

# “Community Blessings” Workshop 10/19/2007

Inspired by an upcoming project in Back of the Yards

Keywords: community building, neighborhoods, immigrants, youth, working class, gang violence, resilience

## **Artist Diana Solis:**

Diana is a multi-disciplinary artist, who works with Shanti in an after school program. As of now the arts program is not integrated in the schools. She will be creating a garden space as a community project. Students will be working with her to create the walk way. The garden is going to be dedicated to an 11 year old who was killed by gang violence. Shanti and Diana hope to confront the issue of gang violence within neighborhoods, by building community.

## **Community Leader Paul Lopez:**

Paul Lopez is a resident of Back of the Yards and President of the Peace and Education Coalition. The mission of the Peace and Education Coalition (PEC) is to foster relationships between local community stakeholders. The Coalition members work to create a united vision to help neighborhood children, especially those trapped in a cycle of poverty and violence. The Coalition serves at-risk and high-risk youth by promoting peace and education in the Back of the Yards, New City community.

Session notes:

### **Group Exercise:**

Question posed: “If you were stranded on a desert island what five items would you bring?”

- iPod, journal, writing instrument, book, all-in-one tool.
- Waterproof matches, dry food, fishing gear, water purification tablets, books
- Water, music, Swiss army knife, blanket, friend
- Garbage bag, sustenance, picture of a loved one, matchbook, music
- Art supplies, knife, matches, olive oil

### **Group Discussion exercise:**

Participants were asked to choose one issue and discuss it. The issues presented were neighborhoods, building communities, or gang violence. In

groups of six, participants were asked to come up with an art project on a brown sheet of craft paper that addresses one of these issues, you can use poetry, prose, drawing, or any other project that requires only paper and writing utensils or spoken word.

### **Topic of Building Communities/Neighborhoods:**

#### **Issues presented by groups:**

- Boundaries and the need for a neutral or safe space
- Generational gaps—the need for intergenerational involvement, focus on the family as a unit and not solely the children, then parents can be active in this process of involvement
- There is a feeling of displacement within communities of one cultural group by another.
- There are all these places where people rub up against each other, with no understanding or mutual respect, how do we get to a place of effective collaboration between schools, agencies, businesses, etc.? Is a community responsible for this occurring?
- There is a fear amongst community members to know of the unknown.
- Immigration, issue of the lack of involvement or belonging because of immigrant status

#### **Questions and potential ideas:**

- How can we evaluate the improvement in our communities, are we coming up with solutions that are bounded? Or are we directing our solutions at the root of the problem!? There is no objective way to calculate success in these ways, but if we base our success off of how people feel—has trust been built? Is there an increased feeling of safety?

#### **Possible solutions:**

- Food! Carries a lot of associations, cultural significance - Cross-cultural pot-luck that includes some oral history where cooks share the tradition around the food prepared
- Common ingredient: prepare a cultural recipe that uses apples as a way to connect my culture with yours

### **Issues within Gang Violence:**

- What is the reason for the violence?
- Who's at risk?
- What are the issues about space?
- What is the difference between different types of gangs?
- How does the connectedness affect the gang members and community?
- What is the communication exchange that is taking place?
- How do we find common spaces? How do we deal with the spaces that are not common, how do we deal with fear?

### **Possible solutions to issues of Gang Violence:**

- Combining arts and sports together.
- Redefining, reclaiming, redirecting
- Creating safe spaces within communities.
- Ideas from group Collaboration:
  - Key to success in any program/project
  - When people of different backgrounds talk to each other freely they will recognize their similarities
  - Example of Little Village: groups are popping up all over the place, in people's apartments, not-for-profit, integrating the arts, creating safe spaces, talking, etc.
  - It's about creating an experience that's coming from the soul of the community, not someone coming in and introducing something new. Taking what is there culturally, including music, writings, arts, and using them to bring people together rather than forcing something foreign on people.

### **Ideas participants took from workshop, and potential next steps:**

- Idea of some sort of dinner in the park—invite residents of the neighborhood to eat together as a way of fostering community between old residents and new home-owners, etc.
- To remember that power and creativity lay within the community. We can model ideas and facilitate, but we need to draw on the ideas of those we work with. We forget that what we do is trying to benefit others, not being successful ourselves

- **Sustainability:** We can't have "hit and run" programming in these neighborhoods. If we start a program we can't bound it with dates and deadlines, but be willing to be a lasting presence in the community, invested in its growth and well-being
- How do we get from the conceptual to the practical? We need to foster critical thinking.
- Idea of collaboration between sports and arts, thinking about these two very critical areas of children's lives coming together.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.  
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.  
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.