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Partners for Change: Community Residents and Agencies

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Efforts to combine the knowledge and skills of community residents and diverse professionals to bring about community and service delivery change are becoming increasingly popular, yet difficult to achieve. This article details, from the perspective of community residents and agency and university staff, the challenges, strategies, and benefits in developing one community-agency collaborative which has successfully engaged community residents. The program is located in a low-income, culturally-diverse, densely populated urban area. Challenges faced by the partnership included recruiting residents, reducing logistical barriers to resident involvement, joining together residents and agency staff, and aligning community and agency goals. Successful strategies in overcoming these challenges included responding quickly to community concerns, developing more personal recruiting strategies, changing logistics to enhance resident participation, increasing program visibility in the community, creating shared goals and vision, and training. Observed benefits include community residents believe their participation has resulted in personal, agency and neighborhood improvements and increased cross-cultural understanding.

Introduction

The benefits for involving community residents on governing boards of social service programs are many and varied. Resident participation in governance benefits program design, service providers, community residents, and the community. Underlying

the rationale for resident involvement in governance is a democratic philosophy that values self-determination. Legitimate decisions regarding programs must be made by a group that reflects the target community (Chang, Leong, & De La Rosa, 1994; Rothman, Erlich, & Teresa, 1981) so a range of perspectives is available to help design appropriate intervention strategies (Chang, et al., 1994). The presence of community residents increases the likelihood that program design and services will be truly responsive to family needs (Jeppson & Thomas, 1995). It also provides a means for ensuring accountability to the community being served (Chang, et al., 1994).

Challenges to Community Involvement in Program Governance

Recruiting community residents for leadership positions can be quite challenging. Board composition should match the ethnic diversity of the target community. Recruitment tactics must be culturally-appropriate so they do not alienate members of a particular group (Chang, et al., 1994). Cultural, class and language differences can be barriers to open and frequent communication which is necessary for effective collaboration (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). Non-English-speaking residents may be particularly difficult to engage if they are intimidated by the process of a large meeting with English as the primary language. Even when interpreters are available, residents may find meetings confusing and overwhelming. They may also have difficulty understanding the collaborative program's mission and service delivery system (Rogers, Berrick, & Barth, 1996).

Barriers to collaborative involvement are experienced by both agency staff and community residents. Agencies face difficulties meeting payroll expenses for meeting times that may not be reimbursed by a funder as part of service delivery. In one study (Rogers, et al., 1996), most professionals were paid for meetings as part of their work time, while community residents were not paid and could not take time off from work. "Those who had less time and material resources in their personal lives were asked to participate at a level that required more of them than the professionals who had more resources at their disposal" (Rogers, et al.,

1996, p.151). Residents often have less resources for child care and transportation than agency staff (Jeppson & Thomas, 1995).

Mutual understanding and trust are essential in any collaborative process (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). Community residents may have difficulty trusting agency staff, particularly if they have had negative experiences with social service providers in the past (Rogers, et al, 1996). Strong leadership is needed to make certain that the group takes the time to build trust and establish ground rules (Chang, et al, 1994). Often there is a distinction between professionals and community residents in their level of education, manner of speaking, and comfort with meeting participation (Rogers, et al., 1996). Residents may question their own expertise when they come to a meeting and do not understand the jargon (Jeppson & Thomas, 1995).

A recent study of collaborative programs found that "The power differential between parents and professionals was obvious to many of the parents and although some collaboratives took pains to establish an atmosphere of equality, positive intentions did not always match parents' perceptions" (Rogers, et al, 1996, p. 150). Another difficulty may be differences in goals between agency representatives and community residents. Collaborative members need to have a clear understanding of one another's organizations and goals. All members must feel invested in both the process and the outcomes of the work (Rogers, et al., 1996).

Strategies to Encourage Community Involvement

Residents need to feel their roles have "real power and substance" (Kaye & Wolff, 1995, p. 101). When residents see actual changes in their community as a result of the collaboration, they are more likely to continue their participation in the process (Rogers, et al., 1996). "Nothing works like results!" (Kaye & Wolff, 1995, p. 101).

