



## Education and Housing Equity Project Records.

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THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

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September 8, 1999

Request No. 99-809

Mr. Richard C. Little  
Executive Director  
Augsburg College  
2211 Riverside Avenue  
Minneapolis, MN 55454

Dear Mr. Little:

Thank you for your letter requesting consideration of a grant of \$150,000 to Augsburg College for the Education and Housing Equity Project.

Unfortunately, we cannot support this project. Although your work clearly is important, the Foundation provides only limited support for research activities. We cannot consider support for all worthy projects.

We regret that we are unable to help, but wish you well with your work. Please feel free to call me with any questions.

Sincerely,

  
Christine Ganzlin  
Grants Program Manager

CSG:ldo

Christine Ganzlin, Grants Manager  
The McKnight Foundation  
600 TCF Tower  
121 South Eighth Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55402

August 12, 1999

Subject: Letter of Inquiry

Dear Ms. Ganzlin,

I strongly commend the new focus of The McKnight Foundation. The Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP) was organized in 1995 sharing the vision you've articulated. We aim to promote racially and economically inclusive communities, and schools that work for all children in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Creating a supportive environment for children, youth and their families is our central purpose, and encouraging regional thinking and planning to accomplish this is a major strategic goal.

Building and maintaining vital, attractive communities where children and families can thrive requires that the region make significant progress in addressing the very difficult, interrelated issues of racial and economic segregation, inequities in education, and access to affordable housing and jobs. Our strategy is to work in collaboration with other groups to facilitate education and deliberative discussion that raises community awareness and understanding of these issues, and that leads to community-building and informed public action. Our project not only enables but motivates citizen interaction and reflection. These in turn help individuals and groups internalize their commitment to act, and direct their agendas and energy into partnerships with other organizations that support their work.

In cooperation with the Wilder Foundation, the Saint Paul "Cities at Work" forums and 20 other regional and community organizations, we have developed a Community Circles Collaborative which has engaged nearly 2,000 people in discussion and action on these issues since 1996.

The Study Circles Resource Center of Pomfret, CT, provided an initial model which we have augmented with attention to the work of the National Issues Forums of the Kettering Foundation, the Communities of Color Empowerment Model of the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership (MMEP), and the Objective-Reflective-Interpretative-Decisional model developed by the Minnesota Facilitators Network and the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution. The latter two groups are primary sources of facilitators for community circle dialogues and action forums, which together comprise EHEP's most visible public strategy. The Minnesota Churches' Anti-Racism Initiative has provided the facilitators introductory training on community and institutional racism. Resource guides for local discussions drew, as a primary resource, upon a paper (now a publication) by John Powell of the Institute on Race and Poverty at the University of Minnesota School of Law, *Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education and Persistent Segregation*. Other resources and perspectives have been added as the community circle conversations have evolved.

Strong collaborative linkages are vital to the results we seek. The community circle discussions draw upon the work of EHEP's project partners. In turn, the circles have been a crucial resource to our partners in building greater public awareness, involvement, support and commitment to sustained changes needed to achieve a more inclusive and equitable future for all the children and families in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

One major effort in this vein is the growing commitment to fair and affordable housing throughout the metropolitan area. The community circles made important contributions to the idea of mixed income housing and the development of the Inclusionary Housing Act in the 1999 Minnesota Legislature. This effort was spearheaded by the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability, one of EHEP's partners. The community circles also paved the way for the engagement of communities of faith by Interfaith Action, the St. Paul Ecumenical Alliance of Congregations and MICAH (the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing) in what evolved into a major citizen push for affordable housing legislation during the 1999 legislative session. Following the legislative victory, a group of partner organizations came together to celebrate and collectively honored EHEP for its 1997 community discussions, which laid the foundation for their later success.

Awareness emerged in many circle discussions of the "NIMBY" (Not in My Back Yard) principle by which many regional residents resist dispersion of affordable housing. Circle participants noted a need to dramatize this issue, through theatre and other media, in order to gain support from and involvement by middle class suburban people and groups. MICAH, one of our closest partners, took the idea to the Illusion Theatre and, together, they developed a theatrical production to address this need. Entitled *Like Waters Rolling Down*, it was funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for six presentations throughout the metropolitan area. Over 7,000 citizens attended the performances, and many of these citizens subsequently took civic action to support affordable housing initiatives in their respective communities and at the legislature.

