

## Darien News-Review (CT)

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### **The Community Fund: Building a Strong Darien**

Author: State Sen. Bob Duff

The Community Fund of Darien is busier than ever. For one thing, its 2008 09 campaign has just begun, and the Board of Directors and Campaign Committee are working diligently to solidify and expand financial support from residents and businesses in town.

As a result of last year's campaign, more than \$700,000 in grants will be distributed this year to more than 29 human service agencies that serve Darien, Norwalk and Stamford.

These agencies are providing a broad range of critical services, such as food and shelter for the homeless, counseling for the abused, respite for caregivers of fragile seniors, self-sufficiency classes and case management for those in poverty, after-school programming, support and training for people with special needs, jobs for people with mental illness and so much more.

As the fiduciary of its donors' contributions, every year The Community Fund recruits a corps of more than 50 volunteers to review agency grant applications, make site visits and carefully discuss and deliberate how to best allocate funds for the greatest impact. This two-month process results in evaluations that prove beneficial to both the fund and its grantees as they receive valuable strategic advice along with their grant awards.

The Community Fund of Darien also provides financial support for Darien individuals with emergency needs as identified by Darien's Department of Social Services. In the past year, payments have been made to help with heating oil, rent, child care and emergency dental work, not to mention a significant contribution in response to those who suffered flood damage to their homes last spring.

But that's not all The Community Fund does. The CARE Darien Campaign to build a "Community of Accountability and Respect for Everyone" is one of the initiatives of its Human Services Planning Council (HSPC), a group that meets monthly to talk about human service needs in Darien. Members include representatives from the selectmen's office; Darien Family & Youth Options; STAR, Lighting the Way; Child Guidance; Family Centers; Person-to-Person; The Depot; Council of Darien School Parents; 2-1-1 Infoline; local press and local churches as well as the police chief, the superintendent of schools, assistant director of social services, youth director and Darien Public Library director. Its co-chairmen are from the Community Fund.

In addition, the HSPC helped start Aging in Place in Darien, a new program helping Darien seniors live independently, comfortably and with dignity in their own homes as long as possible. The AIP in Darien Advisory Board of representatives from agencies and organizations that serve Darien seniors is working to address key issues for this population and their caregivers. In response to this growing need, The Community Fund has funded a part-time coordinator to work with the Advisory Board. For more information, please call 202-2912.

"Creating Connections: A Directory of Mental Health and Support Services for the Darien Community" is another initiative of the HSPC. This directory includes more than 13 pages of information about programs available to Darien residents to help address issues like alcohol and substance misuse, domestic violence and sexual assault, counseling services for people dealing with divorce, loss of employment, eating disorders, self-harm and mental illness.

The Darien community is blessed to have The Community Fund in its midst, helping to raise awareness and educate people about needs and services, provide leadership to address gaps in services and most importantly, bringing together people, their talents and financial resources to make a real difference in so many lives.

For more information, visit The Community Fund Web site at [www.communityfunddarien.org](http://www.communityfunddarien.org) or call 655-8775.

Duff, a Democrat, represents the 25th State Senate District in Darien and Norwalk. He can be reached at (800) 842-1420 or at [duff@senatedems.ct.gov](mailto:duff@senatedems.ct.gov).

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