

RESEARCH REPORT

# Moving On Initiative

## Findings from Participant Interviews

*Anna Feiss*

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
SAN FRANCISCO

*Joshua Bamberger*

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
SAN FRANCISCO

*Josh Leopold*

URBAN INSTITUTE

*May 2019*



## ABOUT THE URBAN INSTITUTE

The nonprofit Urban Institute is a leading research organization dedicated to developing evidence-based insights that improve people's lives and strengthen communities. For 50 years, Urban has been the trusted source for rigorous analysis of complex social and economic issues; strategic advice to policymakers, philanthropists, and practitioners; and new, promising ideas that expand opportunities for all. Our work inspires effective decisions that advance fairness and enhance the well-being of people and places.

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Moving On Initiative</b>	<b>1</b>
Methods	3
Results	3
The Screening and Application Process	4
The Housing Search Process	5
After Move-In	9
Discussion	12
<b>Appendix. Participant Interview Protocol</b>	<b>15</b>
Consent Form	15
<b>Note</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>About the Authors</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Statement of Independence</b>	<b>21</b>

# Acknowledgments

This report was funded by Tipping Point Community. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at [urban.org/fundingprinciples](https://urban.org/fundingprinciples).

The authors wish to thank Samantha Guzowski from Brilliant Corners for her assistance with our data collection and Cody Zeger, Jamie Austin, and Brian Blalock from Tipping Point for their careful review of the report.

# Executive Summary

San Francisco has the most permanent supportive housing (PSH), per capita, in the United States. Once in supportive housing, however, people tend to stay for a long time, creating few vacancies for people who are currently homeless. The Moving On Initiative (MOI) addresses this problem by helping PSH tenants who no longer need dedicated case management and supportive services move out of PSH into market-rate housing. Their exits free up PSH units for people experiencing chronic homelessness who need more supports.

Moving On is part of Tipping Point's Chronic Homeless Initiative (CHI) to halve chronic homelessness for single adults in San Francisco by 2022. The Urban Institute, with the support of the University of California, San Francisco, is studying Moving On as part of its larger evaluation of CHI. This report offers some preliminary findings on the early implementation of MOI, from its inception in Spring 2017 through September 2018. During this time, Moving On helped 154 individuals move out of PSH buildings into market-rate rental housing. Our primary information source is interviews with MOI participants. We interviewed 18 participants—a small non-representative sample. However, we see some trends that are relevant both to the MOI and potentially to other communities interested in similar efforts:

- **High demand for the program.** Program partners were overwhelmed at first with the number of PSH tenants interested in receiving a housing choice voucher to move into market-rate rental housing. The participants we interviewed generally had lived in PSH for more than 10 years and had unsuccessfully applied to other housing assistance programs. All interviewed participants were living in PSH buildings in the Tenderloin neighborhood. Of the 18 interviewed participants, 12 rated their satisfaction with the application process as a 5 (very satisfied), and no participants gave a rating of less than 3. Participants were grateful that the MOI program offered timely follow-up and an opportunity to exit PSH. The most commonly cited reason participants gave for wanting to leave PSH was to move from the Tenderloin to a quieter neighborhood.
- **Challenges with the housing search, but eventual success for most.** Even though we only interviewed participants who had successfully used their voucher to find an apartment, most reported that the search process generated feelings of fear and anxiety. Some of these feelings reflect general challenges with the San Francisco rental market, but participants also expressed

confusion about the search process that could be improved through better communication and coordination. Despite challenges, MOI participants have a voucher success rate of 70 percent. San Francisco Housing Authority staff reported that this is a much higher success rate than its previous efforts to issue vouchers to people experiencing homelessness. It attributed much of this success to the work of Brilliant Corners in boosting landlord participation and helping participants with the housing search process.

- **Great benefits to Moving On for participants.** All the participants we interviewed preferred their new homes and neighborhoods to living in PSH. For many participants, the program has been transformational, providing them a feeling of pride, normalcy, and hope for the future that they lacked before. Most participants reported that moving was not disruptive to their health care, employment, benefits, or other services. Participants typically reported spending more time alone after their move. For most participants, this was a positive change from their experience living in PSH. Some participants, however, reported feeling isolated and missed the regular contact with their former PSH case managers and tenants.

This report is intended to provide an early glimpse into the Moving On program. Future reports will provide a more comprehensive view of the program. We will incorporate interviews with a larger and more representative sample of participants, including those who were unsuccessful in their housing search. We will present results from quantitative analyses of changes in housing stability, income and benefits, and health care utilization and costs for MOI participants relative to a comparison group of similar individuals who remained in PSH. We will also assess how MOI has affected operations in PSH buildings as more stable tenants leave and are replaced with new tenants with long histories of homelessness and acute health care and supportive service needs.

