

Newark Mayor Cory Booker Praises New Community's Commitment To City Residents



Newark Mayor Cory Booker is welcomed by Msgr. William J. Linder, founder and CEO of New Community Corporation, center, and Joseph Matara, right, upon his arrival at NCC's Extended Care Facility on South Orange Avenue.

New Community Corporation is being praised by Newark Mayor Cory Booker, who emerged from a recent tour of the organization's healthcare complex declaring that he was impressed with the wide array of services being offered.

"I've always known about the comprehensive support New Community gives to the city and to people...how New Community is connecting to the fabric of the city and all that we're doing," said Booker. "Building coalitions is so important," he added.

The mayor's healthcare tour included stops at New Community's 180-bed Extended Care Facility, Adult Medical Day Care, Family Service Bureau, Essex Valley Visiting Nurse Association and School of Practical Nursing. Under the visiting nurse program, nurse practitioners are setting up shop in two New Community senior residences, bringing services closer to elderly residents who often lack a primary health care provider. The program's nurses also travel to high-risk residential areas some other visiting nurse programs avoid.

"We're developing a continuum of healthcare for the elderly that doesn't exist for this income level anywhere in the nation," said Msgr. William J. Linder, founder and CEO of New Community, referring to the low-income population the organization is committed to serving.

For instance, NCC's non-profit nursing home, the only one in the city of Newark, takes care of not just the elderly, but younger disabled individuals, many of whom are uninsured.

"Monsignor's philosophy is if somebody needs care we give it," Veronica Onwunaka, director of nursing for New Community's Extended Care Facility, told the mayor. "We'll take people nobody else will take."

At the Adult Medical Day Care program, the mayor mingled with participants who were playing games and enjoying each other's company.

"Every morning I say the prayer and it's very inspirational and helpful to me. I'm very thankful I have a place I can come to," Betty Beachum, 68, told Booker.

NCC's Family Service Bureau, which offers behavioral and mental health services, assisted more than 1,000 families last year with a multitude of problems, including substance abuse and juvenile justice issues. The bureau's services run the gamut from offering parenting classes to individuals whose children have been placed in state custody to mentoring children who have an incarcerated parent.

"Oh wow," said Booker, as he listened to the laundry list of services as they were run down by Linda Combs, who heads the bureau.

During his stop at the School of Practical Nursing, located in New Community's Workforce Development Center on Bergen Street, the mayor was warmly greeted by a classroom full of aspiring LPN's.

“I’m really grateful for what you all are doing,” the mayor told them. “I just hope I never have to see you all professionally,” he joked.

School director and instructor Ellen Boddie then took the mayor across the hall into the clinical nursing lab, showing off her newest mannequins that are so life-like they talk and even cry to express pain. Afterwards, a student pulled the mayor aside to ask his help in securing a grant so she could continue to attend the school.

“I thought it was important for me to meet you today,” said Nicole White, 27, with the mayor directing his aide to write down her contact information so he could see how his office might help.

The mayor also took a bit of a detour off the healthcare path, dropping into NCC’s one-stop Family Resource Center, which offers help with everything from emergency food assistance and help paying utility bills to finding employment and housing. Located in NCC’s Pathmark Shopping Plaza, the center served more than 2,200 clients last year, addressing more than 3,000 individual problems.

“You’re doing everything here,” said Booker, as he spoke to clients who had dropped in for help with challenges like finding a job or an apartment. The mayor promised to see how the city can work more closely with New Community, after hearing program directors talk about how some sources of money are drying up, a sign of the difficult economic times.

“There’s tremendous needs and tremendous opportunities,” said Gail Rader, who oversees Essex Valley Visiting Nurse Association.

“We should have a long conversation about coordinating some of these services,” the mayor responded.

New Community officials are following up with the mayor’s office to see how collaboration might take place in areas like delivery of healthcare to seniors and community re-entry programs for juveniles who have had trouble with the law.

“The visit was especially useful in broadening awareness about the scope and dept of NCC’s various health-related programs,” said Richard Cammarieri, NCC’s director of special projects.