



HARVEST COMMONS

Housing, Health, and Financial
Security Under One Roof

July 2015

**SOCIAL IMPACT
RESEARCH CENTER**
A HEARTLAND ALLIANCE PROGRAM

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This report is available online at:
http://socialimpactresearchcenter.issuelab.org/resource/harvest_commons_housing_health_and_financial_security_under_one_roof_1

HARVEST COMMONS

HOUSING, HEALTH, AND FINANCIAL SECURITY UNDER ONE ROOF

Harvest Commons is a rehabilitated historic property in Chicago owned by Heartland Housing, offering affordable housing and onsite supportive services from partners Heartland Human Care Services, Heartland Health Outreach, and St. Leonard's Ministries. This partnership of housing and supportive services is referred to in this report as one program, Harvest Commons. The program provides the usual services and amenities of typical supportive housing, but many additional offerings make it a unique model. These special features help to contribute to the health and well-being of residents and to the community.

The physical building itself is the cornerstone of the program and a fundamental piece of what makes the whole so special. Originally opened in 1930 as the 175-room Union Park Hotel, its long history in the community is significant. At that time, the large art deco building brought color and new life to an aging neighborhood, but over the years it changed ownership and fell into disrepair, eventually becoming a blemish on the community. As the Viceroy Hotel since 1963, it had turned into a dangerous and unsanitary transient hotel until it finally closed in 2004 and was taken over by the city.

It wasn't until 2009 that Heartland Housing and First Baptist Congregational Church were awarded the contract through a competitive bid process and began the hard work of rehabbing that was necessary to make it the beautiful living space it is today. The historical features, such as the colorful terra cotta on the façade and the detailed plaster work in the first floor lobby and common room, were carefully preserved in the process. Heartland Housing also incorporated many elements to make the building its greenest property to date at that point, earning an Enterprise Green Community certification. Other building features, such as a commercial-grade teaching kitchen and community garden, support residents' health and well-being.

The building opened to new residents in 2013 with 89 studio apartments and common space on the first and second floors. These efforts to provide a high quality, aesthetically pleasing living environment to a vulnerable population embody Heartland's mission to advance everyone's human right to housing and treat everyone with dignity.

On-site staff and services are the other essential piece of the program. Living at Harvest Commons, residents have access to:

- case management
- clinical counseling
- nutrition and diet counseling and cooking classes from a dietitian
- an urban farm where they can both volunteer and receive fruit, produce, and eggs
- computer classes and internet access in the first floor computer lab
- financial literacy workshops and a matched savings program
- health care services from a community nurse
- job readiness and job search support from an employment specialist

This unique mix of supportive services is intended to have a robust impact on residents' success, and more specifically on their health. As an enhanced supportive housing program, it may serve as a model to learn from and to be replicated.

Evaluation of Harvest Commons

In order to learn from the unique program model, the Social IMPACT Research Center is conducting an implementation and outcomes evaluation of Harvest Commons. The evaluation involves a variety of methods including a resident survey that is administered every 6 months, program data analysis, interviews with residents, and interviews with program staff.

This is the first of two reports that will be produced for this evaluation. Data used in this report come from resident survey data collected in January 2015 and again in June 2015, program data from Heartland Housing and supportive services, and interviews with leadership and front-line program staff. In this report,

- data points created from *program data* will refer to 'participants' or 'residents' and
- data points created from *surveys* of 51 total resident participants will refer to 'respondents.'

The final report will include all of the above information as well as data from another round of survey collection, additional updated program data, interviews with residents, and interviews with additional program partners. That report will take a deeper analytical dive into the data, have more detailed information on program implementation and impacts, and give more detailed recommendations for the future. It will be released in early 2016.

Key Findings

1. Residents have faced many challenges in their past.
 - Nearly all respondents were homeless or in a temporary or tenuous situation before moving to Harvest Commons.
 - Many respondents have serious physical and mental health issues, like high blood pressure and depression.
 - Over half of respondents have a criminal background.
2. Harvest Commons is making a significant, meaningful impact on residents' lives, especially in a few key areas: stability and safety and health and wellness.
 - **Stability and safety:** *Since moving to Harvest Commons,*
 - Respondents' feelings of safety and support have improved drastically.
 - Life satisfaction and outlook for the future are much more positive.
 - Most residents have made progress or achieved goals in different life areas.
 - **Health and wellness:** *Since moving to Harvest Commons,*
 - Rates of health insurance coverage are much higher for respondents now than prior to living at Harvest Commons. This is crucial with the high prevalence of serious physical and mental health issues. High insurance coverage rates are likely key to the high percentage of those respondents who are getting all of the treatment that they need.
 - Utilization rates of high-cost health care, such as emergency room visits and hospitalizations are drastically reduced.
 - Respondents are eating more healthfully, are more physically active, and know more about diet and nutrition.
 - The vast majority of respondents have reached or made progress toward their health and nutrition goals.
3. BUT, there is still room for growth and improvement!
 - There are still some unmet needs. Though a minority of respondents, some do report difficulty in areas like financial literacy, nutrition, and legal issues, and not all are getting the help that they need. There are also some untreated health issues, as well as some unemployed respondents looking for work.
 - While a few services and activities are utilized by many residents and others appear to be highly utilized by a smaller number of residents, engagement could be increased.