# Moving On Initiative

This report provides an early assessment of the Moving On Initiative (MOI), drawing primarily from interviews with participants. We assess how the program is being implemented, whether MOI is meeting its goals, and its impact on participants. As part of the Urban Institute's larger evaluation of the Chronic Homelessness Initiative (CHI), we plan to regularly assess MOI to identify processes and aspects that work well and those that do not and to recommend areas for improvement. The Moving On Initiative is a collaboration between Tipping Point, its grantee Brilliant Corners, and its implementation partners the San Francisco Housing Authority (SFHA) and the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH). Brilliant Corners provides quarterly reports to Tipping Point on how many people have moved with the help of MOI, their characteristics, and outcomes. This report incorporates some of that information but focuses on the actual experiences of individual MOI participants. Through structured interviews, we assessed participants' early experiences with MOI: what motivated these participants to apply, their experiences using their vouchers to find housing, and their satisfaction with their new housing. The 18 participants we interviewed, who volunteered to participate in our research, represent a small non-representative sample of all MOI participants. We supplemented these interviews with discussions with Brilliant Corners staff providing direct assistance to MOI participants. Future reports will be based on a larger and more representative sample of participants, including those who were not successful in using their vouchers. They will also use administrative data to compare participants' housing stability, income, and health care use and costs with individuals with similar characteristics that remained in PSH projects.

San Francisco has invested in maintaining over 7,000 units of permanent supportive housing for people with disabilities who have experienced homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Supportive housing tenants receive a long-term housing subsidy, so they can pay their rent even if they have little or no income, and case management to help with life skills, housing stability, and connections to services like transportation and health care. Nearly all of San Francisco's supportive housing is project-based, meaning that some or all the units within a building are reserved for formerly homeless people with disabilities, and nearly all these supportive housing buildings are in the Tenderloin neighborhood. San Francisco has been investing in PSH since the early 1990s and, because retention rates are high, turnover in PSH units is low. The city now has many long-term PSH tenants who may no longer need case management services and would like to live elsewhere but cannot afford to without a housing subsidy. Through MOI, PSH tenants who are ready to move on receive a federal housing choice voucher from SFHA and then work with the nonprofit Brilliant Corners to use their vouchers to rent market-rate housing. HSH then uses

its coordinated entry system to place individuals experiencing chronic homelessness into the PSH units vacated through Moving On. The goal is to move 600 people to market-rate units and to place 600 chronically homeless individuals into these vacated units. In addition, Moving On is also intended to help San Francisco better leverage federal funds that are not generally used to address chronic homelessness.

MOI is a component of Tipping Point's Chronic Homelessness Initiative—a \$100 million effort to cut chronic homelessness in San Francisco in half by 2022. CHI aims to (1) create new PSH opportunities for people experiencing chronic homelessness; (2) prevent chronic homelessness by improving the systems that serve people who are vulnerable to homelessness; and (3) support the public sector to improve policies and practices. MOI fits into CHI's first strategy of creating new PSH opportunities for people experiencing chronic homelessness. The Urban Institute, along with collaborators from the University of California, San Francisco and the California Housing Partnership Corporation, is partnering with Tipping Point to evaluate the success of CHI, including the Moving On Initiative.

MOI launched in January 2017. As of September 2018, 154 individuals have moved out of PSH buildings and into market-rate rental housing through MOI. Participants range in age from 25 to 80 years old. The average MOI participant is 55 years old with an average annual income of \$12,252. Sixty-three percent of all participants have a reported disability, 66 percent are male, and 51 percent are African American. Brilliant Corners staff report that all participants who successfully moved out of PSH through MOI remain housed with a voucher.

MOI has three stages. In the first stage HSH works with PSH staff to identify eligible PSH tenants and review their applications to determine if they are eligible for a voucher and if they are ready for a lower level of services. In the second stage, eligible MOI applicants are issued a voucher by SFHA and work with Brilliant Corners to successfully use their voucher to rent an apartment. In the third stage, after move-in, MOI participants receive up to 12 months of "light touch" housing retention services from Brilliant Corners staff to help them maintain their housing, build independent living skills (e.g., paying for bills), and make connections to health care and other services. After this 12-month period, participants keep their housing voucher, but they have "graduated" from the MOI program.



## Methods

This study consisted of qualitative interviews conducted with tenants who have participated in MOI. Interviewed participants were English-speaking and ages 25 and older. Brilliant Corners staff first randomized its list of tenants and telephoned potential interviewees sequentially to notify individuals about the study. If participants did not answer, staff tried to leave messages about the interviews. Interested participants were instructed to contact a member of the University of California, San Francisco research team to schedule their interviews. This was done to help guarantee anonymity for MOI respondents.

Brilliant Corners staff contacted 94 participants, 20 (21 percent) called the interviewer for more information and, of these, 18 (19 percent) successfully completed an interview. One participant scheduled an interview, missed his appointment and did not wish to reschedule. Out of 18 interviewees, 17 had moved into their new housing and one had secured housing and was about to move in. Interviews took 30–60 minutes and participants were given \$30 gift certificates for their participation. Interviews took place near the Civic Center BART/Muni stop in San Francisco.

Interviews were structured and tape recorded. The interview protocol (see appendix) included a mix of open-ended questions and five-point Likert scale questions. Interview questions addressed participants' experience with the application process, finding an apartment, and working with Brilliant Corners. Interviews were not transcribed, but notes were taken from the recording. Likert scales were averaged and binary responses (yes/no) were tallied. Open-ended questions were analyzed for common themes and conclusions and are summarized in the results section. The interview protocol did not collect demographic information from interview participants, so we do not know how similar they are to other MOI participants.

