



History and Background of Communities Advocating for Resident Empowerment

Communities Advocating for Resident Empowerment (C.A.R.E.) was created to provide high-quality human services, critical resources, educational programs, advocacy and training for children, youth, families and seniors living in affordable housing communities. We seek to create multi-faceted, sustainable and replicable models of service that will reinforce self-empowerment, foster economic independence and encourage community involvement at all the sites we serve.

C.A.R.E. was formed through an association with Las Palmas Foundation (Las Palmas), a real estate development company specializing in the development and long-term ownership of affordable rental housing. In providing solutions to the affordable housing challenge, the principals of Las Palmas recognized that besides building safe, secure neighborhoods, that enhancing the lives of residents through social service programming is essential.

Las Palmas was organized in 1992 as a 501 (c)(3) non-profit housing corporation dedicated to helping communities rebuild for a brighter future by assisting low income residents with programs to address the critical needs of affordable housing. Las Palmas, located in Encinitas, California has sixteen years experience in acquisitions, entitlements, finance, construction and property management. Mr. Joseph Michaels, the founder and President has an extensive history in all phases of multifamily development, with an emphasis in affordable housing for over twenty years.

In 2002, Mr. Michaels and the Las Palmas team felt they were ready in their organizational development to move to the next phase of support. The goal was to provide supportive social and educational services to all of the residents living at the 26 Las Palmas properties scattered across California. The organization recognized that many youth, adult and senior residents needed and deserved more than just basic shelter. A 'wrap around' holistic model of care/service was developed. The vision was to provide culturally sensitive social services and educational programming that would positively impact the lives of those living at the communities. These services would be offered at no cost to the residents.

The initial phase began with the implementation of this holistic model of service, which provides service within the environment the residents live (on-site community centers were built at all of the affordable housing properties owned by Las Palmas). Las Palmas began by focusing on a local San Diego property, Summercrest Apartments, located in National City, CA, 10 miles from the Mexico border. Mr. Michaels partnered with two well established, third party social service agencies in the area (National City Collaborative and South Bay Community Services). After conducting resident meetings, implementing a needs assessment survey and interviewing individual residents, free meaningful services were provided to all interested residents.

Initial services included:

- lunch program for the seniors
- five day a week after-school programming for the youth (with snack distribution)
- intensive case management for adult and senior residents
- ESL classes for adults and seniors
- health care education for all residents
- Nutrition and exercise classes for the seniors

During the first year of service in 2002, Summercrest Community Center served 5,230 residents (duplication in services) through various programs and resources. By the end of 2007, Summercrest Community Center served 16,326 (duplication in services) residents. We are proud to say in five years we have increased resources and services provided by 11,096.

The next phase in the expansion of the social services was capacity building. A Director of Social Service was hired in 2005. The Director took on the task of developing partnerships with service providers, overseeing site staff, and ensuring quality of service of programs at the 26 affordable housing communities across California (serving more than 4,000 residents). Slowly but surely by the end of 2005, culturally sensitive services began to be provided to the most needy low income populations at all of the properties. These residents included: single parent families, large families on public assistance, senior citizens living on a fixed income and mentally and physically-challenged individuals.

These programs and services were funded through social service budgets that came out of the income of the buildings. The services were designed to provide residents with new opportunities to learn, excel, reinforce self-empowerment, foster economic independence and encourage community involvement.

Services (education, advocacy and social services) were provided in multiple languages and included:

- food distribution
- financial literacy classes
- after school programming
- case management/mental health services
- job training and placement health education

- technology/education classes
- community advocacy
- parenting classes
- child care
- ESL classes

After the initial development of service provision, the next major challenge was the limitation and inconsistency in funds for services at many properties. Often Las Palmas was only able to utilize volunteers and/or non paid staff. This caused inconsistency in programming at certain communities. Whereas other communities had much more substantial budgets and a far more comprehensive model of service was achievable (example is Summercrest). This resulted in a lack of consistency in services and quality control.

As Las Palmas continued to provide affordable rental housing to the most needy of residents, they went into stage three of their social service expansion. In May 2006, the Las Palmas team strategically planned and developed an affiliate social service organization that would serve all of the affordable housing communities that are developed and owned by Las Palmas. The long term goal of this entity is to focus on strategic fund raising which would ensure expansion of all of the programming and services, support a sustainable model at all properties, and enable C.A.R.E. to continuously provide quality assurance. In addition, the organization would focus on raising monies that would support the creation of models of service that could become replicated at other sites as funding expanded. In April 2006, Las Palmas received its IRS determination letter for Communities Advocating for Resident Empowerment (C.A.R.E.).

The goal in this exciting new phase of service expansion is to ensure that every property has tailor made, consistent, high quality human services, resources, and education based on the needs of the individual community and a holistic model of service.

In this exciting stage of our service expansion we have come to recognize the value of C.A.R.E. and why it is so very different than a boys and girls club or a local senior center, food bank or community center. By providing services within a residential community we make sure that residents can access them. By ensuring that our communities have a voice and choice regarding programming, we are able to effectively meet their needs. We do not assume we know what each community needs. Instead we make it a top priority to give community members a voice. Given a chance to advocate for the tools that they need for themselves and their families our residents help us to provide targeted and effective services.

We support community involvement through a variety of methods tailored to meet the needs of our diverse communities. These methods include open forum community meetings, anonymous needs assessment surveys, and individual consultations. By including an entire community in the planning and program

development process we are able to create a sense of ownership among residents that drives the success of our programs.

All of our communities are unique. We serve urban communities and rural communities, senior housing and family housing. We serve residents from more than 10 different countries, disabled residents both physically and mentally, non English speaking residents, single mothers raising children, and residents whom have varying income levels. Responsiveness to these factors is critical to the approach we take and of course the services and resources needed at each property.

It is our goal to ensure that we have meaningful, sustainable services at every individual property, regardless of the budget of the building so that we can provide resources, programs and education that will help the residents build personal and financial assets and support every individuals success.