

Spring 2019

# The Changes of Financial Stability and Quality of Life of Cambodian Immigrants and Refugees as a Result of their Participation in a First-Time Homebuyer Program in Lowell

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The Changes of Financial Stability and Quality of Life of Cambodian Immigrants and Refugees  
as a Result of Their Participation in a First-Time Homebuyer Program in Lowell

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SIT Graduate Institute, PIM 77

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in  
Sustainable Development at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, V.T., U.S.A

Capstone Seminar May 2019

Advisor: Bruce Dayton

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the changes of financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees in Lowell, Massachusetts as a result of their participation in a first-time homebuyer program. It also provides recommendations from the program participants about ways to improve the program for future program participants and tips for future program participants to get ready to purchase their first home. There were seventeen research participants. Fifteen of them were the program participants who completed the program. One of them was a program coordinator and the other one was a program implementer. Data were collected by two methods, a survey and interviews. Twelve of the program participants were requested to complete the survey and three were interviewed. The program coordinator and program implementer were also interviewed. The results of the study showed that the knowledge, skills, and assistances that the program offered to the participants resulted in noticeable changes in financial stability and quality of life. The study recommends the program to include the pros and cons of buying new and old home, to entail the costs of fixing different things in the house, to have a Khmer instructor to teach the program. It also recommends the future program participants to ask questions when they take the program, check conditions of the house that they are going to buy, be clear on how to buy a house, find the bank that offers low interest rate for mortgages, have a right team of professionals, have full commitment when they decide to buy a house, and take the first-time homebuyer program.

*Keywords: Financial Stability and Quality of Life*

## **Introduction**

First-time homebuyer programs are programs that are designed to provide information, knowledge, skills, and assistance for the program participants to understand the whole home buying process and get guidance to purchase their first home. People take the programs because they do not understand about the whole home buying process in the United States. It is quite a complicated process that requires homebuyers to learn about the whole process before they are ready to buy their first home.

Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership (MVHP) is the nonprofit organization that provides the Home Buyer Training Program in Lowell, Massachusetts. The Home Buyer Training Program is a program that offers comprehensive seminars for first-time homebuyers. It consists of 10 hours of instruction on ten different topics such as overview of the home buying process, mortgage application process, down payment assistance programs, legal aspects of purchasing, home inspections, household budgeting, building good credit, insurance requirements, multi-unit housing options, and responsible home ownership. The program is designed to simplify the entire home buying process for first-time homebuyers from making the rent or own decision to closing on a property (MVHP, 2018).

This research studies the changes of financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees as a result of their participation in MVHP's first-time homebuyer program in Lowell. The purpose of the research is to get a deep understanding about the changes of financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees as a result of their participation in a first-time home buyers program in Lowell, Massachusetts. The research paper also provided recommendations from the program participants about ways to improve the program for future program participants and tips for future program participants to get ready to

purchase their first home.

The reason I choose the topic is because I have seen many people in Cambodian community in Lowell still struggle with finance and do not have good quality of life. Even though they have been living in the United States for a long time, they have not realized their American Dream. Since I have been living in Lowell, I have seen that there is a difference between people who have their own home and people who do not have their own home and have to rent a place to live. Through my observation, I have seen in general people who own a home are better off in terms of finance and quality of life than people who rent a home. I found that some of the people who own a home took the first-time homebuyer program. So, I am interested in studying in deep about the changes of financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees as a result of their participation in the first-time homebuyer program in Lowell.

This topic of research is very important because it gives people in the Cambodian community ideas on how to improve their financial stability and quality of life. Through my experience working with the Cambodian community in Lowell, I have heard people mention all the time that they have difficulties with their finance and quality of live. Even though they have been living the U.S for a long time, they have not been able to realize their American Dream of owning a home. This research provides guidance for people to solve the difficulties that they have. The research core questions are listed as following:

- How have the financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees changed as a result of their participation in Lowell MA's first-time homebuyer program?

- What are the recommendations from program participants about ways to improve the program for future participants and tips for future program participants to get ready to purchase their first home?

There are two main key concepts in the research. One is financial stability and the other one is quality of life. According to Garry J. Schinasi, “financial stability is defined in terms of its ability to facilitate and enhance economic processes, manage risks, and absorb shocks” (Schinasi, 2004, p. 1). Quality of life is defined as “individual’s perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns” (WHO, 1997, p. 1).

### **Background of the Program**

MVHP’s first-time home buyer program is consisted of two classes on two Saturdays. Each class is about 5 hours starting from 9:30 am to 2 pm. John, a program implementer, mentioned that the program is a 10-hour course. It includes everything in terms of purchasing a property. The program starts off by providing an overview of the whole home buying process and explains what is going to happen during the home buying process. After that, there are lender, real estate broker, attorney, home inspector, insurance agent, and appraisal people. The program explains who everybody is, who they work for, who their loyalty is to whether it is the buyer or the seller, and how they are compensated or how they get paid. Once program participants understand the whole process, the program implementer goes to each of the aspects of the home buying process in depth. Then, the program implementer spends a substantial amount of time talking about mortgages and brings a lender who is a guest speaker representing one of the local banks to talk about mortgages. The lender talks about the whole mortgage application process, what is involved with, how a bank qualifies a person, how they determine people who are

