In Our Backyard

Overcoming Community Resistance to Reentry Housing (A NIMBY Toolkit)

JOHN JAY COLLEGE
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The Fortune Society
BUILDING PEOPLE, NOT PRISONS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY

With over 725,000 men and women being released from prison each year, the need for housing assistance for the formerly incarcerated population is immense. Indeed, in addition to linking homelessness and incarceration, research has identified a significant relationship between homelessness and re-offending. Unfortunately, a number of barriers place the formerly incarcerated population at a disadvantage when trying to access safe and stable housing. For some, returning home to their family is not an option as family members may be unwilling or unable to accommodate them. Accessing housing in the private market also presents a challenge given high prices and landlords' exercising their personal discretion to discriminate against people with criminal histories. Finally, public housing policies – both at the federal and local level – deny access to individuals with certain criminal convictions.

Community-based service providers around the country working in the reentry field have begun to respond to this overwhelming need with few resources. This toolkit highlights the experience of The Fortune Society in its development of a housing project in West Harlem. Through Fortune's experience, organizations can glean strategies to help them overcome one of the greatest challenges associated with providing housing to formerly incarcerated men and women. NIMBY opposition can result in significant project delays, or even shut down. This case study documents how an organization can address a myriad of community concerns and ultimately garner support for its project. By offering tangible steps and lessons learned by Fortune, this toolkit provides guidance and encouragement to those organizations working to assist formerly incarcerated people and create safer communities.

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Colleagues,

The Fortune Society and the Prisoner Reentry Institute at John Jay College of Criminal Justice are pleased to present this toolkit, *In Our Backyard: Overcoming Community Resistance to Reentry Housing (A NIMBY Toolkit).* It has been developed for organizations that have experience with providing housing to the reentry population as well as those for whom it is a new venture. The unprecedented number of men and women returning home from correctional facilities represents an important challenge. How we address the numerous needs experienced by this population today (including securing safe and stable housing) will help shape the way we think about and tackle issues that result from incarceration for decades to come. This toolkit shares lessons learned and successful practices culled from experience and provides a statement of possibility for others who are seeking to house needy and feared populations.

In Fall 2009, The Fortune Society and Prisoner Reentry Institute at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, partnered to create materials to provide skill development opportunities for the reentry field. This toolkit highlights the experiences of The Fortune Society as it established the Castle, a supportive residence for approximately 62 men and women released from incarceration to homelessness in West Harlem. It is set in the academic literature on the relationship between homelessness, reincarceration and criminal justice involvement, and is informed by knowledge about organizational change, leadership and the psychology of conflict resolution. This collaboration between complementary sets of expertise in reentry – that of a direct service provider and a college of criminal justice – was further enriched by contributions from the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Teachers College, Columbia University.

This toolkit focuses on helping organizations address a very specific issue when developing the capacity to provide housing to formerly incarcerated people. Community opposition can be one of the greatest challenges an organization must face as it works to establish services for populations that are considered "threatening." "Not in My Back Yard" – commonly referred to as NIMBY – opposition can result in significant program delays or even complete shutdown. The Fortune Society case study illustrates how those who fiercely oppose a project in the beginning can become an organization's strongest supporters.

This toolkit begins with an overview of housing options for men and women being released as well as a review of others working in this field who have been successful in establishing housing for their clients. The toolkit then provides specific details of how The Fortune Society garnered community support for the project and developed a relationship of trust with its neighbors. Readers will learn the nature of the strong opposition faced by the Fortune Society from neighbors who feared its arrival more than they feared the drug-ridden building and vacant lot that had endangered their neighborhood for some 20 years. The toolkit culminates with key lessons and steps to help other organizations as they work to establish or sustain housing efforts or begin to consider providing this service.
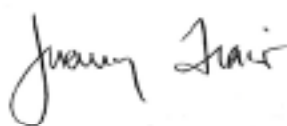
Offering housing possibilities to people coming home from prison is challenging. Not only does it require a strong business plan and stable financing, but equally – if not more importantly – it involves self-reflection about organizational capacity in order to sustain the extensive effort to establish a supportive relationship with community members. As you will see, the relationship The Fortune Society eventually established with its neighbors in West Harlem did not develop overnight. A great deal of skill, patience, and dedication went into developing strong community support. However, this work has paid off tremendously for all involved. The Fortune Society just opened a 114-unit, low-income apartment building and service center directly behind the Castle. The community fully supported its development and will benefit from the new affordable units that are available.

We hope the information presented in this toolkit , including The Fortune Society's case study, will provide guidance and encouragement to those organizations currently providing or those that are considering providing housing options to their clients. We encourage you to contact The Fortune Society if you have questions generated by this toolkit or would like to visit its two Harlem residences.

Sincerely,

JoAnne Page
President and CEO
The Fortune Society

Jeremy Travis
President
John Jay College of Criminal Justice

I: The Reentry Crisis

Challenges for the formerly incarcerated

According to recent national statistics, about 725,000 individuals are released from prisons and millions more cycle through jails each year, a volume of formerly incarcerated people reentering society never before seen.[1] A complex set of factors renders these individuals vulnerable to relapse to criminal activity, resulting in disturbingly high rates of recidivism. Nationwide, two thirds of those released from prisons and jails are re-arrested for a new offense within three years and 54% are re-incarcerated (Langan & Levin, 2002). Among the factors that undermine prospects for successful re-integration into society are that the formerly incarcerated, in disproportionate numbers, are poor and non-white, physically or mentally disabled, undereducated and lacking in vocational skills and experience, and have alcohol and substance abuse problems (Black & Cho, 2004; Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council, 2003). The majority returns home to communities that are challenged by high unemployment, poverty and crime and lack reentry services of adequate quantity and effectiveness (Black & Cho, 2004; Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council, 2003).

Compounding this grave situation is the fact that this unprecedented volume of released individuals increases homelessness. On average across the country, more than 10% are released from prisons and jails into homelessness; and the percentages are higher in large urban areas such as New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago, which receive the bulk of the formerly incarcerated and where from 30 to 50% of parolees are homeless (Black & Cho, 2004; Metraux, Roman & Cho, 2007). These statistics are especially worrisome in light of studies concluding that homelessness, especially in the first 90 days post-release, significantly increases the high risk of re-offending (Harding & Harding, 2006; Metraux, Roman & Cho, 2007). Homelessness makes it difficult to stay safe and healthy, clean and sober, apply for jobs and simply maintain hope (Rodriguez & Brown, 2003).

The formerly incarcerated face considerable barriers to obtaining safe and stable housing (Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council, 2003; Black & Cho, 2004). Family members may be unwilling or unable to house them or, in some cases, home is not safe. Private housing is typically priced beyond their means, and the landlords discriminate against those with criminal records. Those recently released often cannot avail themselves of housing programs for the homeless, because they do not meet the programs' definitions of homelessness. As for public housing, a combination of federal and local policies excludes many with criminal records. For example, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's "One Strike and You're Out" policy requires that all local public housing authorities deny housing to a variety of categories of people, including those convicted of arson, violent crimes or drug-related offenses, those with histories of substance and alcohol abuse, and those subject to registry under state sex offender registration laws (Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council, 2003).

Making matters worse is that no government agency is jurisdictionally charged with ownership of the problems of recidivism and homelessness among the formerly incarcerated: Corrections and criminal justice agencies view their responsibility to the incarcerated population as limited to the period of custodial care; parole agencies are underfinanced and overwhelmed; and, providing reentry services, including housing, does not fall under the purview of any other federal or state agency (Rodriguez & Brown, 2003; Black & Cho, 2004; Metraux, Roman & Cho, 2007). The burden falls increasingly on nonprofit organizations that may be challenged financially and/or organizationally to deal with the pressing need to keep the formerly incarcerated off the streets (Scally, 2005).

