



Cedar Hill: Project Snapshot

Cedar Hill is one of nine projects developed under the innovative Connecticut Support Housing Demonstration Program. The goal of the project is to provide permanent, safe, and affordable housing as well as flexible, individualized supports intended to help tenants maintain their housing. Cedar Hill, a single-site project in New Haven, serves formerly homeless and dually diagnosed adults, has 25 efficiency apartments, and opened in December 1997.

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

Partners

Cedar Hill is the result of a partnership formed between two community-based organizations. HOME, Inc., a nonprofit provider of affordable housing in south central Connecticut, developed and presently owns and manages the project. Columbus House, Inc., is a provider of emergency shelter, transitional housing, and supportive housing services in the New Haven area. Columbus House provides the on-site case management services at Cedar Hill. Their partnership developed in response to several forces:

- Legal Aid and other New Haven-based advocates for homeless people (including the local shelter provider, Columbus House) were fighting locally to forestall the closing of a downtown SRO. One outcome of their battle was an aldermanic resolution to replace some of the beds lost with transitional and permanent housing; this committed the City to at least some level of political support for supportive housing.
- Columbus House was previously a provider of only homeless shelter services. However, through the mid-1990's, staff and leadership noted an evolution in the nature and extent of homelessness. The occurrence of serious mental illness, histories of use and active substance addictions, while always a factor, increased noticeably, and individuals were repeatedly cycling in and out of shelters. It was clear that simply providing affordable housing was not sufficient to keep many consumers from repeated episodes of homelessness.
- The state of Connecticut issued a Request for Qualifications for development teams for the Supportive Housing Demonstration Program in 1993. This provided a significant funding opportunity for HOME, Inc., which had already developed one project in response to the aldermanic resolution.

HOME, Inc. and Columbus House were natural partners, sharing:

- A common mission to serve people who are homeless;
- Geographic focus in New Haven; and
- Board members who knew and trusted one another.

Tenants

Cedar Hill has 25 efficiency apartments. Thirteen units are subsidized by Shelter Plus Care and are leased to people who were homeless and who have a dual diagnosis of severe mental illness and substance use. Referrals for these units are increasingly people who have been homeless for long periods of time. About 50% of these units (25% of total) are leased to people who meet the HUD definition of chronically homeless. The remaining units are leased to people who have low income (50% of Area Median Income or less), and who need and want supportive services. Many in this group are formerly homeless themselves; in practice, approximately 70% of tenants at any given time are formerly homeless individuals, most entering Cedar Hill directly from homelessness. Tenants include both men and women.

Tenant referrals originate from the local Shelter Plus Care Committee for the Shelter Plus Care units, from Columbus House's shelter and transitional housing, from other housing and shelter providers in the New Haven area, from HOME Inc.'s and Cedar Hill's waiting lists, and from walk-ins and word-of-mouth.

This project was not initially focused on serving long-term homeless people. Cedar Hill was designed to serve two distinct populations: disabled single adults who were homeless or at risk of homelessness (50%); and formerly homeless and low-income working poor who wished to live in a supportive housing setting (50%). However, over time, the population served has changed to include a greater number of people who are homeless for the long term, many with co-occurring mental illness and substance use. Both agencies have learned that the number of long-term homeless individuals in New Haven is on the rise, and people require more intensive services from a broader array of provider systems.

Building

Cedar Hill is a single site, 25-unit project on State Street in northeastern New Haven, Connecticut. The project originally consisted of a vacant brick and concrete building and a surrounding parking lot, with a total lot area of 35,000 square feet. The final development has approximately 16,000 square feet of developed residential space.

Cedar Hill is a new construction project with three stories and an elevator. Most of the apartments are located on the second and third floors. The first floor includes a spacious common room with comfortable furnishings, a television, and kitchenette; a large meeting room; vending machines; and an outdoor patio and garden. Case management and property management offices are located off the main lobby. Other amenities include a common laundry. The entry area is supervised each evening from 8pm-12am. The units are furnished efficiency apartments (approximately 360 square feet) with full kitchens and bathrooms.

