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Planning at the Roots: Low-income and Communities of Color in Portland, Oregon

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PLANNING AT THE ROOTS

Low-Income and Communities of Color
in Portland, Oregon



Community Involvement Handbook
June, 2003

City of Portland, Oregon
Office of Neighborhood Involvement

www.myportlandneighborhood.org



The Portland State University Masters of Urban and Regional Planning Program and the Planning Workshop:

The Masters of Urban and Regional Planning program at Portland State University provides practicing and aspiring planners with knowledge of history, practices, methodology, and a consideration of ethical responsibility surrounding the planning profession. The Planning Workshop is the culmination of the Masters Program and it allows students the opportunity to put their knowledge and skills into practice.

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Executive Summary



What do growing your own food, getting cheaper youth bus passes, and becoming the healthiest African American community in the country have in common? These are the project goals of a sample of community groups in Portland formed by and for low-income populations and communities of color. These groups also serve a much larger purpose of fighting for more voice and power in their communities.

Between 1990 and 2000, diversity in Portland increased dramatically. The Asian population grew by 44 percent and the Latino population by 153 percent. Portland's increasing diversity presents neighborhood associations with a challenge to effectively engage all of Portland's communities in community involvement.

In an effort to highlight community-planning efforts in low-income populations and communities of color, a group of Masters of Urban and Regional Planning students conducted interviews with community leaders and wrote this chapter of cases to be incorporated into ONI's *Community Involvement Handbook*. These cases are meant to provide inspiration and understanding about the strengths and differences between planning approaches used in diverse communities working outside of the neighborhood association structure. This chapter may also help to inform opportunities for neighborhood associations and other organizations to better collaborate with diverse community groups. The diverse community groups studied include:

- ◆ *Hope and Hard Work*
- ◆ *Friends of MLK*
- ◆ *African American Health Coalition*
- ◆ *Hacienda CDC*
- ◆ *Growing Gardens*
- ◆ *Sisters in Action for Power*
- ◆ *'ROOTS!'*
- ◆ *Dignity Village*
- ◆ *VOZ-Worker's Rights Education Project*

While each of these community groups' experiences is unique, their stories share several common themes. Following are the lessons learned that can aid a variety of organizations and individuals working to promote greater inclusion in community



Executive Summary

involvement. The lessons fall into three main categories: **Connections, Leadership, and Process.**

Connections

Relationships—Relationships and trust often outlive shorter-term project goals. Allocating project time for community building is especially important when people have been left out or alienated in the past.

Beyond Geography—Many groups are defined by cultural context and issues rather than by neighborhoods or lines on a map.

The Power of Collective Action—Uniting for a cause brings groups together and creates a force in itself, often more valuable than achieving short-term project goals. This is particularly important for community groups whose members have had little formal power in the past.

Leadership

Champions—Leadership from within the community is crucial to providing long-range vision and sustaining participation in community projects. Enlisting key government officials as champions also fosters success.

Entrée into the Community—Forging relationships in new communities can be intimidating. Introduction by an insider helps establish connections, which allows for other opportunities to emerge.

Process

Unexpected Benefits—Groups often organize about specific issues, but many other positive outcomes can occur as a result. Coming together to address an issue creates a forum to explore other opportunities and concerns.

Political Education—Political education connects group members to their history, inspires groups to act, and places their work in a greater historical and political context.

Executive Summary



Alternative Meeting Structure—Culture guides organizational styles. Groups use techniques that meet the needs of the participants, whether that entails meeting in a boardroom or developing a soccer team.

Slow Down—Community development is an ongoing process that requires time and patience. Programs that avoid “burn out” succeed at setting a comfortable pace and working with people’s needs.



Planning at the Roots

Table of Contents:

Introduction	6
Lessons Learned	12
Cases	
<i>Issue-Based Organizations</i>	
■ Hope and Hard Work	17
■ Friends of MLK	21
<i>Staff-Driven Organizations</i>	
■ African American Health Coalition	26
■ Hacienda Community Development Corporation	30
<i>Volunteer-Driven Organizations</i>	
■ Growing Gardens	34
<i>Membership-Driven Organizations</i>	
■ Reclaiming Our Roots Through Struggle ('ROOTS!')	40
■ Sisters in Action for Power	44
■ Dignity Village	49
■ VOZ - Worker's Rights Education Project	54
<i>The Story of VOZ and the Village Building Convergence</i>	59
Contacts	62
References	64



Introduction

This chapter presents cases of community-building initiatives based in Portland’s low-income and communities of color. Neighborhood associations, one of the most established forums for community participation in Portland, struggle to achieve participation from diverse communities. Stories of community-based initiatives by and for communities of color and low-income populations provide insights into different organizational strategies, which can foster increased understanding and partnership-building opportunities.

Portland, Oregon, has one of the country’s most impressive systems of community participation. In 1974 under Mayor Goldschmidt’s leadership, the Office of Neighborhood Associations (now the Office of Neighborhood Involvement or ONI) was formed. ONI’s purpose is to support the city’s seven district coalitions, 95 neighborhood associations and 40 business associations; increase public participation; and cultivate partnerships.

Between 1990 and 2000, diversity in the City of Portland increased rapidly—the Asian population grew by 44 percent and the Latino population by 153 percent. This has challenged the capacity of neighborhood associations to engage a more diverse constituency. Neighborhood associations are not alone in this respect—a variety of community groups, government agencies, decision-makers, and other members of the public face the same challenge. In *Does the Shoe Fit?*, a contemporary study of community participation in African-American and Latino communities, Melissa Marschall contends that “participatory behaviors of racial and ethnic minorities and lower-income groups are less well understood today than those of Anglo-whites and more socio-economically advantaged groups.” Hopefully, the cases in this chapter will shed some light on the participatory behaviors of diverse communities in Portland.

ONI’S Efforts

ONI’s efforts to better connect communities of color and low-income populations with its services and resources are more important than ever before. ONI is addressing this need through several projects.

Increasing diverse participation

“Making Room at the Table” is both a new chapter in ONI’s *Community Involvement Handbook* and a workshop designed to increase neighborhood associations’ ability to include communities of color and low-income populations in community building.

Introduction



Immigrant and refugee communities

ONI has collaborated with refugee and immigrant assistance programs in compiling the *Refugee and Immigrant Community Resources Handbook*. This became the basis for ONI's "Communities Beyond Neighborhood Boundaries" directory, a chapter within the *Community Involvement Handbook*, intended to connect community groups with each other and with the City.

In conjunction with Immigrants Refugees Community Organizing (IRCO) in 2003, ONI administered a set of grants entitled *Interwoven Tapestries* to promote and support community participation for immigrants and communities of color.

Outreach

ONI has instituted requirements that every neighborhood coalition adopt a diversity outreach plan. Neighborhood coalitions provide administrative and technical support and distribute city funds to neighborhood associations.

Taskforce

With the urging of city commissioners, city agency staff, and city residents, ONI convened a Public Involvement Standards Task Force in February 2003. This group was formed to draft recommendations for uniform standards to be followed during public review of city-initiated, "top-down" projects.

Planning at the Roots

In order to fulfill unmet needs from the ground up, communities of color and low-income populations have organized to empower and mobilize their constituencies. Community-building initiatives encompass a range of projects often referred to as "bottom-up" or "grassroots" organizing. This chapter, *Planning at the Roots*, features examples of community-building initiatives in order to increase awareness and appreciation for the important work that these groups are doing.

ONI believes that there is an on-going need to build understanding between city agencies, established community groups like neighborhood associations, and groups developing in low-income and communities of color. This chapter is intended to inform neighborhood associations about the potential for greater understanding and collaboration between their organizations and the ones featured here. It should serve to inform other community groups, city agencies, professionals, decision-makers, and Portland residents as well. *Planning at the Roots* highlights marginalized groups who



Introduction

are taking action to shape their communities. The stories in this chapter offer a vital perspective for planners whose job it is to inform decision-making that will also shape the future of many different communities.

These initiatives were selected to represent a range of racial groups and income levels within low-income and communities of color. They were identified based on recommendations from various community leaders and ONI's "Communities Beyond Neighborhood Boundaries" directory. Each case is divided into sections that provide background and goals, highlight successes and obstacles, show the interface between the city (or other agencies) and the community groups, and reflect upon the outcomes.

Organizational Approaches

The cases are presented according to their main organizational approach:

Issue-Based: These groups form in response to specific, pressing concerns. Sometimes a crisis calls for action, and groups organize. These groups may either disband upon completion of a project, continue working towards the goals, or work to maintain the successes earned in striving toward the group's original goals. For example, the **Hope and Hard Work** committee meets weekly to discuss community-based ways of reducing crime in North and Northeast Portland. Top city officials attend these meetings at least once a month. **Friends of MLK** used community organizing and political education in local land use decision-making to block McDonald's plans for a site on Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard.

Staff-driven: These groups are maintained by an active staff and take most of their direction from the leadership of the staff and board of directors. The issues they address are long-term and call for the continued support of these groups. For example, through physical fitness offerings, the **African American Health Coalition** works to make the African American community in North and Northeast Portland the healthiest in the country. Through its community work in housing and social services (including healthcare, ESL classes, a credit union, and community events), **Hacienda CDC** is reaching out to the Latino community in Northeast Portland.

Volunteer-driven: These groups may have limited staff to coordinate planning and operations, and they depend on the contribution of volunteers in order to continue. **Growing Gardens** provides low-income communities of Portland with home

Introduction



vegetable gardens and resources. The goals of the program are to work towards food security and encourage a healthy diet for low-income people in a hands-on, affordable way.

Member-driven: These groups may also have a small number of staff and a board of directors. However, members primarily guide their direction and work. **Reclaiming Our Origins Through Struggle ('ROOTS!)** was formed to achieve racial and economic justice for the liberation of People of Color. **Sisters in Action for Power** brings low-income women and girls of color together to build leadership skills and work for change in their communities. **Dignity Village** is a self-governing homeless community that has developed into a model collaborative, principled, and loving community. **VOZ-Worker's Rights Education Project** strives to secure and protect day laborers' rights through education, leadership training, and community organizing.

