

Housing lottery: Many are called, but few are chosen

The man with a well-worn duffel bag at his feet asked, "What are my chances of getting picked? Pretty low, huh?"

"No, no, no," said Kelvin Nance, assistant manager of Civic Center Residence, an SRO hotel owned by TNDC. "Think positive, always think positive." Nance placed the man's application in a large cardboard box that already held maybe 50 applications.

Sitting at a table with Nance was TNDC Portfolio Manager Heather Gladding. They were on the ground floor of the hotel accepting applications from people hoping their names would be pulled in a lottery that happens rarely — this is TNDC's fourth since 1999.

Winners are placed on a waiting list for a room at the Civic Center Residence. The first seven will be able to move into one of the coveted vacant rooms.

Vacancies are rare

Rarely are there vacancies in TNDC's 1,568 affordable housing units in its 20 buildings (of which 18 are in the Tenderloin), says Janet Thompson, TNDC's occupancy manager. "Housing is hard to find and people usually stay, try to be good tenants and adjust to independent living," she said.

Eight hundred people applied recently to get on TNDC's Plaza Ramona apartments waiting list. Only 199 made it to the list from the April 8 lottery pull. Of the "winners," the first six pulled got the six vacant studio apartments at the Plaza Ramona. The other 193 are still waiting.

Thompson is in charge of updating the waiting lists. When a list falls to about 50 applicants she's been able to reach and confirm that they are still interested, she reopens the application process for another pull. The number of stale applications doesn't necessarily mean those people have found housing in a TNDC unit. Many people on the lists move without leaving contact information, go to jail, or change contact numbers.



Janet Thompson, TNDC's occupancy manager: "I feel so good when I tell them they did make it."

"I just wish we could get everybody on the list," says Thompson. "But people would rather reapply than stay on a list four to five years."

Most applicants, she says, live in some form of transitional housing and have been homeless. She also sees a fair number of homeless applicants who give "general delivery" as their address.

Who can apply

Applicants do not necessarily need a rental history. A jail record does not prevent them from being viable applicants. But an eviction in the last three years, or two within five years, disqualifies them. An applicant also must be at least 18 years old, have a copy of their Social Security card and a copy of another type of ID, such as a driver's license, passport, or Resident Alien card.

Each must also have proof of income: food stamp receipts, GA or SSI payments, or a notarized letter from a social worker stating the applicant's source of income and copies of bank statements.

Different Requirements

Each building and type of unit — SRO, studio, one and two-bedroom apartments — has different income requirements, but individuals or families cannot spend more than 60% of their income on rent.

According to the TNDC's Web site, 86% of TNDC tenants earn 30% of San Francisco's median income, which, it says, works out to \$10,000 a year for an individual. The average monthly income of a single adult TNDC tenant, the site says, is \$669. To rent a room in the Civic Center Residence, the lowest monthly income needed in all the TNDC's units, the minimum is \$469.

Mercy Housing's lottery

Mercy Housing Corp., with 12,000 units nationwide and 543 of them in the Tender-



loin, has a similar set of requirements for applicants. Mercy has occasional lottery pulls, but right now all of Mercy's Tenderloin properties are full, says Amy Widstrom, resource developer and special events coordinator. Waiting lists are full, too.

When they do need to get the word out that applications will be accepted for a pending lottery, both Widstrom and Thompson advertise in local papers, leaflet service agencies that cater to the target population, and leave notices at the buildings with the open wait lists, as well as other affordable housing buildings within their nonprofits.

"It is really sad when you can't help people — I really get emotional sometimes," says Thompson, a statuesque woman with warm eyes and a honey voice. Her eyes well up as she admits to the daily grind of fielding desperate phone calls from apartment-seekers.

"I feel so good"

But, she adds, after a lottery pull, "I feel so good when I tell them they did make it — I feel so happy...and then

they ask, 'What does that mean?'" She then says she may have to tell them, "Well, you're No. 135 on the waiting list, but hold on and try to stay in touch with me."

