



*Young residents of Park Vista Apartments in Anaheim, California receive help with their homework from volunteers during the after-school program at the on-site Project Access Family Resource Center.*

## More Than Shelter

### **Resident Services Are a Crucial Element at Affordable Rental Properties**

Once a month, some of the younger renters at Metro 510, an affordable family property, saunter across the street to Vista 400, a senior development, to do battle with some of its residents in what has become a regular ritual – a bocce ball tournament.

“So far the seniors have been beating the younger ones every time,” says Debra Koehler of Sage Partners, LLC, the developer/owner of the two low-income housing tax credit properties in Tampa, Fla. She says the contestants from Metro 510, where the average age of residents is somewhere from the late twenties to early thirties, “are coming over to learn the game.”

Bocce ball tournaments are but one of many activities, programs, and services arranged by Sage Partners at its four LIHTC properties. Taken together – under the rubric called resident services – they do more than just provide recreational, social, educational, support, and

skill-building opportunities. Rather they build a sense of community, in which residents feel valued and supported while supporting one another. Sara Wall, of services provider Project Access, Inc., calls this building “social capital.”

#### **Enrichment Activities**

Resident services are programs and activities that aid and enrich the lives of individuals and families living in affordable rental housing properties. They can be delivered on-site or off-site, be provided by third parties or directly by the owner or property management company (or both), and vary widely in scope and type. Resident services generally differ from supportive services, which are normally more intensive and targeted to special needs populations.

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Resident services are commonplace at affordable multifamily properties, especially at LIHTC developments. Reasons include:

- Being more competitive in seeking awards of housing tax credits;
- Building resident cohesiveness;
- Competing more effectively with other apartment properties to attract and retain residents; and,
- Enhancing the lives of residents.

At Homes for America, Inc., a nonprofit developer/ owner based in Annapolis, Md. that has about 5,700 affordable apartments in 68 senior and family communities in four Mid-Atlantic states, providing resident services is part and parcel of the organization's mission. "We're not just here to provide the housing structure," says Julie McCabe, Manager of Resident Service Programs. "We're here to help improve the lives of the residents who live in our communities."

President and CEO Nancy Rase says there are multiple benefits. "We think with the seniors it helps them age in place longer, to live independently as long as possible. With families, our goal is to change their future." She says this includes programs, services, and activities that help children do better in school and support their parents.

"We think residents succeed in the housing better," says Rase.

Sources say resident services also benefit owners and managers from lower resident turnover, which is costly; less property damage and vandalism; and what Wall describes as an extra amenity that helps to attract new residents to fill vacant units. Mark Morgan, President of Interstate Realty Management Company, which manages about 340 affordable multifamily properties nationwide, terms the benefits from services – to residents and owners – a "double bottom line."

**Wide Variety of Activities**

Resident services vary widely. They can include educa-

tional activities, such as after-school programs for children and teenagers; computer training; financial literacy and counseling; blood pressure monitoring and other health services for seniors; job counseling, training, and referrals; recreational and social activities; meal programs; homeownership counseling; and transportation.

Homes for America (HFA) has developed uniform standards for resident services – one set for its senior communities and one for its family communities – that outline 9-10 different categories of services, programs, and activities the nonprofit wants to see at its properties and examples under each. HFA prepares a services plan for each community, after getting feedback from residents about what they want and need; considering the financial resources available to fund services; and determining what services and service provides are available in the community. HFA and service coordinators – employees of HFA's third-party property managers – then work to set up and monitor the services, programs, and activities. These are mostly provided by other nonprofit organizations or public agencies that cover the cost themselves. Partnerships are formed with local parks and recreation departments, county food banks, meal programs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and the like.

The most common services at senior properties are health-related and social activities. The latter help reduce isolation.

At family properties, the most common are

those centered around children and youth – after-school programs, tutoring, summer camps, recreation – and those that provide support and capacity-building for adults or that promote self-sufficiency, such as GED and English as a Second Language classes, job skills training, or assistance in qualifying for different types of government assistance.

