found that actual number of occupied units was 668. We conducted interviews with 569 households, which produced a response rate of 85 percent. Table A1 describes the final disposition of the sample and the response rate.

Table A1. Sample Numbers and Rates

	Number	Rate
Number of Units	2,021	100.00%
Listed Occupied	750	37.11%
Determined Vacant	81	
Actual Occupied	668	100.00%
R Refused	43	
R not available	57	
Response Rate	569	85%



Survey Limitations

Two potential limitations of this survey are coverage error and non-response error. Coverage error can occur when members of the population of interest are not included in the sampling frame. In this study, the respondents consisted of those who lived at the Ida Wells housing project. Since the selection of respondents included everyone who lived there and the selection of respondents was done on site, it is likely that the coverage error is minimal.

Similarly, non-response is only a problem when the respondents are different from non-respondents. With an overall 85 percent response rate, the sample has approximately 15 percent non-responders. By definition, we know very little about those who refuse or who we cannot locate. Therefore, we cannot determine the degree to which non-response is biasing the results. However, the response rate is very high, giving us confidence that the data accurately reflect the Wells population.

Squatter Survey

For two weeks in March 2003, our team of interviewers counted and surveyed the homeless residents squatting in Wells. We defined squatters as ***any person who was staying at least one night in a unit, hallway, or other area in a Wells' building***. When an individual was identified as both a squatter and over 18, we administered a survey that lasted approximately 10 minutes. The respondent received a \$10 gift certificate to a local grocery store for participating. Interviewers worked as a group in the evenings when squatters were likely to be securing a place to sleep, and in the mornings when many squatters had not yet cleared out for the day. The group systematically surveyed one building at a time to minimize the risk of double counting or missing any squatters living in Wells.

Because there was no prior reliable data on how many squatters would be living in Wells and squatters tend to be nomadic, great care had to be taken when quantifying and surveying squatters. Our interviewers had to be able to identify squatters, quickly gain their trust and then secure accurate information from them. Furthermore, we had to make sure that squatters on the move were not double counted. We also need to be sure that our respondents were actually squatting in Wells and not just spending the day in Wells, visiting a resident in an "official unit", or just coming to Wells to secure a gift certificate.

Because of the challenges involved, it was very important that our interviewers would be able to identify, approach, and openly communicate with squatters. We selected interviewers who were experienced working with vulnerable CHA residents and the homeless. Two interviewers were long time residents of Ida B. Wells who had also worked successfully as interviewers on the study's household census. Two other interviewers were resident journalists; one who had worked (and lived) in CHA developments and the other with the homeless. The remaining two interviewers were the study's field manager and an SRL employee, both



experienced working with the needy and homeless on Chicago's Southside. All interviewers went through a day and a half of training, in which interviewers reviewed the survey and practiced methods for ensuring confidentiality and data accuracy. Specifically, interviewers learned how to handle potentially unsafe scenarios and situations where they believed a respondent was being dishonest.

Several precautions were taken to ensure as accurate a count as possible. The interviewers always worked as a group to allow them to monitor if another interviewer was accidentally surveying someone who had already been surveyed. Interviewers reported on different occasions the need to turn away squatter who had already been interviewed by a coworker. Also, our two interviewers who were well-known long-time Wells residents often knew if someone was a squatter or just pretending to be a squatter. To further improve accuracy, once the survey began, interviewers explicitly told respondents that they would receive an incentive even if they had been surveyed before, were coming from outside of Wells just to receive the voucher, or were Wells residents but not really squatters; we just asked the respondent to be honest. This gave respondents no incentive to lie in order to receive a gift certificate. Interviewers reported a positive response to this approach and reported that some respondents were, in fact, not squatting at Wells. Finally, the Survey Director reviewed all completed surveys to identify duplicates or individuals who had been interviewed as part of the census. As a result of these quality checks, approximately 70 interviews were excluded.

After every outing, the field manager used a map of the development to mark off the building that had been surveyed. Surveys were then tallied and checked for errors. Surveys were also matched with voucher receipts to ensure that no vouchers or surveys were unaccounted for.

In-Depth Interviews

In June 2003, we conducted in-depth interviews with residents who had household members living off the lease and with residents who were squatting in Wells. For residents with off the lease household members, the purpose of these interviews was to identify the reasons why legal households did not put some members on the lease, what off-the-lease members planned to do after relocation, and how relocation affected household stability. For the squatters, we wanted to identify the factors that led them to becoming homeless. We also asked why they had chosen to specifically squat in Wells and where they planned on going to after Wells was demolished.

We used contact information given to us in the household census to schedule interviews with legal head of households. To schedule squatter interviews, one of interviewers from the squatter surveys, a journalist with extensive experience working with the homeless, walked through Wells on the day of the interviews and gave certificates to squatters. These squatters



were directed to the Ujima offices where we were holding the interviews. They could drop in for an interview anytime during working hours. Only these squatters with certificates were interviewed.

Before interviews began, the interviewees were told that their interview would be taped and they signed a consent form. The interviews were taped and transcribed to ensure more accurate qualitative data collection. After interviews were completed, interviewees received \$25.