Growing Interest in Supportive Housing

Against this grim background, there is hope. There is a changing climate of greater receptiveness among policymakers to support programs that promote successful reentry, thereby avoiding the huge costs of reincarceration (Rodriguez & Brown, 2003; Black & Cho, 2004; Metraux, Roman & Cho, 2007). And, considerable attention is being directed in particular at "supportive housing" as an "effective and efficient approach to meeting the housing and specialized service needs of ex-offenders in one comprehensive program" (Black & Cho, 2004, p.5).[2] Supportive housing programs provide stable and safe housing to homeless formerly incarcerated men and women alongside comprehensive and individualized services, such as education and vocational training, employment assistance and counseling, substance abuse treatment, access to medical and mental health care, family reunification counseling, and other specialized services directed at promoting independent living and reintegration into the community (Black & Cho, 2004). There is growing evidence that supportive housing for homeless formerly incarcerated persons reduces recidivism, makes neighborhoods safer, promotes family re-unification, and is more humane and cost-effective than re-incarceration (Black & Cho, 2004; Rodriguez & Brown, 2003; Seiter & Kadela, 2003).

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1   www.ojp.usdoj.gov/newsroom/pressrelease/2009/bjs/100001.htm. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), a component of the U.S. Department of Justice, breaks down national trends at the state level for a variety of criminal justice-related and prisoner reentry issues. To access information on such trends and statistics, visit www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/reentry/reentry.htm.

2   "Supportive housing," as a term, came into widespread use in 1987, when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, under the Homeless Assistance Act, created the Supportive Housing Demonstration Program. In its broadest sense, it is housing that is linked with social services tailored to those with special needs who face the threat of homelessness, whether because of substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, former incarceration, chronic mental illness or physical or developmental disability (Glauber, 1996).

Despite its promising nature, nationwide there are relatively few supportive housing programs targeted for homeless formerly incarcerated persons. This is the result both of the difficulty in creatively financing the projects and the challenge that local opposition poses to the siting of supportive housing programs (Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council, 2003; Metraux, Roman & Cho, 2007).

A Diversity of Supportive Housing Models

The supportive housing programs that do exist are located in large, urban areas and are, in fact, designed and operated primarily by private non-profit organizations – although a few come about as a partnership between a nonprofit organization and a local department of corrections. They vary in format along several dimensions.[3] One distinction is between those that provide scattered-site housing with mobile staff providing comprehensive case management services (e.g, Heritage Health and Housing in New York City) to those that provide supportive housing and case management services at a single site congregate facility (e.g, Fortune Society's Fortune Academy in New York City and Delancey Street Foundation in San Francisco). The programs also vary in the length of time that housing is provided to clients. Some programs provide only emergency or short-term transitional housing, typically up to 90 days (e.g, Amity Righturn in San Diego), while others provide longer-term transitional housing that may vary in length from several months to several years (e.g, Providence House in Brooklyn). Some programs offer permanent supportive housing for those unable to live independently in the community due to chronic mental illness or other reasons (e.g, Heritage Health and Housing in New York City).

The various models also differ as to the population served, from those that service a specific group of formerly incarcerated persons to those that offer their services broadly to the formerly incarcerated. For example, Ridge House in Reno, Nevada targets transitional housing and services to those struggling with substance abuse, and Greenhope Housing in East Harlem, New York City provides housing and services for up to six months to formerly incarcerated African American and Latina women, including their children, and for up to 12 months for women referred by the courts pursuant to an Alternative to Incarceration program. Those that offer their services more broadly to the formerly incarcerated population include the Fortune Academy and the Delancey Street Foundation. A few, like the Fortune Academy, have successfully incorporated more than one type of housing in a congregate facility (emergency and phased permanent). Below is a brief mention of models that have generated interest in the reentry field:

» The Cornerstone Program in San Fernando Valley, CA provides housing, mental health and benefit-identifying services to homeless adults with chronic mental illness who are leaving the Los Angeles County jail system. This program contracts for a certain number of emergency beds with a Los Angeles housing shelter program and has a memorandum of understanding with a private landlord who remodels buildings and then rents them to Cornerstone to provide short- and medium-term supportive housing for program participants. Cornerstone also outright owns nine small properties that it rents to clients at a subsidized rate.

» St. Leonard's Ministries in Chicago, Illinois had been offering reentry services for over 40 years before opening, in 1999, its first "second stage" permanent supportive housing facility. This was specifically for men recently released from prison who had already completed a transitional housing program. The facility, St. Andrew's Court, is adjacent to the agency's reentry services facility, ensuring a continuum of care. Ten of the 42 units are funded by the Department of Corrections at a cost just below the cost of providing parole supervision, in exchange for the agency providing housing, supportive services and supervision of the parolees. The other 30 units are subsidized with HUD Shelter Plus Care funding for homeless and disabled individuals with or without a history of incarceration.

» Delancey Street Foundation, based in San Francisco, CA, operates several self-help, self-supporting congregate supportive housing facilities for homeless persons, with or without incarceration histories, where the residents spend a minimum of two years and often as long as four years. Following the credo "each one, teach one," all of the work is done by the resident participants, with the more experienced teaching the less experienced. Each resident receives educational and occupational training that prepares them to work in one or more of the program's businesses, which include restaurants, cafes, moving businesses, furniture making and bookstores. Facilities exist in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York City, New Mexico and North Carolina.

» Volunteers of America's Project Oasis, based in Newark, NJ, operates three community residences where the formerly incarcerated residents are required to complete an 18-month life skills and employment training program, after which they are assisted in obtaining independent housing and jobs.

» Since 1844, the Women's Prison Association (WPA), located in Brooklyn, New York, has served women involved in the criminal justice system. WPA has

three housing programs: the Hopper Home, an Alternative to Incarceration program providing transitional housing (from 8 to 12 months) to up to 20 women under court-mandated supervision; the Sarah Powell Huntington House, a transitional housing residence (from 6 to 18 months) for homeless and formerly incarcerated women seeking to reunite with their children; and a self-governing program that provides permanent housing for 8 women in a two-family row house in Brooklyn, New York.

» Community Partners in Action, located in Hartford, Connecticut, runs several supportive housing programs throughout Connecticut; these include a 33-bed transitional housing facility for men on parole or probation and a 28-bed transitional housing program funded by the local Department of Corrections for men released from DOC facilities.

» Span Transitional Housing in Boston, Massachusetts, provides transitional scattered site SRO housing and comprehensive case management services to previously incarcerated persons living with HIV/AIDS.

» Pioneer Human Services, located in Seattle, Washington, is an entrepreneurial nonprofit organization that integrates housing with self-supporting businesses, comprehensive case management services, and training and rehabilitation services to over 5,000 clients a year. Most clients have histories of incarceration, homelessness and/or substance abuse. It operates various programs throughout the State of Washington.

» Oxford House, based in Silver Spring, Maryland, is an umbrella organization that provides resources and training to men and women recovering from drug and alcohol abuse (some of whom have incarceration histories) to create a network of drug- and alcohol-free self-governing and self-supporting homes located in stable neighborhoods. Each home may have from 6 to 15 residents. Oxford Houses now exist in 41 states, Canada and Australia.

Organizations contemplating providing supportive housing to the formerly incarcerated must not only be prepared to meet the challenge of raising the funds – or starting businesses – to support their programs, but must just as importantly be prepared to cope with and respond to the groundswell of heated opposition that may be expected to arise from the host community.

"Not In My Backyard": The Problem of Siting Supportive Housing

"Siting" or "locational" conflicts occur when residents of a neighborhood attempt to protect against unwelcome developments, fearing that they will lower property values,
threaten their safety and/or adversely affect neighborhood amenity (Dear, 1992). In common language, this is referred to as the "Not in My Backyard" or "NIMBY" Syndrome. Given that one's home represents safety, it is no surprise that strong protectionist emotions and concerns will surface in opposition to any perceived threat to that safety (White & Ashton, 1992). Research demonstrates that NIMBY reactions are greater when the local stakeholders lack participation in the proposed project, lack accurate information about the clients and/or the problems they face, and fear for their safety (Dear, 1992; Wynne-Edwards, 2003). These fears are dramatically heightened when the proposed development is a residential facility for people with criminal records or other troubled and/or socially stigmatized individuals (e.g,, recovering drug addicts, mentally ill individuals, people with HIV/AIDS — all of whom are represented in the population of people with criminal records) (Dear, 1992; Wynne-Edwards, 2003).

