



Education and Housing Equity Project Records.

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June 7, 1999

Barb Stone
White Foundation
Community Services Group
919 Eastland Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55104

RE: Frogtown Circle Dialogue
Summary Transcript

Dear Barb:

Please find attached by FAX the Summary Transcript / Record of the 5 Sessions of the Frogtown Circle Dialogue.

The Community Circle Report Form has been incorporated into each session's Summary section.

Please feel free to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Thanks



1999 Cities at Work Community Circle Dialogues "A Community Conversation About The Challenges Of Education, Housing And Race In Saint Paul"

Session 1 - "Getting Started" - 04/05/99 -

**Sponsoring Organizations: Frogtown Family Resource Center - Model Cities,
Frogtown Pluralism Circle**

Facilitator: Mariann Johnson # (612) 872-7959

Scribe: Jim McDonough # (612) 935-5762

Translator: Chente Vae # (651) 227-2220

Introduction:

(11 adults + 1 Child / 3 Hmong first language / 3 English)

Important Issues: Segregation and Racism <-> Housing and Education

Meeting Dates: 04/05/99 5:30pm (dinner) 6:00pm - 8:00pm

04/12/99

04/26/99

05/10/99

05/24/99

Meeting Guidelines: 1) Respect

2) Listen / Learn

3) Differences of Opinion are OK

**4) Everyone's Voice, Point of View,
and Experience are Important**

5) Dialogue "We are all human beings!"

"Who are you?"

Mariann - Facilitator, works a lot in mediation.

Via Y. - Dialogue; Get to know each other, not just the way they look, but from their hearts. Not so much to solve problems, but to discuss and share and get to know each other.

Vang Pa Yi - Come together in peace; beyond the skin, as if we come from the same mother and father.

Sally B. - Works for Wilder; works in the neighborhood; listens to neighbors / residents from Frogtown.

Pang H. - Staying at home; feels isolated.

Sang Y. - Lives in Frogtown; glad to be in Circle Dialogue about "Races".

Pao Y. - From Frogtown; would like to know about different opinions; help each other.

Trio - Learn from each other; has child in group, Chochilee, age 4.

Chente V. - Translator; works at Frogtown Family Center; want to dialogue.

Michael - Driver for Chente; married to Chente.

Jim M. - Recorder; works with the Frogtown Pluralism Circle; has worked for 2 years on Circle Dialogue Project; enthused to be involved.

"Where we come from?"

"Who we are?"

"What school did I go to?; Where I grew up?"

Michael - Born in Laos; came to USA in 1981 at age 18; lived in Rhode Island, Wisconsin, Minnesota; was CIA soldier in Vietnam; his father fought with the CIA and was killed in Thailand; he was always very busy; the family lived in Laos and Thailand; cows, rice field; rode horse; lived in farm house; worked very hard.

Hmong	English
Ly Hmong	Hello
Naph-hong (phonetic)	
Ua-hong	Thank you
Wa-hong (phonetic)	

Marians - Born and raised in Bloomington, MN; went to Catholic school; very similar environment - all white; has 5 brothers and 2 sisters; her brother was in Vietnam and Laos - 3 years as medic in military during the war; he wrote a book about his experience.

Yia - From the lower part of China; girls were not educated, only the boys; education not for girls - didn't learn to read and write; father died when she was little; mother moved from city to city; at age 13, she had child; she carried her child and worked in the field; married young; if she were "reborn" would want to learn to read and write; she had many "sad" experiences; her mother-in-law was not helpful; her sister-in-law was not helpful; the farm was hard work; when the war started she moved to Thailand; doesn't know English; farming; At her job, she feels "anger and sadness" because can't communicate; works in factory with packing hamburger and bread slices; her family consists of 10 living members: 8 siblings living in St. Paul, 3 died, 1 married living in Laos.

Vang Pa - He helped the French fight the Chinese in China; lived in China and Laos; Lived in the forest; no education, no time to be educated; fought with the CIA/Americans as a soldier; stepped on a mine and was wounded; fought in the war in Vietnam on the American side; the Vietnamese tried to kill the Hmong; the Americans saved us and came to the USA; they were nice; lived in refugee camp in California in 1994; had "bad luck" and is "sad"; the gas heating unit blew up his house and there was a fire and he lost a daughter and a son; he can't work because he got burnt by the fire and his hands are disabled and he can't grasp things; he is disabled; the State and City gave money for the loss of his children; he receives SSI; he has 8 children and receives no support for the children; his family just got MN Care; it fills him with "sadness" to tell his story; (the war has continuous effects on people).