Owners and managers put their own twists on the services they offer as well. Examples are:

- *Virtual Vacations*, an after-school enrichment activity developed in-house by The NHP Foundation, a nonprofit developer/owner with 28 to 30 properties, mostly on the Eastern Seaboard and Gulf Shore. In

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this program, the children, after they have finished their afternoon homework, go on a “pretend” vacation to a certain country or city and learn about it and engage in related learning activities. “This involves math and reading and science and a variety of other things and gives them cultural awareness,” says Ken White, Vice President and Managing Director for Resident Services.

- A summer backpack drive for children living in properties of the Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH), a nonprofit developer/owner in Arlington County, Va., a Washington, D.C. suburb. President and CEO Nina Janopaul says APAH’s supporters donate funds to pay for the backpacks in this “signature” program. “We provide fully-loaded backpacks for over 250 of our school-aged children for the school year,” she says. “We usually distribute those at a picnic at the properties over the summer, kind of an end-of-summer celebration.” Under a separate, new program being launched, Phoenix Bikes, a

local nonprofit, will teach teen residents how to repair bicycles, with those completing nine weekly classes receiving a free rebuilt bike.

- *Painting the Town Changing Lives*, an initiative of Miami-based Pinnacle Housing Group, a developer/owner of 41 affordable communities that commissions local artists to produce different types of art (murals, sculptures, lighting displays) at its properties. Under this initiative, Pinnacle hires local arts-affiliated nonprofits to do art projects at its properties or government-owned public spaces and recruits residents to participate and pays them for their work. Many children and youth, for example, have helped in painting murals. “We’re very interested in art in public places,” says David Deutch, a partner at Pinnacle Housing Group. “That has been a signature Pinnacle investment in our communities.”
- Tai chi and Zumba classes for seniors in a new fitness center at Sage Partner’s newest development. Other services include a truck that visits one community

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1. Young resident from Pinnacle Housing Group development helps paint mural in Little Haiti Park, Miami, Florida. Photo by Allison Diaz
2. Seniors at Project Access Senior Resource Center at Golden West Towers in Torrance, California participate in chair exercise class.
3. Resident of Hermosa Village Apartments in Anaheim, California gets tech instruction during class in computer lab at the on-site Project Access Family Resource Center.
4. Young residents participate in after-school program at Copper Ridge Apartments, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Developed and owned by The NHP Foundation.
5. Resident is checked at on-site health fair at Tower at Falling Spring in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, developed and owned by Homes for America, Inc.

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daily selling fresh vegetables; movie nights; wine-and-cheese parties at Metro 510 paid for by Verizon, the cable TV/Internet service vendor for the building; and free bus passes for some residents from the regional transit authority. Sage Partners obtained the passes on the condition it reports back where the residents go when they use the passes.

**Delivery, Funding of Services**

In many cases, there is an on-site service coordinator at affordable properties that lines up and oversees the services that are provided. These may be full- or part-time, and in some cases may be employees of the property management company rather than the owner.

There are different models for providing resident services. Owners/managers may provide services directly, seek outside providers to furnish the services for free or compensation, or a combination of the two. Owners, particularly nonprofits, try as much as they can to get other nonprofits or public agencies to provide the services for free, or just a modest fee to residents such as for meals.

Sometimes companies also change their models.

For instance, Interstate Realty Management Company (IRM), based in Marlton, N.J., used to rely upon on-site management employees to find local partners to provide the resident services. This changed in February, when The Michaels Organization, parent of IRM, established an independent nonprofit called Better Tomorrows that has taken over responsibility for planning and arranging



Seniors at birthday party celebration at Atlantic City Townhouse in Atlantic City, New Jersey, developed/owned by The NHP Foundation

resident services at 100 of the company's properties and also offers services to other owners. President Rebecca Tone runs Better Tomorrows, whose staff includes former IRM site employees. She indicated that the organization's focus has been on developing "core" programs and activities that will be similar across properties.

IRM President Mark Morgan said one reasons for creating Better Tomorrows was that "only half of our portfolio could afford, through operations, on-site supportive services for our residents." Better Tomorrows, as an independent nonprofit, can raise charitable donations to help fund its operations and resident services to supplement revenues from owners.

Affordable housing owners fund resident services in different ways. Pinnacle Housing Group, for example, has a line item in each property's annual operating budget that provides some funding to cover services. In the industry, though, not all properties can afford this. Some companies or nonprofits may have a corporate account that can be tapped to help pay for some services at resource-constrained developments. Some nonprofit owners also fund services from fundraising proceeds. There are also grants, such as the competitive ones that HUD offers to pay for resident service coordinators.

