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## **RESIDENT ADVISOR / RESIDENT SERVICES COORDINATOR**

### **Description:**

Public policymakers, service providers, and consumers strive to promote the ability of older people to successfully "age in place," even into the frail elderly years. Across the country, multi-unit housing developments (both senior housing and age-integrated family housing) are increasingly employing a Resident Advisor (RA) or a Resident Services Coordinator (RSC) as an adjunct to management staff to coordinate activities and services for those aging tenants whose ability to continue living independently has been comprised by frailties and impairments. Reports and evaluations of this strategy conclude that this is the most flexible, effective, and cost-efficient means to:

- Support the ability of aging tenants to continue living where they are safely and appropriately;
- Relieve the housing manager from spending increasing amounts of time performing non-traditional management tasks as the needs of aging tenants increase;
- Reduce unnecessary and costly tenant turnover rates; and
- Contain the inadvertent deterioration of the physical building when frail elderly residents can no longer attend to routine apartment maintenance.

**History—** In 1977, in response to growing service needs among the thousands of aging tenants in the New York City Housing Authority's (NYCHA) multi-unit senior housing buildings, Kallia Boxer, NYCHA's Aging Services Coordinator, first conceived and designed the strategy of employing a Senior Resident Advisor (SRA) as an adjunct to housing management staff. She demonstrated and evaluated the SRA program through a three-year grant from the federal Administration on Aging. Boxer's model, which continues in 24 of NYCHA's buildings today, includes these features:

- The program is available to tenants 24 hours a day, and SRAs act as friends and confidants to tenants, facilitate linkages and referrals to all levels of community-based services and agencies, monitor the delivery of services by outside providers, provide respite services as surrogate family members, provide ombudsman advocacy, help tenants with family communication, and maintain a community resource directory;
- A paraprofessional SRA is located in each senior housing building; the SRA is trained and acts in consultation with and under the supervision of the professional social worker in NYCHA's central office;

- The SRA in each building is a tenant who lives in the building and who is chosen through a careful selection process to possess strong inter-personal, communication, listening, facilitation, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, as well as the ability to strictly maintain confidences and privacy; and
- There is a volunteer Floor Captain on each floor of a building, who functions as a vital communication network for the program, checking daily on the well-being of other tenants on the floor and referring problems to the SRA.

Boxer subsequently developed the Seniors Safe At Home Program, which extended the Senior Resident Advisor Program's service delivery framework to serve elderly residents in NYCHA's age-integrated family apartments.

In the early 1990s, the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) and the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) sought to encourage the replication or adaptation of Kallia Boxer's model as an effective means to: (1) support the ability of aging multi-unit housing residents to continue living where they were, and (2) address the growing aging-related challenges and burdens facing managers as the number of aging tenants in all multi-unit housing significantly increased. NYSOFA received a federal Administration on Aging grant to implement the New York State Resident Advisor Program (RAP) and, in conjunction with DHCR and the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, trained senior housing and multi-family housing managers across the State in all aspects of the RAP strategy.

At the same time, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded the development and evaluation of ten demonstration programs across the country to test the feasibility of service coordination in multi-unit buildings, all of which included the concept of employing a trained individual (Resident Service Coordinator) as an adjunct to management staff, and whose responsibility was to address the non-management, aging-related issues of elderly tenants. In 1990, the federal Service Coordinator Program was established, which authorized the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to allow service coordination as an eligible activity for elderly persons and younger-aged persons with disabilities living in HUD-assisted projects financially supported under the Sections 202, 221(d), 236 and Section 8 Programs. HUD funds Service Coordinators three ways: (1) limited funding through a national competition, (2) the use of a development's residual receipts or excess income, or (3) application for a budget-based rent increase or special rent adjustment. HUD subsequently began allowing Service Coordinators to serve low-income elderly and disabled persons living in the vicinity surrounding their multi-unit development.

Rapid expansion of the use of RAs and RSCs across the country can be explained by the concept's design-flexibility and cost-efficiency, as well as high consumer satisfaction and managers' strong acknowledgement of the value of the program. Use has spread among both market-rate and subsidized multi-unit housing—in both senior and age-integrated housing.

The huge size of the New York City Housing Authority (240 buildings) lent itself to Boxer's pyramid model of a central-office supervising professional social worker, a paraprofessional Senior Resident Advisor in each individual building, and a volunteer Floor Captain on each floor of each building. However, most developments in other areas of the country consist of a single building, and the predominant RSC model involves the hiring of a single full-time or part-time RSC—with most housing operators hiring professional individuals who were trained or experienced in working with older people, and calling the position by a variety of names, such as assistant manager, tenant counselor, resident specialist, social worker, and others.

Over time, most service and housing providers have settled on using the term Resident Service Coordinator, and proponents have strongly advocated for recognizing service coordination as a profession and for bringing consistency to the job tasks and qualifications of RSCs. In 1999, the American Association of Service Coordinators was established, providing training, conferences, materials, a Web-based data management system, and a Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics booklet for RSCs across the country.