Neighborhood

The northeastern area of New Haven offers a mixture of residential, commercial, and residential uses. In the immediate area of the project are a health care service office, a day care, a public park, an active Amtrak railroad right of way, and additional residential and commercial uses. The

neighborhood has an urban feel, and it is attractive, busy, clean, and diverse. The site is located on a bus line, and is within walking distance to neighborhood stores. A grocery store is located within ½ mile.

Siting and Community Support

Site identification and selection resulted in significant delays (and lessons learned). The site for Cedar Hill Apartments was identified after an extensive, and often frustrating, search process. Two alternate sites were identified early on: one was lost when State approval of the site was delayed due to tenant relocation issues; the other when it became clear that local political support would not be forthcoming.

Considerable time and effort were paid to gaining community support and trust prior to developing Cedar Hill. Once the State Street site was identified, HOME, Inc. secured (with a grant from CSH) the services of a community organizer to do outreach in the neighborhood, develop a comprehensive community support plan, and work closely with the neighbors, area businesses and community leaders to incorporate their input and concerns. HOME, Inc., as the property manager, was essential in this educational effort since they could respond to questions about tenant selection, management practices, and long-term maintenance.

Effective communication with neighbors has contributed greatly to the success of Cedar Hill Apartments, and the immediate neighbors have taken on an informal supportive role with the project. The church on the block donates food, clothing and household goods on a regular basis. Other neighbors call when suspicious activity is taking place in or around the property. Likewise, Columbus House staff and Cedar Hill tenants have developed an effective “block watch” system within the building through which “incident reports” are prepared by eyewitnesses and faxed immediately to the property manager. City officials stop by from time to time to visit and bring vegetables from their garden. The area’s alderman struggled to develop supportive housing at the downtown YMCA facility several years prior to Cedar Hill’s development, and so was a strong supporter of this project.

Once the site was chosen, NIMBY (“not in my back yard”) concerns resulted in a development that closely met the permissible zoning regulations. The building itself blends in well with the neighborhood and has no identifying signage that would set it apart from other buildings on the street. In response to local concerns, additional funding was sought and received to add an attractive ornamental iron fence around the site.

Services

The primary philosophy at Cedar Hill is to keep people housed. All tenants hold one-year, renewable leases, and services are not a condition of tenancy. Services staff approach tenants with the understanding that people who live in the building may have issues that have created barriers in the past to securing and retaining housing, such as mental illness, substance use, unemployment, and medical/health issues. The core of the service program is designed to help tenants “keep their keys,” and all tenants are closely involved in the development and design of their individual service plans. Since opening in 1997, 100% of the tenants have used the services to one degree or another.

The central feature of Cedar Hill's supportive services is flexible, individualized supports coordinated by on-site case management. The approach is consumer-centered. Columbus House provides the full-time equivalent of 2 service coordinators (case managers) on-site. Columbus House's community organizer is also available to work with residents on developing tenant and support groups, educational and employment opportunities, and related efforts.

While the bottom line is the effort to keep people housed, the focus and momentum of the case managers is on improving the quality of life of the people living at Cedar Hill. Tenants have indicated that they need basic life skills training, so the staff supports them with learning about cleaning their apartments, money management/budgeting, family reunification, recreation, nutrition and health care. Occasionally, tenants who have lived on the streets for years are challenged by the notion that this housing is permanent; hence, the adjustment period can sometimes be quite lengthy. Working with the individuals' needs and desires in mind, the staff does not rush anyone to make changes or learn new skills. Instead, over time and with patience and support (and sometimes a little nudging), the staff will introduce new ideas and skills that will help the tenants live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

Substance Use Services

Services and supports include relapse prevention groups, AA/NA meetings on-site weekly, referrals to treatment for mental health, substance use and medical issues, and money management services. While a "zero tolerance" policy on drug use is included in each tenant's lease, sobriety is not a requirement of staying housed in a practical sense. If a tenant relapses, social services steps in to get the tenant into treatment if necessary. If inpatient treatment is necessary, the tenant is able to keep his/her housing for up to 90 days. Upon return, he/she will work out a plan with the case manager to continue with outpatient treatment, deal with any outstanding rent payments due, etc. If the tenant is using drugs chaotically, and the housing is jeopardized due to their behavior, Cedar Hill staff works to get more appropriate housing for the tenant (e.g., more supervised transitional housing, etc.). Though this approach certainly has its challenges in terms of potential mixed messages or different responses to different tenants, Cedar Hill is pleased with its success in this area.

