INTEGRATING HOUSING AND SOCIAL SERVICES:  
Local Initiative versus Federal Mandate (C)

In June 1994, Harold E. Saether, Director, of HUD’s Northwest/Alaska Area Office of Public Housing, was given a special Award of Recognition by the Snohomish County Project Self-Sufficiency Program (PSS) for his outstanding support of the local program. Unable to attend the annual PSS graduation ceremony, where the award would be given, Saether’s award was accepted on his behalf by Michael B. Janis, General Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing, a high-level official who was visiting from HUD Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

To Pete Grodt, Director of Rental Programs for the Housing Authority of Snohomish County (HASCO), this award seemed an appropriate symbol of recognition by both the local program partners and the federal HUD office of Saether’s crucial role in safeguarding the local self-sufficiency program. He hoped Janis would learn about PSS and become an advocate for local program flexibility in Washington, D.C.. Grodt was focused on transmitting the message that supporting local program flexibility is a critical component of successful programs to assist low-income people and help them move out of poverty.

Saether, while flattered that he was highly thought of by the PSS partners in Snohomish County, was rather matter-of-fact about his role in helping to preserve the program. After 26 years working for HUD in a variety of positions, having first started in the public housing field at the local level as a project worker and maintenance manager, he’d seen many housing programs come and go.

“They had done a fantastic job up in Snohomish County to pull together a self-sufficiency program that worked. In the midst of all the ambiguity and confusion, there was no way I was going to tell them they didn’t have a right to run their program in the way that worked best for them. And while we were all waiting for a response from Central Office regarding the letter the Regional Office had sent asking for a waiver, I encouraged HASCO and Everett Housing Authority to continue with their set-asides for PSS.”
“We never did hear back from Central Office, and I never pushed them on it. There comes a point when it’s better not to force an answer. In the meantime, I had told HASCO and the Everett Housing Authority that they could continue their Project Self-Sufficiency program and that I would continue to support it until directed by Headquarters to do otherwise.”