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Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization

330 Hubert H. Humphrey Center

301 - 19th Avenue South

Minneapolis, MN 55455

phone: 612/625-1020

e-mail: ksn@umn.edu

website: <http://www.npcr.org/>

**SINGLE PARENTS
BUILDING COMMUNITY**

SINGLE PARENTS BUILDING COMMUNITY

A Research Project of the
Corcoran Neighborhood Organization

Mary C. Zanmiller
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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is the product of a research project conducted in the Corcoran neighborhood of the city of Minneapolis. The people of Corcoran are working through the process of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP), a multi-year program of neighborhood based planning to strengthen the city of Minneapolis and increase the quality of life in neighborhoods.

This research was provided through the Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (NPCR) program. NPCR is funded with a federal grant by the U.S. Department of Education Urban Community Service Program and is administered by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) at the University of Minnesota.

The purpose of this project was to research single parent participation in the NRP process in Corcoran neighborhood and to develop recommendations to increase their level of participation.

The purpose of the report was to present findings of a research project which examined the participation of single parents in the process of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) in the Corcoran neighborhood. A vital aspect of these findings included recommendations to the Corcoran Neighborhood Organization (CNO). These recommendations, made at the request of CNO, present strategies to accomplish the goal of increasing the participation of single parents in Corcoran's NRP process.

Data used in the report are from the 1990 U.S. Census of Population and Housing and from records of general membership meetings of the Corcoran Neighborhood Organization. Single parents in the Corcoran neighborhood, through their willingness to share their personal stories, provided information which formed the basis of the recommendations.

MAP

CORCORAN NEIGHBORHOOD

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary objective of this report was to develop recommendations to the Corcoran Neighborhood Organization with the purpose of increasing the participation of single parents in the Neighborhood Revitalization Project in Corcoran. A brief listing of these recommendations follows.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

SUPPORT SINGLE PARENTS IN THEIR HOUSING CHOICES

- **RECOMMENDATION:** Adopt strategies which emphasize jobs and other means of increasing economic equality for single parents.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Target NRP monies to assist single parents in purchasing homes.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Through partnerships with other people and institutions in the community provide a home maintenance and repair program to assist single parents staying in their homes.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Target NRP monies to develop cooperative rental housing units, organize people who rent and provide education on tenant rights.

BUILDING A WELCOMING, SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY--UNITY AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

- **RECOMMENDATION:** Build on current efforts to increase people connecting with one another through neighborhood activities. Develop strategies to increase information sharing and networking among single parents.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Adopt tactics to increase feelings of safety in the community.

BACKGROUND

CORCORAN NEIGHBORHOOD

Elements of the Community

The population of Corcoran neighborhood is 3,635 people. Single parent households account for 14 percent of the neighborhood's 1,560 households. A little over one third of all family households with children under 18 years of age are headed by females with no spouse present.

The proportion of households living in rental housing units compared to homeownership housing was greater in Corcoran neighborhood than on a national level. The share of renter households in Corcoran neighborhood was 43.7 percent compared to the national average of 35.8 percent.

Even though there is a significant presence of single parents in the neighborhood, overall their participation in neighborhood activities is very low. An examination of general membership meeting records of the Corcoran Neighborhood Organization over a recent eight month period showed average participation of single parents to be approximately six (6) percent. This low level of participation has long been a concern for the neighborhood organization and with the NRP process it was felt that greater participation by single parents was important.

This underrepresentation of single parents in planning for the future of the neighborhood framed the decision to examine ways to increase their participation. Key informant interviews were the primary field research tool used to gather information. These interviews were analyzed to develop relevant recommendations.

In the past the neighborhood considered offering child care during NRP meetings a primary way to increase single parent participation.

Many parents indicated they would not consider having someone they did not know care for their children. One parent spoke of using child care provided during a meeting which she did not feel was of the quality that she wanted for her child. She also stated she would not consider leaving her child in a similar situation in the future. The single interviews revealed that offering child care was a complex issue.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

WHAT SINGLE PARENTS SAID

In general, single parents interviewed spoke positively about their neighborhood. Single parents who rented their homes spoke of the affordable rents and the sense of calm in the neighborhood. This perception of a calm and peaceful neighborhood was echoed by several people, especially when their current home was compared with housing units previously rented in other neighborhoods.

While single parents who rent overwhelmingly stated their desire to own their own home, economic barriers, such as lack of money for a down payment or poor credit history tend to get in the way of homeownership.

Another recurrent theme in the interviews was one of isolation. Single parents, in general, feel isolated from homeowners and from other parents. Many people, from parents of young children to parents of teenagers, spoke of a desire to get to know a variety of families with the hope of connecting with people with similar values to build a supportive community. One single parent of a young son spoke of a strong need to connect with other parents with a child-centered family life.