HARVEST COMMONS: A BRIEF HISTORY



The hotel changes ownership over the years and falls into serious disrepair, becoming an unsanitary, dangerous transient hotel.

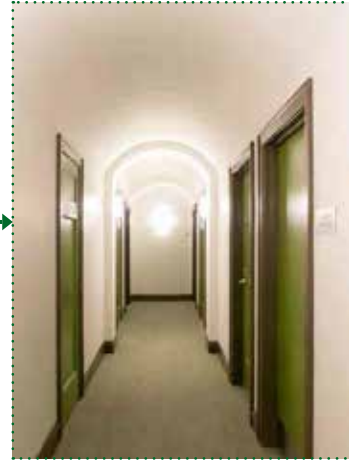
1930

The Union Park Hotel opens on the near west side with 175 rooms and a 'modernistic design.'



The City of Chicago Department of Housing and Economic Development selects Heartland Housing and First Baptist Congregational Church to rehabilitate the building and create supportive housing for some of the city's most vulnerable residents.

**HEARTLAND
ALLIANCE**
HOUSING



2006

2009 2010

2013



The Viceroy Hotel closes and the City of Chicago takes ownership of the building.



The building is designated a Chicago Landmark building and added to the National Register of Historic Places.



Harvest Commons opens to new residents.

HARVEST COMMONS: A SNAPSHOT



Succulent plants on the green roof reduce storm-water runoff.



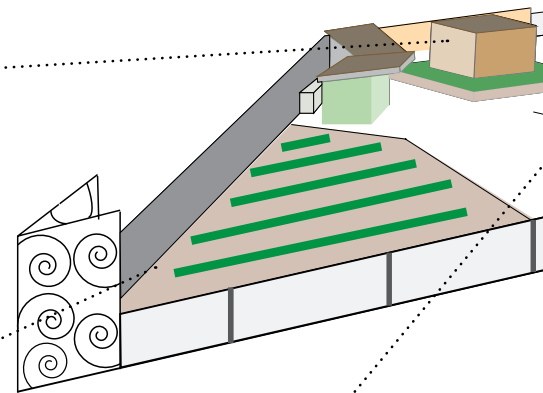
On floors 2-6, 89 studio apartments provide housing to individuals with low incomes who have experienced or have been at risk of homelessness.



The first floor has a commercial-grade teaching kitchen.

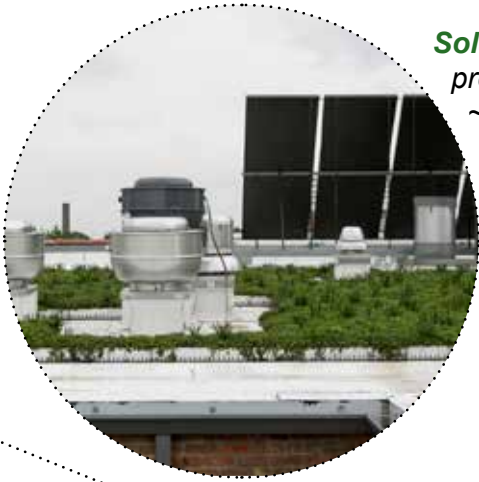


Residents can volunteer in the garden or to help care for the chickens or bees, which provide produce, eggs, and honey to residents.



Geothermal wells reduce energy use for heating and cooling.

Solar thermal panels provide energy for ~50 percent of the building's hot water supply.



The building's **terra-cotta** and **brick façades** and **original plaster architectural details** in the first floor lobby were restored and preserved.



The first floor has laundry facilities for residents, as well as a **computer lab** with internet access for residents.

The first floor houses office space for **Heartland Housing** property management and administration and supportive services, provided by:

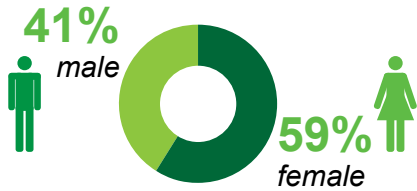
- **Heartland Human Care Services** staff (on-site part time), including supportive housing services specialists, a clinical counselor, an asset development coordinator, a community nurse, an urban agriculture coordinator, and an employment specialist
- a **Heartland Health Outreach** community dietitian
- **St. Leonard's Ministries** supportive programming

Gracie's Cafe, located on the first floor, is a **social enterprise** run by St. Leonard's Ministries.

