



CHRISTIAN
ACTIVITIES
COUNCIL

Breaking Barriers
Building Communities

Bridges

APRIL 2008

NEWS FROM THE CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES COUNCIL • 36 UCC CHURCHES IN MISSION TO GREATER HARTFORD

Teaching Financial Literacy

As a HUD-approved housing counseling agency, the CAC is offering Hartford residents in the low to moderate income brackets homeownership support services that range from building financial literacy to owning a home.



Housing Counseling Specialist Tori Hamilton leads a training session at the CAC office.

Housing Counseling Specialist Tori Hamilton is spearheading the program—generating the participation, coordinating and leading the training sessions, and supporting her clients in taking steps to minimize their debt, build their credit and eventually buy a house. Her curriculum is based on the ongoing training she receives from the NeighborWorks Training Institute based in Washington, D.C. and the FDIC.

“I teach financial literacy first,” Tori said. “Then I gauge how people are taking in the concepts and tailor the training to meet

those needs.”

Most participants (about 85 percent) are single mothers age 28 to 35. Sessions are usually held in small groups on weekday evenings or Saturday mornings, a format that helps build camaraderie and reinforce positive behaviors.

Nearly 200 families have participated in the program to date, and Tori reports many positive changes—reduced payment delinquencies and collections, higher credit scores and savings, and clients who qualify for fixed-rate 30-year mortgages at market rate.

Clients learn of the program through referrals and from ads placed in Hartford-area newspapers and on Hartford access TV. Banks and realtors have also started to refer their clients.

“They’re starting to come to us because of the way we deliver on our services,” Tori said. “We’re not pushing people through and giving them a certificate; we’re tracking behavioral changes.”

Tori is finding that the program participants are appreciative, and motivated, and the changes she sees are gratifying.

“If we can change behaviors away from materialism, we’re giving people a chance for a better alternative,” she said.

A Vision Becoming A Reality

I’ve been writing the CAC’s newsletters for five years. It’s a biannual assignment, so when newsletter time comes around every fall and spring, I need to catch up on the CAC’s latest missions and ministries. I’m always struck by the accomplishments of the CAC’s small but committed (and growing) staff.

This time is no exception. Or perhaps I should say it is exceptional, and noteworthy. Suddenly, from this reporter’s point of view, the CAC’s vision of serving Hartford’s poor is coalescing in a comprehensive and remarkable way.

The CAC’s programs have grown to span the spectrum of life’s essentials: affordable homes, health care, community, financial literacy, education and enrichment for kids and adults, and more. And they’re making a substantial difference to the lives of many.

Housing Consultant Ralph Knighton says it well: “The CAC is a full-service entity, a ‘can-do’ organization. Other such organizations are going out of business, but people and programs are coming to the CAC because of its record and its history. The staff should be recognized for the strides they’re making.” Indeed.

– Kathy Simpson

Metropolitan Training and Advancement

Adventures in the City

Fundraising for 2008 Adventures In the City is actively underway. Our goal for 2008 is to raise \$115,000 for budgeting that begins in May.

Last year, we experienced a shortfall in grants from foundations, making contributions from churches and friends more vital than ever. Please consider donating to this summertime program that brings learning and enrichment to hundreds of Hartford-area children.

New Inner City Experience for Suburban Teens

The CAC's new youth immersions offer teens a first-hand experience of Hartford and the missions and ministries at work within its neighborhoods.

High school students from the South Windsor and Enfield congregational churches attended the first immersion on March 8. Highlights included tours of Deerfield Avenue, the rock exhibit on Albany Avenue commemorating young victims of violence in the city, and the House of Abraham, a Habitat for Humanity house built by congregants from the three Abrahamic faiths: Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Students also visited Zizzo House where Care Coordinator Rev. John Selders discussed life with AIDS and within the Zizzo House community.

A second immersion is coming up in April with teens from the First Congregational Church of Woodstock.

Welcome Ken Esposito

Taking Action for Universal Health Care

Our health care system—does it reflect our values? How often is the theme of healing the sick talked about in the Bible? How often is the term “co-pay” used?

These are questions that Ken Esposito, congregational organizer for the Universal Health Care Initiative, is posing to UCC congregations around the state. His mission: to provide education on health care issues and mobilize our collective forces in helping to shape a system that provides quality care to all. The project is being done in conjunction with the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ and is funded by a grant from the Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut.

“It’s a moral imperative,” Ken says. “The State of Connecticut is committed to creating a program that is affordable to everyone. We want to make sure it happens in the right way.”

State legislators will be voting on a new health care program in the spring of 2009. The time to make a difference is now.

Since joining the CAC staff in October 2007, Ken has been meeting with UCC ministers and congregations through various forums—second-hour programs on Sundays, potluck suppers, regional interfaith events, whatever fits the community. In May, Ken will be conducting a workshop at the annual meeting of the Connecticut Conference UCC, looking at the issue from the medical perspective with representation from doctors within UCC congregations.

Ken is a long-time community organizer. He has a degree in architecture, but it wasn’t long after



UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE
Universally Available
Continuous • Portable
Affordable • Systemically Viable
High Quality

What Can You Do?