Discussion

Collaboration between neighborhood associations and diverse community groups may vary according to the primary organizational approach used by the groups (see Table 1). Issue-based groups have the greatest potential for dovetailing with established organizations like neighborhood associations. Neighborhood character and land use issues addressed by Friends of MLK, and community safety issues taken on by Hope and Hard Work, are the bread and butter of most neighborhood associations. Fully integrating the organizations or developing joint campaigns may address the needs and objectives of both neighborhood associations and the diverse community groups. Strengthening communication between neighborhood association and diverse community groups will help facilitate integration or collaboration.

The staff-driven cases featured in this chapter enter the realm of social service provi-



Introduction

sion, which may not necessarily fit with the missions of neighborhood associations. Still, as in the work of Hacienda CDC and the African American Health Coalition, there may be ongoing opportunities for collaboration in outreach or pooling resources to make events and classes happen. Likewise, volunteer-driven initiatives such as Growing Gardens may benefit from increased communication and collaboration with neighborhood associations.

Finally, membership-driven initiatives make the strongest case for forming groups apart from neighborhood associations while improving understanding between the groups. The transformative nature of the work of 'ROOTS!', Sisters in Action for Power, Dignity Village, and VOZ-Worker's Rights Education Project requires separate spaces for these communities to gather. It is critical to provide a comfortable setting for members to effectively relate and respond to common experiences of oppression and discrimination. In the context of social inequity, groups working to change societal structures extend beyond the scope of mainstream groups and, for this reason, should maintain their own organizations.

Neighborhood associations should be aware of what kinds of membership-driven groups exist, and keep these community groups informed of neighborhood association activities. In doing so, neighborhood associations can establish relationships and trust that may begin a dialogue between the groups. Table 1 summarizes the different opportunities for understanding and collaboration between neighborhood associations – or other organizations – and groups based in low-income and communities of color.

Introduction



Table 1. Opportunities for Neighborhood Associations and Other Organizations

Types of Diverse Community Groups				
	Issue-Based	Staff-Driven	Volunteer-Driven	Member-Driven
<i>Degree of collaboration</i>	Consider integration	Seek on-going possibilities for collaboration	Seek on-going possibilities for collaboration	Respect need for separate, safe space
<i>Resources</i>	Organize together on specific project	Share publicity; pool financial and human resources	Share publicity; pool financial and human resources	Call on groups and group leaders for counsel
<i>Communication</i>	Establish frequent communication	Establish regular communication	Establish regular communication	Keep lines of communication open
<i>Special considerations</i>				Increase understanding and awareness

Lessons Learned

While each of these community groups' experiences is unique, some common themes have emerged. Following are some of the lessons learned from their stories. These lessons may be useful in promoting greater inclusion in community involvement. The lessons fall into three general categories: **Connections, Leadership, and Process.**

Connections

Relationships

Community building is not an end in itself but a process of building relationships, which entails taking the time to communicate, get to know one another, and build trust. This may be particularly important for members of low-income and communities of color that have been discriminated against, mistreated by those with authority, and otherwise alienated in the past. The overall lesson is to let the process flow, do not force things, and take time to truly understand each other's hopes and fears, even in the shadow of pending deadlines. The particular project may not evolve as expected, but if time is allowed for relationships to form, the connections will outlive any short-term objective. **Growing Gardens** is a project that provides the low-income community with home vegetable gardens and resources to grow and harvest food. These gardens have helped people to grow their own fruit and vegetables, but have also added to a sense of community as gardeners work, learn, and share the fruits of their harvest, while creating a forum to hear and empathize with the turmoil in each other's lives.

Beyond Geography

Geography is not the only defining factor for a community. Many groups find more power and strength in the bonds of common culture and experience rather than lines on a map. While there may be some geographic clustering of people of color in Portland, **'ROOTS!** envisions its "community" as something far beyond neighborhood boundaries. Its initial campaign to fight displacement focused on North and Northeast Portland, yet the group aims to bring together people of color – people with similar experiences of culture and oppression – throughout the region.

The Power of Collective Action

There is a synergy that emerges from the work of communities that can transcend specific project goals. Uniting for a cause often becomes a force in itself, perhaps more valuable than the shorter-term goals that the group initially set out to achieve. This may be particularly important for community groups whose members have

Lessons Learned



had little formal power in the past. The outcome of all **Sisters in Action for Power** campaigns has been the force that the girls and women have felt by working together for change. Many of these girls and women have not felt a real sense of power and worth before. The combination of jointly developing direct action campaigns and participating in other leadership programs is an unprecedented way for them to unite and connect with their individual and collective strength.

Leadership

Champions

Leadership is an essential element for community groups. Success is much easier to reach with a strong community leader who becomes a champion for the cause and brings passion to the issue, inspiring others to act. For **Hope and Hard Work**, Richard Brown brought enthusiasm and determination to organizing, along with the support he rallied from key institutional leaders. Brown and Hope and Hard Work strategically secured the support of important city leaders like Mayor Katz and former Chief of Police Charles Moose. The backing of top officials aided the success of Hope and Hard Work because city employees and police officers then followed by example.

Entrée into the Community

Numerous benefits come from having an entrée into the community, ranging from the trust and goodwill that results from the community's familiarity with the person, to the invaluable knowledge of the community that the entrée brings in a way that no outsider could. **Hacienda CDC** has one such entrée for its Back to School Fiesta. The former program director for the event was a Latino who grew up in Northeast Portland. Today his legacy lives on as another family member continues to work in the organization.



Lessons Learned

Process

Unexpected Benefits

Often when a group organizes to make change, many other positive outcomes occur as well. The benefits of community organizing occur independently of groups' success in addressing the original issue that sparked the community-building initiative. **Dignity Village** was created for the purpose of allowing the homeless community of Portland a place to meet their basic needs. Dignity Village has become a collaborative, loving community, which school groups, international visitors, non-profit organizations, and church groups regularly visit. The exposure of Dignity Village has resulted in a more compassionate view of the homeless by the general public. The members of Dignity Village have also developed an extraordinary sense of pride in themselves and in the community that they have created.

Political Education

While learning about procedural or administrative politics is critical for some community struggles, cultural political education is key to others. Political education is a process where a group studies its history and ancestry, and places its current situation in a larger historical and political context. Learning about historical racism and learning from other revolutionary groups are some ways in which political education inspires groups and motivates them to action. **Friends of MLK** embarked on a mission to promote their neighborhood's character as an inviting and pedestrian-friendly environment. The group's year-long struggle was an educational process about the procedural elements of a potential McDonald's siting. Friends of MLK focused on learning about the zoning code as a way to politically arm themselves and form a strategy that would grant them standing in front of City Council and the Eliot Neighborhood Association. This procedural savvy eventually allowed the group to block the McDonald's siting on Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard as proposed.

In other instances, groups like **'ROOTS!'** emphasize its members' connections to historical people of color as well as to other indigenous people worldwide. **'ROOTS!'** is building a Community Resources Library that will serve as the basis for monthly Political Education Nights. The sense of pride and connection that results from political education is what binds members together and leads them to action.

Lessons Learned



Alternatives to Meetings Structure

Neighborhood associations and many other community groups have a culture of meetings. This structure does not necessarily fit with the traditions of many low-income and communities of color. Alternative organizing strategies are often more effective. While **VOZ- Worker's Rights Education Project** provides structured activities, such as English classes, another important aspect of the work of VOZ is the informal events that bring the day laborers together for soccer games or Mexican fiestas. These informal gatherings not only provide fun and companionship, but also serve as an alternative to traditional meetings for sharing important information.

Slow Down

Building trust and participation in a community takes time. If a community or individual feels pressured, they are less likely to contribute. It is critical for the community to feel comfortable with the process and to alter the process to better suit their needs. The project joining **VOZ- Worker's Rights Education Project** and the Village Building Convergence on a community design project had a strict time schedule, which made it difficult to allow the community the time to process proposed designs and become involved. At the start of the project, the day laborers were particularly being left behind. Realizing this shortcoming permitted the core organizing group to make changes to better integrate the day laborers and the community into the project.

Issued-Based Organizations

Hope and Hard Work



Case Background and Goals

Growing out of community concern about violence and gangs in North and Northeast Portland, Hope and Hard Work refers to weekly community meetings that activist Richard Brown started facilitating by 1995. The meetings were spurred by a 1990 press conference to discuss the violence that plagued North and Northeast Portland. Portland Police had not been successful at reducing crime there, and the violence was worsening. The community was frustrated and Richard Brown, Co-Chair of the Portland Black United Front and twenty-year Air Force veteran, decided something needed to be done. With passion and determination, Brown helped organize what would become regular meetings to reach out to the neighborhoods of North and Northeast Portland that felt alienated by the police.

The purpose of these meetings was to provide a place for residents of North and Northeast Portland to voice their frustrations, work towards new solutions for reducing crime and violence, and form better relationships with the Portland Police. The community requested that Mayor Katz and other high-ranking officials from the City of Portland attend these meetings. It was Browns' strong conviction, persistence, and force of personality that enabled him to secure top officials' attendance at these meetings.

Mayor Katz, members of the Portland Police, Chief of Police Charles Moose, the Portland Public School Board, the Portland District Attorney, and representatives from FBI district offices all participated in the first meeting in 1990 along with the community members of North and Northeast Portland. This forum for city leaders and local community members became a weekly event and evolved into the Hope and Hard Work committee. Brown described it as genius, bringing all of these people together in the same room to listen to the concerns of citizens, and allowing for innovative and invaluable collaboration between the city and citizens.

Success of Hope and Hard Work was measured not only by falling crime statistics, but also by new relationships and strong bonds that formed between City officials, Portland Police, and community members from working together to solve problems. The weekly meetings provided a regular outlet for community concerns and for creative collaboration between the community and the police about how to make the neighborhood safer.

