

Syracuse Housing Authority Jobs Plus Program – Work to Independence

The Syracuse Housing Authority has been lucky to have strong local partners over the years, and none more important than those who have assisted SHA in working in a progressive fashion with those individuals who have either been incarcerated, or who have had contact with the justice system. Through two partners, Father Peter Young's Altamont Program, and the Center for Community Alternatives (CCA), SHA has been able to strengthen communities and offer housing, training, and employment opportunities to this population.

The Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) is the program partner to SHA on this Jobs Plus Grant. The formal relationship between SHA and CCA goes back over 7 years, and has been highly productive and beneficial. CCA has provided work crews to SHA properties over those years. Those crews, supervised by a CCA employee, and working alongside SHA maintenance and grounds staff, have been unique opportunities for participants in CCA's reentry program to establish general work skills, and some very specific trade skills as well. This program has provided SHA with a stream of crews to handle many of the projects and tasks which it would otherwise not be attending to due to budget cuts and staff reductions.

In addition, the formal relationship has extended into the re-entry housing development phase between SHA and CCA. As co-developers, along with Norstar Development, USA, a new project, "Freedom Commons" is currently under review through NYS funding application for capital awards which would allow a 54 unit affordable housing development to exist alongside a shelter component of 3 units, with a focus on the re-entry population. The 3 shelter units will house 11 individuals on a short-term basis, and in the 54 unit affordable part of the development 8 units are set aside for transitional housing for individuals or families. This project is a replication of the Castle/Castle Gardens development in NYC run by the Fortune Society.

CCA's re-entry program is nationally known and includes re-entry counseling, job preparedness training, workforce training, life skills counseling, legal assistance, and housing counseling. The collaboration and relationship with SHA has provided numerous participants in CCA programs housing options, job training, and in fact, SHA has hired a number of individuals who have criminal justice backgrounds into SHA full-time staff positions due to this relationship.

The combined strength and knowledge in working with a re-entry population, and the unique relationship between SHA and CCA will be an integral part of the success of this grant. In Syracuse, especially in the extremely low-income census tracts where public housing is located, the number of individuals and families who have had a household member who have had contact with the justice system, who have records, and who have spent time in prison is extremely high, and this variable is often a detriment to employment and housing. So, if SHA and CCA were to not understand the needed services and approach that is required for this population, then this grant would have no opportunity to be successful. Fortunately, both collaboratively understand this dynamic and how to overcome those issues which are impediments and can open opportunity for individuals and families.