## Results

Overall, participants were positive about the program and all were enthusiastic about its continuance. Although many respondents found the housing-search process stressful and confusing, they overwhelmingly preferred their new apartments and neighborhoods to PSH and reported a greater sense of normalcy and independence following their move. For the most part, moving out of PSH was not disruptive to participants' connections to employment, health care, or social networks, although some participants reported feeling more isolated in their new housing.

## The Screening and Application Process

### OVERWHELMING INTEREST AMONG PSH TENANTS

Before enrolling in MOI, participants must pass through several stages of screening. First, staff at PSH projects identify tenants they believe can live independently without on-site services and intensive case management. Potential candidates are then invited to submit a MOI application. Their applications are reviewed by the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH), and eligible applicants are referred to the SFHA to receive their voucher.

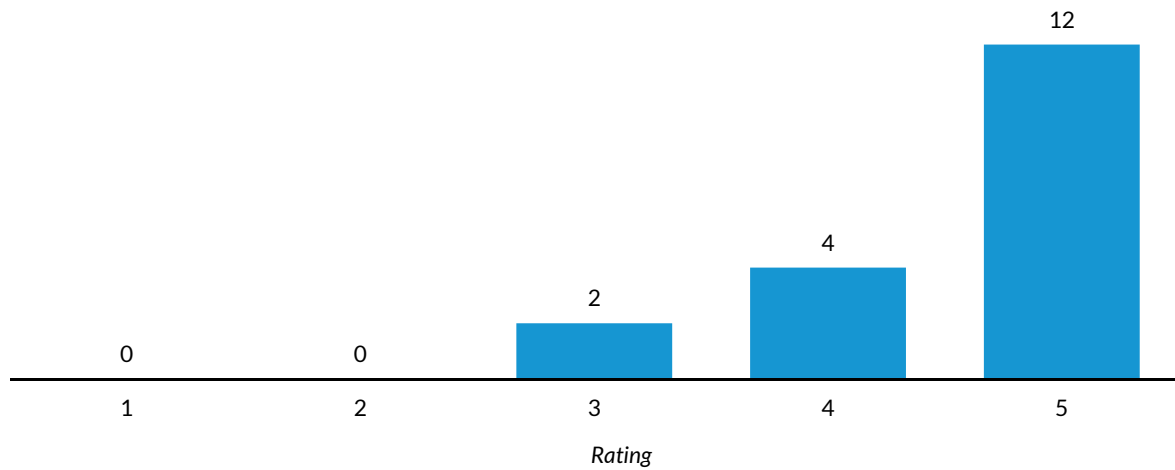
Brilliant Corners staff reported receiving double the number of expected referrals when the program first launched in 2017. The greater-than-expected number of referrals came from overwhelming demand for the program among PSH tenants and a light screening process that may have included some people who needed a greater level of support than MOI provides. HSH now has PSH staff complete a more robust prescreening form to better assess whether individuals are a good fit for MOI or would benefit from continued case management in their current PSH environment.

Most participants learned about MOI from PSH case managers or managerial staff ( $n = 14$ ). Of the 18 interviewed participants, 12 rated their satisfaction with the application process as a 5 (very satisfied) and no participants gave a rating of less than 3 (figure 1). At least eight had unsuccessfully applied to other SFHA programs. Participants typically never heard back after submitting applications to these programs, and they were grateful that the MOI program offered timely follow-up and an opportunity to exit PSH. Program staff believed they had resolved many of the early challenges with the application process but saw opportunities to better coordinate between Brilliant Corners, HSH, and SFHA when the city is ready to start re-issuing vouchers.

FIGURE 1

### How Satisfied Were Participants with the Moving On Initiative Application Process?

Number of respondents



URBAN INSTITUTE

**Note:** 1 = very unsatisfied, 5 = very satisfied.

## The Housing Search Process

### CHALLENGES COORDINATING REFERRALS BETWEEN PARTNERS

SFHA has set aside 300 housing choice vouchers per year to be used for MOI. Once participants receive their voucher, they have up to nine months to use the voucher to lease an apartment. After they have leased up, voucher holders pay 30 percent of their monthly income to their landlord and SFHA pays the difference between that amount and the total rent for the apartment. In the housing search process, participants need to find housing that meets several conditions. First, the rent must not exceed the limit of what the housing authority has agreed to pay, called the payment standard. SFHA will subsidize rents up to \$2,748 for a one-bedroom apartment.<sup>2</sup> Second, participants need to find an apartment and have their application approved by the landlord. Finally, SFHA needs to inspect the unit to certify that it meets the program's housing quality standards and confirm that the rent is reasonable based on market comparisons.

From December 2016, when the program launched, to September 2018, HSH referred 270 individuals to SFHA to receive a voucher. Of those 270, 154 participants (57 percent) successfully used their voucher to lease and move into market-rate rental housing, 50 (19 percent) are actively looking to lease an apartment with their voucher, and 66 (24 percent) returned their voucher to SFHA without leasing an apartment, effectively ending their participation in the program. Of those who leased up, 87

percent live in San Francisco and the other 13 percent used their voucher to lease an apartment elsewhere in the Bay Area. For those who returned their voucher to SFHA, they were able to keep their PSH housing unit.

