

Housing PLUS Services

Sustaining Strong Communities in World of Devolution: Empowerment-Based Social Services in Housing Settings

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Introduction

Over sixty five years ago, Mary Richmond suggested that the linkage of housing and social service should be a professional imperative in building strong communities:

Housing reform affects health, morals, economic efficiency, child-nurture, and the foundations of the family. If we are genuinely interested in these we must be interested in it. (Richmond, 1930)

Today, the experiences of housing developments that provide social services, such as Phipps Houses in the South Bronx, continue to bear out the wisdom of these words. Programs such as these recognize that housing is not just bricks and mortar, but also include a sense of security and community.

What has changed over time is the way in which housing and social services are integrated. The inclusion of a wide range of services as an aspect of housing flourished during the late 1930's (Power, 1979) and 1960's (Bingham & Kirkpatrick, 1975), periods during which there were broad social changes and upheavals. However, in times of relative social calm, society becomes more conservative, with a concomitant reduction of services.

The last two years have brought a large-scale change in the lives of residents of the South Bronx, and other struggling communities in the United States, while the country as a whole has experienced relative prosperity. A growing focus on conservative political themes has brought welfare reform, coupled with cutbacks both in municipal services and the funding of private social service agencies. While the service and funding changes have not been as dramatic as those created by the Depression, they have fallen disproportionately on impoverished communities. In this way, devolution may be a crisis that raises serious questions about how a viable community can be sustained in the South Bronx and other vulnerable neighborhood.

Study of Housing and Social Service Integration

The overall focus of this chapter is the dynamic relationship between social work practice and the socio-political environment in housing settings. In examining this linkage, we draw from our study of the work of Phipps Houses, the largest and oldest developer of not for profit housing in New York City. In undertaking this task, we are building on the 1996 analysis of two Phipps Houses sites, both in the South Bronx (Phillips & Cohen, 1996), which led to our initial development of principles to guide community sustaining practice in housing settings (Cohen & Phillips, 1997). We returned to the same neighborhood in 1998 to explore the degree to which the principles continue to apply to social work practice, and serve as guidelines for program development in other venues. Using the Phipps Houses as a case study, the question we wish to discuss in this chapter is: *How has the devolution of the welfare state in the United States changed the manner in which social services need to be conceptualized and delivered in housing settings?*

In 1996, two of the authors (Phillips and Cohen, 1997) traced the history of two housing developments (Mapes Court and Crotona Park West), which had been open for approximately two years. Through a process of interviewing staff, reading tenant service records, and interviewing a random sample of 145 tenants (approximately 50%), the study's purpose was to explore the tenants' sense of community and family well being, and to understand the impact of the array of social services integrated with the low and moderate income housing. Since that time, social services continue to be provided through an independent entity, Phipps Community Development Corporation (CDC). The Phipps CDC mission, to build and sustain community, focuses on three core service areas: family assistance, community organizing, and services to children and youth. Activities include advocacy, support groups, counseling, information, referral, and crisis intervention.

In 1996, 85% of tenant respondents reported a strong sense of security and stability in their housing, since many had moved frequently, spent time "doubled up" with other families, or had experienced living in shelters. Tenants overwhelmingly identified themselves as either African American (41%) or Latino (53%). Forty three percent of the tenants received public assistance benefits and 58% of the tenants had employment income. This division however, does not reflect the frequent shift of families back and forth from employment income to welfare benefits.

While 50% of the tenants had at least some college experience, 25% were without a high school diploma. Among the 119 families with children, 76% were headed by single women. The tenants studied had high aspirations and credited residence at Phipps Houses with fostering their motivation to achieve their dreams. Twenty eight percent said that living in Phipps increased their commitment to education, and 17% indicated that it increased their motivation to better their lives and become more independent.

The study identified the range of Phipps CDC services and their utilization by tenants. Eighty-four percent used at least one of the services provided, or arranged for, by Phipps CDC. The most common areas of service were around rent or tenant behavior issues, employment and training, education,

financial assistance, health and mental health referral, and family relationships.