Residents of North and Northeast Portland were able to reclaim some of the

area's most crime-ridden neighborhoods. Having high-ranking officials such as the Mayor and Chief of Police attend these weekly meetings and listen to the concerns instilled a sense of respect in the community. This positive interaction between the police and the community built trust among the residents of North and Northeast Portland. The community began to feel more comfortable not only calling the police, but also working with them on an ongoing basis.

Techniques and Obstacles

- Effective media campaign
- Corporate sponsorship
- Foot patrol

The first project of Hope and Hard Work was a media campaign. During the first meeting to discuss the campaign, participants quickly realized that it would be difficult to begin the campaign without financial assistance. With this realization, someone at the meeting stood up and announced, "I know a grant that we can apply for that will give us \$1,000 to start a media campaign. The only problem is that the due date for the grant is tomorrow." The grant application was put together that evening and Hope and Hard Work received the funds.

The community members began to shape a theme for the media campaign. They attempted to convey the repercussions of violence with the slogan "hope you have someone who loves you; guns don't always kill." An advertising agency donated graphic artists and three billboards for the span of four months. The grant funds were used for administrative purposes. The intent and benefit of a media campaign, according to Brown, was to generate conversation. It was a success in his eyes because it worked to bring people together to talk about the problems they shared in their neighborhoods.

Another successful project of Hope and Hard Work was establishing a foot patrol. The foot patrol was a group of citizens who would walk together, or "sweep", some of the most violent streets in North and Northeast Portland. The foot patrol was on the street every day of the week for five hours a night over the

Hope and Hard Work



course of 16 months. Patrols were composed of at least five people performing two-and-a-half hour shifts, with two groups completing the five-hour duration from 6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. each night. Interestingly, many people that participated in the foot patrol were not from North Portland. Citizens from all over the Portland region volunteered so that there were as many as 20 people walking together in the evening “sweeps.” The fact that a majority of the participants were not residents of North Portland did not diminish the success of this program.

Interface with the City

Hope and Hard Work enjoyed a good working relationship with the city, especially given that it had the ear of the most important city officials at its first meeting and many subsequent meetings. In particular, the presence of Mayor Katz sent a strong message to Portland Police officers that the concerns of North and Northeast Portland demanded special attention. When Brown coaches other cities on developing their own community policing strategies, one of his strongest recommendations is that the community enlist the support of high-ranking officials like the mayor. He claims that it makes a significant difference in getting the rest of the city to follow and support the effort.

Although the weekly meetings of Hope and Hard Work continue to this day (May 2003), the group lost a lot of momentum when Charles Moose left the post of Chief of Police. In the past, the neighborhood officers would come to almost every weekly meeting of Hope and Hard Work. Now the Hope and Hard Work committee has to call and directly ask officers to attend the meetings. The current police force is set up so that district officers, not local neighborhood officers, come to Hope and Hard Work’s weekly meetings. This arrangement is less effective because the attending officers often do not work in the North and Northeast Portland community.



Hope and Hard Work

Outcomes and Reflections

The outstanding successes of Hope and Hard Work have been the relationships that have resulted, the reduction in crime, and the creation of a forum for community members to collaborate with city officials.

Foot patrols, in particular, worked to decrease crime as well as provide opportunities for North Portland residents and other Portland residents to have positive interactions with the Portland Police. In one instance, a woman put together refreshments for each shift and told the police a time they could drop by to receive it. This friendly exchange between the police and the residents was witnessed nightly by the neighborhood. While picking up their snack, officers would invariably converse with residents. The personal relationships that formed between the police and the community were advantageous not only because the community felt safer going to the police but also because criminals who knew of the relationships began to avoid the area. Crime dropped considerably along the corridor that was being patrolled.

The city has acknowledged the success of Hope and Hark Work and has incorporated many elements of what it has learned from this project into its own policing policies. While community policing may not currently receive as much direct support as it did in the 1990s, principles developed by community policing have continued to have positive impacts on policing policies for North and North-east Portland and for the city at large.

Members of Hope and Hard Work learned that the leadership of the Chief of Police is critical to the interaction of the police force and the community, says Brown. After an incident of wrongful arrest in North Portland in which police humiliated and scared an innocent civilian in front of his children, Brown suggested that Chief of Police Moose send an apology letter. Chief Moose not only wrote a letter to this family, but also delivered it in person. Humble gestures performed by a leader like the Chief of Police send the message that the police care, serve as an example of what is expected from every officer, and set the overall tone for public safety in the city.

Case Background and Goals

In early spring 2002, a group called Friends of MLK (“Friends”) formed to protest the proposed siting of a McDonalds on Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard (“MLK”). The proposed site was on MLK between NE Cook and Ivy Streets and is part of Northeast Portland’s Eliot Neighborhood. People of color comprise 40 percent of the Eliot Neighborhood, and the neighborhood immediately surrounding the proposed site has a significant African American and low-income population. After an Eliot Neighborhood Association meeting where it was reported that McDonald’s had expressed interest in a particular lot along MLK, a group of residents responded in outrage.

Many in attendance at this meeting were irate but a core group decided to take action. Friends formed and appointed a MLK Steering Committee consisting of six to eight residents. The group realized that it had a lot of energy, but not enough money to fight the plans for McDonald’s. The group then decided to take up a collection to help pay for a land use attorney. As lead organizer David Jahns explains, volunteers went door-to-door in order to gather donations for the attorney’s fee. They found that the closer the households were to the proposed site, the more likely was their opposition to the proposed development. Residents along NE Cook and NE Ivy Streets were opposed to the McDonald’s siting at a ratio of approximately 40 to 1.

After a long battle and the help of 350 volunteers, Friends accomplished its goal to stop the siting of McDonald’s on MLK. As of March 2003, McDonald’s officially removed its bid for the proposed site. Friends feel that the strategies that it pursued are what enabled the group to win the battle. Some members of Friends have gone on to join the Eliot Neighborhood Association.

Techniques and Obstacles

- Door-to-door polling
- Strategic opposition
- Neighborhood rallies

After the announcement of McDonalds' intent, many local residents were upset. The core group that became Friends lived near the proposed site, but its members were not necessarily members of the Eliot Neighborhood Association. The group believed it would be more productive and flexible to take necessary actions if it was separate from the neighborhood association. Working within the framework of the neighborhood association would mean following bylaws that would dramatically slow down Friends' campaign.

However, the first challenge was to gain the support of the neighborhood association. Since the neighborhood association would be the group to officially represent Friends before City Council, Friends needed its support to successfully take action in a land use proceeding like the McDonald's siting. Friends lobbied the neighborhood association and reported results of its door-to-door polling conducted within a six block radius of the site: over 70 percent of the people polled were strongly opposed to the McDonald's, and less than 10 percent supported it. These results made it easier for Friends to gain the endorsement of the neighborhood association, whose support gave legitimacy to Friends' objections to McDonald's based on land use issues and urban design issues. Nevertheless, as Jahns indicated, "The Eliot Neighborhood Association would never go on record as opposing an allowed use on the basis of the corporate identity or behavior."

Friends then spearheaded the effort to rally the general public behind its cause. At a hearing convened by the Portland Design Commission, a voluntary board consisting of professionals from the urban design, architecture and development industries, Friends came prepared with maps of one square mile around the site, diagramming the opposition and support for the proposed McDonald's site. Within this square mile, two people were in favor of

Friends of MLK



the development. This demonstrated to the city that this group was organized and would not back down easily.

Interface with the City

The connection to the city formed between Friends and the Bureau of Development Services- a City of Portland department that reviews proposed site plans, permits and regulation of land use zoning. It became apparent early on that the Friends' protest was based on land use zoning within the area and design review. Friends also had some interaction with the Bureau of Planning and the Office of Transportation. Though sympathetic to the cause, these agencies did not have power to help. Initially, the City granted the first design review for the proposed McDonald's site. With the aid of a former Bureau of Planning employee and the Eliot Neighborhood Association, Friends drafted an official letter to the city to appeal this decision.

Friends was most dismayed about the citizen involvement process in the McDonald's project. Though public input is a faithfully followed requirement of most city projects, the group felt that in the end, public input was not given much weight in this case. Over 1,000 letters written by residents were sent to the city, which helped the cause, but the city still approved the design. It was tireless attention to zoning that eventually brought Friends success.

Outcomes and Reflections

Ultimately, Friends achieved success by changing the zoning code itself. While previous language within the code was "soft" and essentially permitted drive-thrus along MLK, Friends persuaded the City to revise the code to "prohibit" drive-thrus along MLK. If the McDonald's had been built, it would have been the first fast food restaurant to be built in the area since the Albina Community Plan was adopted in 1993. According to Friends, this would have set a terrible precedent since the plan envisions the area as a pedestrian district.

A major obstacle during this battle was that drive-thrus were technically allowed by zoning code at the time. While City commissioners helped Hawthorne Boulevard protest McDonald's proposed design and siting there, the commissioners' support for Friends of MLK was lukewarm at best.



Friends of MLK

The members of Friends are now more educated about land use processes and the politics of the city. There was a steep learning curve, and it took months for the group to decide what its course of action would be. In the end, taking this time allowed for a lot of healthy debate between members of Friends and made it a satisfying experience overall. The debates steered Friends to pursue the most effective course of action.

Those who worked hard on the campaign were overjoyed with overturning the proposed siting and the transformation of the code language. Friends feel that it succeeded because the group was able to honestly represent the local residents' sentiments in its interactions with City officials. This commitment to doing right by local residents kept Friends focused on the issues and dedicated to blocking the McDonald's siting as proposed.

In retrospect, Friends would have liked to have had more low-income people and people of color involved in the process. The group had minority representation turnout for the public rallies, volunteering, and letter-writing campaigns, but not for participation on the steering committee. While recruitment for the steering committee may have fallen short, Friends feels that the residents never waned in their support and enthusiasm for the cause.