In a study of seven communities which had experienced the siting or attempted siting of residences for the formerly incarcerated, researchers Doble and Lindsay (2003) found that the community members expressed understanding of the importance of housing and rehabilitation services for the formerly incarcerated, but nonetheless felt an overriding concern for their safety in being near such a facility and expressed "pure, unrequited fear" about the proposed residents. These fears typically escalated in accordance with the size of the facility and number of residents to be served, the seriousness of the potential residents' criminal histories, and the likelihood that the facility's neighbors would encounter the residents in public spaces and on public transportation (Doble & Lindsay, 2003). Levels of fear were elevated when the neighbors were unfamiliar with the organization proposing the program (Doble & Lindsay, 2003). An additional exacerbating factor is when the community feels exploited by an unequal distribution of social service programs in their neighborhood (Dear, 1992; Wynne-Edwards, 2002; Doble & Lindsay, 2002).

NIMBY opposition – which can take the form of protests, demonstrations, petition-writing, appeals to politicians and, in some cases, court-room battles – can shut down projects or significantly delay them, adding huge costs, or so sour the community-facility relations that eventual client well-being and program success are negatively affected. Strong NIMBY opposition can also endanger obtaining funds or the continuity of funding streams for the program (Dear, 1992). Such is the potential dark side of NIMBY.

But there is also a positive side to NIMBY. Research and case studies on the siting of supportive housing programs for the homeless and/or formerly incarcerated, while limited in number, nonetheless consistently furnish strong evidence that meaningfully engaging the community goes a long way toward gaining its acceptance. Such engagement may comprise actions such as involving local stakeholders in the siting process, genuinely addressing their concerns and fears, providing means for them to develop confidence in the program's safety and effectiveness

and trust in the provider organization, and educating them about the clients and the benefits of supportive housing, both to the clients and the community (Iglesias, 2002; Hart Shegos, 2006; Wynne-Edwards, 2003; Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council, 2003; Doble & Lindsay, 2003). In addition, a meaningful engagement with the local stakeholders has the potential to improve a supportive housing program and strengthen the host community.

Summary

To recap, community-based service providers working in the reentry field throughout the U.S. have begun to respond to an overwhelming need for supportive housing, despite a lack of resources. Given the enormous need for supportive reentry housing – and the limited resources available – sharing among service providers of best practices and lessons learned is critical. This toolkit highlights the experience of The Fortune Society in its development of a housing project in a tight-knit residential neighborhood in West Harlem, New York City. In addition to the many other challenges associated with becoming a provider of supportive reentry housing, The Fortune Society experienced fierce neighborhood opposition, i.e., "NIMBY", to the siting of their 62-bed facility for formerly incarcerated men and women, some of whom have a history of violent offenses. Among the other important lessons to be learned from the Fortune story is that of how it engaged with the community in such a way that strong opposition was transformed to robust support and admiration.

II: A Case Study

Fortune Society Decides to Add Reentry Supportive Housing

The Fortune Society is a New York City nonprofit organization that, since 1967, has been providing formerly incarcerated women and men – and those at risk of incarceration – the skills and services they need to break the cycle of crime and incarceration. Fortune had experienced successes with its "one-stop" model for providing reentry services. A holistic approach, it includes substance abuse treatment, HIV/AIDS treatment and other health services, alternatives to incarceration programs, educational and vocational training, anger management and life skills training, and counseling. [4] In the course of a strategic planning process begun in 1996, Fortune realized, however,

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4   The Fortune Society's mission statement expresses its philosophy about the transformational potential of human beings: *"The Fortune Society believes in a world where all who are at-risk, incarcerated or formerly incarcerated can become positive, contributing members of society. Our work supports successful reentry of formerly incarcerated men and women and promotes alternatives to incarceration, thus strengthening the fabric of our communities. We do this by: believing in the power of individuals to change, building lives through service programs shaped by the needs and experiences of our clients, [and] changing minds through education and advocacy to promote the creation of a fair, humane and truly rehabilitative correctional system."* http://fortunesociety.org/01_about/mission.html

that the organization was losing too many clients to the streets and prisons due to lack of housing. Without safe and stable housing upon leaving prison, clients could not likely gain the traction necessary to rebuild their lives. Taking on the challenges of growing the organization from a non-housing provider to an agency that provides housing, Fortune decided to establish the Fortune Academy program to provide emergency short-term and "phased-permanent" supportive housing to homeless formerly incarcerated people, regardless of their criminal history. "Phased-permanent" housing bridges the traditional gap between transitional and permanent housing by providing housing that is "permanent for this phase of the person's life," with the expectation that the person will move on to independent housing in the community when ready – usually in a year or more – but will have continued access to Fortune's supportive services and the opportunity to return to the Academy in the future if s/he experiences a crisis that would otherwise result in a return to homelessness. Despite obstacles in funding and heated resistance from the area residents, the Fortune Academy opened its doors in April 2002 with the support of the community.

Fortune's first step in this growth process was to complete the multi-year organizational strategic planning effort that it had commenced in 1996. That effort's ultimate purpose was to articulate a vision for the organization's future and design a blueprint to ensure it would have the necessary internal capacity to meet the significant challenges in growing the organization. Working with two organizational psychologists, Fortune first tackled the important issues necessary for its growth: leadership, management and trust. The organization emerged with a stronger culture and management structure. To address the unmet needs of its homeless clients, the organization then produced an ambitious five-year plan, the central piece of which was to raise funds for the purchase and development of a piece of property for use as a congregate supportive housing facility. Notably, there was not unanimous support among Fortune staff for taking on the additional task of providing supportive housing: some staff members, while committed to the need for such housing, were concerned about funding, lack of community support, and diverting attention away from the important services Fortune was already providing to the formerly incarcerated and those at risk of incarceration.

Mindful of these concerns and of the fact that a supportive housing facility would be both a business and social services venture, Fortune's five-year plan to open the Fortune Academy was an all encompassing one. It included:

» Assessing the level of manageable financial risk to the organization, i.e., determining what funds could be put at risk to purchase property and how large a mortgage it could handle;

» Developing an exit strategy to keep the organization solvent and its reputation intact if the plan for supportive housing failed;

The Castle

With an established budget for purchase of a property and partners in place (financial, legal and architectural), Fortune began the search for a suitable housing facility, mindful of factors such as zoning for group living, ease of transportation, and affordability. In 1998, having visited more than 20 possible locations all over Manhattan, Fortune purchased "the Castle," a once magnificent neo-Gothic building located at 140th Street and Riverside Drive in West Harlem. The Castle had been abandoned for more than 20 years, was in a state of ruin and was host to illicit drug use and sales. But, it was affordable, and while it would take millions of dollars to renovate – for which a capital drive would be needed – the building had great potential and came with an adjacent empty lot that would ultimately give Fortune options for future growth. The Castle was zoned for use as congregate housing and, importantly for future clients, easily accessible by public transit from any area of the city. It was situated in the predominantly Latino and African-American neighborhood of "Hamilton Heights," a primarily residential area within West Harlem. The neighborhood immediately surrounding the Castle had a significant portion of lower-middle and working class families (as measured by reference to national median household income ranges), in contrast to the prevalence of lower household income areas in West Harlem generally.

The surrounding neighborhood was tight-knit, politically well organized and had previously clashed with city planners over the unwelcome placement of a sewage treatment plant along the Hudson River across from the Castle. The sewage treatment plant had been originally planned for construction in a predominantly white and affluent neighborhood of Manhattan, and its placement in Hamilton Heights, without involvement of West Harlem's advisory Community Board or input from the community, had left residents feeling bitter and abused. Another pertinent piece of the neighborhood's history was the lingering anger about what it perceived was an over-saturation and "dumping" of social service programs in West Harlem, many of them placed there by the State of New York without community involvement, and many of which had closed their doors once state funding streams ended, leaving the clients behind to fend for themselves. Knowing this history, and aware of generally negative attitudes toward the homeless and those with criminal records, Fortune expected a high degree of neighborhood hostility and resistance. Gaining community acceptance could be very difficult.

» Ongoing recruiting for The Fortune Society Board of Directors to incorporate expertise in areas such as real estate, project capital management and financial planning;

» Strategically securing a blend of public funds to finance the project that would not interfere with Fortune's decisions about which clients to serve and what programs and types of housing to offer;

» Hiring legal, architectural and co-developer partners with appropriate experience and outstanding reputations;

» Developing detailed operational and program details, including intake and screening procedures, services to be offered, staffing requirements, security needs and operating budgets for the Academy;

» Looking ahead to long-term funding possibilities to sustain the Academy program over time;

» Visiting existing supportive housing facilities to witness first-hand the way they worked and their power to transform lives;

» Selecting a suitable location for a congregate supportive housing facility, and;

» Planning a comprehensive community outreach effort.

