

**Building Community Connections: An  
Evaluation of Seward Neighborhood  
Group's Resident Facilitation Services  
at Seward Towers**

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*Report by: Will Delaney*

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## (I) Executive Summary:

### **Introduction:**

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the current state of resident facilitation services provided by the Seward Neighborhood Group (SNG) at the Seward Towers. In so doing, this report can assist in determining what role the group should continue to play in the life of the buildings and their residents. Identifying the positives and negatives of the current program of services was part of that evaluation. Also essential, though, was obtaining a sense of residents' needs, to make sure that the services being provided are consistent with those needs and are effectively engaging residents. Thus, in order to evaluate SNG's services, it was critical to include the perspectives of all the stakeholders in these services – residents, Seward Towers' board members (including resident representatives), SNG staff, and CommonBond/Advantage Services staff from the Towers.

The Seward Neighborhood Group was established in 1960 amid neighborhood residents' concern over the perceived deterioration of Seward. While the projects and personnel have changed over the years, SNG remains committed to encouraging citizen participation and organization within the neighborhood, and is recognized by the City of Minneapolis as the "official citizen participation organization" within the Seward neighborhood. Currently, SNG's guiding priorities include: "building community connections through strong communication, special events, and programs; promoting safety, sustainability and arts; (and) creating leadership around community development."<sup>1</sup>

In the context of that larger mission, Seward Neighborhood Group has been contracted by the Seward Towers Corporation to provide resident facilitation services at the Seward Towers since about 1996. There have been ebbs and flows in the scale of those services, but currently SNG is involved through two main avenues. First, the regular involvement is through facilitation of the Resident Discussion Group, which meets monthly at both Towers. The Discussion Groups provide residents with an opportunity to bring up maintenance, safety, or other concerns from the building, as well as hear from management about potential solutions and other issues. SNG organizes the meetings, advertises them within the buildings, makes sure that residents are able to express their views, and follows up with management to ensure that the issues and concerns raised are addressed. In addition to this regular involvement, SNG helps to organize special events and activities for the residents periodically throughout the year. The best example of such an activity is the annual National Night Out event (a neighborhood-building and crime prevention awareness event) that consistently draws the praise of residents, staff and board members alike. SNG organizes residents to plan and lead the event, and provides any additional assistance necessary to making the event successful.

The Seward Towers (Seward Tower East and Seward Tower West) collectively provide affordable housing to almost 900 people. The Seward Towers Corporation owns the property, but the building is managed by CommonBond Communities, and Advantage Services (a division of CommonBond), as well as the Seward Neighborhood Group, provide resident social services. The residents of the Towers are a diverse group, including a significant percentage of senior citizens, with a majority of the total population being immigrants and refugees from East Africa (Somalia and Ethiopia). This population diversity presents particular challenges for organizers,

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<sup>1</sup> Seward Neighborhood Group 2006 Annual Meeting Program

most notably in that a large portion of the immigrant community does not speak English as a first language, with Somali, Oromo and Amharic being the primary languages. Though SNG has had at least one organizer previously with Somali language proficiency, currently the organization does not have any staff with relevant East African language skills, making organizing among East African residents substantially more difficult.

## **Interviews and Focus Groups**

To evaluate the effectiveness of SNG's programs at the Towers and the needs of residents, a series of focus groups were held with residents, and interviews were conducted with SNG staff, Seward Towers Corp. board members, and CommonBond/Advantage Services staff. Interviewees and focus group participants were asked about the engagement of residents in the Towers' community, the needs of the community, the effectiveness of SNG's services in meeting those needs, and suggestions for improvement.<sup>2</sup>

The interviews and focus groups demonstrated that while there is a considerable amount of diversity in perspectives and opinions, the major stakeholders largely agreed on main themes regarding the positives, negatives, and potential for improvement in SNG's services at the Towers. The general sentiment among respondents was that SNG is playing a valuable role in the Towers community. Resident Discussion Groups are seen as necessary, and having an intermediary such as SNG to facilitate makes residents more comfortable in addressing concerns to management.

However, there was also consensus that there is room for improvement, most notably in the realm of communication. "Communication" here takes on two forms. First, one of the most significant problems brought up by all residents is the language barrier that divides the various groups in the building. As SNG does not currently have a staff member able to provide translation services for any of the East African residents, comprehensive resident organizing is currently not possible. Second, communication between SNG and the other parties involved in providing services has sometimes been inadequate or non-existent. In particular, SNG and CommonBond/Advantage Services do not collaborate regarding the services provided to residents, and consequently, there are often problems of gaps in (or overlapping) services. While there are many reasons for this state of affairs and varied perspectives on how to overcome it, there was consensus from interviewees that communication efforts on all fronts could and should be improved.

In addition to the impressions of SNG's current work at the Towers, residents and interviewees brought forward a number of issues facing the Towers of relevance to the work of SNG. Overwhelmingly, the biggest issue of concern in the Towers identified by residents was the language barrier separating much of the immigrant and refugee community from native English speakers (especially seniors). Also of concern was the issue of security in the buildings, especially for seniors (though most residents felt that the buildings are safe places to live already).

Another issue mentioned prominently was the problem of insufficient participation in events and activities. While there is generally consistent participation in events such as the Resident Discussion Group meetings, that participation is often limited to "the usual suspects," with involvement of new residents hard to come by. Ideally, all residents of the Towers would be willing and able to invest their time and energy in the meetings and events offered, but this is

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<sup>2</sup> For a full list of interview and focus group questions, see Appendix A.

of course not the case. Work schedules and lack of available childcare were common explanations offered as to why residents can't participate in meetings and activities, and cultural differences and lack of interest explanations as to why other residents don't participate. For example, several respondents noted that the regular Bingo nights offered at the Towers, while important to those who attend them, are not "culturally relevant" events for East African residents.

## **Recommendations**

Listening to residents, SNG staff, board members, and CommonBond staff, it is apparent that there are some identifiable needs in the Towers community that are not being met. Moreover, these needs could coincide with the aims of SNG, and represent significant opportunities to enhance and improve the group's role at the Towers. There are also opportunities to improve the level of services provided currently. The following recommendations attempt to make connections between the input of participants and the work of SNG.

