

Building Community in Partnership

Learnings from Five Years Together
at Hawthorne Place Apartments



AUGUST, 2022



Together, POAH and CSL have brought creativity, empathy, and persistence to tackle old problems in new ways, empowering an increasing number of Hawthorne residents to achieve their goals.





INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, a remarkable process has been underway at Hawthorne Place Apartments in Independence, Missouri, through the groundbreaking partnership of Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH) and Community Services League (CSL). Currently, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) subsidizes the rents at properties like Hawthorne, but does not pay for coordination of services for the low-income families who live there. POAH and CSL have stepped up to fill that gap, because we know that families and communities need this help in order to thrive.

Together, our two organizations have brought creativity, empathy, and persistence to tackle old problems in new ways, empowering an increasing number of Hawthorne residents to achieve their goals and grow towards financial independence. After five years, the impact of our work shows – evictions and turnovers are down, more families are building savings and using them to purchase homes and achieve educational goals, and more children are remaining stably enrolled in school.

In the following pages, we tell the story of our Hawthorne partnership and its essential ingredients: a willingness to put our own resources on the line, mission alignment, a focus on relationships and trust, a culture that leans in to curiosity and problem-solving, realistic assumptions about the pace of change, and a fundamental belief that our Hawthorne neighbors are the experts in their own lives and must drive progress towards their own goals. We share our story so that others can learn from it and find inspiration to apply similar models and approaches in other communities.



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ABOUT POAH

POAH is a nonprofit developer, owner and operator of more than 12,000 affordable homes in 11 states and the District of Columbia. POAH's mission is to preserve, create, and sustain affordable, healthy homes that support economic security, racial equity, and access to opportunity for all.



ABOUT CSL

CSL's mission is to make meaningful and lasting change in people's lives by helping communities reach their potential – by providing immediate relief to people in need, assessing their situations, and providing solutions that lead to economic stability. Each year, CSL provides integrated, life-changing services to over 20,000 individuals in Eastern Jackson County, Missouri.

BACKGROUND

POAH has owned and managed Hawthorne since purchasing it in 2002. But in 2016, despite much hard work by many, the 745-unit affordable housing community was struggling – apartments turned over much more frequently than at POAH's other properties, and many families struggled with poverty, domestic violence and other forms of trauma. POAH's two-person resident services team was overwhelmed in trying to provide services and activities for all 2,000 of Hawthorne's residents while also helping a "watch list" of high-needs families to address an unending cycle of short-term crises. By the end of 2016, POAH recognized that a new approach was needed.

POAH and CSL were introduced in 2016 through the Kansas City Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and its efforts to expand its Financial Opportunity Center (FOC) model, which integrates employment counseling, financial coaching, low-cost financial products, and income supports. Both POAH and CSL had become certified as FOCs, and both of our organizations were launching new initiatives to help families grow their financial assets, not just their incomes, recognizing that without assets, the odds families face in trying to break the cycle of poverty are simply overwhelming.

These new initiatives were in fact part of deeper organizational shifts going on at both POAH and CSL. Both of our organizations increasingly recognized the need to move beyond short-term, transactional forms of assistance to get at root causes, helping those we serve to achieve longer-lasting, more transformational change. POAH had launched a new Community Impact program in 2015, intentionally shifting its focus from activities to impact – helping residents in its housing communities to achieve measurable progress in a series of key, linked outcome areas: employment, financial stability, education, health, community engagement, and of course housing stability. CSL, too, was intentionally growing into deeper engagement with the people it served, building on and beyond its 100+ year history of traditional social services provision.



ABOUT HAWTHORNE PLACE APARTMENTS

With 745 apartments and townhomes across 72 acres in the outskirts of Independence, Hawthorne Place Apartments is the largest affordable housing community in Missouri, offering stable, subsidized housing to nearly 2,000 residents. The complex was originally built in 1967. POAH purchased Hawthorne in 2002 to prevent its conversion to market-rate apartments, undertaking comprehensive renovations and constructing the 22,000 square foot David Stanley Community Center. In 2021, POAH initiated a second round of renovations at the property.

