

Burlington Supportive Housing Initiatives



Est. 2004



Burlington Supportive Housing Initiatives, Inc.
65 Main Street
Burlington, Vermont 05401

ABOUT US:

Established in March 2004, Burlington Supportive Housing Initiatives, Inc. (BSHI) is a Vermont non-profit charitable organization with IRS 501(c)(3) status.

MISSION STATEMENT: *To strengthen the Chittenden County community by supporting affordable housing opportunities and helping low-income people living in subsidized housing improve their quality of life through personal and economic self-sufficiency.*

Our program activities focus on the needs of low-income housing communities and programs operated or assisted by the Burlington Housing Authority (BHA).

BSHI BOARD:

The BSHI Board of Directors has five members: two members of the Board of Commissioners of BHA; a City of Burlington representative; the Director of Fletcher Allen Elder Care Services and a BHA program participant.

BSHI INITIATIVES:

With a grant from the Burlington Housing Authority, BSHI is able to pay all overhead costs. This allows BSHI to allocate all other donated funds directly to program costs.

BSHI currently provides support to or is seeking funding for the following programs:

BSHI is a 501 (C)(3) Non Profit Organization

The DREAM Mentoring Program



DREAM Mentors and Mentees at St. Michael's College, Spring 2008

What is DREAM?

In 1998, the Vermont State Housing Authority became the host of an AmeriCorps position through the Vermont Community Stewardship Program. Kathryn Ross, a 1995 graduate of Dartmouth College, became the first AmeriCorps member to fill this position and was charged with the duty of providing after-school programming for close to 100 children living at the Templeton Court Apartments, a Section 8 housing development. Kathryn soon connected with students attending Dartmouth, who began volunteering with the children at Templeton. The volunteers organized themselves into a weekly mentoring program that became known as DREAM (Directing through Recreation, Education, Adventure, and Mentoring).

By May of 1999, the program consisted of more than 30 mentoring pairs. A few years later, two of the original mentors established a non-profit organization to support the existing DREAM program and expand to other colleges and low-income communities. In the fall of 2001, The DREAM Program, Inc. was incorporated in the state of Vermont. In the spring of 2002, DREAM received its 501(c)(3) status. Today, DREAM is a statewide program, with a central office and a growing number of local program sites throughout Vermont.

The Burlington Housing Authority's involvement with DREAM began in January 2003 at Franklin Square, a Family Development, where it continues to thrive today. 26 St. Michael's College students mentor 24 children from 14 different Franklin Square families.

The major goal for the Burlington Supportive Housing Initiatives is the expansion of DREAM to the Riverside Apartments, another Burlington Housing Authority Family Development. We are hoping for the same positive impact that we have seen at Franklin Square. We have just begun the conversation about how we can team up with DREAM, the Mentoring Task Force, the City of Burlington, and other potential partners to share this resource with other low-income children and families. We look forward to another successful collaboration within the year.



DREAM Mentors and Mentees in Boston, April 2007

The Wellness Program for Seniors and People with Disabilities



Photo above: Residents just love a bargain at the Christmas Tree Shops in Williston!

The Wellness Program sponsors activities and events at our 3 high-rise buildings that serve our elderly and disabled residents. Through the Wellness Program, residents have access to;

- On-site Blood Pressure Clinics
- Foot Care Clinics
- Other health-related forums
- Social activities (movie nights, picnics, crafts, shopping trips, breakfast clubs, & fitness classes)

A Resident Services Coordinator and Activities Coordinator facilitate, implement, and evaluate all programs, activities, and workshops.

BSHI would like the Wellness Program to not only maintain the fitness classes offered but also expand the frequency of classes and resident attendance. Through a partnership with Greater Burlington YMCA, a fitness instructor is present to provide courses consisting of balance training, safe lifting, strength training, and overall fitness.

As a result of feedback from residents, classes have now increased to three times a week. To increase attendance, creative incentives will be introduced for residents who attend regularly.



Left: Steve Gaydos, (center) YMCA Fitness Instructor extraordinaire, conducts fitness classes at all three of our buildings 3 times per week.

BSHI is also looking to expand the Homemaker Program currently offered at the Champlain Apartments. The Homemaker Program provides a 'Care Plan' for each resident, which is updated monthly according to changes in needs. Over 51% of the residents residing in our 3 high-rise buildings are considered elderly by HUD's standards, with an average age of 74 years old and an average annual income of \$11,556.00. The cost of homemaker/housekeeping services is \$22.00 per hour, which our average resident cannot afford. As a result, the resident is left at risk of falling, depression, sickness, and ultimately homelessness if he/she is unable to maintain his/her apartment. Through a \$15,000 grant ending in 2009, BSHI is able to provide 48% subsidy for the hourly cost of the Homemaker services for our 7 participating residents.

With a new financial commitment, the Wellness Program will be able to assist more residents with homemaker services in the Champlain Apartments and expand to our other elderly buildings.

The Neighborhood Networks Technology Center and *Taking IT Home*

The Burlington Housing Authority's Neighborhood Networks Technology Center is located at 230 St Paul Street, in Decker Towers, a senior and disabled occupied high-rise building. The Center has been in operation since 2006 and has had two very successful years of operation. Some highlights include:

- An average of 33 people used the Center daily
- There were 47 computer courses offered throughout the year, an increase from 31 computer courses offered in the first year
- 132 people completed a course
- Volunteers provided 3,079 hours to the Center
- Course instructors volunteered 107 hours of their time
- 76 residents reported being able to operate a computer or increased their computer skills after taking a course
- 10 residents reported finding a new job or taking on added responsibilities at their current job as a result of taking a computer course
- 4 of the 12 donated laptops from Systems and Software were raffled off to Burlington Housing Authority residents and program participants.



In addition to meeting and exceeding the course goals for the second year of the grant, the Neighborhood Networks Technology Center is hoping to launch the *Taking IT Home* program this year as well. *Taking IT Home* will allow low income BHA participants and program participants who have successfully completed a series of Neighborhood Networks Technology Center courses to acquire a personal computer at an affordable price. Along with a personal computer, Program participants will also have access to in-home computer set-up and limited technical support provided by the Center staff.



Although using the Technology Center is a great way to build foundation skills, BSHI recognizes that technology must be readily available in order for people to derive the maximum benefit. We are hopeful that with the donation of computers and/or funding, *Taking IT Home* will be a success for our low-income residents.



African Initiatives Program

Under the auspices of the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program (VRRP), about 200 Somali Bantu refugees have settled in Burlington since 2003. According to the International Organization for Migration, 60 percent of the Somali Bantu refugees are under the age of seventeen with 31 percent under the age of 5 (Bryce, 2). The average Bantu family consists of between 4 and 8 children.

VRRP financial assistance ends after 8 months, causing the initial housing placements to generally no longer be affordable. Most families turn to the Burlington and Winooski Housing Authorities (BHA and WHA) for housing, as it is both affordable and offers larger units to accommodate larger families.



We found that there were many challenges the Somali Bantu families faced when they moved into Public Housing. The largest being language barriers, cultural misconceptions, and some racial tensions. It was equally difficult for staff to communicate about rent, rules, and residency to some of the new arrivals. To try to alleviate some of that strain on the system, the BHA and WHA hired a Somali Bantu interpreter/case manager in January 2006, to work with both of the Housing Authorities and the Bantu families on making the transition into the community as seamless as possible.

The funds donated to the program are used to continue the supportive services for African immigrants living in Burlington and Winooski. Through social events and educational workshops, cultural integration is emphasized among residents. Other areas of importance include tenant rights and responsibilities and lease comprehension.