Excluding people whose vouchers are still active, MOI participants have a voucher success rate of 70 percent. SFHA staff reported that this is a much higher success rate than previous efforts to issue vouchers to people experiencing homelessness. In the past, SFHA had created a “homeless preference” that moved people experiencing homelessness to the front of the waiting list for receiving a housing voucher. Individuals experiencing homelessness were often unable to use their voucher to find an acceptable apartment within the allotted time and had to return their vouchers to SFHA. This was frustrating for applicants and carried great administrative cost to SFHA because it takes staff time to identify people from the waitlist, bring them in for their orientation, and inspect apartments, and these activities need to be repeated until the voucher is successfully used. SFHA attributes the higher success rates of MOI to the support from Brilliant Corners and HSH as well as landlords’ greater willingness to rent to individuals who have been stably housed and have less acute service needs. SFHA staff report that Tipping Point’s leadership was critical to bringing partners together to create the program. To date, Tipping Point’s investment of \$2.25 million, in the form of a grant to Brilliant Corners, has successfully leveraged more than \$3 million in rental subsidies from SFHA through the federal Housing Choice Voucher program.

The voucher success rates of MOI participants have increased through improved coordination between partners. In the first two quarters of 2017, SFHA issued 138 vouchers to MOI participants. Brilliant Corners was not fully staffed and did not have a network of landlords willing to work with the program. Only 13 individuals successfully leased an apartment during this period. SFHA acknowledges that the initial volume of referrals was too high, and they should have waited to start issuing vouchers until all the program components were in place and partners had a clear understanding of their roles. Since the third quarter of 2017, Brilliant Corners has hired more staff both to support MOI participants and to recruit landlords. At the same time, the number of vouchers SFHA has issued has slowed down. Some of this slowdown was deliberate, SFHA did not want too many vouchers in the market at one time competing against each other. But some of the slowdown was because of staffing and financial issues within SFHA. In the first two quarters of 2018, 75 MOI participants leased an apartment and SFHA issued 33 new vouchers. The SFHA is now experiencing financial and management challenges that have prevented it from issuing any new vouchers since November 2018.

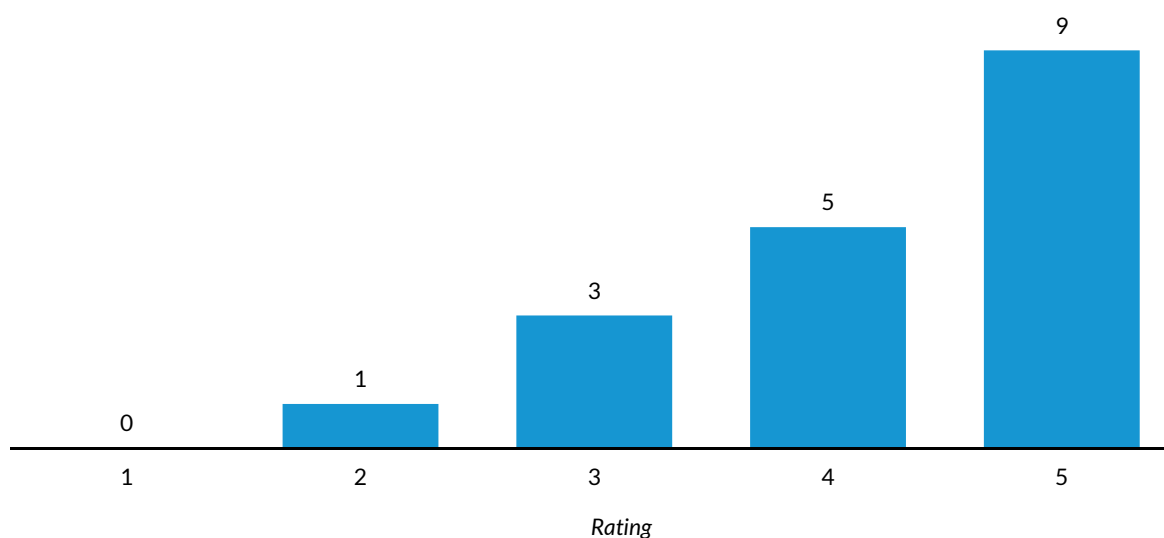
## PARTICIPANT CONFUSION IN THE HOUSING SEARCH

All 18 MOI participants interviewed for this report were successful in using their voucher. In future reports, we will also incorporate feedback from participants who were unsuccessful in using their vouchers. Half of participants reported that they were very satisfied with the process and half reported lower levels of satisfaction (figure 2).

FIGURE 2

### How Satisfied Were Moving On Initiative Participants with the Process of Finding an Apartment?

*Number of respondents*



**Note:** 1 = very unsatisfied, 5 = very satisfied.

URBAN INSTITUTE

In response to open-ended questions about the housing search, 12 interviewees reported that the process generated feelings of fear or anxiety. The first major point of uncertainty for participants was the wait between when their vouchers from SFHA are issued and when a Brilliant Corners housing coordinator contacts them. Participants receive their vouchers at a mandatory informational meeting with SFHA. A Brilliant Corners supervisor sometimes attends these trainings to provide participants information about Brilliant Corners' role in the program. Participants are then told that their Brilliant Corners housing coordinator will contact them to get started with the housing search. Eight participants found this process confusing and worrisome. At least two participants believed that the Brilliant Corners supervisor they met when they received their voucher was their housing coordinator. Others were confused about when and how their coordinator would contact them or whether they should start their search on their own or wait to be contacted. Many participants ( $n = 12$ ) reported feeling particularly anxious about beginning the process and that having no set start date and no way to

contact their housing coordinator increased their anxiety that they would not successfully use their voucher. Seven participants reported that, even at the end of the search process, they still did not understand what was expected of them in finding housing.