eligible for mortgage, and how much they would qualify a mortgage for the person depending on the person's credit history, savings, and debts. And, the program implementer talks about some of the special mortgage products that are available for the first-time home buyer program. After that, the program implementer goes over the legal aspect so that buyers know what happens, what a buyer's attorney does, what a bank attorney does, and what happens at the closing. Moreover, the program implementer also speaks about the contracts, the initial offer to purchase, the purchase and sale agreement, and the title insurance. Then, the program implementer discusses about home inspection. When somebody decides to buy a house, they have a right to get home inspection done by professionals. Besides that, the implementer shares about how to find a good home inspector, what he or she looks for, what kind of report buyers get, and how much it costs. In addition, the implementer invites a home inspector to come to talk to the class about what a home inspection entails. Then, there is a real estate broker talks about the role of the broker and the differences between buyer agents and seller agents. Then, the program implementer goes over insurance, the important of having owner insurance and all different options and things that buyers want to cover for. Then, the implementer talks about appraisal process and when the bank sends an independent appraiser to put a value on the property to make sure that the buyer is not overpaying for the property. Furthermore, the program implementer discusses about the importance of having household budgeting and how to put a budget together. Finally, the implementer speaks about down payment assistance programs. In the City of Lowell, they have two really good down payment assistance programs. One is federally funded home program that comes from the City of Lowell and the other one is funded by the Lowell Development Finance Corporation which is a nonprofit organization in Lowell. A lot of people are eligible to get assistance between these two programs. The first-time home buyer program

has a lot of credibility because it is not promoting a particular bank or attorney, real estate agent, or home inspector. The implementer always rotates between professionals to teach different classes. (Personal communication, February 7, 2019)

Across the country, it is about 64 percent of Americans own home. In Lowell, it is about 45 percent of people own home and it is about 31 percent own home in Asian community. The goal of the first-time home buyer program is to increase the percentage of Asians and everybody who wants to become homeowners, to become closer to the national average. The program is conducted in two languages including English and Spanish. The program is also available in Khmer but it is taught by an English instructor and interpreted to Khmer by a Khmer interpreter. About 30 percent of the program participants are Asian, 20 percent are Spanish, and some are African American. There is about 38 percent of the graduates of the program were born outside of the United States, 50 percent of the graduates are non-whites, and about 60 percent of the graduates come from Lowell. These numbers show that the program has been serving the community that needs it the most. (Personal communication, February 7, 2019)

### **Literature Review**

According to Pamela M. Blumental and John R. McGinty, there are more than 45 million people in the United States who live in poverty including 16 million children. Many people born into very low income families and remain poor throughout their lives. As a consequence, they have limited education and employment opportunities. This happens to a lot of people of color who have experienced income gaps and wealth gaps. In 2016, Black and Hispanic people earn only half of every dollar that white people earn. And, they also only have 1 dollar in wealth of 6 dollars in wealth that white people have. That's why, since the Great Recession, policy makers and researchers have created mechanisms to reduce income and wealth inequality, improve

economic mobility, and provide families with greater financial security, which allow them to avoid homelessness and hunger (Blumental & McGinty, 2015, p. 1).

Housing plays critical role in people's lives because it is a major consumption item, a source of safety and stability, and a mean to accumulate wealth. Moreover, it is also a determination of where people access to education and employment. That's why housing policy is crucial in improving the economic well-being of low-income households, which is a group that is going to be the middle-class income families. Housing policy also reduces progress when low-income families do not have access to affordable, safe, and stable housing and when economic and racial segregation leave some communities with limited financial, social, and human capital (Blumental & McGinty, 2015, p. 1).

Keith Wardrip, Laura Williams, and Suzanne Hague also argue that housing provides safety to households with low and middle incomes. When housing is affordable, low and middle income households will have enough nutritious food on table, necessary medical care, and reliable daycare for their children. The stability of affordable mortgage and rent has significant effect on childhood development and school performance. It also can improve health outcomes for families and individuals (Wardrip, et.al, 2011, p. 1).

According to Michael S. Carliner (1998), the federal government has involved in helping American households to achieve homeownership by providing incentives for households to buy houses rather than rent houses (p. 299). Moreover, the government's support is used to stimulate economic activities and overall economy. Federal government has used three primary mechanisms to create incentives for homeownership such as tax benefits, regulation of and participation in financial system, and direct subsidies to housing producers and buyers. Federal income tax code allows homeowners to deduct mortgage interest expense and real estate taxes

and offers favorable treatment on gains from the sale of owner-occupied homes. Moreover, homeowners receive tax free on the implicit rental income that they gain from owner-occupied homes. The federal tax law also allows state and local government agencies to offer below market rate financing to homebuyers with subsidies from federal treasury (Carliner, 1998, p. 300).

In addition to tax benefits, the federal government also uses housing financial system to encourage homeownership, which includes provision of mortgage insurance and guarantees, sponsorship of private secondary mortgage market entities, creation of regulations encouraging and requiring financial institutions to provide fund for housing, and provision of direct loans to homebuyers. Besides that, the federal government also uses direct subsidies like mortgage subsidies to increase homeownership, but it is the least active mechanism (Carliner, 1998, p. 300).

In order to increase homeownership among low and middle income families, first-time homebuyer programs have played a critical role because homebuyers education and counseling help individuals critically think about risks and benefits, understand how to select affordable homes and appropriate mortgages, and increase financial knowledge, resources, and behaviors needed for sustainable homeownership and long-term financial health (DeMarco, et.al, 2016, p. 1).

## **Research Design**

### **Researcher Positionality**

As an employee of the organization that partners with the implementing organization of the first-time home buyer program, I am aware that I may have some biases toward the positive impacts of the program. The biases can be my support and assumption of the program because I

work at the organization, which partners with the implementing organization. Therefore, I am very cautious about my subjectivity. In order to avoid the subjectivity, I tried to be as objective as possible when I conducted the research. When I collected data, I made sure that I did not influence my research participants. When I analyzed the data, I did not use my subjectivity to interpret the data. In general, I made sure that my biases did not affect my research.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### **Research Genre**

The research genre that I use for this research is case study. Yin (1984) defines a case study as "... an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident" (Yin, 1984, p.13). I use case study because I want to study how the financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees changed as a result of their participation in a first-time homebuyer program from the perspectives of the program participants who completed the program, a program coordinator, and a program implementer in Lowell, Massachusetts.

