



Home Sweet Home Page: New Look, Features for MBHP Website

If you have visited www.mbhp.org in the past few months, you probably noticed a few changes. Recently the website got a face lift, as well as an upgrade to include several new features, such as:

- Online registration for workshops and special events. In just a few clicks you can reserve your spot at an upcoming MBHP event.
- Translation powered by Google. Just click on the “Select language” dropdown menu at the top of the screen and select from 80 languages.
- The online forms also support translation, allowing you to translate the form to your primary language, fill it out, and translate it back to English before submitting.
- Streamlined navigation to help you find what you are looking for, fast.

The website still has all the helpful features you remember from the old site—apartment search, FAQs, clickable links to other organizations and resources.



To ensure that our web presence is helpful to all users, the website has undergone a number of updates to ensure that it is now accessible for persons with disabilities. The MBHP Reasonable Accommodation

Policies & Procedures and Language Assistance Plan are now available on the header of each page, making them much easier to find. Other features include “three-click maximum” navigation that helps users find the information they need quickly, easily understood terminology, and user-friendly forms and documents. Thanks in part to consultation by The Carroll Center for the Blind in Newton, Mass., the updated website also utilizes screen tags and other compatibilities with screen readers. The design of the updated website is also intuitive, making navigation easier for persons with learning or cognitive disabilities. These features also promote universal design principles, facilitating usability of the site, not just for persons with disabilities, but for all users.

Quick Reference Guide

- ▶ How do I Apply for a **Section 8 voucher** or other affordable housing?
- ▶ My family is in danger of **becoming homeless**, what can I do?
- ▶ I have a housing crisis. Are **emergency funds** available?
- ▶ I'm a voucher holder but want to **relocate**. What do I have to do?
- ▶ What is **FSS**, and how can it help me?
- ▶ What is the process for **Inspections**?
- ▶ As a property owner, how do I **track my payments**?
- ▶ How do I know if I've been experiencing **discrimination**?
- ▶ How do I **list my apartment** for rent?
- ▶ My home is in danger of **foreclosure**, can MBHP help?

Looking for answers? Check out the Quick Reference Guide on our new home page.

New Video Promotes Family Self Sufficiency Program

The Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program offers Section 8 voucher holders the opportunity to improve their economic situation. For the nearly 20 years we have administered this program, MBHP has been committed to raising awareness about FSS and increasing program participation.

In December, with funding from The Boston Foundation, MBHP unveiled a new tool to help spread the word about this amazing program: a video summarizing the benefits of participating in FSS. Featuring interviews with MBHP staff as well as current and past FSS participants, the video will initially be played at outreach events and FSS orientation sessions. It is also posted on MBHP's website and YouTube channel.

FSS participants were happy to share their success stories in the hopes of inspiring more eligible families and individuals to apply. "After five years, you're in another

place," said Undrea, an FSS participant. "It's a no-brainer."

One thing that sets FSS apart from other programs is the role of the FSS advisor. Each FSS participant is paired with an advisor who works individually with the participant to identify and achieve goals. FSS participant Tiesha described the relationship with her advisor as "really key."

Nance, another FSS participant, spoke about the escrow account that is opened for each FSS participant to assist them in saving their income, calling it "really beneficial." Nance has used some of her escrow savings to enroll in college courses to work toward a degree in Business Management.

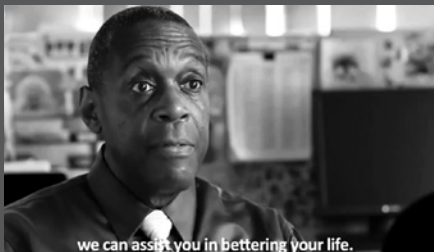
MBHP staff were also eager to explain the advantages of the program. "Our job as an advisor is to try to meet the client where they are and then move forward, providing them with specific client information

that can most benefit them," said FSS Advisor David Kelly.