1) *Clarification of SNG's role:*

While the current structure of SNG involvement works reasonably well, it would be worthwhile to revisit the overall scope of SNG's work and the concrete expectations of their organizing/facilitation efforts. Clarification of SNG's role in the Towers community between SNG and the Seward Towers Board would be of great benefit to both in the services provided and understanding the expectations of both. One suggestion brought out in interviews involved SNG's role being narrowed to include handling of Resident Discussion Group meetings as well as only a few special events throughout the year. By limiting the scope of their work, a small organization such as SNG can be more effective in those services they do provide.

2) *East African Language Proficiency:*

The challenges of dealing with a diverse community, including multiple primary languages, represent an opportunity for SNG to "build community connections through strong communication." A language-proficient organizer is a paramount need for SNG to improve their organizing and community-building work. By having, on staff, an organizer with the ability to speak the same language(s) as Somali, Ethiopian, and Oromo residents, SNG could more effectively communicate, build trust, and engage all residents of the Towers in programs and activities.

3) *ESL for Residents:*

In addition, East African focus group participants strongly emphasized a desire for more regular English language class opportunities. While SNG does not have the capacity to provide such classes, facilitating a partnership with Advantage Services and/or another organization that could provide those services would be of tremendous benefit to the non-English speaking residents of the Towers and would demonstrate a commitment to the capacity building and communication that is so important to SNG's mission. It should be noted, however, that Advantage Services has made numerous attempts to make ESL services available to Seward Towers' residents over



the last few years, and has been unable to find a workable partnership scenario. This service is clearly not one that could be easily provided, and may not be possible to the extent that residents would like at this time, but it is one that should still be explored.

4) *Improved Efforts for Resident Engagement:*

As for the problem of involving greater numbers of residents, it is important to note that time constraints and other personal circumstances will be a factor preventing the participation of many. People will be more likely to get involved if they have incentives to do so, however, whether that be the need to deal with a pressing maintenance issue in the building or a desire to participate in social events, etc. Residents will also be more likely to get involved if they have the capacity to get involved (and there are fewer barriers to involvement). While SNG cannot provide most of these incentives and cannot make residents come to meetings, they can make sure that residents are aware of the opportunities offered and they can work to reduce barriers (such as language). Based on interviews and focus groups, this awareness raising and capacity-building could be improved. One particularly good suggestion brought forward in interviews and focus groups was the idea of “floor representatives.” This system existed in some form in the past, with the basic idea being that interested residents on each floor are designated to bring forward issues and complaints from their close neighbors, welcome newcomers to the building, and promote events and activities when applicable. Ideally, such a system would promote more interaction between neighbors and awareness of events and issues.

5) *More Cultural Events:*

In addition, incorporating more special events addressing cultural literacy, such as the Quilt Project that began in 2005, could go a long way towards fostering trust and understanding among the varied groups in the community. Beyond providing specific cultural events, SNG could also do more to be aware of cultural differences in all events offered. If Bingo is not of interest to all residents, perhaps additional social activities could be offered that would be more relevant to a wider audience.

6) *Improved Communication:*

As for the communication gap between SNG and Advantage Services, building a better partnership is a process that will take time, but there are several concrete steps that could be taken to start that process. First, clarification of SNG’s role within the Towers will be of great benefit to all involved, by ensuring that specific responsibilities for SNG are transparent and understood by all. Second, regular (annual, semi-annual, etc.) conversations between SNG and Advantage Services about the comprehensive state of resident services, including needs and plans, could promote better understanding between organizations of the other’s role as well as their own role within the life of the building.

## (II) Detailed Findings:

### Resident Engagement

Seward Neighborhood Group faces a number of challenges in providing effective resident organization services to the Seward Towers, including the complex organizational structure of the Seward Towers, the lack of communication with Advantage Services, the lack of staff/financial resources, and the uncertainty surrounding their role in the Towers. Further complicating their role, however, is the issue of resident engagement. Some respondents felt as though there is a lack of resident engagement, while others disagreed. All parties, however, agreed that a constant challenge for SNG is finding ways to get more residents involved.

Consequently, one of the most common questions asked by interviewees themselves was how best to get residents involved. Indeed, getting residents involved is the very essence of SNG's work at the Towers, but there are no easy answers for making sure that Resident Discussion Groups and special events engage a representative sample of the Towers' population. Many residents interviewed were not aware of Seward Neighborhood Group or the group's role in the Towers. This lack of awareness seems to come from a number of factors, including the complex organizational structure (with CommonBond, Advantage Services, and SNG, among others, all involved), residents' own time constraints, participation barriers (such as language), and a variety of other factors (lack of effective communication, lack of interest on the part of residents, etc.). However, residents' lack of awareness of SNG does not preclude engagement in events and community life.

Brian Conway and David Hachen, researchers at the University of Notre Dame, suggest that the main factors affecting civic participation by public housing residents are neighborhood attachments, grievances, resources and constraints, and efficacy.<sup>3</sup> While the leap from theory to practice in the context of the Seward Towers is not simple or straightforward, it is worthwhile to consider the above factors in the lives of residents in designing resident facilitation services. Are residents connected to the community at the Towers? What complaints do residents have? Are there resources available to residents to help them get involved, or are there barriers preventing that involvement? Finally, do residents feel that their voices are heard and can have an impact in the buildings?

The input gathered from interviewees and focus group participants for this project does not provide easy answers to these questions, but it does offer insight into some of the ways in which SNG can begin to address these issues and improve resident engagement in the Towers.

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<sup>3</sup> Conway, Brian and David Hachen, Jr. "Attachments, Grievances, Resources and Efficacy: The Determinants of Tenant Association Participation Among Public Housing Tenants." *Journal of Urban Affairs*. 27(1): 25-52. 2005.

