



Education and Housing Equity Project Records.

Copyright Notice:

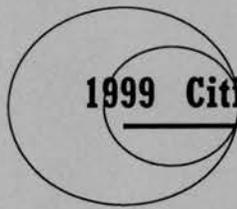
This material may be protected by copyright law (U.S. Code, Title 17). Researchers are liable for any infringement. For more information, visit www.mnhs.org/copyright.

*Community Conversations on Education, Housing and Race
in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Region*

**Sponsor Information Meeting
Minneapolis City Hall
Mayor's Conference Room 333
September 25, 1999
9:00 – 11:00 a.m.**

AGENDA

- 8:30 Registration and Refreshments**
- 9:00 Welcome and Introductions**
Kris Brogan, Policy Aide to Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton
- 9:15 Video "The Community Circle Idea."**
Saint Paul Neighborhood Network News (SPNN)
*What does a Community Circle look like? A look at the Cities At Work
Community Circle experience and Gathering of Circles held earlier this year.*
- 9:30 Conversations at the Crossroads: Twin Cities Community Circles
Dialogue Project**
Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project
- 9:35 Cities at Work Public Dialogue on "Race, Connections and Commitment"**
Barb Rose, Wilder Foundation
- 9:40 The Challenges of Education, Housing, Race and Segregation Minneapolis,
Saint Paul and the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area**
Gavin Kearney, Institute on Race and Poverty
- 9:50 Stories of Successful Community Circles in the Twin Cities**
Representatives of the Bloomington Human Rights Circle
and the Frogtown Pluralism Circle (Saint Paul)
- 10:05 Sponsor Roles and Expectations**
What does it mean to be a community circle dialogue sponsor?
- 10:20 Facilitators, Discussion Guide and Action Forums**
Mitchell Davis, Community Circle Facilitator, and
Manager, Children's Wellness Project, Minneapolis Foundation
- 10:30 Questions and Concerns**



1999 Cities at Work Community Circle Dialogues

EDUCATION AND HOUSING EQUITY PROJECT

What are the Cities at Work Community Circle Dialogues?

- A diverse group of 8-15 people who:
 - ...come together to talk to each other about critical public policy issues and to identify some possible ideas for community action.
 - ...participate in a small, democratic discussion and share common concerns, thoughts, and perspectives.
 - ...can agree that it is not necessary to agree with each other, but that it is important to listen and respect all viewpoints in order to learn from each other.
- The groups meet for five sessions over a period of two months followed by a call-to-action forum and citizens summit.
- The discussions are facilitated by a person who is not there to act as an expert on the issues, but to keep the discussion focused and to ensure that all voices are heard.
- The facilitator and participants use a framework provided in a discussion guide that includes differing points of view about critical issues, questions for discussion, and reference material that can be used to inform the circle participants.

What is Required of You as a Sponsor?

Fundamentals:

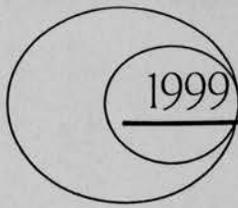
- 1) Recruit a diverse group of between 8 and 15 people for your community circle.
- 2) Arrange a meeting space and time for your community circle.
- 3) Distribute discussion materials to each participant.
- 4) Designate a scribe to capture a written record of the highlights of each circle conversation.
- 5) Assist the community circle in making a concluding presentation and recommendations to sponsor's policy body following the completion of circle conversations.
- 6) Participate in an evaluation process.

Other key roles of a sponsor:

- Provide light snacks and beverages, a writing board and name tags at each meeting.
- Recruit a co-facilitator for your circle (may also serve as scribe).
- Keep records of participation for your circle (including names, addresses and phone listings).
- Provide child care, transportation and interpretive services as needed by participants.

