

COMMUNITIES TOGETHER INC



Every morning this summer, kids at Brookland Manor ask their caregivers the same question: Is today a camp day?



Tamara Robinson with kids from Brookland Manor's summer camp program.

For families in this Northeast DC community—one of the top two largest in Communities Together's portfolio, with 465 apartments—that question is a sign of something bigger. When we took over the contract less than a year ago, engagement was very low, and enthusiasm was absent. Today, kids are showing up to our summer camp, parents are walking into the resource center to share about their lives, and neighbors are noticing that Communities Together is present all day every single day.

Meeting the Community Where They Are

When Communities Together took over the Brookland Manor contract in September 2025, our team knew that we wanted to listen to residents' needs and wishes. Likewise, Tamara Robinson, Community & Youth Engagement Coordinator, started the way any good neighbor does: by knocking on doors.

Robinson brings a background as a school counseling professional and holds a Master's in School Counseling from Clark Atlanta University along with a psychology degree from Bowie State. But her special sauce is her personality. Her experience, sparkling commitment, and training show up in how she approaches the community: not as a program to deliver, but as relationships to build.

"You have to understand the residents before they can understand you," said Nicholen McGougan, Team Manager and Senior Community Engagement Coordinator for Special and General Populations. McGougan brings more than 20 years in nonprofit human services to her work guiding the team's strategy. "What are your needs? We're not planting a program here that you have to follow—we're building it with you."

Robinson spent her early weeks tabling, registering families on-site, and walking the grounds to meet residents face to face. Week after week, she sent out fliers and emails. Slowly, families started to trust that this program and this team were here to stay, that we offered programs and resources of value, and that we were listening to them. We showed the community how much we cared about doing our very best to support their self-empowerment.

The numbers tell the story of that trust-building. The after-school program the team inherited started with a single participant. When summer camp launched in June, 9 kids showed up on Day One. Weeks later, that number has climbed to 19.



A Daily Space Where Kids Feel Safe

Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., kids ages 4 to 14 have a place to go with structure, consistency, and care. The program has brought in guest speakers on mental health, yoga and meditation, and even a "rage out" kickboxing session for kids to process big feelings in a healthy way. Kids have explored STEM projects, learned hip-hop dance, and sat through workshops on bullying prevention, fire safety, and financial education.

They've also gotten out into the city—a trip to the movies, a meal at Golden Corral, and a visit with the Capital Area Food Bank, where kids learned about nutrition and made their own hummus. Field day brought friendly competition to the courtyard, and a "happy hour" pizza-making session let kids build their own pies from scratch.



The little things matter too. Every child's birthday is celebrated with a cake: a small, consistent way of communicating that they're seen and valued. Parents notice the difference at home. "Parents trust that we're here to care for their kids," Robinson said. "And they're looking for a positive outlet, for their kids, and for themselves too."

Growing Into Deeper Support

On July 31st, the Brookland Manor team will host a meet-and-greet to sit down with caregivers, hear what they're carrying, and start building a peer support system. That conversation feeds directly into work already underway. The team is building connections to a behavioral health expert for parents, support with school enrollment, and access to resources many families don't know exist—from DC Medicaid to free eye, hearing, and dental screenings.

It's part of a larger shift at Brookland Manor: parents are no longer just dropping off their kids. They're stopping by the center to talk with Robinson, attending events, and becoming active members of their community. Property management and ownership have taken notice too, crediting the Communities Together team with identifying concerns early and responding with real solutions that residents can see and feel.

What Comes Next

This school year, the team will pilot day camps during school breaks, alongside the ongoing after-school program, building toward something sustainable, not seasonal. It's a reminder of what's possible when a program is built the

Communities Together way: not delivered to a community, but built with it, one relationship, one door, one birthday cake at a time.

By the Numbers: Why Resident Services Matter

Communities with community and resident engagement services earn 26% more in annual profit for ownership groups—nearly \$1,200 more per unit, every year—than similar communities without them.

New research supported and facilitated by Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future proves that community and resident engagement services are an investment that pays off.

The data is clear: Every \$100 spent per unit per year on resident engagement brings \$259 in profit and \$397 in total revenue the following year.

Building resident engagement into property budgets strengthens individual communities and properties as well as the long-term health of the affordable housing system as a whole.

Team Highlight: Bryana Waleska Solano

Bryana Waleska Solano was born in Honduras and raised in the United States, and she's spent her career being an agent of change. Working in human services since 2013, Bryana has provided services for families across nonprofit organizations in New York, Connecticut, and the Pacific Northwest, managing cases for children through a family guidance center, providing behavior modification counseling for children with complex behavioral health needs, and counseling undocumented, unaccompanied boys as they built new skills through therapy.

Bryana joined Communities Together in 2021, focused on supporting families in Maryland's Langley Park Corridor as a Community Engagement Coordinator. Today, she supervises several of our community engagement coordinators as a Community Team Manager, bringing the same relationship-first approach to every community she touches. She's also continuing to coordinate our programs and resources for four Langley Park communities, and she runs our successful Entrepreneurship Program funded by Truist Bank's foundation.

Bryana holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the Antillean Adventist University in Puerto Rico. Executive director Tom Vellenga said, “We are remarkably fortunate to enjoy the uplifting leadership, integrity, supervisory support, and collaborative mastery of Bryana Solano. She is a gift to all the residents, team members, and partners with whom she serves.”



Click the video above to watch Entrepreneurship Program graduate Sophie share what the program and Bryana's support meant to her.

In service,

The Communities Together Team

[Give Here](#)

[Communities Together Inc.](#)
[CORES-certified](#)
[Sarbanes Excellence in Community Service Award](#)

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

Copyright © 2025: Communities Together - All rights reserved.
