



Greenwich Pathways, Inc Case Study

509 Putnam Avenue Project

Greenwich, CT

Pathways, Inc. is a social services agency established in 1981 by Greenwich, CT families. They were responding to the needs of relatives and others who were discharged from psychiatric hospitals following long periods of institutionalization and were often homeless or living in substandard dwellings. The agency also provides services to adults who have been cared for at home by family, often with aging parents who are concerned about how to ensure good long-term care for their disabled children. Pathways provides job-training, health and counseling for about 100 clients with psychiatric disabilities, including 28 people who live at their transitional housing residences. Greenwich is a town of slightly over 60,000, located on Long Island Sound. It is considered to be the wealthiest town in Connecticut, the state with the highest per capita income in the country. It is also ranked as the second wealthiest place in the US with a population of 20,000 or more. In the early 90's, recognizing that their clients faced a daunting task in finding affordable housing and that the residents of their transitional units had no local permanent housing option, Pathways, Inc. decided to develop permanent supportive housing for 16 clients.

From 1994 to 1997, the organization was able to raise nearly a million dollars, but had a harder time finding a good site. Working with a local realtor, a United Way volunteer with ties to the agency, Pathways wanted to find a large enough site that was centrally located near transportation and other amenities – and within their budget. Finally, after a two-year search, the ideal property came on the market in fall 1998. Located on a main thoroughfare, in a section of the city that is a mixture of private homes, and businesses, the house they found was located near the library, hospital, stores, and churches, with a bus stop right across the street.

The agency's offer to purchase was accepted by the owner, a woman with a physical disability who requested that she be given extra time to close so that she could find alternative housing. A deposit was placed on the house in the late fall, with a planned closing in the spring. In the meantime, wanting to do some advance outreach in the abutting neighborhood, the agency sent information to every member of the neighborhood association, inviting them to visit the agency, learn about their work and review the preliminary plans for the property. Not one person took them up on their offer. Instead, both Pathways, their board members and the seller started receiving letters containing derogatory comments about the mentally ill and threatening prolonged lawsuits to keep the project from moving forward. Soon after, the seller was served with legal papers from the Brookridge District Association to prevent her from selling her house. Sensitive to the cause because of her own disability, the seller refused to withdraw the offer and hired her own attorney.

This first lawsuit, filed in January 1998, claimed that the house had a deed restriction limiting it to residential use and asserted that the planned supportive services were a prohibited institutional use. The attorney determined that the restrictive covenant did not apply to the subject property and the sale ultimately went through. Undaunted, the Association – whose multi-million dollar home owners had enough resources to pitch a protracted legal battle – continued in their fight to keep the project from being built, arguing their case on multiple legal, zoning, and public safety fronts.

The Association claimed the septic system to be used was inadequate (despite the fact that it had already been approved and was similar to the one being used by a nearby mansion which had only one bathroom less than the proposed project.) They argued that their children's safety would be at risk by the presence of mentally ill residents on their block; they sued the planning and zoning commission for approving a Special Permit which allowed the project to go through (but only after Pathways agreed to reduce the number of units down to 10 from the originally proposed 16).

Numerous lawsuits were filed from both sides: The Association sued the owner, Pathways and the Town of Greenwich. Pathways, in turn, sued the town and the neighborhood association citing violations of the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. After reaching the Connecticut Supreme Court and the US Court of Appeals, the last suit was finally settled Jan. 29, 2004 with both parties bound by a provision of the settlement not to disclose any details. Pathways was finally allowed to begin construction, but not before hundreds of thousand of dollars of legal costs were incurred, as well as 6 years of delay. Fortunately, the costs of the legal battle were shouldered by a broad network of grassroots supporters and family foundations that were committed to ensuring that the housing would be built. In addition, the city's Office of Community Development and US Dept. of HUD were willing to grant extensions because of the legal delays. Construction for the project is anticipated to be completed in February 2006.

For more details about the various lawsuits, click [here](#).