Staff-Driven Organizations

Case Background and Goals

Tucked away in unassuming office space across from Emanuel Hospital in North Portland, the African American Health Coalition (AAHC) is committed to an impressive vision: to make the residents of North/Northeast Portland the healthiest African American community in the country. Starting in 1998 with a few committed health care workers and this ambitious agenda, the AAHC secured \$50,000 in grants from the Northwest Health Foundation, \$30,000 in grants from Multnomah County, and gained its 501(c)(3) status as a non-profit organization. By 2003, the AAHC's initial volunteer base grew to a staff of thirteen members, a \$1.6 million dollar annual budget, and a board of directors that consisted of community leaders, academics, medical doctors, and members of the media.



Health disparities in the African American community have driven the group's agenda. Cardiovascular disease (including coronary artery disease, stroke, and high blood pressure) affects African Americans in Oregon disproportionately. Compared to white Americans, African Americans are:

- twice as likely to die from coronary artery disease (heart attacks) and
- one-and-a-half times as likely to die from a stroke.

In its second year, the AAHC was awarded a national Center for Disease Control and Prevention grant for Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) to address the health disparities in racial minority communities. The AAHC is one of 44 sites funded through 2010, and has four programs to promote its vision to combat health disparities in the African American

African American Health Coaliton



community. In addition to a program focused on youth, a program geared towards training beauticians and barbers to share information on healthy lifestyle choices with their clientele, and a direct mailing program, the AAHC operates what has become a centerpiece for the organization: Wellness Within REACH: Mind, Body and Soul.

Wellness Within REACH: Mind, Body and Soul offers free exercise classes to the African American community in North and Northeast Portland, with the aim of reducing cardiovascular disease. The leading reasons why people in the community do not exercise include cost, comfort level, and proximity to facilities. Through Wellness Within REACH, the AAHC has worked to overcome these barriers.

The overarching goal of the AAHC is to make the African American community in North/Northeast Portland the healthiest in the country. According to the current program coordinator, Wellness Within REACH is a “lifestyle breaker,” and its specific goal is to saturate the North and Northeast community with venues to exercise. Currently, the target audience is 21 years and older, but this may change in the future.

However, this program is more than just goals— it is a movement. By 2003, over 400 community members have taken part in the free classes, ranging from water aerobics, strength training, Tai Chi, salsa, yoga, and African dance, which are held at a variety of community venues such as Mallory Church, Nature’s natural food stores on Fremont, Matt Dishman Community Center, and the Salvation Army. The classes are free, comfortable, and local, all of which increase the likelihood of participants attending and returning. At first, the AAHC had to solicit the community for the use of space; now people are asking the AAHC for the classes to be held in their space. A recent request for belly dancing classes illustrates the program’s diversity and the fact that people are catching on.

Techniques and Obstacles

- Community connections
- Assistance from faith-based institutions
- Access to community centers
- Dedicated instructors

The current program coordinator's connections to the community have been key to the success of Wellness Within REACH. Raised in North Portland, the coordinator has been able to use his relationship with the African American community in North and Northeast Portland to promote and strengthen the program.

The faith-based institutions have been invaluable as well. Pastors have been using the pulpit to further the message of healthy living and eating habits. In addition, the dedication of the class instructors has increased the program's success. As the program coordinator states, "I believe the success of the program has everything to do with the motivated, and passionate instructors that we have teaching the classes. These instructors have a love and passion for African American people, and the African American Community. They are also residents in the same community."

With approval from Portland Parks and Recreation, the use of community centers for classes has been quite helpful in expanding the geographic scope of the class offerings. The Salvation Army has offered space for classes in North and Northeast Portland, and two African American newspapers, *Skanner* and *Observer*, have advertised to the community. However, a recent survey of class participants found that over 70 percent had heard about the classes by word-of-mouth. Pointing to the value of community connections, Wellness Within REACH has blossomed by building on existing personal connections.

There have been no opponents to the project, nor has there been a proprietary sentiment about the program; in fact, the AAHC would regard a similar program offered independently through a church or other organization to be a success. In their goal of creating the healthiest African American community in the country, the sponsor matters less than progressing toward the goal— any increase in exercise

African American Health Coaliton



will help to reduce heart disease in the community.

Interface with the City and County

The relationship of the AAHC with the City of Portland through the Parks and Recreation department has been very positive and beneficial. Its relations with Multnomah County have been similarly positive, especially given the county's initial \$30,000 investment in the organization.

Outcomes and Reflections

As of May 2003, the outcomes of Wellness Within REACH were being assessed. In addition to an enrollment of 400 participants and growing, the AAHC is planning to identify causes of retention as well as individual success stories within the classes.



The program's future has not always been certain, however. In 2002, the program was failing due to inconsistent program coordination, but with a change of coordinators, as well as the perseverance and faith of the AAHC directors, Wellness Within REACH withstood the tough times.

Outreach to maintain relationships with the community partners is a vital part of this program's success. The current program coordinator is looking for future administrative help to free up his time so that he can continue steering the program in the future.

Advocacy and research is key to the AAHC's long-term success as well. This is supported through staff education and research opportunities; for example, the current program coordinator is returning to school for his doctorate research, new knowledge which he hopes to bring back to the AAHC for its continuing work.

Case Background and Goals

Beginning as a voter education project to get out the Latino vote, Hacienda Community Development Corporation (“Hacienda”) incorporated in 1992. Hacienda seeks to aid Portland’s Latino population with housing, health, education, community and economic development activities. In Portland, there are over 35,000 Latinos, a population that has increased 153 percent between 1990 and 2000. To accommodate this growing population, between 1996 and 2002 Hacienda built nearly 300 affordable housing units in Northeast Portland (Villa de Clara Vista, Villa de Sueños, and Los Jardines de la Paz), which housed an average of 4 to 4.5 persons per unit.

The most recent building, the 43-unit Los Jardines de la Paz, was completed in 2002 and is built on a former abandoned car lot. For its efforts to incorporate “smart” design, such as communal green spaces and proximity to transit, Hacienda was awarded one of 1000 Friends of Oregon’s Developer of the Year awards for 2002. As 1000 Friends, a non-profit organization combating urban sprawl and promoting more compact and livable cities, described Los Jardines de la Paz: “Successfully rejuvenating a community located in outer Northeast Portland, the project has been welcomed and recognized by city, county and state agencies as providing much-needed housing to an underserved population.”

In July of 2000, the Baltazar F. Ortiz Community Center – now a key part of Hacienda’s programming – was opened and houses La Clinica de Buena Salud, operated by Multnomah County. Hacienda also operates Oregon’s only Latino credit union, called the Hacienda Community Credit Union, which serves the Latino populations of Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties. Hacienda works as well with the community in yearly events, including the Back to School Fiesta every August.



The Back to School Fiesta began in 1990 as the combined efforts of a few county health workers, teachers in the area, and Hacienda staff. The basic premise was that kids have to be ready to learn at the start of each school year;

Hacienda CDC



a fundamental component of readiness is access to bookbags, notebooks, pens, and other supplies. The key organizers raised money, secured donations, and made a festival out of the event.

The goal of the Back to School Fiesta is to prepare kids for school. However, through the “passport” design of the program, whereby families must visit a certain number of the invited community organizations that have tables at the event, get a stamp from each on their passport, and then redeem the passport for the bag of school supplies—the goal is much larger. Connecting the community to services that are available is a vital aspect of the program’s design.

Techniques and Obstacles

- Community members on staff
- Short-term notice
- Corporate sponsorships
- Allies as co-sponsors



The first program coordinator for Hacienda’s Back to School program was a life-long member of the Latino community in Portland. The coordinator’s personal connections were invaluable to the initial success of the program. The current coordinator is not an “insider” in this respect; however, the sister of the first coordinator is her assistant. This greatly improves the trust and respect that the Back to School program receives from the residents, and reflects the importance of enlisting the help of community members in program efforts.

Generally, over the years, the organizers have found that short-term notice works best. Alerting residents two days prior to the event seems to elicit the best attendance. Any earlier, and the community places the flyer to the side and forgets about the event. As the current program director notes, “foot and flyers” has been the approach, meaning door-to-door outreach as well as paper advertisements.

Business and neighborhood partnerships are vital to the event’s continued success. Fred Meyer has donated supplies and SafeCo Insurance has provided financial assistance. The Cully Neighborhood Association (a member of the Central Northeast Neighbors Neighborhood Coalition), the 42nd Avenue Target Area, and the Business Association of 42nd Avenue are key partners. The nearby St. Charles Church has been generous in providing space and board member volunteers. For the past two years, Portland Community College’s Metropolitan Workforce Training Center, located on NE 42nd Avenue, has hosted the event in its parking lot.

While the school supplies are an expensive part of the yearly budget (in 2003, \$4,500 for supplies and \$1,000 for backpacks was planned), advertising costs are much higher. In 2003, a unique partnership was formed with State Farm Insurance and Clear Channel, a multinational telecommunications company with local offices. In addition to donating money, State Farm is partnering with Clear Channel to air Back to School Fiesta 30-second spots on FM stations, and air requests for donations on AM channels.

A challenge with advertising is the free “give-away” component. Although this is an asset of the program, it could attract people less in need. With the Clear Channel connection this year, Hacienda expects to selectively market the event, using the title “Back to School Fiesta” on Latino channels, and the “Cully Neighborhood Fiesta” in other venues, in order to target the population that most needs the service. Hacienda has struggled to find the balance for the event, between a community festival with a back-to-school theme versus a strictly back-to-school event.

Interface with Other Institutions

The connection to the Central Northeast Neighbors (CNN), a neighborhood coalition within ONI comprised of eight Northeast neighborhoods and four business associations, has been an added resource for Hacienda in its Back to School Fiesta. In terms of funding and organizational support, the 42nd Avenue Target Area group – a sub-set of CNN, which focuses on physical and economic development in the area – has been instrumental as well.

Outcomes and Reflections

In 2002, 550 kids were served by the Fiesta; in 2003, the number was expected to grow to 750. For the future, many things are unknown. The changing nature of the community that Hacienda serves has played out in its housing complex on NE 60th and Killingsworth, Los Jardines de la Paz. Somalian families currently occupy more than half of the 43-unit, three- and four-bedroom townhomes. As the mix of immigrant families change, there will be possible implications for Hacienda’s future programming and outreach efforts. However, the staff is unsure as to the extent of these population shifts and their potential impacts.