What Cities at Work will provide for your community circle:

- Discussion guide (plus additional background materials)
- Trained facilitator or co-facilitators
- Assistance in linking with other sponsor organizations to ensure group diversity
- Opportunity to share ideas for community action at the *Cities at Work* Call-to-Action forum and the Metropolitan Citizens Summit



Sponsorship Commitment

Sponsoring Organization: _____

Contact: _____
Name Phone E-mail FAX

Mailing Address: _____

We will provide space for a *Cities at Work* Community Circle Dialogue as follows:

Location

Dates and Times

Name of location: _____

Day of Week: _____ Time: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Dates: _____

On Site Contact: _____

Scribe (if available): _____

Co-facilitator (if available): _____

_____ We will be able to provide a diverse group of 8 - 15 participants per Circle (not more than half of the group from any one racial/ethnic background).
-or-
_____ We will need assistance to insure the diversity of our group.

Please fax or mail to:

Barb Rose

Fax: (651) 642-2088

Wilder Foundation, 919 Lafond Ave.

St. Paul, MN 55104

or

Dick Little

Fax: (612) 330-1507

EHEP, 2211 Riverside Ave., CB 185

Minneapolis, MN 55454

Steps to Success

Goal setting for sponsors

Hazy goals produce hazy results. Clearly define your goals. Write them down, make a plan for achieving them, set a deadline, visualize the results and go after them. Wishing will not bring success, but planning, persistence, and burning desire will. Success is an attitude, get yours right. It is astonishing how short a time it takes for very wonderful things to happen. —Barbara Smallwood

Meeting Place and Schedule:

- What resources do you have available either with your organization or in your community? i.e., schools, libraries, community centers, churches, businesses, etc. _____
- Whom can you contact? _____
- Preferred location, day of week, time of day: _____
- Our organization will secure (number) _____ meeting spaces and dates for 5 community circle sessions by (date) _____
- Keep these things in mind: the participants may need childcare and transportation. How are you preparing for this? Is the location able to accommodate hospitality needs?

Recruiting and Publicity:

- Where is your sphere of influence? How can you make this project known, i.e. newspapers, bulletins, personal contacts, other organizations, etc _____
- How can you achieve diversity? Race, ethnicity, age, gender, income, political ideology, etc _____
- Do you need pairing with another organization; if so, what other organizations could you pair with? _____
- Our organization will recruit (number) _____ participants by (date) _____

Administrative:

- Who is your “go to” person? Overseeing details of: registration, troubleshooting, contact with EHEP, coordinating of details, etc? _____
- Who are other individuals on the “Team” that believe in this project and will work to make it successful? _____
- Who would make a good scribe for the community circle (good listener, observer, writer and reporter)? _____
- If you know of an experienced, professional moderator or facilitator, please contact us.

Questions:

Please keep record of your questions throughout the morning, and we will take time to answer them at the conclusion of the session, or following the session.

Fall 1999 Community Circle Dialogues Timeline

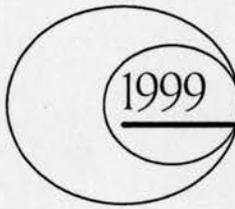
September 25	Sponsor Information Meeting Followed by sponsor planning for new circles <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Identify sponsor contact➤ Set dialogue dates, time and place➤ Publicize and recruit participants
October 1 & 2	Facilitator Meeting and Workshop on Intercultural Communication Followed by facilitator assignments to new circles; dialogue groups paired if needed
Sept. – Dec.	Community circle dialogues (5 sessions) and facilitator check-in meetings
October 14	<i>Cities at Work</i> Forum “The Changing Faces of Business”
November 8	Community Circles Action Forum – “Beyond Tolerance: A Call to Action” (<i>Cities at Work</i> Forum)
November 18	An Intergenerational Dialogue on School Desegregation and Educational Reform
December	Metropolitan Citizens Summit – “Education, Housing and Race in the Twin Cities” – Minnesota Meeting and Minnesota Public Radio
January	Evaluation and Report to the Community



