



CHAngemakers

Keosha Thomas is a driven woman from the South Side with a passion for people. After working at Chicago Public Schools for several years, Thomas wanted a change and was looking for something different.

When she discovered the Chicago Housing Authority was searching for new housing inspectors for Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) properties, she immediately pursued the position.

“I was looking for something new, and I passed up some other offers because this position was intriguing and I thought it would be rewarding,” said Thomas. “The training process took a lot of time and dedication, but I think it was worth the effort.”

The objective of the HCV Program is to assist low-income families in leasing safe and secure housing at an affordable cost. Families and individuals with vouchers first select an apartment that suits their needs. CHA then ensures the unit meets a minimum level of health and safety before the family or individual moves in. CHA inspectors must inspect the properties and determine whether or not the units meet Housing Quality Standard (HQS) requirements.

“We spent a lot of time training and working in the classroom to master the varying rules and regulations, but I enjoyed the time we spent learning in the field the most,” said Thomas. “I’ve been an inspector for about six months, and I plan to stay with it because I love what I do.”

The initial training process is three weeks long followed by a 12 to 16 week apprenticeship program where the details of HQS requirements, federal regulations, inspection forms and unit inspection logistics are perfected. Trainees work to master the inspection materials and then apply them to live inspections with landlords and tenants at sites across Chicago. In 2016, CVR Associates, the HCV vendor contracted by CHA, opened the application and training process for the first time as an opportunity for HCV holders. The apprenticeship was pursued by 11 HCV residents, and a majority of these voucher holders have successfully worked to become HCV inspectors over the last year.

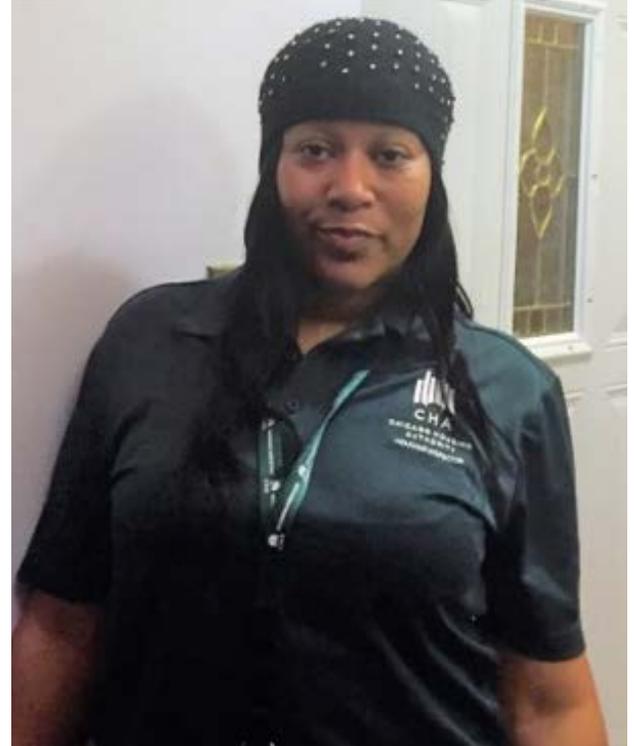
“It takes a special person to hold this position, because it’s not easy to apply everything you’ve learned to a real life situation. You have to be good with people, act as a professional and work with composure. Sometimes it can be challenging but it’s a big part of the job.”

Over 17,000 property owners in Chicago are working to build stronger communities by participating in CHA’s HCV Program and families can use their vouchers to rent in all 77 Chicago community areas. This means inspectors are busy, and Thomas inspects 15 to 20 properties every day.

“I inspect sites all over Chicago from as far North as Evanston to the West and South Side. Working in the field is the most rewarding part of the job, and I talk with all kinds of people every day. From interacting with landlords to speaking with residents, no day is ever the same.”

The CHA is equally committed to the experience of both HCV landlords and residents who participate in this program. While units are regularly inspected annually, new opportunities like the Inspection Excellence Program have been implemented to give high quality owners more flexibility. When landlords are incentivized to pass inspections on their first try and meet enhanced inspection requirements, owners, inspectors and HCV holders benefit.

“I like what I do because I’m ensuring that residents are living in safe spaces. Our job is to ensure that these places are up to appropriate living standards. I do find problems, but many of the landlords work hard and even have a team onsite who correct the issues while I’m there. Tenants deserve to live in safe and comfortable homes, and as an inspector I ensure that’s happening.”



Keosha Thomas is a passionate south sider who became an HCV inspector and is now a role model for other housing inspectors looking to follow in her success.