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Columbus Scholar House: Innovative Housing for Student Parents

Isabel Toth

Community Properties of Ohio

Traci Lewis

The Ohio State University ACCESS Collaborative

Denise Liston

Community Properties of Ohio

Nancy Hood

Community Properties of Ohio

Sarah French

Community Properties of Ohio

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Isabel Toth, Traci Lewis, Denise Liston, Nancy Hood, Sarah French, and DaVita Tucker



Columbus Scholar House: Innovative Housing for Student Parents

Contact Information: 910 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43205 | Phone: 614.253.0984 | www.cpoms.org | www.cpoimpact.org

cpo management
community properties of ohio



Introduction & Background

Almost one-quarter of U.S. college students are also parents. Many student parents are single parents, grew up in households with limited financial resources, or are the first in their families to attend college.

Stable, quality, affordable housing is a critical foundation for student parents to be successful but there are limited housing options for this student subgroup. Supporting high-quality early learning opportunities for children of student parents is also a priority based on evidence from two-generation approaches to breaking the cycle of poverty.

Description

Community Properties of Ohio (CPO) is a mission-driven affordable housing property management company based in Columbus, Ohio. CPO began development of Columbus Scholar House (CSH) in 2012 to provide several important resources for low-income student parents: 1) high-quality affordable housing; 2) high-quality early childhood and school-age care and education; and 3) wrap-around services for children and parents. Primary goals of CSH are: 1) families maintain stable housing; 2) parents obtain post-secondary degrees; 3) children enter school ready to learn and are successful in school.

CSH will have a total of 38 2- and 3-bedroom housing units when completed in fall 2016. Rent is based on 30% of adjusted annual income. Units are 970-1,145 square feet with energy efficient appliances, microwave, dishwasher, washer/dryer, and wood laminate flooring. The location is on the COTA bus line.

Phase I
CPO renovated and began operating the first 10 CSH units in one building at the corner of Long Street and 17th Avenue in August 2012.

Phase II
In 2015, CPO was awarded Low Income Housing Tax Credits to construct an additional 28 units in the immediate vicinity of Phase I. Phase II is three additional buildings along 17th Avenue and will be complete by the end of 2016. One building includes a community center in the lower level with a computer lab, staff offices, and after-school care.

Childcare
To provide convenient, consistent, high-quality early care and education for CSH children, CPO is renovating the ground level of the CSH Phase I building to be a childcare center called Future Scholars Community Learning Center (FSCLC). The YMCA of Central Ohio will manage FSCLC, ultimately serving 63 infants, toddlers, and preschool children through Early Head Start, Head Start, and publicly-funded childcare. Additional slots will be available to children 5-12 years old for school-age care. CSH children and families will receive priority for FSCLC slots. YMCA, CPO, and other CSH partners will work collaboratively to recruit, enroll, and support children and families enrolled at FSCLC.

- CSH applicants must meet the following criteria:
- Primary custody of at least one child
 - Full-time student enrolled in State of Ohio accredited institution of higher learning with at least one year remaining
 - Maintain minimum 2.5 GPA
 - Under 50% Are Median Income
 - Eligible for Section 8 Housing Voucher Program
 - Subject to credit and criminal background checks

Table 1

CSH resident characteristics (n=13 households)

Characteristic	Number (%)
Race	
White	1 (8%)
Black	12 (92%)
Household composition	
1 adult	12 (92%)
2 adults	1 (8%)
Adult age (average)	28 years (range 23-33 years)
Child age	
0-3 years	3
4-5 years	7
6-12 years	11
13-17 years	1
Unknown	3
School	
Ohio State University	9
Columbus State Community College	1
Franklin University	3

Seven of the students living in phase I graduated with bachelor's degrees between 2012 and 2016 in Human Nutrition, Sociology, Social Work, and Speech and Hearing Science. As of July 2016, four of the current leaseholders remain on track with their degree programs. Two households were not on track to receive their degrees. Three households moved out of CSH upon graduating with bachelor's degrees.

Methods

Demographics, household composition, and parent outcomes were collected for families who lived in CSH Phase I from 2012-2016. Data were obtained from administrative records, CPO property management, and service providers.

Results

Since August 2012, 13 households have lived in Phase I CSH units. Head of household were primarily African American and single adults (Table 1). Phase I households had a total of 22 children with the most common age groups pre-schoolers and elementary schoolers. Most residents attended the Ohio State University.

Partnerships

The success of CSH depends on high levels of collaboration with several key partners:

Partner Organization	Services
The Ohio State University ACCESS Collaborative	Academic and social support (on-site)
YMCA of Central Ohio	Childcare for 0-5 year olds (on-site) After-school care for 6-12 year olds (on-site)
Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority	Section 8 housing vouchers
Greater Columbus Community Helping Hands, Inc.	Laptops/printers for CSH residents (competitive application process)
Ohio Capital Impact Corporation	College scholarships for CSH residents (competitive application process)
Columbus State Community College	Academic and social support (off-site) In-kind donations

Discussion

CSH Phase I demonstrated that low-income parents in need of affordable, high-quality housing with early childhood care and education and wrap-around services. It also showed that CSH residents can maintain housing stability while pursuing post-secondary education. It was surprising that most CSH Phase I residents attended the Ohio State University (OSU); as we had expected more students from Columbus State Community College because it is located less than one mile from CSH.

A critical mass of OSU students led us to develop a closer partnership with OSU ACCESS Collaborative. OSU ACCESS staff are providing academic and support services for all CSH residents in Phase II, regardless of whether they attend OSU or another accredited post-secondary institution. OSU ACCESS staff are also well-informed about pathways from 2- to 4-year institutions and will support CSH residents throughout that process.

A key improvement in Phase II is that high-quality early care and education (ECE) will be available on-site at CSH. In Phase I, ECE was only available for OSU students on the OSU campus through OSU ACCESS. In addition to CSH residents, other CPO residents living in regular subsidized housing owned and managed by CPO have priority access to FSCLC. We anticipate these residents will be working or going to school or interested in doing so; access to high-quality ECE will facilitate this for CPO parents and help children to enter school ready to learn.

Authors

Isabel Toth, President & CEO¹; Traci Lewis, MSW, Program Director²; Denise Liston, Director of Property Management¹; Nancy Hood, PhD, Director CPO Impact Supportive Services¹; Sarah French, Marketing & Communications Manager¹; DaVita Tucker, Marketing & Communications Assistant¹

¹Community Properties of Ohio
²The Ohio State University ACCESS Collaborative