Most participants reported that Brilliant Corners staff were difficult to contact ( $n = 10$ ). Participants reported that Brilliant Corners staff often did not answer their calls ( $n = 6$ ) or failed to respond to their messages ( $n = 4$ ). Some participants attributed this lack of response to Brilliant Corners' being short staffed ( $n = 6$ ). Four participants reported having multiple housing coordinators over their time working with Brilliant Corners, because their original housing coordinator was no longer at Brilliant Corners, or had too large of a caseload. Three participants reported housing coordinators seemed new, inexperienced, or poorly trained. Complaints about staffing were more common among participants who joined the MOI early in its inception, and participants reported improvements over time.

#### A LACK OF HOUSING OPTIONS AND PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION BY LANDLORDS

Many participants reported either having to extend their voucher ( $n = 6$ ) or coming close to losing their original or renewed voucher ( $n = 6$ ) because they could not find housing in the allotted time. Five participants reported choosing an apartment because they were running out of time on their original or extended voucher and feared it would not be renewed. Three participants reported feeling "pressured" by their housing coordinators to take units that did not fit their needs, primarily at the end of their voucher window.

Participants described several reasons for the difficulty finding units. Most participants cited the lack of housing in the San Francisco area, especially for units that accept vouchers. Participants often had been living in the same PSH building for 10 or more years and were not prepared for the high costs and limited vacancies in the local rental market. Brilliant Corners staff felt that many participants had expectations that were not aligned with the types of neighborhoods and amenities that would be available to them with their vouchers. In addition to the universal challenges of finding housing in San Francisco, MOI participants also felt they had to deal with landlord discrimination based on their income, race, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability status, and use of a voucher. Some participants reported that landlords, even those who listed that they would accept vouchers, turned them away immediately or refused to give them an application upon learning their status as housing choice voucher holders ( $n = 5$ ). Though participants often felt they were being discriminated against for personal reasons, Brilliant Corners staff reported that landlords generally rejected voucher holders

because of the bureaucratic requirements of the program or concern about getting paid on time rather than negative feelings about voucher holders.

In addition to its housing coordinators, Brilliant Corners employs housing specialists to recruit landlords to build a pool of units available to MOI participants. Although MOI participants can rent any apartment in the area that is within the voucher's payment standards and meets the program's quality standards, most end up choosing an apartment from the pool Brilliant Corners has secured. Though choosing apartments from this pool has improved the chances of successfully using a voucher, some participants ( $n = 4$ ) were dissatisfied with the options available to them, and Brilliant Corners staff acknowledged that they are working on increasing the diversity of locations and amenities available to participants. Some participants were also disheartened when they learned that an apartment they were told had been secured for them by Brilliant Corners was also available to other MOI participants ( $n = 4$ ).

Participants who successfully leased up may view these challenges with the housing search as water under the bridge, but for unsuccessful participants the process may do lasting damage. While unsuccessful participants remain in supportive housing, they may become despondent at losing the opportunity to move out and live in their own apartment in a different neighborhood. One participant reported discontinuing his use of physical and mental health care services after originally losing his housing voucher. Though the voucher was extended and he eventually found housing, the participant reported that, at the time, the process made him "exhausted" and that he no longer wanted to "do anything with his life" anymore. For future reports, we will incorporate the perspective of other MOI participants who were unsuccessful with their housing search and had to return their vouchers to SFHA.

## **After Move-In**

### **PREFERENCE FOR NEW HOUSING OVER PSH**

Despite challenges with the housing search process, all MOI participants we interviewed preferred their new housing to their old housing. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very unsatisfied and 5 being very satisfied, on average, participants rated their satisfaction with both their new housing and their new neighborhoods as a 4.5.

The high levels of satisfaction reflect, in part, the circumstances that MOI participants were leaving behind. All participants reported that their housing and neighborhood in their former PSH buildings were difficult places to live. Most participants reported feeling unsafe in PSH. Two participants

described feeling like “prey” because of their slow speed, age, or disability. In addition, several participants felt unsafe inside their PSH apartments ( $n = 5$ ). Most participants reported widespread drug use in their previous neighborhoods ( $n = 11$ ). Participants, many with histories of substance abuse, reported struggling with being forced to have drug use “in [their] face” whenever they left their building. All interviewed participants feel significantly safer in their new housing ( $n = 18$ ). They described their previous housing and neighborhoods as being noisy ( $n = 7$ ), with loud neighbors, street noise, and sirens late into the night, sometimes affecting sleep. Reflecting on their time in PSH, some participants described a sense of hopelessness or of feeling “stuck” in their situation ( $n = 7$ ).

Participants also reported that their new apartments were in better condition than their previous housing. Participants described their former housing as cramped and sometimes pest-ridden ( $n = 5$ ). The amenities in participants’ current housing are summarized in table 1. All but one apartment had a complete set of kitchen appliances (i.e., fridge, stove, and oven), with the exception of one participant who was lacking an oven. Only one-third of participants’ new apartment buildings included an elevator. Several participants ( $n = 4$ ) reported that they had mobility issues and would have preferred to either be on the ground floor or to live in a building with an elevator. All participants reported their units were clean ( $n = 18$ ), and most described their new housing as spacious ( $n = 15$ ). In addition, participants were emphatic in describing how improvements in their amenities, like having a kitchen and a clean, private bathroom, made a huge improvement to their quality of life ( $n = 10$ ).