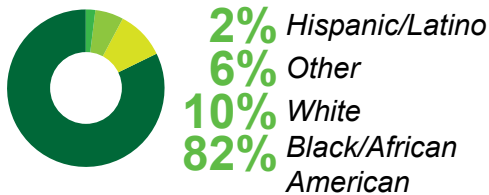


WHO LIVES AT HARVEST COMMONS? RESIDENT SNAPSHOT*

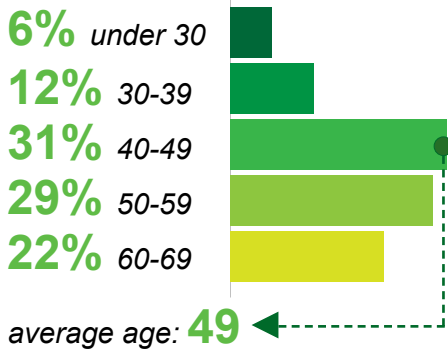
gender



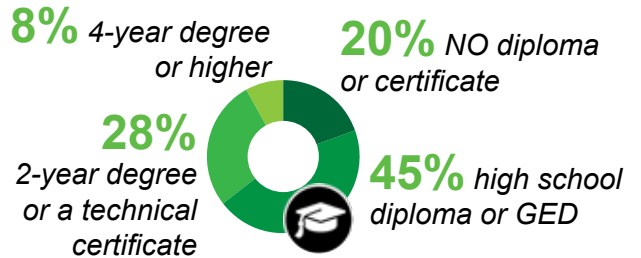
race/ethnicity



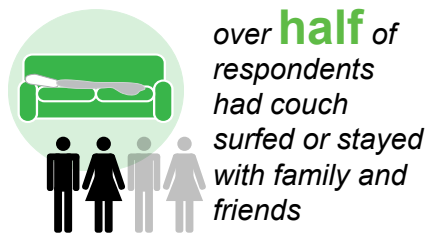
age



education



history of homelessness

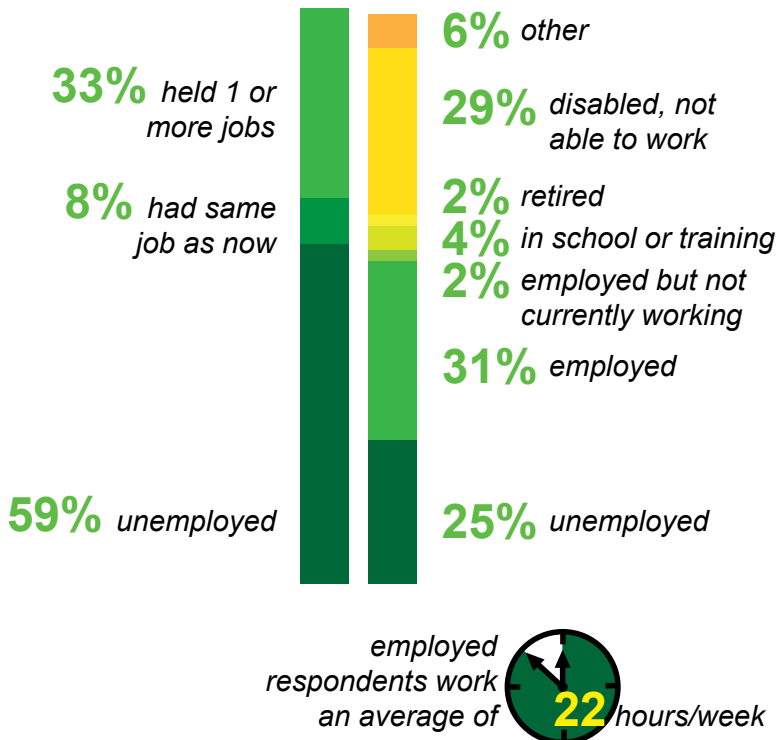


criminal record



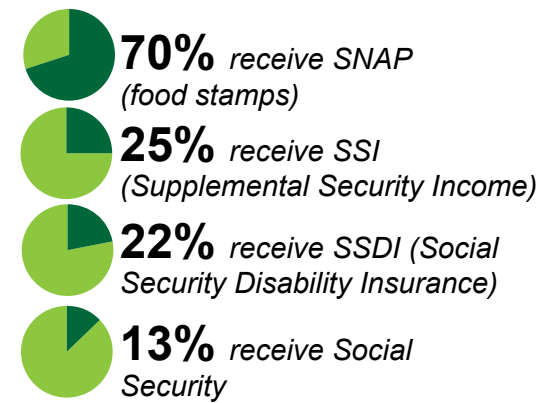
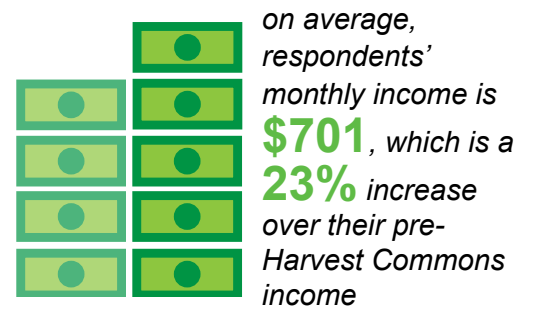
employment

in the 6 months before moving into Harvest Commons...



more than **2/3** of respondents had held a job for 3 or more years at some point in their lives