### **Participants Description and Sampling Techniques**

My research participants are the program participants who completed the program, one program implementer who delivers the program, and one program coordinator who helps to coordinate the program. I interviewed five people: one female and four males. Three of them are the program participants. One of them is the program coordinator and the other one is the program implementer. I also surveyed twelve people who are the program participants. Eight out of the fifteen program participants are immigrants. Two out of the fifteen are refugees and the other two out of the fifteen are U.S born. All of the fifteen program participants have been living in the U.S between 3 to 38 years. Six out of the fifteen program participants have high school

degree. Three out of the fifteen program participants have college degree and one of the fifteen has master's degree. The annual income level of the program participants ranks between \$24,000 and \$90,000.

Convenience sampling method was used to recruit the research participants because they were accessible physically and timely. Convenience sampling method is a type of nonrandom sampling where target population meets certain criteria such as geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included in the purpose of the study (Etikan, et.al, 2015, p. 2).

### **Methods of Data Collection**

There were two methods that I used to collect data for the research. First, I used a semi-structure survey to collect general perspectives of the program participants regarding to financial stability and quality of life and demographic data including immigration status, amount of time living the U.S, education level, and annual income level. By doing that, I am able to see the big picture from my research participants' perspectives of the changes of their financial stability and quality of life as a result of their participation in the first-time homebuyer program. I gave the semi-structure survey to twelve program participants who completed the program. The reason that I chose the semi-structure was because I wanted to have all types of questions including closed-ended questions, open-ended questions, and scale questions in the survey (See Appendix 1).

Second, I used a semi-structure interview to collect qualitative data from my research participants so that I can have deep understanding of my research participants' perceptions on the changes of financial stability and quality of life as a result of their participation in the first-time homebuyer program. I interviewed three program participants who completed the program, one

program implementer, and one program coordinator. The reason I chose semi-structure interview was because I wanted to lead the interviews so that I could get the information that I wanted. At the same time, I also wanted to allow the interviewees to share their thoughts and experiences. There were two different interviews. One was with the program participants and the other one was with the program implementer and the program coordinator. The program participant interview had sixteenth questions including questions about the program, questions about the impact of the program, questions about recommendation, and questions about socio-demographic (See Appendix 2). The program coordinator and program implementer interview had nine questions including questions about the program, questions about the impact of the program, and a question about recommendation (See Appendix 3).

### **Participants Recruitment**

My research participants were recruited from the first-time home buyers program at Cambodia Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA). In order to recruit them, I went to meet the program coordinator and the program implementer to request them to participate in the research. When they accepted the request, I gave them an invitation letter and the research informed consent form. Then, I requested them to share their contact information of the program participants with me and connected me with the program participants so that I could build relationship with the program participants. After that, I contacted the program participants through email and/or phone and met them in person to explain them about my research. When they agreed to participate in my research, I sent them an invitation letter and a consent form and asked them to sign it. Finally, I scheduled appointment with all the research participants for an interview or requested them to complete a survey.

### **Managing, Analyzing, and Interpreting Data**

The data was stored in my protected personal computer that had password so that no one could access the data. Then, I uploaded the data to an online software, Dedoose, for categorization and analysis. Dedoose is an online application that helps to enhance the experience of researchers regarding to data management, excerpting and coding, and analysis. It provides tools to help researchers with management, integration, and analysis of text, video, audio, spreadsheet, and other types of data in a secure and awesome collaborative environment. It helps make researchers' works more efficient, effective, and collaborative (Dedoose, 2019).

There are two approaches that I use to analyze the data. I adopt both deductive and inductive approaches. For deductive, I analyzed the data to see if the data confirmed with the theories that I gathered from my literature review. One of the theories said housing plays a critical role in people's lives because it is a major consumption item, a source of safety and stability, and a mean to accumulate wealth. Another theory also said that housing provides safety to households with low and middle incomes because when housing is affordable, low and middle income households will have enough nutritious food on table, necessary medical care, and reliable daycare for their children. When I analyzed the data, I looked at data to see if it confirms with the theories. For inductive, I looked for any data that were common among my research participants. I looked for commonalities based on themes of the data. When I found the commonalities, I put them in categories by creating a code for each category. Under each category, I added subcategories that were the supporting data of each category and I also created a code for each subcategory. Finally, I interpreted and organized the data based on the categories and subcategories. Based on my research findings, I also provided some recommendations from the program participants about ways to improve the program for future program participants and

tips for future program participants to get ready to purchase their first home. The data was deleted after the study completed and could not be used and accessed online in the future.

### **Trustworthiness Strategies (credibility and trustworthiness of data)**

I adopt member checking strategy to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data. After interviewing my research participants, I sent a transcription of their interview to them to receive their confirmation. In case, they want to change, delete, or add more information, they can make all of those requests to me. By doing that, I am open so that I can avoid my subjectivity and misinterpretation.

## **Findings**

### **The Impacts of the Program**

The data is presented based on data from both the interviews and survey. The data from the survey tells the numbers so that readers can understand the overall perspectives of the research participants. Moreover, the data from the interviews also explains to readers in numbers and provides quotations directly from the research participants so that readers can get in-depth information to understand the research participants' perspectives of the changes of financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees as a result of their participation in the first-time homebuyer program in Lowell, Massachusetts.