Community Outreach and Response

The Castle site had two advantages: because Fortune purchased the property with it own funds, no city or community level approval was needed for the organization to move in; and, because the site was already zoned for group living, Fortune did not need to seek a zoning variance. Fortune could have ignored the host neighborhood and

proceeded "as of right" with its renovation and supportive housing program plans. However, the organization wanted its Fortune Academy program to be a part of the community "for the long haul" and appreciated that success would in significant part depend on the neighborhood's acceptance of the program and trust in The Fortune Society as an organization. Fortune therefore prepared a two-pronged comprehensive outreach strategy. On the one hand, they collaborated with the community, following the principles of respect, transparency, accountability, accessibility and "being a good neighbor" and, on the other hand, remained firm about their mission to provide phased permanent housing to formerly incarcerated persons without discrimination based on criminal histories. The strategy also took into account practical concerns of marshalling and allocating the necessary resources for the outreach effort (e.g,, time, staff, finances, and consultants) and bracing for the physical and emotional stamina needed to endure what could likely be a protracted and volatile process. Because the renovation would take years to complete and finance – itself a challenging and time-consuming process that would occur simultaneously – Fortune had the benefit of time. The Academy was not scheduled to open for five years.

The outreach strategy included taking specific steps to work collaboratively with the community on gaining acceptance:

» **Hiring a Public Relations Consultant:** To assist in planning the community outreach, Fortune hired a public relations consultant. The consultant stressed the importance of being transparent, addressing people's concerns and issues immediately, maintaining a steady presence *all of the time*, and helping make the community safer.

» **Reaching Out to Elected Officials:** Before directly engaging with the community, Fortune sought the early support and advice of its elected officials, many of whom had a prior relationship with Fortune or knew of its work by reputation. The elected officials provided advice, but kept a low profile, not wanting to get out ahead of their constituents. They identified community stakeholders, both those who could help build a support base and those who would oppose them. They predicted that the stakeholders would raise a "fairness" concern about the over-saturation of social service programs in West Harlem and that the immediate neighbors to the Castle – the politically active, middle-class, predominantly African-American residents of a large building next door – would present the strongest opposition, due to their proximity to the Castle.

» **Identifying Community Stakeholders:** Based upon advice sought and their own research, Fortune identified the key local stakeholders. These included: the Executive Committee of the local Community Board (which consists of appointed members of the community who advise elected officials and government agencies on matters affecting the social welfare of the community); two committees of the local Community Board, the Committee on Housing, Land Use and Zoning and the Committee on Uniformed Services; members of the tenant's association for the next-door neighbor; the Council for the 30th Police Precinct; and the Friends of Riverbank State Park organization. Fortune surveyed its current and former staff and clients, as well as Board Members, identifying who could be mobilized to assist with the outreach, strategically taking advantage of prior relationships of trust and connections to local leaders.

» **Hiring a Community Liaison:** Fortune also decided early on to hire a community liaison and chose for that key role a former employee who had long lived in Harlem. He was a trusted pillar of the community and had significant experience with support programs for the formerly incarcerated. He was also a great presenter and patient listener. A formerly incarcerated Fortune staff member accompanied him at local stakeholders' meetings. Between the two of them, the public faces of the community engagement campaign had both legitimacy and authenticity.

» **One-on-One Relationship Building by Organization's Leaders:** Another early decision was to have the CEO of Fortune, JoAnne Page, supported as needed by the current board chair, Roland Nicholson, attend every community meeting likely to be "hot and volatile" or at which detailed questions about the project would be asked. Prior to approaching the local stakeholders at public meetings, JoAnne and other team members engaged in a series of one-on-one meetings with individuals from groups that were likely to be supportive (and who could then act as ambassadors), as well as with those key, influential persons likely to be the most opposed. As JoAnne explained,

> We elected to do a person-by-person campaign. We started with the influential people. It was about building a bucketful of individual relationships. We gave out our phone numbers, even our home phone numbers. I took people [out] for lunch. We saw what people cared about and we responded. We had very personal contacts.

One community board member interviewed noted this strategy and commented on its success in building support for the project, saying,

> JoAnne Page was strategic in first going to individuals and small groups of people to generate support. She saw the [Community Board] Chairs first. Then she moved to the executive committee, and then she went to

bigger groups. In this way, by going from key individuals to groups, she obtained a growing consensus.

» **Balancing Client Needs With Giving Voice to Community Concerns:** Mindful of the diversity in any community and the need for different styles of outreach, Fortune adopted a variegated process that, above all, allowed the local stakeholders frequent and meaningful opportunities to voice their concerns and feel heard and valued. Fortune varied both the format and location of community outreach – from private meetings with individuals at neutral places, to small and large local meetings on the stakeholders' home turfs, to meetings held at the Castle as it was being renovated and at other Fortune facilities, to attendance at neighborhood events. Whatever the outreach format, the Fortune team aimed to strike a certain balance: They were determined to be accessible, respectful of local stakeholders' concerns, and accountable to the host community, while remaining committed to their goal of transforming the Castle into a 62-bed facility to provide emergency and phased permanent supportive housing to homeless, formerly incarcerated individuals (including those convicted of serious crimes.)

By way of example, when sharing with the community stakeholders accurate and up-to-date information about what they planned to do (re: renovations and the design of the Academy program), the Fortune team was also implicitly communicating its determination to go forward. There was, moreover, never any attempt to soft pedal the fact that the Fortune Academy would not exclude people convicted of drug-related, violent or sex-related crimes. Fortune's liaison articulated to local stakeholder groups how supportive housing for people returning home from jail and prison would promote public safety, the very goal the community desired.

The Fortune team also provided information and statistics to debunk stereotypes and myths about the formerly incarcerated and nuanced information about the risks of recidivism. Through such education and awareness-raising, Fortune sought to re-characterize the discussion from one about speculative fear of crime waves to the fact-driven reality that community safety is best assured when people return home from jail and prison to supervised supportive housing, rather than living without support on the streets.

Fortune's liaison recalled how he explained at community meetings the central feature of the organization's mission, giving hope and opportunity to those returning home:

"These people are coming home. So, are they going to come home to some kind of hope or are they coming home to despair?"

We explained that we help people coming out of jail who have turned their lives around and need a support system to reintegrate into society and not hurt anyone and help themselves. Fortune Society gives people who've been away many years the opportunity to change their lives….

» **Taking the Heat and Making Concessions Without Jeopardizing Essential Client Needs:** As expected, however, the area residents' reaction, for quite some time, was one of fear, shock and outrage. For over a year, meetings were contentious and marked by shouting, shutting off microphones, and threats of taking measures to stop Fortune from opening the Academy. Some opponents actually did circulate a petition to stop the project. The biggest fear concerned the clients themselves, given that the Academy would not in any manner be a lock-up facility and the clients would share public spaces and transportation with neighborhood residents. Neighbors accused Fortune of wanting to bring "hardened criminals" to their neighborhood who would be free to roam and steal from, assault or rape them. The neighbors expressed concerns about the high needs of certain formerly incarcerated persons, such as those with chronic mental illness. There was immense concern about bringing sex offenders into the neighborhood.

Fortune remained adamant in its commitment not to discriminate on the basis of criminal or medical/psychiatric history, but also reassured the local stakeholders that persons who posed a *current* threat of violence or who would otherwise endanger the community would not be admitted to or be allowed to remain at the Academy. Fortune carefully explained its screening process and security measures, assuring the area residents that community safety would be a foremost criterion and that decisions would be made on a case-by-case basis. The community was made aware of the strict house rules and code of conduct that residents at the Academy would have to follow. As for sex offenders, Fortune made the decision to service them, but, in a concession to the local stakeholders' strong concerns, agreed not to accept at the Castle "level three" sex offenders, i.e., those persons deemed by a court to pose a high risk of re-offending, not based solely on the type of crime they had committed, but, rather on individual factors unique to those persons.