Principles for Community Building Practice in Housing Settings

The Phipps Houses/Fordham University Study in 1996 served as the basis for the identification of the following six principles for community building practice:

- 1. The task of community building is constantly evolving and should be continually evaluated.*
- 2. Housing and social work services should be integrated and provided to tenants in distressed communities.*
- 3. Staff of social work programs in housing settings should understand and subscribe to a collective vision of the program's purpose.*
- 4. Efforts should be made to provide services on-site.*
- 5. Social work programs in housing settings should maintain a dual focus upon the individual family and the collective.*
- 6. Community development activities should be extended to the surrounding community, and not be limited to the building alone.*

In 1998, welfare reform and other policy initiatives affecting poor people had been in place for two years, prompting our interest in exploring how these changes had affected the setting and whether the previously identified principles continued to apply. We met with staff and administrators of Phipps CDC from both sites to discuss changes they have seen among families in the last two years, and how the program had responded to these changes. In reviewing the principles during our return visits in 1998, we found all of the initial six principles remained highly applicable and useful in guiding social work practice in housing settings. However, we found that the addition of the following two principles needed articulation in light of changes brought on by the devolution of human services in the last two years:

- 7. Engagement of clients must take place in a context of needs identified within the client -- those needs may be identified by tenants, workers, management*
- 8. Organizations should cultivate the institutional flexibility and capacity to pursue multiple points of intervention in order to address the needs of tenants.*

On further reflection, it became apparent that these new principles had been in operation during our earlier visit, but in a time of relative calm had not been as important to community building. This experience suggests that the relative weights given to each of the principles will change over time, in relation to changes in the larger social context.

This chapter will now focus on the elaboration and illustration of all eight principles in current practice. We will examine why the original six principles are still applicable, and how their implementation has been modified in recent times in response to the devolution that is currently impacting poor communities, as well as provide examples of how all of the principles are implemented in practice in order to expand their application in other programs.

1. The task of community building is constantly evolving and should be continually evaluated.

It has been recognized that social services are critical in maintaining stable and secure housing . Thus, social services should not be seen as "frills", or auxiliary activities, incidental to the main purpose of providing housing, but as a mechanism leading to the building of community, tenant self determination, and the protection of the housing asset. This principle addresses the need for social service providers to continually assess the buildings' and community climate, and adjust service delivery strategies to meet new challenges. In our review we found several changes to which Phipps CDC responded.

A change that is clearly tied to devolution has been the impact of the reconstituted public assistance system and regulations. Previously, we had seen the movement of tenants in and out of the labor market, using public assistance as their safety net. We had also seen families become involved in education and then drop out, feeling that school responsibilities were too great a burden with child care and/or work responsibilities. With the new demand that persons on public assistance take jobs chosen by the city, many residents on public assistance re-evaluated their situation. Many residents chose to close their public assistance cases and to seek employment on their own, rather than accept the city's training opportunities which they felt were of little or no value.

While this voluntary movement from welfare to work may at first appear to validate the cynical view that people receiving public assistance "could work if they wanted to," it is important to realize that the residents in Phipps Houses were able to attempt to find their own employment because they were not in the same restrictive situation as most other public assistance recipients. Many Phipps Houses tenants receive a Section 8 housing subsidy, enabling them to limit their rent to not more than one third of their family's income.

All Phipps tenants, including those who were not receiving a subsidy, knew it was the management's policy to work with families to resolve rent arrears rather than moving immediately to eviction. In fact, Phipps Houses responded to tenants increased concerns about their ability to pay their rent by developing a counseling system which emphasized contracts to resolve rent arrears rather than instituting legal avenues of collection or removal. Residents also knew that staff had always supported work efforts. Workers helped residents see the new work requirements in a positive light, and that

getting a job was in their family's best interest in the long run. The staff also responded by making families aware of what services were still available to working parents.

