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Stabilizing Housing Careers and Building Community

Prepared in partnership with
Urban Homeworx

Prepared by
Keith Sterling Miller
Research Assistant
University of Minnesota

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Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)
University of Minnesota
330 HHH Center
301–19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
Phone: (612) 625-1551
Fax: (612) 626-0273
E-mail: cura@umn.edu
Web site: http://www.cura.umn.edu

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Stabilizing Housing Careers and Building Community

Expanding and Strengthening Urban Homeworks’ Strategic Network of Good Neighbors

By Keith Sterling Miller
Acknowledgments:

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Executive Summary

The mission of Urban Homeworks (UHW) is to perpetuate the hope of Jesus Christ through innovative community development that produces dignified housing for very-low income families, a strategic network of good neighbors, and the redemptive development of real estate. Urban Homeworks focuses its work in neighborhood clusters that are 2 city blocks by 2 city blocks called PODs. UHW currently implements three housing programs including rental units for families with very low-income, the Urban Neighbor program, and Project Reclaim a home ownership program for families with low-moderate incomes.

Since its inception UHW has desired to provide support its residents through a strategic network of good neighbors. Families with very low incomes tend to have very erratic housing careers. Negative non-housing related issues frequently cause families to move. This pattern is one of many circumstances that keep families living in generational poverty. UHW has always understood the value of social networks and social capital as important mechanisms for the survival and enrichment of families and communities. That is why UHW has desired to surround its residents with a strategic network of good neighbors. Historically, one component of that network has been UHW’s connections to social services. UHW has a number of partnerships with social service institutions and organizations that help families with very low income address many of their challenges. The Director of Housing has been the only staff member responsible for facilitating connections and support to families that rent from UHW. However, the Director of Housing has also been responsible for filling vacant units, managing compliance, and providing maintenance on its rental properties. The other component of the strategic network of good neighbors has been the desire within UHW to facilitate social connections within PODs. The goal has been to expand the social network of POD residents to help families establish stability and a sense of place.

As UHW grew, the property management responsibilities began to consume the workload of the Director of Housing. This has meant that the desire to build this strategic network of good neighbors has remained informal and ad hoc. The growth and organizational change of UHW has lead to the central questions of this research:

• How can UHW organize itself so that UHW can formalize the process of offering resources and support to families with very low-income in order to help them establish stability in their housing careers? How can Urban Homeworks intentionally facilitate a strong network of good neighbors within PODs?

The report will attempt to answer these questions by providing recommendations for Urban Homeworks based on three areas of research. They include:
• A broad-literature review on housing issues that affect very-low income families, different housing support models, community engagement, social networks, social capital, and Asset Based Community Development.
• Findings from interviews conducted with community members in PODs, and
• Findings from consultative interviews conducted with organizations involved in urban housing and community building activities.

The research process for this project has been iterative and the Community Building team was continually involved in shaping its focus and the following recommendations. Recommendations for Urban Homeworks stem from the information gathered for the literature review, interviews from POD residents, and consultative interviews.

• **Recommendation #1:** Develop a formal service enriched housing model that is designed to support families with very-low incomes to establish stability and self-sufficiency in their housing careers.
• **Recommendation #2:** Expand and develop UHW’s community building model by adopting the formal role of facilitator within PODs.
• **Recommendation #3:** Explore ABCD in the Real Estate Development Team.
• **Recommendation #4:** Introduce listening sessions as a means to build bridging and linking social capital in and across PODs.
• **Recommendation #5:** Integrate the language and conceptual models of social networks and social capital into all of UHWs programming.
I. The Vision and Mission of Urban Homeworks

The mission of Urban Homeworks is to perpetuate the hope of Jesus Christ through innovative community development that produces dignified housing for families with very low-income, a strategic network of good neighbors, and the redemptive development of real estate.

Urban Homeworks (UHW) focuses its work in neighborhood clusters that are 2 city blocks by 2 city blocks (see the Urban Homeworks doodle below). UHW refers to these clusters as PODs, (People Oriented Development). Within each POD UHW implements three different programs including the Urban Neighbor Program, rental housing for families with very low-incomes\(^1\), and home ownership opportunities for families with low-moderate incomes\(^2\). All of the properties that UHW owns for rental or re-sale were previously distressed properties that were rehabilitated with the help of volunteers, trainees, and private contractors (most of which are minority and woman owned businesses).

