

## Report on the Housing Department of Queens Community House July-December 2012)

### What is Queens Community House? What is its mission?

Queens Community House, a non-profit organization located in Queens, New York, is “a multi-service settlement house that serves nearly 25,000 children, youth, adults and older adults at 22 different sites in 11 neighborhoods throughout Queens”.<sup>1</sup> A settlement house is defined as a community or neighborhood based organization that strives to serve the needs of the community while empowering individuals, families, and groups to succeed.<sup>2</sup> Services of a settlement house can include, but are not limited to, afterschool programs, housing programs, senior citizen programs and the use of the space for community meetings and organization. Queens Community House offers all of these services, plus LGBT programs, teen programs, and more. The mission of Queens Community House is as follows:

“Queens Community House is committed to the personal growth of

the diverse people it serves and to the creation of self-reliant, open, responsible communities.

Established in the settlement house tradition, it embodies the core belief that all persons can and want to grow and that all can contribute. Through broad-based, innovative leadership, it offers programs and services, which help all people improve their lives and work together to strengthen their communities.

Queens Community House is more than a social service provider: it is a welcoming, extended family for both new and long-time residents.”<sup>3</sup>

Queens Community House is an organization dedicated to its mission of helping both their clients, and the community, to thrive and grow. QCH currently has programs in Astoria, Jamaica, Elmhurst, Flushing, Kew Gardens, Ozone Park Rego Park, Jackson Heights, and, at its main site, Forest Hills.

### The Housing Department

One of the most important services offered by Queens Community House is the

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<sup>1</sup> Queens Community House Website, qchnyc.org, 2008

<sup>2</sup> United Neighborhood Houses Website, *What is a Settlement House?*, <http://www.unhny.org/about/settlementhouse>

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<sup>3</sup> Queens Community House Website, qchnyc.org, 2008

Housing and Homelessness Prevention Program. One big part of the program is Eviction Prevention; each year, QHC helps over 1,000 families avoid eviction, therefore avoiding homelessness or moving into a shelter.<sup>4</sup> In 2008, the approximate annual cost to keep one family in a New York City shelter was \$36,000; meanwhile, Queens Community House's Homelessness Prevention Program costs a \$446 per family, plus the Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (also referred to as FEPS) of about \$5,400.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, Queens Community House's program is more cost efficient, and achieves the more important goal of keep families in safe and stable homes. Since the program's start in 1992, Queens Community House has successfully helped 15,000 households avoid eviction (counted in 2008).<sup>6</sup> The program also assists neighborhoods throughout Queens by keeping these families housed, and therefore keeping up the presence of affordable housing (which is already minimal).

The Housing Department also offers other client services on a case-by-case basis. Some of the services include housing

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<sup>4</sup> Queens Community House Website, *Eviction Prevention*, qchnyc.org, 2009

<sup>5</sup> Queens Community House Website, *Eviction Prevention*, qchnyc.org, 2009

<sup>6</sup> Queens Community House Website, *Eviction Prevention*, qchnyc.org, 2009