LAUNCHING THE NEW PARTNERSHIP

In January 2017, POAH and CSL formally launched our new partnership at Hawthorne. We established the Hawthorne Resource Center – with a CSL satellite operation, co-located at the site's David Stanley Community Center alongside POAH's property management offices, as well as a computer lab, food pantry, Kansas City Boys and Girls Club satellite office, and other long-time social service partners. CSL hired an initial staff of 6, including financial, career development, and family stability coaches, as well as a community development manager and an activities assistant. POAH hired a senior partnership manager to support the new collaboration, supplementing its 28-person property management and maintenance staff. Together, POAH and CSL launched a series of new, integrated programs and initiatives with the goal of supporting the long-term success of Hawthorne families.

As we launched new programming, we intentionally shifted away from past efforts to solve problems with shorter-term, more transactional fixes – like simply paying families' back rent and helping them to find a job, any job. While income supports and jobs can indeed be important ingredients in families' progress, offering them without other supports



LUIS AND JENNIFER PIZZARO

Luis and Jennifer Pizzaro moved into Hawthorne Place Apartments in February 2018 after Hurricane Maria destroyed their home in Puerto Rico. They and their two children had no physical possessions, but they had each other and a sense of optimism that they could rebuild their lives in their new city of Independence, MO. The local church stepped in to help the family with basic needs – most importantly helping Luis get a new car so that he could find a new job and support his family. Shortly after he began a full-time job, Luis enrolled in the FSS program - working with the Community Services League to make their American dream of home ownership come true.

The family saved \$10,025 through the FSS program and achieved their goal in late 2020, moving into a home in Independence in just two and a half years. Luis has been at the same job for three years, and they still drive the car that the church gave them.

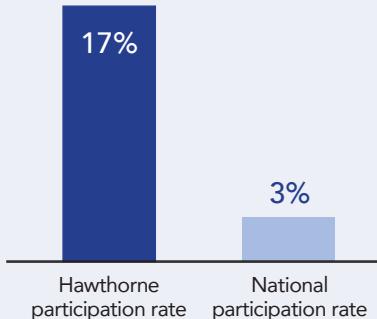
that address families' deeper needs can sometimes only paper over problems, and contribute to a cycle of repeated crisis and instability. We aimed to interrupt this cycle, and work with families to consider their longer-term educational and career goals, to connect with self-care learning and resources, and to build a support system that they could rely on as they took steps forward in their lives. Some of the key programmatic building blocks we put in place are described below.

Family Self Sufficiency Program (FSS)

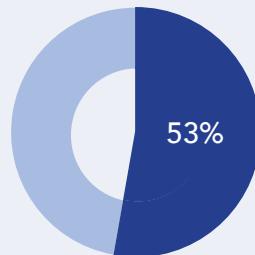
HUD created the FSS program in 1990 for use at public housing sites, and it remains one of the most effective tools currently available for incentivizing economic mobility. But HUD only expanded the program's use to include privately-owned, HUD-subsidized affordable housing like Hawthorne in 2014. POAH was one of the first private owners in the country to implement the program, launching FSS programs at several of its other sites in 2015-16, and getting HUD approval to start an FSS program at Hawthorne in mid-2017.

In a nutshell, the program helps families to increase their earnings, build savings, and make progress towards financial independence over a five-year period. In signing up, participants commit to staying employed, coming off of cash welfare, and working towards their goals. In return, FSS allows them to capture the money they pay in rent increases as their incomes rise via a special escrow account – essentially converting rent increases into a monthly savings deposit which families can then tap and use towards goals like homeownership, college, a car purchase, or paying down debt. Studies of the FSS program show strong results: participants increasing their earnings and savings and in many cases achieving goals like purchasing their own homes, thus becoming independent of housing assistance and freeing up affordable apartments for other families in need. FSS programs have been shown to be particularly effective when supplemented by and integrated with the kinds of Financial Opportunity Center coaching and other supports offered by CSL.

Participation in CSL's Financial Coaching/FSS program at Hawthorne has steadily grown, with clear benefit to participants:



203 Hawthorne families have participated in the FSS program to date



53% of Hawthorne's FSS participants have built savings escrows (average balance of \$2,913)

Among program graduates, **68% increased their earnings**
(average earnings doubled, from roughly \$11,000 to \$22,000)



31 families have graduated from the program (which requires employment and being off of cash welfare for 12 months), including 17 who used their escrowed savings to become homeowners

CSL has collaborated with additional partners to integrate new services as the need became clear – like a local church with a car ministry that facilitates access to affordable cars and car maintenance as well as information on responsible car ownership; and the Holy Rosary Credit Union, which supports families in getting out of toxic loan situations.