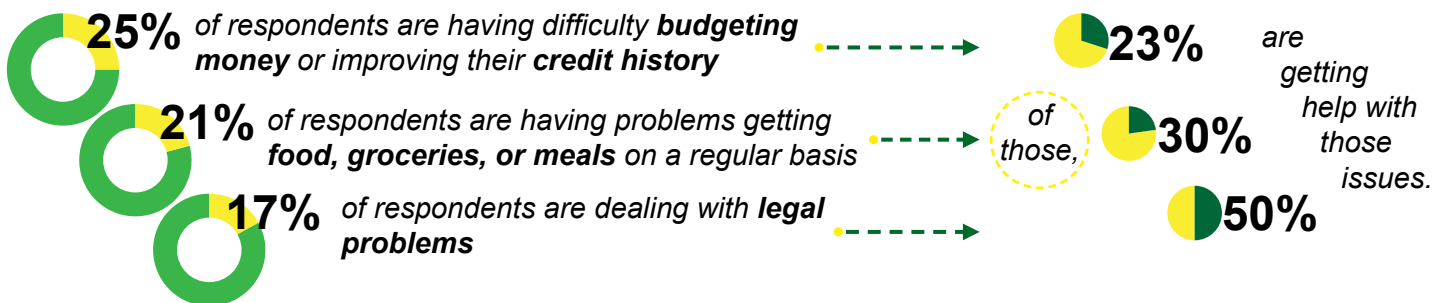
income



on average, residents pay



challenges

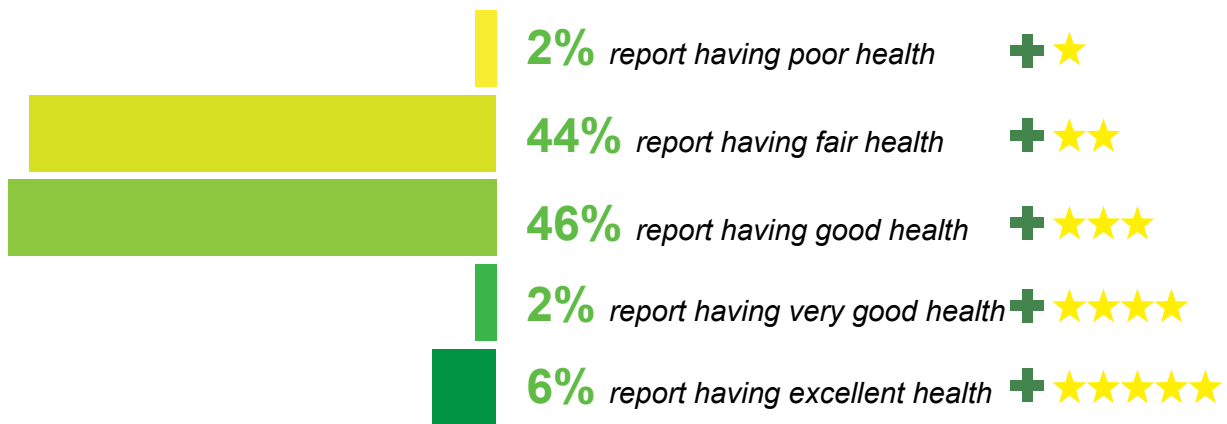


* All data points on the Resident Snapshot pages, except for rent data point, come from resident survey data.

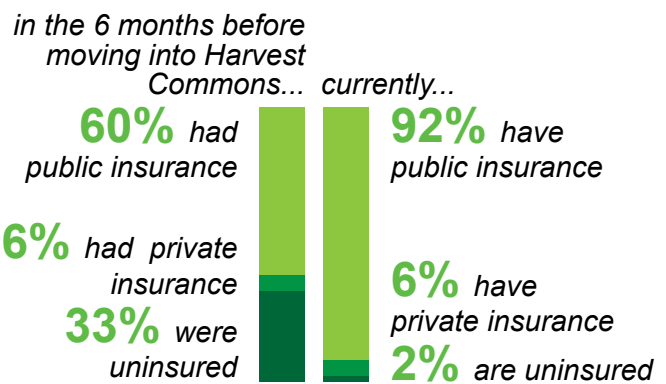


HEALTH FOCUS*

self-reported health



health insurance coverage



health care utilization

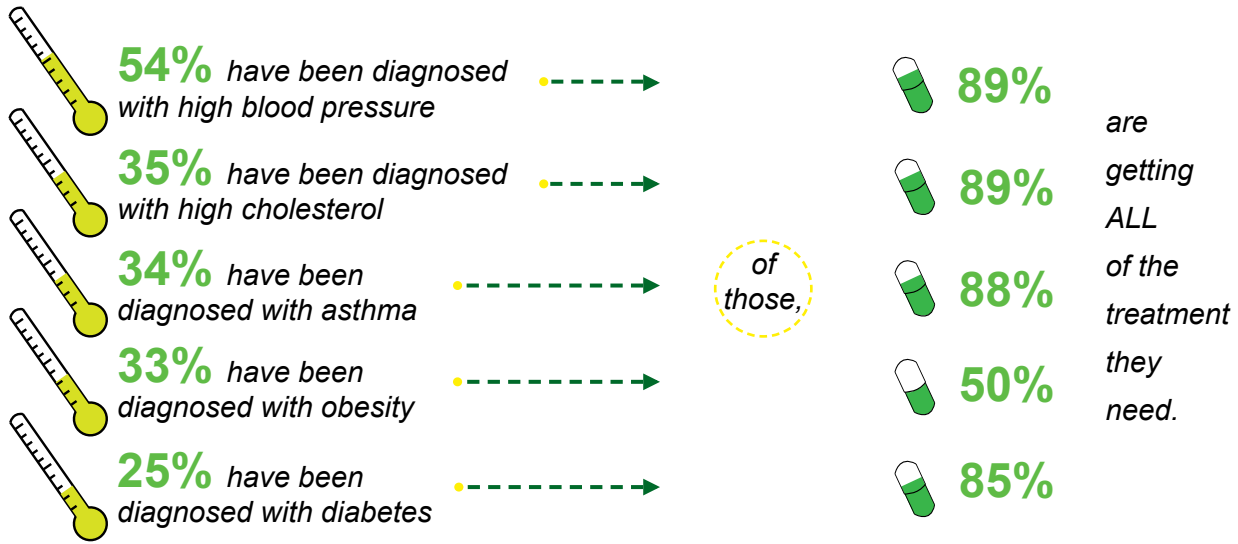
Respondents report using far fewer health care services now than they did prior to moving in.