## **Evaluative Input of Key Stakeholders in Seward Neighborhood** **Group services at Seward Towers**

Summary of Resident Needs (as expressed by residents) and Corresponding Services (currently offered):<sup>4</sup>

- 1) Social events – chances to interact positively with neighbors  
Offered: Bingo Night (SNG - not necessarily culturally relevant to all residents), National Night Out (SNG - offered annually), Movie nights (at Advantage Center)
- 2) Language Services – both translation and English language classes  
Offered: no translation services for meetings currently  
No comprehensive English language classes offered at Towers (despite the best efforts of Advantage Services)
- 3) Cultural/Educational events – chances to learn about other cultures of other people in the building and communicate  
Offered: no regular offerings; past examples include the Quilt Project (which was only open to a limited number of participants, but drew high praise from all involved)
- 4) Health/Exercise Activities – residents expressed a desire to have opportunities for exercise, whether through classes or equipment in the building  
Offered: Nothing currently
- 5) Youth programs  
Offered: Homework Center, Study Buddies, Kid’s Garden Club, Campfire USA (all through Advantage Services); Public Achievement (SNG neighborhood-wide project – few Towers residents involved thus far)
- 6) Way to communicate with management  
Offered: Resident Discussion Group (unanimously viewed as necessary and worthwhile; effectiveness not totally agreed upon)

Summary of Recommendations from Participants:

- 1) Language Services – both translation and enhanced English as a Second Language class offerings
- 2) Improved Communication – more communication between SNG and CommonBond/Advantage Services regarding services, as well as better communication of events to residents
- 3) Floor Representatives – designated residents responsible for communicating resident concerns to Resident Discussion Group meetings, as well as promoting awareness of events and activities.
- 4) More Social and Cultural Events – additional events to promote understanding and interaction between seniors and East African residents

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<sup>4</sup> The Advantage Services staff at the Seward Towers recently conducted a needs-assessment among the residents and, not surprisingly, many of the themes brought out in that assessment were echoed in the focus groups and resident interviews conducted for this report.

## Sample Interview Responses:

Interviewees were told that their responses would remain anonymous, and they have been kept that way. However, in order to give as full voice as possible to those who offered their thoughts and opinions to this evaluation, included here is a representative sample of interview responses. Since the various parties involved have different perspectives, the responses are organized by groups (Non-resident Board members, Residents, SNG staff, CommonBond/Advantage Services staff), but names are omitted.

**Non-resident Seward Towers Board Members** – interested in SNG as organizer for residents – want SNG to do more in the way of services (4 of 7 standing board members interviewed)

*“Bingo is not culturally relevant for immigrants – there is a need to be creative to involve everyone (find out what people are interested in, what will motivate them) – good examples: community gardening project, and quilt project got everyone involved.”*

*“Immigrants won’t come to a meeting unless they have an issue they need dealt with – many are intimidated by meetings (cultural difference in importance of meetings – not used to attending them, has different political associations for immigrants).”*

*“Language barrier is present, but good events (like the quilt project) that are interesting to everyone can bring people together regardless of language.”*

*“Success at the Seward Towers would be a multilingual community with residents that points toward effective organization and decision making and citizenship of residents.”*

*“Ideal for SNG involvement is to help residents make their views known to the outside world (including management).”*

*“Seward Towers is in danger of becoming a ghetto. It is meant to be transitional housing for new immigrants, but people are getting caught there. We need to get back to that transitional nature, giving people the skills they need to move on.”*

**Residents** – interested in safety/security, communication with other residents, social activities (2 Board Representatives interviewed, 36 Focus Group participants)

*“Seward Towers are not a cohesive community. There are big cultural differences and language barriers.”*

*“Most people just want to know their neighbors and feel safe.”*

*“The best events are ones where people can enjoy something together. Potlucks are good. Events where something is handed out tend to be more interesting.”*

*“The best thing SNG could do is help bridge gap between cultural groups. Language services would be good. It would be good to get more people interested in the events that go on.”*

*“I wish there were instructors/opportunities for things like Tai Chi/physical exercise for different age groups.”*

*“National Night Out is good for community building. The KaBoom [playground-building] project was very good. It is good to have chances for social interaction, though things like Bingo might not be good for E. African population – not sure if cultural differences play a role.”*

*“A big problem is that it is the same people who are always volunteering for things. It burns out volunteers, makes them discouraged when nobody else steps up.”*

*“It is mainly seniors who come to events – cultural differences, work schedules, lack of childcare probably prevent other people from attending.”*

*“Having different people come together for community education-type events would be helpful, especially for finding out what people’s needs are.”*

*“The language barrier is very frustrating (there used to be interpreters, but I’m not sure what’s happening now).”*

**SNG Staff** – interested in continuing Resident Discussion Groups, special events – want more clarity in terms of role – would like narrower, but more well-defined role (interviewed all 3 staff members who work in Towers and 1 Seward Redesign staff member involved with Towers)

*“Most people won’t get involved unless there’s a problem to be addressed (no incentive otherwise – people are busy, etc.).”*

*“There are different ways to gauge engagement: seniors attend meetings, get involved as volunteers when possible; kids are involved, looking for things to do; others are interested/engaged, but might not attend meetings (though do come to special events, potluck events). Meeting attendance is not necessarily a relevant or good indicator of engagement – since different people/groups have different ways of being engaged, maybe we need to offer corresponding services.”*

*“Different groups are involved differently – elderly are engaged in Towers, younger groups not as involved, E. African groups would like to be involved, but don’t know how/face barriers (especially language barriers).”*

*“SNG should be running specific programs/special events (meeting needs of specific groups), helping people find things/activities outside of the Towers, helping fulfill needs of groups, and shouldn’t be doing more than 2-3 specific programs.”*

*“To be more effective, SNG needs to get different cultures to interact and promote more cultural awareness. Residents need to step up as volunteers. We need translation services. SNG and Board and CommonBond need to communicate better, especially to clarify SNG’s role.”*

**CommonBond/Advantage Services Staff** – would be open to more communication with SNG over projects – history of little communication with SNG (interviewed 3 CB/Advantage Services Staff members)