Sponsors

1998-1999

Amherst H. Wilder Foundation
Bloomington Human Rights Commission
Central Neighborhood Improvement Association
Crystal Human Rights Commission
District Five Teen Council
Frogtown Family Center
Hamline/Midway Coalition Alliance for a Prejudice-Free Community
HECUA (Metro Urban Studies Term)
Hiawatha YMCA and Longfellow-Nokomis Family & Community Resource Center
Hmong American Partnership
J.J. Hill Montessori Magnet School
League of Women Voters of Minneapolis
Lexington/Hamline Community Council
Mayflower Community Congregational Church
Merriam Park Community Council & Goodwill/Easter Seals
Minneapolis School District
Southwest Area (Barton Open School)
South Area (Bryant Square Park)
East Area (East Lake Library)
North Area (Northstar Elementary School)
Neighborhood Economic Development Alliance
Burnsville Partnerships for Tomorrow
Project for Pride in Living
Ramsey Action Program
Ramsey International Fine Arts School
Richfield Human Rights Commission
Saint Paul Foundation
Saint Mark's Episcopal Church
Saint Paul Area Council of Churches
Saint Paul Neighborhood Network
Saint Paul Public Schools
The Saint Paul Companies
University of Saint Thomas
West Side Family Center
Westminster Presbyterian Church
Wooddale Lutheran Church
Young Leaders Caucus
WILPP



1999 CITIES AT WORK COMMUNITY CIRCLE DIALOGUES

EDUCATION AND HOUSING EQUITY PROJECT

FALL FACILITATOR TRAINING OPPORTUNITY

Part 1: Setting the Context for Dialogue

October 1, 1999

6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

University of St. Thomas

St. Paul Campus, Murray Herrick Bldg, Rm #151

An orientation to the fall round of community circle dialogues on housing, education and race including:

- setting the context for dialogue
- tips for working with a co-facilitator
- how to capture and record the work of the circle
- ideas for moving from dialogue to action

Part 2: Understanding Cross-cultural Communication

Karima Bushnell, trainer

October 2, 1999

9:00 am - 12:00 noon

University of St. Thomas

St. Paul Campus, Murray Herrick Bldg, Rm #151

Experiential training for overcoming cultural barriers unveils the hidden effects of culture on ourselves, others, and the relations between us. Both deep and enjoyable—one participant called this workshop "awesome!" Karima Vargas Bushnell is a multicultural researcher, writer, and intercultural communication trainer.

For more information, call Barb Rose (651) 659-6031 or Dick Little (612) 330-1505.

I will attend the October 1 & 2 Facilitator Training session.

Sorry, I will not be able to attend the training.

Name _____

Phone _____ Fax _____ E-mail _____

Please RSVP by September 24

Please return to Linda Hoskins, Fax 651-642-2088
Wilder Foundation, 919 Lafond, St. Paul, MN 55104

1999 Cities At Work—Fall Forum

A Continuing Public Dialogue on Race, Connections, and Commitment to Action

BEYOND TOLERANCE: A CALL TO ACTION

November 8, 1999

Arlington High School

Keynote Speaker: john powell, Institute on Race and Poverty

Talk. Dialogue. Action. Can we move beyond talk and passive tolerance for our cultural and economic differences to committed action? For the past eight months, over eight hundred people have been engaged in dialogue on the challenges of housing, education, and racial reconciliation in our community.



Learn from their experiences and join others in forging action steps that make a difference in our community. We can complement each others' strengths and assets as we work community-wide towards cross-cultural understanding and racial reconciliation.

Hear what others have discussed and learned in the 1999 Cities at Work forums and in the Community Circle Dialogues about the impact of racism and economics on their lives

Explore how group and individual actions can address the challenges of economic and racial injustice

Discover how you can personally become involved with others to initiate community-wide strategies

Share good food and conversation as we affirm our ongoing commitment to eliminating racism and creating a more inclusive community

Join these organizations and others at the Call to Action:

St. Paul Council of Churches
Education and Housing Equality Project
MN Advocates for Human Rights
Minnesota Minority Education Project
Saint Paul Housing Campaign
Alliance for Metropolitan Stability
Immigration Task Force
Minnesota Churches Anti-Racism Initiative
Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing
St. Paul Ecumenical Alliance of Congregations
Hamline/Midway Alliance for a Prejudice Free Community
and MANY OTHERS.....

