



Cedar Hill: Property Management and Services Collaboration

Below is a detailed profile of Cedar Hill's successful collaboration between property management and support services. Also available are separate profiles on the [project](#) itself, as well as a look at Cedar Hill's [tenant involvement](#) programs. [Sample documents](#) from the project and a [photo tour](#) are also available.

A Story of Collaboration

Everyone who tours Cedar Hill will use the same adjectives to describe it: “warm,” “gorgeous,” “inviting,” “special.” While great design is a significant contributor to a great housing development, what makes Cedar Hill so special is the atmosphere created by its excellent property management and supportive services staff. Starting from shared organizational missions to “keep people housed,” and building on the strong relationship between the two organizations’ Executive Directors, the Director of Property Management for HOME, Inc. (Charles Klompus) and the Coordinator of Social Services for Columbus House (Emily Robinson) have together created a living environment that is safe, attractive, comfortable and tenant-focused. Together, their philosophy encompasses three primary goals:

- *Goal 1: Keep Residents Housed.* The chief goal of Cedar Hill Apartments is to keep people housed despite chronic disabilities and challenges that can impede stability.
- *Goal 2: Improve Quality of Life.* The secondary goal is to improve the quality of life for each resident in the building. To accomplish this, the staff works with the residents in the development of their daily living skills.
- *Goal 3: Build Community.* Community is a vital component of the success of Cedar Hill and a key to the success of the residents remaining housed. Most of the residents who come to Cedar Hill have lost the natural support of family, friends and neighbors over time. The sense of community within the building rebuilds that support and is critical to the success of keeping people housed.

Key elements of the partnership between the two organizations include:

- Positive chemistry rooted in mutual respect, trust, professionalism, and complimentary strengths.
- A spirit of entrepreneurship in solving problems, acting both proactively and creatively to address ongoing and emergent issues.
- A willingness to work hard and work together to help people maintain their housing.
- Each organization is very competent at their jobs, and brings a certain maturity and depth of experience.
- Clear, strong boundaries around roles and responsibilities.
 - [Operating Policy & Procedure Guidebook](#). This document includes detailed descriptions of the relationship between the property management and services teams, the eviction prevention and crisis intervention policies, and more. An excerpt from the guidebook speaks to how the teams collaborate: “The Property Manager notifies the Support Services team of recent incidents, late rent payment and any

other issue related to housing. A copy of incident reports and 10-day notices of non-payment of rent are given to the Support Services team. Support Services will then outreach to the tenant and determine how best to help him/her develop a solution in order to avoid possible eviction. In addition, tenants may engage a Support Services staff person in advocating for a repair to their unit or a payment plan for a missed rent payment. They will assist the tenant in negotiating a solution with property management... All major decisions regarding tenants, for example move-in or eviction proceedings are made together. The decision making process is a collaborative effort and not a difficult one at Cedar Hill Apartments.”

- [Tenant Selection Plan](#).
- The property manager and lead case manager have work experience in the other’s field prior to coming to Cedar Hill. For example, the property manager’s previous experience as a methadone program case worker has helped him work with tenants who are actively using and/or in recovery. The lead case manager has a tenant organizing background, increasing her sensitivity to the important of group dynamics among tenants and the need to place work with individuals into a group context.
- Consistent, regular communication between agencies and among staff regarding tenant issues prevents triangulation and misunderstandings.

The real strength of the HOME, Inc./Columbus House partnership is in the manner in which key staff people from both agencies relate to one another. The relationship begins with the close working relationship between the respective Executive Directors who each have strongly committed their agencies to supportive housing and are continually collaborating on future supportive housing projects. The Executive Directors ensure that effective, experienced staff members are assigned to Cedar Hill and future initiatives; thereafter, they strive to support these staff members and insist on a high level of service delivery. The property manager and chief case manager, in addition to years of separate experience, now have five years of day-to-day collaborative experience solving a wide range of problems. Each of these staff members has absorbed the goals of the other to the point that they work together – on the client level -- to keep clients housed and – on the building level -- to keep the asset working effectively for the future. This collaborative effort has often helped tenants avoid eviction, hospitalization, and incarceration.

Cedar Hill and HOME, Inc. staff have developed a cooperative working relationship that serves to improve the quality of life for residents in the building. The services staff and case managers meet on a regular basis with property management staff to review issues of the building and the residents. The staff share the philosophy of keeping people housed and will work flexibly, within established professional and legal boundaries, to ensure that each resident maximizes his/her opportunity to remain at Cedar Hill. This relationship of understanding and cooperation has contributed to the success of this supportive housing.