**Affordable housing owners fund resident services in different ways.**

**Alternative Systems**

In addition, there are alternative delivery mechanisms available to affordable property owners.

Two examples are Portfolio Resident Services, Inc. and Project Access. These nonprofits provide the services at multifamily rental housing properties in return for a fee from owners that retain them.

Portfolio Resident Services (PRS), based in Houston, Texas, currently provides services for about 200 affordable and conventional multifamily properties, including a dozen it owns and manages, in Colorado, Mississippi, and Texas, according to Executive Director JOT Couch. He says owners are charged a flat monthly fee based on the size of each property.

PRS has standardized processes, procedures, documents, and tools. It assigns a part-time resident service coordinator, an employee, to each property. This individual reaches out into the community to line up services from local providers, oversees the services,

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provides internally developed services, and is overseen by upper management. Using software, the company has developed detailed descriptions of 60-plus programs (services, programs, activities) that can be offered at properties it serves. These detail what each program should look like and encompass and provide guidance for resident service coordinators on how to set them up and oversee them. "This way we get a much more sure approach so that each one of these classes, functions are the same across the state and across the country," says Couch. The programs fall within broad categories, such as education, health and nutrition, and personal development.

PRS requires properties to provide an on-site space such as a clubhouse where the services can be delivered.

Project Access, founded in 1999 and based in Newport Beach, Calif., sets up "resource centers" in dedicated spaces at affordable multifamily housing properties. These centers, open 20 to 40 hours a week and staffed by on-site coordinators hired by Project Access, are where most of the services and activities for residents are provided. Owners retain Project Access and pay a fee; the nonprofit also does fundraising to cover its costs.

Project Access currently operates about 50 resource centers serving 10,000 families at affordable housing properties in 13 California counties, and is opening a new center in Denver, said CEO & President Kristin Byrnes.

Services and activities include after-school programs and tutoring for children, capacity-building activities for adults, linking up residents to government assistance programs, and more.

Most services are provided at the resource centers by partners that Project Access recruits from the community – nonprofit groups, individual volunteers, universities and colleges, public agencies, etc. "We have somewhat of a collaboration model," she says.

### Measurement of Outcomes

Sources said an increasingly important trend is to assess the effectiveness of resident services by measuring "outcomes" – the tangible positive results among residents from utilizing the programs and services. "That's a high priority for our funders," says APAH's Nina Janopaul.

This means more than just regularly tracking the number of residents that participate in a particular program or activity – still important. Rather, it means also devising a way to measure the achievements or progress made by residents as a result of their participation in resident programs and activities.

Project Access, for example, collects the school report cards of children (grades K-6) participating in its after-school program to evaluate their progress, such as changes in math and reading scores. "One data point that we're particularly proud of is that of the 2,100 youths that participated in 2012, 84% showed positive achievement in reading scores," says Project Access' Sara Wall, Social Impact Director.

Other examples include using pre- and post-test scores for participants in its English as a Second Language (ESL) program, and annual surveys of residents. "In 2012," says Wall, "97% of the 900 seniors we served throughout all our properties reported that our programs helped decrease their social isolation."

The NHP Foundation also uses tests and other tools to measure outcomes. White, for example, said that in 2012, 87.5% of the underachieving kids in its after-school program (ages 6-14), who tested at the beginning of the school year at one or more grade levels below their peers in math or reading, tested 1.5 grade levels higher at the end of the school year. Likewise, kids participating in the President's Challenge, involving 15 to 20 minutes of physical exercises each afternoon, also benefitted. Some 36% of the kids tested above the 50th percentile nationally in these exercises at the end of one year, up from 3% at the beginning.

### Here to Stay

Resident services at affordable housing properties are here to stay, and are apt to get even more sophisticated, diverse, and effective as time goes on.

"The industry of resident services," says White, "was founded on the notion that we just can't build affordable housing for low-income residents and think that they're going to be stable in their housing without additional programs and services."

Now, with all kinds of programs and services to support and enrich them, affordable housing communities today represent a stable housing environment for residents where they can not only live but prosper. **TCA**