Circles have also been credited with breaking down stereotypes and barriers between people who are different from one another. This was illustrated by the community circles sponsored by CommonBond Communities, Inc., which brought together residents of one of their developments with surrounding neighbors, many of whom initially had opposed introduction of affordable housing in their neighborhood. Through face to face conversations, these residents are now coming together to develop a common agenda for making their community more hospitable and supportive for all families and children. EHEP and the community circles project were subsequently invited to be a partner in the "Faces of Affordable Housing Campaign" project (with the lead partner, the Minnesota Housing Partnership) funded by the Minneapolis Foundation.

The community circles also have contributed to expanding awareness that residential desegregation is a primary step in the struggle for educational quality and equity. The NAACP, the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, and the Minneapolis Public Schools have been close collaborators with EHEP on issues of race and education. Other city and suburban districts have shown growing interest in including housing in their discussions with city and regional officials. Community Circles are also being planned that will address systemic issues within schools and school districts. Discussions are under way with the West Metro Educational Program (a consortium of west metro school districts) and the East Metro Office of Interdistrict Initiatives concerning what a successful inclusionary school and integrated education should look like. The Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Project, an early partner in the Community Circle Collaborative, has expressed particular interest in these city-suburban and inter-district discussions.

Other vital partners in the effort to build schools and institutions that *work for all kids* include the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs, the Urban Coalition, the League of Human Rights Commissions and Metro Area Council of League of Women Voters. EHEP was invited by mediating groups to join in efforts to mediate legal action involving school desegregation (e.g., Educational Adequacy and Equity Lawsuits). The results of circle discussions have been used to help inform the mediation efforts, and many circle participants were identified as candidates for participation in early discussions to frame the mediation and potential settlement.

A new component is being developed for the community circle discussion guides that will focus on the linkage between economic development and job access, on the one hand, and equity in housing and education on the other. The Saint Paul "Cities at Work" Community Forums series on "Race, Connections and Commitment" this fall will build on this theme through a forum with business leaders. The discussion guides are also being augmented with a Faith Compendium developed by the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing for use in paired congregational and inter-faith discussions.

The community circle project is designed to lead participants to consider follow-up action. At the conclusion of this letter is a list of the groups that have been highlighted in discussions as opportunity contexts for this work. We relate them to the three broad areas of concern addressed in the Collaborative. Many are active partners in sponsoring or providing resources to community circles, as well. The list also is growing through nurturance of informal relationships. Interfaith Action and the Saint Paul Ecumenical Alliance of Congregations (SPEAC), for example, have utilized the new ideas, focus and energy generated in community circles as a framework for organizing community action among their member congregations.

EHEP and the Wilder Foundation are coordinating planning for a "Call to Action" Forum in November to help motivate new discussions and further focus energy of past participants. A Metropolitan Citizens Summit is planned for next December, in collaboration with the Minnesota Meeting and Minnesota Public Radio, supported by grants from the Minneapolis Foundation and the Saint Paul Foundation. These events will serve to bring the larger public into the dialogue and move the dialogue from discussion toward informed public action and civic commitment.

As we look toward the future, EHEP identifies the following areas needing concentrated development in support of our vision:

- Expanded community circle discussions, with special emphasis on:
  - Increased participation in suburban communities.
  - Increased racial diversity of study circles, with strategies to include pairings between secular or faith community groups connecting predominantly low-income neighborhoods with those of privilege, and inner city with suburb.
  - Increased participation by youth in the study circles.
  - Potential development of "play and talk circles" for younger children, to augment the project's involvement of families.
  - Improved action formation to motivate participants to identify the groups that are doing the work that best addresses the community's needs ('promising or best practices') and that offer them hope and growth.
  - Building of stronger media, public official and business partnerships

- Expanded community collaborations, both to support community circle expansion and to increase the base for future public action - providing the organizing “glue” to reinforce collaborative visions for community change.

To accomplish these aims, EHEP needs to fulfill its plan to extend its staff by two positions. The first will be a full-time Community Circle Coordinator whose immediate priority will be to focus on expanding racial diversity and broadening community outreach. The second will be a civic engagement youth coordinator whose role will be to strengthen youth participation and to explore effective ways to involve children in community circles and partnerships that address their immediate as well as long-term needs and growth potential.