BETH DOMANSKI

In July 2017, Beth Domanski was one of the first participants to join the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program that CSL and POAH operate at Hawthorne. Through her participation in the program, Beth engaged with a Housing Stability Coach, Career Development Coach and Financial Coach. After attending a training through a CSL partner, Beth got a job driving a school bus for Fort Osage School District. Beth loved her job and the families and children she served loved her back. However, Beth recognized that she needed 12-month employment, so she took a new job driving trucks. Through the FSS program, Beth was able to save her rent increases as her earnings increased. She used the funds to purchase a car and, ultimately, a new home. Beth loved her neighbors at Hawthorne and their experience raising children together. In the fall of 2021, after ten years at Hawthorne, Beth graduated from the FSS program and moved into her own home.

Beth and her family in their new home.

Amy Anthony College Savings Program



The Amy Anthony College Savings program (named after POAH's founding director), benefits every Hawthorne child from birth through age 19 whose family is enrolled in the FSS program. There is evidence that even modest college savings can have a major impact, helping children to perceive themselves as college-bound and influencing their academic performance. The Amy Anthony College Savings program accounts are seeded with an initial deposit of \$250, with ongoing matching fund deposits. The Holy Rosary Credit Union, with a satellite branch at Hawthorne, administers residents' savings accounts. More than 75 children and youth at Hawthorne have benefited from the program since it first began.

Family Stability Program

This evidence-based program takes a two-generational approach to working with at-risk families – helping parents stay stably housed and on track towards their goals while at the same time working to help kids stay stably enrolled in their neighborhood school. CSL has worked with nearly 100 Hawthorne families through this program over the past three years.

Coaches work with family members to look at the holistic situations they face, identify strengths and barriers, outline action steps and milestones, and provide layered services to help them learn and practice new skills in a safe environment, while ensuring that they remain in charge of their own progress. A key program focus is mental wellness and self-care, helping parents to gain insight into how their own brains work, how to interrupt a spiraling stress response, and how to incorporate healthy mental and physical habits into their lives. One of the program's longer-term goals is to help reduce the number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that Hawthorne children experience, such as witnessing violence or experiencing neglect or parental break-up. CSL coaches work with the

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Independence School District's Family School Liaisons, Fort Osage School District's social workers, and other community partners to strengthen family stability and community engagement. The 97 Hawthorne families CSL has worked with over the past three years have made real gains:



Of the 16 high-school seniors in these families, half have achieved the goal they set for themselves prior to graduating, and three quarters are either in college (6) or other schooling (2), or in a training program or employed (4).



89% of the 200+ children in these families have remained stably enrolled in their neighborhood school



Of the **70** families engaged with the program in 2020-2021, 93% stayed stably housed with their children enrolled in the same school.

FSP coaches have assisted in 53 eviction preventions at Hawthorne. For some families, this saved their tenancy at Hawthorne, while for others, the assistance allowed them to move out without an eviction on their record.

Career Development Program

CSL and local partners offer coaching, supports, and training designed to help people think about their future, develop a career mindset, and take steps to develop and implement a career growth plan. These services are available not just to FSS program participants but to all Hawthorne residents. We work with people to address obstacles that may prevent them from moving forward, such as lack of transportation, child care, or an adequate support system. We help them to think ahead about how to manage the “benefits cliff” – loss of benefits when income increases – and to report additional income in a timely way so that their housing is not jeopardized for “failure to report” (a scenario in which income not reported within a narrow window of time results in retroactive increases to a household’s rent balance and monthly payments). CSL has added training and services components over the years to fit Hawthorne residents’ needs, including:

#HOMEHACKS

A four-week class focused on housekeeping/cleaning, paperwork and record-keeping, organizing one’s things, and time management/schedule-making.

CIRCLES INDEPENDENCE

A local chapter of the national Circles USA program that matches people who are motivated to move out of poverty with middle-income and high-income volunteers (allies) who can support and encourage them on their journey. Participants attend a 24-month program where they learn relevant skills, build relationships, and work towards increasing their income.