For instance,

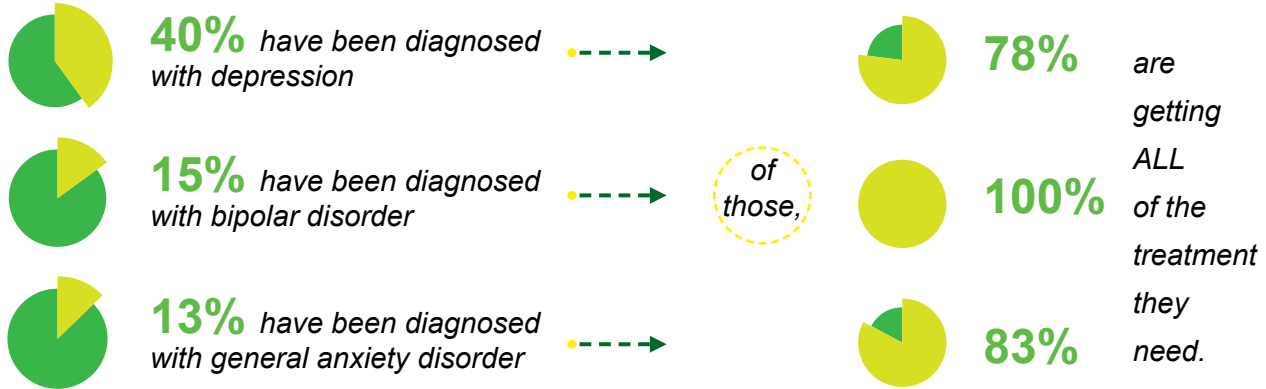
- ↓ there was a **55%** decrease in the average number of **emergency room visits** for an **emergency**.
- ↓ there was a **92%** decrease in the average number of **emergency room visits** for a **non-emergency**.
- ↓ there was an **84%** decrease in the average number of **medical hospitalizations**.
- ↓ there was a **100%** decrease in the average number of **psychiatric hospitalizations**.