Volunteer-Driven Organization

Case Background and Goals

Formerly Portland Home Garden Project, Growing Gardens originated in 1996 with one staff member and a handful of volunteers. The small gardening project began as a way to teach others how to successfully harvest their own food, but quickly transformed into an extraordinary organization that would eventually serve a population who could benefit enormously from its service.



In a typical year Growing Gardens has served as many as 54 individuals and families facing hunger or food insecurity. For these members of society, having dinner on the table each night is not a certainty. Although the project's original mission was not aimed at low-income persons, it soon became apparent that this was the place of greatest need. Oregon is ranked first in the country in terms of hunger statewide. Additionally, according to a Growing Gardens fact sheet, a higher rate of food insecurity exists for households headed by people of color, immigrants, or naturalized citizens.

In 2003, Growing Gardens had expanded to include over 900 diverse volunteers and five hard-working staff. Contributing thousands of hours each year, volunteers and staff maintain four programs:

Growing Gardens



1. **Home Gardens:** This program teams volunteer groups with Portland-area families and individuals who are interested in starting a vegetable garden. The volunteers spend five to six hours at each home, building wooden bed frames, preparing the ground, providing seeds and digging dirt. Over 278 low-income households have received raised bed gardens since the project's inception. Of those participants, approximately 55 percent are people of color and 11 percent are non-English speaking, and most are residents of Northeast or Southeast Portland.
2. **Partner Gardens:** Thirty-one neighborhood gardens on private lots have been created in the city through this program. In collaboration with apartment complexes, schools, and private parcels serving a defined community, partner gardens have been created at Early Head Start Family Center of Portland, DePaul Youth Residential Treatment Services, and NE Emergency Food Program among many others.
3. **Youth Grow:** This program targets children and is attended mostly by younger family members of Growing Gardens' current home and partner gardeners. Youth who have been identified as living near or below the poverty level are also recruited for this program from local schools.
4. **Educational Workshops:** This portion of the Growing Gardens' work is geared towards current home and partner gardeners. As a free service, the workshops ensure that the community will have the skills and resources necessary to grow fresh food, and offer a venue where people can gather together in a garden to form bonds and create community spaces.

Growing Gardens' goal is to provide nutrition and self-reliance for an underserved community – in this case, low-income people – where the need is great. Though their efforts will not solve the hunger problem, Growing Gardens programs can reduce food insecurity by increasing the variety, proximity, and affordability of fresh food.

According to Growing Gardens Executive Director, Deb Lippoldt, the mentoring and gardening workshops are key to reaching the program goals. For instance, through Youth Grow, after-school programs and summer programs are offered to children in low-income schools. During these programs, youth can explore food



Growing Gardens

gardening and learn where food comes from.

Success for Growing Gardens would mean that they no longer have to recruit home gardeners at WIC or food stamp offices; willing and eager participants would come to Growing Gardens instead. Thanks to word-of-mouth, there is a very long waiting list; demand is high for both home and partner gardens. On the individual level, success shows in the response of garden recipients. Home gardeners are delighted and empowered by their new garden. They spend less money on groceries and they can now share their extra garden produce with neighbors and family where they may not have had this before. What is important is that they now have something to give and share with others. Cited as an increasing need in one of its newsletters, Growing Gardens also helps foster a sense of community by “helping build relationships across neighbors’ fences.”

Techniques and Obstacles

- Adaptability
- Team work
- Culturally appropriate seeds
- Non-judgmental about the challenges for low-income people

According to Lippoldt, Growing Gardens employs several approaches that have allowed the organization to succeed. First, becoming responsive to gardeners’ needs permits Growing Gardens to constantly shape the work they do and become more effective. Second, community building has been valued as a vital part of uniting community members to work together for a common goal.

Third, Growing Gardens makes sure that a variety of seeds are available for the culture/ethnicity of the gardeners. For example, epazote - an herb used by many Latino households when cooking beans - helps reduce gas and also adds flavor. When Growing Gardens has a shortage of hot peppers, it reserves them for their Asian and Latino gardeners. These seeds have been added to reflect communities’ food ties. This sensitivity is important in forming the bond between the organization and the gardeners.

Growing Gardens

Finally, an understanding for people's different life situations is critical, specifically when working with low-income people. As Lippoldt comments, "The challenges of day-to-day can interfere with the best intentions so we try not to judge, but continue to offer and include."



Financial challenges have made it difficult for Growing Gardens to carry out some programs as planned. In 2002, the organiza-

tion had to cancel some workshops, lay off a staff member, and cut back hours in order to provide a temporary solution to budget problems. Growing Gardens has had difficulty with community partners who fail to meet commitments, as well as Growing Gardens' own lack of clarity in expressing its expectations of community partners. For instance, with the YouthGrow program, working in some of the school environments has been limited by lack of funding and resources on the schools' part. Finally, limited resources such as staff and funding, have impacted Growing Garden's ability to build the organizational infrastructure needed to increase its financial base. Throughout these trials, however, Growing Gardens still manages to meet its program commitments.

Interface with the City

Portland Bureau of Housing and Community Development has been a valuable resource to Growing Gardens. The city agency funds all of the soil lead testing and certification of staff to assess if the ground beneath the sites of raised garden beds is contaminated.

Outcomes and Reflections

Thanks to a generous grant from the United Way of the Columbia-Willamette's Community Impact Focus Funding Initiative in 2002, Growing Gardens has partnered with Portland-based GEARS (Gaining Empowerment, Access, Respon-



Growing Gardens

sibility and Support). The goal of this partnership is to increase the ability of community members to obtain, store, and prepare food. The initiative targets the mainly Russian- and Spanish-speaking communities in outer Southeast Portland. “A growing area of the work is providing support to families to overcome the isolation and barriers connected to language and cultural differences,” says Bill Boyd, GEARS Program Director. GEARS’ role in the partnership is to provide Growing Gardens with non-English-speaking gardeners and other Russian and Spanish translation services. This newly formed partnership will benefit many of the families participating in home and partner gardens.

In the near future Growing Gardens would like to take a look at the percentage of gardeners who still maintain their gardens. Currently, Growing Gardens does not have a system to track and monitor its programs in this way. In addition, the organization does not follow up with the changing demographics of its participants and feels that their needs might be changing. Growing Gardens would like to perform an ethnicity profile to better characterize the diversity of gardeners involved in its programs.



Member-Driven Organizations

'ROOTS!

Case Background and Goals

Residents Organizing Against Removal (ROAR!) originally formed in 2000 in response to the adoption of the massive, 3,700-acre Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area in North Portland. The area had begun steadily gentrifying during the 1990s. Along with gentrification, urban renewal designation threatens to displace current business and home renters and owners. Forced displacement occurs because either rental units are converted to owner-occupied units, new owners and renters are willing to pay more for housing and commercial space, or – as a result of rising property values – property taxes exceed what current owners can afford.



The Interstate Alliance to End Displacement (IAED) was formed at the same time as ROAR!. Yet ROAR! differed from IAED in that it was made up primarily of low-income people and people of color who were in direct danger of losing their businesses or residences to gentrification and displacement. Drawing from the members of ROAR!, a new organization formed in 2002 to dedicate itself to the anti-displacement campaign as well as other anti-racist campaigns.

At its first meeting in July 2002, members brainstormed the kinds of feelings and qualities they wanted to capture with a name, a mission, and an organizational structure and eventually agreed on 'ROOTS!, Reclaiming Our Origins Through Struggle. 'ROOTS! would meet monthly and would be supported by two staff members, Lakita Logan, Director, and Tomás Garduño, Organizer, who combine solid backgrounds in political theory and organizing around issues of culture and race. 'ROOTS! would be a membership-driven organizing group rather than a staff-driven advocacy group and would seek to transform established systems of governance more than to work with them.

'ROOTS!



'ROOTS! is made up of only people of color – those who can trace their origins to Africa, Latin America, Asia, and indigenous North America – and works in collaboration with sister organization White Allies Against Racism. This distinction was made to honor the belief that people of color often share common cultures and experiences of oppression, and need a separate space in which to express and respond to this. Even in Portland, Garduño suggests that “well-meaning white people” can pose a barrier to the participation of people of color in community building. White activists in Portland tend to have the advantage of more numbers, time, money, and familiarity with local power structures and administrative procedures. 'ROOTS! is not necessarily seeking to secure similar access to this system as much as reform the system itself.

Members are either Grassroots Members – low-income members – or Associate Members – more financially stable members. To ensure that the organization is driven by low-income people of color, 'ROOTS! has a board for managing affairs and a Leadership Committee for determining the organization’s direction and campaigns. Anyone from the membership may sit on the board, while only Grassroots Members may sit on the Leadership Committee. All members can veto board decisions, vote on board members, and vote on proposed changes to 'ROOTS! bylaws or policies.

The goals of 'ROOTS! are set out in its Mission:

- Empower People of Color with an emphasis on building the leadership of grassroots leaders of color
- Develop youth and adults of color to be the leaders of tomorrow by teaching ourselves about our rights, our history and empowering our community to demand what is rightfully ours
- Challenge institutions through direct action organizing to be accountable to our communities
- Build a broad based revolutionary movement for racial and economic justice with an ultimate goal of liberation of People of Color

In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Similarly, racial justice and the liberation of people of color, explains Garduño, will have the effect of liberating all people. Putting the brakes on gentrification and displacement, like ROAR! strives to do, targets issues of racial injustice but will be only one of several racial justice campaigns eventually spear-headed by 'ROOTS!.

Techniques and Obstacles

- Committees
- Political education
- Personal connections
- Door-knocking
- Direct action
- Earned media

ROAR!'s anti-displacement, anti-racist campaign is activated within 'ROOTS!'s framework of five working committees including a Political Education Committee, a Fundraising and Organizational Development Committee, an Outreach and Propaganda Committee, a Campaign (Community Action Project) Committee, and an International Work Committee.