- n Enlist others
- n Write letters to editors and politicians
- n Get endorsements from businesses, organizations, hospitals, local governments
- n Attend events sponsored by the Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut

Learn more
Contact Ken (203.994.3366) for more information or to schedule an educational session for your congregation.

graduating from college that he became involved in community- and faith-based organizing, starting in the city of Cleveland and then at the Ohio state level.

Ken and his family returned to Connecticut about eight years ago, and now he’s mostly on the road with his laptop and cell phone, invaluable tools for his statewide travels and visitations.

Ken says he is inspired by the opportunity to bring about change and to meet with interesting people who are trying to make a difference.

“I’m most impressed by the openness of all the pastors in facilitating commitment to the cause within their congregations,” he says.

Welcome Ralph Knighton

Housing Development Consultant

Ralph Knighton joined the CAC staff in May 2007 as our housing development consultant. But he's not new to the organization.

Ralph's history with the CAC goes back to the 1990s when he was on staff as the executive director of the North Hartford Development Corporation. He also served a 20-year tenure with the City of Hartford, first as chief of staff for Mayor Mike Peters, then as director of housing, and worked for the federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) agency for seven years.

Retired from both the City of Hartford and HUD, Ralph has returned to the CAC on a part-time basis. He brings a lifetime of experience to the cause.

"It's where I started," he says. "It's like coming back home."

Ralph's charge is to expand the CAC's capacity for housing development and neighborhood revitalization through rehabilitation of existing homes and the construction of new homes on vacant lots. His work, which is funded by LISC, includes grant writing, researching properties, and examining socio-economic indicators for the CAC's target



Housing Development Consultant Ralph Knighton

populations.

"We're trying to do mixed development, offering housing at cost and below cost," Ralph says. The general target is 80 percent of the median income, which equates to about \$70,000 for a family of four.

To date, Ralph has identified properties on Edgewood (where rehabilitation is already underway) and on Lenox and Cabot streets, for which the CAC has made overtures to the City of Hartford. He is also consulting on suburban properties, including those the CAC assumed through the West Hartford Interfaith Housing Coalition.

Resident Organizer to Join CAC Staff

It's not enough to build and refurbish homes. A sense of community is also needed, one that fosters pride, connection and a feeling of safety within our neighborhoods. In order to facilitate this process in the Upper Albany area, the CAC is working on funding for a resident organizer who will bring residents together into block clubs, follow through with them on home and street beautification, and work with the police to make their neighborhoods safe. We hope to have a staff member on board by early summer.

Housing Initiatives

Update on West Hartford Interfaith Housing Coalition

The CAC has assumed management of the West Hartford Interfaith Housing Coalition. The transfer of assets (approximately 40 housing units) has been completed, and we are hard at work establishing relationships with the families. We are also exploring an opportunity to purchase vacant land in the Elmwood section of West Hartford in order to produce a 22-unit condominium complex for mixed income families.

Edgewood Street

Construction work continues on the conversion of the apartment buildings at 19 and 29 Edgewood Street into two side-by-side two-family homes. We expect the homes to be completed and sold by the fall of 2008.

Operation Weed and Seed

CAC Executive Director Don Steinle serves on the steering committee for Upper Albany/Clay Arsenal (UACA) Weed and Seed, a U.S. Department of Justice program whose goal is to reduce violent crime, drug abuse and gang activity in targeted neighborhoods throughout the country. The UACA neighborhoods, which received official Weed and Seed recognition on June 1, 2005, comprise a combined population of 11,435 residents within a .83 square mile area.

Christian Activities Council
Annual Awards Dinner

Thursday, May 22, 2008
Bond Hotel Ballroom

Keynote Speaker
Associate Conference Minister
Rev. DaVita D. McAllister
"Empowering Our Youth"

Outstanding
Music!
Good Food!
Silent Auction!

WANTED:
Hot Items to Entice Silent Auction Bidders!

Vacation Homes • Handcrafted Items
Jewelry • Art • Dinner for Two • Sports and
Entertainment Events • and more

*Please contact Sharon Steinle at 860-296-1525
to contribute to this exciting event!*

**Want to stay apprised of the latest CAC
events and initiatives?** Join our email list. Send
your email address to Office Manager Candy
Bordonaro: candy@christianactivities.org.

Planned Giving: Leaving a Legacy

If you believe in the CAC's social justice ministry and want to ensure that its inner city mission is sustained for years to come, we invite you to consider making a planned gift to the CAC in your will or through your estate planning. Your gift will benefit the poor and their quality of life. All donations, large and small, are welcome.

Planned gifts require legal and professional advice. For more information, call Rev. Edwin Ayala at the CAC office (860-527-9860).

**Urban Mission through
Asset Mapping**

Our UCC congregations are rich in assets—from tangible resources such as facilities, materials and financial resources to skills, interests, and personal and professional experience. How can these resources be put to work in urban ministry?

"Asset mapping" workshops, offered free of charge by the CAC, can help church groups identify their resources and act on them in mission and ministry, and for social justice.

Members of the First Church of Christ, Simsbury were the first to participate in an asset mapping workshop on March 16. If your congregation is interested in this experience that yields empowering and often surprising results, please call Rev. Nancy Allen at the CAC office (860-527-9860).

Bridges

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