**TABLE 1**  
**Housing Amenities in Moving On Initiative Participants’ New Apartments**

<b>Amenity</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Laundry	12 (67%)
Elevator	6 (33%)
Appliances	17 (94%)

Note: Interviewed participants  $n = 18$ .

Of the 16 participants who moved into new neighborhoods, all preferred their new neighborhood to their old neighborhood. Most participants found their new location very accessible to public transit and the rest of the city, finding little to no difficulty getting to their jobs, clinics, and other services ( $n = 17$ ). Almost all participants who moved to a new neighborhood ( $n = 16$ ) felt safer in their new neighborhood than in their previous neighborhood ( $n = 15$ ). Participants described feeling safe to come and go from their new home and to walk alone in their neighborhood, at least during the day, without fear of violence. It was clear from the interviews that this increased sense of safety enhanced



participants' quality of life. Participants described their new neighborhoods as quiet ( $n = 12$ ), safe ( $n = 12$ ), and accessible ( $n = 13$ ), and most liked their new neighbors ( $n = 11$ ).

Though most participants planned to stay in their current apartments, three participants described plans to move into a new place at the end of their lease and two had already moved to a second apartment. These two participants broke the lease on the initial apartment because of conflict with neighbors and mold, respectively. Brilliant Corners successfully rehoused these two participants, who were satisfied with their new housing.

### **PRIDE, SELF-WORTH, AND “NORMALCY” FOR PARTICIPANTS**

A theme throughout conversations with participants was a feeling of pride in their new homes and their new “place in society.” Participants described feeling proud of their homes and neighborhoods ( $n = 10$ ) and having a sense of self-esteem and hopefulness when thinking about or returning home to their new housing. In their supportive housing units, participants reported it was difficult having friends and family visit, either because their units were too small, their programs restricted visitations, or their building or neighborhood was not safe. Two participants reported feeling shame or embarrassment about their previous living situation, hiding it from their families. In their new homes, some participants said that they were finally able to have friends and family over for meals and overnight visits ( $n = 6$ ).

Many participants reported that living in their new homes allowed them to regain a sense of normalcy, being in the world and feeling like a “real person” ( $n = 12$ ). When asked what they liked best about living in their own homes, participants often reported that their new apartments offered them a greater sense of freedom: freedom of movement, freedom from the constraints and limitations of the supportive housing units, and freedom from what many described as an “oppressive” and “depressing” environment ( $n = 5$ ). Participants reported a true sense of independence ( $n = 4$ ) and privacy ( $n = 4$ ) living in their new home. Many participants described hope for the future and plans for a “better life” ( $n = 10$ ), which many had previously feared unattainable.

### **CONTINUITY OF SERVICES, BUT GREATER ISOLATION FOR SOME**

Almost all participants reported using the same services that they had before moving ( $n = 17$ ). Most participants reported receiving the same state and federal benefits, but three reported a decrease in their SSI food allowance now that they had a kitchen. Although Brilliant Corners offers 12-months of follow-up housing retention services after move-in, only four participants reported using these services, and three others did not know this was something Brilliant Corners offered. Most participants reported that they no longer received any case management services ( $n = 10$ ), though only a few reported no

longer feeling that they needed case management services ( $n = 5$ ). Some received case management services through their health care clinics or other public entities (e.g., through their job or from the Institute on Aging). Four participants reported that paying their utility bills was a new challenge, and Brilliant Corners staff often provided help with this. Four participants reported Brilliant Corners staff also helped them negotiate issues that arose with landlords, which included help breaking their leases and resolving conflicts with landlords and neighbors.

Most participants reported seeking health care at the same clinic they had used before the move ( $n = 15$ ) and did not have or anticipate any additional trouble getting to their clinic from their new location ( $n = 17$ ). Those going to new clinics made the change because of factors like getting new health insurance or a new job, not because of their participation in MOI.

Although moving was not generally disruptive to benefits and services, it did cause some changes with social connections. Though some participants felt that they saw more of their friends and loved ones since moving into new housing ( $n = 4$ ), most reported that they spent more time alone ( $n = 13$ ). Participants often reported they liked having more time alone ( $n = 8$ ), finding it peaceful and relaxing compared with the “constant noise” of PSH. However, a few participants reported struggling with significant isolation since their move ( $n = 4$ ). These participants tended to be older, had lived in supportive housing for more than 10 years, and lacked nearby family and friends. Some did not realize until after they moved out how much they valued their relationships with the staff and fellow tenants in their former PSH residence.

## Discussion

Overwhelmingly, participants described positive experiences with MOI. In fact, most finished the interview by expressing gratitude for Brilliant Corners staff and their hopes for the program’s continuation and expansion ( $n = 16$ ). All 17 participants who had moved into their new apartments preferred them to their previous housing. Participants reported a significant increase in their quality of life since moving into their new apartment; they felt safer, more independent, and had more freedom, allowing them to feel like they were “part of the world” again. Participants felt that they could be proud of their homes and their position in the community. Notably, participants adopted the language of the program, reporting that MOI allowed them to “move on” from a difficult part of their lives or a difficult living situation, and to feel “normal” again.