All the program participants said that the program was very helpful because it provided the knowledge, skill, and assistance for them including home buying process, mortgage application process, down payment assistance programs, legal aspects of purchasing, home inspections, household budgeting, building good credits, issuance requirement, housing options, becoming responsible homeowner, and preparing to purchase first home. Based on the survey, it showed that eight out of twelve program participants said that the program is extremely

important to help them understand mortgage application process and the other four said that the program is important and moderately important to help them understand mortgage application process. Nine out of twelve program participants said that the program is extremely important to help them understand legal aspects of purchasing home and the other three said that the program is important and moderately important to help them understand legal aspects of purchasing home. Ten out of twelve program participants said that the program is extremely important to help them understand home inspection and the other two said that the program is important to help them understand home inspection. Ten out of twelve program participants said that the program is extremely important to help them understand how to build good credits and the other two said that the program is important to help them understand how to build good credits. Six out of twelve program participants said that the program is extremely important to help them understand insurance requirements and the other five said that the program is important and moderately important to help them understand insurance requirements. Nine out of twelve said that the program is extremely important to prepare themselves to become a responsible homeowner and the other three said the program is important to prepare themselves to become a responsible homeowner. Seven out of twelve program participants said that the program is extremely important to prepare themselves to purchase their first home and the other five said that the program is important to prepare themselves to purchase their first home.

**Household Budgeting.** Ten out of twelve program participants said that the program is extremely important to help them understand household budgeting and the other two said that the program is important and somewhat important to help them understand household budgeting.

Robert said,

It gave me a lot of knowledge in terms of putting budget together, make consciously choice on what to spend and what not to spend so to increase my saving, and put together a good budget. It is very useful especially how to put budget together. I reiterate again because it is a soft skill but it helps me a lot. For example, my wife and I love to go out to eat. We go out to eat probably two or three times per week. But, when we decided to get a home and so we made conscious decision by cutting down going out to each and we save a lot of money. That's very useful for me, the soft skill. (Personal communication, February 12, 2019)

John, a program implementer, also mentioned that household budgeting is very important. He said,

If we give people some tools to be able to keep track of their expenses by category and by weeks and months or they can really see where every penny that has been coming through the house is going where does it go and then once you've done that then you can make really mindful and conscious choices about wait I am spending way too much money on the table. I am going out lunch way too much, yeah, all those trips to buy coffee adding up cost \$2,000 a year. (Personal communication, February 7, 2019)

**Home Buying Process.** Ten out of twelve program participants said that the program is extremely important to help them understand home buying process and the other two said that the program is moderately important to help them understand home buying process. Angelina said that, "Buying a home is a really big thing. It is like anything you purchased your own like buying car. The first step to do is really overwhelming and it is a lot to take too. There is a lot but after a couple of years, it will get better. You get the idea. You know it is like what we do" (Personal communication, February 4, 2019).

**Housing Options.** Seven out of twelve program participants said that the program is extremely important to help them understand housing options and the other five said that the program is important and somewhat important to help them understand housing options from the survey. Two of the five people who I interviewed mentioned that they are able to learn about different types of housing through the first-time homebuyer program. David said, “We learned about different style of homes. You know whether we want an old Victorian. We want something newer. These are the pro and con about buying something older. Do you have time to renovate or work on it yourself? So, we learned all those things too” (Personal communication, February 1, 2019).

Robert also shared that, “Before I have not known that what kind of house that I should looking for. Whether I want to live in a condominium or live in a single home. Or, I want to be a landlord by owning a duplex or multiple family home” (Personal communication, February 12, 2019).

**Down Payment Assistance Programs.** Seven out of twelve program participants said that the program is extremely important to help them understand down payment assistance programs and the other five said that the program is important and somewhat important to help them understand down payment assistance programs from the survey. Four out of the five people I interviewed said they learn about different down payment assistance programs through the first-time homebuyer program. David shared his experience that,

We were qualified for Lowell assistance through Mass Housing which is a program through the state that help people buy homes for their first time which allows people to buy home at a low-down payment rate. And so, we were qualified for that program. So,

we did not have to have a 20 percent down payment rate. We only need 3 to 5 percent. So, that is very helpful. (Personal communication, February 1, 2019)

**Building A Good Team.** Three out of the five people I interviewed strongly mentioned that building a team they trust to help them purchase their home is very essential because the team comprises of real estate brokers, home inspectors, lawyers, and bankers. They are the people who helped them to find the house that they were we looking for and fit with their needs. The program participants said that the program helps connecting them with a group of professionals so that they were able to build their own team. Robert said,

All these people I got a skill and knowledge to find them through the first-time homebuyer program. And also, I have no idea before in terms of putting together a good team to purchase the house and to find a retailer, personal lawyer, home inspector, good bank that can help me but also fit my case such as my credit score and my situation. (Personal communication, February 12, 2019)

**Getting Coaching.** Coaching is important for program participants to purchase their home. After the program participants complete the program, they also can request for a counselor who can help coaching them during the home buying process when they decide to purchase their first home. John, a program implementer, said,

We have a home buyer counselor on our staff who sits down with people individually and helps them figure out what's the next step for them that involves putting their credits, having them bring in their pay steps and budget their other debts so that we can really sit down and give them an assessment of their readiness to buy if they have issues we can help them figure out what those are and come up with a plan you know many times that involves paying down debts or increasing the amount of saving for down payment

sometimes it means repairing or building good credit so that you're eligible to qualify for a mortgage and sometimes people are ready by the way they go for so in that case we help them figure out one of the best mortgage options for them and give them some suggestions about where to go find those. (Personal communication, February 7, 2019)

David also shared his experience about getting coaching. He said,

We are able to meet financial coaches and coaches that teach us on whether or not we want to be landlord in the future. They teach us how to manage multiunit homes and staff like that too. But our finance coach literally works with us to save money because within 6 months we were able to save enough to buy home which is really great. We came from having really nothing to meet with someone who really empowers us and encourages us. Look at us and say you can buy home in 6 months. The person basically looks at our expenses and finances and look us at our eyes and say you and your wife can get a home in 6 months if you stick to this budget or stick with to routine. And, we were able to do that, which is wonderful. (Personal communication, February 1, 2019)

