



## 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](http://www.mnhs.org/copyright).

**EDUCATION & HOUSING EQUITY PROJECT  
'CHOICES FOR COMMUNITY'  
COMMUNITY CIRCLES PROJECT  
1997 REPORT**

During 1997, EHEP established the Community Circle Collaborative, a metro-wide dialogue project that engaged over 500 citizens from 35 different municipalities in informed public conversations focused on the challenges of school achievement, housing integration and racial/economic equity in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

These discussions included:

- 1) Twenty-five 'community circles,' each composed of 5-20 participants meeting between three and six times (approximately two hours for each meeting) during the months of March through June. These circles were sponsored by a wide variety of organizations and were convened in central city, suburban and outlying communities. Approximately 25% of the 350 or so participants were people of color.
- 2) A Metropolitan Citizens Forum held at Macalester College Chapel in May moderated by George Latimer and Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, two noted facilitators and leaders on issues of race relations and segregation. Martha McCoy, director of the Study Circles Resource Center, offered a national commentary. 125 citizens and public community leaders, including representatives of community circles who shared the results of their circle deliberations attended the forum.
- 3) A set of town meetings in Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools in September held in conjunction with the National Summit on Race Relations and America's Public Schools and co-sponsored with the President's Commission on Race and the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Approximately 50 adults and youth participated in facilitated, nominal group discussions.

EHEP and its Community Circle Collaborative partners accomplished these dialogues through a sequence of organizing and supporting activities, including the following:

- 1) A sponsor kick-off event *Beyond Busing: A Metrowide Dialogue on the Challenges of Education and Housing Segregation* held in December 1996 at the St. Louis Park City Council Chambers. Over 100 citizens representing nearly as many organizations attended the forum, which introduced the project and provided an overview of the issues. The forum included presentations by 10 civic and government leaders. A sponsor's packet was provided to each participant. Following the forum, approximately 50 different groups (school districts, churches and synagogues, libraries, neighborhood councils, community-based non-profits, housing groups, human rights commissions, chambers of commerce and municipalities) signed pledges of participation, agreeing to sponsor or convene at least one community circle.

- 2) Publication of a newsletter "*Beyond Busing*" in January 1997 to draw attention to the project, announce upcoming activities, provide forms for sponsor, facilitator and participant sign-up, and to cover the "who, what, why, where, how and when" of the project. The newsletter was mailed out to approximately 500 interested individuals and organizations.
- 3) Facilitator training workshops held in February at Augsburg College. Approximately 85 people with backgrounds or experience in facilitating small groups were recruited and received training on the issues and process to be used in the community circles discussions. A team representing the lead partners of the Community Circle Collaborative delivered the training. A facilitator's packet was provided to each participant. Each volunteer moderator/facilitator signed a pledge of participation. Facilitators were subsequently matched with community circles convened by the sponsors. The Community Circle Collaborative worked with the Minnesota Facilitators Network to identify and recruit moderator/facilitators. In addition, many of the sponsor/conveners provided their own experienced facilitators. To facilitate communication between community circle study groups, e-mail services were offered to facilitators at no cost by the Twin Cities Free Net.
- 4) Research and preparation of an issues/discussion guide *Choices for Community: A Regional Conversation about the Challenges of Education, Housing and Segregation in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area*. In the preparation of this document, the Education and Housing Equity Project was assisted by a review team representing the Collaborative; staff of the Study Circles Resource Center; a CURA-funded graduate intern from the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs; and by noted journalist, editorial writer and playwright Syl Jones.
- 5) The Collaborative also produced a resource bibliography that includes over 125 publications and articles to help inform the public discussions. The Librarians for Social Responsibility offered to assist in making these resources available for community circle use at branch county libraries. In addition, the Collaborative supplied resource experts who were available to meet with community circles upon request. Community circle participants were also invited to local conferences and seminars, such as the Institute on Race and Poverty's Spring Conference on housing, education and persistent segregation, to augment their inquiry and knowledge of the issues they were discussing.
- 6) A concluding forum *Coming Together: A Regional Conversation on Schools, Housing and Segregation*, co-sponsored with the Macalester College Department of Urban Studies, the Study Circles Resource Center and the Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Initiative (described above). This event brought together community circle representatives, interested citizens and invited community leaders to achieve a metro-wide conversation and share the results of the individual community conversations.

- 7) An evaluation survey of the community circle sponsors, facilitators, reporters and participants to learn what worked well and what needs to be changed before a second round of community conversations is held. All participating circles completed the survey, and a summary report of the results has been prepared. A focus group meeting with community circle representatives will be held in the near future.
- 8) A summary report of the community circles' findings, conclusions and recommendations to be made available for public distribution in early 1998. At the conclusion of their deliberations, the community circles submitted over 100 pages of reports. The substance of these reports, along with the results of the fall town meetings at Minneapolis and Saint Paul Schools, are being synthesized and integrated into a summary report. The final document will report on the substance of the conversations, but will also include a critique of the discussions and process recommendations for a second round of discussions and action steps in 1998.
- 9) Video and audio documentation of the project, which was provided by a community circle partner, the Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Project.
- 10) The project network directory, which now includes over 1,000 participants and interested citizens.

