



# HOW HOUSING MATTERS 2016 CONFERENCE



## **Supporting Educational Achievement with Afterschool Programs Located in Affordable Housing**

A profile of the Eden Housing collaboration with the Partnership  
for Children and Youth

**BY JANET VIVEIROS** National Housing Conference

**The MacArthur Foundation's How Housing Matters to Families and Communities initiative explores the notion that affordable housing may be an essential "platform" that promotes a wide array of positive human outcomes in education, employment, and physical and mental health, among other areas. The National Housing Conference is the host of the 2016 How Housing Matters Conference and produced this and other case studies that will form the basis of discussion at that event.**

## PARTNERS

**Eden Housing (Eden)** is California's second oldest nonprofit affordable housing developer and property manager with more than 8,900 affordable rental apartment homes in more than 135 properties across the state. Eden offers a robust range of supportive services at all its properties to its low-income residents, including programs specifically focused on academic enrichment for children and teens. Eden's on-site service coordinators help residents access a variety of public and private services and direct programming to support the wellbeing of residents.

**Partnership for Children and Youth (PCY)** is a nonprofit organization in California with a mission to "ensure all children have the learning, health, and social supports they need to succeed in school and life." To achieve this, PCY offers technical assistance to afterschool and summer programs, supports relationship building between schools and afterschool programming providers, and advocates for legislation that supports and funds high-quality afterschool and summer learning. PCY also leads the HousEd Initiative which supports expanded learning opportunities for children living in affordable housing communities in California.

Establishing afterschool and summer programming can be an effective strategy to support the educational achievement of low-income students and extend their progress in the classroom. Affordable housing developments are home to many low-income students who could benefit from educational supports outside of school. This profile explores the partnership formed between an affordable housing provider and an education advocate and technical assistance provider to develop and offer high-quality afterschool programming in the buildings where students live.

## Bringing Education Services Home to Low-Income Children through Collaboration

In 2011, the President of Eden, Linda Mandolini met Jennifer Peck, the Executive Director of PCY. Mandolini explained to Peck that Eden, along with many other affordable housing providers, offered afterschool enrichment programs to residents. Peck and her staff were not previously

aware that housing providers offered afterschool programming and saw the potential to make inroads on reducing the achievement gap of low-income students through quality afterschool programming offered by affordable housing providers to children living in their developments. According to Jenny Hicks, HousEd Director at PCY, "research has shown us that kids spend more than 80 percent of their time outside of the classroom and experts agree that accessible, high-quality after school and summer learning programs are an essential set of opportunities that can help to close the achievement gap. Therefore, PCY believes that housing's role in offering youth services is a fundamental and vital step toward helping close the achievement and opportunity



gap, creating equitable educational outcomes for all children and youth."

After discussions with Eden about the limited resources and capacity of affordable housing-based programs, the two organizations jointly approached the S.H. Cowell Foundation to fund PCY to work with Eden and other affordable housing providers to enhance their afterschool learning programs to "create pathways out of poverty," according to Vanessa Hernandez, resident services manager at Eden. With the grant awarded by the S.H. Cowell Foundation, as well as other funds raised by PCY, PCY began offering technical assistance at no cost to build the capacity of Eden Housing and other housing providers to conduct high-quality

afterschool programming. This evolved into PCY's HousEd initiative, launched in 2015, which convenes affordable housing providers in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond at regular workshops and trainings focused on best practices in education, elements of quality education programming, and peer learning. With the expertise and guidance of PCY, affordable housing providers in HousEd explore how to make housing-based afterschool programming more effective and learn how to design programs tailored to the needs of their residents. HousEd recently released **"Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in Public and Affordable Housing"** to guide the development and improvement of housing-based afterschool programming to incorporate academic, social and emotional learning. The standards recommend collaboration with community stakeholders through formal partnerships and ongoing communication, and particularly emphasize the importance of including parents and caregivers in the process. According to Hernandez, Edén is working in consultation with PCY to develop its afterschool programming to give the children living there a venue "to develop soft skills such as effective ways to communicate and work in groups" to support their achievement in school.

