Walnut Park Apartments
Portland, Ore., REACH Community Development

Originally built in 1981 under the Oregon Housing and Community Services Elderly and Disabled Bond Program, Walnut Park Apartments exemplifies a quality rehabilitation with residents in place. The 38-apartment development is a critical preservation story, located in the King neighborhood of Portland where affordable housing for low-income African American seniors is rapidly disappearing. In 2008, Walnut Park was at risk of being sold and losing its affordability, threatening displacement of long-time residents living on fixed incomes. REACH worked with the City of Portland to preserve the affordable community, by extending the Section 8 contract and renovating the building to lengthen its useful life for at least 30 years.

REACH approached the comprehensive rehabilitation using resident involvement in the building design as a cornerstone in the development plan. The project included an extensive relocation plan as renovations were performed with residents living in the building. The work included substantial energy upgrades, a reconstructed building envelope and the addition of energy- and water-efficient appliances and fixtures. REACH instituted a no-smoking policy inside the buildings, engaged residents in green living practice and installed elevated gardening beds, promoting healthier and more active lifestyles.

To provide quality services for residents, REACH works with local agencies including the University of Portland's School of Nursing, the Oregon Food Bank, Ride Connection and Meals on Wheels. Many Walnut Park residents receive case management from the nearby Urban League of Portland Multicultural Senior Center, where they also participate in social and wellness activities.

Walnut Park now stands as a pillar in the community, home to very low-income seniors. All apartments are reserved for those making less than 30 percent of area median income. The project serves as an excellent example of community partners coming together to save affordable housing while also creating a sustainable asset for the neighborhood.