



Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association, Inc.

2014 Annual Report

2014 was an incredible year for Banana Kelly. The year was significant for so many reasons including the launching of new programs, hiring new staff, gaining new supporters, and providing new benefits that offer long term rewards for and impact on our community. The following is a review of our accomplishments during the year and a brief look at what is in store for 2015.



2014 Meet & Greet Honorees

- *Affordable Housing - Our affordable housing projects continue to expand. In 2014 we added two more projects, College Avenue (3 buildings/63 units) and the Simpson-Dawson (2 buildings/41 units) Street Project.*
- *MSC Program - In 2014 we were able to expand our services to families with developmentally disabled children. Currently we serve over 130 consumers in the Bronx and Upper Manhattan.*
- *RAP/Supportive Housing - This was our 17th year of providing a Supportive Housing Rental Assistance program. RAP targets homeless and disabled individuals. In 2014 we were able to serve over 35 families.*
- *Case Management - We work with Banana Kelly residents to ensure receipt of all available services and provide linkage to other supportive programs. We increased our efforts this past year to serve many of our residents.*
- *Green Infrastructure - In 2014 we installed green elements at three sites within our portfolio: with our most ambitious project at the five buildings along Kelly Street.*
- *Community Outreach and Resident Council - This year our community organizers began the critical process of expanding resident leadership through a council of residents pulled from our buildings to assist us in program development/monitoring, assist with policy development and become involved with public policy advocacy directly affecting their lives. The Resident Council is member-led, meaning that members decide the direction, goals and actions of the group with the assistance from our community organizers.*
- *ESL - We continue to partner with New York City Communities for Change to provide ESL classes to our residents.*
- *Summer Camp and After School - After another successful Summer Camp Banana Kelly expanded into a full year after school program for our area children.*
- *AmeriCorps - In 2014 we had the honor of having three AmeriCorps volunteers assisting us in our outreach, organizing and environmental efforts.*

Affordable Housing: Our affordable housing portfolio continues to expand. Banana Kelly now oversees over 1,240 low-income housing units. Throughout our organization's history, we have focused our energies, resources and programs around critical housing needs. And where at our inception the housing challenge was framed by disinvestment, abandonment, and arson -- the pressing current challenge is framed by decreasing affordability, over-leveraging, speculation, , irresponsible ownership, and displacement priorities motivated by potential rent increases at any cost. To address these and other related challenges Banana Kelly consistently provides rent concessions to over-burdened by rent increases wherever possible, provides ongoing case management services to residents to prevent evictions and has undertaken efforts over the past several years to work with banks, foundations, community institutions and residents themselves to remove ownership from these modern-day speculators and move buildings into the hands of responsible owners.

Banana Kelly's model for the redevelopment of distressed, over-leveraged properties is ground breaking given the scope of the problems and the comprehensive collaboration among all of the parties involved. This collaborative group includes the city, both as emergency responders and lead financing entity; community group organizing efforts undertaken by Banana Kelly; court intervention to put interim control in the hands of a responsible Administrator; private investors; the assistance provided by outside agencies, including New York Community Trust, LISC and the National Equity Fund; and construction lenders. However, as unique as this mechanism may seem, we have seen the opportunities to capture buildings out of the speculative market shrink as owners "bet on the Bronx," banking on the opportunity to profit off of speculation. So, between the aggressive efforts of HPD's enforcement programs and the aggressive organizing not only by Banana Kelly, but by groups like CASA and Mothers on the Move, many of the worst landlords have been driven out of business and we are left with speculative landlords who do just enough repairs to maintain their ownership until they can "flip" the properties for a huge profit.



Still, we have made a real difference in the lives of many residents abused by these speculative practices.

Two years ago, the Kelly Street project was the first of our redevelopment projects to use this innovative model of redevelopment. This past year we expanded this model to our College Avenue site. College Avenue consists of three buildings with 63 housing units.