II. Urban Homeworks’ Strategic Network of Good Neighbors:

A central component of the Urban Homeworks POD strategy is to foster a strategic network of good neighbors (NOGN). Over the years there has been a desire within UHW for this network to have multiple dimensions. First, UHW has informally sought to provide support to families with very low incomes throughout their housing contract with UHW. Many of the families that rent from UHW bring non-housing related issues into their contract that previously affected their housing stability. Some of the non-housing related issues that families bring with them are poor credit history, chemical dependency, mental illness, and/or interpersonal

\(^1\) According to the HUD very-low income qualifies at 50% area median income.
\(^2\) Low-moderate incomes qualifies at 80% area median income.
conflict. This support often has been ad hoc and informal. Historically it has involved guiding and connecting families to the appropriate tools and resources to help families deal with the issues that affect their housing stability. UHW’s current model for implementing this part of the strategy is implemented by the Director of Housing and through its strong partnerships with social service agencies such as Lutheran Social Services and the Northside Achievement Zone.

The second component of UHW’s desired strategic network has been to facilitate relationships with families, UNs, and Strategic Neighbors in a POD. UHW has historically understood the role that social networks and social capital plays in helping families and communities address generational poverty. UHW’s desire is to build a social network so that all residents, but in particular families with very low incomes, are connected to the social capital within a POD.

For the first 10-12 years of its history UHW was able to foster this network through informal relationships that were created and maintained by its small and multi-purpose staff. In previous years the Director of Housing was responsible for building relationships with renters, community members, maintaining properties, and filling vacant units. However, 16 years after its inception UHW has grown to a point where the day-to-day operations of rehabilitation, property management, and maintenance have consumed the workload of its staff members, in particular the Director of Housing. UHW has grown as a small organization of 25 to a total of 96 rental units in a relatively short amount of time. This growth has meant that the informal work of network building, supporting, and connecting families to resources have been consumed by property management responsibilities. The growth and organizational change has lead to the central questions of this research.

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• Findings from consultative interviews conducted with organizations involved in urban housing and community building activities.

It is also important to note that the research process has been iterative and participatory. Members of the Community Building team have participated in the consultative interviews with other organizations. In addition, the findings from the
research have influenced ongoing discussions within the Community Building team at UHW.

**III. Literature Review**

The purpose of the literature review is to become aware of the professional and academic literature within the community engagement and low-income housing sectors. Specifically the review surveyed:

- The housing careers of families with very-low income,
- Models for providing housing to families with very-low incomes,
- Models of community engagement,
- Conceptual models of social networks and social capital, and
- The principles of Asset Based Community Development.

**Housing Careers of Families with Very-Low Incomes**

The first step in the literature review is to understand the circumstances that result in housing instability among families with very low incomes. In 2010 The Center of Urban and Regional Affairs published a study that tracked the housing careers of 47 individuals living in or on the waiting list for subsidized housing. The purpose was to learn more about the housing careers of very-low income persons and coping strategies used to secure housing. (Goetz, Skobba and Yuen 2010)

One of the most important findings of the study was that the average length of stay at any given residence for an individual or family with very-low income was 20 months over 22-year housing career. (Goetz, Skobba and Yuen 2010) That means that the average family with very-low income moves over 13 times in a 22 year period. Moving 13 times in a 22 year period appears to be a very high mobility rate. Especially if compared to a middle income family. Housing instability has negative implications on several circumstances that help families survive and get ahead including; job opportunities, stability of supportive networks for families, and the consistency of educational opportunities for adults and children.

Generally the reasons for moving can be placed into three categories. They include positive or negative, forced or unforced moves, and housing or non-housing related. For the purpose of the literature review this report will focus on the negative reasons cited for moving. According to the research 59% of the situations that led to a move were negative. 49% of moves that families encountered were reported as forced. This suggests that half of all moves by families with very-low incomes are the result of something that was impressed on them. Many of the negative and forced moves were related to non-housing related issues including chemical dependency, mental illness, and interpersonal conflict. (Goetz, Skobba and Yuen 2010)
Interestingly, when asked about neighborhoods that participants of the study formerly lived in 69% of participants commented on the social environment rather then the physical characteristics of the neighborhood. In addition, when something negative was said about a former neighborhood 82% of descriptors were about the social environment. (Goetz, Skobba and Yuen 2010) While no causal link can be made between the social environment of neighborhoods and mobility of families with very low-income two hypothesis can be suggested. First, relationships within neighborhoods seem to matter more to residents then physical conditions. Second, families with very-low incomes frequently live in or around social environments that they consider negative.