*“There have been a lot of changes in last year or so regarding the role of the different groups (SNG and CommonBond) in meeting needs - overlap between CommonBond and SNG, roles have become more muddled – needs to be clarified again, needs more dialogue.”*

*“A successful Towers community would be a diverse community, a healthy one - where people understand different cultures – especially need to help seniors understand E. Africans/new populations.”*

*“People who live here have low income for a reason – language barrier, lack of skills, cultural barriers, disabilities, etc.”*

*“SNG should hire someone to connect with E. African residents – need to communicate and build trust to be effective.”*

*“There is a need to help E. Africans learn the value of volunteering - not part of culture – needs to be learned.”*

*“The mixed community here creates some challenges. It is good to see the differences, but it does make some people uncomfortable. There have been some great community building efforts – the most effective ones are the community events with common goals.”*

*“The gaps in services for residents: adult education (English language – wish that Adv. Services could provide, but haven’t been able to yet – a matter of funding, looking for partnerships); health/wellness education (fitness/exercise programs).”*

*“CommonBond’s mission is ‘housing as stepping stones to success, both for seniors and families.’”*

## **Other Examples of Resident Organizing Services**

**Skyline Tower (St. Paul, MN)** – The Skyline Tower is a CommonBond Community in St. Paul, with a resident population similar to that of the Seward Towers. According to Brenda Petry, Advantage Services Program Manager at Skyline, there are 1,000 residents at Skyline, 75-80% of whom are East African immigrants and refugees. There is also a significant senior population in the building. Advantage Services offers most of the same programs at Skyline as can be found at Seward Towers (Homework Center, Computer Lab, reading programs, etc.), and works with community partners to provide other necessary services. Most notably, the Lex-Ham Community Council provides “resident organizing” services. According to Garat Ibrahim, who is in charge of those organizing services, resident organizing at Skyline has not been consistent over the last number of years. The current project was started approximately 1 year ago, and involves “peace circles,” designed to help provide leadership opportunities for E. African residents. An initial group of leaders have been trained, and now the group is preparing to expand to involve other residents in 2007. One of the aims for 2007 is to promote more effective communication between residents and management. According to Mr. Ibrahim, the relationship between management and residents has not been good in recent years, and the former resident council/discussion group structure that was in place had ceased to exist in 2005. However, there will be a new group formed to address resident concerns with management starting in January 2007.

### **Metropolitan Tenants Organization (Chicago, IL)**

#### 1) Subsidized Tenants Empowerment Project

From website: “The program organizes tenants in subsidized buildings to improve their living conditions. Tenants create associations that will increase their power. Many of the tenants form ongoing organizations. The program also works in conjunction with CHAC, Spanish Coalition and other groups to provide workshops for section 8 tenants in maintaining their lease and security deposits.”

#### 2) Healthy Homes Program

“This program provides workshops to tenants and to organizations and agencies that work with low-income tenants. The goal of the program is to educate residents about the impact of various indoor environmental hazards on their health and steps they can take to remedy the situation. For instance, the majority of kids poisoned by lead or who end up in hospitals because of an asthma attack are low-income residents.”

#### 3) Section on Tenant Organizing:

“Situations that may be conducive to tenant organizing:

Generalized repair problems throughout the building; Large rent increases to all the tenants; Condo conversions; Security Deposit interest; Utility shutoffs; Undesirable lease clauses; Drugs.”<sup>5</sup>

[Resident, or “Tenant Organizing,” as understood by an organization like the Metropolitan Tenants Organization, would seem to deal primarily with issues of concern different than those identified by Seward Towers residents. Thanks in large part to the active and responsive management of the building, issues such as “generalized repair problems” and “undesirable lease

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.tenants-rights.org/>

clauses” are not typical issues Seward Towers residents have to face. As such, SNG’s resident services have to be tailored to life at the Towers and cannot simply follow a “classic” model of resident organizing such as the one outlined here.]



## Analysis of SNG Performance

### Contract for SNG Involvement at Seward Towers<sup>6</sup> (analysis included)

#### **Section 2: Stated Expectations of Seward Neighborhood Group –**

- 1) Develop community facilitation plan using collaborative processes in order to identify needs and goals “relating to resident involvement at the Seward Towers,” – Performance: Good. *Plan was created for 2006, detailing goals for involvement.*
- 2) Include in plan a Resident Involvement Process (including facilitation of resident councils and committees), - Performance: Good. *Resident Councils do not exist as such – current structure is Resident Discussion Groups, facilitating discussion between residents and management.*
- 3) Coordinate resident involvement with the other contractors – Performance: Needs Work. *An area of weakness identified by both SNG and CommonBond, due to lack of ongoing coordination between the agencies – room for significant improvement.*
- 4) Work with residents to facilitate the grievance policy – Performance: Needs Work. *No identified problems with current grievance policy, but residents may not be aware of that policy; SNG could do more to increase awareness.*
- 5) Encourage involvement of Towers residents in greater Seward community events, Seward residents’ involvement in Towers’ events (as appropriate), and encourage resident candidates for Board of Directors – Performance: Mixed. *SNG has promoted Seward community events and relevant Seward Tower events (to larger community), but has not had success widening pool of resident candidates for Board.*
- 6) Encourage resident councils in designing and holding events to build community – Performance: Mixed. *National Night Out and Bingo Nights are good examples of events put on by residents with the support of SNG (though ST West did not have a NNO gathering in 2006 because of lack of resident involvement in process), but more could be done to build community, especially across cultures.*

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<sup>6</sup> “Contract for Community Facilitation Services Between Seward Neighborhood Group & Seward Towers Corporation Amendment #1” (for full document, see Appendix B)