These buildings were previously owned by a slumlord whom Bill de Blasio as Public Advocate referred to as the city's worst landlord. These three buildings accumulated over 700 violations against the buildings covering all sorts of issues, from rat infestations to leaky pipes to broken windows. Despite the city spending tens of thousands of dollars in emergency repairs to these buildings, there was little the city could do since the buildings were privately owned and taxes were being paid. Banana Kelly was

contacted originally by the organizing group, CASA, which had spent the prior year fighting the landlord in court and asked to become involved. Unlike our Kelly Street project, this landlord did not just walk away. Instead, he fought for every last dollar that he could extract from the building. Fortunately, where on the Kelly Street project the bank did not even return our phone calls, we were able to begin direct negotiations with New York Community Bank, which it turned out was anxious to work with us. For this project we brought in Wavecrest Management and FC Equities to assist in the nearly \$1million that was necessary to secure title, pay municipal arrears and make emergency repairs. We renegotiated the mortgage with New York Community Bank and secured finances from Community Preservation Corporation and NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development through the PLP Program. In fact it was outside our College Avenue building that Mayor Bill de Blasio announced his administration's Affordable Housing program - creating or rehabbing 200,000 units of affordable housing in New York City over the next ten years.

A final example of this type of redevelopment occurred earlier in the year when Banana Kelly took control of two more buildings -- one on Dawson Street and the other on Simpson Street. The Dawson Street building has undergone a complete renovation and was re-tenanted in December of 2014. The Simpson building is slated to be completed by late 2015.

MSC Program: In 2014 we were able to increase our services to families with developmentally disabled children, complemented by the formation of the expanding Parents Council. Our Medicaid Services Coordination Program continues to grow and now currently serves close to 130 consumers. In fact, we are not only providing our services solely in the Bronx, our program has expanded to clients living in upper Manhattan. After preparing individual service plans (ISPs) for each family, our staff follows with extensive tracking and monitoring; our staff serves as facilitators for all services our consumers are eligible for, as well as training adults in the family to be advocates themselves. Given the spectrum of developmental disabilities, each consumer's ISP is customized. For example, some form of independent living would be viewed as being optimally successful for one consumer, whereas completing college could be viewed as optimally successful for another. Operating this program through the NYS Office of People with Developmental Disabilities, we expanded our reach and began to serve former Willowbrook class residents, with close to 20 currently being served.



RAP Program: For the past 17 years we have administered a Supportive Housing Rental Assistance Program funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The program, which targets homeless and disabled individuals and families, has both a rental subsidy and a supportive services component. The supportive services component requires extensive case management, monitoring and the development and updating of ISPs for each of the RAP participants. In 2014 we served 37 families who were homeless and have at least one family member with a physical and/or developmental



disability. We continue to see this program as invaluable to the families we serve, however it is becoming a challenge to expand this program under new HUD regulations, but we continue to persevere due to the program's importance to the participants.

Case Management Services. Every resident of Banana Kelly buildings has access to our case management services, where we work with each to ensure receipt of all available services and provide linkages to other supportive programs. The goal of this program is to provide stability and preservation of tenancy by preventing homelessness or rapid re-housing of families experiencing homelessness. Our staff assists these families with entitlement screening, securing the services needed to remain in their apartments, be that by re-applying for Section 8 assistance or accessing available entitlement programs. This is challenging and at times frustrating work, particularly because South Bronx residents on the whole, including many of our own residents, pay a disproportionately high percentage of their incomes for rent and lack information on available supportive services. But as difficult as it is, we are proud that we have been able to effectively assist so many residents in retaining their tenancies.



Green Infrastructure: Through our many housing projects, which are at various stages of design, construction, planning and implementation, we are developing source controls through green roofs, permeable pavements and rain water collection system serving both environmental needs, as well as promoting our community building agenda through the establishment of shared space and gardening activities.

The Home Street project was completed during the summer and a court yard open space was installed just within the entrance of the building. Green elements include large wooden planters, rain water collection and irrigation systems, trellises, and of course plantings. Our existing green infrastructure projects at 970 Prospect and 750 Bryant Avenue remain in operation and were heavily utilized during the spring and summer months.

Finally our largest and most ambitious project completed this year is located in the rear yards of our Kelly Street project. In partnership with Workforce Housing Advisors, Grown NYC, Scott Landscape, OCV Architects, and others and with the support several corporations, foundations and public agencies including NYC DEP, TD Bank, and LISC we created a garden that has 2,000 sq ft+ of growing space and can produce herbs and vegetables for the benefit of the families living within the five Kelly Street buildings. With this garden we raised the bar by installing green infrastructure that helps meet the City's long term environmental objectives and feeds into a garden that meets demand for no- or low-cost produce and safe outdoor space. Moreover, we have created a platform for residents to self-direct neighborhood transformation efforts. During this first summer in operations the garden was able to feed 117 adults and children free, wholesome meals featuring garden-grown produce. At the bi-monthly Chef in the Kitchen workshops facilitated by residents who live on the block, the garden helps to create a culture of reciprocal teaching/learning; logging over 415 volunteer hours dedicated to garden maintenance; hosting over 150 visitors at neighborhood beautification events and garden

workshops; and harvesting and distributing over 450 pounds of carbon-reducing fruits and veggies to neighbors—for free—in an area with poor air quality and limited access to affordable healthy food.

