

## **Introduction:**

Common Ground is an international leader in the development of solutions to homelessness. Our mission is to end homelessness through innovative programs that transform people, buildings, and entire communities. Over the last 20 years, Common Ground has grown into one of the largest providers of supportive housing in the United States.

Our strategy has four components:

- We build and operate a range of housing options for homeless and low-income individuals – housing that is attractive, affordable, well managed, and linked to the services and support people need to rebuild their lives.
- We identify and house the most vulnerable: those who have been homeless the longest, have the most disabling conditions, and are least likely to access housing resources.
- We prevent homelessness among known vulnerable groups (e.g., young adults aging out of foster care, low-income families from depressed neighborhoods, military veterans, and individuals involved in the criminal justice system) by addressing the multiple factors that cause individuals and families to become homeless.
- We train colleagues in communities throughout the country and around the world in successful, cost-effective practices that reduce homelessness.

To end homelessness, Common Ground does much more than build housing. We create supportive communities where individuals are connected and the human spirit is revitalized. As part of our holistic approach to renewing the health and well-being of individuals and communities, Common Ground is committed to making sustainability an integral part of our housing.

## **Current Practices for Changing Behavior Among Staff & Tenants**

In 2007, Common Ground launched its Green Campaign, a three-year, \$4.3 million capital campaign to raise the funds needed to incorporate environmentally sustainable design, construction, operating, and maintenance practices into all of our new buildings. By 2011, we will have completed six new buildings in New York City and Connecticut (including The Hollander and The Brook which are currently opened), all of which will be LEED certified and will feature “green” design elements, including low-toxicity paints and materials to protect indoor air quality, increased natural light, energy-efficient heating and lighting systems, and green roofs. Green buildings promote improved quality of life for our tenants, many of whom suffer from chronic physical and mental health conditions, while improving air and water quality in the surrounding neighborhood.

In addition to our commitment to green design, Common Ground works to foster and promote healthy/green living and energy efficiency among the staff and tenants of our permanent supportive housing sites. Our goal is create a culture of self sufficiency as well as healthy living/green lifestyle among our tenant populations. Specifically, we work to offer our tenants activities and/or programs that promote healthy lifestyles and increases tenants’ knowledge of environmentally friendly practices for everyday living. We also encourage our staff to model healthy, green and energy efficient behavior for our tenants through established practices that we incorporate across Common Ground buildings.

Common Ground's current practices for changing the behavior of staff and tenants are as follows:

- **Recycling Programs:** All Common Ground permanent, congregate residences feature recycling rooms on all tenant floors. In accordance with NYC law, tenants are required to separate cans, bottles, papers and other recyclable items from garbage/refuse. This requirement is included in the Rules & Regulations (which are part of the lease) for Common Ground buildings and is enforced by our management staff. Tenants are also encouraged to recycle other specialty items (such as batteries and plastic bags) via programs offered by our Tenant Services Offices. Staff are also required to recycle and are provided separate trash bins for recyclables and refuse.
- **Regular Communication:** All Common Ground sites produce monthly newsletters for tenants which feature a Green Tip of the month and celebrate events such as Earth Day.
- **Workshops & Classes:** Common Ground buildings offer tenants a variety of workshops and classes including many focused on healthy lifestyles, green living and energy reduction. We have even incorporated green themes into one of our Art Classes by utilizing found and recycled materials.
- **Garden Clubs:** Most Common Ground buildings feature roof top gardens and/or green roofs. We encourage tenants to actively participate in the maintenance and upkeep of our gardens via clubs sponsored by our Tenant Services staff. We also offer internship opportunities through a partnership with the Horticultural Society of New York at several of our sites.
- **Exercise & Bike Rooms:** Most Common Ground buildings include exercise rooms that are open for staff and tenant use as well as Bike Rooms where staff and tenants can store bikes.
- **Leading by Example – Staff Commitment to Green and Energy Efficient Practices:** Our maintenance staff at all Common Ground buildings utilize green cleaning products to clean the common areas of the buildings. We have also installed motion detectors (which automatically turn off lights) at several of our sites. We utilize energy efficient light bulbs in offices and other common areas of our buildings. We similarly install efficient fixtures in the bathrooms and purchase energy efficient air conditioning units for tenants whenever possible. We set office printers to copy double sided and have included an email tag on all staff emails encouraging receivers to consider the environment before printing. We periodically hire consultants to review energy usage at our sites and make recommendations regarding further reductions. Several Common Ground sites also participate in an energy reduction program offered by Energy Curtailment Specialists, Inc. (ECS).