Multiple strategies for recruiting residents are necessary. For example, door-to-door outreach may be effective for some ethnic groups. Other recruitment strategies include meeting with community leaders, attending community meetings, holding public meetings, and *community-driven assessments* (Kaye & Wolff, 1995). Once a core group of community residents becomes involved,

they can be highly effective recruiters because they know their community. They are more likely to be trusted by their neighbors than outsiders (Hooper-Briar & Lawson, 1996).

Scheduling meetings after work hours and paying residents for their time are two strategies that may make it more likely residents will attend. Child care and transportation are two essentials that can be provided for residents who may not have these resources (Jeppson & Thomas, 1995). Resident involvement also improves when meetings are translated and they are asked their individual opinions about each agenda item to make sure their voices were heard (Rogers, et al., 1996, p. 150–151).

Resident participants need to feel that their opinions are truly valued and that decisions are really based on their input (Jeppson & Thomas, 1995). Public recognition through praise and awards can help to retain resident participation. Social activities may also be rewarding for residents. Social activities also provide opportunities for interaction and relationship-building among residents and agency staff (Kaye & Wolff, 1995). Other strategies to help retain community residents include training and orientation meetings (Jeppson & Thomas, 1995). Collaborative planning retreats with both agency and community representatives also contribute to the development of relationships, shared power and goals (Kaye & Wolff, 1995).

Establishing a shared vision and agreed-upon goals are essential elements in any collaborative endeavor (Mattesich & Monsey, 1992). "Developing goals or subgoals that are personally meaningful to the community participants is likely to increase their motivation" (Rogers, et al., 1996, p.151–152). Working in small task-related groups also help residents build relationships with other collaborators (Chang, et al., 1994). A subcommittee structure allows for multiple layers of decision making and "has the potential for becoming the bridge needed to involve community residents" (Rogers, et al., 1996, p.167). Small meetings before or after collaborative meetings where residents can comfortably ask questions can be particularly effective (Chang, et al., 1994).

Benefits of Community Involvement in Program Governance

Residents bring many strengths to the governing process including the expertise that comes from knowing the neighborhood intimately. They have a vested interest in the outcomes of

neighborhood programs (Jeppson & Thomas, 1995). "There are no greater architects of solutions than those who are experiencing the problem" (Kaye & Wolff, 1995, p. 102). Residents can be visionaries because they are not bound by bureaucratic limitations or restrictive agency policies. "They are committed to excellence, and their energy is unflagging. They bring fresh perspectives, creative solutions, and limitless creativity" (Jeppson & Thomas, 1995, p. 7).

Benefits to residents who serve on boards include developing new skills and increasing their sense of competence. Participation in program governance also gives residents an opportunity to "give back" to their community (Jeppson & Thomas, 1995). Participation "endows people with a sense of dignity and charges them with responsibility for solving their own problems. It removes the sense of dependence and passivity that comes from being on the receiving end of assistance" (Chang, et al., 1994, p.79). Participation may also develop linkages among community residents and build a sense of community among residents.

Service providers also benefit from resident participation since it may lead to a greater appreciation of families' strengths, resources and individuality (Jeppson & Thomas, 1995). As they serve alongside community residents, professionals become more familiar with the community they serve and better able to provide responsive services. As residents become involved in governance, they also become more effective recruiters of program participants.

Community Oversight Council Description

The Juvenile Crime Prevention Program (JCPP), a large, long-term, state-funded initiative, is a collaborative endeavor of community residents, 20 community-based organizations, city and county agencies, public schools and a university, all of whom are involved in governance and service delivery. This primary prevention program was funded to reduce juvenile crime in a high-risk neighborhood through a wide variety of mandated direct service programs and by building community bonding and cohesiveness. The Community Oversight Council (COC) was developed as a required component of JCPP as the state required resident and agency involvement in program leadership. The COC

is composed of community residents and agency representatives and serves as the governing body.