And many do. She says she gets to know them so well that she'll be able to identify a caller just by the sound of his or her voice.

One man, Patrick, who is homeless, concerns her. He has a Section 8 voucher, which can involve a lot of HUD paperwork for the landlord but subsidizes a large portion of the rent. He's at the top of Plaza Ramona's waiting list. But all his luck may run out soon,

because last Thompson heard from Patrick, his voucher was due to expire by April 10, yet he had not found an affordable place to rent.

"He was really stressed out Thursday [April 11]," says Thompson.

She plans to keep him on the TNDC waiting list even though without the voucher he may not qualify for the minimum income to rent a vacant apartment. She hopes that if she can arm him with a letter from TNDC stating how close he is to finding an eligible apartment he may get an extension on his voucher.

"That's a lot of money"

If an apartment opens while Patrick is at the top of the TNDC list, he will need to come up with \$500 for the security deposit and \$534 for the rent to move in. "That's \$1,034 bucks; that's a lot of money," Thompson says. With his SSI, Patrick could probably come up with the rent, but not the security deposit. In the past, agencies such as Catholic Charities could help people with security deposit requirements, but that funding has dried up, she says.

The application process is a no-brainer to John Tran, 63, a fit, neat, jeans-clad man, who says that his experience taking tests at City College pre-

pared him well. He is among the stream of people coming into Civic Center Residence's hall to drop off completed applications. It turns out that his application has a hitch. His monthly income with GA and food stamps combined is \$16 shy of the required minimum for the smallest room, \$469.

Gladding advises him to bring in copies of job applications he says he's filled out recently for security guard jobs. She also recommends that Tran visit 201 Eddy, where TNDC offers job referral services. He says he's fluent in Chinese, Vietnamese and French and speaks passable English. "No one wants to hire an old man," he says.

Before he leaves, he helps Gladding explain to an elderly Chinese couple that the rooms at the SRO are only for single adults, so married couples will have to live in separate rooms.

Lining up for the lottery

One week after the application process opened for the lottery at Civic Center Residence, about 30 people waited outside the hotel. Charles Buckley said he'd tried to get on the list previously but didn't make it. But he said he was confident he'd get on today because he's a lucky man.

At exactly 9 a.m., the desk clerk ushered in the lottery hopefuls. They took seats in the same large room where they'd brought their applications and gotten a raffle ticket number.

Thompson stood at a small table, and announced in a firm voice that those chosen will be able to start the process of moving in once they clear the security deposit and first month's rent. All the others will be placed on a waiting list in the order in which they're called. If applicants aren't on site for the lottery, their names and spots on the waiting list will be displayed outside TNDC's main office.

Then Thompson began calling out the numbers on the raffle tickets, which she pulled from a manila envelope.

A slender black man with a baseball cap whooped. He was one of the winners in the top 10. A cheer rang out from the audience.

When Thompson asked for a volunteer to pull the numbers from the envelope, the man with the cap, Willie Clark, stepped up. Later he said, "I prayed a lot last night."

The lucky man, Charles Buckley, made it to the waiting list but not to the top seven. He was called after the first 70 tickets had been pulled. But he has a winning strategy: Along with his good luck, he said, "I have patience, too." Maybe that's what Nance meant by thinking "positive." ■



Nineteen-year-old Dia in her new studio, decorated with favorite images and precious possessions: "I feel like I'm among friends here."



PHOTOS: LENNY LIMJOCO

Low-in-the-dark stars dance across the ceilings. On the wall behind a cocoonish couch-bed are artfully displayed photographs of the elaborate graffiti inside the N-Judah tunnel. Books and CDs line one wall. Handmade African-inspired jewelry stretches across a ledge under the window. Christmas lights drape the faux fireplace. The little kitchen is almost tidy and the bathroom is spotless.

This is Dia's studio apartment at 864 Ellis. She made the jewelry and took the photos that decorate her new home, which she moved into in December. Her first apartment.