The final section of the report outlined summary and policy implications that carry over into UHW’s work. The implications that are relevant to the scope of this research are below:

- **Options for service-enriched housing need to be expanded.** Service enriched housing has been very important for participants in our study. Much of the forced mobility of these families was related to non-housing issues such as drug and alcohol use, mental illnesses, and interpersonal relationships. Thus, prospects for longer-term stability for these participants depends on their ability to address these challenges. Service-enriched and community settings work well to mediate these issues and help families achieve greater stability.

- **Housing assistance should be offered in forms and in locations that support the coping strategies of very-low income families.** What is most important about neighborhoods for these participants is the proximity of family and friends and the establishment of a support network to meet basic needs. Participants depend on informal work, reciprocal relationships within their social network, and financial support of nearby kin, each of which are frequently location-sensitive. Being able to maintain proximity to these sources of support and to access housing subsidies is critical for these families.

- **Helping very-low income families achieve stability requires a strong system of nonprofit organizations that address basic needs that go well beyond housing.** Meeting basic needs goes beyond stable, affordable housing. Many of the follow-up participants relied on nonprofit organizations for help with food, energy assistance, and referrals—even those who were living in subsidized housing.

- **Housing assistance must be provided in ways that address intergenerational influences.** Housing instability, poverty, and family trauma have been an intergenerational problem for many participants. Helping families achieve housing stability as well as chemical, mental, and physical health may help break the cycle of instability for the next
For most, the hypermobility of their own housing careers is part of an unbroken pattern that began when they were children. (Goetz, Skobba and Yuen 2010)

**Housing and Service Provision**

Amongst housing support organizations there are a number of different approaches or options for providing support to residents. The variance in approaches generally reflects the level and type of needs among residents. This literature review explored two models of service provisions within a housing context. The first model, supportive housing, generally refers to permanent housing support to individuals with chronic mental illness, victims of abuse, or individuals in recovery from drug or alcohol abuse. Supportive housing usually accompanies a housing subsidy and requires case management and direct service provision. Populations that live in supportive housing are generally at-risk or have special needs. (Tull 1996)

The second model, service enriched housing, is a differentiation from supportive housing. Service enriched housing has services available to residents but participation is voluntary. There is generally a system for providing immediate support to families or residents when needs become apparent or assistance is requested. (Tull 1996) Services that are typically found in service-enriched housing include afterschool activities, tutoring, continuing education opportunities for adults, family literacy, and or financial literacy classes.

**Community Engagement**

Over the years community based organizations have worked with families and communities in different ways. In order to frame how social networks and social capital can be used and developed by organizations it is important to differentiate between different models of community engagement. The different models have different outcomes, depend on, and produce different types of social capital. The three models that this literature review explores are community organizing, community development, and community building. A definition for each model is below:

- **Community organizing** is an approach to community engagement that is driven by the self-interest of a group of people. Community organizing builds collective power. Community organizing usually results in a political change, re-ordering of power arrangements, or completion of an activity that addresses the self-interest of a group of people. Community organizing generally taps into the social capital of existing social networks rather then building new capital. (Jordan 2006)

- **Community building** generally refers to the development of relationships within a specific area. It can mean building and integrating relationships
across racial, class, and social lines. Often community building work leads to building the capacity of a community. It may include mapping out priorities and opportunities to build positive change in a community. Often community organizing and or development can come out of community building work. However, those efforts are seen as by-products not the goal of community building work. (Jordan 2006)

- **Community development** is a broad term and concept that can encompass community building and community organizing. However, within UHW and the literature, community development usually refers to the projects or activities designed to better or strengthen a community. For the purposes of this research we will refer to community development as the bricks and mortar component of community engagement. It should be noted that there is much dispute in regards to the definition within the discipline.