Sally - Born and raised in Syracuse NY; had African American friends; went to public school; her family has been in this country for over 200 years and may have arrived in the 1600's; her mother is of Irish, Swedish, German, Norwegian heritage and grew up in the South and maternal side of family had experienced slavery system; her father grew up in the North and his ancestors were part of the discovery of America; in High School and College, her boyfriend went to Vietnam and was killed by a land mine; she was involved with the Civil Rights movement in College; she lived in the Fiji Islands in a grass hut surrounded by rice fields and jungle ferns; has traveled in Thailand and could hear the sounds of exploding bombs in Vietnam.

Pang (means "flower" in English) Pa - There is no word in Hmong for "Racism"; the closest concept is of "nationality"; grew up in Nafia ??; her mom died when she was little; her dad killed in the war by the Vietnamese; her family or origin consists of 11 children, 6 brothers and five girls; one brother died in a car accident with his wife; he had his B.A. and was studying to be a Doctor and had 4 children; an American man from Massachusetts who was his friend and adopted the children; last Friday the children visited their aunt in Minnesota and they had dyed their hair; (tears) it was like seeing her brother again; when she grew up in Thailand, she and her sister were not educated; they worked to help their two brothers get an education; she has a brother and sister who live in France; she and her other seven siblings live in Minnesota.

Seng Yang - When she was age 5 she learned to cross stitch and knit in order to support her mom and dad; she was from a family with 9 girls and no boys; when she lived in Thailand girls were snatched; she married at age 13; she applied for immigration to the USA for a "better life" and later did immigrate; in Laos the Hmong were being exterminated by the Vietnamese; in 1975 when she met Americans, she felt they were nice, kind people; she hoped to find education and work in the USA; in 1996 she became a single mother with three daughters, ages 7, 5, and 3; she is on MFIP and has had ESL training for 3 months and education; she works at Packaging First; the money in wages is not enough to support her family.

Pao Yang - Grew up in Seing Quan ??, the Capitol of Laos; her father died when she was young; her mother got remarried; her other siblings were adopted out to her father's side of the family; the family did farming, chickens and cattle; she knitted to send her brother to school; her half-brothers, who were younger went to school; she married a farmer and built a house; she had 11 children, 5 have died; she came to the USA from Thailand in 1996; she knows how to cross stitch; she has been on MFIP and has been in school for 6 months and is being "pushed" to go to work; she has 3 children living with her; her husband and she go to school, but it is not enough; her husband was shot in the legs and because of his damaged legs, can not stand for long periods of time.

Trin - Grew up in Mousai ??, Northern Laos farming cattle; the Vietnam War started; she has 5 sisters and 3 brothers; her father went to war against the Vietnamese; the Vietnamese captured her father, tortured him and they thought he was probably dead; in 1975 her mother died; the family later found out her father was alive; the family subsisted on farming; they moved and worked to support younger siblings; when the war erupted again, they ran away to Thailand; she was afraid to come to the USA because she does not have education and does not know the language; she wanted to take the risk and came to the USA in 1979 and lived in Tennessee and moved to St. Paul, MN in 1981; her brother and sister live in California; she feels "very sad".

Chente - Grew up in Laos and later moved to Thailand; she and family came to USA when she was 5 years old; they relocated in Appleton Wisconsin in 1980 with 4 - 5 sponsor families; her family lacked education; they had to walk to Target to buy food; she was married when she was age 15 and has 6 children; she and her sister attended St. Therese's School; when she started first grade, she cried for a week; her father got an education as well; she "wants to help her people" and is "proud to be Hmong".

Jim - Grew up in Minneapolis; his father had immigrated from Ireland in 1928; his mother was one of 11 children and first generation Austrian heritage; he went to Catholic School, the seminary, St. Thomas College, and the University of Minnesota; he has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology; he has been married and divorced twice; he has a 17 year old daughter whom he hasn't seen in nine years; he has been involved in human rights activism and advocacy for the disenfranchised for most of his professional life. He currently works with homeless persons and helps them find work.

Wrap up / Reflection:

Vang Pa (male) - Being here and hearing the stories is profound - bad and good, "sad" parts.

Pang (female) - Since she doesn't speak English, people are offended; she realizes that Americans have had a better education; she feels "sad" she has no education.

Pao Yang - He is "happy" too!! Felt like she was back in Laos; the opportunity for jobs is here in USA even with limited education; the rich get to go to school. We are all "human beings"; we need to talk for a very long time.

Next Time the Topic will be: "Segregation" -- your and our experiences now.

Summary:

Please describe the two or three main themes or ideas about experiences with racism or segregation which your group discussed today. (1 - 2 sentences each)

1. Hmong women sacrificed their opportunities for education for their fathers and brothers.

Hmong people immigrated to the USA, like earlier immigrants, for better work / education opportunities, and to escape violence in their home country.