The building, a half-block east of Van Ness Avenue, is a five-story SRO that burned in 1997 and has been reincarnated as subsidized housing for young men and women who are homeless or likely to become homeless.

Dia (the name she asked *The Extra* to use) and her cotenants live there independently, each in his or her own studio. They're allowed to have overnight guests only nine times a month and must attend a monthly tenants meeting. Otherwise, they're on their own, much like students in a college dorm.



TNDC's 864 Ellis Apartments opened in December.

TNDC's new housing for young people

This is permanent housing. Tenants can stay indefinitely, as long as they were between 18 and 24 when they moved in, pay their rent and remain "low-income."

TNDC bought the 25-unit building in 1998 — acquisition and renovation cost about \$5 million, according to TNDC's Craig Adelman — and the first young people moved in right before New Year's. Much of the building's interior painting was done by the Volunteer Construction Workcrew, a collaborative program of TNDC's after-school program, Larkin Street Youth Services and the Boys & Girls Club of San Francisco. Several crew members were lucky enough to snag one of the precious affordable apartments.

Nineteen-year-old Dia is like many of her fellow tenants: This is not only her first apartment, it's the first time she's lived alone and — most important — the first

Marjorie Beggs

permanent roof she's had over her head for years.

"I've lived in San Francisco off and on for three years," Dia said. "I was a runaway."

Stable housing is essential for youth with troubled pasts, but they have other needs as well. So TNDC contracts with other service providers, primarily Larkin Street, for case management, medical care, HIV/AIDS services, employment counseling and more for their young tenants.

Dia found out about the new apartments at Larkin Street, where she was a client, and she jumped at the chance, she said. "I was third in line to put in my application," she said proudly. Applications were accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

Most of the other tenants also were Larkin clients, Dia said. "I feel like I'm among friends here — it takes away some of the stress of living alone."

The ubiquitous stress is money. Rents are subsidized with Section 8 HUD funding;

tenants pay 30% of their income. When Dia was on General Assistance, she paid \$106 a month. Now that she's off GA, her rent is supposed to drop to \$12, but that hasn't happened yet and she's not working right now.

"I sometimes don't have much food around," she said. In the corner are a couple of boxes — the traditional "care packages" from Dia's family back in New Jersey. "Yes," she said, "they are really proud of me."

And if she keeps on this track, their pride will grow. She just completed a carpenter training course and has plotted out an ambitious future for herself: She's getting her GED and, that done, she plans to go to City College, then U.C. Berkeley to study law and speech. ■

TNDC Tenderloin Projects Under Development

	PROPERTY	ESTIMATED START	ESTIMATED END	UNITS	DESCRIPTION
1	Ambassador Hotel 55 Mason	November 2001	March 2003	134 SRO	Major rehabilitation and seismic retrofit.
2	Dalt Residence 34 Turk	June 2002	November 2003	175 SRO	Seismic retrofit and rehabilitation. Ground-floor commercial.
3	Maria Manor 174 Eddy	June 2002	June 2003	119 SRO	Preservation. Seismic retrofit and rehabilitation. Ground-floor commercial.
4	Alexander Residence 230 Eddy	Fall 2002	December 2003	179 SRO	Preservation. Rehabilitation with added ground-floor commercial.
5	Antonia Manor 180 Turk	October 2002	October 2003	134 SRO	Preservation. Rehabilitation with added ground-floor commercial.
6	145 Taylor	February 2003	May 2004	67 family	New construction family housing.
7	West Hotel 141 Eddy	February 2003	December 2003	106 SRO	Major rehabilitation and seismic retrofit.
8	999 Geary at Polk	July 2004	December 2005	130 senior	New construction, 12 stories with ground-floor commercial and support services.
9	Pavilion	No date yet	No date yet	400	Exhibition pavilion, parking, market-rate, affordable housing, ground-floor commercial.

Source: Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corp.



One of several lottery hopefuls who volunteered to pull winning raffle tickets.