## Community Facilitation Services 2006 Workplan<sup>7</sup>

- I. Advocate for issues unique to Towers' residents.
  - a. Improve and facilitate communication between residents and Towers management. (Performance: Good. *Residents do take advantage of Resident Discussion Groups and feel that SNG is doing a good job with them*)
  - b. Increase participation of residents in Management Discussion Groups.
    - i. Outreach to involve new people. (Performance: Mixed. *SNG does advertise to get new participants, and most residents are aware of meetings. Language barrier is an issue.*)
    - ii. Implement communications strategies for group meetings.
    - iii. Staff MDG and provide necessary information to all parties. (Performance: Good. *SNG leads Resident Discussion Groups and facilitates information sharing.*)
  - c. Work with new immigrant populations to ensure their participation in Tower's Resident Councils, the Seward Neighborhood Group board, the Seward Towers Corporation board and their activities. (Performance: Mixed. *SNG has gotten East African residents involved, but without language-proficient organizer currently attendance has waned. Current staff has reached out to various residents, but have limited ability to get broad participation.*)
    - i. Recruitment and working with residents to maintain their involvement in these Councils and Boards and their activities.
  - d. Support Resident Council meetings so that residents maintain their involvement in the Councils and develop Resident Council leadership's ability to effectively facilitate their meetings. (*No Resident Councils currently, only Resident Discussion Groups.*)
    - i. Staff and organize representative and effective Resident Council's committees and resident representatives to the Seward Towers Corporation board. (Performance: Mixed. *SNG could do more to recruit new resident representatives.*)
    - ii. Develop management system that is responsive to the resident's needs, working with both residents and management. (Performance: Good. *Resident Discussion Groups are generally effective for facilitating communication between residents and management.*)
    - iii. Attend full and executive Seward Towers Corporation (STC) board meetings to provide an oral report to the board or executive committee. (Performance: Good. *SNG attends meetings and provides requested reports.*)
  - e. Facilitation: Highlights of Resident Council meetings and newsletter articles
    - i. Write a summary of what transpired at the monthly STW and STE Resident Council meetings to include in the Towers newsletter. (Performance: Good. *Regular summaries of Resident Discussion Groups submitted.*)

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<sup>7</sup> "2006 Work Plan for Community Facilitation Services – Seward Towers" (for full document, see Appendix B)

- ii. Advocate for issues unique to the new immigrant populations as well as for issues affecting the entire community in the Towers. (Performance: Mixed. *No major issues identified to SNG, but capacity for working with immigrant population could be improved.*)
- II. Increased connection between, and sense of community among Seward Towers residents and the greater Seward community.
  - a. Ensure that Seward Towers residents are aware of and invited to Seward community events, and vice versa. (Performance: Good. *SNG does promote Seward community events among Towers residents, and recent KaBoom playground building project involved Towers and greater Seward residents.*)
  - b. Write articles for SNG's Catalyst and Towers newsletter. (Performance: Good. *SNG contributes regularly to Towers newsletter.*)
  - c. Flier the Towers and Seward neighborhood and post signs as appropriate to announce community events. (Performance: Mixed. *Notification of events has not always happened by flyering – most important thing is that information is distributed.*)
- III. Ensure residents have the resources to address their housing needs and living situations.
  - a. Update and distribute to residents in both Seward Towers a Resource Guide containing up-to-date addresses and phone numbers of community resources close to the Towers. (Performance: Needs Work. *No comprehensive Resource Guide exists.*)
  - b. Ensure that under-represented populations have translation resources and other resources available to enable their empowerment and involvement in the community. (Performance: Needs Work. *SNG does work with members of East African community who can provide translation services, but that ability is limited.*)
  - c. Assist residents in understanding and utilizing the Seward Towers Grievance procedures. (Performance: Mixed. *No identified problems with current grievance policy, but residents may not be aware of that policy; SNG could do more to increase awareness.*)
- IV. Increase interaction between diverse groups of people within the Towers.
  - a. Hold and encourage multi-cultural celebrations and exchanges within the Towers and the greater Seward community and include cultural exchanges in other community events. (Performance: Mixed. *Quilt Project was highly successful cultural event, but not many others have happened. Focus on this type of event annually could be of great benefit.*)
  - b. Hold and encourage community-building events, such as community parties for National Night Out. (Performance: Good. *National Night Out events have been very successful at community-building. Could be more, but only if residents are willing to invest time and energy.*)
  - c. Assist the new immigrant populations in their own community-building and organizing activities. (Performance: Needs Work. *Again, language barrier prevents adequate organizing among East African residents.*)

## (III) Appendices

### **Appendix A**

#### Research Methods:

The “data” gathered for this report was qualitative in nature, and was gathered from personal interviews and focus groups conducted by the researcher from September through December 2006.

Individual interviews were conducted with key stakeholders identified by the project supervisor, with input from the researcher and interviewees. In this case, members of the Seward Towers Corp. board (including resident representatives), staff of the Seward Neighborhood Group, and staff of Advantage Services/CommonBond Communities at Seward Towers were selected to allow for articulation of the various perspectives on SNG’s work at the Seward Towers. Every effort was made to include as many interviewees as possible, though time and communication constraints did prevent the inclusion of absolutely all relevant parties.

Focus groups were also conducted with residents to gauge residents’ perspectives on SNG’s work, as well as get a better sense of resident needs. Given the demographics of the Towers, the decision was made to hold 6 separate focus groups with various groups of residents. We held focus groups for 1) non-immigrant senior citizens, 2) East African adults, and 3) youth (8-18 years), with 2 meetings for each group of participants to encompass residents from both the East Tower and the West Tower.

Included here are the actual questions asked for the individual interviews as well as the focus groups (though each interview/focus group may not have included all questions for the purposes of time).

### **Focus Group Questions**

#### *Youth Focus Groups*

- 1) What activities do you participate in here at the Seward Towers?
- 2) Which activities do you like the most? Why?
- 3) Which activities do you like the least? Why?
- 4) Do you know many other kids in your building?
- 5) How do you get to know them?
- 6) What one activity would you most want to have offered here in the Towers? (or change to existing activity)?
- 7) Have you heard of Seward Neighborhood Group? How? Do you know what they do?

#### *Adult Focus Group Questions (\*optional based on time)*

1. How many other people do you know in your building? (How have you gotten to know them? How often do you talk to other people in your building?)