2. The lack of English and / or education makes work in the USA very difficult.

Entry level wages are not sufficient to support the total family.

3. English speaking white Americans have "privilege" regarding access to opportunity, work, wealth, and power.

There is no word in Hmong for "Racism".

War / violent conflict has ravaged the lives of many people.

4. Please use this space to note action ideas, if any, that were mentioned in today's discussion:

- a. The importance of continuing to talk and "telling and sharing" our stories from the "Heart".
- b. The need to get a better education.
- c. Developing an appreciation that we are all "human beings" regardless of skin color.

1999 Cities at Work Community Circle Dialogues "A Community Conversation About The Challenges Of Education, Housing And Race In Saint Paul"

Session 2 - "What are the reasons for segregation in the Twin Cities?" - 04/12/99 -

Sponsoring Organizations: Frogtown Family Resource Center - Model Cities,
Frogtown Pluralism Circle

Facilitator: Mariann Johnson # (612) 872-7959

Scribe: Jim McDonough # (612) 935-5762

Translator: Chante Vue # (651) 227-2220

Introduction and Attendance

(2 Hmong / 6 Hmong first language / 3 English)

Mariann (facilitator)

Vang Pa

Yia

Seng

Pang

Pao

Sally (had to leave for neighborhood meeting at 6:30pm and later returned)

Chante (translator)

Jim (scribe)

Mariann reviewed the topic from last week and introduced this week's topic of "Racism and Prejudice - Segregation". The group members were encouraged to "tell their stories". She asked

"Do you experience segregation?"

Pang - Don't know why we can't get along? Fear? - of different color skin? We (Hmong) are afraid of African Americans - fear of crime / impoliteness. Related incident 4:00pm one day a car with 4 Black women stopped and they bumped into her with her 2 children and said "give me your pants or else!"

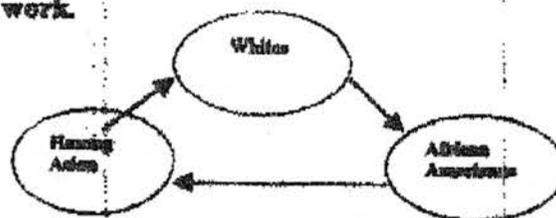
Yia - Not all Blacks are mean; some care!! They have no respect for her and scare her, e.g. a car stopped when she was walking across the street and then took off when she started walking and sped by her. The police stopped the car and gave the driver a ticket. She feels "sad"; fear and anger.

The topic of "Segregation" (comments):

We learn in school and the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) where Asian and Black parents participate. The teachers are White and Black, but the White teachers set the guidelines.

The KYYR issue where Racist comments were made against the Hmong people on the radio.

Hmong feel mistreated at work.



Feeling the object of Police Brutality / Prejudice makes us feel like going back home and running away.

Feel Fear / Violence - not as free in the USA as in Laos; in Laos we are only afraid of ghosts.

Mariann presented an outline:

Work / Where one lives
Police (Racism and Segregation)
Media / Radio
Court System

Causes:
Power (language / color of skin / culture)
System
Pain
"Production" of Power

Would / does money make the difference?

According to the Hmong participants "too much money and being very rich is not a good thing because then you would have to worry about being robbed".

Being powerful in the USA ?? - Money, Education, White Skin, Laws, Being the Manager / Boss / Owner.

Being powerful in Asia ?? - Being a Good Person, Polite, Help those in need who are poor, Respect each other / others, White Skin, Kindness, Law of having a Kind Heart - therefore Respected, Model of Kind Heartedness.

Pao - In Vietnam during the War, we sacrificed and welcomed and protected US soldiers so they could go back home to their wives. Why aren't we welcomed in your country?

Speaking from the Heart - just say "HI" to people.

(Suggestion to have a "pot luck" supper at our last session.)

A) Things We Can Do?

- 1) To learn and understand why we (Hmong) are here; we helped the Americans / CIA. The USA is the Land of the Free.
- 2) Learn about the Law System - (look inside - get to know the person; don't judge because of the color of skin) it needs to be respectful of others' culture.
- 3) In Laos we respected Americans, we want respect from Americans.
 - a) All people come together as one; talk about it as one people.
 - b) Coming together to affect the system; the system is so big as a whole, we all need to come together.
 - c) Love, honor, and appreciation. Get together; make peace. Whites did treat Blacks bad, now Blacks treat Hmong bad (pecking order). We need to come and sit together. The Hmong have a culture. Forgiveness - Now we all need to forgive the past. We need to forgive each other and don't bring up the past. Do not pass on to our children this past as their parents.
 - d) Sally - It would be really helpful if the Mayor and Police Chief were here !! Would we all be comfortable and say the same thing?!!
In circle everyone has power.
The group really wants to have the Mayor and Police Chief.
 - e) Back in Laos - Tai / Cambodian / Hmong all live in same place.