The agenda for the day:

Date: Monday, Nov 7, 1999
Location: Arlington High School
1459 Rice Street
5:00 p.m. Registration & Dinner
5:30 p.m. Public Forum
Opening: Yusef Mgeni
Keynote Speaker: john powell
Call to Action: Rev. Devin Miller

Cities At Work 1999—Sponsors and Funders

Amherst H. Wilder Foundation ■ Asian Pacific Endowment for Community Development ■ Catholic Charities ■ City Solutions ■ East Side Neighborhood Development/VISTA ■ Education and Housing Equity Project/Community Circles Collaborative ■ Jane Addams School for Democracy ■ Leadership Saint Paul ■ Local Initiatives Support Corporation ■ MRA Initiatives for Change-Twin Cities ■ Minnesota Hmong Chamber of Commerce ■ National Conference for Community and Justice ■ St. Paul Area Council of Churches ■ Saint Paul Human Rights Department ■ St. Paul/Ramsey Children's Initiative ■ St. Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development ■ St. Paul Planning Commission ■ St. Paul Public Schools ■ 3M Corporation ■ United Way of the St. Paul Area ■ University UNITED ■ The Urban Coalition ■ YMCA of Greater St. Paul and a diverse group of community volunteers

Registration

All events are free and open to the public, but advanced registration is required for meals. For more information contact Linda at 651/642-4060 or lmh@wilder.org.

Name _____

Organization (if any) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Ph: _____ Fx: _____ E-mail _____

Send registration to: Linda Hoskins, A.H. Wilder Foundation, 919 Lafond Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55104
Fax: 651/642-2088

**THE 1999 - 2000 ISSUE FORUM SERIES
OF THE
MINNESOTA MINORITY EDUCATION
PARTNERSHIP, INC.**

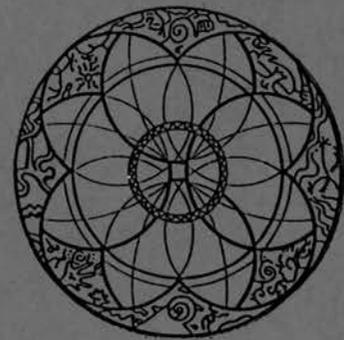
**An Intergenerational Dialogue on
School Desegregation and
Educational Reform**

**Featuring Dr. Jim Gambone of
Points of View Incorporated**

Sponsored in part by:

Active Citizenship School
African American Citizenship Initiative
Center for Excellence in Urban Teaching
Citizens League
Concordia College
Education and Housing Equity Project
Institute on Race and Poverty
Next Innovations
PACER Center
U of M College of Education & Human Dev.
Urban Coalition

In
November
1999



**WATCH
YOUR MAIL**
FOR MORE
INFO

Metropolitan Citizens Summit
Education, Housing and Race in the Twin Cities Area
December 1999 (date, time and place to be determined)

At the conclusion of the 1999 Community Circle Dialogues, circle participants will be invited to participate in a "Citizens Summit" on creating better schools, livable wage jobs and affordable housing for every resident of the Twin Cities.

This event will be designed to bring "closure" to the Community Circle Dialogues and to move the community forward on education, housing and race in the Twin Cities:

- to honor the work that dedicated citizens have undertaken in the community circles;
- to provide a forum for further exchange of ideas among these diverse groups of citizens (in the form of more concrete solutions and next steps);
- to further build connections among citizens metro-wide to *act*;
- and, finally, to generate attention for citizens' ideas and recommendations among local, state and national policy leaders, the media and the public.

The ultimate goal is to begin to "change the way we do business" as an economically and racially diverse metropolitan community.

The Citizens Summit will have two parts:

1) **A citizens forum with participants from the Community Circle Dialogues**

At the forum, participants will present their best ideas for moving from ideas to action on better integrating the metropolitan area (i.e., building more inclusive communities and schools). This session will be fully interactive, with participants having the ability to electronically vote on and prioritize the various ideas presented. The forum will be moderated by a known and trusted community leader in the Twin Cities.