The original proposal was developed primarily by university and agency representatives, although some forums were held with community residents during the grant planning phase. Thus, when the project was funded, agency partners were familiar both with the programs and each other. However the participation of community residents at that point was at a minimal level. For example, a resident's only involvement may have been agreeing to serve on the COC board. Only after the project received funding and had gone through two months of start-up did efforts to actively involve community residents begin. This article describes the experiences of our COC to form and institutionalize a working community-agency partnership during its first 14 months. Special emphasis is placed on sharing community residents' perspectives on resident involvement in program governance and oversight.

The project is in a low-income, culturally-diverse, densely populated urban area. Approximately 50% of the residents are Latino, 22% are Asian American, 16% are African American and 11% are European American (Census, 1990). Our neighborhood, like many other urban areas, has high rates of poverty, unemployment, violent crime, child abuse reports, mobility, homicide, and school dropout. However, it is also an area of incredible ethnic and cultural diversity and home to families who have weathered adversity, yet are still committed to the success of their children and the improvement of their community. Many residents have decided that it is time to change their community for the better.

In August of 1995, the COC had 36 members of which 33% ($N = 12$) were community residents. By December 1996, the COC had 39 members of which 59% ($N = 23$) were community residents. In March 1997, a slate of community residents was formally elected as COC officers. This marked a turning from agency representatives as leaders to community residents as leaders of the governance structure of the JCPP. The partnership has been extremely successful in recruiting and retaining community residents and creating a working community-agency collaborative. The next sections describe some of the challenges, strategies, and benefits of our community-agency partnership including quoted observations of resident COC members.

Challenges to Community Involvement

Recruiting Residents. We struggled, particularly in the beginning, to recruit community residents. Our original members were recruited primarily through agency referral. However, since many of our residents had seen agencies come and go without listening to resident concerns, the idea that joining a board of a new program would benefit them and really help their community was an “act of faith”. Residents were hesitant to be the “only” resident and some felt uncomfortable joining a board of agency “strangers”. Residents were initially unclear on the program and their role in its governance. So recruiting meant not only attending numerous neighborhood meetings, visiting apartment buildings, and encouraging involvement by graduates of JCPP programs, but also individual, personal discussions on the meaning of involvement.

Recruiting non-English-speaking residents for the COC took longer, in part, because they had experienced translation frustrations both for themselves and for English speakers. There might also have been more trust issues to overcome since some residents were from cultures where social services were foreign concepts and governments were not trusted.

Once residents agreed to join the COC, retention became an issue. Few residents who agreed to serve on the COC in the grant proposal stayed involved during the first six months of the program. In addition to the inherent difficulties in retaining volunteers, many of the residents we recruited were faced with the multiple stresses that come with living in a low-income, high crime area. As one resident said:

You’re sitting here (listening about programs). You begin to think it’s a waste of time because you’re not really dealing with the key issues in the community . . . people gathering on property, consuming alcoholic beverages, selling drugs, gang banging, poverty and graffiti.

Balancing the work and time demands of the COC with neighborhood stresses, children, and their often multiple jobs sometimes resulted in low attendance or dropout. Residents may not have believed that their efforts on the COC were meaningful or that agencies were really listening.

We've got to be worthwhile. We have to see that what we're doing is important. We have to see that we're able to make a difference. We have to see that our problems are relevant to all the agencies and that they are willing to listen.

Some residents also worried they did not have the knowledge or skills to lead this program.

Joining Together Residents and Agency Staff. Our community residents did not always understand the "jargon" or language used by agency staff. Some residents have had difficulty in seeing themselves as "experts" in social services and may have felt intimidated about sharing their opinions with agency staff.

Most of the COC members (residents) are not educated in social work. The terms to us are psycho-babble. I've got accustomed to some of them but I think others feel like me—we're overpowered . . . I feel my own inadequacies . . . sometimes its just totally over my head and the COC is made up of people like me.

Compounding this sense of separateness is that some residents believed that agency staff, who do not live in the area, could not really understand what their lives and neighborhoods were like.

You people (agency staff) are the ones making decisions on what's best for me. Well, life in 9—(area zip code) is a lot different in a 9—(another zip code) or wherever. Life is a lot different and our concerns are a lot different, and our problems are definitely different.