'ROOTS!'s political education program draws its inspiration from grassroots movements of people of color, especially from the 1960s and 1970s, including Black Power and the Chicano Liberation Front. Consequently 'ROOTS!' organizes by constituencies, where people with common experiences of oppression can come together, rather than by issues that tend to be more transitory.

Methods for Outreach and Campaigns have consisted mainly of door-knocking, word-of-mouth, phone-calling, and emailing. The nature of ROAR!'s anti-displacement campaign and of many of the personal connections of its participants bounded door-to-door outreach mainly to the neighborhoods of North and Northeast Portland. However, as Garduño emphasizes, the ultimate reach of 'ROOTS!' will not to be confined geographically but will extend to all people of common cultural experience in the metropolitan area.

The cornerstone of 'ROOTS!' – and what it shares in common with other racial justice organizations worldwide – is *direct action*. These are demonstrations, blockades, and other tactics directed specifically at decision makers and those holding power in what are deemed white supremacist and oppressive structures of capitalism, imperialism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism. “By any means necessary” is a philosophy the organization shares with other groups, although political and social contexts may differ. Recognizing its connections to indigenous people's struggles internationally, 'ROOTS!' organizes with other anti-racist and anti-imperialist grassroots groups through COMPA, a coordinating body formed in 1999 that stretches from Canada to South America.

Interface with the City

Very consciously, 'ROOTS! wants to foster relationships with established officials and agencies strictly for the ways in which those relationships will advance goals of racial justice. The organization chooses to respond with praise or criticism for the *actions* of individuals and agencies, not with praise or criticism for the individuals and agencies themselves.

The primary basis for interaction between 'ROAR! and city agencies has been the negotiation of anti-displacement support in the Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area. In this process, 'ROOTS! and ROAR! have developed working relationships with City of Portland Commissioner Erik Sten, his staff, and other housing leaders. When ROAR! and Interstate Alliance to End Displacement sensed there might be backsliding on city agreements of anti-displacement support, they held a community forum at Jefferson High School, invited Sten, and arranged for members of the media – the *Oregonian*, KOIN-6, and *Portland Alliance* – to attend so as to keep the pressure on. This was successful. Sten assured the participants that the city would continue to fund a rental assistance program and also proposed a real estate transfer tax to re-direct a portion of area real estate sales back into anti-displacement programs.

Outcomes and Reflection

Although a controversial court ruling and a sluggish economy suspended additional urban renewal funding for displacement prevention, ROAR! has been successful in securing city general funds to fight displacement. The result is the Residential Displacement Prevention Project in which \$150,000 for rental assistance has been allocated for 'ROOTS! and the Albina Ministerial Alliance (AMA) to administer. Currently, 'ROOTS! solicits and screens applications and AMA handles the case work and distributes rental assistance grants based on need.

In spite of uncontrollable legal and economic factors and institutionalized racism, sexism, and classism, 'ROOTS! and ROAR! have made forward progress overall. Having met one campaign goal of securing anti-displacement assistance, the organization turns to its members to determine the next battles to be fought.

Sisters in Action for Power

Case Background and Goals

Sisters in Action for Power’s Tri-Met Student Pass Campaign was part of a nationwide Transportation Equity Campaign demanding that people of color, low-income people, women, and other transit-dependent constituency groups have more of a voice in transportation policy-making. In spearheading a transit equity campaign, Sisters in Action for Power (“Sisters in Action”) was joining a growing movement to hold transit agencies accountable for the social impacts of their policies. This trend was dramatically illustrated in the 1994 case in which the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority was unable to credibly or convincingly defend its policies against federal charges of discrimination.



The aim of the Student Pass Campaign was to have one transit-dependent population – Portland youth – shape policy, namely in terms of affordable youth transit passes in the Portland region. The campaign began with community research and polling in 1997 and celebrated a major victory with the approval of restricted free student passes in 2000 and universal discounted-rate student passes in 2001.

Sisters in Action did not form expressly for the Student Pass Campaign or Transportation Equity Campaign but, rather, for the kind of work and worth they represented. Ultimately, the power of the organization comes from bringing low-income girls and women of color together, offering them social, political, cultural education about their cultural history and current social situations and letting group members learn from each other while collaborating on community-based research, campaign development, leadership training, demonstrations, and other direct actions.

Girl members, in particular, start by attending Wednesday Youth Nights before moving onto the Girls Leadership Program, where they are expected to lead meetings, fundraise, and recruit. Some girls and women go on to Internship and Staff Apprenticeship Programs within the Sisters in Action offices. Taking

Sisters in Action for Power



on this kind of responsibility, the girls and women build invaluable self-esteem, leadership and work skills, and a sense of community identity— whether community is defined by place, culture, or spirit.

Since 2000, the organization has been made up of over 120 members, more than half of the membership being girls under 18 years old. Composition has also remained somewhat stable over the last few years with most of the members being African American and the other members being white and Latino. Roughly ninety percent of the girls live in single-female-headed households, almost a third of the girls' mothers are either deceased or incarcerated, and a third of the girls are teen mothers themselves.

In struggling for more youth influence over transit policy, Sisters in Action advocated for combinations of the following changes to the regional transit agency Tri-Met's \$33 youth pass: a \$15 year-round rate for youth passes, free passes for students, a \$10 student pass, or the same number of free and discounted passes for students as are allotted to workplace commute programs.

Techniques and Obstacles

- Door-to-door polling
- Policy research
- Direct action
- Inter-generational membership and leadership

Sisters in Action's organizing model relies on direct action campaigns, political education, and having an organizational structure that reflects its vision. Sisters in Action used this model to develop its transit equity campaign strategy. The first strategy was community-based research— door-to-door surveying of 2,000 local students in 1997. More than 35 percent of the students surveyed reported that transit costs were a transportation problem and 11 percent that they were missing school because of transportation costs.

Sisters in Action then challenged the equity of Tri-Met's policies by presenting research of other cities' youth and student transit policies as well as Tri-Met's own policies regarding other riders. Youth and student passes in comparable transit markets cost anywhere from \$8 to \$18 as compared to \$33 in the Portland region.



Sisters in Action for Power

Further, Tri-Met's senior passes were \$14. In 1998, Intel purchased employee passes through Tri-Met's workplace PASSport program – a program that discounts transit passes according to workplace location and amount of transit ridership – at roughly \$10 each. The girls presented these findings to the Tri-Met Board, as well as to Mayor Vera Katz, Multnomah County Commissioner Serena Cruz, and Portland Public Schools Superintendent Assistant Pat Burk.

Sisters in Action made a point of attending and demonstrating at Tri-Met Board meetings. In front of the Tri-Met offices where the June 2000 board meeting would be held, Sisters in Action performed a role-play where businessmen and tourists were welcomed aboard a cardboard bus and students were shut out. The Center for Community Change reported that, after their demands were not fully met at the board meeting, Sisters in Action members left the room singing:

“The wheels on the bus go
Round and round
Round and round
Round and round
The wheels on the bus go
Round and round
All through the town

The students on the bus say
WE'LL BE BACK
WE'LL BE BACK
WE'LL BE BACK
The students on the bus say
WE'LL BE BACK
'Cause we can't get to school!”

Tri-Met responded that it was more or less powerless to meet Sisters in Action's demands. The agency claimed that it simply could not afford to institute free student passes, yet Sisters in Action found that the agency was spending \$2.7 million annually on the Portland Streetcar, for instance. Otherwise, Tri-Met felt that it did not have the mandate or responsibility to offer more affordable youth or student passes; it ultimately deferred to Portland Public Schools and other school districts.

Sisters in Action for Power



Deflection was the largest obstacle throughout the campaign, according to Sisters in Action's Darlene Lombos, and was also used by Tri-Met in forming a Transit Equity Committee. Sisters in Action called this committee a strategic buffer that Tri-Met sought to place between Sisters in Action and Tri-Met decision-makers. This was seen as particularly manipulative because committee members came from some of the same neighborhoods as Sisters in Action.

Interface with Other Agencies

Tri-Met convened the Transit Equity Committee in Summer 2000 to study transit policy implications for communities including youth, low-income, people of color, non-English-speaking, and less physically able. To maintain control over its own campaign and to reject the buffering tactics that the Transit Equity Committee represented, Sisters in Action declined to join the committee. Sisters in Action wanted contact only with the General Manager and the decision-makers on the board, and refused to be softened or diverted by the North and Northeast Portland leaders that sat on the committee.

When the Tri-Met Board eventually approved a discounted youth student pass, it initially credited its policy change to the work of its Transit Equity Committee. Members of Sisters in Action demanded a meeting with Tri-Met General Manager Fred Hansen in which he agreed to more fairly acknowledge Sisters in Action. The *Oregonian* and the *Willamette Week* published news of Sisters in Action's victory soon after.

Outcomes and Reflection

In their first attempt to address youth transit equity during Sisters in Action's campaign, Tri-Met and public schools adopted a pilot program granting free passes to low-income students in Fall 2000. Influenced by the advocacy of Commissioner Serena Cruz, Multnomah County funded \$100,000 of this program, which was designed for students receiving free or reduced-price lunches at school. However, outreach was limited and not nearly the number of students who qualified actually applied.

But Sisters in Action persisted. Finally admitting disparities with other cities' rates at its August 2001 meeting, the Tri-Met Board approved a universally discounted



Sisters in Action for Power

student pass, to be sold for \$16 monthly from school outlets. This was a solid improvement over the \$33 youth pass and, after four years of tireless organizing and campaigning, marked a dramatic victory for the girls and women of Sisters in Action.

In April 2003, Sisters in Action once again mobilized to protect the gains it made by protesting proposed Tri-Met fare increases that would bump student passes up another dollar. With this in motion and the development of a new land equity campaign in the works, the women and girls of Sisters in Action for Power are continuing to make their unforgettable mark on this world.

Dignity Village



Case Background and Goals

On September 27, 2000, Multnomah County Judge Stephen Gallagher ruled that the City of Portland's 19-year-old anti-camping ordinance was unconstitutional. This ordinance made it criminal to sleep outdoors or in public, on private property, or in vehicles.

