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A new program designed to help Indians buy homes in off-reservation locations has been launched by the Employment Assistance Branch of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Robert Lo Bennett announced today.

The plan is another building block in the Bureau's efforts to develop a real sense of belonging in the off-reservation Indian who decides to settle in the city.

Confined mostly to the major cities where training programs are effectively being carried out for Indian families, a $500,000 appropriation for fiscal year 1968 is designed to supplement other activities that help Indian people make the transition from reservation to urban living.

Bennett pointed out that for some years the Bureau has guided Indian families who wish to leave reservations and move to the cities by first informing them of the benefits of the Employment Assistance Program in various cities. They receive counseling and guidance on job opportunities, institutional training, cost of living, climate, housing, and community resources. The head of the household may go into direct employment or adult vocational training. When this is determined, he and his family are guided to go to the place that has the kind of vocational training or employment he prefers. The entire family is transported to a major 9ity.

Meanwhile, the BIA Employment Assistance Officer in the city the Indian family · has chosen is informed about all members of the family and when they will arrive. Arrangements for temporary housing are made for the family. When the head of the household has chosen the place he will work or the school he will attend, BIA counselors help the family find suitable permanent housing. Also, the counselors guide the couple on how to shop in a city, enroll their children in school, use public transportation, and use community resources.

"Yet, too often, somewhere in the course of these plans, something happens to destroy the Indian's confidence, his sense of identity," Bennett said, "In many cases, the desire for a home and family, with a plot of ground, is frustrated by an inability to pay."

By the time the man is established in a job or has finished his schooling and is ready to take on a job, the family is usually pretty well adjusted to city life. After the man goes to work, often a real need arises for the permanently of a home and a family neighborhood in which to bring up the children. But the Indian family that has spent month getting itself accustomed to a new life and surroundings, including work, home, and school, doesn't usually have cash set aside for a down payment on a home.

Under the new program, after the man has shown satisfactory work habits, the Bureau puts up the money for the down payment and closing costs, no strings attached. Employment Assistance staffers realistically evaluate the chance the family has to keep up regular mortgage payments, and check the prospects of the community in which the Indians want to live.

Generally, requirements are that the Indian applicant for these funds must have been steadily employed

off the reservation for at least 6 months, or if he has been in training, he must have been steadily employed at least 3 months. In both cases he must have demonstrated job and family stability and shown a real desire to become a home owner. A Bureau counselor then guides the applicants on how to secure a loan.

Typical of the current success of .the program is the story of Phillip Starr, an Arikara Indian from Emmet, N.D.

Starr went to Chicago in March this year leaving his wife and six children on the Fort Berthold Reservation. He was finding it increasingly difficult to support his family in the reservation area and felt that with his background in various jobs, including meat-cutting learned in the Army, he would have better employment opportunities in the city.

The Jewel Tea Company was impressed with his sincerity and willingness to learn and he was soon earning $170 a week, including overtime, as a junior engineer mechanic. The work involves the maintenance of conveyor equipment, welding, and the repair of battery-operated fork lifts.

Soon, Starr could afford to have his family with him, but his small savings blocked attempts to find a home that was large enough and in a proper community for bringing up children.

The new Home Purchase Program was the answer to Starr's and many Indians' problems. The Chicago Employment Assistance housing specialist had found few rental units available and rental rates exceedingly high. In looking into purchases, Starr himself found one that exactly suited his purpose in suburban North Lakes, Ill.

The two-story home has three bedrooms and a large living room on a 60' x 130' lot. A Bureau specialist inspected the home and was impressed. It was located in a good neighborhood and close to both shopping and transportation. Schools were within a few blocks, with a large playground nearby.

Under the home purchase plan, the Starr family was given a small grant which was sufficient, with Starr’s own savings, for the down payment and closing costs. The family has moved into their new home. Today, Phil Starr is remodeling the upper half of the home to provide additional space.

The same program is being launched in Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Jose and other major cities.