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PROFILE: Carrfour Supportive Housing

By Keat Foong, Executive Editor

As Stephanie Berman, president of Carrfour Supportive Housing, points out, the homeless population does not appear to be likely to shrink substantially any time soon. One reason is that families that are at-risk of homelessness include many middle-income families with impending evictions, foreclosed homes, unemployment or health problems. These people compose the “new face” of the homeless. An abundant supply of jobs—better jobs and higher paid jobs—is what is needed to prevent many in this group from slipping into the ranks of homelessness, says Berman. But it does not appear as though the local jobs situation will be improving meaningfully in the near future.



Stephanie Berman

For the transitional, and permanent, homeless, there continues to be much need for the type of supportive individual and family housing that are being developed by Carrfour Supportive Housing. Carrfour was founded in 1993 by the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce to provide permanent housing and supportive services for the homeless in Miami-Dade County and other cities in Florida. Carrfour is today a leading non-profit affordable housing developer in the state.

This year, Carrfour says it is having one of its most impactful years. The company was awarded \$17 million in federal stimulus dollars under the Neighborhood Stabilization Program 2 (NSP2) to acquire and rehabilitate three formerly distressed apartment complexes in Miami-Dade County. Carrfour Supportive Housing was part of a consortium of development firms in the County that were granted \$89 million in NSP2 funding.

Carrfour’s three turnaround projects, whose other funding sources include the Low Income Housing Tax Credit and/or local county programs, are: Harvard House (\$4.4 million budget), Hampton Village (\$6 million budget) and Tequesta Knoll (\$5.6 million budget). In all, 256 new residences are expected to be delivered for low-income families earning 60 percent or 50 percent or less of Area Median Income.

On average, Carrfour starts one new project for the homeless per year, with three projects in various stages of predevelopment, construction or post-construction at any time, says Berman. Carrfour has over 100 employees, most of whom are onsite supportive staff. In its history, it has assembled more than \$200 million to develop and operate 1,140 units of supportive housing across Miami-Dade County.

Unlike for-profit developers, one of Carrfour’s competitive advantages is its full in-house expertise in providing supportive housing. Nevertheless, one of the greatest challenges for a non-profit lies in finding and bidding for real estate properties. The greatest competitors for Carrfour are for-profit affordable housing developers who are able to pay all-cash, notes Berman.

“About two years ago, Carrfour’s board of directors re-examined the families coming into the company’s properties, and found that a lot of them were not so much the chronically homeless as those who were on the brink of becoming homeless,” says Berman. These families are in transitional situations as a result of the economy. Following that analysis, the company decided to expand the type of projects it develops to include developments without a homeless component, Berman notes.