**Additional Efforts:**

The information below describes additional efforts to promote healthy / green living among tenants that are unique to specific Common Ground buildings. We have also provided brief information regarding several of our buildings / programs below.

**The Times Square**

255 West 43<sup>rd</sup> Street  
New York, NY

Acquired by Common Ground in 1991, The Times Square is the largest permanent supportive housing project in the nation. A once-stately neighborhood fixture that had fallen into serious disrepair, Common Ground carefully preserved the building's historic character while redeveloping it into housing for 652 low-income and formerly homeless individuals and persons living with HIV/AIDS.

**Green and Healthy Living Expo:**

- Falling on Earth Day this year, Tenant Services staff expanded The Times Square Community Health Fair into the 'Green and Healthy Living Expo'
- Environmental exhibitors covered topics including urban botany showing, urban composting, advocacy for air quality in public areas, recycling education, and community supported agriculture.
- A giveaway item for tenants included reusable shopping bags.
- A raffle item included products that encourage non-traditional recycling for decorations.
- Refreshments provided by Whole Foods.
- Instead of providing disposable water or juice boxes to attendees, a booth was set up in the Tenant Services Office to encourage the use of tap water.
- Exhibitors were provided with reusable water canteens instead of plastic one-time use water bottles.
- A Documentary Screening Room was available for attendees showing environmental documentaries.

**'Don't Get Tapped' Raffle and Screening:**

- During April & May, Times Square tenants will be entered into a raffle each time they fill up a reusable water bottle in the Tenant Services Office with filtered tap water from our Quench machine.
- The raffle drawing for a Brita water filter and a BPA free water bottle will be held on Wednesday, May 19<sup>th</sup> after a screening of *Tapped*, a documentary about the negative impact of bottled water on communities and environmental resources.

**The Aurora**

475 W. 57th St.  
New York, NY 10019-1772

Common Ground partnered with The Actors Fund in 1996 to create a shared housing facility at The Aurora. Common Ground Management as property manager operates the building, providing maintenance, security, marketing, and administrative services. The Actors Fund

provides on-site supportive services for building tenants. The Aurora is home to 178 tenants, including the elderly, low-income working professionals, and people living with HIV/AIDS

- **Swap Meets:** On a periodic basis, Aurora tenants bring down personal items that are old or unused and swap them with other tenants for other items. Activities like these encourage reuse and recycling as opposed to disposal and more consumption.

### **The Prince George**

14 East 28<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY

The Prince George provides permanent, affordable housing for 416 low-income and formerly homeless adults and persons living with HIV/AIDS. Built in 1904, the residence was once one of New York City's premier hotels; after many years of decline, it was rehabilitated by Common Ground and reopened in 1999. The Prince George is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

- **Community Supported Agriculture:** Unlike any other Common Ground building, the Prince George hosts a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program that provides tenants and neighborhood residents with weekly deliveries of fresh organic produce at affordable prices. The Prince George - Norwich Meadows Farm CSA is a New York City Community Supported Agriculture program that brings fresh, organic, affordable produce to members while supporting local, sustainable farming practices in New York State. CSAs are mutually beneficial partnerships between local farms and community members. Members join the summer CSA season during the winter and spring months. They pay in advance to provide Norwich Meadows Farm with a stable financial base that allows them to buy seeds and hire labor without having to take out high interest loans. When the harvest season begins in June, Norwich Meadows Farms delivers weekly shares of their harvest to Common Ground's Prince George building that members then pick-up through mid November. CSA membership is income-based— higher income individuals subsidize the price of lower income members, allowing all people access to high-quality organic produce – and is open to all Common Ground tenants and staff.
- **Green Table:** Last year for Earth Day, The Prince George had a green table set up in the lobby where we discussed and handed out educational material on how we can reduce our carbon foot print. This year we are hoping to show a series of green movies in the ballroom.

### **The Christopher**

202 West 24<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY

The Christopher provides 207 units of permanent supportive housing for low-income or formerly homeless adults and persons living with HIV/AIDS. The Christopher also houses the Foyer Program, a housing-based career development program targeting young adults ages 18-24 who are "aging out" of foster care or already homeless. Built originally in 1904, the building was rehabilitated by Common Ground and opened in 2004.

- **Jobs:** A green jobs presentation was offered in April 2010.