Staffing

On-site staffing is as follows:

- Two case managers on-site 8am-6pm, Monday-Friday.

- Front desk clerks, who are current tenants and paid for their services, are on duty from 5pm-12am, seven days per week. Cedar Hill notes that twenty-four hours coverage would be ideal, but is currently unaffordable.
- Property management and service staff has pager coverage for all hours not on-site.
- The property manager is based off-site and shares his time between this property and a few other local HOME, Inc. properties. He is on-site about one-half to one full day every third week or so, and is available as needed otherwise.
- Maintenance staff is available as needed, on on-site a few times per week on average. Some tenants are paid as janitorial staff, and some of the same tenants also serve as front desk clerks.

As was noted above, HOME, Inc. employs two to five residents in two roles: front-desk/reception, and janitorial. In both cases, HOME Inc. plays the role of traditional employer by monitoring performance, setting wages, etc. The service provider plays an essential supportive role as “job coach,” providing encouragement, helping manage schedules, providing structure, and seeking additional training resources. Additionally, by setting her usual high (but not unreachable) standards, the chief service provider monitors performance of tenant employees, reporting regularly her observations to management.

Examples of Collaboration

- *Eviction Prevention for Non-Payment:* As with most supportive housing projects, the deeply subsidized rent structure of Cedar Hill allows 30% affordability for all residents. The minimum rent is \$25, and the maximum is the area’s Fair Market Rent of about \$650. HOME, Inc. supplies the on-site service provider with a semi-monthly delinquency list. The service provider, who in 15-25% of the cases is the representative payee for the tenant, then intervenes as appropriate. The manager allows repayment arrangements without court supervision, and these are occasionally necessary. In the unusual cases where this intervention is unsuccessful, management proceeds with a legal course of action. This typically includes a letter from the sponsor’s attorney and sometimes further action. Typically, this results in a court-supervised repayment arrangement under which possession is returned to the owner, but eviction is stayed as long as the terms of the repayment arrangement are met. The elements and pace of this action are well known to the lead service provider, and she often employs other supportive interventions during this time as appropriate.
- *Eviction Prevention for Nuisance:* The service provider facilitates an informal complaint system by which tenants are encouraged to fill out a brief complaint form that is then faxed to the property manager. These forms often form an important basis for future action. All tenants are well aware of the system and that it is utilized, so tenants are aware that disruptive behavior on their part will likely be reported. Upon receipt of a material complaint, the manager will schedule a meeting with the tenant and the service provider. At that meeting, the specifics of the incident or behavior are described, with the manager laying out the consequences of continued nuisance. The service manager assists with ideas for supporting the tenant, intervention with others, etc. Often, a formal letter follows the meeting from the manager describing the incident/behavior, consequences, and plan of action, if any. If the nuisance continues, a second meeting is called. At this meeting, often the managers “raises the stakes” by inviting a relevant outside service provider of the tenants, such as their mental health case manager. To reinforce the seriousness

of such a meeting, the manager refers the matter to its attorney. Things then proceed from there, hopefully resulting in a cessation of the nuisance.

- In its 6 ½ years of Cedar Hill’s operations, only one dispossession (for nuisance) has culminated in actual eviction, and as of this writing only one resident is under a court-supervised re-payment agreement.

Lessons Learned

- Be creative, and bring an entrepreneurial spirit to this work.
- Create a shared goal of keeping people housed, with a focus on keeping *everyone* housed – not only an individual.
- Be clear on who is doing what, and let them do it. The sponsors note that their joint success is a direct result of the different skills that each organization brings to Cedar Hill along with clear boundaries. The differences have allowed each organization to focus on its strengths rather than “tripping over each other.”
- Take the time to create a shared vision and build trust among collaborating agencies.
- Communicate effectively. Being on the same team helps tenants understand that talking with services or property management will yield the same result as talking with the other.
- Property management needs to make “space” for the service provider-tenant relationship. By carefully setting the timing of warnings, being patient, and even choosing words carefully, the manager can support – and not hinder – the service provider-tenant relationship.
- Keep high standards, and care about the success of the tenants, the quality of the building, and the quality of the operation as a whole.
- It’s all about the intersection of good service provision, housing retention, and asset management.