It is important to realize that not all families took the option to seek their own employment. Some did go into training and at least one was able to develop her training into a real job with a city agency. There have also been families who have not been able to adjust to the new circumstances. In the last two years, the staff has had to help more families seek emergency food and other necessities. While a minority, there is no doubt that there are families who are significantly worse off now. Even with the services that Phipps CDC staff have been able to provide, there are residents who due to their personal functioning and the lack of flexibility of Work Experience Program regulations, are unable to meet the demands of welfare reform. Their situation promises to become even more dire in the future and will require increased worker involvement. Thus, Phipps Houses and other organizations are challenged to fulfill the tenets of distributive justice (Rawls, 1971), and create opportunities for clients least able to access services. The issue of child care looms large when families are required to work. While the city has said it will pay for child care, this promise has turned out to be extremely difficult to fulfill. During our study, families legitimately indicated a concern for the danger of crime and violence in the neighborhood, making the case for quality child care even more compelling. From the time tenants moved into the buildings, Phipps Houses has responded to this concern by providing security service at the building, and has installed enhanced intercom systems during the last two years. Security systems notwithstanding, residents reported in 1996 that they felt they needed to be close to home to mitigate the danger to their children. This has been a continuing concern, illustrated by one woman who recently gave up her job because her child was getting into difficulty without her supervision. Once again, this choice was only possible because she lived in Phipps Houses.

Three interesting developments have occurred in response to this concern for child care. First, some tenants responded to this need by developing their own family day care program in their apartment, rather than seek employment in the community. Once again, being at Phipps was critical. Phipps CDC staff facilitated tenants' contact with licencing authorities and arranged for their training as child care providers. The second response was Phipps CDC extending its collaboration with other onsite day care providers. Third, the Phipps CDC managed youth center expanded the snack program, and began serving a hot meal to all participants.

In a previous paper (Cohen & Phillips, 1997) we made the point that strong communities depend to some extent upon the continued involvement of a critical mass of stable concerned community residents. About forty percent of tenants at that time reported they expected in the next five years to have moved from the city, to their own home, or to another neighborhood within the city. Two years later, with a turnover rate of approximately 25%, there was indeed evidence that some families had voluntarily moved elsewhere, some even moving out of the city. In their place a substantial number of African immigrants have moved into the buildings, and now comprise 11% of the population at Crotona Park West. This has led to a need for staff to work with long time residents, who were concerned about this trend, and to overcome cultural barriers which might lead to divisions within the building.

In response to demographic changes, the on-site health center found it necessary to hire new staff who can provide services to persons speaking a different language and coming from a different culture. The center has done extensive outreach, and has enrolled 501 of the 563 Phipps families of Crotona Park West in the family medical practice. On-site services include health care to children of low income families through the New York State's initiative to improve the children's well being.

Differences in culture have also been reflected in stricter child rearing patterns and different perceptions of women's roles in African immigrant families. In particular, these beliefs came to the attention of Phipps CDC through reports of spousal abuse. In reaching out to African families, Phipps CDC staff noted that these families were more likely to view Phipps Houses merely as a place to live, rather than as a community to join. This perception made initial engagement more difficult, particularly when initiated following a report of family violence. Language differences have been another obstacle, though some staff have been using telephone company translation services to communicate with residents that do not speak English or Spanish. The new cultural mix in the buildings has led Phipps CDC to recognize the need to be more active in reaching out to newly arrived families to help them become part of the community building enterprise.

2. Housing and social work services should be integrated and provided to tenants in distressed communities.

Phipps Houses and similar programs have demonstrated the efficacy of integrated service delivery to families (Chaskin, et.al., 1997). Social services, with the support of housing management, can provide a stabilizing force needed to keep communities strong. This principle addresses how the social worker, as the pivotal person in the service delivery system, draws from a repertory of roles and skills. In our earlier study, the social worker was identified as responding in a holistic way to both the housing and the larger community within which the client resides through the thoughtful use of self in a variety of ways. The primary roles identified in the research were workers serving as educators, mediators, and advocates. The educator function was to help tenants understand the environments in which they operated; the mediator function was to help clients establish a common purpose with people in their environment; and the advocate function was to help clients obtain those services to which they were entitled. Given the rapid changes in services brought about by devolution, the distribution of workers' roles has shifted. Workers now need to spend far more time educating clients on what is available, and how to represent themselves in such a way as to be eligible for services. As has been noted in relation to welfare reform, staff is active in helping the tenants reframe the new demands, so that they can see them in terms of a newly opened window, rather than a locked gate.