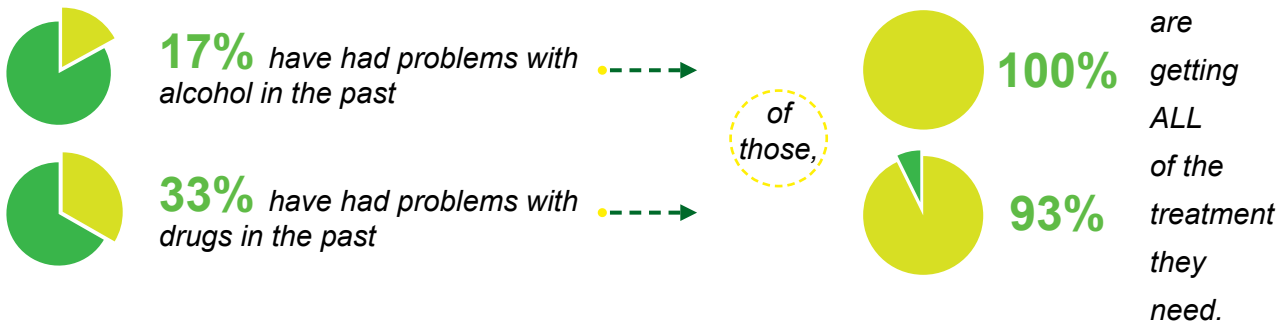
physical health



mental health

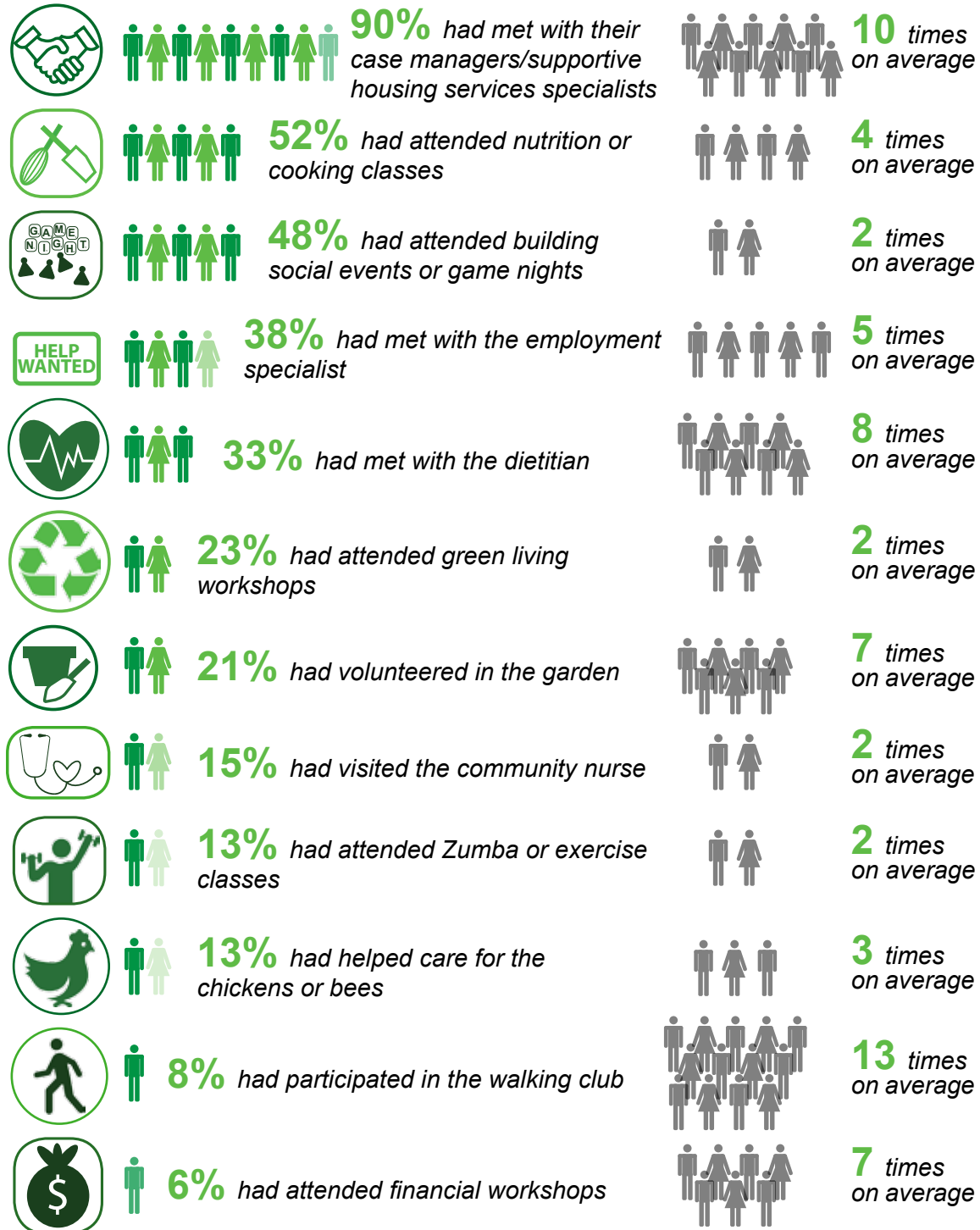


substance use



WHAT IS HAPPENING AT HARVEST COMMONS? SERVICES SNAPSHOT

Respondents report that in the first half of 2015,



top 5 supportive services utilized



#5

Transportation:

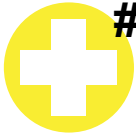
providing residents with CTA passes or taxi fares to get to other service locations.



#4

Advocacy/Intervention:

advocating on behalf of the residents to help them get the services they need.



#3

Health Services:

providing health/dental, HIV/AIDS related, and health and wellness services.



#2

Employment and Education Services:

providing or helping residents locate Adult Basic Education, vocational training, ESL, and job placement services.



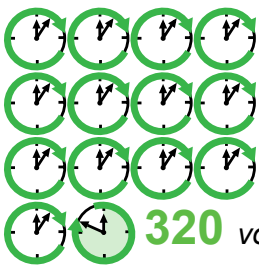
#1

Case Management/Counseling:

assisting residents in locating and obtaining supportive services, and providing individual or group counseling.

community gardening

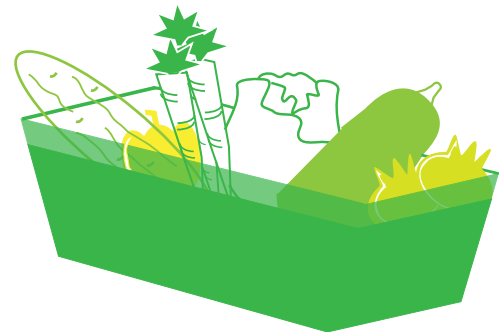
In fiscal year 2015...



320 volunteer hours were completed by
20 residents in the community garden



34 training sessions/
engagement events were held



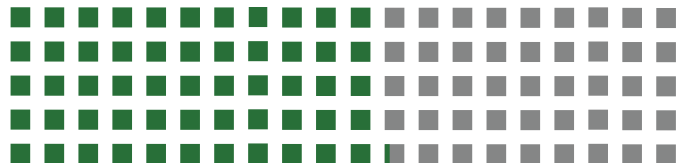
2,182 servings of vegetables and fruits were produced by the Harvest Commons garden

nutrition and cooking classes



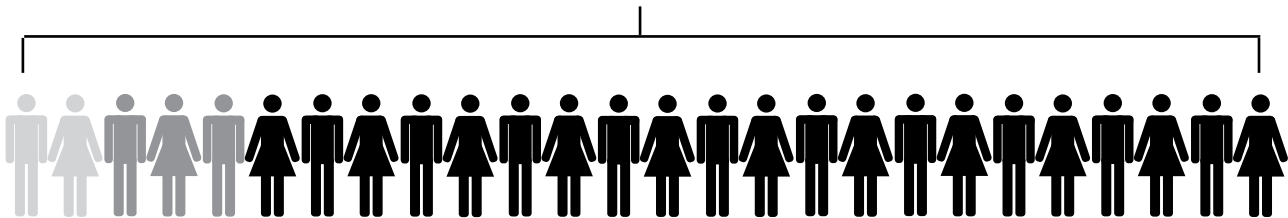
56%

of participants in the nutrition and cooking classes increased their knowledge of diet and nutrition.



