Housing Models for People with Legal-System Involvement

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The Fortune Society

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The Fortune Society: Castle & Castle Gardens
Castle Replication: Freedom Commons, Syracuse New York
Freedom Commons
A place to live, grow, connect, and thrive
Named in honor of Syracuse’s rich history in the anti-slavery movement & its historic significance in the Underground Railroad
A partnership between the Syracuse Housing Authority & the Center for Community Alternatives

Syracuse Housing Authority
- property management

Center for Community Alternatives
- case management
- supportive services

Assistance provided by the Fortune Society
1998: The Fortune Society transformed a crackhouse into a new home for people returning to the community after incarceration... an innovative reentry housing program was born.
Homelessness rates among formerly incarcerated people

Number of homeless per 10,000 formerly incarcerated people in each category, compared to the general public in 2008 (the most recent year data for formerly incarcerated people are available)

General public: 21

- All
- Sex: Men, Women
- Race or ethnicity: Black, Hispanic, White
- Age: 24 and under, 25-34, 35-44, 45 or over
- Prior history: Incarcerated only once, Incarcerated more than once
- Time since release: Less than 2 years, 2 to 3 years, 4 or more years

Sources & data notes: https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html#methodology
Homelessness & reentry in Central New York

“For people looking for housing, having a criminal history is often a non-starter”
CNY Fair Housing Report 2014

Release from institution is the 5th greatest cause of homelessness, surpassing mental health
2015 Consolidated Plan - City of Syracuse

From 1/1/18 - 11/30/18 there were 529 HUD homeless individuals in Onondaga, Oswego, and Cayuga Counties whose prior living situation was jail, prison or juvenile detention (12% of total)
CNY Housing & Homeless Coalition
Bringing a new model of housing to Syracuse

NY Assemblywoman Pamela Hunter, former Senator David Valesky & current Senator Rachel May helped to secure technical assistance funding.

Community partners offered support & in-kind services.
Funding sources - new construction

- NYS Homes & Community Renewal - Housing Trust Fund
- NYS Energy Research & Development Authority
- Homeless Housing & Assistance Program
- NYS Homes & Community Renewal - Low Income Housing Credit
Funding for rent, operations, and programs

Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI)-
Through NYS OTDA
Rental subsidy & program funding for Permanent Supportive Housing tenants

Section 8
Rental subsidy for Permanent Supportive Housing tenants

Onondaga Dept of Social Services
program funding for residents of Freedom Commons Academy - emergency/transitional housing
Freedom Commons - three types of housing under one roof

- Freedom Commons Academy - emergency/transitional housing - 3 rooms with multiple beds
  approx. 11 beds

- Permanent Supportive Housing - 11 apartments
  1,2,3 bedrooms

- Affordable Housing - 43 apartments
  1,2,3 bedrooms
Eligibility

Freedom Commons Academy
A reentry program with housing: emergency/transitional housing for individual adults who are returning after incarceration & would otherwise be homeless

Permanent Supportive Housing - permanent apartment + support services
up to 30% AMI; homeless adults and families; history of incarceration + qualifying disability

Affordable Housing
50% AMI, application chosen application & lottery through SHA
Permanent Supportive Housing

*Rental subsidy
*Case management
*Support services
Permanent Supportive Housing - Eligibility

- Homeless
- Adults & families
- Criminal Justice history - incarceration
- Household income limit (30% AMI)
- May have other disability / life challenge (mental health, SUD, etc)
- Need supportive services to maintain stable housing
Freedom Commons Academy: a reentry program with housing

Commitment to the program and individualize service plan
No acts or threats of violence
Comprehensive support services to help transition and rebuild
Freedom Commons Academy - designed for individuals coming home soon after incarceration

- structured environment
- laboratory for new behaviors
- community building
- time to build a strong foundation in order to transition to their next stage of life in the community
“this is a place you come to experiment with new behaviors, new ways of being, new ways of dealing with people...”

“Coming from prison a lot of us have preconceptions of what people are about. So, it’s relaxing to know that people are here to help you, they aren’t here to get something from you...”
The Thursday night community meeting
where the answer is in the room
What type of support services are offered?
Permanent supportive housing residents & Freedom Commons Academy participants

- Recovery
- Employment & job readiness
- Literacy
- Medical exams
- Conflict resolution
- Legal services
- Mental health & counseling
- Perm. Housing
- Healthy relationships
- and more....
Referrals to Freedom Commons PSH & Academy

- HHC Continuum of Care & partner agencies
- Parole/probation
- Ond. Cnty Reentry Task Force
- Jail/prison discharge planners
- Law enforcement
- Assigned counsel
- Human service providers
- CCA & SHA staff
- County agencies
- Family & Self refer
- Courts
- Others
Freedom Commons CCA program staff

- Lived experience
- Knows the community
- Highly skilled - interpersonal & technical
- Experienced with population & systems
- Values & practices align with mission
- Familiar with local resources & partners
Continued challenges to housing for individuals returning home from incarceration

- **Problem:** Coordinated Entry programs prioritize “chronic homelessness” for limited housing programs & assistance

- **HUD:** incarceration for 90 days or more counts against “time homeless” - not considered chronically homelessness
Need for housing designed for reentry population: policies & programs

- Unrealistic expectation of 30 day turnover from emergency housing - need transitional housing options

- Household composition requirements- programs must allow people to define their “family”; some need support of an unrelated roommate

- Definition of homeless - ESHHI is broader than most HUD programs, able to prevent requirement that you must stay in shelter to qualify
Freedom Commons - opening summer 2019!