2. What would help you to get to know other people in your building?
3. What kinds of things do you think PREVENT or discourage you from getting to know other people in your building?
- \*4. Next we would like you to think about the management of your building. What issues have you been concerned about?
- \*5. Overall, how responsive do you think the building managers have been to your concerns about safety or other issues? How comfortable do you feel bringing up these issues directly with management?
6. Have you ever attended a resident discussion group meeting?  
 PROBE: Why HAVE you attended a discussion group?  
 If needed: Did the meetings help answer your questions or provide you help with any issues? Are there differences in how a problem is resolved if you go through the discussion group or if you bring up a problem or complaint on your own?
7. For those who have not attended a resident discussion meeting:  
 Why have you NOT attended a discussion group?  
 What would make you more likely to attend one of these discussions?
8. There are a number of other activities that happen at Seward Towers where people get together. I'm going to mention a few activities and if you have ever gone to the activity, please raise your hand.  
 Have you ever gone to a National Night Out gathering?  
 What about Bingo Night?  
 Coffee Hour?  
 And, what other special Tower events have you gone to?
9. What are some of the reasons you HAVE gone to these events?
10. What are some of the reasons you have NOT gone to these events?
11. Do you think that ALL residents at the Towers feel welcome at these events?  
 PROBE: Why DON'T they feel welcome?  
 What could make them feel welcome?
12. What suggestions do you have for encouraging people to come to these activities? Are there other activities that you would want to have available?
- \*13. Have you had any contact or interaction with the Seward Neighborhood Group?  
 IF YES: What types of interactions have you had? What suggestions do you have for improving the work that is done at the Towers by the SNG?
- \*14. What events have you attended in the Seward neighborhood outside of the Towers?
- \*15. How important is it to you to feel like you are part of the Seward neighborhood?
16. In general, how do you feel about living at the Towers?
17. Do you have any final comments about living at the Towers or any of the issues we have discussed today?

### **Individual Interview Questions (asked of):**

(All non-residents) What is/has been your interaction with the Towers' community?

(All non-residents) From your perspective, do the residents seem engaged in the Towers' community? In the broader community? Is there a difference in participation between the various groups of residents (i.e., seniors vs. families, minority groups)?

(Board) In your time on the Seward Towers' Board, what has been your impression of SNG as a contractor? Do you think the services they offer are what the Board had intended? Are they filling a needed role?

(All non-residents) What are your impressions of the role that SNG plays in the life of the Towers' community? Are residents aware of the role of the various groups (and their distinctions)?

(CommonBond) What needs do residents have that are not being met (either by CommonBond or SNG)? What role should these groups play in meeting those needs? What services are most valuable to the residents?

(SNG) What do you think are the biggest needs for residents of the Towers? Does SNG have a role to play in meeting those needs?

(SNG) What are the biggest challenges that SNG has in organizing/providing services for residents of the Towers? What would help?

(Resident Reps) How long have you lived at the Towers?

(Resident Reps) Do you know many of the other people in the building? Do you interact regularly? Do you think it is important to get to know other residents of the building?

- Do you think this is a cohesive community? Are there divisions? Conflicts?
- How well do you feel you know your neighbors? Do you know people different from you? Are there opportunities to get to know your neighbors? What would help?

(Resident Reps) Have you ever attended a resident discussion group meeting? Why or why not? Have you met anyone you did not know before through the resident discussion groups or any of the special events? Have the resident discussion meetings been able to help you get resolution for any issues/questions? If you haven't gone to any meetings, what would make you more likely to attend?

(Resident Reps) When you have had problems in the building (security, cleanliness, things being broken, etc.), have you brought them to the attention of the building management (did you do this at discussion meetings or another way)? Has that helped you get the situation addressed or resolved? Was there any difference in response when you brought up your complaints on your own and not with the help of SNG?

(Resident Reps) Have you ever attended a National Night Out gathering? Bingo night or Tea Time? Any other special events in the Towers? Would you again in the future?

(Resident Reps) From what you can tell, who attends the meetings/events? Are there any groups of residents that are not represented at meetings and events? Why do you think that is? Do you think that most of the other residents feel connected to the community here?

(Resident Reps) Have you ever attended any events outside the Towers in the Seward neighborhood? Do you feel part of the Seward neighborhood? Is that important to you?

(Resident Reps) In general, do you feel that the Towers are a good place to live? Do you want to keep living here in the future, or do you plan at some point to move elsewhere?

(Resident Reps) How much interaction have you had with people from SNG? CommonBond? What are your thoughts about those groups and the work they do here?

(All) Of the services that SNG provides to the Towers community (resident discussion group, Bingo, National Night Out, coffee hours, other special events), which do you think is/are the most effective? Which is/are the least effective? Given unlimited resources, if you could add/modify one service of SNG to the Towers community, what would that be?

(All) What is your idea of a successful Seward Towers community?

(All) Do you have any additional ideas of ways to improve existing services, or alternatives?

## **Seward Tower West Seniors Focus Group Summary**

**Nov. 13, 2006**

**Facilitators:** Will Delaney and Leah Entenmann

**Participants:** 11

### **How have you gotten to know other people in the building?**

- Mail day; try to welcome newcomers.
- Resident Council meetings were good (better than Discussion Group)
- It's harder to get acquainted with foreign people—language barrier—they don't always answer when you say hello. It's easier to talk to the kids.
- Want Somalis to reach out to *us*.

### **Concerns:**

- Security around doors
- People who don't pay rent
- There should be regular pest control; infestations are awful
- Maintenance should be timed with people's needs in mind

### **Management response:**

- Messages on the doors that say "such and such is going to happen" makes me feel like I'm treated like a kid; why am I not consulted?
- Management is not very available.
- There should always be someone at the desk.
- It's partly a social issue because they all take smoking breaks together.
- Didn't respond to window washing request.
- There was a predator at a meeting and no one did anything
- We need an *authoritative* manager with a thumb on the pulse
- Need more *teeth* (for enforcement of rules)
- Manager should be a man
- It's not residents' job to police
- They won't tell us when security hours are

### **Ideas:**

- More frequent movie nights; maybe 2:00 p.m.; everyone's in the community room getting their mail
- Seasonal kids' activities (Easter egg hunt etc)
- Holiday activities; Christmas tea
- Election day rides; someone should make sure they can vote! (The office should have helped.)

