

MASTERING A MISUNDERSTOOD ISSUE



Section 8, the federal affordable housing program, has carried various stigmas and negative connotations, even in liberal oases such as Berkeley. Thus, in 1985, the Berkeley Housing Authority embarked on a public education campaign – with Fern Tiger Associates at the helm – to change tenant, landlord, and public attitudes.

The city wanted to encourage landlords to rent to Section 8 tenants; to help tenants understand their right to rent anywhere in the city; and to educate the public about Section 8 and to dispel associated myths. In examining the issues and different audiences’ attitudes, FTA realized the Housing Authority needed three compatible but distinct publications to address its three compatible but distinct goals. For this award-winning series of publications, FTA visited, interviewed, and photographed Section 8 tenants and landlords. The firm also met with Berkeley Housing Authority staff to determine the questions most commonly asked about Section 8.

Each of the three high-quality publications introduced warm, meaningful images of Section 8 tenants and helped readers understand the basics of the program. Each demonstrated errors in the public’s commonly-held misconceptions about the program and explained what readers needed to know in an easily accessible Q&A format. The publications were memorable and effective, leaving a lasting impression on Berkeley residents.

*One of the most popular aspects of the set of three publications on Section 8 housing were “resource lists” that appeared on the back cover of each brochure. These lists provided phone numbers for city and community services often needed by the audiences: Section 8 residents, landlords, and Berkeley citizens. Because the list was likely to come in handy in the future, many readers held on to their publications for years and even reread them numerous times.*



*THE BERKELEY HOUSING AUTHORITY is responsible for carrying out the Housing Assistance Voucher and Public Housing programs for more than 1,600 very low-income, elderly, or disabled Berkeley families.*