KC SCHOLARS

A program incubated by the Kauffman Foundation and available to Hawthorne’s young adults, offering scholarships and accompanying support to expand access to post-secondary education.

WORK READINESS WORKSHOP

Hands-on training sessions covering everything from employability and skills assessments, to resume-writing, interview skills, career exploration, digital literacy and computer skills, and dealing with conflict in the workplace.

Over time, as CSL and POAH staff deepened our engagement with the community, we became aware of additional needs and service gaps. In response, we began a process that continues to this day of adding new initiatives and supports as the need for them becomes apparent. These additional programs include the following:

1

Financially Fit Families. A four-week program, offered in partnership with a local bank, to teach everyone in the family, including young kids, about money and budgeting. The program is fun, with group classes held over a meal.

CINDY CHOWNING

Cindy Chowning moved into Hawthorne Place Apartments at the beginning of 2020. Just one month later she was introduced to Community Services League. “From the moment I walked into the Community Services League Hawthorne location,” Cindy says, “they did not hesitate to help me. That’s when my journey began to grow into a self-sufficient young lady.”

Cindy began working with a Family Stability Coach who helped her manage and pay bills, apply for state benefits and advocate for herself in other areas of her life. Working with her Family Stability Coach, Cindy says, reminded her how brave and independent she is, and that the things she has accomplished are because of her own hard work. Her Family Stability Coach and Career Development Coach became like family. “They always listened and helped me find resources; they even went as far as helping me get connected to a group that talked about mental health... it helped remind me that I was not alone.”

Cindy continues to work with Family Stability Coaches that help her set goals and meet monthly to talk about her progress. When Cindy was in need of immediate financial help, CSL was able to provide resources to stabilize her housing, which Cindy shares with her daughter Lucy. Not only did CSL provide financial support, they also provided mental support. “They listened,” Cindy says, “they really care.” One of the “best things” that CSL introduced Cindy to is the Circles USA Program. Circles



USA gathers middle-income and high-income volunteers to support families in poverty. In just 12 weeks, Cindy already feels that her life is changing. “Not only do they provide dinners and welcome kids, but they also guide us to talking about the hard things of poverty. I have so much hope for my future. This program is free to us and is really here to help us get to the other side. I have met so many new people through this program who are also in similar situations like me.”

Cindy feels supported by the entire CSL team, whether its the smiling face of another Family Stability Coach, or regular updates from her Financial Coach, about how much she’s saved in the FSS program. Inspired by other families who have graduated from FSS to purchase homes, Cindy hopes to use her savings to buy a house one day.

“Community Services League are always smiling and ready to help or be a listening ear. The staff gives you this family type, friend vibe. They are really with you if you let them be.”

2

Summer Lunch program, started by CSL but now run by the local school district, providing meals to up to 200 children in the summer and when schools are otherwise closed and school-based meals programs are not operating.

3

Early education programming, including on-site kindergarten enrollment, access to books, and parenting education. A child care center has long been located on-site. But with roughly 500 children age 0-5 living at Hawthorne, the insufficient supply of affordable and conveniently-located child care remains an area of critical need.

4

Mental health services. We built partnerships with local mental health providers to create referral systems and facilitate access to critically needed services, previously unavailable due to barriers like lack of transportation and long waiting lists. In addition, Jackson County COMBAT brought a domestic violence services provider, Hope House, on site, with an advocate and a therapist.

5

Community Crisis Response plan. With the support of Jackson County COMBAT funding and guidance, a collective of community partners including CSL, Hope House, and the Independence Police Department began to collaborate to build a sense of community safety, proactively knocking on doors and reaching out to families, building trust with the police, informing residents about available community resources, and following up after the incidence of a crime or other traumatic event.

6

Integrated Services Coach. With no receptionist initially on staff at CSL's Hawthorne offices, the team found that walk-in appointments were consuming a great deal of staff time and not always being effectively managed. In 2020, CSL added an Integrated Services Coach position to welcome walk-ins, hear their concerns, connect them with the appropriate staff person, and encourage them to access coaching and other resources to address their more fundamental issues rather than simply the emergency that brought them in the door that day.