mental health services

26 Residents have had a mental health assessment with the on-site clinical counselor.



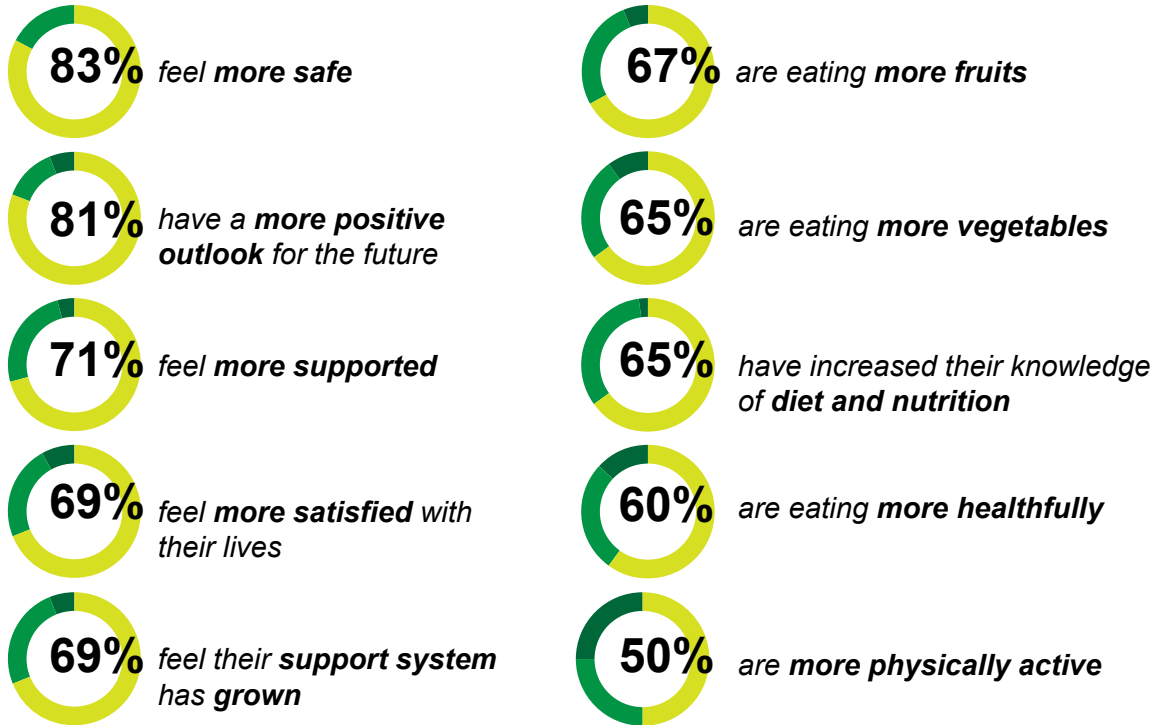
5 Residents have received, on average, 8 mental health therapy sessions.

2 Residents have received, on average, 4 drug abuse therapy sessions.

WHAT IS HARVEST COMMONS' IMPACT?

10 biggest impacts

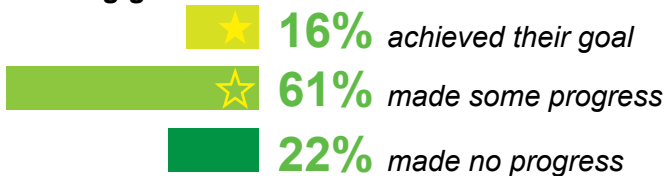
since living at Harvest Commons, respondents report that...



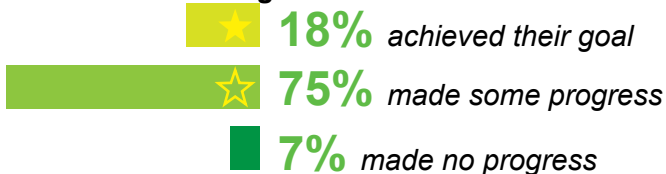
goal attainment

upon 6 month follow-up, respondents report...

