

NEW YORK QUARTERLY MEETING, FOURTH MONTH 2012

Annual Report of Friends in the City, Inc., April 15, 2012

**Cedars/Fox Hall at 745 Fox Street, Bronx, NY 10455.** This housing and supportive service residence for 95 special-needs families and low-income residents of New York City is the main concern of Friends in the City committee. We are happy to report that most of the open building and property management issues have been resolved, and that program for our families with a mentally ill adult is doing its job!

**Property Issues.** The problems with malfunction in the geothermal heating and cooling system have been resolved with a discovery of missing return valves on the four ground source wells and pumps, which were then installed last summer. The other unresolved issue is leaky fiberglass windows, which the general contractor is negotiating with the manufacturer: we expect perfectly functioning windows from the settlement. Even though 2010 and part of 2011 was the time of the worst of these two systems malfunctions, Cedars/Fox Hall was able to achieve 40% better energy efficiency than buildings conforming with new NYC energy efficiency codes--according to our environmentalist's preliminary measurement study, and is achieving 38% better energy efficiency than Lantern Group's other most efficient residence (Jasper Hall, which opened at the same time with the same energy star features except for the geothermal system and green roof)--according to consultant-calculated benchmarking data. Friends' concern for environmental and ecological integrity is being served by Cedars.

**Program Achievements.** We are exceptionally fortunate to have a dedicated Program Director and social work team for our tenants. The data show progress for our special-needs adult head of family: 1) 79% are not using drugs or alcohol; 2) 29% are employed; 3) 96% have one year of housing stability (which means paying the rent and remaining responsible tenants). We attach a report from Program Director Stacie Woodland on several tenant success stories (see continuation on other side of report). Stacie Woodland is also becoming the Director of Clinical Services for a series of Lantern Group residences, while remaining the Cedars/Fox Hall Program Director. Stacie reports to FITC that "Cedars has evolved into a building with a sense of community and respect. We have had very little turn over within the [special-needs/DOHMH] family units....both the families and the community tenants are utilizing our services for assistance in handling crisis....particularly the Vets and HASA tenants."

**Special Shade Garden Project.** Due to many distractions last fall, we did not manage to plant the shade-tolerant plants, except a few daffodils. We are organizing to plant this spring, with the help of the green-thumbed tenants and Superintendent Antoni Marinez. We thank Antoni for his attention to the difficult details of landscaping maintenance and geothermal equipment. He is a master castellan.

**Requests from FITC Board.** We are asking New York Quarterly Meeting to put and retain the Application for Housing at Cedars on the website. Vacancies do become available occasionally, and there may be income-eligible Friends in pursuit of excellent housing in the Bronx. We also want input regarding future senior housing for Quakers, a project that we understand will need private funding. Our board welcomes Daniel Kent as Treasurer; he works for Lantern Group as Planning and Development Specialist.

Respectfully submitted by Steven Monroe Smith, Clerk, Friends in the City Committee

**Success story.** We have a tenant who has really struggled with bi-polar disorder, anxiety and isolation. Both [she] and her husband stay to themselves and rarely leave each other's sides. We were in the process of moving to the 4th floor and vacating [the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of Fox Hall]. I thought it might be a good idea to at least approach this woman about helping us with the layout of the space. I thought she may have some interest in interior design because her apartment is absolutely gorgeous. When I approached her Case Manager about this idea, I learned that she has her degree in Architecture from D.R. She was very excited to help. What we didn't know was how talented she is. During the process we saw something emerge in her that we had not seen before, mainly a passion and a sense of self-worth. She had sketched out spaces on all three floors. We were so impressed with her ideas that we allowed her to set up all of our space, including individual offices, herself. Just a few weeks ago she was terrified to leave her home. She has now expressed an interest in pursuing an internship. We see this as a huge success for her and want to support her growth in anyway. She has worked very hard to create a portfolio to showcase her work. Carol Jackson has spoken to some architectural firms that have expressed interest. We are also applying for a stipend for this tenant.

**Success story.** This past summer we had our first summer program for the children in the building. Groups and activities included gardening, arts and crafts, movies, recreation and games. We had four undergraduate interns to assist in running groups. Their knowledge, enthusiasm and openness to learning helped to enhance the program. The children were able to develop healthy connections with the interns through both group activities and one on one time. We had groups for toddlers, elementary school kids and middle school aged children. We look forward to expanding our program next summer.

**Success story.** We were concerned with one of our newer DOHMH tenants. [This tenant] had moved in with her children back in March 2011 after living in a shelter for 5 years. She was beginning to stabilize when she started talking about moving out. With exploration, we discovered that the father of her two younger children was threatening to stop paying child support if she didn't move to Brooklyn. She reported that he is abusive and she is afraid of him. She also feared losing income and getting evicted. She has been working closely with her Case Manager in making healthy changes in her life. She has cut relations with the boyfriend and is now working with the employment specialist to become more financially independent.

**Success story.** Two years ago not only was there no sense of community but there was a division between the DOHMH tenants and the Community tenants. The Community tenants were quite vocal about not wanting to be mistaken as a "homeless" family. At this time the DOHMH families were very resistant to meeting with the case managers. The team felt the families were feeling stigmatized by Community tenants, causing them to resist services. The team made it a top priority to create a safe and supportive community in the building. That was no easy task considering the negative and judgmental atmosphere that had existed for almost a year. Although the families were pretty quickly engaged, this past summer we started to see a big increase in the amount of Community tenants utilizing our services not only for supportive employment but also crisis management, supportive counseling, referrals and socialization. I have not heard the term "homeless families" used in well over a year. We have noticed that the Community tenants, who themselves may have serious mental health and medical issues, are less isolated and more connected to both other tenants and the staff. Tenants, both DOHMH and Community, participated in a joint party. We have seen strong friendships develop within the community as well as a sense of trust with the staff. We hope this will continue especially as we reconfigure the program space.