7

COVID supports. CSL has long provided emergency supports such as a food pantry and housing and income supports. But in 2020-21, a range of additional pandemic-related assistance and supports were put in place to assist residents during an enormously challenging time. During COVID, while CSL staff were not able to see as many families in person, they worked intentionally to connect with families in other ways – through phone checks, porch knock-and-talks, and Zoom sessions.

“Resources may be what bring people through the door at first, but trusted relationships keep them connected long-term for as long as they desire. Showing compassion and respect also meant that staff would be open to ongoing personal reflection to see where our own needs or beliefs block us from being fully present with the person in our midst – not worrying about having the right response, or a fix to their problem, or a duty to help them see what we think they need to understand. By also honestly communicating what we can and cannot do, and respecting people’s choice in a matter, develops trust.”

– Brianna Powers, CSL Coach



Throughout, POAH’s and CSL’s efforts have built on the work and support of a strong network of partners and allies, both co-located at Hawthorne and throughout the community. These partners include the Kansas City Boys and Girls Club, Community of Christ, and Small Wonders Child Care and Learning Center, all long-time partners and service providers co-located at Hawthorne Place; as well as Jackson County COMBAT, Holy Rosary Credit Union, Hope House, Truman Medical Center, Mid-Continent Public Library, Harvesters, Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault (MOCSA), Child Abuse Prevention Association (CAPA), United Way of Greater Kansas City, LISC of Greater Kansas City, the two local school districts (Fort Osage and Independence), the Independence Police Department, and the City of Independence.

HOW THE PARTNERSHIP EVOLVED: TRAUMA- RESILIENCE

This new programming at Hawthorne was implemented against the larger backdrop of a community experiencing high levels of trauma and its ripple effects – violent crime, domestic violence, mental illness, poor school outcomes, eviction, incarceration, substance use disorder, poverty (characteristics not unique to Hawthorne, to be sure, but shared by many other low-income communities with elevated levels of trauma).

Despite everyone's hard work, progress towards goals was often interrupted by crises and setbacks connected to community trauma and its aftermath. POAH and CSL became increasingly interested in the growing field of trauma-informed practice (with groundbreaking work being done particularly in the health and education spheres) and its relevance to Hawthorne. We learned how trauma-informed practitioners strive to recognize and respond to the signs, symptoms, and risks of trauma and toxic stress, and work to avoid re-traumatizing people through triggering behaviors, policies, or environments. Trauma-informed practitioners don't ask "what's wrong with you?" but rather, "what happened to you?".

In 2018, POAH and CSL staff participated in our first trauma-informed training, with staff from the Center for Trauma Informed Innovation at the Truman Medical Center in Kansas City. The message resonated deeply. POAH and CSL realized that while helping residents to thrive was our most fundamental goal, the rigid compliance requirements of regulators and funders too often got in the way, consuming our energy and thwarting our efforts to create supportive, vibrant communities. Our three organizations (including Truman Medical Center) continued to work together in an effort to reimagine affordable housing provision through the lens of trauma-informed care, and to think about how we might reshape property management, resident services and physical design in ways that truly prioritize residents and staff, centering the trauma-informed principles of safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment.

Our collaborative work attracted one of six \$2.5 million grants from the national Housing Affordability Breakthrough Challenge in 2020, offered jointly by Enterprise Community Partners and Wells Fargo. With these funds, POAH, CSL, and the Truman Medical Center have continued to work together on the Designing Trauma Resilient Communities project, with Hawthorne as one of four POAH properties where the model is being piloted. At each of the four POAH sites, a multi-disciplinary Site Team has been formed, including residents, POAH's property management and maintenance staff, and staff from partner resident services organizations like CSL as well as other stakeholders. These teams have

collaboratively used a human-centered design process to understand how to make changes in property management, resident services and physical design using trauma-informed principles to support community resilience. The intended result: a more effective and equitable model for affordable housing that improves residents' experience and increases staff well-being and retention, all while improving property performance.

At Hawthorne, members of a Trauma Resilient Site Team that includes residents, POAH and CSL staff, and community partners have worked together since 2020, listening to each other and the community, building relationships, and identifying promising areas and ideas to make Hawthorne a more trauma-resilient community. A key part of this process has been building a foundation of trust, which has then allowed each team member to speak honestly about their own concerns, challenges, and constraints, and to hear with empathy about those of others. Only when team members were ready to be fully transparent and honest with each other could we begin to effectively collaborate on making change.