"The main thing I like to get across to people is: we can assist you in bettering your life," said Marshall James, another FSS advisor at MBHP.

According to FSS Program Manager Jessica Powell, this video was a big undertaking, but one that will reap long-term rewards in terms of recruiting more FSS participants. "The video will be really useful," said Powell. "It's a great snapshot of the program, both the work we do at MBHP and the hard work the participants put into achieving their goals."

"FSS is an important tool to help people work toward bettering their situation," said MBHP Executive Director Chris Norris. "The new video will be a great asset in helping us reach even more individuals and families."



To watch the new FSS video, visit www.mbhp.org or youtube.com/watchmbhp.

Interested in Joining FSS? Applying is Easy!

Visit www.mbhp.org and go to "Family Self-Sufficiency Program" under Programs/Section 8.

Scroll down to download the PDF file or fill out the online form.

Or call the FSS Info Line at (617) 425-6603 and ask for an application.

Or email FSS@mbhp.org and request an application.

Send completed, signed applications to:

Jessica Powell, FSS Program Manager
Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership
125 Lincoln Street, 5th Floor, Boston, MA 02111

MEET MBHP: A Day on the Job with Yamaira Perez, FSS Advisor

As an advisor for the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program, MBHP staff member Yamaira Perez sees the work she does with FSS participants as a partnership. Yamaira regularly goes above and beyond to help participants succeed and inspires them through her positivity, helping them find the strength and motivation they need to make their goals a reality.

Hobbies: I have always been a very active person. My childhood included activities such as ballet, karate, basketball, soccer, and track. Today, whenever I have free time, I like to relax and spend time with my son.

Motto: Live. Laugh. Learn. Grow.

Food: My favorite dish is rice, beans, chicken, and sweet plantains.

Community involvement: I began volunteering at the age of 10 at a local after school program and day care. In college, my sorority, Sigma Lambda Gamma, was always involved within the community, whether that was waking up at 5 a.m. to clean the trash off the road that we had adopted or dancing with the elderly. One of my favorite projects



Yamaira Perez

was when we created the The Women of Color scholarship. We raised over \$3,000 that helped three young women pay for college expenses upon graduating high school.

Motivation: My motivation and strength definitely comes from my son, whether he's running up to give me a hug after a long day or just walking over and telling me he loves me. I push forward because I want my son to know I will never give up on my dreams and I'll keep working hard until I make them reality.

Person she admires: The person I admire the most is my mom. She raised three kids as a single mother, working several jobs while attending school just to give us a better life. We were and still are very blessed to have such a caring and loving person in our life that still looks out for our best interests.

Values: What I value most about myself is that no matter what struggles I go through, I never give up. I know that whatever I'm going through at that time will get resolved. I just have to stay positive and keep pushing forward.

Accomplishment: My greatest accomplishment is connecting with different community resources to help my clients succeed in the goals they have set for themselves. When they walk through the door, I tell them: whatever happened in the past, let it stay in the past. I am here to help you move forward and achieve the goals that you want. I remain sensitive to what my clients have gone through in the past and present, but I focus on the good and relay that positive energy to my clients.

FREE APPS AND COOL DISCOUNTS

Learn about the ladies who helped make Boston what it is today with the **Boston Women's Heritage Trail** app. To download the free app, use your smartphone to visit <http://beaconhill.bwht.org>.

Discover **Boston National Historic Park**, home of the Freedom Trail, and Boston African American National Historic Site, home of the Black Heritage Trail, with a free app from the National Park Service, available either on iTunes or the Android Marketplace.

Got an MBTA CharlieCard? Use it to access discounts at businesses around town. You can view or print the CharlieCard Discount Book at www.mbta.com/riding_the_t/CharlieCard_Discount_Book.



Free Fun In and Around Boston

The calendar says spring starts on March 20—so it's time to get outside! Below are some fun ideas that won't break the bank.