**Identifying Purpose and Being Realistic.** Two of the people I interviewed shared the important of identifying purpose and being realistic of purchasing a home. They realized their purpose and became realistic because of the first-time homebuyer program. David said,

I think being realistic is really important. Like sometimes we have this big dream of getting this really big home. I am honest with you that you can get a big home but right now it is not the time for you to get a big home. Maybe based on your income and your wife's income. This is what you can effort right now. And being to be honest with yourself and figure it out like you know. I want to buy ten rooms home one day in the

future. And right now, let just focus on something that we could effort and help us get on the ground. (Personal communication, February 1, 2019)

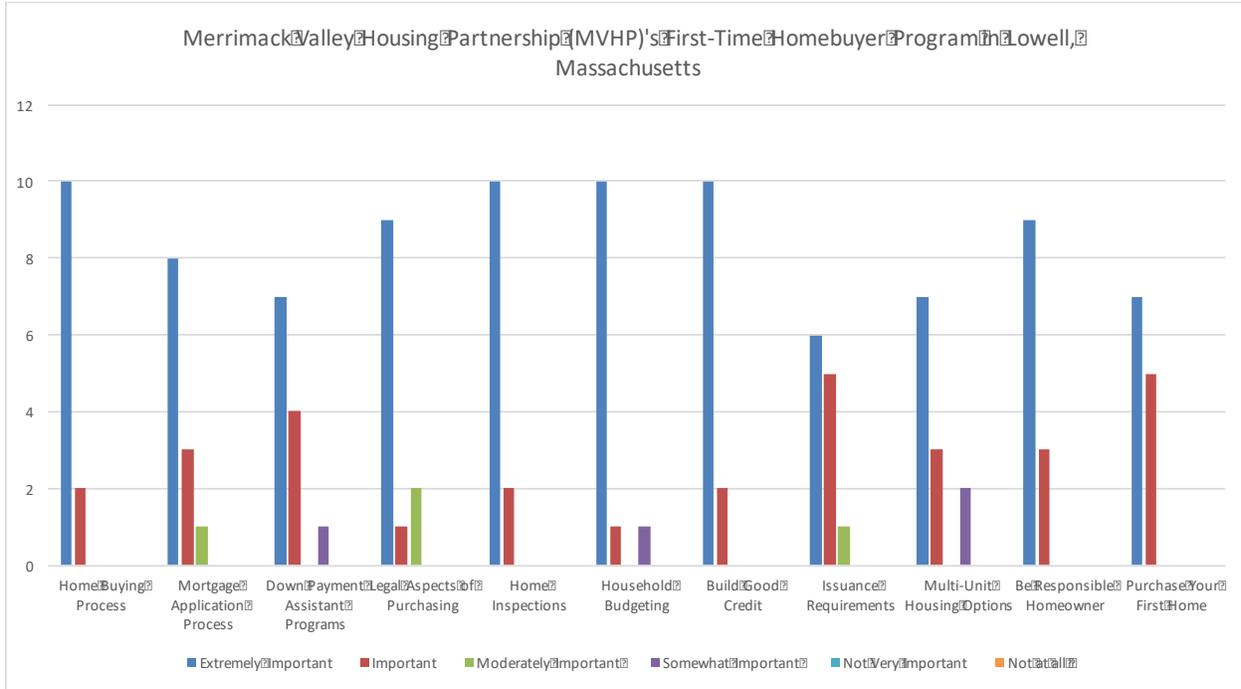


Figure 1 - Topics of the Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership (MVHP)'s First-Time Homebuyer Program

### Financial Stability Before Purchasing

Two out of three the program participants said that they did not have financial stability before they purchased their home. Angelina, a program coordinator, believes that half of the program participants have financial stability before purchasing their home and half of the program participants do not have financial stability before purchasing their home. She said that,

There are two types of people who live here either immigrants or migrants. For people who come in the 80s are migrants, whereas the 90s are more immigrants, they are more focus on working and not really getting education that they have so that they focus on more work and money that they are coming from helping out with the family. They have that situation comparing to who just came here recently who they lived in a country

where you work and have been educated and have office job comparing to factory jobs.

They have the money to help provide for it. So, I would say half and half. The other half, they have the money but they want a nicer place. But, the one who is struggling to start an American dream. They have all of the obstacle of taking care of their families. So, money is a little difficult for them. It is not just taking care of themselves but taking care of the whole community. (Personal communication, February 4, 2019)

John, the program implementer, also said that, “fifty percent of program participants earned eighty percent or less than the medium income area” (Personal communication, February 7, 2019).

### **Financial Stability After Purchasing**

All five people who I interviewed told that they believe homeownership can or will improve their financial stability. Based on the survey, twelve out of twelve respondents also agree that homeownership can or will help them to achieve financial stability. There are two main reasons why they believe homeownership can or will improve their financial stability. First, when they own a home, they do not have to pay rent every month so they can save some money for other expenses. David said that “I mean at the end we learn that when you own your home, you basically pay for your own property. You are not necessary putting money to somebody’s pockets when you rent” (Personal communication, February 1, 2019). Angelina also mentioned that,

Compare to a renter where the landlord increase the rent. They can increase it even though the law says they can’t. I have seen a couple says that the landlord just rose five months ago and they raise again because of whatever situations. The price keeps going back and forth. (Personal communication, February 4, 2019)

Second, homeownership is a way to build equity. When you pay off the mortgage of the home that you bought, you will own the home. It will become your asset. Later on, you can rent, sell, or give to someone. David said,

At the end, you get to enjoy something that you take full commitment to and then you know you can have for 30 years and forever as long as you decide to stay there. And it is an asset. You pay it off, it is an asset to you. If it is 200k home, when you pay it off, it is 200k on your belt. You can use it as anyway you like for financial stability in the future. It is investing. (Personal communication, February 1, 2019)

John shared a similar view. He said, “If you look at the average wealth of the average American family, at least half of the wealth is based in the real estate” (Personal communication, February 7, 2019).