This sense of uneasiness was exacerbated since community residents were not invited to COC meetings until funding was secured, programs were in place, and agency COC members had established relationships. In addition, for a number of months, agency and COC meetings continued to be held separately, suggesting differences between agencies and residents.

We haven't been able to sit down as one collective body, members and agencies alike, except for one meeting. So you couldn't establish equality as far as what is being done, whose opinions are (sic) at the forefront, whose interests are being acted upon or blown aside.

These things combined to create an atmosphere that made it challenging to create a cohesive community-agency partnership.

I can't say that I feel as though we're equal with the agencies because there's been very little interaction between the COC members and the agencies . . . we haven't been able to sit down, all as one collective body . . . Don't wait a year and a half before you establish a working relationship between agency and community members, because then the community members will become alienated, they'll feel as though their opinions don't matter . . . just have a rapport of agency and community members saying we're equal and here for the same purpose

Shared Vision and Goals. This project was designed in response to a RFP so project goals and programs were primarily established by the funder. While agencies were providing services to prevent involvement in juvenile crime to young children and families, residents were focused on stopping the current adult crime and violence in their neighborhood. Our challenge was to address the immediate and pressing concerns of residents, while not abandoning the program focus on prevention.

You really can't determine (goals) that until you get both groups together and you put down in writing what are some of the objectives, what are some of the ways to approach, what are some of the ways to empower and make the community better, until you get these items from both groups at the same time.

Logistics of Involving Residents. Several logistical challenges needed to be addressed for residents and agency staff. Residents often lack adequate child care and transportation. Scheduling meetings has continued to be problematic. Some agency staff have not attended evening meetings which may take them away from their families and other responsibilities. Many community residents are unable to attend meetings during the day due to their jobs.

It's very difficult for a working person to take off a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday to attend an important COC seminar where information is being provided . . . it's very difficult for members to at the drop of a hat to attend certain functions that are scheduled . . . in the evenings it isn't so bad.

Finding ways to ensure that information and communication go across cultures were also challenges faced by our inclusive partnership. In our culturally-diverse area, people who do not speak English may typically be excluded from program governance. Some residents are unable to read English or their native language which makes traditional written communication ineffective.

Strategies for Developing Community-Agency Partnerships

Although any one of these challenges could discourage agencies from including residents in program governance, our partnership was committed to the idea of strong resident involvement so we implemented a number of community involvement strategies. Multiple, comprehensive strategies that cut across challenges were needed.

Responding Quickly to Community Concerns. In order to retain residents, establish agency credibility and close the gap between resident and agency goals, efforts were made to address resident concerns rather than merely focusing on program issues. For example, at one of our first resident-agency training retreats, residents shared their overriding concerns about neighborhood crime. A meeting between community residents and the Chief of Police was scheduled by an agency COC member. This resulted in the Chief designating an officer to attend COC meetings. This has provided a safe and direct way for residents to share criminal activities with police and get immediate officer response.

My opinion counts because I told about the problems in my neighborhood and now police come. The police never used to come and now they come every 10 or 15 minutes and it's a lot better.

Basically, the COC uses its power and we persuade people to come in and listen to some of the complaints . . . the police come during the COC meeting itself and interact with residents, listen to some of their concerns, take information on some of the hot spots and then they go back and react, they act on this information and that's what's important.

As the neighborhood became a little safer and police relationships improved, residents gave the COC credit for these changes.

As one resident said, "COC on the move". Residents became more interested in prevention programming once their immediate concerns were addressed and they were convinced that working with agencies could lead to community change.

Recruiting through Relationships. Once residents saw their participation was worthwhile, they began recruiting others through "word-of-mouth". The positive "word-of-mouth" not only helped to establish credibility and bring in new members, it also reduced the sense of resident isolation since relationships were established before they were asked to join. "I heard about it from a friend"—makes people feel more comfortable since they know someone who will also be at meetings.