In addition, the forum will be attended by a number of local policy makers – elected officials from suburban, urban, metropolitan, school, county and state government – all key officials working on or influencing these issues. The goal of the meeting will be to have these policy makers present to listen to the citizens who participated in the community circle conversations, and to understand the depth of support of their ideas.

2) **A luncheon, public address to the Minnesota Meeting, and radio broadcast**

In conjunction with the forum, the Minnesota Meeting will host an address by Lani Guinier, a nationally prominent leader in civil rights, education and housing (who will have observed the citizens summit). A larger group of community leaders – largely from business and the professions – will join the participants from the citizens forum for the Minnesota Meeting, a luncheon event which will be broadcast live on the stations of Minnesota Public Radio. This event will give the guest speaker the opportunity to relate to a larger public (luncheon guests and radio listeners) her understanding of the work among citizens that took place at the "citizens summit."

Sponsors: **The Minnesota Meeting, the Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Initiative, and the Education & Housing Equity Project**

Funded by: **The Minneapolis Foundation and The Saint Paul Foundation**

A COMPARISON OF DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.

Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.

In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.

In debate, winning is the goal.

In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.

In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.

Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.

Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.

Dialogue reveals assumptions for reevaluation.

Debate defends assumptions as truth.

Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.

Debate causes critique of the other position.

Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.

Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.

Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.

Debate creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.

In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other peoples' reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.

In debate, one's submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.

Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.

Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.

In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.

In debate, one searches for glaring differences.

In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions.

In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.

Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend.

Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person.

Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution.

Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.

Dialogue remains open-ended.

Debate implies a conclusion.

Adapted from a paper prepared by Shelley Berman, which was based on discussions of the Dialogue Group of the Boston Chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). Other members included Lucile Burt, Dick Mayo-Smith, Lally Stowell, and Gene Thompson. For more information on ESR's programs and resources using dialogue as a tool for dealing with controversial issues, call the national ESR office at (617) 492-1764

*Community Conversations on Education, Housing and Race
in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Region*

**Sponsor Information Meeting
Minneapolis City Hall
Mayor's Conference Room 333
September 25, 1999
9:00 – 11:00 a.m.**

AGENDA

- 8:30 Registration and Refreshments**
- 9:00 Welcome and Introductions**
Kris Brogan, Policy Aide to Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton
- 9:15 Video "The Community Circle Idea."**
Saint Paul Neighborhood Network News (SPNN)
*What does a Community Circle look like? A look at the Cities At Work
Community Circle experience and Gathering of Circles held earlier this year.*
- 9:30 Conversations at the Crossroads: Twin Cities Community Circles
Dialogue Project**
Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project
- 9:35 Cities at Work Public Dialogue on "Race, Connections and Commitment"**
Barb Rose, Wilder Foundation
- 9:40 The Challenges of Education, Housing, Race and Segregation Minneapolis,
Saint Paul and the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area**
Gavin Kearney, Institute on Race and Poverty
- 9:50 Stories of Successful Community Circles in the Twin Cities**
Representatives of the Bloomington Human Rights Circle
and the Frogtown Pluralism Circle (Saint Paul)
- 10:05 Sponsor Roles and Expectations**
What does it mean to be a community circle dialogue sponsor?
- 10:20 Facilitators, Discussion Guide and Action Forums**
Mitchell Davis, Community Circle Facilitator, and
Manager, Children's Wellness Project, Minneapolis Foundation
- 10:30 Questions and Concerns**

Community Circle Dialogues: *Reflection and Action on Education, Housing and Race in the Twin Cities*

by Dick Little, Education and Housing Equity Project

There is growing ethnic and racial diversity within Saint Paul and the entire Twin Cities region. We are becoming increasingly polarized along the lines of race and class. Demographic changes in the central cities, suburban communities, and school districts point to serious issues of equity and access to opportunity in both housing and public education.

