

# Property Management of Supportive Housing

Best Practices and Resident Employment  
March 2009

VIVA Consulting

# Survey of Property Managers of Supportive Housing

- 32 management firms invited to participate; 13 responded
  - All completed written survey
  - Follow-up phone interviews with 12
- Two for-profit managers; 11 nonprofits
- Collective portfolio of 37,000 units of all kinds; 11,400 supportive housing units in 186 supportive housing properties
- National sample, but concentrations in California, Northeast, and upper Midwest

# Property Management of Supportive Housing Study

## Study Sponsors

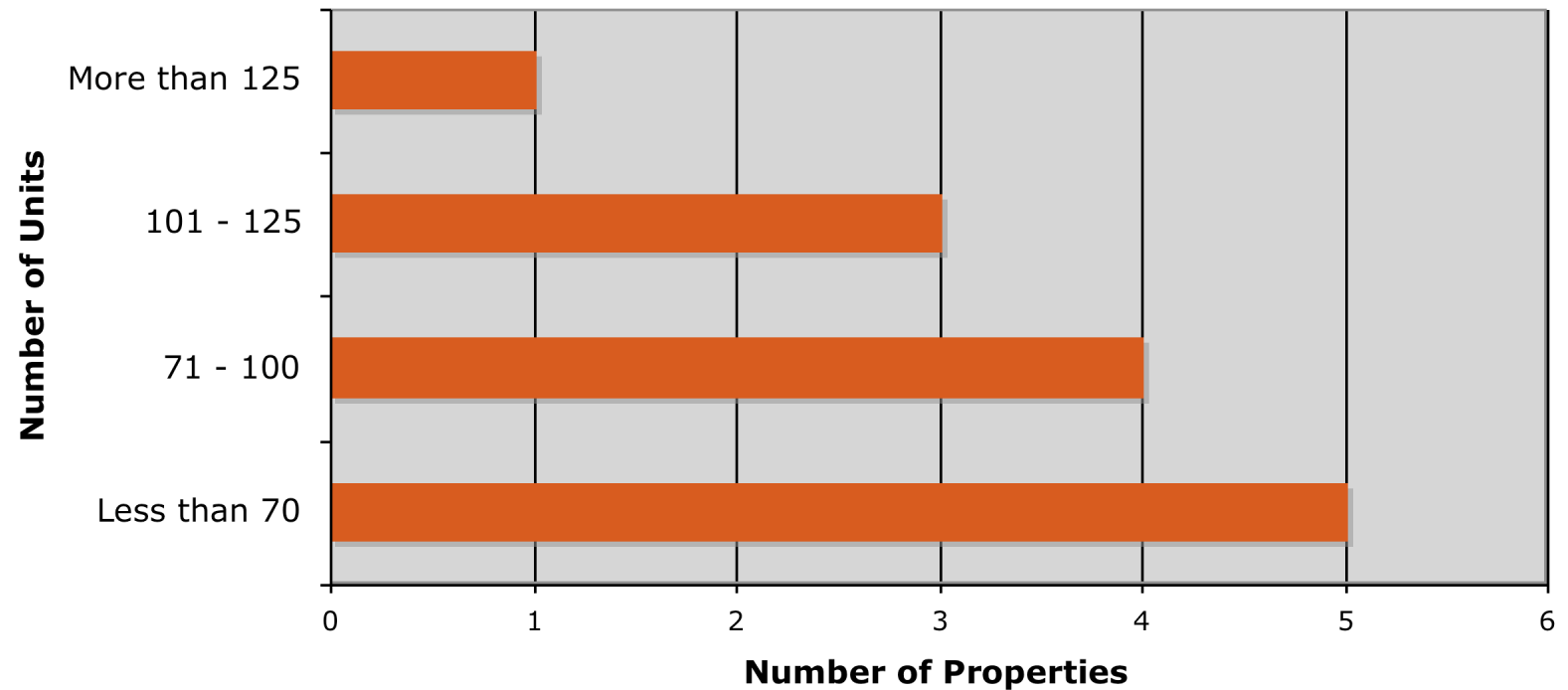
- Corporation for Supportive Housing
- Enterprise Community Partners
- REDF

## Study Purpose

- Identify business practices that result in well-managed properties
  - Inform the field
  - Encourage best practices as the portfolio of supportive properties expands
- Explore the employment of supportive housing residents
  - Can this practice be expanded?