The level of community heat on this issue was such that Fortune could not jeopardize the entire project.

The community also expressed its deep frustration that West Harlem was already and had long been over-burdened and saturated with social service agencies, all of whom promised great things, but many of whom proved not to be accountable when things went wrong. Fortune's response to this concern was nuanced. Fortune understood the many subtext issues inherent in this frustration: the local stakeholders' feelings of powerlessness; the legitimate concerns, based on past bad experiences, about agency competency, financial stewardship and accountability; and the concerns that Fortune would be another agency that would temporarily invade the neighborhood, never intending to become part of the fabric of the neighborhood. *In short, they were concerned that Fortune would not be a good neighbor.*

» **Being a Good Neighbor and Responding Promptly to Community Concerns:** To demonstrate that it was determined to be a good neighbor, Fortune used deeds, not words, and it responded quickly to community concerns. When Fortune learned that the holdover tenant on its back lot was conducting an extensive drug trafficking business under the guise of a parking lot, Fortune moved to evict him and got the police to patrol the area more often. Upon learning that trespassers were engaged in drug dealing, drug use, and prostitution inside the Castle, it boarded up the building, fenced in the property and hired a private security firm to patrol the premises and keep trespassers out. When a neighbor complained of the noxious odors emanating from garbage that had accumulated over the years, Fortune cleared all of it away. Noise complaints were handled with similar expediency. To increase safety, Fortune added lights to the property. For the first time in over 20 years, the Castle had an owner who dutifully cleared the ice and snow off of the sidewalk in front of and alongside the Castle. Fortune made the Castle cleaner and safer; and it did so years before it opened its doors to any residents.

» **Building Trust in the Agency:** To demonstrate transparency and the competence to run the proposed Academy program, the Fortune team invited its opponents to tour its other facilities, speak to staff and clients, and even question Fortune's other neighbors. To show accessibility and that it would be accountable should any problems arise, Fortune's community liaison attended six local stakeholder meetings every single month, whether or not the Academy was on the agenda, as well as special neighborhood events, from the time of purchase of the building in 1998 to the opening of the Fortune Academy in 2002. (The liaison still

attends those meetings each month.) Knowing *specifically* who to contact to express concerns was, and remains, very important to the community. Many local stakeholders interviewed expressed their appreciation of this level of outreach effort. One Community Board member said:

> *[Fortune] came up against a community who didn't know them and was distrustful of them and of the work they did, and it was mostly distrustful of the population they served. What [Fortune] promised was they would be regular visitors to the Community Board, so that anytime anything happened they would be there to address it. [The liaison] came to every single community meeting every single month and sat in the back to respond…. I've never seen anyone follow through like [he] followed through…. Through [his] work and consistency … the wariness sort of whittled away.*

» **Honoring the Architectural Heritage of the Castle:** Fortune applied for and received listing of the Castle on the National Historic Register and committed itself to restore the Castle as nearly as possible to its original neo-Gothic grandeur. This unsolicited move proved to be quite meaningful to the area residents, as it made the Castle once again a source of neighborhood pride. Fortune's architect, a partner at a well-known and respected architect firm, had his staff research the rich architectural history of the Castle and, at Fortune's request, shared that with the area residents. Fortune also agreed to make the Castle a resource for the community, allowing groups to hold their meetings there. In another concession to the host community and signal of its intent to be a good neighbor, Fortune agreed to give priority to formerly incarcerated men and women from Harlem.

» **Creating a Community Advisory Board:** To create a sense of shared ownership in the project and further integrate itself into the community, Fortune created a Community Advisory Board early in the process. They invited as members elected representatives, Community Board leadership, and neighbors, including opponents of the project. Fortune used its Advisory Board to share information on the proposed renovations and program design, listen to the area residents' concerns, and solicit input from the Board members, honoring their local experience and knowledge. As Fortune's community liaison put it, an organization must *"use the community's wisdom,"* adding, *"What they say is very close to them. Treat their concerns very seriously."* According to an advisory board member interviewed, the impact of all this was to make the local stakeholders feel valued:

People co-create your project when they are on your Community Advisory Board. Community based organizations create advisory boards all the time, but all they do is a dog-and-pony show on a quarterly basis or so, and there is little real interaction…. Fortune Society had all of the "in between" interactions. They allowed real community interaction on the advisory board.

»   **Perseverance in Relationship Building and Learning From Mistakes:** It took time, but by the time the Castle opened its doors in 2002, there was a great deal of community acceptance. The local stakeholders interviewed felt that a partnership had evolved between Fortune and the community. They attributed that evolution to Fortune's transparency, responsiveness to their concerns, evident passion for its mission, and constant presence and follow-through. As one local stakeholder summarized it:

> *The way that things changed was that [Fortune] became very engaged in the community…. [JoAnne Page] slowly explained her ideas and plans over time to us. She addressed the concerns that we had. She fully engaged with the most vocal organization in opposition…[and] kept the community apprised at all times…. She appointed the right community liaisons to different organizations…. What JoAnne said, she meant…. JoAnne was always there. And, in doing all these above things, she gained a lot of credibility and credible capital…. In a real and palpable sense JoAnne very deftly made the community and everyone involved a partner of hers in obtaining The Castle.*

An important test of community acceptance of the Academy, and a learning moment for Fortune, occurred after the Castle opened. A client who had served time for a high profile child murder conviction came to live at the Academy. Once the news leaked to the press, immediately there were demonstrations and reporters day and night in front of the Castle, and news helicopters overhead filming his arrival. Many of the protestors were from the Dominican community, the largest Latino group in West Harlem. This client stayed in the Castle for two weeks until Fortune asked him to leave for violating the requirement that he

not deliberately seek media attention, although he continued to receive services at Fortune's main service site in downtown Manhattan. In the process, Fortune gained valuable experience in handling intensive media attention and learned two important things about community relations. One, the demonstrators were not opposed to the supportive housing program at the Castle, but, rather, they were protesting the client specifically. Second, Fortune realized that it had not adequately targeted its outreach to stakeholders from the Latino, including the Dominican, community. This population was less integrated into the established political structure of West Harlem. Fortune learned that in identifying stakeholders, it must be careful to identify and reach out to those who may be disenfranchised or less politically engaged. It acted quickly to correct this and continues its work of relationship building.

The Legacy of the Fortune Academy Project

Since the the first Fortune Academy clients moved into the Castle in 2002, there have been no challenges to its presence there or the way the program is run. There have been no complaints about client behavior, and no safety issues have surfaced. The Fortune Society has kept its promise of running a safe congregate supportive housing facility. It continues its organizational culture of being a good neighbor (e.g,, the community liaison continues to attend six local stakeholder meetings per month; the Castle is open to community groups for meetings; and annual Halloween "haunted castle" parties and backyard health fairs are held for the area residents). That same "good neighbor" culture is passed on to the clients, who are expected to be friendly and courteous with neighbors and take ownership and pride in the care of neighborhood property. The 30th precinct police officers interviewed noted, "What's so great about them is that Fortune Society is pretty low key. We don't hear from The Fortune Society." Many community members interviewed likewise measured success in part by how little they notice that there is a supportive housing project in their neighborhood and how "no impact is good impact." One neighbor put it this way:

Considering what the program is, it is a success that it can be just a new neighbor. There are no new crime incidences, no loitering, people don't feel they can't walk by the Castle and there are not a lot of problems spilling out from the Castle and onto the community. The Castle is open and it is a settled part of the community. It is a good neighbor.

Others interviewed expressed their appreciation that with the Fortune Academy at the Castle the neighborhood is now safer and more beautiful. And, the subsequent development of the adjacent lot shows how far the area residents and Fortune have come in working together as partners to strengthen their community. When Fortune discussed with its Community Advisory Board its plans to develop the lot to add permanent supportive housing apartments and service facilities for its clients, the advisory board members raised the issue of the enormous need for affordable housing for low-income members of the neighborhood. In response, Fortune added affordable housing for the community in its plans to develop the lot. The Castle Gardens, open in 2010, is a mixed used residential building that will reserve 50 of its 114 units as affordable housing for members of the local community. Acknowledging these steps forward, one advisory board member stated:

[The Castle] used to be a crack den…. It is now a beautifully renovated building and the vacant lot behind it is now a beautiful building with housing for people in the neighborhood. It is a wonderfully positive change….