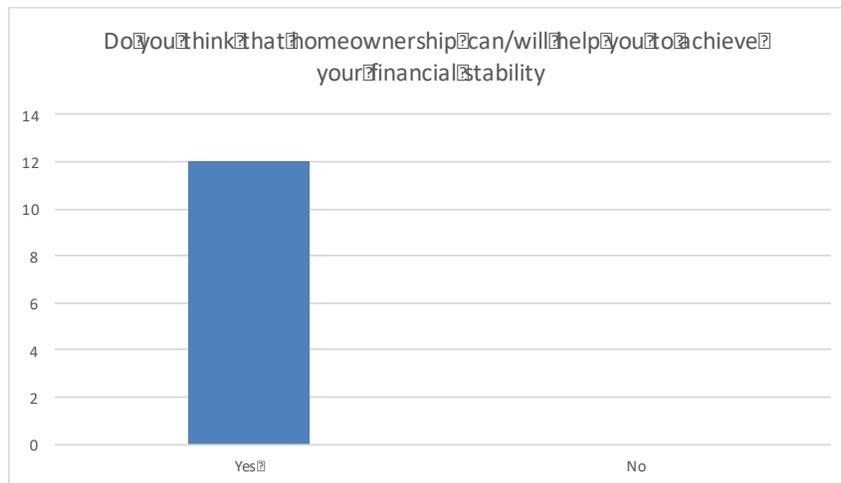


Figure 2 - Number of People Saying Homeownership Can/Will Help Them Achieve Financial Stability

### Quality of life Before Purchasing Home

Two out of three participants I interviewed told me that their quality of life before they purchased their homes was bad because the environment of the house they rented was not good and they could fix the house. Moreover, they had to move around from one house to another and

they had to waste a lot of time to find a new home. They had less time to spend with their family and their kids also could not focus on education. Robert shared that,

We just got married in Cambodia and my wife just arrived and then we are looking for affordable rental and I found a rental but I would not mention a name. One of owner of the properties in Middlesex street and the condition there is a disaster. It has a lot of insects, bugs. I think one of the reasons that we move out from the rental because my wife is pregnant and we about to have a baby. So, we have to find a quality living situation for us to raise a baby. (Personal communication, February 12, 2019)

David also shared similar experience. He said,

For some people who have to move around and worry about home a lot, that takes the time from living a fulfilling life. I think when you have a strong foundation like a home, it allows you to have the time that will be wasted on finding home to focus on your education and spending time with your kids, saving money to do another family staff. I think it really. I think I move around a lot. I think this goal is a very wonderful goal for me to have a home. So, you say that yes you have a good quality of life before you own a home. However, you also feel that they don't have a place to be called a home. I would not say I had a good quality of life. I would not consider that. I think that out of all my sibling I have a very strong mind set in terms of keeping myself positive and happy. But I can tell you that it is not the best situation when you are moving around a lot. I can tell through my siblings and family. It was not good you know. So, my quality of life was not good. It was ok, but it is much better now. (Personal communication, February 1, 2019)

### **Quality of life After Purchasing Home**

Twelve out of twelve mentioned that homeownership can or will improve their quality of life from the survey. All three program participants who I interviewed shared that their quality of life have improved after they purchased their home. They said that it is much better now because they have better place for their kids, have a strong foundation, increase civic engagement, have a sense of pride, and enjoy their own place.

**Better Place for Their Kids.** When they own a home, their kids are happier because they feel that they have their own home. They can focus on their study and do not have to worry about moving around. There are also social relationships with housing. Jonh said,

Studies have shown that people children grew up in houses in their owned have higher graduation rates from high school they have lower teenage pregnancy rates there are better health outcomes yeah let fewer cases of asthma and things like that so this there's all these other intrinsic certain you know positive things associated with homeownership. (Personal communication, February 7, 2019)

**Having a Strong Foundation.** One of the program participants who I interviewed mentioned that homes provide a strong foundation. He said,

I knew that at the end one of the ultimately goals in my life is to build a strong foundation. And what make a strong foundation is our home. Personally, I learned that it is very important that when you are young, you don't move around a lot and you are being able to have a place for you can just be stable and have a place to call home. (Personal communication, February 1, 2019)

**Increasing Civic Engagement.** Two out of five people I interviewed shared that when people own home, they tend to engage civically. John said,

Satisfaction in owning a home and having a stake in it I think that gives people a real ego boost I think the benefits are it gives people much more incentive to be engaged in the community civic engagement goes up people vote higher. (Personal communication, February 7, 2019)

**Having a Sense of Pride.** Two of the five interviewees talked about when people own home, they feel a sense of pride because there are a lot of good reasons to own a home. Robert said, “I bought a home in Lowell. I have a lot of pride and a sense that I invest in the city of Lowell, economic development” (Personal communication, February 12, 2019). John also had similar thought. He mentioned that,

I think there's a lot of there's a lot of really good reasons to own a home that help people financially I mean people that there's I mean the biggest one is stability you know predictability in terms of what your house is going to cost you own it there's a real sense of pride. (Personal communication, February 7, 2019)

**Enjoying Their Own Place.** All of the five interviewees said that they enjoy their life better and have more freedom when they have their own home. David shared that,