In a number of states, Resident Service Coordinators have organized into statewide associations, which provide training, conferences, materials, networking, and technical support for RSCs. Several state housing agencies have each developed their own RSC Manual of policies, procedures, and guidelines as a resource for Coordinators and property managers in their states; and some provide technical assistance in establishing an RSC program. Some states have defined an RSC program in law and provide grant funding to state-assisted rental housing for this position. In New York State, RSCs and RAs have organized into regional networking groups, but no cohesive statewide association has been established.

**Tasks and responsibilities of RSCs and RAs**—In New York, RAs and RSCs perform one or more of the following tasks and responsibilities:

- Program is available to residents up to 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Assess collective needs of the development's resident population.
- Advocate for/on behalf of residents.
- Establish and maintain networking relationships with community-based services and organizations.
- Provide residents with information and referral lists for community services.
- Check whether promised services from community agencies are being provided.
- Arrange for educational and socialization programs for residents.
- Active listening and informal counseling for residents with concerns or issues, such as grief and loss, interpersonal relations, family dynamics.

- Coordinate wellness fairs where healthcare providers offer free blood pressure screenings, cholesterol tests, nutrition counseling in the development for interested residents.
- Assist residents with such needs as reading and understanding utility bills and medical forms; filling out eligibility, entitlement program, and legal forms; sign up for discounted heating and phone services, etc.
- Bring in appropriate individuals who can regularly help residents with balancing check books or other personal finance issues, negotiate quantity discounts for residents with area businesses, etc.
- Help residents arrange for housekeeping, shopping, transportation, meals-on-wheels, cooking, laundry assistance.
- Promote interactions and shared activities among residents.
- Conduct orientation of new residents in the development.
- Help residents organize activities, library deliveries, purchase of a common computer, establishing religious services in the development.
- Help residents organize a residents' council.
- Provide resources for problem-solving, and help resolve conflicts between residents.
- Liaison with residents' families and informal caregivers.
- Establish a "buddy" program or crime watch program to enhance safety.
- Crisis intervention.
- Serve as a neutral liaison between residents and management, and promote effective communication between residents and management.
- On behalf of residents, bring tenant concerns and housing environment issues to management staff.
- Work with hospital discharge planners to make a transition back home go smoothly.
- Help tenants with eviction issues.
- Collaborate with family members and management to appropriately address situations where residents can no longer continue living in the development.

- Help residents when relocating to alternative living arrangements.

In other states, in addition to the activities and services listed above, RAs and RSCs also provide the following services:

- Conduct assessments of individual residents' needs.
- Case management.
- Formalized (through an agreement or contract) liaison with community-based service programs and organizations.
- Link residents to health and long-term care services in the wider community.
- Arrange for home a health aide, nursing services, physician appointments, or delivery and set-up of medical equipment.
- Coordinate and implement medical, psychological, and rehabilitative services.
- Formally monitor service-delivery arrangements and provide follow-up.

Across the country, as well as in New York, public policymakers strive to keep older people and people with disabilities in conventional housing for as long as possible. These policies have had a major impact on (1) the character of multi-unit housing populations, and (2) the tasks and responsibilities required for managing these buildings. The RA and RSC strategy has been shown to be the most programmatically effective and most cost-efficient means for addressing these two impacts.

**Benefits:**

*For older people:*

- Extends successful aging in place, which is a primary preference of older people.
- Delays or eliminates relocation to costly health or long-term care facilities.
- In family multi-unit buildings, allows older tenants to continue living in an age-integrated living environment, which is a major preference of older people.
- Increases the safety of the living environment.
- Each program's design is based upon the unique needs and preferences of the program's client population.

*For younger-aged people with disabilities:*

- Supports the ability of people with disabilities to live in conventional housing units.
- Supports a consumer-directed approach to service choice, access, and usage, which is a primary preference of people with disabilities.

*For family caregivers:*

- Supplements and supports the substantial efforts of family caregivers.

*For housing owners and managers:*

- Reduces costly apartment turnover.
- Reduces deterioration of the physical building.
- Allows managers to focus their effort and time on traditional management tasks and responsibilities, and decreases the manager's role in actively assuming non-traditional tasks, activities, and services.
- Reduces tenant complaints and chronic requests.
- Provides a moderating influence in the development, maintaining overall tenant stability, increasing tolerance and understanding among tenant age groups, and reducing friction and active conflict between individual tenants and among tenant groups.

**Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:**

- For market-rate housing, the cost of an RA or RSC is borne through rent charges, which is a feasible system. However, for subsidized housing, the cost of an RA or RSC is typically not accepted as an eligible line item in the development's operating budget and, thus, is not factored into the rent structure, leaving managers to rely on a development's limited reserve funds or residual receipts or the limited competitive funds of HUD's federal Service Coordinator Program to cover the cost of the RA/RSC position.