The best way to recruit anybody is word of mouth . . . I know they have been recruiting those who have responded to programs at the FRC. That's good. If you just go out into the community and look for people, I'm not sure that would be good because you have not real knowledge of what kind of person you're recruiting. While you might get some good ones that way, you might also get some that would not be faithful in attending and would not have the right motivation. So I suppose it could be done by the COC members who know the community and who know members who would be effective.

Three Spanish-speaking COC members have also gone door-to-door with project staff to tell other residents about the program. They believe they are the best recruiters since they have experience with the project that they can share with others "since we have been here".

Making the Program Visible. Keeping the program visible at neighborhood meetings and organizations enhances recruiting efforts. Continuous staff outreach is done at schools and community organizations.

They (JCPP staff) need to be present with information on what they're about, what types of services that they are providing . . . They need to make periodic presentations at some of the local meetings.

Put tidbits in there (other organizations newsletters) about what the COC is trying to do within the community.

Residents have also suggested that the COC work closely with other organizations in the community, such as churches and schools. Due to their intimate knowledge of the neighborhood, our COC residents have come up with creative ways to link the program with other grassroots efforts that agency staff have overlooked. Their efforts have also increased program visibility.

I met the people who are directing the “—” (a local community outreach program). I came right over from my meeting over there and talked to N. and he immediately saw the possibility of collaboration and they thanked me publicly, they thanked me privately, for giving them this information . . . So I know that they listened to me, I know they paid attention to me and the suggestions I’ve made.

In addition to quickly responding to this resident’s linkage suggestion, it was also important that staff publicly and privately thanked her for this important contribution to the partnership. While the efforts of staff, due to the nature of their positions, may be very visible, the work of community residents may be more “behind the scenes”. Thus, it is important to take the time to applaud the work of residents and create opportunities for them to be visible.

Creating Shared Goals. Time was invested in linking community and project goals. To ensure shared goals, the COC worked for three months to establish their own goals and priorities which were separate from program goals. COC members brainstormed about their vision for the community, then identified and prioritized the ways to achieve the vision. Work was then done to blend residents’ desires with project goals and resources to create a shared purpose and an overarching vision.

I think we should be able to establish a formal dialogue to really come up with a feasible plan of attack on the way to address some of the problems . . . What needs to happen is that the agencies need to utilize the resources of the COC members.

These goals were finalized and then shared with all agency staff at a day-long retreat in January, 1997. It is hoped that developing these shared and specific goals will increase residents’ feelings of shared ownership.

What keeps me involved is I think that today there is a consensus that we need change and people are real hot for change for one or two or three meetings and then after awhile people dwindle off. So there's a support and community involvement. I stay involved in the COC because I have a vested interest in my community. I want to see some of the ambitions and goals of this project really take off. . . . I realize that this isn't going to be something that is going to happen overnight. We're looking at three to four years.

Changing Logistics to Enhance Participation. One logistical barrier we have yet to fully overcome is finding a meeting time that is satisfactory for both residents and agency staff. Although all COC meetings now include both parties (previously agencies also met separately or prior to the COC meeting), agency attendance is often low. A compromise time of 5:00 p.m. was set; however, some agency staff still do not come or leave early since the time is outside their standard working day. While changing the time has improved some resident-community relationships, a true partnership will not develop among all participants unless residents and agency staff are able to meet together consistently.

We need to establish one cohesive body, one platform and one agenda on the way to address problems, and that can only be done between unity of the agencies who have the power to enact certain programs, and the members who can give suggestions of bigger and better ways of doing things.

Dinner is scheduled an hour into the meeting so that residents and agency staff can socialize. To alleviate some of the financial burdens associated with day-time meeting attendance, the COC allocated money for resident stipends to attend day-long meetings and retreats.

Quality child care and transportation are essential to resident participation. Child care means not only trusted adult supervision but structured activities, snacks, toys, adequate space for numerous children, accessibility to parents, and the ability to provide care for infants to adolescents. Providing on-site child care is costly and time consuming; however, it allows residents to fully participate without worry or interruption. Agency attendance might increase if staff feel comfortable in bringing their own children to the meetings. Transportation both to and from

meetings has also enhanced resident attendance. Transportation is provided to residents with taxi vouchers or bus tokens to attend meetings.