The idea that we have a home to go to is very empowering. It is so nice to be able to go home and know that you are sitting on your couch at your living room after long day of work. But, it is your house. It is no one house. It is your and your wife's house. And, it feels really good to have that. (Personal communication, February 1, 2019)

Angelina also shared her experience. She said,

I feel warm when I have my own place. When I was a kid, I experienced landlord moved us around because there was always issues. Even though it was other people's issue, the

landlord blames everyone in the building because we live in apartments. The landlord wanted us to move. (Personal communication, February 4, 2019)

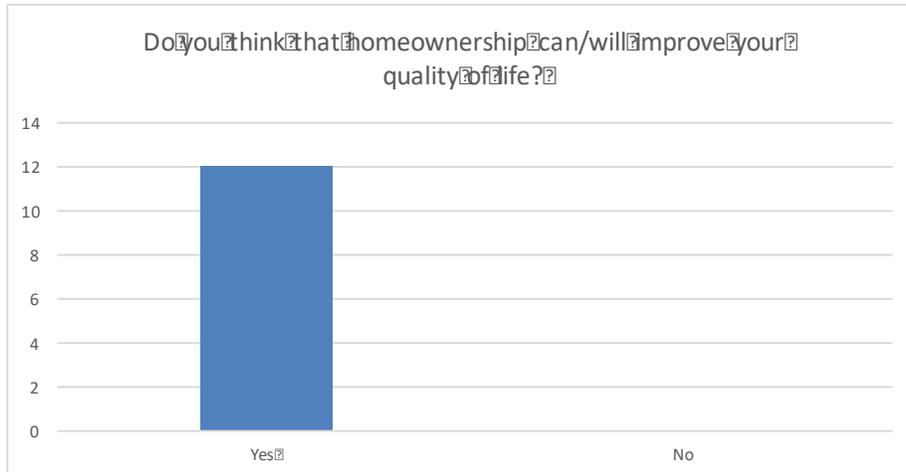


Figure 3 - Number of People Saying Homeownership Can/Will Help Them to Improve Their Quality of Life

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for the Program

There are some recommendations from the program participants about ways to improve the program for future program participants. First, the program should include the pros and cons of buying new and old houses and entail the costs of fix different things in the house. One of the interviewees said,

The program should include the slides of examples of homes that require to fix and how much it costs to fix different things in the house such as insulation, window, and door.

The examples of old houses. For the new house, it is not a problem if it is just 30 to 40-year-old. But, my house is 70 to 80-year-old which has a lot of damage. If the wall of house is made of wood and it does not have protection from outside, the problem is that it rips off because of the changes of the weather. It takes a lot of time and money to fix it.

Now, if I want to fix my wall, it costs 10k and 10k to fix my roof. When I took the class, it did not mention in the class. (Personal communication, February 15, 2019)

Second, the program should have Khmer instructor to teach the program rather than Khmer interpreter interprets the class from English instruction. Third, the program should be conducted in other languages besides English, Spanish, and Khmer interpretation.

### **Recommendations for Future Program Participants**

There are several recommendations for future program participants to get ready to purchase their first home. First, they should prepare questions to ask the instructor when they take the program. The reason is that the instructor sometimes does not cover the points that they want to learn about because he/she cannot cover everything in two sessions. Second, when you buy a house, you should check the conditions of the house yourself even though you have home inspectors look at the house because you should make sure that you buy the right house that you want. Third, you should be clear how you are going to buy the house if you decide to buy it. Are you buying alone or with someone else? Fourth, you should find a bank that offers low interest rate for mortgage because you may overpay for the house if you pay too much interest rate. Fifth, you need to have a right team of professionals so that they can help you along the home buying process. Sixth, you need to have full commitment because buying a home takes a long time for you to pay off your mortgage. Seventh, you should take the first-time home buyer program so that you can get more knowledge, skill, and assistance.

### **Conclusion**

The scope and purpose of the research are the delimitations of my research. The purpose of the research is to understand the changes financial stability and quality of Cambodian immigrants and refugees as a result of their participation in the first-time homebuyer program in

Lowell. So, I am not able to understand the changes of other issues besides financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees as a result of their participation in the first-time homebuyer program in Lowell and understand the changes of financial stability and quality of life of other populations in other areas. The scope of the research is also a delimitation because of the number and type of my research participants. I selected three program participants from the program who are either Cambodian immigrants or refugees and live in Lowell, one program implementer, and one program coordinator to do interviews. I sent survey to other twenty program participants from the program who are either Cambodian immigrants or refugees and live in Lowell.

The study shows that there are changes of financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees as a result of their participation in the first-time homebuyer program in Lowell, Massachusetts because the program provides them with knowledge, skill, and assistance that are needed to purchase their first home. Based on the findings, it also shows that financial stability and quality of life of the program participants who are Cambodian immigrants and refugees in Lowell, Massachusetts have improved when they completed the program and became a homeowner.

Homeownership is a part of American Dream. It is a concept that people believe if they work hard and take advantage of their opportunities, they can have an expectation to have a prosperous and fulfilling life. For many Americans, homeownership is a way for them to achieve a prosperous and fulfilling life. That's why homeownership becomes a very important thing for Americans. However, not all of them can realize the dream because of different reasons such as financial difficulty, job stability, location, family situation, price of houses, and etc. First-time homebuyer programs are designed to help people to solve their problems and then realize their

American Dream through homeownership. The study shows that the first-time homebuyer program in Lowell helps people to improve their financial stability and quality of life, which allow them to have a prosperous and fulfilling life.

