Internship Description

At the end of June 2015, residents of Penn Plaza Apartments in East Liberty began receiving 90-day notices that their leases would not be renewed and that they would be evicted in three months. Shortly thereafter, the City of Pittsburgh intervened on behalf of the residents and was able to secure a 60-day stay on the existing notices and the issuance of any new notices. During this time, the Penn Plaza Tenant Council, in partnership with the City, came to an agreement with Pennley Park South (PPS), the owner of Penn Plaza, in a memorandum of understanding that provided certainty and secured assistance to over 200 families and individuals who call Penn Plaza home. Neighborhood Allies, at the request of the Mayor’s office, was asked to work in conjunction with the City of Pittsburgh and various stakeholders to facilitate the management of hiring a Relocation assistance firm to help transition these Penn Plaza residents into safe, affordable, and decent housing.

Neighborhood Allies is a dynamic and multifaceted 21st century community development support organization committed to improving the social and physical infrastructures of low-capacity, low-income and distressed neighborhoods, primarily in Pittsburgh. Affordable housing in Pittsburgh’s growing neighborhoods is an increasing concern for many current residents, particularly as home values in the Pittsburgh’s East End continue to rise drastically. With that, assisting residents who are displaced from the Penn Plaza location is crucial to demonstrating our commitment to residents, especially those who may not have the financial resources to remain in their neighborhoods.

With the assistance of Interstate Acquisition Services, the relocation consultant, we have relocated all residents from the 115 units that comprised the first Penn Plaza building (5704 Penn) to safe, decent and affordable housing. The majority of residents were relocated in the City of Pittsburgh with 54 residents finding a home in the East End. Pennley Park South, the property owner of Penn Plaza Apartments, will permanently close the doors to the second building (5600 Penn) on March 31, 2017. As we continue to relocate residents from the second building, we recognize that a long-term social fabric for residents is being disrupted, resulting in the permanent alteration or loss of social supports for many residents. Furthermore, a number of residents may have experienced trauma in the past that may resurface and the forced move itself is likely traumatic, especially for the elderly. With the support of a student from the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh, we hope to provide residents of Penn Plaza with more one-on-one assistance. Some of the objectives that we envision for the student include:

- Building relationships with residents
- Connecting residents to available social services and supports
- Identifying relocation obstacles that residents may have
- Tracking where Penn Plaza residents have moved/are moving and inputting that information into a spreadsheet
- Assisting the Field Instructor in documenting this process and learning from these efforts (i.e. researching nationwide practices to help mitigate resident displacement in neighborhoods experiencing significant development).