"There were people in the neighborhood who felt the addition of formerly incarcerated people into the community was going to make the community less safe, but the truth is that its presence has made the community more safe."

Another important legacy is that the area residents themselves have undergone transformation in various ways. One person observed that a beneficial byproduct of the early opposition to the Fortune Academy was that cooperative relationships emerged among community groups that had not previously worked together. According to local stakeholders interviewed, the process of community engagement with Fortune also set for them a high, but achievable, standard for how other social services providers and community-based organizations could seek to establish good working relationships with host communities. Other neighborhood residents learned from the experience how to be better advocates for their needs and expressed that they now enjoyed "a stronger bond with local politicians."

Another important transformation was in how area residents changed their views on the formerly incarcerated.

The greatest turnaround occurred among those who most feared that their vulnerable community would be hurt by the presence of the Academy at the Castle. These individuals eventually became the Academy's greatest supporters. One Castle neighbor, who had never expected that the Fortune Academy would gain community acceptance, saw that "there was …a complete turnaround, [from] we don't want these horrible people here to we can be neighbors and we can work together." This same individual describes the Academy's clients as

…men and women looking for an opportunity to learn from the past and move forward as human beings. This is a place where we can really look and see the result of the impact on a population that we are really fearful about.

Given this evolved appreciation and understanding of the Fortune Academy program, it is no surprise that community members have come to solicit the services of the Academy for family or friends returning home from incarceration, giving the Academy a strong stamp of approval.

III: What Does the Fortune Academy Story Tell Us?

The proposal to create supportive housing for formerly incarcerated individuals in a West Harlem residential neighborhood was initially met, not surprisingly, with intense anger and fear. And yet, community resistance began to turn into acceptance even before the first clients arrived at the Castle, the result of the community outreach effort put in place by The Fortune Society's leadership from the very beginning of the project. Today, more than eight years after the opening of the Fortune Academy at the Castle, The Fortune Society is viewed as an important partner in making the surrounding community safer and stronger. This is reflected in Fortune's decision to incorporate affordable housing for community members at its new housing facility, Castle Gardens.

What were the critical factors that contributed to The Fortune Society's success in gaining community acceptance for the Fortune Academy? What does it suggest to other organizations considering similar supportive housing programs in their communities, especially those serving homeless formerly incarcerated individuals?

One place to look for critical success factors is in the research field on "siting" or locating social service operations in established neighborhoods. White and Ashton (1992) characterize location conflicts as *"the by-product in a democratic society of the on-going tension between [individual] freedom of choice and the potential infringement of the rights of others that such freedom entails."* Those who study location conflicts in the context of supportive housing describe the conflict as *"a constant struggle to balance*

individual liberty and collective responsibility in terms of public housing and sheltering supports and services" (Wynne-Edwards, 2003). The approach taken by The Fortune Society leadership to achieve community acceptance for the Fortune Academy is a clear example of state-of-the-art practices for resolving siting conflicts.

The literature on overcoming NIMBY – or resolving siting disputes – provides guidelines for understanding and working to overcome community resistance (Allen, 2007; Dear, 1992; Iglesias, 2002). Guidelines taken from two different sources – The Community Acceptance Strategies Consortium (CASC) in partnership with the Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California (NPH) and Michael Dear, a leading scholar in the field – describe the actions taken by The Fortune Society leadership. The CASC and NPH approach is a six-step strategy for community acceptance that begins with internal planning meetings by the organization that include self-assessment and result in strategies and outreach plans for the five critical audiences a project developer faces: government, supporters, concerned neighbors/potential opponents, the media and the courts (CASC, 2000.) Dear (1992) describes a five-step collaborative community-based strategy that includes: broad public education; community outreach; creating a Community Advisory Board; concessions and incentives to the community; and post-entry communication strategies.

While these strategies may seem rather straightforward in text, implementing them successfully can be challenging. To understand why the Fortune Academy was ultimately embraced by the community, it may be helpful to place the strategies and guidelines in the context of constructs and models from the social science fields of systems change, constructive conflict resolution, and effective leadership practices.

Thinking of a community as a "system," and viewing the siting of an outreach program through the lens of systems change, highlights the fact that the introduction of such a program will likely impact the neighborhood in ways both planned and unplanned. Generally, community residents fear that the siting of what they view as an undesirable outreach program will have a negative impact on their community and affect their comfort, stability and safety. Service providers focus instead on the positive impacts that the services they offer will have on their clients directly and on society indirectly. Systems thinking recognizes that in a "system" all parts impact one another and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Therefore, introducing a social services program into a residential neighborhood *will* have impacts beyond those that the service provider envisions. As experts on their neighborhood, community members can help the service provider create a more effective program, as long as they buy-in and are not alienated by the project. As a result, service providers should be mindful of the following principles of effective systems change (Burke, 2002):

- » identifying the *key stakeholders* (i.e., all individuals and groups *who see themselves as a part of the system and who believe they will be impacted by the change*);
- » working with these stakeholders, honoring their reactions and responding to their needs;
- » "educating" stakeholders by being honest and transparent about the nature of the change;
- » creating and participating in opportunities for ongoing input from and dialogue with stakeholders, including those most resistant to the change; and
- » identifying benefits that the change may have for the stakeholders and for the systems as a whole.

Fortune applied each of these principles as they approached the community to gain acceptance for the Fortune Academy. For example, they chose as one of their three main "ambassadors" a highly respected Harlem resident who knew the community (i.e., "system") as an insider and who was believable when describing benefits to the community of the future transformation of the Castle. He also was effective at reminding the community that many potential clients of the Academy are neighborhood residents who will be "returning home."

Concepts from the field of conflict and its constructive resolution also help to explain the success of the Fortune Academy. A powerful concept in the conflict resolution literature is *collaboration*: i.e., when two parties in a conflict work together to identify a resolution that meets both of their needs (Deutsch, 2006; Kihlmann, R.H., and Thomas, K.W., 1977). For collaboration to be successful, the parties must not simply negotiate their different *positions* (i.e. "what" they want); they must instead identify their underlying *needs and interests* (i.e., "why" they want it.) Using a collaborative approach, The Fortune Society leadership never *avoided* conflicts (e.g,, it never ignored the fiercest opponents to the Academy) and never sought to *dominate* when its positions were at odds with those expressed by the community. Even though Fortune had the legal right and power to place its housing program at the Castle, it chose to engage with the opposition and seek "win-win" solutions. In addition, rather than reacting to the overtly stated *positions* of the various stakeholder groups, Fortune's leadership worked tirelessly to gain insight into the underlying *needs* of the various constituencies so that they could then jointly find ways of meeting those needs (Fisher & Ury, 1981).

A clear example of this conflict resolution approach was the way that Fortune handled the intense community heat about its decision to accept sex offenders as clients. Most community stakeholders took the position that sex offenders should not be housed at the Academy *under any circumstances*. Recognizing neighbors' fear of sex offenders and their lack of knowledge of the distinctions among them and how those distinctions relate to risk of re-offending, the Fortune leadership responded by making a concession to not house "level three" sex offenders, those deemed

most at risk of re-offending. They also reiterated their *strong commitment to community safety*, a clear "need" and priority among its neighbors. In addition, they explained their client selection process; educated the community on recidivism statistics corresponding to different types of sex offenders; and agreed to keep clients with sex offense convictions away from children and community members who sometimes visited the Castle (e.g,, during the annual Halloween haunted castle neighborhood event).

Finally, the Fortune Academy's leadership team behaved consistently with the leadership principles of successful change agents. Models of positive organization leadership stress the importance of having a clear vision of the future as well as the ability to lead the organization through the changes required to meet that future (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002; Whetten & Cameron, 2005). Fortune's CEO and Board led by creating and conveying a clear and compelling vision for the project, while staying open to input from others about ways of implementing the vision. This is evident in the decision to include affordable housing for community members in the plans for Castle Gardens. The inclusion was suggested by neighborhood members and would not have been a part of the project otherwise. Also, Fortune's leadership led the organization through internal changes necessary to grow as an organization and become a housing provider, and they demonstrated the courage and determination to see the project through to successful completion. Community members commented on the unwavering persistence and commitment that the Fortune leadership exhibited, attending meeting after meeting, and always making the time to listen to one more concern or complaint.