Summary:

Please describe two or three main themes or ideas about the reasons for segregation in the Twin Cities that your group discussed today:

1. Fear and anger based on skin color.
2. The Distribution of Power based on skin color: access to money / education / legal system.
3. Continuation of old hurts / pains / and abuses from the past.
4. Please use this space to note action ideas, if any, that were mentioned in today's discussion:
 - a. To learn about each other's cultures.
 - b. To learn about the legal system.
 - c. To come together to affect positive change.
 - d. To come together in love, honor, and appreciation and forgive the wrong doings of the past.
 - e. To have the Mayor and Police Chief attend our Circle discussions.

1999 Cities at Work Community Circle Dialogues
"A Community Conversation About The Challenges Of
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Session 3 - "How can we address the housing challenges in the Twin Cities?"
 - 04/26/99 -

Sponsoring Organizations: Frogtown Family Resource Center - Model Cities,
Frogtown Pluralism Circle

Facilitator: Mariann Johnson # (612) 872-7959

Scribe: Jim McDonough # (612) 935-5762

Translator: Chante Vue # (631) 227-2220

Introduction and attendance

(23 adults / 9 Hmong first language / 3 English)

Mariann (Facilitator)

Soy Ye

Pang

Yia

Van Pao

Chang Lee

Sally

Yer

Seng

Trio (with 4 year old daughter)

Chante (translator)

Jim (scribe)

Hmong
Chick lan
Ua-ntsuang

English
Hungry
Thank you

Mariann welcomed the group and stated it felt like a "long time" since we had met. She reviewed our topic of two weeks ago - "Segregation" and stated that tonight's topic is "Housing".

Our next meetings will be: May 10, 1999

May 24, 1999 (last session)

Pang - Doesn't like the importance of "skin color"; no word in Hmong for "Racism".

Mariann reviewed the Guidelines:

- 1) Respect**
- 2) Listen / Learn**
- 3) Differences of Opinion are OK**
- 4) Everyone's voice and point of view, experience are important!**
- 5) Dialogue / Conversation**

"We are all human beings!"

What does "home / house" mean to you?

Marianne - Home means safety and security.

Chong Lee - Comfortable / relaxed at night.

Pao - In his house, he is married; home is like a friend to have people over; home provides a place for relatives to visit; welcome everybody; not having a home means he has no family; in the Hmong culture when you get married you go out of the family home to get or build a home for your family and children; it means being "safe" forever; no home = no family.

Yea - Providing a place to play / a place to yell / to cook / be by yourself; she felt "safe"; freedom / no one will tell her what to do; as a woman in the home - nobody tells her what to do.

Sally - Safe place / be what and how you want to be; children could be and play; in Minnesota it's a place that is warm and safe from the elements; a place to relax.

Chong Lee - In Minnesota, need to have a home to live, because you can't live outside and grow own food; in California, could live outside, if you have to, not in Minnesota.

Chente - In Laos, we farm; the year 2000 (Y2K) and the threat of no light (electricity) would not be a problem in Laos; can't survive here without electricity.

Yer - A place to be happy, not perfect or real beautiful; to play and be free.

Jim - My home means having to be responsible and work to take care of the repairs and yard.

Pao - His experience where he was raised as a child had "good energy"; it is bad if you get sick a lot; if the energy is bad, you have to move from place to place; loves his home; a place to raise his family; for one year now, he has had good luck; but since his hands have been burnt, it has been hard to fix/repair things i.e. walls, etc.

Yer - Where you live depends on the neighbors; like with Black people, if you don't like your neighbors or they don't like you, you can't live there; she has been 8 years in her home.

Chong Lee - Teenage kids break things, holes in the walls, etc.; a single lady can't do all the repairs; wants a short house, not tall apartment, a garden to plant flowers.

(A discussion about "Good Luck" charms occurred - Gold chain is valuable, handed down from her parents; a woman - Buddha - came from a mountain a few years ago and speaks the Tai language; what she blesses wards off evil spirits; Hmong people are poor and don't speak Tai; she carries tablet and speaks to the Tai Prince and told him that God said you need to love them (the Hmong), they are My (God's) children, respect and treat them equally; if he did not comply with this directive, God would send flood and the harvest would be destroyed; the flood came for three months and the people in Thailand went hungry; the Hmong have no home and get no respect; the Buddha was buried under a tree and the tree turned to rock; Good fortune will come to the Hmong people.)

Mariann returned the group to the Circle Dialogue:

- 1) *What would you change about where you live?*
- 2) *Where would you live if you could? ideal place?*

Yea Sang -- ~~is~~ a big house with many rooms; big yard with a play station for children; garage for car.