Hawthorne's Site Team established the following six desired outcomes for incorporation into the community's culture, on which concrete progress has already been made:

We recognize that the housing system (e.g., policies, rules, how buildings and space are designed, stigma around affordable housing) and the traditional system of social services, which has historically been transactional, can cause or exacerbate trauma;

We recognize that everyone's experiences are valid, even if they differ from our own;

We see our value and strength beyond transactions of money or services;

We recognize fears and triggers to avoid;

We can speak up about concerns and issues without fear of retribution;

We seek out ways to give choice to staff and residents.

The team is now exploring specific proposals to make Hawthorne more trauma-resilient. By utilizing a "prototype" approach to conduct small-scale tests of change, we are able to learn which ideas have merit and where we need to strengthen community engagement before developing a full-scale pilot. Three areas the team has identified in which to test out improvements are as follows:

- **Increasing organizational support to avoid burnout:** Developing a "Community Care Plan" including a range of trauma-informed resiliency resources for residents and staff, such as training and resources on de-escalation, conflict mediation, cultural humility, and detecting burnout; and various forms of burnout prevention, peer support, self-care incentives, and flexible work schedules for staff.

- **Redefining leadership:** Developing more streamlined and effective ways to communicate and access services via clear points of contact, such as by employing resident liaisons, dividing the property into smaller “zone teams,” launching a “maintenance advocates” program to strengthen communication; and supporting a resident-run newsletter.
- **Communicating with dignity and belonging:** Reimagining certain rules and policies; communicating with positivity, clarity, and compassion; and making sure everyone has the tools and information they need to make inspections, recertifications, and other potentially stressful events more positive.

These efforts are our first steps in what we see as a longer-term process of transformational change towards growing trauma resiliency at Hawthorne. We will continue to develop and test new ideas through collaboration between residents, staff, and community partners.



NANCY LOVING

In 2015, Nancy moved to Hawthorne Place Apartments after being uprooted by a financial crisis and the need to be closer to her aging mother. Nancy loves Hawthorne’s affordability, the wood floors in her home and the proximity to shops and transportation. But more than anything, Nancy loves people. She cares about her neighbors and lives from the perspective that every person should feel important and valued.

In early 2021, Nancy agreed to become a Resident Fellow on the Resilient Communities team at Hawthorne Place. She joined on-site staff from POAH, CSL and Community of Christ, and a dedicated group of Hawthorne residents. Throughout the yearlong Resident Fellowship, Nancy attended monthly workshops, conducted interviews with her neighbors and developed new ideas for making Hawthorne a more livable, comfortable and safe community for all. Reflecting on the Fellowship, Nancy says she appreciated that she was “respected for my input and learned so much. It opened my eyes, heart and brain.” The issues that the Resilient Communities team discussed ranged from improving translation services for non-English speakers to reimagining community policing. “All the issues were near and dear to my heart,” says Nancy, “and the people I met are amazing.”

“It’s important for [everyone] to know that we are a community” says Nancy, [the residents here] aren’t forgotten and they are important on every level.”



EVIDENCE OF GROWING STABILITY

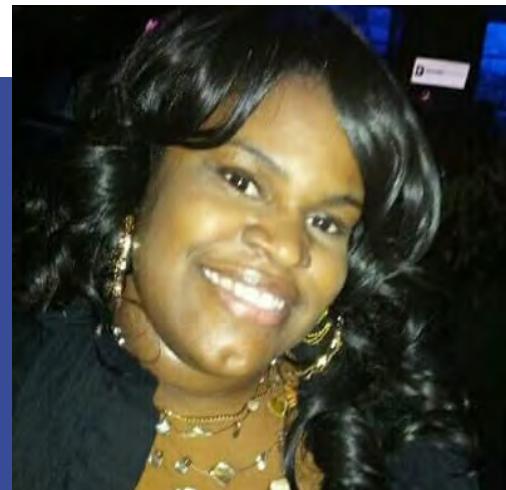
Our work at Hawthorne is challenging, but we have made real progress over the past five years, which we celebrate. In addition to the real gains Hawthorne residents have made through their participation in our Family Self-Sufficiency, Family Stability, and other programs described above, we have also seen improvement in metrics measuring housing stability, one of our central goals. Understanding that without stable housing, families will struggle to progress in other areas of their lives, we have worked to reduce the number of residents leaving Hawthorne via a “negative move-out” – i.e., being evicted, whether for non-payment of rent or other major lease violation, or abandoning their unit without notice. And we have made great strides in this area:

