

City of Lawrence
Social Service Agency
Bi-annual Report
Housing and Credit Counseling 2016 Mid-Term Report

Reports on activity should be submitted electronically to Casey Toomay, Assistant City Manager, at ctoomay@lawrenceks.org. Reports on activities from January 2016 to June 2016 are due on July 15th 2016. Cumulative reports on activities from January 2016 through December 2016 are due on February 15th 2017.

Agency Name: Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc. (HCCI)

Reporting Period (please check one):

☒ January - June
(deadline July 15)

☐ January – December
(deadline February 15)

1. Give a brief narrative of the activities that were funded with City funds over the reporting period checked above.

HCCI's Rental Counseling Program serves as a valued city resource that provides *free* counseling and *free* education classes for both tenants and landlords regarding their rights and responsibilities based on the Kansas Residential Landlord and Tenant Act, local codes and ordinances, and Fair Housing Law. HCCI is also a local, trusted resource for law and code enforcement officers, family members, social service providers and concerned neighbors.

HCCI's Rental Housing Program helps people help themselves to secure safe, affordable and equitable rental housing through counseling, education and collaboration with other agencies. Historically, about 90% of clients served by this program report they have very low to low-moderate incomes.

HCCI's Rental Housing Counseling services are available by phone Monday-Friday from 8:00 AM -6:00 PM.

Extensive information is available on HCCI's website at no charge. There is a small charge to cover printing and postage for hard copies of HCCI's Tenant Handbook, Landlord Handbook, and sample forms.

2. **Provide specific detail (and supportive documents, if needed) to demonstrate progress made toward your goals/objectives.**

HCCI projects 245 Lawrence residents will be served by this program in 2016. As of June 30, 2016, HCCI served a total of 182 Lawrence residents. Of these, 107 were counseled and 54 attended 5 classes prepared and presented by HCCI's three Rental Housing Counselors.

Counseling: 87% of the 107 people counseled were tenants. 13% were landlords, property managers or concerned neighbors. The primary concern of tenants calling was poor maintenance and the lack of follow-up by landlords when tenants have made repeated requests for repairs. The primary concern of landlords and property managers calling was to inquire about their rights to pursue eviction for non-payment of rent.

HCCI is glad for the opportunity to counsel both tenants and landlords (and their representatives) about their respective rights and responsibilities. In addition to counseling, HCCI provides sample forms for renters to document (for example) requests for maintenance. HCCI provides sample forms for landlords to document (for example) the appropriate steps may take within a timeline designated by state law to file an eviction notice.

HCCI's website provides additional information for frequently asked questions.

Education Classes: HCCI provided 5 free public education programs that were attended by 54 Lawrence residents.

HCCI's Rental Housing Classes address fair housing law, rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords, appropriate behavior and communication skills. Counselors presenting classes give "real life" examples of what to expect to find in common rental documents such as:

- advertisements that include occupancy policies (standards),
- lease agreements,
- move-in and move-out checklists.

Outcomes of Counseling:

As HCCI counsels each caller (tenants and landlords), recommendations are given for appropriate options and alternative steps that may be appropriate for the caller to take to resolve their rental housing issue. These recommended options and alternatives are always based on the Kansas Residential Landlord and Tenant Act, city code and Fair Housing Law.

An immediate follow-up survey question asks each person counseled the following two questions.

- a) Was the information given by HCCI, based on the Kansas Residential Landlord and Tenant Act, Fair Housing Law, and/or city code helpful and do you feel more confident about taking options and alternatives to resolve your rental housing issue?

At mid-year 2016, 98% of people surveyed immediately following counseling reported the information given was extremely helpful. They indicated they did feel more confident after receiving information from HCCI. [Includes tenants, landlords, and other concerned persons counseled.]

- b) Does the person counseled understand the recommended "next step/s" to resolve their rental housing issue based on the information given to them in the initial phone counsel and are they comfortable to take options and alternatives based on their rights and responsibilities?

At mid-year 2016, 98% of persons surveyed reported they had received helpful information from HCCI and they did understand their "next steps" options.

In addition, HCCI makes follow-up calls to at least 10% of persons counseled to ask three questions.

- a) Did the caller implement their rights and responsibilities based on the information they received from HCCI?

At mid-year 2016, 73% of persons surveyed following counseling responded they did implement their rights based on information received from HCCI.

- b) Was the caller (tenant) able to remain in their current rental unit or find suitable alternate housing, thus avoiding homelessness?

At mid-year 2016, 97% of persons surveyed following counseling reported they were able to sustain housing.

- c) Did the caller utilize community resources recommended to them by HCCI?

At mid-year 2016, 27% of persons surveyed following counseling reported they did utilize recommended community resources. It should be noted that often persons seeking counseling from HCCI have been referred by other community agencies (Ballard Center and Salvation Army for example), and are aware of community resources. But many others are unaware of other community resources (for rent and utility assistance for example) available to them. They benefit from the unique rental housing counseling provided by HCCI that is not available to them through other community agencies.

3. How have you impacted the citizens of Lawrence?

For tenants: the primary reason renter's contact HCCI is about poor maintenance by landlords.

It is very helpful that HCCI's contact information is listed on the City of Lawrence Rental Housing Inspection website. Some tenants will be reluctant to contact the city as they fear their landlord may retaliate and attempt to evict them. In most cases, HCCI's Rental Housing Counselors can quickly determine if the tenant's complaint is a potential code violation and refer that individual to the City's Rental Housing Inspection Team. When eviction is a potential possibility due to code violation or non-payment of rent, HCCI Counselors can refer callers to community resources for temporary housing.

For landlords: the primary reason landlords and property managers contact HCCI is about their rights to pursue eviction notices due to non-payment of rent. In addition to instructing landlords about the appropriate reasons for filing an eviction notice and the timeline for the eviction process, HCCI provides helpful booklets and sample forms that landlords may use to assure they are not violating the tenant's rights.

4. What barriers, if any, have you encountered?

The City of Lawrence Rental Inspection staff probably faces some of the same barriers HCCI encounters. Examples of these barriers are listed below.

- a) Unsubstantiated information in the initial report from tenants that is often an indication of a larger issue.

Example: a report of mold is an indication of a larger health standard issue of leaking or standing water.

Example: a report of boarded windows or windows not repaired is often an indication of a larger safety issue of inadequate egress from the unit.

- b) Vague information in the initial report from tenants that is often an indication of code violation.

Example: report of cosmetic maintenance issues such as bare light bulbs with no globes but no mention of other potential electrical issues such inadequate grounded circuits.

Example: the number of permanent occupants reported by the tenant at the address may not include frequent guests (that stay).

HCCI's Tenant and Landlord Counseling service is very effectively provided by phone using a call log to respond to callers in the order their call was received. An HCCI counselor returns the call immediately if the caller (tenant or landlord) has an issue that they describe as a situation related to a court action involving an eviction.

The primary barrier for this program is that the telephone number of some callers is discontinued before HCCI can return their call within one to three days. Most often these are persons who are experiencing severe financial hardship.

5. Review the line-item budget you provided in your application. How much of your allocation has been spent?

At mid-year 2016, 100% of the funding was spent.

HCCI appreciates the opportunity to partner with the City of Lawrence to provide this unique service to counsel both tenants and landlords regarding rental housing issues.