



Education and Housing Equity Project Records.

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SUMMARY FROM THE GATHERING JUNE 22, 1999

On June 22, participants, sponsors and facilitators of *Cities at Work* and Education Housing Equity Project (EHEP) community circle dialogues on education, housing and race gathered at St. Stephanus Church in St. Paul. During small group discussions, participants shared what they gained from their community circle dialogue experience and how it will affect their future involvement in and commitment to their neighborhood and community. Highlights from this discussion were presented to the larger group and are summarized as follows:

Value of the community circle dialogues

The community circle dialogues provided opportunities to listen to one another, share personal life stories and connections and to take the time to know and trust each other. The dialogues enabled participants to become aware of and understand complex community issues and acknowledge barriers and prejudices. Often the circles involved diverse groups of people who shared qualities of optimism and activism—and a willingness to put passion into community action. Participants encouraged future dialogue participants to:

- deepen the experience via sharing personal stories and feelings
- listen and care; take time to trust and know each other
- see the connections between education, employment, housing and transportation
- take practical action—individuals and groups can effect change

Participants recognized a need to increase diverse perspectives and experiences in the circle dialogue materials and involve more intergenerational sharing—especially with youth. Recruitment of participants with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints is seen as crucial so that issues are interpreted through a broad perspective. Action areas identified at the gathering are listed below:

Action Areas

EDUCATION

- There needs to be a way for parents, students and educators to adapt school structures to fit their community values and culture.
- We need to provide more translation and support services to non-English speaking students and parents and recognize the barriers presented by diverse languages
- The tax structure and financing programs should be changed to put more resources in the communities and schools that need it most
- We need to address the relationship between school attendance, student achievement and
 - * concentration of poverty in neighborhoods, and
 - * problems related to drug and alcohol use
- Opportunities for equitable, quality education should be available to all

HOUSING

- Our communities need to understand the links between housing, employment, and transportation, and work on them as connected issues
- We must increase community awareness of housing shortages and take steps to pull in \$ from the community
- We need to create job opportunities that provide enough income for decent, affordable housing
- A system of affordable and reliable transportation that ensures equal access of all people to work and education opportunities is needed
- The public must become more aware of how taxes affect the preservation and construction of affordable housing

RACE & RACISM

- We need to see that racism is present and real in our communities—police stops, housing discrimination, etc—and not pretend it doesn't happen. All people need and want to be safe and to have services irrespective of race.
- Circle dialogues can help people to view issues through a broader perspective, learn to let go of stereotypes, and promote tolerance, respect, and empathy across racial, ethnic and ideological boundaries
- We need to recognize that the problems of institutional racism are deep and systemic in our communities
- Communities must understand the importance of public policy and political action in addressing issues of race and racism
- Use the insights developed in circle dialogues to help voters and public officials make more informed decisions

Conclusion

Additional community circle dialogues are being formed to start in fall 1999, culminating in a *Cities at Work* "Call to Action" forum on November 8 and a Citizen's Summit in winter hosted by EHEP.

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