

Title – How might we establish a formal consortium of neighborhood representatives to create a membership organization focused on resolving gang-related activities, including arts and sports activities for the community at large?

Convener – Annette Faber (Lively Arts of Chicago)

Participants – Michelle Balog, Jean Carter Hill, Raven Johnson, Amy Mogelberg, Carol Wilinski

Session Notes –

Background of participants –

Annette – previously produced children’s opera at Lookingglass Theatre; more recently, created Lively Arts of Chicago;

Jean – Englewood resident; worked in schools for over 25 years, retired school community representative (conducted home visits, provided resources to parents); currently involved with “Imagine Englewood If ...” organization;

Raven – Jean’s granddaughter, currently a student at Hyde Park High School;

Michelle – representing Southeast Chicago Development Commission;

Amy (joined discussion later) – officer in the Chicago Police Department (Back of the Yards), has community relations responsibilities; and

Carol – volunteer for conference, note-taker for session

Discussion –

Jean discussed her participation in Citizen Leaders Workshops - she completed their training program, started workshops in Englewood in 1998 – focus was on making a difference within community, working together, buy-in. Community interest dwindled after a while; in 1999, introduced annual Make-a-Difference Day - next one is scheduled for 10/27/07 at Kennedy-King College, partners include NIU and UIC, will share results of food assessment study of several communities.

(Examples from earlier years include painting porches of homes of senior citizens, police tutoring program for kids.)

Annette – perhaps the initiative outlined by Jean could be expanded to 8-10 communities affected by gang violence – perhaps partner with aldermen – create membership organization (free membership; members would be invited to special events initiated in the community; seek commitment of participation from families of gang members)

Various issues were then identified by the group –

- (1) There is a need to provide transportation (kids afraid to cross gang boundaries).
- (2) Families can be comprised of 2nd/3rd generation gang members, how do we recruit kids for our programs when their entire family has gang affiliation?
- (3) Trust isn't present in these communities (especially between different racial groups) – comes from individuals' past experiences – they may not be "ready" for this yet..
- (4) In South Chicago, it's hard to bring kids together because everyone is so afraid of gangs – this is a very real issue in the neighborhood. Turf wars. Churches try – but in a practical sense, it's hard to get different groups to the table.

Annette - suggestion – theatre company involvement/ theatre training helps break down barriers, builds trust among participants – perhaps could come to a central meeting place, work with participants and share techniques of building trust between individuals

Jean – Imagine Englewood If ... has received assistance from student interns from CSU and Urban Allies. Based on their research, they've learned that church leadership and members are no longer based in community, so those institutions may not be as invested in neighborhood improvement as they might otherwise be. Their effort is a work in progress – (1) identify/name the leadership/contact person for each church; (2) identify programs currently open to community residents (day care, karate, etc); (3) then talk about what the community needs, and how to obtain funding for more programs to address those needs. Michelle – suggested LISC may be a potential source of funding.

Amy, a Chicago Police Officer, spoke about monthly Peace and Education Coalition meetings in her area – they've identified a strong leader/voice (Father Bruce), also includes local principals, school social workers, clergy, business leaders. They promote community service (and have developed a booklet), scholarship fund (50

awarded this year), mural painting on viaducts (invite kids from other communities); Youth Summit - students from 5-6 area schools, series of 20-minute workshops, mix kids up and get them working together.

Amy's advice was that it is essential that a strong voice/leader be identified, to speak for the group; recruit diverse leadership who have on-the-ground commitment to community; then encourage community residents to observe/participate in activities. Michelle – observed that “Peace and Education Coalition” is a more positive/constructive-sounding name for group, than anything described as “anti-gang”!

Other comments – need to introduce kids to life outside of their neighborhoods, broaden their exposure to the city. Also, Annette mentioned Play for Peace, (a national organization), bringing together young people from diverse backgrounds to play sports (soccer) (they implemented an initiative in Iraq) – perhaps this could be another potential funding source. Amy – said they'd implemented something similar in her community, involving basketball.

Next steps –

All participants in the group were very energized by Amy's example of what's already underway in her district/community, and viewed this as a potential model for wider replication! Next steps include:

Several participants plan to attend the November 2007 meeting of the Peace and Education Coalition at Chavez School;

Follow-up regarding the potential funding sources identified during discussion (LISC, Play for Peace); and

Additional dialogue/brainstorming regarding potential avenues of replicating existing community efforts that are making headway/achieving success elsewhere.

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