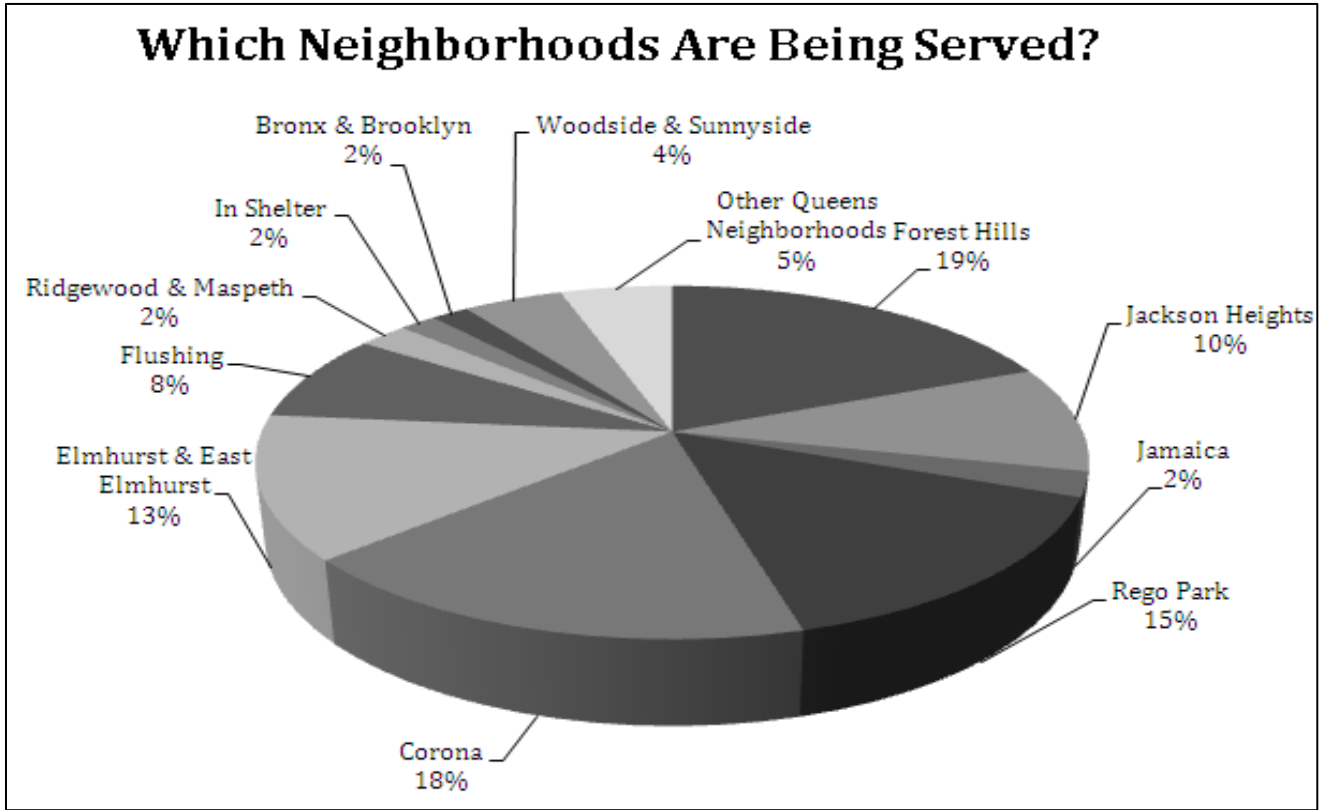
counseling on lease issues, rights issues, subsidy issues, foreclosure, repairs, Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE), Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE), repair issues, and the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP).

### **Research Methods**

The information of 174 clients is used in this report. Information was obtained through their intake forms and files (where applicable), from the Queens Community House Housing Department. The intakes were entered into a database that include the intake date, neighborhood/community district, monthly income, landlord information, rent, housing type, the main issue for coming, and the leverage received from a program, if any. Intake forms are self-reported, meaning the client is only obliged to answer questions they feel comfortable answering. This is why, for example, the database does not contain the monthly income information of all 174 clients. For privacy reasons, the client's names and addresses will remain confidential.

### **Neighborhood Distribution**

Figure 1 shows the distribution, by percentage, of the neighborhoods that are being served by the Housing Department of