Sey Ye -- ~~Bad~~ part is that in Hmong culture, we have a big kitchen and big living room for entertaining and relatives visiting; a place for 30 - 100 guests; here no parking is available for guests' ~~cars~~; need to change so that can have parking lot for parties; many rooms - living room and bedrooms; wouldn't live in Frogtown as she does now; don't feel safe; would live in the country; ~~not close~~ by others.

Chong Ho -- Big house 4 - 5 rooms, wood floor, carpet in bedroom; out in the country; swimming ponds, flowers, gardens; live close to river to hear waterfalls = good for you.

Sally -- ~~Like~~ my house; wave a magic wand and make it take care of itself, "magic".

Yer Har -- Home in the country = Peace.

Mariann ~~heard~~ the group's comments about what they defined as "Good Housing":

- ✓ Peaceful
- ✓ Country / Nature: Birds, Garden, Water, Vegetables, Flowers
- ✓ Yard for Children to Play in
- ✓ Rooms - Big Kitchen, Living Room
- ✓ Celebration (30 - 100 guests)
- ✓ Gathering for Friends / Relatives - to stay for awhile
- ✓ Take Care of itself
- ✓ Neighbors who wouldn't complain about parking, number of family / friends

3) *Why don't we have that Dream House?*

The Hmong are not educated; do not get good jobs with money; no "money".

Lack of Education / English.

Not enough experience to have a job.

Yea Sang -- "Sad" and happy; she didn't get a raise because of language barrier; she can't work at "fast rate" without language. Dreams about her "Dream House".

Pao Yang -- In Laos it is peaceful; don't have gas or electricity; money is the biggest issue in USA; in Laos you can live as a "free" man; live with food on the table and happy to have a home.

Sally -- She ~~is~~ judged by neighbors since she was a single mom with three "active" sons; lived next to ~~one~~ very quiet family with one daughter.

Mariann -- Home in Laos is very different than here in USA.

Sally -- When she lived in Figi (Pacific Islands) it was easier; the whole village helped take care of repairs to a house.

4) *What can the community do? What can the government do? What can we do?*
(Strategic Questions)

- > *Peaceful?*
- > *Safe?*
- > *Comfortable?*
- > *Descent Homes?*

Pao Yang - *Maybe, not going to be better; neighbors get to know each other; come together and get to know each other; not judge by color; no "Racism" in Laos.*

Chong Lee - *More business; more jobs; own work; make money for living e.g. translating, computer typing; she is a single mom with 5 children; had to lift 100lbs. Before at job.*

Yea Sang - *Hmong here have so many children; judged by neighbors negatively.*

- *(smiling)*

Pao Yang - *We the people need the help of the Government - Senator / Attorney General / Mayor; they could be "racist" too; teach our children by example.*

Pang Har - *Hmong??*

Mariana - *What could make it easier for Hmong people?*

- 1) *Education*
- 2) *Jobs*
- 3) *Money*

- *We are "old" because we are old; too old for school; English is for the young children.*

Pang Har - *ELL class on going; child care / adult care.*

Chong Lee - *Pay more on the job; on the job training; more money to have translators*

Mariana - *English speaking people could learn Hmong.*

Yea Sang - *People live together in peace / respect / like one another even if she doesn't speak English; be polite; help teach English and we will teach them Hmong; live in peace and teach one another; show kindness; show her how even though she can't read.*

Chong Lee - *Her Doctor speaks both Hmong and English; the people love her; she does not have enough time for all the people who come to her.*

Next smaller topic: "Schools / Education"

Summary:

Please describe two or three main themes or ideas about the housing challenges we face in the Twin Cities that your group discussed today:

1. Having a "home" is the foundation for the family.

The "home" is peaceful, safe, comfortable, and decent.

2. People in our community have different family compositions; e.g. single parent family; extended family; larger numbers of children.

3. Having a "decent home" is directly dependent on having the money to afford it.

People entering the workforce at entry level wages cannot afford a decent home for their families.

The language barrier creates barriers to access to "good jobs", higher wages, and the ability to attain one's dreams.

4. Please use this space to note action ideas, if any, that were mentioned in today's discussion:

- a) To develop more parking for family and guests.
- b) To get to know our neighbors better.
- c) To develop more businesses and jobs (economic development) owned by community people.
- d) To provide more ESL Classes / Education / On the Job Training / Child Care / Adult Care / and Home Maintenance Assistance.

1999 Cities at Work Community Circle Dialogues
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Session 4 - "What can we do about the achievement gap in our public schools?"