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum offers free admission to:

- Children under 18
- U.S. military and families
- Anyone named Isabella

Location: 280 The Fenway, Boston

MBTA: Green Line E train to Museum of Fine Arts Station



*Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
(photo provided by AtHandGuides.com)*

Museum of Fine Arts

Upcoming free days at the Museum of Fine Arts include:

- Monday, May 26 (Memorial Day)
- Every Wednesday night after 4 p.m. (admission is by voluntary contribution)

Location: Avenue of the Arts, 465 Huntington Avenue, Boston

MBTA: Green Line E train to Museum of Fine Arts Station or Orange Line train to Ruggles Station

Harvard Museum of Natural History

Harvard Museum of Natural History, home to the incredible Great Mammal Hall, offers free admission to Massachusetts residents every Sunday morning (year-round), 9 a.m.–noon and on Wednesdays, 3–5 p.m. (September through May). Please be prepared to present proof of residency (driver's license or utility bill). Children under 3 are always free.

Location: 26 Oxford St., Cambridge

MBTA: Red Line to Harvard Square

Massachusetts State House

Learn about how your government works by taking a free tour of the Massachusetts State House. Tours are given weekdays year-round, 10 a.m.–3:30 p.m. Self-guided materials are available if visitors do not wish to join a conducted tour. The building is open from 8:45 a.m.–5 p.m. The State House is closed on weekends and holidays.

Location: Downtown Boston, Beacon & Park Streets

MBTA: Take the Red or Green Line to Park Street Station



Massachusetts State House



Bunker Hill Monument (photo: Peter H. Dreyer; City of Boston Archives)

Bunker Hill Monument

Climb the stairs to the top of Bunker Hill Monument. Learn about this site of the first major battle of the Revolutionary War and get an amazing view of the city. Hours: Sept. 1–June 30, daily, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. (last climb at 4:30 p.m.).

Location: Monument Square, Charlestown

MBTA: Orange Line to Community College Station

Boston Public Library

The Boston Public Library offers free public tours highlighting the architecture and many works of famed sculptors and painters. Tours meet in the lobby of the McKim Building (Dartmouth Street entrance). For more information, call 617-859-2373. Mon., 2:30 p.m.; Tues., Thurs., 6 p.m. Wed., Fri., Sat., 11 a.m.; Sun., 2 p.m.

Location: Copley Square, Boston

MBTA: Green Line to Copley Street

If you have a library card in good standing, you have access to the Boston Public Library's free and discount passes to museums including Boston Children's Museum and the New England Aquarium.

Free Tax Preparation Advice

There are organizations and offices all over the state which will provide free tax filing services for eligible families. Here are a few in our region. Contact them for more information.

Bunker Hill Community College

250 New Rutherford Ave., Rm. D206
Charlestown, MA 02129

Tues. and Wed., 10 a.m.–8 p.m.

Thurs., 10 a.m.–1 p.m., 2:15–5 p.m.

Fri., 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

To make an appointment visit
www.bhcc.mass.edu/vita

The Neighborhood Developers (two locations)

4 Gerrish Avenue
Chelsea, MA 02150

Mon. and Wed., 3–8 p.m.

Sat., 9 a.m.–2 p.m.

Revere Public Library
179 Beach St., Revere, MA

Tues. and Thurs., 3–8 p.m.

Sat., 9 a.m.–2 p.m.

(617) 889-1375, ext. 26

taxes@tndinc.org

Urban Edge

1542 Columbus Avenue
Roxbury, MA 02119

Tues. and Thurs., 5–8 p.m.

Sat., 9 a.m.–12 noon

(617) 989-9326

freetaxprep@urbanedge.org

Go to <http://masscashback.ehs.state.ma.us> and type in your ZIP code to get a listing of all the free tax assistance centers near your home

Please Note: We strongly advise against taking out a Refund Anticipation Loan (RAL) if you are offered one by a tax preparation service. When you file electronically and use direct deposit, your refund arrives promptly and you get to keep all of it (rather than paying fees and/or interest on an RAL). The National Consumer Law Center estimates that these fees can range between \$30 and \$130, but can be potentially much more due to myriad “add-on” fees.