The results of the community circle conversations are already being used and have had some impact on the Twin Cities civic community:

1. The Project was a major contributor to the winter 1997 edition of Wilder Foundation's *Community Matters*. The entire issue is devoted to "Race and Community." The Project has also received media coverage by:
  - The *Star Tribune of the Twin Cities*
  - The *U.S. News & World Report*
  - Minnesota Public Radio's Midday Program and (KNOW-FM) and National Public Radio's "All Things Considered."
  - Community Radio Station KFAI in Minneapolis
  - Minneapolis Community Television Network, Channel 34
  - A radio program of the Black Leadership Forum (Yvonne Scruggs) in Washington, D.C.
  - The National League of Cities in its Local Officials Guide *Governing Diverse Communities: A Focus on Race and Ethnic Relations*
  - The national newsletter of the Study Circles Resource Center
  - Several Twin Cities-based neighborhood and suburban newspapers

We have also received a request from NBC News for coverage of the second round of conversations in 1998. Our project will also be the subject of a major display at the Minneapolis Public Library in January and February 1998.

2. Project staff and participants were invited to be contributors to two other public conversations in September 1997: The Peoples Summit, broadcast by KTCA as part

of its Block by Block television series, and the Metropolitan Initiatives Forum, cosponsored by the Center for Neighborhood Technology, several Twin Cities foundations and the Citizens League.

3. Several new community-wide discussion initiatives have begun which are inspired by or modeled after the community circle discussions we initiated. One prominent example is the dialogue and action project begun by Interfaith Action, a social justice ministry of church congregations in the greater Minneapolis area. EHEP assisted them in convening metro interfaith forums on jobs, housing, sprawl, race and poverty. Their discussion guide and "issues map" are taken directly from the Community Circles project. The chief organizers, planners and resource speakers of the Interfaith Dialogues were participants, sponsors or facilitators in the Community Circles project. Partly in response to our initiative, education and segregation issues have been added to their agenda.
4. Following completion of the first round of community circle conversations, EHEP board members and staff, and community circle partners, were invited to:
  - Make presentations to the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership at its annual conference, and the West Metropolitan Education Program (consortium of nine suburban school districts and the Minneapolis school district) at one of its quarterly board/superintendent meetings;
  - Meet with and provide input to the mediation consulting team (CMI) for the NAACP v. State of Minnesota educational adequacy law suit;
  - Participate in updating the Minnesota Milestones measures for state and metropolitan outcomes in education, housing and multicultural diversity; and
  - Develop strategies at the Metropolitan Housing Summit cosponsored by the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing.

EHEP staff and board members have also participated in and helped lead discussions at various conferences focusing on housing and education issues (e.g., the DFL Education Foundation's conference on closing the income gap and the Institute on Race and Poverty's conference on overcoming spatial barriers to welfare reform).

5. EHEP has been contacted by National Days of Dialogue to help promote conversations on race relations in the Twin Cities. The National Days of Dialogue on Race Relations is a coalition effort of national organizations to encourage and highlight dialogue on race relations during the week leading up to Martin Luther King Day. We have also been contacted by the St. Paul Pioneer Press to advise and assist them in establishing a series of community discussions that that would be tied to a newspaper series they will be running on welfare reform and poverty in the Twin Cities.

6. Some of the community circles continue to meet (e.g., the Golden Valley Circle sponsored by the Black History Month Committee of the Human Rights Commission, working with the Twin West Chamber of Commerce and Hopkins School District). EHEP is also monitoring action initiatives that spring from local community circles (e.g., churches getting involved in fair housing initiatives).
7. EHEP formally supported and helped develop MICAH's proposal to HUD for a Fair Housing Initiatives Grant. In the category of "education and outreach – reducing suburban tensions," MICAH was one of only five non-profits in the nation to receive funding. EHEP will be a collaborating partner in this project, which will use theatre as a vehicle for engaging the public in the issues we care about. Other community and congregational organizing groups (e.g., St. Paul Ecumenical Action Council) are approaching us about collaboration in 1998.
8. We have also received requests from local communities (e.g., Maplewood Human Rights Commission) and academic institutions (e.g., Twin Cities area seminaries' joint course on "Solving Urban Problems" and the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs' Metro Urban Studies Term program) to use our discussion guide as part of their course curricula and community education and outreach initiatives.
9. Also as a result of our accomplishments in 1997, EHEP has been invited by the Minnesota Fair Housing Center to co-sponsor and provide technical assistance and policy direction in developing a comprehensive fair housing training conference for suburban planning officials in 1998.
10. The executive director of EHEP also met with the Chair of the Metropolitan Council, Curt Johnson, to discuss how the community circle project could be assisted by and infused into the work of the Council.

Our major thrust at the close of 1997 is to plan and organize a second round of community circle conversations and forums in 1998. This round will be built on the results of the first round. The circle discussions will culminate with a Citizens Summit co-sponsored with the Minnesota Meeting and the Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Initiative, and a public action agenda for 1999.