### **The Schermerhorn**

160 Schermerhorn Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

In February 2009, tenants began moving into The Schermerhorn, Common Ground's permanent housing residence in downtown Brooklyn, co-sponsored by The Actors Fund . The Schermerhorn provides 217 units of permanent, affordable housing for single adults, with more than 50% of the units reserved for formerly homeless and individuals with special needs. Low-income working tenants, including local actors and artists, occupy the remaining units. The building is set in an exciting, integrated urban neighborhood that will include market-rate housing, community and retail space, and supportive housing. The Schermerhorn also features numerous green design elements, including rooftop gardens and a high efficiency boiler system.

- **Rooftop garden:** The Schermerhorn recently planted their rooftop garden for the very first time. Common Ground staff are now working to establish a Garden Club for tenants (similar to other Common Ground buildings). Common Ground staff in collaboration with the Garden Club will learn how to best maintain the grass and other plants featured in the garden.

### **The Andrews**

197 Bowery Street  
New York, NY 10002-2811

Located on the Bowery in Lower Manhattan, the Andrews is a former lodging house built in 1901. It offers Common Ground's First Step housing, a low-cost, short-term alternative to the City's shelters or life on the street. First Step housing provides private, safe, clean, and affordable short-term accommodations to individuals who are transitioning to permanent housing, facing homelessness, or who have failed in other programs. The Andrews offers 146 short-term living units, including 38 units reserved for homeless veterans.

As a newly re-opened building, Andrews staff are currently focused on filling vacant units. Once fully occupied and stabilized, the staff will focus additional attention on promoting and fostering green behaviors among residents.

### **The Brook**

455 East 148th Street  
Bronx, NY 10455

The Brook, Common Ground's first construction project in the Bronx, is a six-story residence that will play a key role in revitalizing the surrounding community. The 190-unit building includes ground floor community and retail space and provides permanent supportive housing to low-income workers, people with HIV/AIDS, and chronically homeless individuals, including individuals with mental illness. Residents began moving into The Brook on January 20, 2010. Green features include a green roof; Building Management System to control temperature; lighting and motion sensors; hydronic wall panels; exhaust air energy recovery system; low-VOC paints and materials; high-efficiency boiler; and bike storage.

As noted above, the Brook is a LEED certified building with several green features. One such feature (the BMS System) is detailed below as it involves active staff and tenant participation and, thus, helps change behavior.

- **BMS (Building Management System):** The BMS system is activated via the Brook tenant ID key card. The ID key card and a turnstile system in the lobby is used to control access into and egress out of the building. The system is also linked to all tenant units and controls the activation of bathroom lights and the AC component in each unit. When a tenant enters the building and swipes his/her key card, BMS enables operation of both the bathroom light and AC. When a tenant swipes and exits the building, both components are automatically turned off. BMS software also allows building staff to track and monitor who is in the building at any given time. This function enables management staff to monitor trending logs and print reports. The BMS is a critical tool for controlling, monitoring, and optimizing the building's safety, energy consumption, and efficiency.

Management staff do face some challenges in the implementation of BMS. For example, if a tenant loses his/her ID key card the bathroom light and AC in their respective unit will not be operational, until the key has been replaced. As such, the system needs to be "overridden" until a new card is programmed and incorporated into BMS. Tenants also need to be educated on proper use of the card. Similarly, management staff need to be properly trained on BMS functions, capability to overwrite system, and reporting.

Despite the fact that The Brook is currently in the process of "renting up," Common Ground staff have already embraced the importance of promoting and fostering green and energy efficient behaviors among tenants. Once the building is fully occupied, the staff will focus additional efforts on these areas that are in line with other Common Ground sites.

### **Conclusion / Next Steps**

Although we believe we have made great strides at Common Ground to foster, encourage and promote green and energy efficient behaviors among our staff and tenants, we know we can always improve upon what we are doing and do more. The following represent the areas (identified by Common Ground staff) in which we could use more assistance and/or about which we would like to learn more:

- Systems for measuring the overall impact our buildings have on the environment including capacity to track and measure energy/water consumption by unit and the effectiveness of individual mitigation strategies such as rewarding / incentivizing the right behavior.
- Additional strategies for incentivizing/making it easy for our tenants to engage in green / energy efficient behavior - e.g., increasing usage of low impact cleaning materials within tenant units.
- Additional staff training on green / energy efficient behaviors and practices.



- Additional information about green jobs that might be available to / appropriate for our tenants.