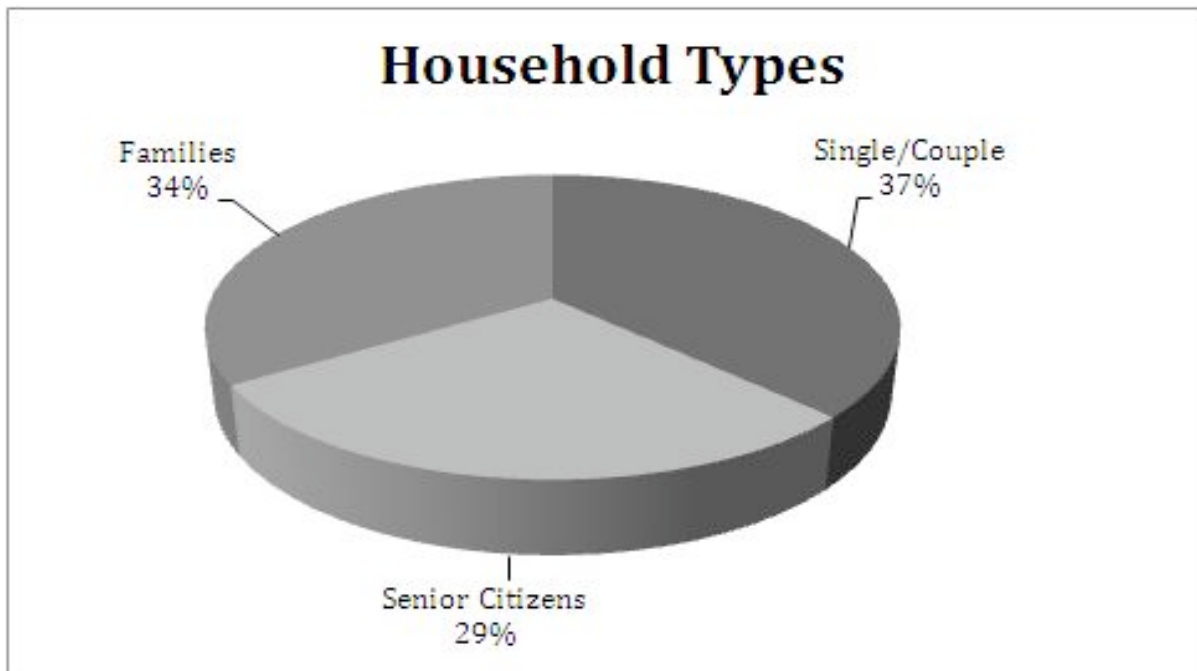


**Fig. 1, Which Neighborhoods Are Being Served**

Queens Community House. As stated previously, QCH has its main location in Forest Hills and another location in Jackson Heights. For these reasons, it is not at all surprising that the majority of clients seen in the last six months were from these neighborhoods and the surrounding ones (i.e. Corona). It is also notable that in both of

these areas there are concentrations of lower income and immigrant residents. It seems for these neighborhoods especially, Queens Community House is a key player in keeping residents safely housed.

In other neighborhoods, however, it seems outreach efforts are not enough. Jamaica, Queens, for example, seems to be



**Fig. 2, Household Types**

underrepresented in Figure 1. As of 2006, 16% of all Jamaica residents were living below the poverty line, in comparison to only 15% of all of Queens' residents.<sup>7</sup> It is hard to imagine that there is not a need for eviction prevention, and other housing services, in the Jamaica area. It is possible, however, that the location of the Queens Community House sites, with housing departments, is too far for residents of Jamaica. Furthermore, it is likely that potential clients would use public transportation and the ride from Jamaica to Forest Hills can be very long, especially for someone working a full-time job or a senior citizen.

<sup>7</sup> Community Health Profiles, *Take Care Jamaica*, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/data/2006chp-408.pdf> Second Edition, 2006. Page 2

It is also interesting that there have not been many clients from Flushing this year. Flushing is a known immigrant enclave and a large portion of Flushing (zip codes 11355 and 11354) has a poverty level of 13-16%.<sup>8</sup> It is likely that the need is there but the residents do not know where to seek help, or that they even can get help. Additionally, it may be effective for the Housing Department of Queens Community House to hire a native Chinese or Korean speaker; this may help residents feel more comfortable, aside from being a resource for those residents who don't speak English. As Queens is the most diverse place in the world, having bi-lingual staff members is always a valuable asset.

<sup>8</sup> ZipAtlas, *Flushing, NY by Zip Code*, <http://zipatlas.com/us/ny/flushing/zip-code-comparison/families-below-poverty-level.htm>

## Household Types

Of the 174 clients included in the database, 34% are families, 37% are adults with no kids, and 29% are senior citizens (as shown in figure 2). These statistics show that

Queens Community House is doing a great job of reaching a diverse population. The three types of households are almost equally represented, even though there are different services available for each group.