While the role of mediator and advocate remain, their relative importance have been modified within the new context of social regression of support services which can be obtained from the community for the tenants. As workers talked about their experiences over the past two years, it became clear that the mediator function has become less useful in an environment in which the opportunities for matching clients with services are shrinking. Workers no longer can simply facilitate a match between clients and providers, but must take a partisan, advocacy approach on behalf of clients. There appears to be increasing resistance on the part of remaining service providers to facilitate the application process, as

evidenced by a significant increase in the difficulties experienced by workers when they attempt to access existing services for their clients. Workers reported that phones of social agencies were constantly busy. When they were actually able to reach a worker, they detected a distinct reluctance to provide information about the service unless they had a prior relationship. This means that staff need to spend more of their time keeping up with the myriad of changes in services and policies so they know what they can demand for their clients.

The advocacy function has become even more vital in an atmosphere of scarcity, where clients compete for services. Not only is the workers' role as advocate for individual clients critical to each family's survival, the need for workers' macro level advocacy to change policies has been increased. By strengthening the community-wide advocacy function, workers have the opportunity to join with tenants in a collaborative enterprise. This has become increasingly important in fostering a consciousness of "we" in the face of social policies that further divide the "haves" from the "have nots". Without this sense of "we"ness there will be less of a sense of security. As such, the social workers' tasks go beyond the individual case to advocacy for increased services such as child care and improved educational programs.

3. Staff of social work programs in housing settings should understand and subscribe to a collective vision of the program's purpose.

During our 1996 study one CDC worker said: "From Custodian to President, we all have a part in making it work." This reflected staff recognition that all staff were part of the same vision of building a strong community within which families could flourish. Common to all efforts was a belief in the strength of families. As such, staff do not see the provision of services as a way of making up for residents deficits, but rather as ways of enhancing client strengths. This value stance served the staff well in the time of devolution. They were able to respond in ways that helped residents see what was positive in the demand for work while assisting tenants in obtaining available benefits. The effort in relation to welfare reform paralleled their stance regarding rent arrears, in which rent problems were seen as opportunity to help families deal with their problems in a better way.

There is a recognition that services are only as good as residents' ability to use them. While previously much of what was addressed by workers came up in the normal course of interaction with clients, this is no longer the case with clients who do not routinely interact with workers due to their work schedules. As noted, residents are less likely to be on-site during the day. Staff have responded by instituting night hours but residents are often pressed when they return from work. Nonetheless, one worker "leaves the shade up" in her office so residents will know she is there and they can stop in to chat. Possibly because of the previous history of Phipps social workers helping residents, workers are still contacted for help, but now the help is not likely to be provided face to face. At best it is provided through phone contacts between worker and resident. Except for emergencies, an even more frequent mode of communication is the answering machine. This means that the opportunity to extensively prepare clients on a face to face basis for contacts with service agencies is less likely to take place. Only the name of the contact can be provided. Unfortunately, some of the educating and enabling

function the social worker could provide is now diminished, even though this role is seen as critical.

Further, now the focus is less on how to help the client achieve their goals than upon helping residents fit into the highly proscribed, and often mandated, categorical service. In this new environment it is even more important that agency staff subscribe to a unified and positive message so that the resident experiences from all staff that sense of belief in the capacity of the residents.

4. Efforts should be made to provide services on-site.

The Phipps Houses experience indicated that the best used services are those provided in the tenants' own buildings, or as nearby as possible. This principle evolved out of a recognition that many families needed to have the security of taking risks on their own turf before they were able to effectively leave their home area and branch out. Further it provided a sense that this was "our" program not one imposed upon us. This sense was further reinforced by programs being developed out of identified resident needs. Thus, many Phipps CDC services were not only "community based", but also "community centered" in that they existed out of community need and operated with residents' collaboration (Ewalt, et.al.,1998).