IV: Best Practices for Gaining Community Support: Applying Lessons Learned to Your Community

Using Fortune's experience as an example, below are some best practices for gaining community acceptance for a supportive housing project.

Organizational Readiness: Deciding to Make the Commitment

Launching an unpopular project like supportive housing for the formerly incarcerated in a neighborhood that opposes it takes both intensive effort and sustained commitment; it resembles an organizational marathon, rather than a sprint. As is seen in the "siting" conflicts literature (e.g,, CASC, 2000), as well as The Fortune Society case study, successful organizations need to consider a wide range of issues, develop strategies and plans, and then execute them effectively.

What should an organization do first to prepare itself to embark on a challenging new initiative, like supportive housing? While it may be tempting for organization leaders to "dive in" and begin to plan for the initiative, it is extremely useful – and maybe even necessary – to begin with an *assessment of the organization's current state*. Taking on an inherently ambitious project that is also likely to attract much community opposition will put stresses on an organization, revealing gaps in its knowledge or capacity. Questions about the current leadership model, the competency levels of organization members in key skill areas, the agency's financial health and prospects, and the state of client services should all be addressed. As a result of this assessment, it may well be necessary to launch a "Phase 1" planning process to develop the organizational capacities that are determined to be less than optimal. After this Phase 1 effort is underway, organization leaders can turn their attention to Phase 2.

In Phase 2, leaders specifically assess the requirements of the proposed project and compare them against the current and/or emerging organizational capabilities. Staffing and organizational structure, financial robustness and expertise, and necessary knowledge and skills for the new initiative should all be considered. Once the organizational capabilities have been addressed (Phase 1) and requirements of the initiative have been fully identified (Phase 2), the decision about whether or not to embark on the project can be made.

Another factor to consider in making the commitment to an ambitious new project is its relevance to the organization's mission. A project that is viewed as well aligned with the organization's mission has obvious advantages. For example, Fortune determined that for a portion of its clients – those who are homeless upon leaving prison – the scarcity of available supportive housing undermines and seriously impedes their successful reentry. While the Fortune Academy would be able to meet only a small fraction of the need for such housing in New York City, Fortune's leadership hoped that its existence might serve as a model for others, and, perhaps, help to bring down some barriers to supportive housing in the future.

Even with the best preparation and systemic self-reflection, some organization members may be hesitant about the prospect of launching a challenging project like supportive housing. They may not be eager or willing to embrace the necessary changes; they may have doubts about the priority, timing or desirability of the project. It is important for organization leaders to acknowledge the doubts of organization members at the same time that they confirm their belief in the project's benefits and the organizational capacity for success. In the case of The Fortune Society, some employees questioned the fundamental wisdom of adding housing to their portfolio. They worried that it would impact their capacity to provide wrap-around services, that the funding would be difficult to get, and/or that the community opposition would be formidable. Listening to these doubts, the leadership

shared their plan to proceed incrementally, building into their five-year supportive housing plan "choice points" at which the organization could discontinue the project if the risk to organizational functioning was determined to be too great. The organizational self-assessment and the resulting areas of growth, the placement of "choice points" into the planning process and the open debate all helped to "plant the seeds" for the eventual acceptance by Fortune employees of a new, broader portfolio.

The Fortune example demonstrates some of the ways that leaders can best shepherd their organization when making a decision about launching a new initiative: adopting a two-phase assessment and openly sharing the results; making necessary changes to the organization and offering opportunities for growth and development; listening to the concerns of its members; and, once appropriate, demonstrating an unwavering belief in the project and in the organization's capacity to accomplish it.

Beginning Community Outreach: Identifying the Stakeholders

Identifying those groups of individuals who have a strong interest in a community-impacting project, like supportive housing for formerly incarcerated individuals, is a necessary initial planning step (Iglesias, 2002; Allen, 2007). Some of the siting conflict literature identifies five key stakeholder audiences: government (i.e., elected officials and governmental boards), supporters who can act as ambassadors in the community, concerned neighbors/potential opponents, the media and the courts[5] (CASC, 2000). Organizations should modify this listing to fit their specific circumstances.

It is important to reach out early to elected officials. In part, they may be able to identify both potential supporters and opponents. A truism in NIMBY situations is that the closer the neighbor to the site of the project or service, the more strongly opposed they are likely to be (Dear, 1992). This was true in the Fortune Academy case. The most vocal opposition to the Academy came from and was led by residents of the building across the street. Fortune's "faces" to the community (i.e., the CEO, the esteemed Harlem resident and the former drug dealer and Fortune client) spent a great deal of time listening to the concerns of these neighbors.

Within a stakeholder group, it may be challenging to identify all impacted members. For example, identifying all concerned neighbors/potential opponents may be difficult, especially in racially or culturally diverse neighborhoods. For example, Fortune initially relied upon Community Board meetings and elected officials to help identify both supporters and opponents. However, in the West Harlem neighborhood surrounding the Academy, African Americans were well represented at the Community Board meetings while the less politically integrated Latino community was

5   This is true in cases in which the opposition to the project is in violation of antidiscrimination or housing laws.

not. It was not until much later that the voices of the Latino community surfaced in a dispute about the housing of a highly-publicized child murderer at the Castle. Fortune was quick to reach out directly to this constituency, learning the important lesson that the more disenfranchised members of the community may be harder to identify, requiring more creative outreach.

A takeaway lesson is that organizations should not rely on any one approach or strategy to identify all key stakeholders in the community. Neighborhood meetings may be ideal for attracting some stakeholders, but not others. Elected officials may represent some constituents, but not all. *It is necessary to reach out to the community through a variety of methods and in various venues*, e.g,, churches, schools, political events, community meetings, other social agencies, media, etc.

Two Pillars of Trust: Accessibility and Accountability

Underlying many of the recommendations in this Toolkit is the importance of *developing trust within the community.* For this to happen, an organization needs to be purposeful in choosing who will serve as the "face" to the community of the project. For example, Fortune identified as its primary representatives its CEO, a community liaison who was a well-respected pillar of the Harlem community and a former Fortune Society client known to the community as a drug dealer and who had since begun to turn his life around. These individuals served as both spokespersons and active listeners.

Once these key individuals are identified, they must be continuously accessible to the community. The more accessible they are, the more trust will be established. Community members need to know how to locate these individuals; phone calls must be returned promptly. Meetings that are important to community members should be attended, even if they do not directly relate to the organization's project. (As was noted, Fortune's community liaison still attends more than six community meetings a month, some eight years after the Academy opened its doors.)

The other critical builder of trust is accountability. Communities, especially less affluent communities that may be the location of more social service agencies and projects than they believe is their fair share, have a long memory of promises (from government or non-profit organizations) that have not been kept. *As a result, the behavior of the organizational representatives will be scrutinized to see if they do what they say they will do, or colloquially, if they "walk the talk."* Virtually every stakeholder who was interviewed about the Fortune Academy said something to the effect that "Fortune always did what they said they would do – they followed through." The importance of this cannot be overstated. To be accountable to the community while still pursuing the mission and goals of the organization and the project requires a high level of tact and candor and much patience.

Being a "Good Neighbor"

Most simply, for an organization to be a good neighbor to the community in which it seeks to be located means: being honest and straightforward about its organizational mission, acting with transparency about its operations and plans, listening to the needs and concerns of the community, trying to meet or accommodate those needs whenever possible and committing to making the neighborhood safer and stronger. The mindset underlying the "good neighbor" philosophy strives for a *collaborative relationship with the community, understanding that their fates are intertwined and that they have in common certain overarching priorities.* In the case of The Fortune Society leadership, they shared with all community members the goals of greater public safety, decreased crime, family unification and making the neighborhood around the Castle more desirable for all.

Honesty is one hallmark of a "Good Neighbor." Candor about an organization's client population is essential. For example, Fortune did not cover up the fact that they would be providing temporary and longer-term housing for those formerly incarcerated individuals who needed it most, without discriminating on the basis of criminal record. Their mission is to serve and to offer hope to those who have nowhere else to go; therefore, formerly incarcerated individuals who have been convicted of a violent crime are accepted at the Castle as long as they demonstrate a strong commitment to changing their lives, abide by the house rules, and pose no current threat of violence.

