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Tulalip housing program back

After years of resolving inappropriate spending by the tribes' housing department, HUD releases \$6 million of frozen funds.

By [Krista J. Kapralos](#) / Herald Writer

TULALIP - By this time next year, 16 families on a waiting list of more than 300 Tulalip Tribal members will be well into the process of building their own homes.

It's a small step - an answer for fewer than 6 percent of the families on the list - but it is movement for a tribal department that was stalled for years while federal housing officials unraveled a knot of inappropriate spending, embezzlement and bungled accounting.

"We're out of HUD jail," tribal attorney Michael Taylor said, referring to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "We're not even on probation."

In August, tribal leaders were notified that they had successfully resolved the issues listed in the federal audit.

HUD officials could not be reached by phone Friday to talk about the federal audit.

About \$6 million in previously frozen funds from the federal department of Housing and Urban Development are now freed for use, Taylor said. About \$1 million will be used to develop a lot that will eventually be a neighborhood comprised of the 16 new homes.

The families who will build their own homes will do so through Housing Hope. The Everett-based nonprofit group helps low-income families throughout Snohomish County get low-interest loans to build their own homes. Housing Hope runs the program through grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This is the first time Housing Hope will work on an Indian reservation.

None of the 16 tribal families have been chosen yet.

Under Housing Hope, up to 35 percent of the work can be contracted out, but the family and other volunteers must provide the rest of the labor.

Each family begins mortgage payments at the end of the construction. The payments will be 30 percent of the household's income.

"It's a hard program. It's a lot of work, and it's non-ending for the better part of a year," Housing Hope Executive Director Ed Petersen said.

The homes will be built in two groups of eight. Each group will build their homes simultaneously - no

one will take ownership of a home until all the homes are finished, Petersen said.

Tribal members who are interested in applying for the program should contact the tribal Housing Department, Petersen said.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which provides grant money for Housing Hope's self-help program, suggested that the nonprofit work with the Tulalip Tribes.

"(The tribes) had this land, and they wanted to do this kind of program, and they're interested in borrowing our know-how and expertise," Petersen said.

Nearly 10 percent of all Tulalip tribal members who live on the reservation are on the Housing Department's waiting list.

It's not an unusual scenario.

Though some tribes are becoming increasingly affluent thanks to gambling revenues, many tribal members continue to live in squalid conditions, according to the National American Indian Housing Council.

Fourteen percent of all reservation homes don't have electricity. Twenty percent don't have telephone service, and more than 65 percent of reservation roads are unpaved.

The Tulalip Tribes' Housing Department also plans to build 25 rental homes with money obtained through tax credits through the Indian Housing Program.

Those homes are expected to be completed in two years. Tribal members who already own homes can also apply for grants for home repairs.

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