With devolution it has been increasingly difficult to develop on-site services, although this continues to be a priority. Further, some on-site services have had to be closed because of the time constraints faced by residents. For example, due to the increased number of working parents, it was necessary to close the in-home, daytime program where staff and parents engaged in activities with their children. On the other hand, as has been noted above. Phipps has extended its teen and after school program, and launched an early evening congregate program for children and parents to promote family literacy.

These programs have gone a long way toward helping working parents feel that their children are in a secure and supportive environment. Efforts have also been made to link residents with job training and employment opportunities in the community, continuing the tradition of residents being able to feel that the local program is endorsed by the Phipps community. What has become clear is that on-site services provides a sense of security that enable residents to safely move beyond the security of the setting. This continues to be true, though the nature of the services being used has changed.

5. Social work programs in housing settings should maintain a dual focus upon the individual family and the collective.

A focus on strengthening both individual resident families and building-wide communities must exist. This dual focus recognizes that even strong families deteriorate under the pressures of a chaotic environment. The residents must have the sense that they are a collective. For this reason, there is a concern that the facility be well maintained and residents have been encouraged to report problems they see and to participate in their solution. The development of tenants councils and building meetings were a major aspect of this dual focus. Unfortunately, with the increasing numbers of residents employed, attendance at these regular meetings have declined.

It may also be possible that traditional tenant associations have a natural ebb and flow in their membership as residents interests and concerns fluctuate. At this point, tenants appear generally satisfied with management policies, and most feel connected with others in the community. The need for a forum to air grievances and official channel to resolve differences appears less immediate, and may have resulted in lower attendance and interest. Ironically, it may be that fewer tenant association meetings contribute to increased dissatisfaction and renewed calls for meeting. Therefore, tenant associations have not been abandoned at Phipps Houses, but there has been a search for alternate community building activities. The formation of the Crotona Park Conservancy is an example of a new collective that has the potential to bring tenants together (with other area residents and leaders) around the adjacent park space and quality of life issues of mutual concern. Special parties, and recognition days where tenants who have been of service to others and tenants who have obtained their GED are recognized, also continue to bring tenants together as a community.

With fewer persons at building meetings, staff working on individual problems have needed to think how one family's problem may be reflected among the larger building community. With fewer resources, such problems have been less likely than before devolution to be responded to by new programing. The response in a time of scarcity has been to modify existing programing to meet the new need. Examples have includes the hiring of translators at the health center to address the needs of the immigrant population, and the changing of social worker and rental agent schedules so they are available one night a week. Similarly as it became clear that working residents had an increased interest in, and commitment to, the educational progress of their children, modifications were made to the youth program so that it had a more explicit educational focus. For example, youth center staff are working with the local principal to prepare children for the city-wide achievement tests.

6. Community development activities should be extended to the surrounding community, and not be not be limited to the building alone.

Changes in social provisions, (such as changes in public assistance and Section 8 funding), can make a big difference in the lives of the tenants in marginal neighborhoods. Therefore, building based social service efforts must maintain a dual focus on individual support and advocacy for larger community changes. This requires a vision of services that recognizes their integrated nature, and the role of staff on both the individual and community change level.

The 1996 study made clear that the interests of tenants go beyond their building. The safety of the neighborhood streets, the quality of the schools their children attend and the availability of jobs are all larger issues that directly impact upon the lives of the residents. As workers have helped individuals obtain employment and develop self employment opportunities, they have always been conscious of the need to address issue of employment opportunity on a larger community level. Phipps CDC has a history of providing services to non-tenants. Whether it is the fact that individuals being employed during the day leaves a building empty, making it more vulnerable to theft, or the fact that as the Phipps community uses more of the services Phipps can provide, there are now less services for outsiders.

Thus, devolution has increased tensions between the smaller unit and the larger unit. Just as the individual cannot stand apart from the housing community so too, the housing complex cannot stand apart from the larger community. Phipps staff recognizes this and attempts to allocate some of their diminished time and resources to community work. Without such activity they will not be able to make the contacts that will provide access for their residents.

