

How Do the Lives of Participants in a Housing Mobility Program Change after They Move? A Case Study of the Mobility Connection Program

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Overview

This brief outlines the results of an assessment of Mobility Connection, a housing mobility program in St. Louis, Missouri. Mobility Connection is administered through Ascend STL and this assessment was conducted in partnership with the Social Policy Institute at Washington University in St. Louis. Our research focused on answering the following questions:

- How do Mobility Connection participants report their lives changing since moving to a High Opportunity Area?
- How do participants feel about the quality of the Mobility Connection program?

To answer these questions, researchers administered a novel survey to 20 Mobility Connection participants who had completed a move with support from the program.¹

The Mobility Connection Program

Mobility Connection is a housing mobility program that helps individuals and families with Housing Choice Vouchers in St. Louis move to High-Opportunity Areas, which Ascend defines as having a 10% poverty rate or less.² In partnership with the St. Louis City and County housing authorities, Mobility Connection provides case management and serves as a liaison between residents and landlords throughout the moving process.

There were some clear differences between the areas in which residents lived before and after their moves, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Neighborhood Characteristics Before and After Moving

Characteristics	Pre-Move	Post-Move	% Change
Poverty Rate	22.34%	7.63%	66% Decrease
High School Drop-Out Rate	13.08%	7.41%	43% Decrease
Unemployment Rate	12.77%	7.62%	40% Decrease
Median Household Income (\$)	40,631	65,786	62% Increase

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Motivations for Moving

The Housing Choice Voucher program is intended to offer households greater choice in where they want to live. We asked participants why they wanted to move from their existing residence, and Figure 1 summarizes their responses.

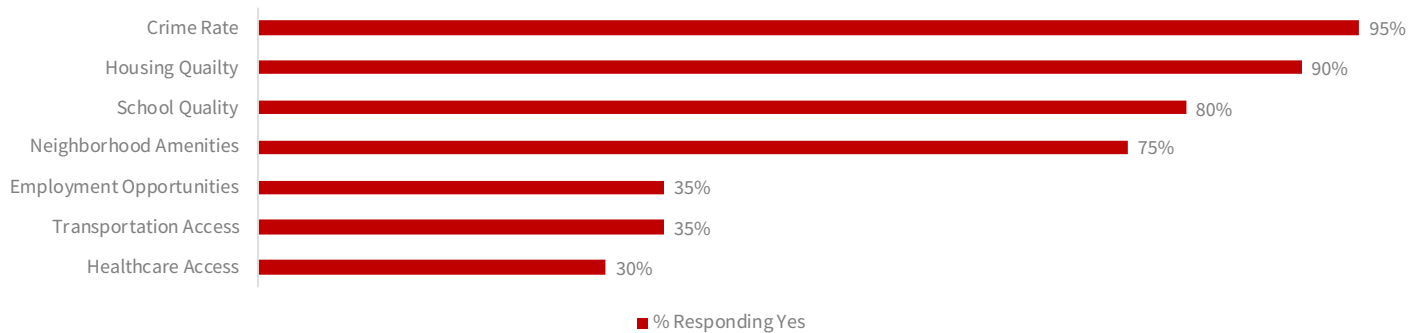
Importantly, most participants were not motivated to move by economic factors, but by factors related to the safety and general well-being of their families. These included a desire for lower crime rates, better housing and school quality, and more resources like grocery stores and parks in their neighborhoods. One mother explained the concern for safety she felt while living in her previous neighborhood:

“My house was broken into and then my car was broken into... there was a shooting up the street from the house, so I just didn’t feel safe... I didn’t feel safe with [my son] being home by himself in that neighborhood.”

Quality of Life Changes since Moving

We also asked participants about whether their perceived quality of life regarding their neighborhood, children, accessibility, general well-being, and health had improved since moving. Figure 2 summarizes their responses to these questions, where a “5” indicated that they strongly agreed their lives had improved, and a “1” indicated they strongly disagreed. Participants generally agreed that their quality of life had improved in every metric we measured, and they most strongly agreed that their neighborhood quality had improved.

Figure 1. Motivations for Moving among Mobility Connection Participants (n = 20)



Note: Participants could select more than one option.

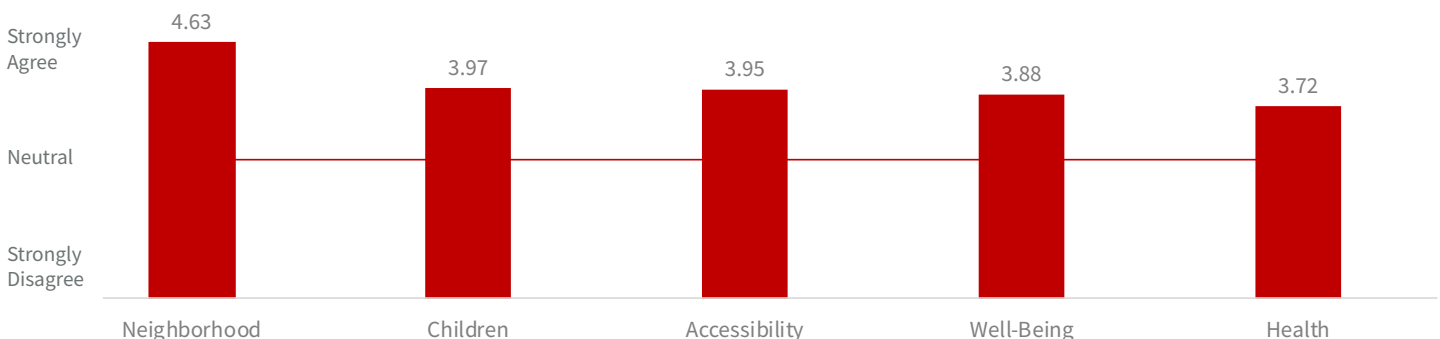
These results, in conjunction with the results above, indicate that participants connected the outcomes of their move with the impact on their more immediate needs like security, neighborhood amenities, and school quality. We also assessed the degree to which participants’ outlook on the future had changed since the move:

- 55% said their hopefulness about their own futures had increased (n = 20)
- 72% said their hopefulness for their children's futures had increased (n = 18)

Experiences with Mobility Connection

The majority of survey participants were satisfied with the Mobility Connection program. The average rating (on a scale of 1 – 10) for overall satisfaction with the program was a 9.8. Participants explained that the program is helpful, that Ascend goes above and beyond to move people to High Opportunity Areas, and that they had recommended the program to others in their communities.

Figure 2. Quality of Life Improvements After Moving: Scale of 1 - 5 (n = 20)



Note: The red line indicates that neutrality would be scored as 3.

A participant explained:

“I feel like they assisted me every step of the way from the beginning to the end. When I was moving in, they even followed up after I got settled in my place... they helped me through the entire process.”

In general, Mobility Connection seems to be an effective housing mobility program that helps improve quality of life for participants. The Social Policy Institute recommends further evaluation of the Mobility Connection Program in terms of its short- and long-term outcomes (e.g., employment, school achievement, health status) in addition to participants’ experiences and perceptions.

¹ Staff from Ascend STL reached out to all eligible households to obtain their consent to participate in the research. Households that completed the survey received a \$20 gift card as compensation.
² Ascend STL also defines High Opportunity Areas as neighborhoods in which 10% or less of the housing units are subsidized.