Since we wanted the COC to reflect the community, we also recruited residents who did not speak English. Adding these members meant we needed to translate COC materials and meetings to Spanish and Khmer (Cambodian language). Headphones and equipment with simultaneous and multiple language capabilities allowed non-English-speaking members to participate on a "real time basis" without lengthy pauses for translation. Residents have expressed appreciation for the verbal and written translation. They have said that they feel respected because they are listened to even though they do not speak English. It is costly to translate materials and it is often difficult to find people with the skills to do good verbal and written translations. However, the sense of respect and equality it conveys is well worth the cost. In addition to providing translation, the Executive Director of the program also meets with non-English-speaking residents prior to the meeting to review the agenda and answer questions.

Resident COC members have frequently asked for information (census reports, crime statistics) about their community, which is sometimes difficult to access. This information is crucial if residents are to make informed decisions, contribute equally to the COC, and bridge the gap between their knowledge and agency knowledge. Having access to statistics and numbers is often seen by residents as power.

Yeah, I see a change in myself because my initial mind set was just to deal with my immediate problem, and since I came on board, I've been given information, demographics information, census reports, the types of programs about the area which I live in and . . . I realized the COC has given me a forum where I can bring some of the concerns that I have that my fellow residents and community members have and be the spokesman for them.

Training

Ongoing and varied training has been needed for community residents and agency staff to better understand each other and work together successfully. All of our training is designed to reinforce and enhance the strengths and skills both residents

and agency staff bring to the program. Residents and staff are encouraged to attend all trainings even when the topic is something more agency-related, like case management. Training has underscored the expertise residents have of the neighborhood and provided another means for them to contribute to agencies. For example, at a two-day retreat, residents and agency staff planned the schedule and training topics together. Residents also organized a culturally-diverse panel presentation on the neighborhood and led workshops on assertiveness training for youth. A large number of agency staff said they learned important things about the lives of people in the neighborhood from the presentation. Participants wrote, "All associated with the program should have heard this piece. I wish it was longer for questions and answers" and ". . . have a better understanding of the people's neighborhood and how they are dealing with criminal problems".

In response to COC requests, training has focused on cultural diversity, juvenile crime prevention, collaboration, conflict resolution, advocacy for your child at school, communication and the structure and procedures of the COC. A day-long retreat was held to present COC goals, set procedures, and problem-solve communication issues with residents and staff. After participating in a cultural diversity training, one Spanish-speaking COC member wrote:

This program has really helped because we have learned to recognize that all cultures are good. They want the same things we do its just that the language sometimes acts as a barrier for us in expressing what we want.

Benefits of Community-Agency Partnerships

COC residents have said that they have personally benefited from their involvement in the program. These benefits are described below in the words of COC members.

It's helped me personally because now I talk more. I used to think that other people would solve my problems and I just let them. Now I'm the one doing it.

I made good friends, I can say that. I made good friends here.

I was there with myself and four or five Hispanics and we talked openly, we disagreed, and that was good for me. That helped me to

improve. Trying to understand where they were coming from, what they were saying and why they felt that way . . . if I understand where they are coming from I can understand more what they're saying and why they're saying it.

Some residents shared that their participation has benefited the larger community. The opportunity to help others is viewed positively by community residents, who see that their contribution connects them with their neighbors and helps the community.

I'm trying to have a positive effect on my community. I pick up bread at my church once a week and give it away, so now the people who just pass by, they always speak to me, they always smile and I think it's because I reached out in a way that could help them.

I see a change in myself because my initial mind set was just to deal with my immediate problem, and since I came on board . . . now it's broadened into the street that I live on. I'm looking at the total community because I think that I can't survive in this community alone. It takes more than me to initiate change and total community involvement brings about total community change.

We want to get involved and help improve life for others in the community . . . [to] help . . . not only with the family but with humanity which seems to be very lost right now.