Medical Services

Visiting nurses see tenants who require regular medical services on-site. Tenants are also referred to Hill Health Center or Fair Haven Health Clinic, Yale-New Haven Hospital, and the Hospital of St. Raphael's.

Off-site Services

There is a substantial referral network that has been established by Columbus House over the years. Referrals are made to treatment providers throughout New Haven, and there is a natural link between the Connecticut Mental Health Center and Cedar Hill for Shelter Plus Care certificate holders. Cedar Hill case managers often call team meetings with outside providers to work more efficiently toward tenants' goals. The Community Service Coordinator has also invited professionals from the service arena to come to the site with information for the tenants. These include legal services, employment services, and basic medical services and screening.

Financing

Development

Cedar Hill was part of the Supportive Housing Demonstration Program and, as such, participated in a state-sponsored process that eventually produced 281 units of supportive housing in 9 developments in 6 different cities. The Demonstration was a unique (to Connecticut) collaboration among public, private and non-profit entities to provide layered and flexible financing to selected projects.

The total development cost of \$3,202,227 was financed with following sources:

- \$1,562,500 1% interest loan with a 30 year term from the Community Housing Development Corporation Loan Program
- \$312,500 1% interest loan with 30 year term from the Connecticut Housing Financing Authority
- \$15,281 in General Partner Equity
- \$1,311,946 in net equity through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program, syndicated through the National Equity Fund

Services

The services are paid through a contract with the state of Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), at the rate of \$7,500 per qualified (having mental illness, substance addiction, or both) tenant. For Cedar Hill, this amounts to \$97,500 annually. Additional service funding was sought, but not awarded. In spite of budget constraints, services are available to all tenants without respect to disability.

CSH Role

According to the sponsors, CSH's most important contribution was in establishing and maintaining the interagency approach to financing supportive housing. CSH drove the process that resulted in the demonstration program and the memorandum of understanding among six state agencies to provide the financial resources needed to develop and operate the projects in a coordinate fashion. The sponsors also cited: emphasis/insistence on good design; financial support through predevelopment loans and grants; initiating the process toward a Connecticut-wide supportive housing initiative; and high quality technical assistance and training on all aspects of development and operations.

Results

Along with the other Supportive Housing Demonstration projects, Cedar Hill participated in the [Program Evaluation Report](#) undertaken by the Arthur Andersen, Kay Sherwood, TWR Consulting and the University of Pennsylvania Health System. The Evaluation identified and analyzed many factors, both in the aggregate and on a project-by-project basis. Detailed results are available in the publication, and demonstrate a very positive impact across all factors analyzed.

Among the data reported that is specific to Cedar Hill:

- Tenant turnover rate from 5/96 to 2/01: 41%
- Number of exits: 14
- Reasons for exit: moved to other housing, 43%; evicted, 21%; deceased, 29%; unknown, 7%
- Occupancy rate: 97.30%

In addition to the information provided by the Evaluation, HOME, Inc. asks tenants to participate in a survey by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. This pilot survey became an annual effort. The survey questions are as follows:

- How well would you rate the quality of service you received?
- Did you get the kind of service you wanted?
- To what extent has the program met your needs?
- Would you recommend the program to a friend who needed similar help?
- How satisfied are you with the amount of help you received?
- Have the services helped you deal more effectively with your problems?
- How satisfied are you with services?
- Would you come back?

Remarkably, Cedar Hill residents report a satisfaction rate of about 85-95% each year.