Edén Housing's afterschool programming varies significantly from development to development, based on the number of residents with children, the budgets and staffing of the development, and other factors. Despite Edén's commitment to provide educational programming for residents, before partnering with PCY, resident service coordinators who ran the afterschool programs typically had limited experience in education and struggled to find enough time to devote to the



afterschool programming in addition to their other responsibilities. Through its partnership with PCY, Edén committed to expanding its capacity for offering high quality afterschool programming with trained staff. To that end, Edén hired Hernandez to provide coaching and training to Edén staff involved in administering afterschool programming. Additionally, Edén hired two youth program specialists whose sole responsibilities are to run afterschool programming, create curriculums for the afterschool programs, and conduct outreach to local schools.

Hernandez also sees the potential for Edén's afterschool programming staff "to bridge the gap between parents and schools." Edén staff may see some families every day and often have developed relationships and trust with parents. This creates opportunities for Edén afterschool staff to support parents navigating the schools by helping them understand elements of their children's educational experience such as interpreting testing scores, the importance of attendance, individualized education programs for children with special needs, and more. Edén developments can be a physical space for parents and school staff to connect by providing a place that is more familiar and comfortable to

parents than a school building. They have hosted events that bring parents into closer contact with school staff. For example, one Edén development hosted a school resource fair at its building in 2016 to give parents a chance to meet principals and teachers, and to learn more about the school.

## Overcoming Challenges

**Securing funding.** Funding afterschool programming is a real challenge for Edén and other affordable housing providers. Edén does not require each of its developments to offer afterschool programming or dedicate the same amount of operating revenue to the programming. Each development determines how much it can budget for those services and how best to meet the needs of residents. Edén is currently working to identify and secure outside sources of funding to expand afterschool programming in its building with additional days and additional staff.

**Establishing relationships with schools.** Another challenge that Edén and other housing-based afterschool programming providers face is developing relationships with local schools to foster collaboration. Edén's

## Eden's goal is to develop relationships with schools that serve their residents.

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goal is to develop relationships with schools that serve its residents so it can obtain testing data for the residents. This will allow Eden to work with the school to jointly identify how Eden's afterschool programming can best support work in the classroom and improve educational outcomes among children living in Eden developments. These schools belong to a number of different school districts and each district and school may have differing priorities and levels of openness to collaboration.

Teachers and school administrators are often overburdened. Asking them to take on the additional work involved in sharing test scores and grades, as well as coordinating with affordable housing-based afterschool programs, may be more than they can handle. Eden is still in the early stages of transforming its afterschool programming but it has laid the foundation for much of the work it plans to do in the future, such as educating schools that serve its residents about how Eden afterschool programming is a resource that can assist schools in achieving their goals.

**Measuring impact.** Eden's afterschool programs have struggled to obtain data from schools on student test scores, grades, and other outcomes and measures typically used by schools to track a child's educational progress. Eden would like to use that data to identify areas of greatest need and design curriculums for their individual programs that address these needs for each child in their developments. While working to create data sharing arrangements with schools, Eden has been able to obtain this data by asking parents of children who attend the afterschool programs to sign educational releases or provide the information themselves. Eden has found that many of the children in their buildings struggle with reading and have made that a focus of their curriculums. Additionally, two Eden sites are piloting



an online reading program which will independently assess resident children's reading skills and offer information that can be used in creating curriculums for those development sites.

**Complying with licensing requirements.** There are also ongoing questions regarding what kind of certification, if any, is necessary for affordable housing providers to comply with California laws regarding childcare. If the programs are required to seek licensing, it may create a cost burden that prevents some affordable housing providers from offering programs because they cannot obtain sufficient funding to cover licensing costs.

**While the work of the partnership between Eden and PCY is in its early stages, these efforts to create guidance for high quality affordable housing-based afterschool programming and develop replicable programs have the potential to impact educational outcomes for low-income children in California and elsewhere.**

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