SPRING 2014 TENANT WORKSHOPS IN BOSTON AND CHELSEA

MBHP Workshops

MBHP workshops are held at the MBHP office: 125 Lincoln Street, 5th Floor, Boston, MA 02111.

Reservations are recommended. To attend, call (617) 425-6605 or email workshops@mbhp.org. You can also register online at www.mbhp.org.

Requests for reasonable accommodations and language assistance must be made no later than two weeks before workshop date.

Affordable Housing Basics

Tuesday, March 4, 10–11:30 a.m.

The session is open to tenants seeking information about affordable housing options. Learn about criteria, wait lists, and how to apply.

Housing Strategies Clinic

Become Empowered and Effective in Meeting Your Housing Goals

Tuesday, March 18, 10–11:30 a.m.

or

Tuesday, April 15, 10–11:30 a.m.

Finding and keeping housing is difficult. There are issues of affordability, location, access to services and the quality of the housing. The clinic speakers will provide you with information, strategies and problem solving as valuable tools to assist you to meet your housing goals. The topics in the clinic are housing search strategies, utility resources and fair housing.

CONNECT Workshops

CONNECT workshops take place at The Neighborhood Developers: 4 Gerrish Avenue, Chelsea, MA 02150. To register, or for more information, contact Elsa Jimenez at (617) 889-1375 (ext 45) or ejimenez@connectnow.org.

Affordable Housing Basics

Monday, March 24, 6–7:30 p.m.

This session is open to tenants seeking information about affordable housing options. Learn about criteria, wait list, and how to apply.

Apartment Search and Utilities

Monday, April 28, 6–7:30 p.m.

This workshop provides tenants with recommendations and information about finding a market-rate apartment. The workshop is appropriate only for tenants who can afford a market-rate apartment or who have a housing voucher.



Connect with MBHP!

MBHP updates can come to you! Like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter to stay up-to-date on MBHP happenings and the latest news on affordable housing.

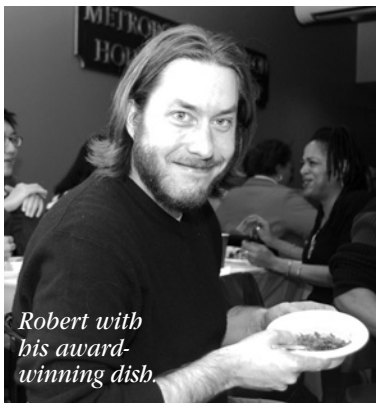


www.facebook.com/MBHPHome



@MBHPHousing

Cooking with MBHP



Robert with his award-winning dish.

Each year, MBHP celebrates the diversity of our staff (and our mutual love of good food) with a potluck lunch. Called the Around the World Luncheon, staff are invited to bring in a dish that reflects their cultural heritage. To make things exciting, there is also a competition for Best Dish. The 2013 prize went to

HCEC Housing Search Case Manager Robert Butman, who was kind enough to share his award-winning recipe with *mbhp@home* readers.

Moroccan Lentil Stew Recipe

Total time about 1 hour
Serves 4

Ingredients

1 tablespoon olive oil
¾ lb. spicy Italian sausage, casings removed
2 medium onions, chopped
2 gloves garlic, chopped
6 cups chicken or vegetable broth
6 cups (1 bunch) stemmed and torn mustard greens or kale
1 lb. (about 2 medium) white sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces

1 cup dried lentils
salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a large pot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the sausage and cook 8–10 minutes, stirring to crumble. Add the onions and cook 3–5 minutes or until just a bit soft, tossing occasionally. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute.
2. Add the broth, mustard greens, sweet potatoes, lentils, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer partially covered until potatoes and lentils are soft, about 30–35 minutes.
3. Serve and enjoy.