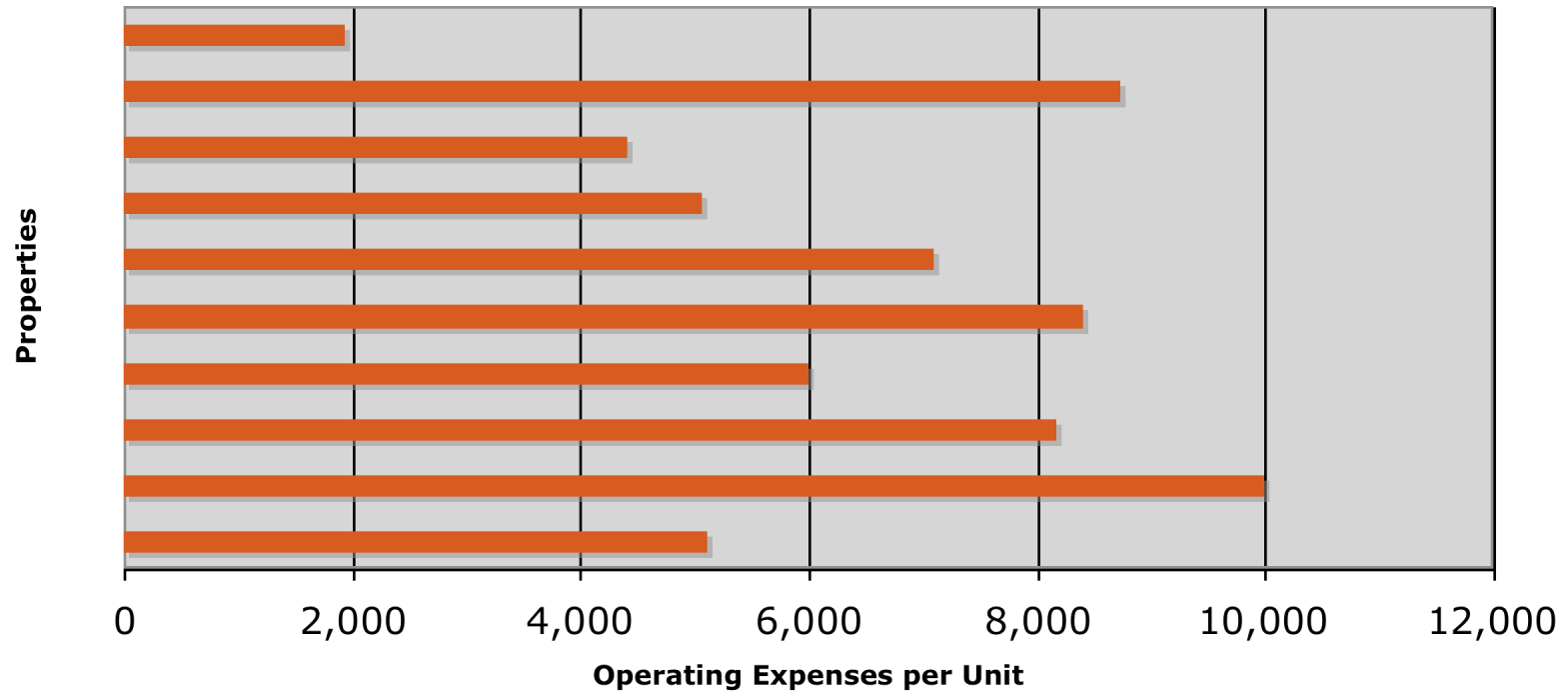
# Typical supportive housing properties

**Units in Representative Property**



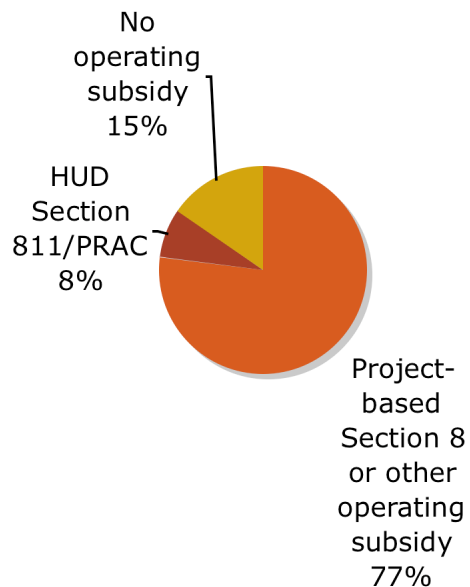
# Per-unit operating costs vary widely

**2007 Operating Expenses/Unit**



# Most properties were financially viable

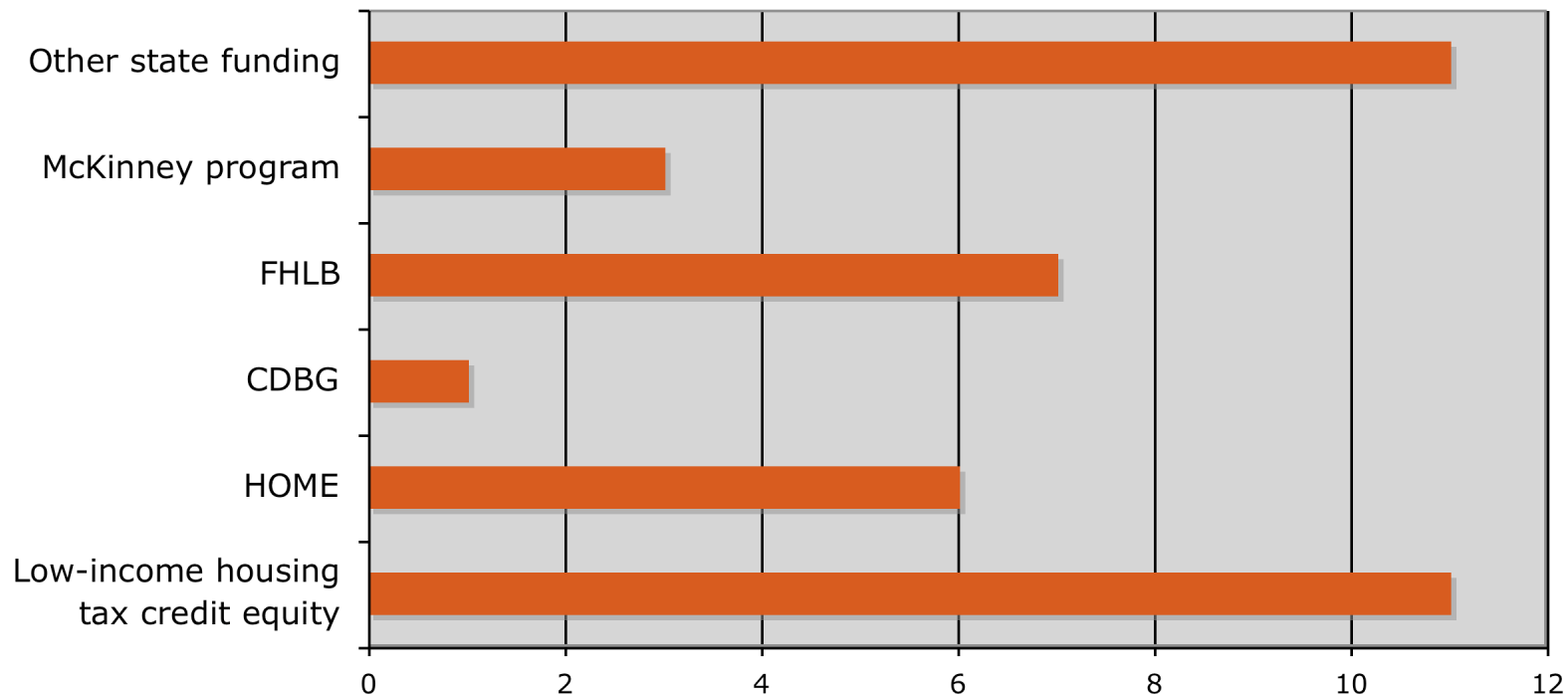
## Operating Subsidies



- Most properties have some form of operating subsidies
- A majority (54%) have third-party source for supportive services funding
- Very few have must-pay debt service

# Multiple sources of financing

**Sources of Financing**



# Site Staffing

- Most operators believe they need full-time front-desk coverage for supportive properties
  - Less important for rural properties; building design is also important
- FTEs required for desk coverage is relatively constant regardless of development size
  - 4 FTEs
  - Building scale must be big enough to support coverage
- Staffing patterns for other positions varies enormously across sample

## Strong emphasis on policies, procedures and rules

- Safe and stable environment for residents is key
- Clear rules about rent payment, building entry, housekeeping standards are critical to achieving that level of safety and predictability
- Rules are codified and enforced

# Centralization/Decentralization of Management Functions

- Very different decisions among survey participants; but most viewed these decisions as strategic
- Functions involving resident contact almost always performed at the site
- Supportive properties may have a greater tendency to centralize administrative functions than other affordable properties
  - Allows site staff to concentrate on resident interactions

# Strong emphasis on training

- Supportive housing providers identify robust employee training as an important element of their success
  - Related to emphasis on policies and procedures
- Training tends to be internal (formal and informal) for the first three months; a mix of internal and external thereafter

# Best Practices in Employee Training

- Overall

- Annually identified training objectives as part of annual review
- Encouraged attendance at annual conferences to stay current with industry trends

- External

- *Property Mgmt* (e.g. LIHTC, fair housing, green maintenance)
- *Resident Services* (e.g. crisis prevention/de-escalation (CPI), motivational interviewing for case managers)

# Best Practices in Employee Training (cont)

- Internal - “it’s continuous”
  - All staff workshops that are “participatory, fun and held regularly”
  - Monthly staff newsletter
  - Certified in-house staff who “train the trainers”
  - Annual company conference where employees attend three to four workshops
  - Team building

# Retention and Tenure

- Tenure is highest with more highly skilled and paid positions and lowest with the more entry-level positions.
- Over 60% of the Directors/VPs of Property Management and Resident Services had tenures over six years.
- 88% of Desk Clerks had tenures of one to two years.