### **Complaints:**

- Making residents responsible for management's projects (e.g. pest control)
- Elevators: often one out of commission
- Lack of non-senior transportation



**Seward Tower West East African Focus Group Summary**  
**December 11, 2006**

**Facilitators:** Will Delaney and Leah Entenmann

**Translation and support:** Shegitu Kebede

**Participants:** 4

**How have you gotten to know other people in the building?**

- Knowing people is no problem, but she doesn't know many people. She does not go to meetings.
- We say hello to other Africans or other Ethiopians; we know each other from church, mosque, nearby floors, etc. It's nice to have coffee at each other's homes.
- Meets people at the laundry room who aren't Somali.
- The only non-African we know is the social worker because we don't speak English.

**What would help you meet more people? Is it important?**

- Doesn't like to speak English.
- It's good to say hi, socialize and eat with people. In our culture, people come together to eat/drink/socialize, and here there is not as much opportunity, but we would like it.

**Have you been to a Resident Discussion Group Meeting?**

- I don't have time for the meetings. I am sick, or with my family, or I have to go shopping. Lack of time is the only reason I don't go.
- I would be happy to be with other people but I don't understand.
- We would be happy to go if there were a translator.
- I am busy with my son but sometimes I go to the potluck.

**Concerns:**

- I've only had small problems, but the office helped. My lock was broken.
- No problems.

**Activities:**

- I went to Way to Grow; it was good—they have parenting information and school readiness. I go to potlucks too. There are no other chances to get to know people, because I am busy.

**Do you feel welcome at events?**

- Yes (always, according to one participant).
- We don't go to things sometimes because of time or language, but not because we feel unwelcome.

**What would make you more likely to participate in events?**

- Invitation.
- Encourage *everyone* to come.
- It would be good to have activities to get to know each other.

**Seward Neighborhood Group:**

- We don't know SNG.

- Know who they are, but not sure what all they do.

**Do you ever go to events in the neighborhood? Do you want to?**

- We haven't been to neighborhood events.
- We would like to.

**Are there any problems between immigrants and American-born residents?**

- There are no problems.

**How do you feel about living here at Seward Towers?**

- I like living here; it's better than Cedar Riverside.
- We like it.

**Other ideas/anything else?**

- We need daily adult ESL classes at all levels, like they have at Brian Coyle.
- There should be more activities for young children.

## **Seward Tower East Senior Focus Group Summary**

**December 13, 2006**

**Facilitators:** Will Delaney and Leah Entenmann

**Participants:** 3

### **How have you gotten to know other people in the building?**

I know a lot (of people); I've been here for so long—I know them just from smiling, starting conversations, helping people out when they need it.

I know people because I've been here for 23 years and deliver for Meals on Wheels.

I've been meeting people by introducing myself to my immediate neighbors, to women down the hall, and going to the Resident Discussion Group meeting; people are very, very nice, there are always smiles and courteousness. The tower is very community-oriented, but there's a limit or a reticence.

### **What would help you get to know more people?**

An interpreter! The language barrier is a problem.

Where I used to live I was working in assisted living with diverse clientele—we had a monthly feature country in the newsletter with a resident author, a recipe, names and pronunciations.

Could each floor have a different introduction?

People came when Nasra was there to interpret.

### **Why do you go to Resident Discussion Group meetings?**

I want to meet people.

I want to share my views and help out.

I want to help make sure there's a grocery store.

Meetings are helpful.

There should be food for the immigrants

### **Problems:**

There aren't any big problems.

There are soapsuds in the kitchen sink every morning and maintenance couldn't fix it.

Management and maintenance are responsive.

### **Have you been to any special events?**

National Night Out! We go because it's fun, people like it, and children *love* it.

I run Bingo; participation is dwindling.

But there's free food; immigrants don't come. [Again, I'm not sure if I missed something in my notes here.] We need an interpreter!

It might be cultural—they're not familiar with it.

People came to the Resident Discussion Group meetings when there was an interpreter.

### **Do you have other ideas for activities?**

There should be posters in multiple languages. Get people used to activities.

They should do something native to *their* culture and invite us!

### **Impressions of SNG:**

I like them! They do good work here.

**Neighborhood events:**

I went to the park fair once.

I went too.

**Is it important to be connected to the neighborhood?**

Everything is important! I have a long history in this neighborhood.

I agree.

Is there a neighborhood walking group? I'd do that. Involvement will be important; my kids live nearby, by the river walk.

**Do you like it here?**

It's my home.

I've been here 23 years.

I plan on growing old here.

Seward Towers and Seward Neighborhood have a good reputation. It's a good life. This is a safe place (including fire safety).

There are guards here from 6:00-1:00 a.m.

**Seward Tower East (East African) Focus Group Summary**  
**December 14, 2006**

**Facilitators:** Will Delaney and Leah Entenmann

**Translation and support:** Jamal Elmi

**Participants:** 6

**How have you gotten to know other people in the building?**

We get together every Friday.

**Interjection:**

Where is Nasra? She's the connection between SNG and translation—always there for everybody.

We need a place to exercise.

We need full time English and GED school nearby.

We need a nearer grocery store.

**Have you been to a Resident Discussion Group Meeting?**

One time, yes—things discussed weren't followed through.

Don't want a translator because they want to learn *themselves* in their own building/neighborhood.

**Interjection:**

The heat in the building is uneven. It would be good for everyone to have their own control.

**Management:**

Says they cannot solve problems.

**Activities:**

National Night Out—because it's fun, because of crime and safety. The more the better with this kind of event—but this is not the main issue.

**Socializing:**

Yes, we have enough time to socialize with people. The language barrier is a problem—we need a school with all levels! This is better than a translator.

We need SNG to hire someone to connect—Nasra.

**Do you feel welcome at events?**

Yes!

**What would make you more likely to participate in events?**

Better notice/publicity, etc. Flyers under people's doors are best, in English and other languages.