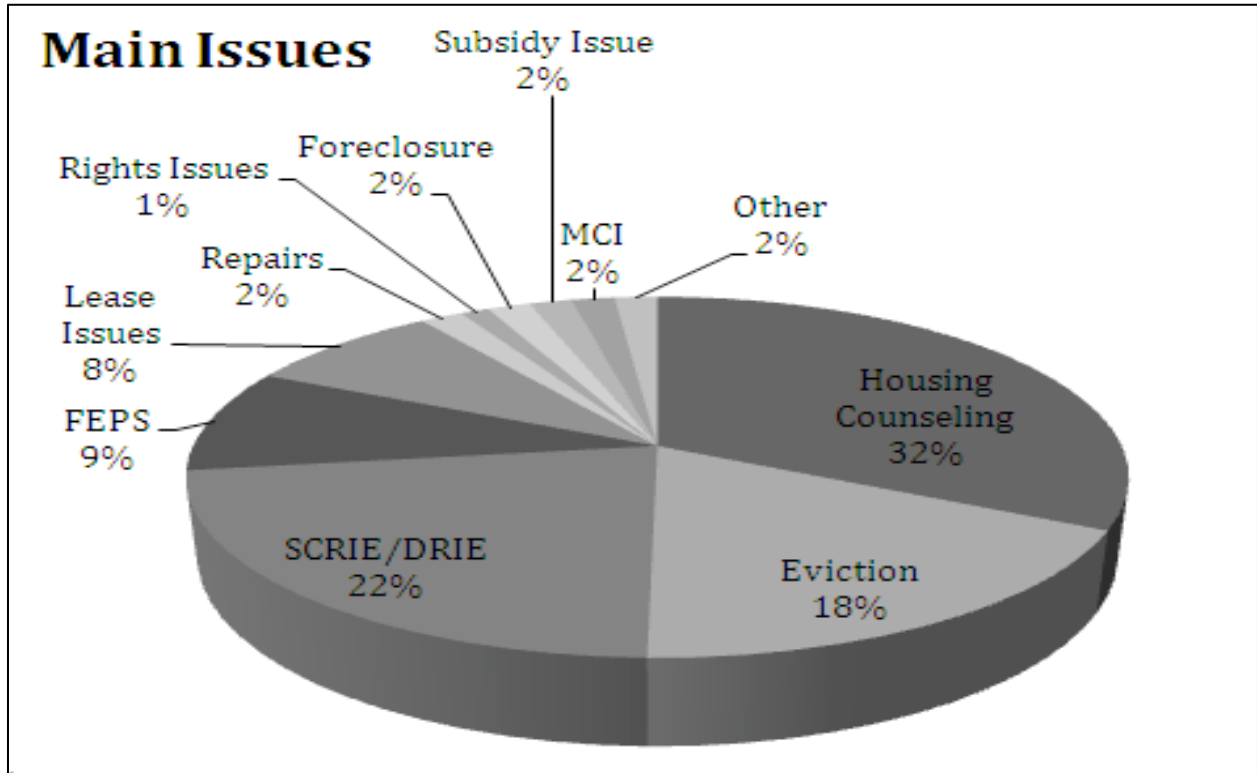


Fig. 3, Main Issues

## What Issues Are Clients Facing?

Of the many housing issues that QCH deals with, the most common practice is housing counseling (making up nearly one third of all of the cases in the database). The broad issue of housing counseling involves many different types of advisement. One of the main tasks completed within “housing

counseling” is helping clients apply for New York City Housing Authority’s (NYCHA) public housing. Currently, 629,345 New Yorkers are living in NYCHA’s public housing and Section 8 programs<sup>9</sup>; 22 of those developments, with a total of 17,125

<sup>9</sup> New York City Housing Authority, *NYCHA Housing Fact Sheet*, April 16, 2012  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/html/about/factsheet.shtml>

apartments, are located in Queens.<sup>10</sup> NYCHA's public housing, however, is extremely hard to get into due to the lack of affordable housing throughout New York City. As of February 2012, there were 163,965 families on the waiting list for public housing, and almost 7,000 more in the certification process. Unfortunately, Queens Community House can only help families apply for NYCHA and cannot really do much else; the families must follow the same process as every other applicant. Housing counseling at QCH also includes services such as help clients review a lease before signing it and advising them on how to deal with other housing situations.