Benefits to Agency Programs

Agencies have benefited from community participation because the residents provide periscopes not only into the community but also into interagency dynamics. Although residents perceive that it is a change for agencies to work together, they also have recognized the agencies work and improvement in collaborating with one another.

I think they're (agencies) are a little more agreeable to listen to another agencies' opinion and needs and their needs to cooperate. I think they've seen that collaboration is a difficult thing because they have not been accustomed to it.

Community residents also have special insight into their blocks or cultures that help agencies to better understand and recruit members from the area they are trying to serve. For example, one community resident said although door-to-door recruitment

might be successful with Latinos, African Americans residents might not want agency staff coming to their home.

What needs to happen is that the agencies need to utilize the resources of its members, of its COC members. The COC members are the ones who reside in this community. They're the one's who actually know the concerns. If you're having problems with recruiting . . . members who live in the community give you another way of approaching people in the area.

As residents have become more involved in the COC, they have expanded their volunteer efforts to contribute even more to agency programs. These resident efforts have increased the number of program participants, improved the quality of current programs and have led to the creation of new programs. One COC resident cooks regularly for 98 people who are involved in one of our program components. Another COC resident had trained program participants on nutrition. Others have recruited program participants.

I've recommended "Mothers and Sons" to one women who took her two boys and they like it. They said that "We love that club". I've recommended ESL and parenting classes to another . . . I know she came over and checked it out.

After a COC youth expressed safety concerns about walking home after school, the COC began exploring the possibility of creating a neighborhood "safe" block program. Building the skills of community residents to provide programming has been particularly successful and will be crucial for agencies since funding is likely to tighten in the future. All programs have some service gaps and our residents have helped fill them in creative ways.

Benefits to the Community

Residents have reported that their community has also changed as a result of this community-agency partnership.

I had problems with vacant building that it took us six months to deal with but now it is boarded up. The street looks entirely different, you know, people come by at night and there's no gang bangers hanging out. They're not selling drugs anymore. I mean it has really

been a massive turn around and it makes you feel good that you know you had a part of this.

Although residents have noticed some changes in the community, it is impossible to change an entire community in a short time. More residents involvement is needed. The partnership still has a way to go in order to ensure our neighborhoods are safer and improved.

The police department has helped me (since joining the COC) but they were helping before, just not as much. They're helping me now but I tell them it's like a low spot on the pavement that collects the water. You can sweep it out but the water runs right back in the low spot. So they sweep out the people who are buying drugs occasionally but they come right back because the drug sellers are still here.

Conclusions

Although in this partnership, agencies are charged with the responsibility for implementing services, the guidance of community residents ensures that these services are accessible, meaningful to the community and consistent with the cultures being served. Unless agencies understand the ways in which resident involvement can lead to service improvements, their efforts to successfully engage low-income communities will be greatly hindered. At the same time, agencies and their funders must take care not to structure programs to an "inflexible" degree so that resident input is seen as unimportant or useless. Genuine collaboration between agencies and communities is reflected primarily by changes in the ways that programs are focused or delivered. Agencies and funders should recognize that the goals of their programs or initiatives might be reached more effectively if they modify their means or strategies to reflect community desires or norms.

Clearly, residents have made significant contributions to our community-agency partnership. However, these contributions would not have been possible if agency staff had not had a strong commitment to meaningful resident involvement. Developing and maintaining positive community-agency partnerships requires constant and ongoing efforts. Implementing the community involvement strategies outlined here require dedicated time

and fiscal resources. Communities wishing to develop governance structures such as our COC, will need to build these costs into their operating budgets.

Partnerships between agencies and communities residents need to understand that these challenges and stages of development are part of the natural process of such endeavors so they will not become easily discouraged. It is likely that all of these partnerships will go through ups and downs; however, with the long-range potential for community change so great, the short-term disappointments, inconveniences, and mistakes are more easily weathered.

This is a real key to the success of the program, if they would put all their resources together and work together, that it would help all of the neighborhood. I've found out that much money is being thrown at 9—and I think that until there's some collaboration, they're going to be pulling in different directions and the money is not going to be as effective as it would be if they and we were together.

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