Community-wide study circle programs have taken place in many communities across the country, (See sidebar, next page) but the Twin Cities community circle dialogue project is the first attempt at a region-wide program. With the growing national attention to regional policy issues such as urban sprawl, segregation, social equity, and transportation, the regional approach to community circle dialogues is an innovative model. Recently, the community circles on education, housing and race in the Twin Cities was selected by the President's Initiative on Race as a model of a "Promising Practice for Racial Reconciliation" and as an innovative approach to our nation's racial problems.

Metro-wide Community Circle Dialogues

The community circle dialogues on education, housing and race, initially launched by the Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP), encourage civic engagement and multi-

cultural conversations to help build more inclusive communities in the Twin Cities. In 1997, EHEP and partnering organizations, including the Minnesota Minority Education Project, the Metropolitan Interfaith Council, sponsored the first "community conversations" or community circle dialogues on the challenges of segregation in education and housing. In the fall of 1998, a new round of community circles was launched in the Minneapolis Public Schools.

The community circle dialogue project has brought together hundreds of people in dozens of communities throughout the Twin Cities region, who met in "community circles." Suburban moms, city dwellers, recent immigrants, small business people, the

underemployed, people of color, pastors, police officers, teachers and many others have met in small groups to explore the related issues of housing and school segregation. Dialogue participants share personal experiences with prejudice and racism and develop their ideas for building integrated and inclusive communities that work.

In 1999, several major community activities had their genesis in the circle dialogues of 1997 and 1998. The innovative and inclusionary housing legislation sponsored by the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability was recently passed into law by the 1999 State Legislature. MICAH (Minnesota Interfaith Coalition for Affordable Housing) and the Illusion Theater,



Community circle dialogue participants share experiences at June gathering.

Source: Education and Housing Equity Project

• Work in Progress •

produced and performed the fair housing theater event "Like Waters Rolling Down" in churches and synagogues around the metro area this past year. The Alliance for Metropolitan Stability and MICAH were both partners and sponsors of the 1977 community circle dialogues on housing, education, and race. Another idea that grew out of the community circle dialogues, still in the development stage, is the creation of a property tax check-off as part of mortgage, and utility payments. The funds donated will contribute to a metropolitan affordable housing fund. The small monthly donations will support fair housing initiatives and to reduce up front expenses for households attempting to access better housing.

The community circle dialogues can also lead to new relationships and partnerships that contribute to overcoming racial stereotyping and discriminatory attitudes. A circle convened by Saint Paul's Commonbond Communities, Inc., brought together residents of one of their developments in Oakdale with nearby residents who had initially opposed the introduction of affordable housing in their neighborhood. New understandings, new connections and new commitments by residents who are together working to build a shared community.

Community Circle Dialogues in Saint Paul

In the spring of 1999, the *Cities at Work* public forum series kicked off their fifth season with "Unleashing the Power of Our Community: A Public Dialogue on Race, Connections and Commitments." *Cities at Work* community circle dialogues were convened to complement the citywide forums by engaging Saint Paul residents in dialogue at the grass-roots level.

A new discussion guide was developed. Experienced facilitators were recruited and trained by the Minnesota Facilitators Network and Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution. A training workshop on "Understanding Community and Institutional Racism" was offered by Minnesota Churches Against Racism. In Saint Paul, twelve community circles have met this spring; more are planning to convene in the fall. Each circle is ethnically and racially diverse, consists of 8 to 15 participants, and meets for approximately 10 hours spread over five sessions. Examples of circles meeting this spring are the Frogtown Pluralism Circle, and the SPNN (Saint Paul Neighborhood Network) Circle.

In all, more than 50 community circles have or will be convened in both Saint Paul and the Twin Cities area. *Cities at Work* and EHEP co-sponsored a gathering of the community circle participants in June. In November, *Cities at Work* will hold its final forum, "Beyond Tolerance: A Call to Action." The forum will capture the results of the community circle

Community Circle Dialogues Engage Citizens Across the Country

The *Cities at Work* and EHEP community circles dialogues are modeled after a highly successful study circle program developed by the national Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC), headquartered in Pomfret, Connecticut. Study circles have been used throughout the country to generate reasoned citizen dialogue, decisive policy input, and grass-roots problem solving. SCRC is a national partner in the Twin Cities circle dialogue project.