Interviews revealed several areas for improvement in the early implementation of the program. Many participants were confused about the overall process of working with Brilliant Corners during the housing search process. Many participants felt that they would have benefitted from additional attention, time, and advocacy from their housing coordinators, who were sometimes overwhelmed and unresponsive. Some of these challenges were caused by growing pains for the program that have been addressed by increasing provider capacity and fine-tuning the application and search process. There is also a certain amount of confusion and anxiety inherent to the housing search process. MOI may benefit, however, from establishing and adhering to clear standards for when Brilliant Corners' housing coordinators will establish contact with participants to begin the housing search. Participants may also benefit from more information at the start of the housing search process about expectations, roles, and responsibilities between themselves and Brilliant Corners staff.

It is encouraging that participants were generally able to retain their connections to employment, health care, and other services after their move. This seems to validate one of the central premises of Moving On—that many individuals currently in PSH can manage independent living in affordable housing without supportive services. We were surprised to learn that most participants were not receiving follow-up services from Brilliant Corners and many were not aware that Brilliant Corners provided these services for up to 12 months after move-in. In future reports, we will try to better determine Brilliant Corners' policies about following up with participants after housing placement and how closely they are adhering to them. We will also assess whether any participants experience challenges after the initial 12 months in housing when they “graduate” from MOI services.

Finally, most participants reported that they spent significantly more time alone since moving into their new housing. Though many participants see this as a benefit, for some it is a significant drawback. In future reports, we will track issues of social isolation after move-in, its effects on participants, and how staff are addressing it.

This report is intended to provide an early look at how the MOI has been implemented and its initial effects on the first cohort of participants. The study has a number of limitations including the small number of interviewees ( $n = 18$ ), which limited the power of this study and its generalizability. Particularly concerning is the low response rate to outreach, with only 20 percent of tenants scheduling interviews after being invited to participate. This likely resulted in a significant amount of self-selection, possibly for participants who were particularly motivated by the \$30 gift certificate; had time and capacity during the day to interview downtown; or were motivated by strong positive or negative feelings about MOI that they wished to share. The recruitment process, which required participants to reach out to researchers to schedule an appointment, rather than being able to schedule directly with

the Brilliant Corners staff member who contacted them, may have contributed to the low response rate. Because this is a small, non-representative sample, we should not generalize their experiences to all MOI participants. Our sample may be biased toward higher functioning participants, who could respond to Brilliant Corners' original message, schedule an interview with the research team, and make it to the downtown location to participate in the interview.

The research team will continue to collect information on MOI participants, staff, and partners as part of the evaluation of the Chronic Homelessness Initiative. We will provide annual updates on the program's process from 2019 to 2022 and a final evaluation report in 2023. Beginning in 2019, we will be interviewing 30 MOI participants each year with a focus on recruiting a representative sample of participants. We will also try to interview individuals in PSH who either applied for and were not selected into the MOI program or were unsuccessful in using their vouchers and remained in PSH. We will use results from this initial study to expand interview questions and probe deeper into common themes that arose in this interview cycle. We will also include input from Brilliant Corners staff, PSH program staff, and additional partners to add depth and greater understanding to the effects and implementation of the MOI and its effects on existing PSH projects. Finally, we will incorporate data on outcomes including housing retention, returns to homelessness, employment, income, health status, and health care costs for MOI participants and a comparison group of individuals with similar characteristics who remained in PSH.

# Appendix. Participant Interview Protocol

Hello. My name is (name), and I'm a part of a team of researchers at the Urban Institute that is conducting an evaluation of Tipping Point's Moving On program. We are conducting a study designed to learn more about the Moving On program, which helps tenants of supportive housing move into independent housing supported by a housing choice voucher.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary: you can choose to not answer any questions and you can stop the interview at any time. If at any time I ask you a question and you don't feel comfortable talking about the topic, or you do not want to answer, feel free to say so. You will still receive \$30 in cash even if you decline to answer our questions.

If you choose to participate in this interview, we will never give your individual answers to anyone outside the research team. Your participation will in no way affect your housing or any other benefits you might be receiving.

With your permission, I would like to tape record the interview to make sure I have your thoughts and experiences recorded correctly. Nobody outside the research team will be allowed to listen to the tapes, and those tapes will be destroyed at the end of our research.

## Consent Form

*If you choose to participate in this interview, I need to go over this consent form with you. It gives you more information about the research study and a telephone number you can call if you have questions later.*

**[Read Consent Form]**

*Do you have any questions or comments before we continue?*

*I am going to turn on the tape recorder now, and we can get started.*

***I'd like to begin with talking about your first experiences with the Moving On program.***

1. How did you learn about the Moving On program?
2. How did you decide to apply to the Moving On program?

3. What were your primary reasons for applying to the Moving On program?
4. On a scale from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), how satisfied have you been with the application process?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Very unsatisfied

Very satisfied

5. What have you found frustrating or difficult about the application process?
6. On a scale from 1 (not frustrating) to 5 (very frustrating), how frustrating have you found the application process?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Not frustrating

Very frustrating

- a) If 1 or 2: What did you find frustrating about the application process?