**Resource—examples:**

- Resident Service Advisor: The Beverwyck, market-rate supportive senior housing, 40 Autumn Drive, Slingerlands, New York, 12159, 518-451-2103.
- Resident Services Coordinator: Embury Apartments, subsidized independent senior housing, 133 Lawrence Street, Saratoga Springs, New York, 12866, 518-587-3301.
- Resident Advisor: New York City Housing Authority, public housing (senior and multi-family), central office: 250 Broadway, New York City, 10007. Senior Resident Advisor Programs: contact the Social Services office in: The Bronx, 718-409-8699; Brooklyn, 718-498-3243; Manhattan, 212-334-2506; Queens, 718-206-3286; Staten Island, 718-816-1521.
- Resident Services Coordinator: Doubleday Woods, subsidized independent senior housing, 91 Church Avenue, Ballston Spa, New York, 12020, (518) 885-1900.

### Resource—written and web:

- State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development: Public Act 98-263 (Chapter 128 of the laws of 2005) created the Resident Service Coordinator Program and provides general fund appropriations to sponsors of state-assisted rental housing for seniors.  
<http://www.ct.gov/ecd/cwp/view.asp?a=1096&Q=256916>.
- Tenant Assistance Program (August, 2008), *Massachusetts Resident Service Coordinator's Handbook*. Boston, MA: Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency. Includes job description and qualifications for service coordinators, as well as guidelines, policies, and forms for all aspects of establishing and operating a Resident Service Coordinator Program. <http://www.masshousing.com/>; on the home page, use the search button: type in Massachusetts Resident Service Coordinator's Handbook. Or, simply type the title into an Internet search button.
- New England Service Coordinators, Inc., whose mission is to expand and enhance the profession of Service Coordination throughout New England, through education, conferences, and training for service coordinators and property management professionals. <http://www.nerscinc.org/>. This site includes excellent written resource materials; on the home page, on site map on the left side, click "Resources": find links to the following comprehensive training manuals and articles:
  - V. Lysogorski, and D. Landry (April, 2008), *Resident Service Coordinator Training Manual*. Portland, Maine: Preservation Management, Inc., 177 High Street, 04101. Comprehensive guidelines, policies, procedures, and forms on all aspects of establishing and operating a resident service coordinator program.
  - Vermont Housing Finance Agency and Vermont Resident Service Coordinators, Inc. (September, 2008), *Vermont Resident Service Coordinator Resource Guide*. Comprehensive guidelines, policies, procedures, and forms on all aspects of establishing and operating a resident service coordinator program. This guide is also available on the Vermont Resident Service Coordinators, Inc., web site: <http://www.vrsc.org/>. Click on "Tools and Resources" on the homepage.
  - Alex Ruiz (June, 2007), "Results from Affordable Housing Study Demonstrate Cost Savings in Properties with Residents Services," *The Valuation Report*, Volume VI, Issue, VI. Publisher: Novogradac & Company LLP.
  - New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority (New Hampshire Housing) (January, 2009), *Resident Service Coordinator Manual*. Comprehensive guidelines, policies, procedures, and forms on all aspects of establishing and operating a resident service coordinator program. This guide is also available on the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority web site: <http://www.nhhfa.org/>; on the home page, type "Resident Service Coordinator Manual" into the search tool and press "search"; select "bp\_hspubs.cfm"; select "Resident Service Coordinator Manual" to see the manual.

- U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Multifamily Housing—Program Description, *Multifamily Housing Service Coordinators*.
  - [http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/housing/mfh/progdsc/servicecoord](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/housing/mfh/progdsc/servicecoord).
  - KRA Corporation (August, 1996), *Evaluation of the Service Coordinator Program, Vol. I—Study Findings*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Includes HUD's "Training Guidelines for Service Coordinators."  
<http://www.huduser.org/Publications/pdf/HUD7316.pdf>.
  - KRA Corporation (August, 1996), *Evaluation of the Service Coordinator Program, Vol. II—Case Studies*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.  
<http://www.huduser.org/Publications/pdf/HUD7316.pdf>.
- American Association of Service Coordinators, whose mission is to advance the interests of the service coordinator profession and provide guidance in the creation and maintenance of service-enhanced housing through leadership, education, training, conferences, networking, advocacy and other services. Web site includes numerous technical assistance resource documents.  
<http://www.servicecoordinator.org/>.
- Massachusetts Association of Resident Services Coordinators, Inc., a professional, nonprofit corporation whose mission is to promote the role of Resident Service Coordinators in the housing community and to provide professional development, certification, and resources to Resident Service Coordinators (RSCs) and others interested in this field.  
<http://www.marschlink.net/>.
- D. Meyer, T. Britt, S. Cardenas, D. Fromm, I. Kennedy, P. Magnuson, and R. Petersen (2006) (Editor: Catherine Hyde), *Creating Opportunities for Families Through Resident Services: A Practitioner's Manual—Guidance and Resources for Offering Effective Services to Residents*. Columbia, MD: Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. Funded through FreddieMac. Available for free downloading at:  
[http://www.enterprisecommunity.org/resources/publications\\_catalog/#resident](http://www.enterprisecommunity.org/resources/publications_catalog/#resident).
- Tony Proscio (2006), *More Than Roof and Walls: Why Resident Services are an Indispensable Part of Affordable Housing*. Columbia, MD: Enterprise Community partners, Inc. Funded through FreddieMac. Available for free downloading at:  
<http://www.enterprisecommunity.com/knowledge-central/publications-catalog/resident-services>.