The community circle, or study circle process is one important way to achieve new levels of citizenship, interaction and civic action on difficult issues affecting the community. Large scale, community-wide and metro-wide community circle programs can have a significant, cumulative impact. These impacts range from new friendships, to neighborhood projects, to city-wide action plans, to new legislation. Citizens who participate in community circles often become more involved in the civic life of their community.

Examples of other community study circle programs that SCRC has assisted include suburban Cleveland (race relations), Maine (community violence) Oklahoma League of Women Voters (criminal justice) and Lima, Ohio. In Lima, communities of faith joined forces with the state university, labor unions and the chamber of commerce, and the mayor and city council to initiate the first city-wide study circle program on race relations. Study circle participants in Lima have done everything from building new playground to changing the makeup of a regional board. A statewide study circle program in Oklahoma helped the state legislature enact sweeping changes in the criminal justice system. ●

continued on back page

Community Circle Dialogues:

continued from page 25

conversations, generate ideas for community action and mobilize citizens to take action in new and different ways that bridge the diverse cultural, ethnic and racial communities that make up Saint Paul.

A metropolitan Citizens Summit, sponsored by Minnesota Meeting and Minnesota Public Radio, is also planned for early Winter that will include participants from all of the Twin Cities area circles, and invited community and public officials. At the Summit, participants will use electronic audience response technology to discover areas of consensus and to prioritize action steps for the community. ●

If you are interested in learning more about community circle dialogues in Saint Paul, call Barb Rose at (651) 659-6031 or email her at bar@wilder.org. If you live or work in Minneapolis, call Dick Little at (612) 330-1505.

StarTribune Editorial

Our perspective

Community circles

Support talks on housing, education

In many cultures, most notably Native American, the circle is an important symbol. It can stand for beginning and ending; it can represent the cycle of birth, life and death. Or it can simply be the way people organize themselves to discuss issues, solve problems or protect one another.

That symbolism is at the heart of a local effort to get folks thinking and talking about education, race and housing. A coalition of more than 20 Twin Cities partners, the Community Circle Collaborative, is wisely promoting a metrowide series of small group discussions on this question: How does racial and economic segregation of housing affect educational achievement and life opportunities?

The idea is to get at least 200 people (five to 15 at a time) actively involved in study circles. Ideally, each group will be as diverse as possible across racial, ethnic, economic, age and political lines. They will be urban and suburban, work from a common discussion/information guide and will meet several times for two to three hours. Sessions will take place early next year.

Among the organizing partner groups are the Minneapolis Initiative Against Racism, the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, the Minneapolis, Edina and St. Louis Park public schools, the Institute on Race & Poverty and the Minnesota Fair Housing Center.

Do the organizers have an agenda? You bet. They start from the basic belief that racism and segregation hurt everyone. They know that many students who perform poorly in school

come from deep pockets of segregated, low-income housing. And they rightly agree these housing, family and economic questions must be addressed to help improve educational outcomes.

The Collaborative has a direction, but it doesn't have all the answers. And so, the small circles are designed to get civil, informed dialogue and analysis bubbling up from citizens. The questions and solutions will then be used to guide policies and practices of government, school boards, nonprofits, foundations, businesses and grass-roots groups. Community circles have been used successfully in other cities around the country to help form public policy and build public awareness and consensus.

All metro-area residents are huge stakeholders in this issue. Parents and singles alike pay for public schools, police, courts and prisons. Both the young and the old want safe neighborhoods and good housing. Whether you are black or white, rich or poor, well-educated children eventually help fuel a stronger economy and higher quality of life for everyone.

With help from the Bush and Bremer foundations, the Collaborative will provide recorders and train facilitators for each circle. For more details, attend the kick-off/information session on Tuesday, 9-11:30 a.m., at the St. Louis Park City Council Chambers, 5005 Minnetonka Blvd. Or call Dick Little, at the Education & Housing Equity Project, 871-8980.

Join the circle of those who want better housing and education opportunities in the Twin Cities.