Transparency can be demonstrated by sharing plans for the facility with the community well before implementing them; inviting community members to visit existing locations and to meet clients and staff, and being prepared to answer questions thoroughly and/or finding out additional information as necessary. Fortune used all of these techniques to let the community know that they were not hiding information and had no secret plans that would be kept hidden until it was too late for the community to stop them from implementing them.

Importantly, being a good neighbor means listening to the community's needs and requests, even when they are expressed with anger or hostility. It is understandable that a strong and organized community opposition to a project could be seen as solely a negative force. While challenging for the organization, a clearly organized resistance can, however, make it easier to determine the needs of the stakeholders and, ultimately, to meet them. *When community members state their opposition to the project, it is an opportunity to listen for their underlying needs and concerns.* There is no need to worry that listening will be confused with agreement about the merits of their concerns. Ask questions and make sure that community members know they have been heard. Listening to community needs allows the organization to find opportunities for collaboration. Fortune's community liaison advised that organizations should *"use the community's wisdom"* and added, *"What they say is very close to them."*

And finally, being a good neighbor also means that *all members of the organization, i.e., staff and clients, need to present a positive impression of the organization.* As a former member of the Fortune Academy leadership noted, clients understood that when they were out in the community, they were being scrutinized. If they behaved in a surly manner or were careless about littering, the reputation of the Castle, and of other clients, would suffer.

Leadership Effectiveness: Embodying Strength and Grace

As noted previously, an effective leader has a clear compelling vision of the future as well as the ability to lead the organization through the changes required to meet that future (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002; Whetten & Cameron, 2005). The leader's commitment may be sorely tested when faced with angry, organized opposition to the organization's plans. It is imperative that the leader, as well as other organizational representatives, continue to show up. Their presence at meetings with community members who are strongly opposed to their plans is crucial. When the situation gets hot, they may experience a natural desire to be elsewhere. Being noticeably visible during difficult times makes an enormous difference in overcoming community opposition. Showing up is the minimum leadership commitment. *How the leader handles him/her-self is key. When in a room filled with angry opponents, the leader should aspire to provide information and answer questions with grace and non-defensiveness.* Mirroring the

reactions of the project opponents by expressing anger or behaving defensively will be counterproductive.

Finally, the connection between the organization's leadership and the community can be viewed as a relationship that needs to be built and *continually nurtured*. As such, it takes time and effort, falling mostly on the organizational leadership. In order for a healthy relationship to develop, the organization's leadership must behave in ways that conveys that they are trustworthy. In such situations, community members are especially attuned to inconsistencies in a leader's behavior. Therefore when an organization leader says he or she is going to do something, or be somewhere, follow-through is imperative. This is a key ingredient to building a successful and trusting relationship between the organization and the community.

V: Conclusion

Fortune Society's journey toward becoming a provider of supportive reentry housing for formerly incarcerated men and women began with many challenges - including strong reactions of anger and resistance from community members to the siting of the Fortune Academy in "their backyard" - and ended successfully - with acceptance and trust from neighbors who perceived common ground with Fortune's commitment toward making the community stronger and safer. The resistance, anger and fear of neighborhood members toward a residential facility for people with a history of incarceration (and/or of other socially stigmatizing conditions) is not surprising. The purpose of this document then is to equip policy makers and service providers with a better understanding of the dynamics of this "NIMBY" reaction, and to offer some guidelines for engaging with community members via a collaborative, transparent approach that can lead to successful initiatives and positive alliances.

For additional information, see the References section of this document for a roadmap of both scholarly and practical resources. Also, you may wish to visit The Fortune Society's website (www.fortunesociety.org) and/or contact them for more detailed information.

VI: Endnotes

Methodology

Data were obtained from 15 interviews with at least one person from each of the following stakeholder groups and some individuals representing more than one stakeholder group: Fortune leadership and staff members (6); elected and appointed political representatives of the Castle neighborhood in West Harlem (3); neighbors of the Castle (4); members of community organizations (6); and uniformed service officers (1). The community persons interviewed were working with an area

stakeholder group and/or living in the neighborhood during the time that Fortune was developing the Academy at the Castle (1998-2002). Participation in the study was voluntary and confidentiality was assured. Data were organized and analyzed with the assistance of NVivo 8 – a qualitative data analysis software package – to identify common themes, become aware of turning points, and compare relationships, perceptions, responses and actions across the stakeholder groups.

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CONTRIBUTORS

John Jay College of Criminal Justice of The City University of New York is a liberal arts college dedicated to education, research and service in the fields of criminal justice, fire science and related areas of public safety and public service. It strives to endow students with the skills of critical thinking and effective communication; the perspective and moral judgment that result from liberal studies; the capacity for personal and social growth and creative problem solving that results from the ability to acquire and evaluate information; the ability to navigate advanced technological systems; and the awareness of the diverse cultural, historical, economic and political forces that shape our society.

The Prisoner Reentry Institute (PRI) at John Jay College of Criminal Justice works to spur innovation and improve practice in the field of reentry by advancing knowledge; translating research into effective policy and service delivery; and fostering effective partnerships between criminal justice and non-criminal justice disciplines. To achieve this mission, PRI develops, manages, and evaluates innovative reentry projects; provides practitioners and policymakers with cutting edge tools and expertise; promotes education opportunities for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals as a vehicle for successful reentry and reintegration; and creates synergy across fields and disciplines.

The Fortune Society is a nonprofit social service and advocacy organization, founded in 1967, whose mission is to support successful reentry from prison and promote alternatives to incarceration, thus strengthening the fabric of our communities. Fortune works to create a world where all who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated can become positive, contributing members of society. We do this through a holistic, one-stop model of service provision that is based on more than forty years of experience working with people with criminal records.

In 2007, The Fortune Society launched the David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy (DRCPP). While Fortune has always engaged in advocacy and community education, DRCPP is focused on the coordination of Fortune's policy development, advocacy, technical assistance, training, and community education efforts. DRCPP integrates Fortune's internal expertise – the life experience of our formerly incarcerated staff and clients and our first-hand experience as a longstanding direct service provider.

The International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution (ICCCR) is committed to developing knowledge and practice to promote constructive conflict resolution, effective cooperation, and social justice. Based at Teachers College, Columbia University, the center was founded in 1986 under the direction of Professor Emeritus Morton Deutsch, one of the world's most respected scholars of conflict resolution. The ICCCR's mission is grounded in education: to support individuals, communities and organizations in better understanding the nature of conflict and in developing skills and settings to help them resolve conflict effectively. In addition, the Center's pedagogy is based in research and theory; applied research, including participatory action research, directly links the creation of knowledge with its application to issues of social justice.

As part of the Center's commitment to linking research and practice, researchers from the ICCCR partnered with Fortune and PRI to provide scholarly and research support in producing this toolkit. ICCCR researchers performed literature reviews, conducted interviews, analyzed data and wrote various sections of this toolkit.

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

With over 725,000 men and women being released from prison each year, the need for housing assistance for the formerly incarcerated population is immense. Indeed, in addition to linking homelessness and incarceration, research has identified a significant relationship between homelessness and re-offending. Unfortunately, a number of barriers place the formerly incarcerated population at a disadvantage when trying to access safe and stable housing. For some, returning home to their family is not an option as family members may be unwilling or unable to accommodate them. Accessing housing in the private market also presents a challenge given high prices and landlords' exercising their personal discretion to discriminate against people with criminal histories. Finally, public housing policies – both at the federal and local level – deny access to individuals with certain criminal convictions.

Community-based service providers around the country working in the reentry field have begun to respond to this overwhelming need with few resources. This toolkit highlights the experience of The Fortune Society in its development of a housing project in West Harlem. Through Fortune's experience, organizations can glean strategies to help them overcome one of the greatest challenges associated with providing housing to formerly incarcerated men and women. NIMBY opposition can result in significant project delays, or even shut down. This case study documents how an organization can address a myriad of community concerns and ultimately garner support for its project. By offering tangible steps and lessons learned by Fortune, this toolkit provides guidance and encouragement to those organizations working to assist formerly incarcerated people and create safer communities.

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