The second most commonly addressed issue is SCRIE/DRIE. SCRIE (Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption) and DRIE (Disability Rent Increase Exemption) are similar programs aimed at helping senior citizens and disabled people making their rent and therefore, avoiding eviction. Both SCRIE and DRIE have eligibility requirements, like a certain level of income, and a very specific application process. The Housing Department assists with all aspects of the process, including

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<sup>10</sup> New York City Housing Authority, *NYCHA Housing Fact Sheet*, April 16, 2012  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/html/about/factsheet.shtml>

determining eligibility, filling out applications, and applying for renewals or modifications (when necessary). The clients that reported their SCRIE results, including those that applied for the first time, for modifications and renewals, received an average of \$2,804.47 per case. SCRIE and DRIE benefits are sent on a monthly basis and are valid as long as the current lease is; for this reason, some client's leverage equals to a much larger number than others, especially if the client applies for SCRIE/DRIE at the beginning of a two-year lease.

The third biggest issue was eviction. As discussed previously, Queens Community House has an Homelessness Prevention program specifically for family eviction cases. The cases filed as FEPS (Family Eviction Prevention Supplement) could also be considered part of the larger category of eviction. Eligible families (receiving public assistance, have been sued by landlord for non-payment of rent, meet the rent limits for the family size, etc.) are able to receive a one-time payment, up to \$7,000, of rent arrears and a monthly housing supplement for five years.<sup>11</sup> Of the clients who received

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<sup>11</sup> Earn Benefits NYC, *Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS)*,

FEPS, both new cases and modifications, an average of \$10,061.05 (per case) in arrears and monthly supplements was granted.

In terms of the other case types, the methods of helping clients solve their issues are done on a case-by-case issue. Some clients are referred to other services, such as HomeBase NYC, and others are provided with the proper information or resources to deal with their issues (i.e. how to contact their landlord about a bedbug or repair issue).

## **Conclusion**

In the last six months, the Housing Department of Queens Community House has seen a wide variety of housing issues, from a wide variety of clients. Most recently, the department has had to deal with Hurricane Sandy relief, making it more difficult to work on all of the other client cases. In today's current economic climate, programs like the Housing Department, and more specifically the Homelessness Prevention program, are providing a service that the city is not able to. There is a serious lack of affordable housing in New York City, which is evident by the amount of people in shelters, as well as the amount of people on the waiting list for NYCHA; in 2009, an

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<http://newyork.earnbenefits.org/page.php?pageID=662>

average of 35,915 persons stayed in city shelters, a 7% increase from the previous year.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the Housing Opportunity Index (HOI) found that only 20% of New York City's housing was affordable to households with median income;<sup>13</sup> most New Yorkers were paying nearly 50% of their annual income for housing alone.

Organizations, like Queens Community House, are extremely important to help New Yorkers become more stable, self-sufficient, and put them in a generally safe situation. Furthermore, it is also vital to have organizations that are specific to boroughs and neighborhoods, as citywide initiatives are not usually aimed towards these smaller demographics. It is imperative that city officials fight to keep funding available for these programs, or more New Yorkers will end up in shelters or on the streets. Without the support of these funds, Queens Community House would no longer be able to help people create secure environments for themselves and their families.

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<sup>12</sup> 2010 Income and Affordability Study, NYC Rent Guidelines Board, [http://www.housingnyc.com/downloads/research/pdf\\_reports/ia10.pdf](http://www.housingnyc.com/downloads/research/pdf_reports/ia10.pdf) Page 3

<sup>13</sup> 2010 Income and Affordability Study, NYC Rent Guidelines Board, Page 10.

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Urban Studies 370 Semester Project

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