The ruling was the verdict of a court case between Norman Wickes, Sr., his son Norman Wickes, Jr., and the State of Oregon. Norman Wickes and his son were homeless and had been living in their vehicle, moving it to different locations every night. Over time, Portland Police had given the Wickes over 40 citations for camping in their vehicle. Had the Wickes had a proper home



to reside in, it would have been legal for them to camp in their van, but otherwise not. This illogical aspect of the law was one argument cited in the Gallagher ruling.

The Gallagher ruling was an immense victory for the homeless community of Portland. A local paper, *street roots*, which is written by the homeless community about issues that concern them, ran an editorial passionately written by Jack Tafari, a regular writer for the paper, in response to the ruling. In his editorial, Tafari called for the homeless of Portland to organize and form a tent-city in Portland.

Word of the idea spread and supporters of a tent-city in Portland began to coalesce. Weekly meetings were held at either the *street roots* office or the Martial Arts Gallery in downtown Portland and the visioning process for a tent-city in Portland began. An array of organizations and individuals offered their



Dignity Village

support during this process, ranging from churches who donated supplies and tents, to the Oregon Law Center who offered legal counsel, to Mark Lakeman of the community design collective City Repair who donated his time and expertise to help draw up a project master plan. During planning and visioning, the tent-city came to be known as Dignity Village.

Success has been achieved in incremental steps. December 16, 2000 marked the beginning of Dignity Village. On this date a small group of eight homeless men and women pitched tents on public land in Portland. From that day forward this core of pioneers grew and challenged the city through civil disobedience as the city proceeded to move the group to different sites around Portland. Civil disobedience and non-violent demonstrations have allowed this community to make its voice heard and feel a sense of power in an otherwise powerless existence. For members of Dignity Village, this experience of voice and self-determination has been in itself revolutionary.

The immediate goal of Dignity Village was to meet its residents' basic needs. In fact according to some of the original visionaries, John Hubbard and Ibrahim Mubarak, during one of the early meetings with supporters of Dignity Village, a proposal was made for the homeless to go to the site and to "practice the village and analyze." In response, JP Cupp and other homeless immediately stood-up and said, "No way!" Since it was December, the cold temperatures made the urgency of meeting basic needs paramount. Later, Dignity Village worked to create a more detailed vision.

According to Hubbard, the broader goals of Dignity Village were not entirely clear at the start. However, as time has passed and more supporters have come forward, the vision of Dignity Village has expanded. Today Dignity Village works to include skills training, academic training (studying for GEDs), along with working with the organization City Repair to incorporate principles of sustainable design. Dignity Village has become a community of people that work together to create new possibilities for their lives.

Techniques and Obstacles

- Partnerships with local businesses and groups
- Shopping cart parades
- Drawing media attention during demonstrations
- Civil disobedience

Dignity Village



When planning and visioning for Dignity Village really began to take off, more and more supporters emerged. Organizations like Sisters of the Road Café, which provides meals to the homeless and to the general public, and various churches throughout Portland naturally came on board to support Dignity Village. Unexpected allies like City Repair and Mark Lakeman offered ideas of sustainability and natural building when envisioning what the community could be. As quoted in the Dignity Village brochure, Lakeman explains, “I supported D.V. from its inception because I feel that their vision of a self-guided, democratic, ecologically sustainable community can be a model for us all.”

The city initially completely resisted the establishment of Dignity Village, although as time has passed the city has become more willing to negotiate with this homeless community. Businesses and residents have been vehemently opposed to a tent-city because they fear it will lower property values and infringe on their daily lives. Given this resistance, a frenzy of opposition surrounded the search for a long-term or permanent site for Dignity Village. As the village’s website reports, “NIMBYism is alive and well in Portland as Dignity found out when we tried to rent a parcel in the Creston-Kenilworth neighborhood in SE Portland last October. At a neighborhood meeting to consider the move, neighbors shouted down Dignity speakers and behaved in a most undignified manner (including one arson threat) which factored into the decision to stay at Sunderland (the site in outer Southeast until July.”

Once Dignity Village would settle into a site, the city would give the community three to five days before they were asked to move. In response, Dignity Village members and their supporters would often organize shopping cart parades and call the media. This was very successful, especially at Riverplace, an area of high-end development adjacent to downtown Portland where residents were taken aback by a shopping cart parade in front of their homes. Using the media to educate the public about the goals and plight of Dignity Village was very effective in giving the homeless community a sense of identity and power that allowed them, eventually, to negotiate with the city.

Engaging in civil disobedience with Portland Police and city officials has come with unique risks for the homeless community. Discussing its ultimate decision to vacate a site under the Fremont Bridge in a letter posted on the Dignity Village website, Hubbird wrote, “These critics of the village’s decision seem largely

Dignity Village

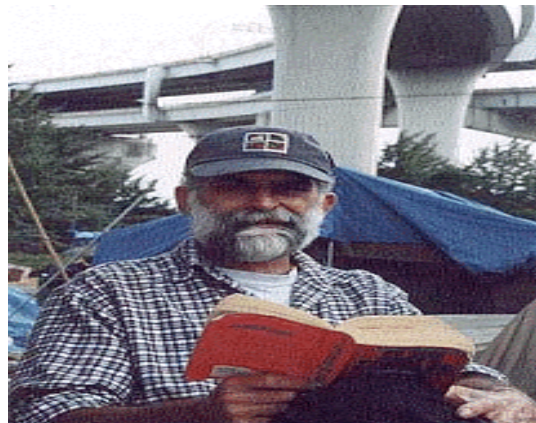
oblivious to their own relatively comfortable, privileged housed status in comparison to someone living in the Village or on the street who is routinely criminalized day-in and day-out for months or years. Going to jail ‘for the cause’ may present very different kinds of issues to different people, primarily depending on their socio-economic status.”

Interface with the City

Interface with the city was difficult from the beginning because of the city’s strong opposition to any kind of tent-city. However, the city tempered its eviction policy with instances of leniency. Immediately following shopping cart demonstrations, the city gave Dignity Village a 60-day extension at their NW 17th and Savier site. Acts of protest and non-violent disobedience and the support that Dignity Village was able to garner convinced the city to enter into negotiations with Dignity Village and granted the group a certain amount of power at the negotiation table. Dignity Village advocates found they needed to “re-frame” the issue of siting a tent-city not in terms of conflict but in ways that might be mutually beneficial to the city and the homeless community.

There were many vocal, powerful opponents to the project. In the October 2000 publication of *street roots*, Mayor Vera Katz addressed the Gallagher ruling by saying, “Many of them [the homeless] just don’t choose to stay in a place with a roof over their head. They want to be outside, they want to continue drinking, or taking drugs and not playing by the rules that are imposed by the shelters.” With

prominent public officials viewing the homeless population in Portland in such a judgmental way, it is easy to see why the fight for Dignity Village was an uphill battle. Besides the mayor, Commissioner Jim Francesconi, the business alliance, local talk show host Lars Larson, and local papers like the *Oregonian* and the *Willamette Week* were among other opponents of a tent-city in Portland.



Dignity Village



Outcomes and Reflection

Despite the city's mostly legalistic attempts to eradicate a tent-city in Portland, the persistence and passion of the homeless men and women of Dignity Village and their supporters ultimately persuaded the City of Portland not only to take their ideas seriously but also to assist in finding a more permanent site for Dignity Village. Having the city listen to these members of the homeless community and negotiate a site for the tent-city has been a major success for this group. It has given them further legitimacy and support with which to pursue their goals.

As of spring 2003, Dignity Village has secured a one-year lease on a site in Sunderland in outer Northeast Portland and has expanded its vision to include natural building and sustainability. Anyone who visits the site can get a sense of the community and pride that exists within Dignity Village, which in itself is one of its greatest successes.

The general population's fear of the homeless has been evident in neighborhood meetings and other forums discussing Dignity Village. However, one of the unexpected benefits of establishing Dignity Village as a collaborative, principled, and loving community has been the growing humanization of homelessness in Portland. School groups, non-profit organizations, church groups, and international visitors come to Dignity Village. They have come to help with natural building practices, gardening and planting, or just to see what the place is about.

The space of Dignity Village has given the homeless community a place to interact with various groups and individuals, which has allowed these visitors to see homelessness in a more compassionate and constructive light. These spaces and experiences help to slowly chip away at the stigma surrounding homelessness.

Case Background and Goals

“Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed;
you cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read;
you cannot humiliate the person who has pride;
and you cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore.”

-Cesar Chavez

VOZ, the Spanish word for “voice,” is Portland’s Latino day laborer advocacy group.

VOZ - Worker’s Rights and Education Project’s mission is to work to secure and protect immigrant workers’ rights through education, leadership, and community organizing. VOZ works with Portland’s day laborers or “*jornaleros*,¹” a group of predominantly Latin American, immigrant men who gather daily on a few corners in and around lower East Burnside to pick up work from contractors and other potential employers that drive by.

Jornaleros come to the United States for political, economic, and personal reasons. The majority of Portland’s *jornaleros* come from Mexico, but a diversity of nationalities – mainly from Latin America – are represented. Day laborers range in age from teens to elders. Many day laborers are veterans who have fled from war. Asians, Native Americans, and Americans, are also present at the corners. Sometimes women – mainly selling tamales to the *jornaleros* – are also found at the corners. The *jornaleros* are skilled at a variety of manual labor jobs including painting, construction, and landscaping.

In the late 1990s, tensions surrounding the *jornaleros* escalated. Businesses in the area around the corners where the laborers gather, Portland Police, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) began cracking down on the *jornaleros*. The *jornaleros* came together to address these issues and, in doing so, were part of forming VOZ- Worker’s Rights and Education Project.

VOZ organizes to establish a minimum wage for the workers and provide classes



¹ *Jornaleros* will be used interchangeably with “day laborers.”

VOZ- Worker's Rights Education Project



in English, computer skills and leadership development; lobbies nationally for the rights of day laborers; and holds monthly workshops, which instruct the laborers in an empowerment model of education in which collective power is gained to make change.