Lessons Learned

- *The importance of the union of services and property management* – 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 support services staff. [See profile.](#)
- *The value of tenant involvement and employment* – Cedar Hill offers a range of tenant involvement and employment opportunities, and these have added to the tenant experience of Cedar Hill. [See profile.](#)
- *Serving the long-term homeless* – Columbus House and HOME, Inc., are moving their supportive housing program toward serving people who have been homeless repeatedly or for long periods of time. This move, however, results less from an evolution of mission or philosophy and more from demand. The first and second waves of supportive housing in Connecticut addressed much of the less intensive supportive housing needs locally, leaving people with multiple and severe mental health and substance use issues still to be served. As the affordable housing crisis deepens and people continue to be discharged from hospitals and incarceration without adequate supports and resources, the need for supportive housing is growing. People who have been out of the mainstream for long periods often lack the natural supports needed to successfully navigate the myriad activities of daily life. There continues to be a lack of consistent treatment planning and delivery, and people are living in the community with more complex needs than perhaps at any other time in history.
- *Solid project financing* – The financial package available through the Demonstration provided sufficient funding for not only the construction, but also to ensure long-term affordability (by establishing operating reserves in the capital budget). Rent increases were built in and

anticipated, and draws on reserves are done on a quarterly basis. At the same time, the project lacked as much funding as was needed. More service dollars are desired to pay the existing staff more appropriately, and the operating budget should increase to be able to pay for 24/7 security as needed, improve the landscaping, and add several hours of maintenance/janitorial staffing.

- *Integration among tenants* – The sponsors are surprised how little the “categories” mean once people are housed. People with disabilities, people who have been homeless for the long-term, people who are actively using drugs, and the working poor, all need, want, and use the services. Their interaction within the project is very normal. This can be an especially challenging issue because funding for services is typically tied to particular populations, especially those perceived to have the greatest needs based on diagnoses. Being prepared to serve every tenant, regardless of documented level of need, is important. At Cedar Hill, the services and property management teams have worked diligently to treat everyone equally. Staff has found that individual needs and personalities tend to trump categories and diagnoses in the end, and the sponsors welcome that dynamic.
- *Anticipating issues in the first year* – The intensity of issues and transitions in the first year of the project were not anticipated. This impacted expectations of the tenants for themselves, and of the services and property management staff for both the tenants and the property. There was a considerable amount of substance use relapse, security issues, and behavioral challenges that needed to be addressed. Simultaneously, the case manager and service coordinator were struggling to redefine services in a housing setting. At the same time the tenants were learning about taking responsibility in this particular context, the services staff was learning about giving up control and finding new ways to engage with people. While perhaps not surprising, the sponsors and their staff were not anticipating these issues. Training on issues in the first year has some merit; however, the sponsors also indicated that for the next project, they would spend more time in the screening/tenant selection process. The sponsors are committed to housing the long-term homeless and avoiding “creaming” only those tenants who appear to be the “easiest” to house.

Suggestions

For shelter providers trying to serve this population, Columbus House suggests:

- Jump in and do it!
- Be certain that the on-site service provider is sophisticated, flexible, mature, intuitive, and knowledgeable.
- Talk with others who have made this transition, and spend time in supportive housing to understand how it works and how it’s different.
- Be prepared for a roller coaster ride in the first year, and don’t underestimate the power of the culture of homelessness.

For developers and property managers, HOME, Inc., suggests:

- Expect the process to take longer and be less profitable than you think.
- Insist on, and be prepared to pay for, good design, materials, and landscaping.
- Don’t skimp on unit size.

- If you're good, expect to be on display 24/7 and build the cost of that level of maintenance into your budget.
- Be certain that the property manager is professional, has a desire for perfection and challenge, is patient, and is willing to have the development succeed on its own terms.

Future Projects

- Cedar Hill II is the second collaborative effort by HOME, Inc. and Columbus House, and the project is currently in development. It is being developed as part of Connecticut's second structured supportive housing initiative, known as Pilots. When completed, it will offer 38 units in two separate sites in New Haven. It will also include program space at each location. The tenant population will be integrated, with approximately 10 units set aside and targeted specifically to people with multiple disabilities who are chronically homeless; 17 units reserved for individuals who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness; and 11 units that will be rented to low-income working people. The focus in this project on chronically homeless individuals is an evolution from the first Cedar Hill.
- HOME, Inc. and Columbus House are in the earliest stages of planning their next supportive housing project, presently thought of as "Cedar Hill III". It is envisioned that this project will be incorporated in and funded through the next generation of supportive housing funding that is now in the planning stages. Cedar Hill III is expected to have a minimum of 40 independent units in a congregate site in New Haven and will, once again, house a mix of tenants, including people who are chronically homeless and in need of services, people who are at risk of homelessness, and working poor who need and want affordable housing with services.