- 05/10/99 -

Sponsoring Organizations: Freetown Family Resource Center - Model Cities,
Freetown Pluralism Circle

Facilitator: Mariann Johnson # (612) 872-7959

Scribe: Jay McDonough # (612) 935-5762

Translator: Chante Vue # (651) 227-2220

This Evening's Topic: "Schools / Achievement"

Introduction and Attendance:

(12 Adults / 7 Hmong first language / 3 English)

Mariann (Facilitator)

Chante (Translator)

Trio (with 4-year old daughter)

Shouh - (older sister of regular participant / 6 children)

Yia

Nina

(Seng ?)

Cheng Lin

Sally

Jim (scribe)

Dinner - Chinese food and fortune cookies.

"Simplicity is the result of the most profound thought (wisdom)."

Topic: "School / Education - Learning"

- It is stressful going to school / adult education; hard with young children.

How do we learn things?

- ✓ **Her parents taught her to cook, be polite, etc.**
- ✓ **Parents taught how to cook food; from mother and father.**
- ✓ **By watching my parents; I am really good in math; but when I was younger in High School, my boyfriend moved away and I had a "broken heart"; when you have more children, you have pain and can't learn.**
- ✓ **Love is stronger here in the USA (romantic love); in Laos love is not as powerful; relationships are arrangements; here there is hugging and kissing and affection; in Laos there are arranged marriages; the boyfriend has to stand outside to talk to the girl; in the USA love is strong, but also weak, because it can't take the hurt or pain.**

- ✓ In Laos, there is no kissing or hugging; you are never alone with your boyfriend; in USA, couples are sensitive to pain, e.g. "one word can hurt and cause divorce".
- ✓ In arranged marriages, there is no love; her husband's side of the family likes her and says that he should marry her; she has never met her husband; its good and its bad.

What's good about school?

- Teach reading, writing, and new things.
- Depends on the school; good and bad style; daughter goes to Jackson School and is frightened of Black children; she doesn't know the language; daughter has been transferred to Special Education Class - more 1 to 1 time, more time for ABC's and speech; when child is sick they call and you can go get her or the school brings her home; bus transports daughter to and from school is good.
- Nina - Really likes school in St. Paul; in California, no bus for children in High School; in St. Paul, 11 years in school, pushing them to learn is good thing.
- Chong Lee - Came to USA in 7th grade and has gone to part of semester in College.

Mariana: (Transportation is a big theme.)

- She likes ESL and 1 to 1 teaching; school is very supportive; in Laos only the wealthy / rich can go to school; in USA all go to schools, regardless of whether your parents are poor, drug dealers, alcoholic, etc.; every child goes to school / push; in Laos, farmers are poor and couldn't send child to school; in Laos, no financial aid for college; hard for adults; stresses of family being and her age.
- Sally - All different kinds of children and different cultures; St. Paul provides "choice" where you can choose to go to school.
- Chants - Schools provide awareness of Black History Month, Asian Day, Mother's Day, etc..
- Jim - Learned love in his family; education was important; learned how to get along with people.

Break - (Diversion: Good Fortune, Amulets / Tibetan Forest Monks; Belief in Buddha / Monk)

Mariana: "We're all over the place tonight."

Among participant - "Because we are happy !!!"

What don't you like about the schools?

- Many students, not enough time to help each student achieve, esp. Asian students who are very shy; need smaller class size; one teacher for too many children.
- More interpreters needed in schools.
- Sally - Teachers need to learn about different kinds of children, different language, different color of skin, too shy, too noisy, different color clothes; related an incident where a teacher said regarding a second grade boy "what do you expect, he's from a single parent home!"

- **Hmong** participant agreed with Sally: a child from a single parent home can still learn, if someone's willing to teach them!!!
- **Too much homework**, difficult for parents to help them.
- **Poor students** may not have clean clothes.

Are some children treated better?

- **Yes**
- **Smart, quiet, well-behaved children** are treated better.
- **"Knowledge of language" is an asset.**
- **It depends on the student** (teachers don't like naughty, trouble-making students and those who **stare** and **differently** and have a different language).
- **More interpreters needed in class!!!**
- **Racial attitude** seen by parent in Head Start / School; the teacher misunderstands; the child can't communicate in same language, and the Asian child gets blamed first; this is also true for student who is in the 9th grade.
- **The system** needs to be better about being "fair".
- **Suspension** from school, children are sent home.
- **Children can't defend themselves**, because they don't know the language; she has attended school as a volunteer and observed other children point to the Asian girl as the "problem" child to the teacher when asked about trouble in the classroom.
- **Jim** - Suggested paying parents to go to school and learn; review out of school suspension policy and procedures, if effective as means of discipline; asked about whether it is OK for children with Hmong speaking parents to speak English at home; (answer was yes, but it is hard sometimes to take the time to communicate in English),
- **Bus Drivers** need more training regarding discipline; Hmong students called "chink", "Chink", but if call other student "Black", the other student's parents are so offended and side with other against the Asian students; Asian children are blamed unfairly for wrong doing.
- **Provide special tutoring** for children who need it!
- **Establish communication** between parents and teachers.
Language barriers result in Asians always being at fault.
Interpreters needed for parents too.
Teachers never call them (the parents); the child will tell them what happens in school.
Parents don't know English.
An example was offered: a pencil was stolen 3x by the same person, shoes were stolen, \$15.00 was stolen; who cares? She can't see who!
- **Sally** - Where a school liaison? Would parents like to have one?
- **Mariana** - An advocate, someone to help you in school.
- **Four interpreters**; interpreters need honesty: someone might be lying in order to protect their job and income / money.
- **Mariana** - Need to summarize what we have learned and the things suggested. We will present the summary for everyone at the next session - our last session / pot luck supper + bring friends.