# Best Practices in Retention and Tenure

- Employment Practices

- Competitive or slightly above market salaries; above market benefits
- Promoting from within
- Transferring staff among properties
- Individual professional development plans and training
- Regular public recognition (awards)

- Flexibility

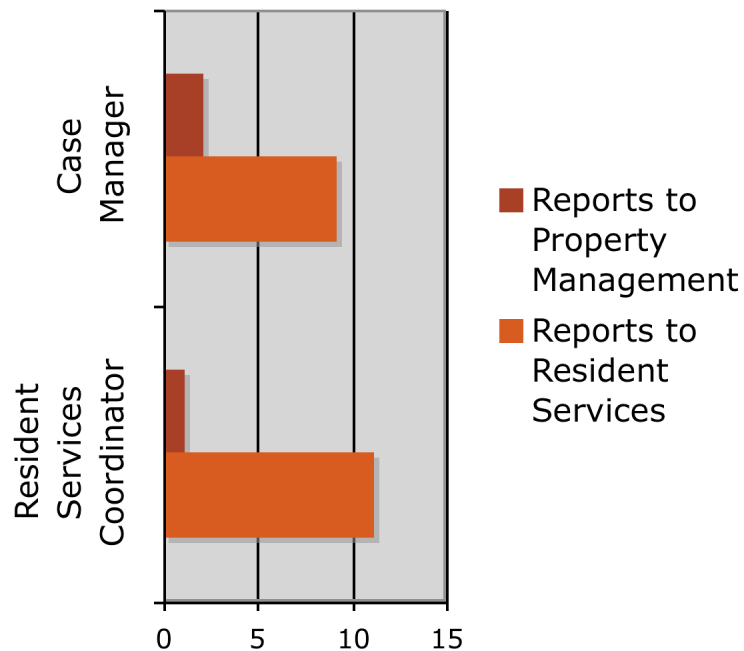
- Access to executive leadership
- Special or part-time schedules to accommodate family or a return to school
- Extended leaves to care for family members

- Hiring Right in the First Place

- Many organizations find cultural/mission fit particularly important

# Property Management and Resident Services

**Services Staff Reporting and Supervision**



- Roles are separate and distinct
- All properties have separate office/program space for resident services

## Clear communication between services and property management staff is key

- In many cases, terms of collaboration memorialized in a formal document
- Regular and frequent meetings between the two functions
- Shared goals for property performance and resident success
- Goal is healthy tension, “comfortable conflict” between functions

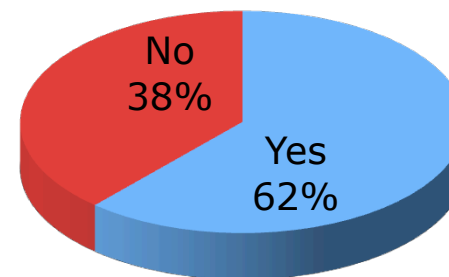
# Best Practices in Property Management/ Resident Services Interaction

- Regular, frequent and often formal meetings with set agendas
- Formal agreements
- Joint accountability
  - Vacancy control
  - Minimizing resident turnover
  - HQS
  - Performance reviews and specific property performance standards
- Creating comprehensive data base that ranks residents so team focuses on most problematic in holistic way
- Creating on-site case management case loads appropriate to resident population

# Employing Residents of Supportive Housing

- Over half of respondents make it a practice to employ residents of supportive housing or other individuals with special needs in property management or resident services positions.

**Hiring Residents for Property Management Positions**



# Positions most commonly held by resident employees

- Desk clerk and custodial positions are most commonly held by resident employees.
- A small number of organizations employ residents or former residents as peer counselors, a social service role.
- Residents are employed at seven (54%) of the 13 representative properties in the survey; all in desk clerk or janitorial/custodial positions

# Keys to successfully employing residents

- Training
- Supervision
- Continuous support coupled with open and clear communication
- Clear and enforced practices
- Generally, do not allow residents to work in a building where they live
- Specific and strict rules regarding resident employees' interaction with other residents