The voices of single parents who rent multi-family housing are conspicuous by their absence. Significant barriers to communication with people living in apartment complexes in the neighborhood exist. The scope of this research project did not allow more than a few failed attempts to tap into the knowledge base of these single parents. This is one segment of the community that more resources need to be put into reaching and organizing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SUPPORT SINGLE PARENTS IN THEIR HOUSING CHOICES

HOMEOWNERSHIP

Interviews clearly showed a relationship between homeownership and participation in the NRP process. Homeowners tend to be more involved in their neighborhood. Increasing home ownership opportunities and creating community support to assist single parents in staying in their homes could increase participation in the NRP process.

Having a job and earning enough money to afford a monthly mortgage payment is central to homeownership. The larger issue is about increasing economic equality. Economic equality is about jobs and economic opportunity. Increasing womens opportunities to obtain jobs with wages which support families and which allow for a home purchase has the potential to increase the number of single parent homeowners and lead to increased participation in neighborhood planning.

RECOMMENDATION: Corcoran neighborhood adopt strategies which emphasize jobs and other means of increasing economic equality for single parents.

A tactic Corcoran neighborhood could undertake to increase homeownership could be a down payment assistance program. A subsidy for initial monthly mortgage payments might be considered. Both of these tactics could assist in the transition to homeownership.

As an alternative, Corcoran neighborhood could form a partnership with existing programs which offer down payment assistance and mortgage subsidies. Corcoran neighborhood could compile an information packet with information about these programs and market them to single parents in the neighborhood. Additionally, volunteers could work one-to-one with single parents to work through barriers to homeownership.

RECOMMENDATION: That Corcoran neighborhood target NRP monies to assist single parents purchasing homes.

In the interviews some single parents spoke of their fear of not being able to keep up with home repair and maintenance work if they purchased their own home. One single parent spoke of a fear that buying a home would leave little room in the family budget for home

maintenance, much less emergencies. Periodic home repair/maintenance programs could help to ensure single parents in staying in their homes, once a home purchase becomes a reality.

A home repair/maintenance program could be modeled after one already established by a neighborhood church. As part of their ministry to single parents, Vine Evangelical Church assists single parents with regular scheduled and emergency home repair and regular home maintenance. Vine Evangelical's ministry to single parents also includes car maintenance and repair and a 10 week class which includes components on increasing self esteem, building strong and healthy families, and career planning.

Single parents compose approximately 10 percent of Vine's membership. In assessing the impact of this ministry to single parents on church participation, Vine Evangelical Church's minister, Pastor Stuart Lindberg, spoke of an increased level of single parent participation in church life once their basic needs are met.

RECOMMENDATION: Through partnership with other people and institutions in the community provide a home maintenance and repair program to assist single parents to stay in their homes.

RENTAL HOUSING

Single parents living in multifamily buildings in the neighborhood were very difficult to connect with to include in this research project. Community workers in the neighborhood spoke of the high turnover rate of people who rent and the subsequent lack of a feeling of community connectedness as being a significant neighborhood issue.

Strategies leading to the development of tenant cooperatives could lead to more satisfying and long term tenures in rental housing. The development of leasehold co-ops, an effective action of the Whittier neighborhood, is an example of this strategy.

Directing community resources toward organizing people who rent and educating them to become active consumers could be another tactic to increase participation in neighborhood planning. Increasing the likelihood that people who rent have the opportunity to live in safe and affordable rental housing has the potential to increase the stability of households who rent, which will in turn strengthen

the neighborhood. People who are aware of their rights and how to receive the full value of their rental dollars are people who have a greater potential to feel in control of their lives.

RECOMMENDATION: Target NRP monies to develop cooperative rental housing units, organize people who rent and provide education on tenant rights.

BUILD A WELCOMING, SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

Unity and support for families

Breaking down the barriers that prevent the full participation of single parents in their community is pivotal to increasing their participation in neighborhood planning. Helping single parents make connections in their neighborhood is an important foundation in building community. Sharing information about events, programs and ongoing neighborhood activities helps families make these connections.

RECOMMENDATION: Continue current efforts to increase people connecting with one another through neighborhood activities and develop strategies to increase information sharing and networking among single parents.

A nurturing environment in which children feel safe is one in which parents increasingly have the capacity to engage in community activities. Developing tactics to create a neighborhood in which children feel safe and welcomed is an indirect way to build the community participation of single parents. How the community develops these tactics is the next challenge.

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt tactics to increase feelings of safety in the community.

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of key informant interviews showed a relationship between participation in the NRP process and homeownership. Single parents spoke of the desire to buy their own home. Single parents consistently referred to their sense of isolation from other people in the community and their need to connect with other people.

Recommendations to the Corcoran Neighborhood Organization centered on the theme of supporting single parents in their housing choices and building a welcoming supportive community with a safe environment.

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