Summary:

Please describe two or three main themes or ideas about the achievement gap in our schools that your group discussed today:

1. Most people learned essential information and relationship building in their families.

It is good the schools in USA "push" children to learn and make education available to all.

Transportation to and from school is very important.

2. It is difficult for parents to go to adult education classes and manage a family at the same time.

3. There are too many students in the classroom for one teacher to attend to.

Asian students tend not to know the language and are shy and polite.

Asian students get inordinately blamed for wrong doing.

More interpreters are needed in schools.

4. Please use this space to note action ideas, if any, that were mentioned in today's discussion:

- a. Teachers and bus drivers need to develop awareness of other cultures.

- b. More interpreters, liaisons, advocates, and ombudspersons are needed in schools.

- c. There needs to be better communication between parents and teachers.

- d. Special tutoring for new arrival students, especially those who don't know the language, is needed.

1999 Cities at Work Community Circle Dialogues
"A Community Conversation About The Challenges Of
Education, Housing And Race In Saint Paul"

Session 5 - "Making A Difference" - 05/24/99 -

**Sponsoring Organizations: Frogtown Family Center - Model Cities,
 Frogtown Florallan Circle**

Facilitator: Mariann Johnson # (612) 872-7939

Scribe: Jim McDonough # (612) 935-5762

Translator: Charles Yee # (651) 227-2220

Mariann initiated the session:

"What do we do now?"

(The Circle Group had decided to have a "pot luck" dinner and invite guests; the table was spread with a sumptuous feast of Hmong cuisine.)

Introductions were made by each Circle member and guests were introduced:

(20 adults / 11 Hmong first language / 7 European decent / 2 African American)

Invited Guests: Sam Schuer

Mark Rose

Charles (teacher)

Robert Giles

Madison McMillan

Michael Kidder

He (husband of Soy)

Hmong woman

Mariann reviewed the Session Topics:

1 - Introductions

2 - Segregation

3 - Housing

4 - Education

5 - What do we do now? - (Bring Guests - Expand the Circle)

Reviewed Guidelines: Respect

Listen / Learn

Differences of Opinion OK

Everyone's Point of View is Important

Dialogue / Conversation

"We Are All Human Beings !!!"

Session # 1 - Introductions

Mariann - Our Dialogue's purpose was to "talk and really listen to each other"; "we aced it !!!"

I remembered my brother was in Vietnam; we shared: 1) our experiences and 2) who we are.

Group Comments:

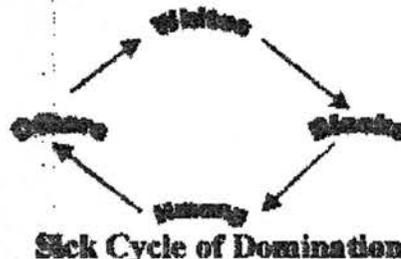
- **There is no word in Hmong for Racism.**
- **Our stories were good, but sad to tell.**
- **We are all human beings (speak from our hearts, skin color doesn't matter).**
- **We need to talk more and longer.**
- **Not speaking English and limited education, makes it difficult not to get the lower paying jobs to support our family.**

- The War / Conflict ravaged our lives (all of us).
- The Hmong are here because of war and subsequent genocide.
- (Sey's Husband) - It has been an opportunity to see the USA; the men hid the US soldiers from the Terror of War.
- The women considered the US soldiers "good luck" and hid them.
- A soldier parachuted down and the Hmong shot Communists away to protect him.
- Her brother saved two American soldiers and they didn't eat much rice, so the Hmong mixed the rice with eggs and that's all they ate for weeks.
- In 1975 I remember getting candy from American soldiers; General Linn Pao moved Hmong to USA.
- (Sally) - We shared our stories.
- (Marianne) - It is the only way to heal.
- (Guest Hmong woman) - I feel sad and disgraced here as compared to back in Laos; little kids here spit and swear at her; she doesn't feel as important as paper money; feels hurt; her kids answer back to verbal attacks from others; feels sad and bad; feels "left out"; people who are working / educated don't know why we are here; they say the "f..." word.

