

FAMILY CENTERS AT CHARTER OAK COMMUNITIES

Community and Supportive Services

Family Centers began its formal relationship as the provider of the Community and Supportive Services Program in 2004 when Charter Oak Communities administered the Fairfield Court HOPE VI revitalization project. At that time, Family Centers employed a team of 3 full time case managers who provided onsite services to the residents of Fairfield Court. Throughout the HOPE VI Program period, it became increasingly evident that those residents who were receiving help from the Family Centers onsite case managers had a better chance of successfully completing their requirements in order to become eligible to move into new homes. Residents who had been on the cusp of losing their apartments due to late payments, poor housekeeping, poor resident relations, not providing the required documentation, etc., had received support and as a result, most were able to successfully relocate to their new homes. Further, in the process of correcting the issues that once put them at high risk of eviction, these same residents began to think of their futures, creating obtainable goals for themselves and their families. Over time and with ongoing support, residents were seeking educational opportunities, job training, and were becoming advocates within their own communities. When the HOPE VI Program was complete, Charter Oak Communities and Family Centers extended our agreement by expanding the program, providing onsite support to residents living in the three new developments that were built as a result of HOPE VI. And once again, over time and with ongoing support, residents who had once lacked direction were showing signs of increased self sufficiency, obtaining jobs, furthering their education, handling resident relations more effectively, maintaining their apartments, paying rent on time and becoming increasingly independent.

Charter Oak Communities and Family Centers expanded the program to other buildings within the Charter Oak Communities portfolio that could benefit from onsite supportive services. Over time, the contract between COC and Family Centers continued to grow and what started out as a service to one location ten years ago has become a large community-wide program, with onsite supportive services at 14+ locations throughout the City of Stamford. These locations include: Post House, Taylor Street, Fairgate, Westwood, Palmer Square, Greenfield, Oak Park, Lawn Hill Terrace, Quintard Manor, Clinton Manor, Stamford Manor, Rippowam Manor, Glenbrook Manor, Ursula Park Townhouses, Lawn Avenue Town Homes, Rippowam Manor and Glenbrook Manor.

For the past 12 years, enormous effort has been made in terms of helping residents to realize that they live in a community and have the opportunity to play a role within that community. The Family Centers' Community and Supportive Services team has worked to educate residents so that they understand the impact of the role they play and the impression they make, both positively and negatively. Ten years ago, the focus of the Community and Supportive Services Program was on crisis intervention issues, assisting individuals and families with challenges and issues. Very few residents had interaction with other residents, except when dealing with conflicts. In family developments, the majority of families kept to themselves and children did not have much interaction with each other, except when at school or when attending other off-site programs. In

senior/disabled developments, the majority of interaction that took place was with service providers, if they were already engaged, and occasional friends and family. Most seniors tended to keep to themselves and reported that they didn't know the names of their neighbors. Family Centers has been committed to engaging residents on a larger level, encouraging interaction with each other. Family Centers' team of Resident Service Coordinators created monthly gatherings as a platform for residents to interact.

During these gatherings, residents come together to:

- a. Interact socially (breakdown of isolation)
- b. Share input about community-wide needs
- c. Share input about community-wide events
- d. Gain information about resources, community based activities, health related issues, etc.
- e. Identify opportunities to unite and support each other and the greater community.

As a result of these gatherings, many community based initiatives have been established. Communities have joined together to facilitate internal and community based food drives, coat drives, shared meals (pot luck "healthy eating" community dinners), after school and summer camp registration events, walking and exercise groups, nutrition groups, family and/or group fieldtrips, distribution of vouchers to local Farmers' Markets, health fairs, social events and building-based safety initiatives (buddy system, floor captains, etc). Seniors who would experience anxiety and fear of being forgotten or unnoticed, particularly in the case of an emergency, are now paired up with a neighbor and many have even taken on leadership roles as floor captains, looking out for others who are on their floors. They visit each other, help with shopping, medical appointments and community visits and many have become close friends. Some locations have also worked to establish (or re-establish) Resident Councils. Stamford Manor and Clinton Manor, for example, recently completed the reestablishment of a fully functional Resident Council that meets monthly with elected residents and Property Management. Both have incorporated previously existing leadership with new resident leaders.

Social, recreational, informational and educational events have all been venues for pulling groups of residents together. A diverse menu of events is scheduled each month and gatherings are held with a variety of frequency. Residents at each site are provided a Monthly Events Calendar that lists each event, the time of the event, a brief description and where the event will be held. Some events are more appealing or relevant to one resident versus another. For this reason, there are a variety of events and gatherings offered each month (in an attempt to have a broad enough menu so that there is something for everyone). Some events convene on a weekly basis and residents can count on participating without having to sign up in advance. For example, there is a weekly Bingo Group at Post House, Movie Night at Clinton Manor, Walking Group at Fairgate, a women's support group at Post House and a teen group on the East Side. Other events and programs meet just once or meet annually and address a specific identified need within the community. For example, the senior locations host an annual "Life Alert" presentation for residents who do not have the financial resources to support a mobile phone (Life Alert phones are free for people who are income-eligible and are used for emergency purposes only). Other one-time events or annual events have included health screenings (Mobile Wellness Coach, for example), Energy Assistance, HealthCareer

Academy, plus numerous presentations provided by partner agencies. Other events are held to address a specific trend or need within a building or community. Quintard Manor pulled residents together to distribute lanyards to residents who were repeatedly forgetting their keys and locking themselves out of their apartments, causing a penalty fee and extra work for maintenance and property management. Residents were assisted with attaching their keys to their lanyard necklaces and came up with a group plan so that they would not forget to take/wear their new lanyards. And in the spirit of residents helping each other, it is common to find residents reminding other residents to wear their lanyards.

In addition to the group based events and activities that have supported community-wide efforts, residents continue to receive individually based support on an as-needed and as-requested basis. This type of support has also enhanced community-wide initiatives because individuals are able to address their personal needs, making them more open and available to the idea of assisting others beyond their personal needs.

Although we have made enormous progress within the communities that we provide services, Family Centers strives to further develop and enhance the Community and Supportive Services Program. We strive to collaborate with Charter Oak Communities to create vibrant communities where neighbors recognize each other, greet each other, socialize with each other, become leaders and advocates and support each other. As mentioned earlier, communities have developed food banks, clothing drives, safety practices (floor captains, resident councils, neighborhood safety watches) and other initiatives that support community based awareness and enriched living. Further, we have taken steps at planting the seeds for housing communities to take part in larger community based events such voter registration, neighborhood conversations, KIDS Fans, Fairgate Community Farm, neighborhood clean-up, NRZ, and more. Family Centers is committed to continuing our collaborative work with Charter Oak Communities so that together we can help to strengthen the City of Stamford.

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