We view these Green Infrastructure programs not only as environmentally important (ameliorating combined sewer overflows) but also critical to our community-building efforts, since resident groups will manage and help maintain these public spaces. These greening projects bring people together in ways that support mutual aid and enhanced living environments based upon collective activities. We are confident that these spaces will be put to good use by engaging more residents in gardening activities, planning various celebrations in the space, and beginning new traditions that make use of both the gardens and the public space surrounding them.



Community Outreach and Resident Council: In terms of fostering resident engagement, Banana Kelly's community organizers began the critical process of establishing a council of residents pulled from our buildings to facilitate leadership development. The Banana Kelly Resident Council is designed to provide the opportunity for our residents to become engaged in advocacy and organizing around self-identified issues of importance to the community. During 2014,

the core leadership of the group doubled, while its membership increased to 50 through outreach, workshops, and creative actions that engaged Banana Kelly residents in community-based housing activism.

In establishing the Banana Kelly Resident Council, our organizers continued to host twice monthly meetings. The Resident Council is working to increase awareness and engagement among neighborhood residents around key issues facing the neighborhood, the Bronx and the city at large. The Council has organized community-building events including workshops related to housing issues such as the rent freeze, the mechanics of affordable housing, and the cluster-site homeless shelter policy. One engagement of which we are very proud is our effort to address the systemic issues that led to the 12-hour notice for closure of a private shelter on Intervale Avenue. Our organizers collaborated with Intervale Avenue residents and with organizers from Picture the Homeless, the office of State Senator Ruben Diaz, Assemblymember Marcos Crespo and the local community board to prevent the closure altogether. Banana Kelly and Picture the Homeless then co-sponsoring two Town Hall meetings with Bronx Community Board #2 to educate local leaders and residents about the private shelter system and to set up a Task Force to better utilize public resources to deal with the homeless crisis.

Beyond the Resident Council, our organizers have facilitated our resident involvement and attendance at several forums and actions on issues related to the Mayor's affordable housing plan, laws governing rent in the city, and shelter policies. The organizers personally met with hundreds of our residents and constantly work to engage them to work together to build a strong base and created social and leadership capital. And in fact, our organizers were successful in facilitating the appointment of one of our residents to Bronx Community Board 2. And at two new properties, Dawson Stand Simpson Street, five residents have already become Banana Kelly members.

Other projects in which our organizers were involved include: six workshops/training sessions on HDFC administration; a research project that included focus group meetings on the unique



benefits of non profit CDCs to maintain affordable housing in the City; rallies and marches in support of a rent freeze and other assorted events and celebrations around affordable housing issues. Finally, our organizers spent the better part of six months during the spring and early summer engaging residents to pressure the slumlord of 755 Jackson Street to make the necessary repairs to the building.



English as a Second Language. In partnership with the New York City Communities for Change, Banana Kelly operates an ESL program that currently serves over 70 adults from the neighborhood. In our community there is a growing need for English language programs. Over the next several years we intend to grow the program to reach more of our community residents by offering additional times that classes are offered.

Summer Camp and After School. Our 2014 Summer Camp was a mix of education presented in an engaging manner, programs with wide cultural exposure and physical recreation. The children went to museums, libraries, zoos, cook-out, the beach and two Yankee games (yes they attended two games!). In September we expanded the summer program into a full year after school program offered to area children. Over 30 children attend the first Banana Kelly Afterschool program. It is our hope that the Summer Camp and the After School program will continue to grow and serve more of our area children.



AmeriCorps Member and Interns. This past year Banana Kelly was fortunate to have three AmeriCorps volunteers as part of the Banana Kelly family. Through our partnership with LISC New York, we received a slot for an AmeriCorps member to help us with outreach without building portfolio and throughout our catchment area.

With the help of our friends, consumers and funders we look forward to making 2015 an even better year. Looking ahead we will work to build on our past successes and continue to take on new challenges, specifically those that expand the supply of affordable housing, provide employment opportunities and expand necessary services for the most vulnerable among us. Ultimately Banana Kelly's success is defined through the people we represent and serve. Thank you for all your support and assistance.

Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association, Inc.

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