The scarcity of devolution is a subtle destructive force thwarting attempts to create the larger community change by pitting groups against each other for limited resources. In response, Phipps Houses has sought opportunities to engage the larger community. Some of that involves allowing residents of the city run buildings sandwiched between the Phipps building attend the Phipps Christmas party out of a recognition that if they are not there some of their kids will not have any Christmas gifts. This also serves to make the block, not just the Phipps building, a community. Similarly, one quarter of the children in the day camp program were not the children of tenants. Phipps staff has also spearheaded a community wide clean-up day where residents join other members of the community in cleaning up a local park. In this effort Phipps took the lead in obtaining the materials necessary for the clean up effort. The building community also worked together to collect food for needy families for Thanksgiving.

What devolution appears to have done is to make such efforts less related to bringing services that all members of the community can use, and more devoted to the types of activities which help community residents interact with each other. Such activities can build a climate of trust and bring community residents closer together. Eventually it may be possible to use that sense of togetherness for larger community change efforts.

An interesting development which shows a connection between the individual and the larger context is in the area of education. Contrary to our belief that employment requirements would lead to fewer residents going to school, an increased number of working residents are also going to school. Residents report that they are going on with their education because they need more education to advance in the workplace. While previously they expressed this view and indicated a commitment to education fewer acted upon this commitment. There is an increased involvement both in finishing high school and in continuing with college. It is too early to tell whether working parents will be able to meet the multiple responsibilities of education, child care and employment.

7. Engagement of clients must take place in a context of needs identified within the client -- those needs may be identified by tenants, workers, management.

The Phipps CDC staff have always cultivated relationships with maintenance persons, building managers, security officers, and others in order to open channels of communication about residents who were in need of service. Until devolution, this communication was based on frequent, face to face contact between these people and tenants on a daily basis. With the increasing number of residents who are working and the immigrant population who see the building as housing, not as a community, workers must use a range of opportunities to establish contact with families. Community oriented

activities, especially those taking place on Saturday and after the supper hour and the intake interviews conducted when the family is accepted into the building are now major vehicles for establishing a non-problem focused relationship with clients. In setting up community activities workers had been able to depend upon residents to take major responsibility for planning and implementation. Increasingly, this has become the responsibility of the social service staff if the event is to happen.

In a time when more poor people are engaged in work activities during the day, there are even fewer eyes and ears to provide security to an area. However, in cases where social services are attached to housing, more can be done to strengthen the links between persons who remain. At Phipps Houses, the security staff continues to keep workers in touch with difficulties in the building and they can be addressed. Furthermore, the development of the teen program at Phipps included a conscious recognition that teens could be of help to other members of the community.

With devolution, the teen program provides a safe haven for an increasing number of teens, despite the fact that increasing numbers of children are now taking jobs to help their families survive. The program serves as a link between staff and parents. It increases parents sense of security that their children are being well cared for. Being on-site, residents know the staff and program's location. Neighborhood residents use Phipps CDC staff assigned to the teen program as a conduit to keep parents informed if a child is going astray or having difficulty. In fact, the parent who had to stop work to address the problems of her child was first informed of the child's troubling behavior by the youth worker. Thus, the connection between social services and housing is even more important in a time of devolution.

Another issue resulting from the increase in working residents is in the area of helping families address child care needs. Increasingly, staff are asked to "watch out" for children who are in the neighborhood when parents need to work. While the on-site child care facility has a waiting list of 50 children, workers are active in helping families connect with each other to develop cooperative child care arrangements. Despite this, there is a recognition that increasing numbers of children are at home alone. It is around such emergent needs that Phipps CDC develops its contacts with residents and structures its programming.

The difficulties staff face have been in obtaining scarce resources for residents and finding a time when they can get together with residents to plan initiatives to meet their needs. This means that the intercessions with clients are now more on a crisis basis and are more problem focused. The constraints on residents' time limit their opportunity to work with staff on thinking through goals and plans to achieve them.

8. Organizations should cultivate the institutional flexibility and capacity to pursue multiple points of intervention in order to address the needs of tenants.