7. Who helped (is helping) you find a new place?
8. On a scale from 1 (very unhelpful) to 5 (very helpful), how helpful was (is) this assistance?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Very unhelpful

Very helpful

9. On a scale from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), how satisfied were (have you been) you with the process of finding an apartment?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Very unsatisfied

Very satisfied

(If they have moved, 10–24):

***Now, I would like to speak about your new housing.***

10. How do you feel about your new housing?
11. On a scale from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), how satisfied are you with the new housing?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Very satisfied

Very unsatisfied

12. In comparison to your previous housing, how does your new housing compare?

I prefer my new housing

No preference

I prefer my old housing

a. If "I prefer my old housing", why?

13. What do you like most about your new housing?

14. What aspects of living in your own home do you like (most)?

15. What do you dislike most about your new housing?

16. Please describe your new apartment and its amenities. For example, is it a one bedroom or studio?

- a. What floor is it on? Is there an elevator?
- b. What kind of floors are in your apartment?
- c. What appliances came in the kitchen?
- d. Is there laundry in the building?

17. Do you feel anything is missing from your new housing?

Yes

No

Don't know

a. If yes, what do you feel is missing from your new housing?

18. How do you feel about your new neighborhood?

19. In comparison to your previous housing, how does your new neighborhood compare?

I prefer my new neighborhood

No preference

I prefer my old neighborhood

20. Do you feel that you spend more time with other people or more time alone since moving into your new housing?

a. How do you feel about this?

21. On a scale from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), how satisfied are you with the neighborhood?

1

2

3

4

5

Very unsatisfied

Very satisfied

22. Can you tell me about your experiences accessing services since moving into the new housing?

- a. Ex. accessing state/federal benefits, accessing clinics, case managers

23. Do you use the same services as you used previously?

Yes

No

Don't know

- a. If no, why?
- b. If don't know, elaborate

24. Do you go to the same hospital/clinic for healthcare as you did before the move?

Yes

No

I haven't gone since moving in

- a. If you haven't gone since moving in, do you plan to?

***Thank you for talking with me today, I truly appreciate you taking the time to answer my questions. I just have a few final questions before we end our conversation.***

25. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your experiences with the Moving On program?

26. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your new housing?

Do you have any questions?



# Notes

<sup>1</sup> City and County of San Francisco, Controller's Office, City Performance: Homelessness, April 19, 2018, <https://sfcontroller.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Auditing/Homelessness%20Performance%20Overview.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> "New Payment Standards," Leased Housing Department, San Francisco Housing Authority, October 1, 2017, [http://www.sfha.org/Leased%20Housing%20Documents/2018%20REVISED%20Payment%20Standards\\_.pdf](http://www.sfha.org/Leased%20Housing%20Documents/2018%20REVISED%20Payment%20Standards_.pdf).

# About the Authors

**Anna Feiss** is a medical student at the University of California San Francisco. She grew up in Boston and moved out to the Bay Area for college at UC Berkeley. She is passionate about working toward equitable access to health care and addressing the intersection of violence, racism, ableism, and access to care.

**Joshua Bamberger** is an associate clinical professor in the Department of Family Medicine, University of California, San Francisco and the Center for Excellence in Primary Care. He worked for the San Francisco Department of Public Health caring for people living with homelessness for 25 years beginning in 1991. During his time with DPH, Dr. Bamberger coordinated all medical and behavioral health services at the health department's supportive housing programs which grew from one building in 1999 to 43 buildings today serving over 1750 tenants. In 2006, he helped establish the Housing and Urban Health Clinic the first integrated health clinic designed to serve people in supportive housing. From August 2012 to January 2013, he was a special adviser to the executive director of the United States Interagency on Homelessness, the Federal government's homeless policy agency. He is an attending physician at the Downtown VA health clinic and the director of Health and Housing Initiatives at the Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California (NPH) assisting with policy to bridge the gap between housing and health care. Dr. Bamberger is the 2015 recipient of the Beverlee Myers Excellence in Public Health Leadership Award given annually by the California Department of Public Health. He has been practicing family medicine with people living with poverty since 1989.

**Joshua Leopold** is a senior research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where his work focuses on homelessness and affordable housing policy. Before joining Urban, Leopold was a management and program analyst at the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). At USICH, he helped implement the Obama administration's plan for ending chronic homelessness and homelessness among veterans by 2015; he also helped develop a national research agenda related to homelessness. From 2006 to 2011, he worked as an analyst for Abt Associates, where he was involved in numerous studies, including the Annual Homeless Assessment Report, the Costs of Homelessness study, the Study of Rents and Rent Flexibility in Subsidized Housing, and an evaluation of the AmeriCorps program.

## STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

The Urban Institute strives to meet the highest standards of integrity and quality in its research and analyses and in the evidence-based policy recommendations offered by its researchers and experts. We believe that operating consistent with the values of independence, rigor, and transparency is essential to maintaining those standards. As an organization, the Urban Institute does not take positions on issues, but it does empower and support its experts in sharing their own evidence-based views and policy recommendations that have been shaped by scholarship. Funders do not determine our research findings or the insights and recommendations of our experts. Urban scholars and experts are expected to be objective and follow the evidence wherever it may lead.



2100 M Street NW  
Washington, DC 20037

[www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)