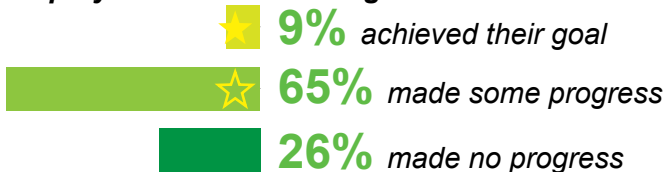
housing goals



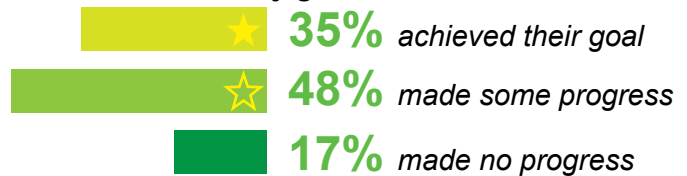
health & nutrition goals



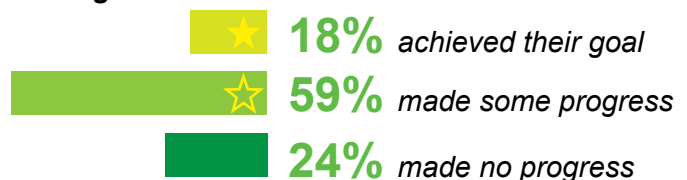
employment & education goals



social & community goals



other goals



KEY FINDINGS



1. Residents have faced many challenges in their past.
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 - There are still some unmet needs. Though a minority of respondents, some do report difficulty in areas like financial literacy, nutrition, and legal issues, and not all are getting the help that they need. There are also some untreated health issues, as well as some unemployed respondents looking for work.
 - While a few service and activities are utilized by many residents and others appear to be highly utilized by a smaller number of residents, engagement could be increased.

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

Moving forward, there are countless directions that the program could grow and evolve. Residents and staff alike had many ideas and suggestions for improving the program. Most fell into three general themes: communication, coordination, and innovation. These recommendations are intertwined and dependent on one another to be implemented effectively.

1. COMMUNICATE.

Leadership staff, frontline staff, and residents at Harvest Commons all cited a lack of consistent communication within the program as a roadblock to further success.

To the same end, when good communication does occur, great things happen. Strong communication between property management staff and supportive services staff can help prevent evictions and essentially keep residents housed. Consistent communication between residents and staff can increase engagement in services; residents who are aware of and engage in services generally love them. Engaged residents also create a community among themselves and take pride and ownership in their environment.

In order to promote communication at all levels, some processes should be put in place to outline expectations and accountability.

➔ Next steps:

- Increase staff-to-staff communication. Inspire a culture of cooperation in the Harvest Commons community by increasing proactive, positive communication among staff—both leadership and front line. This may mean creating an email listserv for everyone who works on-site, scheduling regular all-staff meetings, or planning periodic all-staff retreats. Staff are willing and eager to communicate more with one another, but without processes in place, they don't always have a clear path for doing so.
- Increase staff-to-participant communication. While there is generally very friendly and open communication among staff and residents in Harvest Commons, outreach and information sharing continues to be a challenge. Again, there is not always a clear process in place for this type of communication, so staff learn by trial and error, not necessarily reaching everyone they hope to. Creating standard mechanisms for strong communication can help overcome some of the barriers that staff face. This may mean creating things like a large calendar in a public space with activities and services posted, additional clear signage about when staff are on-site and what services they provide, a resident email listserv or newsletter, or periodic all-resident gatherings.
- Encourage participant-to-staff communication. Many residents have built relationships with staff and communicate frequently with them, but there are still some who are not as engaged or are unaware of everything available on-site. Increasing and improving staff-to-participant communication will likely naturally improve reciprocal communication, but creating more opportunities for rapport building, as outlined in the examples below could also help.
- Encourage and create opportunities for participant interaction and communication. Many of the services and activities offered on-site facilitate resident-to-resident communication and community building. Game nights, community dinners, and working in the garden all help to create a collegial environment where residents can share information and support one another. Creating more of these opportunities, such as barbeques, group outings, or social groups, and implementing the right mix of outreach and communication about them could help to foster that community.

2. COORDINATE.

The logical next step from communication is coordination. A great deal of the program's success is a result of coordination of services and activities. Many of the on-site service providers only receive participants through referrals from the supportive housing services specialists, so without that coordination, they could not be successful. The connection between the urban agriculture and nutrition programming has been very meaningful to many participants as they take part in growing the food that they then learn about and cook. With the additional communication outlined previously, coordination could increase dramatically and improve outcomes for residents.

➔ Next steps:

- As communication among staff increases, reserve time and space for staff to come together and brainstorm new *opportunities to connect services*.
- In those planning discussions, be mindful and strategic about logistics like shared space and resident outreach.
- Encourage staff to not only get involved in resident activities, but to contribute to planning and consider what they bring to the table.

3. INNOVATE.

As communication and coordination become stronger, there will be new opportunities for growth. Leadership staff, front line staff, and residents all have creative, exciting ideas for how the program could evolve and become even better. With increased communication and coordination, these ideas can be shared and hopefully brought to fruition.

➔ Next steps:

- As communication and coordination among staff and residents increase, reserve time and space to brainstorm new *ideas for innovation and improvements*.
- Create a space to collect and share ideas—both verbally and visually. This could be a community idea board, monthly group discussions with residents, or a taskforce of staff and residents that send updates to the rest of the building.
- Create a process for putting new ideas into action—an application or proposal form, a strategic planning session with follow-up dates, etc.

To put these ideas in motion, ownership and accountability will be key. The braiding of services offered by different providers is a big part of what makes Harvest Commons work, but it also poses challenges to aligning and streamlining communication, coordination, and innovation. Part of the challenge is that no one leader sits at the crux of all the program elements brought together at Harvest Commons, and so the shared responsibility of communicating, coordinating, and innovating can fall by the wayside or be inconsistent. The current program model and its impacts have the potential to exponentially grow under the guidance of a clear and consistent Harvest Commons leader who keeps an eye toward the big picture and helps staff across services make the necessary connections.

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