

# Helpful Information for Communities

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



What laws apply to the siting of a community residence?

Are people who are considered to be dangerous moved into DCF homes?

If a group home moves into my neighborhood, will my property values go down?

Are all group homes, DCF group homes?

Will they pose a threat to my family's safety?

*If your child or adolescent had a behavioral health challenge, how would you feel if you heard people say, “I don’t want them living near me,” “Those children are dangerous,” “Once they move in, my property values will go down,” or “No thanks, not in my neighborhood.”*

**Unfortunately, children and youth with behavioral health challenges and their families hear these words all too often.**

The fact is, children and youth with these challenges have been living in community programs such as group homes and apartments across New Jersey for years. They have been living, going to school, making friends, going to church – in short, living their lives – just like all of us.

These children and youth deserve a home of their own, and all of us have an obligation to abide by the federal law that protects their right to live where they choose, without discrimination.

Today, their success stories are played out every day in homes across New Jersey – homes with a proven track record for being good neighbors.

So, consider this: if your child or adolescent had a behavioral health challenge wouldn’t you like them to have the chance to be a good neighbor, too?

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) develops community homes for children and youth who need supervision. In the past, these children and adolescents either lived at home with their families or were sent to institutions. But as we learned more about behavioral health issues, we also learned that most of the children and youth do not have to live in large institutions, segregated from the rest of society. They can lead happy, productive lives and become contributing members of society, if given the chance and the proper support services.

Before a child or adolescent moves into one of these homes, he or she is carefully evaluated by a team of doctors and professionals who have experience and expertise. In addition, services that are tailored to fit each child’s needs must be in place.

Programs are staffed 24 hours a day so that we can be sure that community homes are well run, well maintained and provide children and youth with the services they need to live safely and successfully in the community. DCF pays local community agencies to operate these community homes. These agencies must adhere to strict licensing requirements and are inspected to meet quality care and safety standards.

When choosing a location, DCF requires its community agencies to ensure that the location of their home will positively influence the residents’ quality of life. The agencies also consider the location of other DCF residences in the community, to ensure that homes for children and youth with behavioral health challenges are available statewide.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q** If a group home moves into my neighborhood, will my property values go down?

**A.** There is an overwhelming volume of evidence that these homes do not significantly impact property values. In a review of 47 studies from 1973 – 1993, researchers found that property values remain unaffected by homes for people with disabilities. The studies also revealed that group homes do not make properties close to the homes harder to sell.<sup>1</sup>

For example: Julian Wolpert, Princeton University, studied the impact of group homes for people with mental retardation in 10 New York State communities and compared the findings with 42 other communities without group homes. Wolpert found that there was no significant difference in property values and no decline in the value of adjacent properties in the study area.<sup>2</sup>

Another study of property market activity around 12 Philadelphia mental health facilities also concluded that no decline in sales prices occurred due to the presence of community homes.<sup>3</sup>

The Community Services Information Program reviewed a total of 58 studies, spanning nearly two decades, from 1970-1989. The research reviewed consistently demonstrated that group homes have not negatively impacted property values or property turnover rates.<sup>4</sup>

Among these studies, S. Breslow, Princeton University, reviewed the impact of 16 community residences for the developmentally disabled, mentally ill, veterans, neglected children and the elderly on the real estate market in White Plains, NY. He found that the homes did not depress property values and, in some cases, caused appreciation of property values.<sup>5</sup> (Believed to be the result of renovations to the homes.)

In Stamford, Connecticut, property values in eight neighborhoods with group homes were compared to 23 neighborhoods without group homes. The group homes housed chronically mentally ill and mentally retarded adults, homeless families, adolescent males and recovering alcoholics. The researchers concluded that the data provided strong evidence that group homes have no effect on property values.<sup>6</sup>

**Q** Are people who are considered to be dangerous moved into DCF homes? Will they pose a threat to my family's safety?

**A.** No. The Department of Children and Families takes its responsibility to New Jersey communities and the vulnerable people we serve very seriously.

DCF has a track record of providing safe, quality residential programs in local communities. These homes are just like any other, except that there is an agency operating the home whose staff members assist the residents. As part of their contract obligation to the department, community agencies are responsible for maintaining the home and property, as well as for assisting or supervising the residents.

Specific licensing requirements for health and safety safeguard DCF residents. The homes are licensed and inspected regularly by DCF. The department requires its contract agencies to adhere to an ongoing system of reporting and monitoring, which means any problems in the home can be quickly detected and resolved.

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1. Michael Dear, Robert Wilton (1996) "The Question of Property Values," Campaign for New Community, Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, 1419 V Street NW, Washington, DC 20009. 2. Wolpert, Julian (1978) "Group Homes for the Mentally Retarded: An Investigation of Neighborhood Property Impacts," prepared for NY Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities; Princeton University. 3. Dear, Michael (1977) "Impact Of Mental Health Facilities On Property Values" Community Mental Health Journal, 13:150-157. 4. Community Services Information Program (1990) There Goes the Neighborhood. White Plains, NY. 5. Breslow, S. (1976) "The Effect of Siting Group Homes on Surrounding Environs." Princeton University. 6. Coleman, A. (1989). "The Effect of Group Homes on Residential Property Values in Stamford, Connecticut." Stamford Connecticut. St. Lukes Community Services.

## Q Are all group homes, DCF group homes?

A. Not all group homes or apartment programs are funded by DCF. Many religious organizations or other private entities operate community residences, as do other departments of state government, such as the Department of Human Services, the Department of Community Affairs and the Department of Corrections.

## Q What laws apply to the siting of a community residence?

A. The Federal Fair Housing Act (42 U.S.C. 3601 et seq.):

- Prohibits local zoning rules to discriminate in housing opportunities for the disabled;
- Makes it unlawful to deny a dwelling to any buyer or renter because of a handicap.

The Municipal Land Use Law (N.J.S.A. 40:55 D-66.1 and 66.2):

- Requires all residential districts in the State to permit new community residences.
- Specifically protects community residences that are licensed by the State
- Prohibits municipal authorities from excluding group homes from their communities (S.210); and requires handicapped individuals to be placed in community residences whenever possible (N.J.S.A.30:6-D-13 and N.J.S.A. 30:11B-1)
- In addition, State Statute (N.J.S.A. 30:11-B-5) ensures that homes for the handicapped are geographically “available throughout the State without unnecessary concentration.” These living arrangements are established in N.J. S. A. 30:11B-1 et. seq. Stringent standards for opening, licensing and operating a community residence are delineated in N.J.A.C. 10:44A.

## Q Does DCF only fund homes in particular areas?

A. DCF has group homes and out-of-home treatment homes available in every county of the state. Some communities may have more homes than others because the characteristics of the area may make it more attractive to the future residents. Closeness to family members, school, transportation, shopping, churches or synagogues and, of course, the cost of the home are all considerations, as well.

## Q Why aren't communities informed when a group home is moving into the area?

A. Because it is against the law to do so. Homes for people with disabilities share the same rights as everyone else in choosing where to live. The Federal Fair Housing Act was originally created to protect the rights of people being discriminated against based on race from living where they choose. In 1988, the Act was extended to specifically include people with disabilities. Once a home has settled into a neighborhood, community members find that it is just like any other home in the community.

## Q Who do I call if I have questions about a community residence in my neighborhood?

A. Contact the agency that operates the home, or call: DCF's Division of Child Behavioral Health Services at 609-888-7200.