Finally, due to small sampling size, I cannot make a generalization based on the findings of my research and apply it across other communities. However, this study also supports and contributes to other existing research on the changes of financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees as a result of their participation in the first-time homebuyer program in Lowell Massachusetts. I believe that we need further research to expand the study of the topic in other communities across the country so that we can understand if there is any changes of financial stability and quality of life of people as a result of their participation in first-time homebuyer programs in different communities. By doing that, we will have enough information based on the different research to create policies that better serve different communities across the country.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Survey Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions:

Note: Please choose one of the answers for the multiple-choice questions

1. How important is the first-time homebuyers program in helping you to understand home buying process?
  - a. Extremely Important
  - b. Important
  - c. Moderately Important
  - d. Somewhat Important
  - e. Not Very Important
  - f. Not at all
2. How important is the first-time homebuyers program in helping you to understand mortgage application process?
  - a. Extremely Important
  - b. Important
  - c. Moderately Important
  - d. Somewhat Important
  - e. Not Very Important
  - f. Not at all
3. How important is the first-time homebuyers program in helping you to understand down payment assistant programs?
  - a. Extremely Important
  - b. Important
  - c. Moderately Important
  - d. Somewhat Important
  - e. Not Very Important
  - f. Not at all
4. How important is the first-time homebuyers program in helping you to understand legal aspects of purchasing?
  - a. Extremely Important
  - b. Important
  - c. Moderately Important
  - d. Somewhat Important
  - e. Not Very Important
  - f. Not at all
5. How important is the first-time homebuyers program in helping you to understand home inspections?
  - a. Extremely Important

- b. Important
  - c. Moderately Important
  - d. Somewhat Important
  - e. Not Very Important
  - f. Not at all
6. How important is the first-time homebuyers program in helping you to understand household budgeting?
- a. Extremely Important
  - b. Important
  - c. Moderately Important
  - d. Somewhat Important
  - e. Not Very Important
  - f. Not at all
7. How important is the first-time homebuyers program in helping you to build good credit?
- a. Extremely Important
  - b. Important
  - c. Moderately Important
  - d. Somewhat Important
  - e. Not Very Important
  - f. Not at all
8. How important is the first-time homebuyers program in helping you to understand issuance requirements?
- a. Extremely Important
  - b. Important
  - c. Moderately Important
  - d. Somewhat Important
  - e. Not Very Important
  - f. Not at all
9. How important is the first-time homebuyers program in helping you to understand multi-unit housing options?
- a. Extremely Important
  - b. Important
  - c. Moderately Important
  - d. Somewhat Important
  - e. Not Very Important
  - f. Not at all
10. How important is the first-time homebuyers program in preparing you to be responsible homeowner?
- a. Extremely Important
  - b. Important
  - c. Moderately Important
  - d. Somewhat Important
  - e. Not Very Important
  - f. Not at all



17. What would be your recommendations for the program to help future program participants to achieve financial stability and better quality of life?

18. What would be your recommendations for people who would like to have financial stability and better quality of life?

#### Socio-demographic Questions

1. Are you a refugee or an immigrant?
2. How long have you been living in the U.S?
3. What is your education level?
4. What is your annual income level?

## **Appendix 2**

### **Research Problem and Purpose**

This research paper is going to study about the changes of financial stability and quality of life amongst Cambodian immigrants and refugees as a result of their participation in a first-time home buyers program in Lowell, Massachusetts. In other words, the study aims to explore the impacts of the first-time home buyers program on financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees. The research paper will also provide recommendations based on the research findings.

### **Interview Guide for Program Participants**

#### **Questions for Program Participants**

##### **A. Questions about the Program**

1. Could you share what you learned from the program?
2. Do you think that what you learned in the program are useful for you to purchase your first home? If so, how are they useful?
3. Do you think that what you learned is enough for you to make good decision on your first home purchase?

##### **B. Questions about the Impact of the Program**

1. Did you purchase your first home? If not, are you planning to buy your first home?
2. If you purchased, did you have financial stability before your purchase? If you are planning to purchase, do you have financial stability currently?
3. Do you think that homeownership help/will help you to improve your financial stability? If so, why?
4. How was your quality of life before you purchase you first home? If you are planning to purchase, how is your quality of life currently?
5. Do you think that homeownership can/will improve your quality of life? If so, why?
6. Comparing between your life before owning your first home and after owning your first home, which one is better? Why?

##### **C. Recommendations**

1. Do you think the program needs improvement? If so, what are your recommendations?
2. What would be your recommendations for the program to help future program participants to achieve financial stability and better quality of life?
3. What would be your recommendations for people who would like to have financial stability and better quality of life?

##### **D. Socio-demographic Questions**

1. Are you a refugee or an immigrant?
2. How long have you been living in the U.S?
3. What is your education level?

4. What is your annual income level?

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Research Problem and Purpose**

This research paper is going to get a deep understanding about the changes of financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees as a result of their participation in a first-time home buyers program in Lowell, Massachusetts. In other words, the impacts of the first-time home buyers program on financial stability and quality of life of Cambodian immigrants and refugees. The research paper will also provide recommendations based on the research findings.

#### **Interview Guide for Program Implementer & Program Coordinator**

##### **Questions for Program Implementer & Program Coordinator**

###### **E. Questions about the Program**

4. Could you describe the program?
5. How does the program help program participants to purchase their first home?
6. Do you think that the program provides enough information for the program participants to make good decision on their first home purchase?

###### **F. Questions about the Impact of the Program**

7. Have program participants shared their difficulties with you about not owning a house? If so, could you please explain?
8. What was the financial situation of most of program participants when they joined the program?
9. Do you think that homeownership helps/will help program participants to achieve or improve their financial stability? If so, why?
10. What was most of program participants' quality of life before purchase their first home?
11. Do you think that homeownership can/will improve program participants' quality of life or eliminate their difficulties that they mentioned? If so, why?

###### **G. Recommendations**

4. Would you recommend a person who wants to improve their quality of life and financial stability to join the program? Why?