- After peaking at 150 negative move-outs in 2016, the number of negative-move outs at Hawthorne has come down every year but one (2018). In 2021, there were 55 negative moves, an overall decrease of 63% in five years. (While a COVID-era eviction moratorium has no doubt contributed to this decrease over the past two years in particular, the five-year decrease is a broader phenomenon that we do believe our work has helped to bring about.)
- In addition, the percentage of all Hawthorne moves that are negative (not just the raw number) has also come down, from 56% in 2016 to 28% in 2021.

LASHAUNDA COOPER

Lashaunda Cooper is a single mother of three children who has lived at Hawthorne Place for more than 8 years. Growing up, Lashaunda and her siblings she moved back and forth between Wisconsin and Kansas City while being raised by a great aunt. When Lashaunda had children of her own, she set a goal to become the parent she did not have growing up. She knew that education provided the pathway to a better life. Shortly after CSL and POAH launched the Hawthorne partnership, CSL hosted a job fair for residents and community members to connect with local employers and education programs. Lashaunda attended the fair and met a recruiter from Metropolitan Community College who asked her, “Why do you want a job when you can have a career?”

Inspired by that conversation, Lashaunda enrolled in the MCC hosted NewSkills program and within nine months, earned her Medical Assistant certification. With CSL’s assistance, she was able to pay for her certification to obtain a job. Over the next three years, Lashunda would engage in the Family Stability



Program (FSP), where she worked one-on-one with an CSL coach to set goals for her family, attend parenting book study, vision boarding sessions and other events designed to build her confidence and community. Lashaunda worked across CSL’s integrated services coaching team and enrolled in the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program so that she could savings her new earnings each time she paid rent.

Lashaunda strives to be a mother that encourages her children to be well-rounded. She teaches them they can be whatever they want to be, so long as they work hard. In three years, Lashaunda sees herself in her own home with her three amazing children and working in a career she loves. Lashaunda’s advice, “Learn how to be better for the next opportunity!”

- Negative move-outs at Hawthorne now represent roughly 36% of all such moves across POAH’s entire housing portfolio, down from 47% in 2016.
- Hawthorne residents are staying longer, a sign of growing stability: the average length of tenancy has gone up from 2.8 years in 2017 to 3.8 years in 2021.
- Evictions for non-payment of rent constitute a smaller share of the total at Hawthorne than evictions for other cause. This has remained true across all five years, supporting our belief that simply helping families to cover back rent does not typically get at the real root cause of the problem.

While stable housing alone is not enough to ensure families’ successful progress towards their goals, without it, that progress becomes impossible.

WHAT MAKES THIS MODEL DIFFERENT?

We are always looking for ways to do our work better. Some of the shifts we have made over our five-year partnership that we believe to be most responsible for the successes we have had at Hawthorne are as follows.

- Willingness to invest the resources. To do this work effectively requires a significant investment of resources. In the absence of sufficient public funding to pay for services coordination, we have increasingly stepped up and committed or raised the funds ourselves. In 2016, POAH had only two resident services staff to work with Hawthorne's nearly 2,000 residents – clearly not enough to be effective! CSL started at Hawthorne in 2017 with a staff of six, and now employs 11 coaches and others, allowing staff to spend more time with families with greater need while still keeping an open door for all residents. Helping to bring about deeper, longer-lasting change requires being adequately staffed with carefully-selected and well-trained employees. POAH and CSL are committed to raising the funds needed to maintain appropriate staffing levels – we estimate the required amount to be approximately \$1,000 per Hawthorne household per year, funds we raise largely from philanthropic sources.
- Focus on root causes. Both POAH and CSL have moved away from traditional, transactional services provision towards an effort to achieve deeper, more transformational change. While we still help families with emergency short-term needs when necessary – back rent and food, for example – we no longer believe that this is enough. We set and work towards goals that address families' more fundamental challenges, such as a lack of assets, a support network, or adequate child care. We provide families with tools that allow them not just to get by, but to get ahead, through programs like FSS and incentives like college savings accounts.
- Client-centered, strengths-based coaching. CSL has moved away from the traditional case management approach with staff essentially dictating what clients should do to make progress. Instead, CSL coaches start with the premise that each person they work with is the expert in their own lives, in charge of their own future. CSL coaches are on their team, working alongside them, meeting them where they are, helping them to problem-solve, and building on what is strong, not what is wrong.
- Trauma-informed practices. As described, POAH and CSL are increasingly looking for ways to move away from rigid policies and procedures that can make it harder for families to progress, applying a trauma-informed lens to how we work. We are working to make our common spaces warm and welcoming, to ensure our staff are working