To pursue these goals, EHEP envisions an annual budget of approximately \$125,000. Funding by The McKnight Foundation of a major share of this budget (e.g., \$50,000 per year) for a period of three to five years would enable expansion of community circle discussions to engage the public and private sectors throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan area, to fully inform the agendas of partnering communities and institutions, and to create the ‘common ground’ essential to building a metropolitan consensus on needed public actions. This effort would establish a framework for systemic change of major benefit to *all* children and families in our communities.

We look forward to continuing a conversation with the McKnight Foundation about what we are doing, and hopefully receiving an invitation to submit a full proposal. My staff and I, and some of our board members and key partners, are available to answer your questions and clarify or expand on what is presented in this letter. We look forward to hearing from you. Please call me at (612) 330-1505 or (612) 724-5662.

Sincerely,

Dick Little, Executive Director

Attachments:      List  
                         Recent article in *Community Matters*  
                         Recognition by the President’s Initiative on Race



June 1, 1998

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Ms. Carol Berde  
Vice President for Programs  
600 TCF Tower  
121 South 8<sup>th</sup> Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55402

Dear Ms. Berde:

We are delighted that the Education and Housing Equity Project (EHEP) has decided to submit funding proposals for continuation of the Community Circles Collaborative and expansion of the *Choices for Community* project. Dick Little has asked us to write this letter of support, and we are honored to do so.

The Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) is a project of the Topsfield Foundation, a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation dedicated to advancing deliberative democracy and improving the quality of public life in the U. S. To carry out this mission, SCRC provides free materials and technical assistance to organizers of large-scale study circle programs, which engage large numbers of citizens in discussion and action on critical public issues.

Since we provide free materials and services, we have to apply strict criteria to our participation in a project. We chose to assist the Community Circle Collaborative for several reasons: the Collaborative's articulation of the challenges posed by residential segregation in the Twin Cities; their appreciation of the community-building power of study circles, also called community circles; and the fact that the Collaborative represents a broad array of Twin Cities organizations. These qualities provided a strong foundation for *Choices for Community*.

We are very pleased with the progress made by the Collaborative so far. The Collaborative has recruited over 100 other organizations, including churches and synagogues, school districts, housing agencies, human rights commissions, cities, neighborhood groups, block clubs, and other community-based groups and civic groups, who will in turn recruit and convene participants. The total of 48 community circles already completed is an impressive start.

Furthermore, the report on the first round of community circles shows that the Collaborative is thoughtfully taking stock of the program, identifying both weaknesses and strengths in preparation for the second round. Few

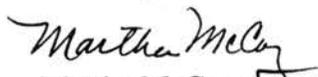
study circle programs have done as good a job of documentation and analysis. One change that has already resulted from this process is a completely different approach toward action in the second round, including plans for an action forum and citizen task forces working on various aspects of the issue. We have seen this kind of approach lead to significant results in other communities, and we think it holds great promise in the Twin Cities.

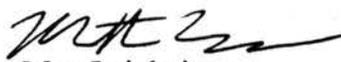
The progress made by *Choices for Community* is doubly impressive because regional issues like segregation are so crucial to the future of many communities, and yet have – until now – not been the subject of large-scale public dialogue programs. William Barnes, co-author of *The New Regional Economies*, writes, “We need to develop a regional civics that is not about governmental entities. It’s about citizens, community groups, businesses, and government agencies coming together to act in the common interest of the region.” In that sense, the work of the Community Circle Collaborative is truly unprecedented. By engaging citizens of the Twin Cities in honest, productive dialogue about some crucial, controversial regional issues, the Education and Housing Equity Project is the first organization in the country to try to create this kind of “regional civics.”

In the second round, there will be greater emphasis on including public officials in the circles and the action forum. This will strengthen the ability of *Choices for Community* to connect grassroots voices to the policymaking process. In Oklahoma, organizers used a similar strategy to involve over 1,000 people across the state in study circles on criminal justice and corrections. One of the outcomes of the project was House Bill 1213, a radical bipartisan revision of the state’s corrections system which upheld the main policy ideas being advanced by study circle participants.

The Study Circles Resource Center is committed to assisting EHEP and the Community Circle Collaborative in this work. In March 1998, we provided a free one-day training in study circle organizing and facilitation at Hamline University, which was attended by almost 100 Twin Cities residents representing scores of organizations. We have a strong interest in the success of *Choices for Community* and we look forward to the continuation of this productive working relationship.

Sincerely,

  
Martha McCoy  
Executive Director

  
Matt Leighninger  
Program Director

Cc: Dick Little, Coordinator, Community Circle Collaborative