Techniques and Obstacles

- Leadership development
- Alternative meeting structures
- Meetings on the street
- National organizing and lobbying
- *El Jornalero* journal
- Educating city police
- Enlisting media support
- Cooperative agreement

VOZ is a membership-led organization in which the laborers are involved at every level of planning. The organization also has a board of directors that governs the administrative, fiscal, personnel, and day-to-day practices of the organization. VOZ fluctuates between having one to three paid staff members. VOZ organizes through meetings, fiestas, and a soccer team, which act to unite the workers.

Many of the VOZ meetings are held on the corner at SE 6th and Ankeny (“the corner”) where many *jornaleros* gather to wait for work. Pedro Sosa is the Community Development Coordinator for VOZ and was once a *jornalero* himself, having left Latin America because of political persecution. This allows the other day laborers to relate to and trust Sosa. He can recount the scene of a VOZ meeting at the corner.

Pedro brought his Powerbook with him to the corner for a meeting with the jornaleros. When everyone realized the need for a table to hold the laptop, one of the men volunteered to bend over to form a table out of his back. While the meeting was taking place around the makeshift table, a police officer stopped by to observe the unusual situation and learned about what the jornaleros were working on. Pedro has often brought his easel and flip chart with him to the corner to hold meetings, and the jornaleros have established rules of conduct and a minimum wage for the workers. Pedro visits the corner regularly to offer classes and workshops to the laborers, to discuss requests of nearby

VOZ- Worker's Rights Education Project

businesses, to problem-solve issues of non-payment from employers, and to attend to general business.

Outside of meetings at the corners, VOZ holds fiestas for holidays and occasions like May Day- International Workers' Day, which celebrates the work of laborers. The group also organizes a soccer team, which – along with the fiestas – is so important to the development of VOZ.

These activities provide an opportunity for the *jornaleros* to gather in settings more hospitable than the street corner. Eating traditional Latin American food, while



jornaleros mariachis play familiar songs, gives a sense of cohesion and comfort to the organization members. As one *jornalero* put it, “I came for the food, but I realized I left with so much more than that”.

On a broader scale, the *jornaleros* have worked with the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON) to introduce legislation advocating for day laborers. In March of 2003, NDLON was part of introducing the *Day Laborer Fairness and Protection Act* to Congress. Involvement at every level of organizing is an important principle of VOZ, and Sosa has been crucial to coordinating this involvement.

VOZ also publishes a bi-monthly newsletter by and for day laborers called *El Jornalero*. The journal is a forum for sharing ideas, stories, and announcing workshops and classes. The journal helps the *jornaleros* to organize and explore issues and struggles, as well as provide stories of inspiration and success.

One obstacle facing the VOZ community is the transient nature of the group. On any given day, the *jornaleros* at the corner do not know each other by name. There are always newcomers. For this reason, Sosa and a group of more regular

VOZ- Worker's Rights Education Project



jornaleros are constantly meeting with groups on the corner to update everyone on the rules of conduct, issues brought up by the business or police communities, and ongoing projects like the journal *El Jornalero*.

The greatest obstacles that face the *jornaleros* are the perceptions and stereotypes that they are drug dealers, criminals, and homeless beggars. In 1997 one of the neighboring businesses called the police and the INS to complain about the day laborers waiting for work in front of their business. The agencies' reactions were quick and forceful. In 1997-98 many abuses occurred during INS raids on Portland's day laborers. INS agents would come to the corner, chase down the laborers, and subsequently arrest and deport them. This mobilized VOZ and with the help of Migra Watch, an immigrant watchdog group, the INS' actions were documented on tape and exposed in the media. This exposure, coupled with negotiations between VOZ and the INS, brought an end to INS raids in 1997.

Interface with the City and Other Agencies

The interaction between the *jornaleros* and the Portland Police has been pivotal. In 1999 the police began cracking down on the day laborers. The police would come to the corner to issue tickets, take pictures, and sometimes arrest the *jornaleros*. Additionally, employers picking up workers were issued tickets. VOZ negotiated with the police for nine months. Churches and community members organized to negotiate the corners where *jornaleros* could gather and look for work.

Finally, in 1998, Chief of Police Charles Moose and the Portland Police began to better understand the day laborer community. Whereas the police had previously associated the *jornaleros* with illegal activities in the surrounding neighborhood, negotiations with the police and the increased involvement of the day laborers in the neighborhood (including picking up litter and reporting incidents of crime, drugs and prostitution) began to change stereotypes about the laborers. The police then began to see the day laborers as hard workers, not criminals.

When the police began to understand the culture of the corner, relations and the situation for day laborers began to improve. The officers began to meet regularly at the corner with the *jornaleros*. The *jornaleros* have been willing to report any illicit activity they witness since the association with these activities lessens their ability to pick up work at the corner, and has helped to forge a better relationship with the police. Additionally, the *jornaleros* pick up litter along the street, and abide by rules of conduct. Cooperative agreements have been forged with local businesses to empty



VOZ- Worker's Rights Education Project

litter that the *jornaleros* collect into their dumpsters. This cooperation has fostered whole new attitudes of the Portland Police, which have led to verbal agreements – in place for over four years – allowing the workers to wait at three corners in the lower East Burnside industrial district of Portland.

The *jornaleros* also face difficulties with some employers. Nearly every *jornalero* has had the experience of working for a day, days, or even weeks at grueling jobs, after which the employer has refused to pay. VOZ works to educate the laborers about their rights and responsibilities. When *jornaleros* face the situation of a delinquent employer, VOZ secures rightful payment by working with the State of Oregon Bureau of Labor Industries or a group of lawyers. VOZ as a unified organization has been successful in remedying employer delinquency. In one year, the organization has recovered over \$37,000 in unpaid wages.

Outcomes and Reflections

VOZ has undoubtedly met much of its mission “to secure and protect immigrant workers’ rights through education, leadership, and community organizing”. *Jornaleros* are aware of their rights and responsibilities and have maintained verbal contracts with both the Portland Police and the neighborhood businesses. They no longer face the threat of being chased down on the corner

by the INS, and when employers refuse to pay, systems are in place to claim their earnings.

VOZ has played an integral role in several collaborative partnerships including CAUSA, a statewide coalition for immigrant rights; PCUN- Pineros, Campesinos, Unidos de Noroeste; Oregon Campaign for Economic Justice; American Friends Service Committee; and Centro

Cultural de Cornelius (in Washington County). The connections VOZ has formed among the *jornaleros*, the Portland Police, the business community, the INS, and other immigrant rights and education organizations has positioned the organization to effectively address issues as they arise, and to improve the quality of life for Portland’s day laborers.

Story of VOZ and the VBC



In the spring of 2003, two Southeast Portland Industrial District businesses, City Bikes Cooperative and KBOO Community Radio, located two blocks away from the day laborer corner at SE 6th and Ankeny, began talking about the possibilities for building a “Plaza Latina” at SE 8th and Ankeny. At the same time Southeast Uplift, a coalition of Southeast Portland neighborhood associations, was beginning a project called the Village Building Convergence (VBC). The intention of the VBC was to develop five “intersection repairs” in southeast Portland. Intersection repairs bring together neighbors to design and build public gathering places around an intersection in their neighborhood. When the two groups learned of each other’s project ideas, a collaborative effort was born.

A core organizing group quickly formed because of design submission deadlines that the Portland Office of Transportation required in order to get the permits for the SE 8th and Ankeny site. The core group included representatives of City Bikes, KBOO, VOZ, neighborhood residents, Portland State University graduate students in Urban and Regional Planning, and several volunteers. The group held a series of meetings and design workshops, and went door-to-door talking with the surrounding businesses and residents about the community building project. The neighbors were all invited to get involved or to submit their ideas for the designs.

Early morning visits were made to the day laborers at the corner of SE 6th and Ankeny. Although the *jornaleros* expressed great interest in participating in the project, they were absent at the meetings and design workshops. When the core group realized the importance of ongoing contact with the laborers throughout the project, a separate design workshop was organized. With the help of VOZ coordinator Pedro Sosa, it was determined that the workshop would coincide with already planned May Day celebrations and consist of a morning of soccer, a Mexican fiesta for lunch, and then a discussion about designing community space around the 8th and Ankeny intersection. The day allowed relationships to develop between organizers and the day laborers. Sharing stories began to build a basis of trust, which became the backbone of the project.



Story of VOZ and the VBC

The first phase of the intersection repair took place in May 2003. During that time the group built a garden, with a rainwater catchment system; benches; and two kiosks for posting fliers, business cards, or items for trade or sale. The construction incorporates natural building techniques such as cobb, a mixture of straw, clay, and sand, as well as frescoes and mosaics. The designs represent all who participated in the project, and reflects Latin culture throughout, especially in the shrine-like kiosks, which feature alters at the tops with the Virgin de Guadalupe, an important symbol in Mexican culture. As further validation of the work, the project received a \$2,000 grant from Immigrants Refugees Community Organizing. With part of this funding, the laborers were offered gift certificates in exchange for their work on the site.

The VBC project at SE 8th and Ankeny has begun to change the neighborhood's perceptions about the *jornaleros*. During the initial door-to-door visits, one business expressed concerns about attracting the day laborers closer to its establishment. During the opening fiesta on the first day of the Village Building Convergence, this same business owner visited the party, saw the laborers' many contributions, including mariachis, Mexican decorations, food, salsa dancing in the street, and a Mayan ritual to bless the site. The business owner appreciated this form of positive community action and asked when the next phase of building would begin, giving his support for the project in the future.

Walking by the site in the beginning of June 2003, one would encounter a group of committed volunteers - including day laborers, area employees, and others - putting the final touches on the first phase of what could eventually become a Plaza Latina. After spending thousands of hours completing this first phase, the core organizing group was already meeting to plan for the project's future. As the vision for this site unfolds, the prospects are great for increasing involvement of the day laborers and making this a space that is truly representative of the surrounding neighborhood.

Story of VOZ and the VBC





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