**Other ideas:**

More events—always with food—after 6:00 (because of work).

**How do you feel about life here?**

Ok, fine, good.

**Problems with rent office:**

When there's a change in income, the response is too slow; they cancel appointments; it has gotten worse the past two years, specifically rent, cleaning etc.

There are especially problems with temporary jobs.

There are problems with management and rent.

There are difficulties getting management to allow family to move in and share space; one woman had a nephew who couldn't move in with her even though she asked, and now he is homeless.

There are communication problems with management.

## Youth Focus Group Responses

### Seward Tower East Youth Focus Group Summary

December 4, 2006

Facilitator: Will Delaney

Participants: 7

- 1) *Activities you participate in:*  
Study Buddies, Homework Center, Campfire
- 2) *Activities you like the most:*  
Playing games (board games)  
Homework Center – get your homework done, get help  
Fun activities – play games, give you snacks  
Children share with each other
- 3) *Activities you like the least:*  
Homework  
Computer lab – some disagreement on this
- 4) *Do you know other kids in the building?*  
Yes  
1 response: only my relatives
- 5) *How do you know them?*  
Meeting them in the building  
Coming to Advantage Center (Homework Center, Computer Lab)
- 6) *One Ideal Activity:*  
Kids' Open Computer time – like Adult Open Computer time  
More math/reading games  
4H was really good – not offered any more
- 7) *Have you heard of SNG?*  
No – some thought yes, but not sure why

### Seward Tower West Youth Focus Group Summary

December 6, 2006

Facilitator: Will Delaney

Participants: 5

- 1) *Activities you participate in:*  
Homework Center, Campfire, Study Buddies, Youth Council (don't have anymore)
- 2) *Activities you like the most:*  
Field trips  
Homework Center – do work and play games – get all my homework done  
meet friends  
Summer Fun – get to play outside and work with Americorps volunteers (who are fun)
- 3) *Activities you like the least:*  
Don't get to use computer labs  
Have to stay here for a long time

- 4) *Do you know other kids in the building?*  
Yes
- 5) *How do you know them?*  
Advantage Center  
School  
Community Room in Tower  
Sometimes meet in programs
- 6) *One Ideal Activity:*  
Field Trips (more)  
Watch movies  
Gym/fitness room  
Game room (with video games) – one for older kids  
Get to use computer lab anytime
- 7) *Have you heard of SNG?*  
No – one responded yes, but not sure why and not sure what they do



## **Appendix B – Important SNG Documents**

### **Contract for Community Facilitation Services Between Seward Neighborhood Group & Seward Towers Corporation Amendment #1**

This agreement is made between Seward Neighborhood Group, Inc. (SNG) and Seward Towers Corporation (Owner) for Community Facilitation Services for Seward Towers East and West.

#### **Seward Neighborhood Group Obligations:**

- 1) Term. The term of this contract shall be from January 1, 2006 through December 31, 2006.
- 2) Annual Work Plan. SNG will develop a Community Facilitation Plan using a collaborative process that engages the community, Seward Towers' residents and the property manager, the service coordinator, and the asset manager (hereinafter "Other Contractors") in identifying needs and goals relating to resident involvement at the Seward Towers. The Plan shall include:
  - a) A resident involvement process including facilitation of resident councils and the respective committees.
  - b) Coordinating resident involvement efforts with the Other Contractors.
  - c) Work with residents and Other Contractors to facilitate the grievance policy.
  - d) Identify and facilitate opportunities for Seward Towers' residents to get involved in the greater Seward community and for residents of the greater Seward community to get involved in appropriate activities at the Towers. Will identify and encourage resident candidates for participation on the Seward Towers Board of Directors.
  - e) Offer Resident Councils guidance and support for events and projects as appropriate and feasible in order to build a sense of community among residents.
  - f) Written report to the Seward Towers Board of Directors quarterly.
- 3) Plan Approval. The Plan shall be approved annually by the Seward Towers Corporation board. The approved Plan for the year beginning January 1, 2006 is attached.
- 4) HUD Approval. The services specified in this contract are provisional and are subject to approval by the project manager in the local office of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- 5) Budget. SNG will develop an annual Budget for the proposed Community Facilitation Services for review and approval by the Owner. The approved Budget for the year beginning January 1, 2006 is attached.
- 6) SNG Performance. SNG will perform the services identified in the Work Plan and will maintain communication with the Owner and Other Contractors, and alert them to any situation that affects the continuity of service or raises concern among residents or the community. Performance will be documented in monthly reports that include number of

residents participating, issues raised at meetings and resolutions to resident concerns/issues. A summary of these reports will be included in the written quarterly reports to the STC Board of Directors.

- 7) Owners Performance. The Seward Towers Corporation will:
  - a) Participate in the development of the Community Facilitation Plan, and in the identification of needs and goals on which the Plan is based.
  - b) Review and approve the Community Facilitation Plan and Budget, and any changes to the Plan or Budget during the contract period.
  - c) Assess performance of Seward Neighborhood Group, based on accomplishment of goals set forth in the Plan.
  - d) Provide free and open access to facilities at Seward Towers as requested by SNG for resident or community activities.
  - e) Compensate the Community Facilitator as set forth in the Annual Budget.
- 8) Modification. This agreement may be amended at any time pursuant to the written agreement of both parties.
- 9) Termination. Either party may terminate this Agreement provided that the party terminating the Agreement gives at least sixty (60) days advanced written notice. SNG shall be paid for its services on a pro rata basis through the date of termination.

Notice to SNG shall be addressed to:  
Executive Director  
Seward Neighborhood Group  
2323 East Franklin Avenue  
Minneapolis, MN 55406

Notice to the Owner shall be addressed to:  
President, Seward Towers Corporation  
c/o Office Enterprises, Inc.  
1711 West County Road B, Suite 300N  
Roseville, MN 55113

Seward Neighborhood Group, Inc.

Seward Towers Corporation:

by \_\_\_\_\_

by \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Seward Towers Corporation Organizational Chart