In posing the question of how has Phipps Houses been able to meet the continuing needs of its residents in this time of scarcity, we discovered this final principle. Phipps CDC has never restricted itself to address only the needs of the particular tenants in residence. It has always seen current tenants' needs in

a larger, community-wide context. Recognizing the broader sphere, they have always worked on multiple levels. None of the programming that currently exists would be there if their had not been a clear vision supported by the capacity to write grant proposals. Further, the ability to build coalitions and network, to lobby and advocate, and utilize skills in working with groups has been invaluable to Phipps CDC's ability to bring to Phipps Houses the resource base it enjoys.

In developing neighborhood coalitions and in working with outside agencies, Phipps Houses has provided consultation and guidance to other agencies in programming and proposal writing. Out of this willingness to provide services to others Phipps Houses has built up a reservoir of good will which can be drawn upon in this time of scarcity. The many boards on which Phipps' administrators sit are another aspect of being able to survive in a time of scarcity. Yet if this was the exclusive focus of Phipps Housing they would not be meeting the very real needs of some of their residents for social support and counseling. It is the capacity to operate on multiple levels that has enabled Phipps to survive -- they have consciously developed in staff a diversification and expertise in multiple levels of social work practice. As one service area became less important, or unfunded, they could move on and meet related needs through other services. Having a larger, systemic view, they seem able to innovate in ways that continue to meet residents needs. This ability to operate at a variety of levels at the same time that makes it possible to build and sustain a nurturing community.

Summary

In returning to Phipps Houses to investigate the impact of the devolution of services, we found that the major factor has been in the area of the work requirement in public assistance. The demand that all public assistance recipients work has had positive as well as negative impacts. The positive effects have been that the requirements have served as an impetus for many residents to take actions they had long contemplated. It is important that one realize that Phipps Houses has had a group of clients who have been encouraged over the years to plan for a different future. In that way they may be different from the average recipient. They are clearly unique in that they have lived in a supportive environment, which in contrast to the usual landlord, is supportive of their efforts to develop their capacities. For this reason they have options and can take risks, such as setting up their own businesses, that are closed to the usual recipient. With these supports they have obtained jobs and pursued education. The climate of the building has changed with this change. It is no longer acceptable to be sitting outside the building during the day. Residents expect that everyone will be working. Tenants support each other in job seeking by bringing to workers information about job opportunities that can be shared with others.

On the negative side, despite all the support Phipps Houses are able to provide, there are families who have not been able to adjust to the demands of work. Some are simply unable to consistently show up at work and are fired. Others can not meet requirements due to a variety of chronic and acute individual factors. In addition, working has caused a variety of family strains. There are more money management problems that must be addressed by staff and a emergency loan fund has been set up. The lack of available day care is a major problem and some children are being left home alone. Furthermore, between work and family responsibilities, and the addition of school for some, it is hard for families to make contact with the resources they need. These families do not work the kind of jobs where they can

take off when their child is sick or for a clinic appointment. The days of "9 - 5" social services are over. In response to changing needs of residents, Phipps Houses has modified workers' schedules to provide service on Saturdays and weekday evenings. Even with these modifications, face to face service contacts between workers and residents are increasingly limited, and more and more services are delivered through telephone conversations. This means that new residents will not have the reservoir of past experience with workers to draw on. Workers may only get to know families on a crisis basis.

These issues are not limited to Phipps CDC. Beyond the area of employment, staff report clear evidence of a continuing erosion in available services. Over worked staff in the social agencies that remain are increasingly unresponsive and difficult to reach. It appears that there is more red tape and it takes longer to be accepted for services.

Despite the many problems impacting upon the residents the Phipps Houses community seems to have survived. The principles for community building seem alive and well in this time of change. It is important to realize that it is the settings continued ability to innovate, to operate on multiple levels, to modify existing programming to address changing population needs, all within the context of a shared vision of the capacity of families to develop and grow that has made the survival of this community effort possible. As evidenced at Phipps Houses, the eight principles can serve as guides in developing new programs, or in evaluating and adapting existing operations.

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