

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse and mental health:

High rates of substance abuse in Creighton Court have long been a concern raised by the Informed Neighbors Corps. The majority of substance use in the population living in public housing is the illegal use of prescription drugs, which affects adolescents and adults and therefore has consequences at school, in the workplace, and in terms of short- and long-term physical and mental health. Substance abuse and mental health disorders are often co-occurring -- according to VCU Health Systems patient data compiled in 2014, substance abuse and substance abuse with coexisting mental illness tied for the sixth-most common diagnoses. Substance abuse by parents can have drastic implications for families; however, consistent and confidential access to mental health and substance abuse services lacking in the East End, particularly for adults. Several models, notably “Celebrating Families” (discussed below), have been put forth as feasible interventions in the public housing community; however, implementing these models as written will likely be challenging due the overwhelming lack of services for parents and adults in Richmond.

What it means for redevelopment:

Residents who are habitually incapacitated or intoxicated may be unable to organize themselves and their affairs in order to physically move into the development. Moreover, youth who abuse drugs often demonstrate truancy from school and diminished academic performance, while adult users may not be able to perform at work. This may prevent residents who abuse drugs from holding down a job, which can have drastic consequences after the redevelopment: steady employment is a requirement to move into the new housing, and constant drug use would put this in jeopardy. As noted above, the high prevalence of substance abuse in the East End is exacerbated by the lack of services and support for adults battling addiction.

Celebrating Families model (from celebratingfamilies.net):

Celebrating Families![™] is a successful, evidence-based 16 week curriculum that addresses the needs of children and parents in families that have serious problems with alcohol and other drugs. The curriculum engages every member of the family, ages three through adult, to foster the development of healthy and addiction-free individuals. Each session begins with a family meal. Afterwards family members break into age groups for developmentally appropriate activities led by the group facilitators. At the end of each session, all family members re-connect in activities to learn how to apply these new skills and interact in healthy ways. The Celebrating Families Curriculum Objectives include:

1. To break the cycles of chemical dependency and violence/abuse in families by increasing participant knowledge and use of healthy living skills.

2. To decrease participants use of alcohol and other drugs and to reduce relapse by teaching all members of the family about the disease of chemical dependency and its impact on families.
3. To positively influence family reunification by integrating recovery into daily family life and by teaching healthy parenting skills.
 - Providing a safe, nurturing place for children and parents to talk and to explore their feelings and choices.
 - Facilitating trust through a process of bonding with consistent role models.
 - Assisting participants in developing their self-awareness and self-worth.
 - Educating participants about chemical dependency as a disease and how it affects family members.

Potential service partnerships to address substance abuse:

- **Alcoholics Anonymous** at Richmond Community Hospital.
- The **Strengthening Families Model** does not address substance abuse directly, but has similarities to Celebrating Families. Strengthening Families was piloted at MLK Jr. Middle School and is currently being run by RBHA. The program targets families who are residents of public housing and whose children are recognized as truant. Once per week, a family dinner is offered to teach the family members about nutrition. Afterwards, the parents break away and are taught basic parenting skills, while the children are taught about peer pressure.
- Other potential partnerships targeting **youth** include: Challenge Discovery Projects, RBHA, The Resource Center
- Potential partnerships targeting **adults** include: The Healing Place, The Daily Planet, RBHA, The Resource Center