together and not in silos to solve problems collaboratively, to push back on compliance requirements from funders and regulators that cause gratuitous pain for residents as well as staff, and to implement policies that support staff and residents alike and prevent burnout.

LESSONS LEARNED AND ONGOING CHALLENGES

Building an effective partnership takes work:

- **Sharing the big-picture vision isn't enough.** We thought we were all on the same page when we began working together, because we had the same vision. But in fact, it took time and effort to figure out roles and how each organization and staff-person would contribute to moving the work forward.
- **We had to learn each other's language.** POAH's world of HUD housing rules and regulations is different from CSL's world of family services programming. We each had a body of knowledge with its own terms, acronyms, and constraints that the other did not immediately understand. We had to develop sufficient trust to be transparent with each other, sharing our vulnerabilities and fears and challenges honestly, so that we could learn how to find common ground and truly collaborate. For example, to coach families effectively, CSL quickly realized they needed to learn the ins and outs of the HUD income recertification and lease renewal processes, and the various "housekeeping," "failure to report," and other issues that could become obstacles if not managed correctly.
- **Collaboration takes work.** Being co-located does not automatically translate to being collaborative – it just means you are in the same location. We had to learn to communicate and collaborate across silos. We needed improved data systems that would support better two-way communication and provide more visibility into the work of each team. For example, we expanded our data-sharing via Salesforce, so that, for instance, CSL coaches could get real-time alerts if one of their families owed important information to POAH's property managers. In sharing information, we had to navigate each team's privacy and confidentiality concerns, an ongoing process.
- **Change is not always quickly and easily embraced.** As the saying goes, "All change is loss, and all loss is mourned." We were excited about all the new programs we were launching at Hawthorne. But for the existing property management team, there was an initial sense of loss of a familiar way of doing things. We also had to be careful not to lose sight of the property management basics in our excitement at starting new initiatives.

CONCLUSION

At the five-year point, the partnership between POAH and CSL has produced results worth celebrating. Both organizations are better for having worked together. Working collaboratively, we are more than the sum of our parts. And we are still learning and growing. We believe that transformational change takes more than five years to achieve, and requires persistence, consistency, and the ongoing commitment of five key ingredients: vision, skills, resources, incentives, and action planning.

We hope that the model we have built at Hawthorne will inspire others to pursue similar work in other communities, aiming for transformative change by thoughtfully layering and integrating resources. To others interested in following our example, we offer these final recommendations:

- 1. IDENTIFY BEST-IN-CLASS** partners with a mission that aligns with yours;
- 2. START WITH RELATIONSHIPS**
 - building strong relationships between residents, partners and their staff is essential and needs to happen from the get-go;
- 3. WORK THE OPERATIONAL DETAILS** – sharing a vision doesn't translate to on-the-ground success unless you work hard to bring everyone along and make it so;
- 4. LEAN INTO CURIOSITY** – about the residents, partners, the community, systems, challenges, and resources that may be found in unexpected places. Seek to understand, not criticize.
- 5. IDENTIFY GOALS AND OUTCOMES** that matter most to the community;
- 6. BE WILLING TO GO DEEP INSTEAD OF WIDE** – perhaps serving fewer families, but working with them more deeply to address root causes;
- 7. SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS** – change will not happen overnight. Be patient as well as persistent;
- 8. BE WILLING TO COMMIT** or leverage the resources it takes to be successful. This work requires a significant investment – but the investment is worth it!



CSL – Hawthorne Place Apartments
16995 E Dover Lane
Independence, MO 64056
www.cslcares.org

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