Session # 2 - Segregation and Racism

Marianne - This was a difficult session; Circle members felt Racism was: wrong, unjustified, bad. It is a terrible cycle in this country.

Segregation results in feeling isolated; a sick system: a sick circle of dominance and domination.



New Hmong Woman - We're all human beings !!! We bleed ! No right to be treated badly because of what happened long ago; treat everyone equally; being treated badly for "bad" behavior is understandable; but not for doing nothing wrong.

- Causes of discrimination: language, color of skin, "Culture".
- In America, "power" is in the head, in Laos "power" is in the heart.
- In Laos laws and guidelines are there if you do something wrong; you have to be responsible; in USA, white skin can be an exception to the law.
- Things we can do?
 - 1) Learn and understand why Hmong are here!
 - 2) The System needs to be respectful; don't judge according to skin color.
 - 3) Come together; the system is so big, we all are needed to affect it.
 - 4) Love, honor, appreciate and "forgive" from and for the past.
- I feel very hurt; I've been forced to be here; other people feel that my people came for the money.
- Rodney - "Our people have lost their culture; they have no history, except being told they came from the "shores of Africa"; the Hmong have a richness in your culture; our African American people lost their culture; in the 1970's, after the War, we lost something; the young people have no respect / act out of ignorance; they do not know who they are.
- Hmong woman - The Hmong and Blacks are "brothers" according to our history.
- Rodney - There was an awakening when our black people came back from the War; Asian / Oriental stores charged twice the price in our neighborhoods; Asians were willing to have two or more families in the same house; they took lower paying jobs; there was a world-wide deceit that we have enmity between Blacks and Asians; older Blacks hold your people in respect and felt that "we had no business being over there and fighting our brother.

- Mariann - There is a need for healing !!!

Session # 3 - Education

- We described our "ideal" homes - gardens, lots of rooms for family and friends to visit, etc.
- In Laos, our fears are of "ghosts" and "spirits"; in USA we are afraid of "gangs" and "gangsters".
- Among women - Even though we do not speak the language, we still learn, by feel and hands on learning; we can understand what is expected of us on the job.

Session # 4 - Education

See Summary in Transcript

- Among women - school is good; but it depends on the quality of the teacher; some teachers are only concerned about their job, and not "teaching" children.
- Connie - (A Special Education Teacher for the deaf) - We must take our concerns about Education to our school boards; Neal Tai is a Hmong person on the school board; call him on the phone.
- We need to add to our summary transcript that it is "good" in the USA that there is education for the "slow learners" and "disabled"; in Laos, those who are disabled are simply ignored and often shunned.

Mariann and Dale announced that there will be an "All Circle" meeting on Tuesday, June 22, 1999 at St. Stephanus Lutheran Church at 739 Leland Avenue.

Tom - Working on "housing" in Frogtown.

Melvin - Working in Frogtown and invited the group to a "Peace Pole" planting and the Taste of Frogtown on Thursday, July 15, 1999 from 5:30pm - 8:00pm; the program will include Hmong dancers.

"Thank You's to everyone to all !!!" - Adjourn.

Summary:

1. What are two or three of the most powerful steps *individuals* can take to make a difference?
 - a) Get to know your neighbors and talk to them.
 - b) Develop and understanding of other people and their history and culture.
 - c) Speak from the heart with love, honor, appreciation, and "forgiveness" for past wrongs and misunderstandings.
2. What are two or three of the most powerful steps *groups or organizations* can take to make a difference?
 - a) Hold our organizations accountable to practice equality and justice in their policies and procedures.
 - b) Request that language barriers be addressed in all public and community meetings.
 - c) Develop a sense of "community" that is inclusive of all persons in the community and develop concern and support for that "community".

3. What are two or three of the most powerful steps our *community* or *region* can take to make a difference?
- Ensure equal access and fair treatment of all students in school.
 - Assist new immigrants in learning English and having access to livable wage jobs that will support their families.
 - Recognizing the need for healing and forgiveness between people in our communities.
4. What are some of the things participants said they would do differently in the future as a result of being part of this community circle dialogue?
- Have more of this type of dialogue with our neighbors.
 - Hold in greater admiration and respect those of other cultural backgrounds.
 - Get involved in institutional change to provide greater "access and opportunity" for people of color in our community.
 - Feel like there is a sense of fellowship and community empowerment, which enable us to support each other in our efforts to make our dreams come true.
 - "Speaking from the Heart" makes it possible to use our wisdom and untapped knowledge for the good of the whole community.