

Resources for Community Development Houses Frail Seniors

Nearly fifty very low-income seniors with major health challenges are now living in beautiful, affordable apartments at the Berrellesa Palms complex thanks to Resources for Community Development (RCD), a nonprofit housing developer in Berkeley, California.

Housing quality and affordability is a growing problem for the elderly. Nationwide, nearly 10 percent of seniors live under the poverty level and about 45,000 are homeless.

According to Dan Sawislak, RCD's Executive Director, the new residents of Berrellesa Palms had many living situations before moving into their new homes. "Some had been in medical settings and had nowhere to be discharged to," he said. "Others had bounced around the homes of various family members. One man got cancer and lost everything. You can just hear the relief in their voices about having a safe place to live now. Their gratitude is beyond words."

RCD is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary of building affordable housing for San Francisco Bay Area residents. In a region that has long been one of the most expensive in the nation, it's a big challenge. RCD's hard work and persistence have translated into fifty properties that house 4,000 low-income residents.

Like other housing developers, RCD raises most of its funds on a project basis through bank loans and tax credits. But often RCD has to spend money on projects before the funding arrives, forcing the agency to invest its own capital in projects. RCIF helped out with a working capital loan that RCD can invest in such projects when the need arises.

"A lot of banks will tell us that they won't make working capital loans to organizations like ours," said Peter Poon, RCD's Chief Financial Officer. "We have a solid income, but it is derived from housing properties that we own indirectly through partnerships. RCIF understands the way nonprofits like ours work."

Peter says that even more important is the match between the missions of RCIF and RCD. "Both of our agencies want to work with people and do something good for the community," he said. "Working with RCIF is a truly gratifying experience. We really benefit from the loan, and we can be a good steward of that money and make use of it in a way that RCIF can be proud of. It's a very good match."

Dan saw the embodiment of those two missions as he watched overjoyed residents move into their new homes at Berrellesa Palms. "They've faced such struggles to keep their lives together," he said. "Now they have the security of a home."



A couple walks through the courtyard at Berrellesa Palms. Photo by Treve Johnson.



Nearly fifty very low-income seniors with major health challenges are now living at RCD's Berrellesa Palms. Photo by Treve Johnson.

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Invest in RCIF

When Sr. Colette Didier of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in Cincinnati thinks of compounding an investment, she thinks not just in dollars and cents, but instead of compounding the efforts of many people to make a difference.

“I think of it as lighting a candle,” she said. “One candle alone only makes so much light, but if we all bring our candle power together, we can shed so much more light on something.”

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur recently made their first investment with RCIF, but they aren’t newcomers to community investing. They had already been making community development investments for over thirty years when Finance Manager Shari Powers attended the Resource Center for Religious Institutes National Conference while she was also researching new community investment options. “Sr. Corinne from RCIF spoke on impact investing,” said Shari. “Afterwards I visited her booth and spoke with her about whether her work would agree with the sisters’ mission and objectives for community investment.”

“It came at a good time for us to look at this seriously and move in this direction,” said Sr. Colette. “We did our homework and chose RCIF.”

Sr. Colette thinks of the sisters’ investment in RCIF as a kind of collaboration. “The focus of the funds benefits the poor, especially women and children,” she said, “and that’s right in line with our constitution and mission. That makes it a very collaborative endeavor for us.”

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur came to the United States from Belgium in 1840, making next year the 175th anniversary of their presence here. “Eight sisters landed in New York,” said Sr. Colette, “and made their way down the Ohio River to Cincinnati.” From there they established grade schools, high schools and colleges throughout the region, eventually expanding over the decades throughout Ohio and as far away as Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan and Arizona. Their prodigious history of accomplishments has included providing free education to thousands of immigrant children and establishing Trinity College, the first



Sister Mary Ellen Carinato, SNDdeN, is a reading tutor to students at inner-city Corryville Catholic Elementary School in Cincinnati, OH.

four-year Catholic liberal arts college for women in the country. Sisters of Notre Dame currently serve on five continents.

“Our foundress, St. Julie Billiart, would say ‘How good is the good God,’” said Sr. Colette. “That is a lens through which we see what we do and what we can do for others. There are many attributes of God—all-powerful, all-knowing—but God’s goodness is the piece of the prism that we want to shine our light on. We try to keep that idea very much to the forefront. We seek to bring the goodness of God to other people through our ministries.”

Sr. Corinne Receives Community Impact Award

The Northern California Community Loan Fund recently gave Sr. Corinne Florek, RCIF’s Executive Director, their Community Impact Award for her “unwavering support of low-income communities” and her leadership in the community development financial institution field. Sr. Corinne thanked NCCLF for their work for the community. NCCLF makes loans and conducts training programs that support hundreds of nonprofit organizations that provide services to low- and very low-income people in Northern California, with a focus on the least-served communities.

RCIF’s lending relationship with NCCLF began decades ago, when individual RCIF congregations began making investments in the NCCLF. “NCCLF staff are the eyes and ears, hands and feet of the sisters, carrying on our ministry in low-income communities,” said Sr. Corinne. “We are very proud to be co-ministers with them through our investment and together we are making a difference in the lives of many people.”



From left: Sr. Patricia Bruno, OP; Sr. Evelyn Montez, OP; Sister of Mercy Susan Vickers, RSM; Sister Corinne Florek, OP, with the NCCLF award; and Sisters of Mercy Bernadette Hart, RSM, and Judy Cannon, RSM.