**Social Networks:**

Over the last 10 years the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) has published a number articles in the Making Connections series. These articles provide the conceptual frameworks for understanding social networks and social capital. According to AECF a, “social network is a set of people, organizations, or other social entities connected by a set of social relationships.” (Jordan 2006) It is important to note that there are different types of social networks and differentiating between them will provide clarity on their use and function in community engagement.

- **Informal networks** exist among family members and friends. These networks often have deep emotional and complex bonds.
- **Generalized networks** exist among individuals who belong to organizational groups that share common ideas, beliefs, values, or activities. These might be churches, social clubs, or associations.
- **Institutional networks** are facilitated by an institution for the purpose of providing services or a specific outcome. An institutional network might be a job search network, parent-teacher-student network, or even a place of employment. (Jordan 2006)
To better understand the intricacy of social networks the following table taken from *Tapping the Power of Social Networks* provides definitions of key components of a network:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Node</td>
<td>A point within a network that can connect to other points. A node can be an individual, a family, an institution, or a community, depending on the level of analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portals and Doorways</td>
<td>Places through which individuals and families enter a network, such as leadership programs, block parties, or neighbor circles. A program or activity becomes known as a portal or doorway when families are introduced to the network at that point of contact and are then made aware of other opportunities for engagement or participation in the network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hubs</td>
<td>Focal points for network connectivity and activity: for example, settlement houses, family support centers, or community schools. These are places where families come to get specific needs met, but also tap into networks that may lead to other opportunities to use their skills and talents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hives</td>
<td>Accumulation of points in the networks where there are innovative communities that create, adapt, and spread network tools and ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectors and Weavers</td>
<td>A connector or weaver is an individual who sees his or her role as representing a network and taking responsibility for engaging individuals and families in opportunities within the network. While a connector will often stop at simply introducing people to each other, a weaver will take the time to build relationships and learn about a family's interests, skills, and needs with the intent to encourage more than one connection to the network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Stewards</td>
<td>People or organizations that cater to the care and feeding of networks (for example, data and information resource centers).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Jordan 2006)

Organizations that build generalized and institutional can create two types of network environments.

- **Instrumental Network Environments (INE)** - In an instrumental network environment a specific result is the goal of the network. The network is a vehicle for accomplishing the goal. The result could be homeownership, financial literacy, or job placement. Relationships and social capital are the vehicles for accomplishing the goals of the network.
• **Transformative Network Environments (TNE)** - In a Transformative Network Environment the goal is the network itself. Other results such as access to jobs, learned skills, or community change are the byproduct not the goal of a TNE. (Bailey 2006)

For more detail on network environments see Appendix II.

Social networks matter and are important for a variety of reasons. First, people are most impacted by those they are in personal relationship with. Second, the social service industry is increasingly reliant on the service delivery model for families and children in need. Often these models are detached from meaningful relationships with communities and individuals. In addition, funding structures often drive service models more than consumers of services. Third, there is a persistent disconnection from civic engagement in America that places families that live in poverty at a distinct disadvantage in advocating for the things they need to change their lives and the circumstances of their communities. (Bailey 2006)

Of course social networks can be equally destructive and beneficial depending on the quality of the environment in which they exist. Characteristics and indicators of healthy and vibrant networks that are facilitated by community-based organizations are below:

- The network is demand driven;
- The network is flexible;
- The network is constantly expanding;
- Leadership is expected of all members;
- The network is non-hierarchical;
- Staff members play the role of a facilitator; and
- True power is in the relationships. (Bailey 2006)

Anecdotally it appears that people stay connected to networks if the networks are vibrant and healthy. However, there are other things that keep people connected besides vitality. These reasons are particularly true of networks that are facilitated (generalized or institution). They include:

- The presence of rituals, common principles, and group norms;
- People find value in choices available;
- Opportunities for families to participate;
- Networks stand in for distant or problem family members;
- There is power in a unifying experience;
- The opportunity to imagine a different future; and
- The expectation and opportunity to contribute. (Bailey 2006)
Social Capital:

Conceptually, building social networks are a precursor to building social capital. In other words, social capital is the accumulation of social assets that accrue from social networks. Much like financial capital the amount and type of capital a family has plays a significant role in what they are able to accomplish. In the article, Ties That Bind, the AECF provides helpful distinctions between the different types of social capital. The different types of social capital are helpful for thinking precisely about the purpose and different types of community engagement models. Especially when it comes to having a full understanding of the type and amount of social capital that needs to be developed or already exists. The different types of capital include the following:

- **Bonding capital** refers to the links with people that are most like you. Relationships are informal, reciprocate similarity, and are intimate. Bonding capital helps individuals and families, “get by,” in times of need.
- **Bridging Capital** refers to the links between people, groups, and assets outside of one group or community. Bridging capital expands access and helps families and individuals, “get ahead.”
- **Linking Capital** refers to the alliances between individuals and groups with those in power over assets required for economic or social development. (Bailey 2006)

Economically disadvantaged demographics often have significant amounts of bonding social capital and some intra-community bridging capital. However, most of these demographics lack sufficient inter-community bridging capital and little if no linking capital. (Bailey 2006)

Asset Based Community Development:

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach to community development that builds off the existing capacity of a community’s assets. ABCD is a strategy that re-focuses the traditional path of social work and community organizing, which is needs or problem driven. A needs driven approach, according to John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, leads organizations and residents to view neighborhoods as fundamentally deficient. This leads organizations and individuals to think of themselves as incapable of taking charge of their lives and communities. (Kretzmann and McKnight, Building Communities From the Inside Out 1993)

ABCD is an alternative path to community development that is capacity focused, asset based, and relationship driven. Capacity focused community development leads toward policy and program activities that are based on the capacities, skills, and assets of people with lower incomes and their neighborhoods. Each community
has a distinctive arrangement of assets to build on for its future. However, residents and individuals may not be aware of the assets of individuals, within citizen associations, and local institutions. (Kretzmann and McKnight, Building Communities From the Inside Out 1993)

ABCD stresses the need to focus the work of community development to incorporate community building. This includes facilitating leadership roles in a community so that work is internally focused, allows for local definition, local investment, ingenuity, hope, and autonomy. If community building is capacity focused, asset based, and internally focused, then by definition it is relationship driven. The role of community building staff is to constantly build and maintain relationships between residents, associations, and institutions. (Kretzmann and McKnight, Building Communities From the Inside Out 1993) Tom DeWar, an evaluator of Asset Based Community Development Programs, noted that ABCD is not so much a model of work but a compass for guiding local participation and capacity building in community development work. (Dewar 1997) A list of community development and mapping tools published by the ABCD Institute can be found in Appendix III.

IV. POD Research

Community based research was conducted in two Urban Homeworks PODs including one in south Minneapolis and one in north Minneapolis. Interviews were conducted with UHW residents including families, Urban Neighbors, and Strategic Neighbors. The purpose of the interviews was two fold. First, to gain perspective on how Urban Homeworks could increase, improve, or change its community engagement model. Second, to gauge how Urban Homeworks could improve its work in providing support to families renting from UHW.

Families

When interviewing families that rent from UHW the interviewer asked a series of open-ended questions about the neighborhood, the family, and the interviewee’s experience with UHW. Before the interview began a confidentiality statement was read to the interviewee. No names will be used in this section of the report.

In the sample of residents that were interviewed most of the residents had either lived or had been living in an UHW unit for 2 or more years. When asked about what drew residents to UHW two themes emerged. First, respondents wanted to make a change in their lives. Second, someone in their family or support network helped families get connected to UHW. Residents were asked to reflect on their experience with UHW. Residents had only positive things to say about their relationship with UHW. These questions revealed an important theme that was present throughout these interviews. Residents felt like they had honest and trusting relationships with Dan Hunt, the Director of Housing. Most residents felt like Dan was there to support them. One resident felt that she could call Dan or
UHW day or night in regards to problems in the neighborhood, with housing, or her personal life.

When residents were asked to reflect on their experience living in the neighborhood several themes emerged. First, most residents commented on the relationships within the block. Second, all residents noted that they had positive relationships with the Urban Neighbors that lived in the same building. Each family had varying levels of connection with Urban Neighbors that ranged from UNs providing informal childcare and mentoring to simply being a friendly neighbor. Third, most residents desired to know neighbors on their block. Interestingly none of the families were connected to a church or religious organization in or outside the neighborhood. However, most of the children were connected to local churches or organizations through programs provided by local institutions. When asked about the benefits that the neighborhood offered to their families most of the respondents mentioned safety, that the neighborhood was peaceful, and the proximity of parks and activities. When asked about the divisions in the neighborhood most families didn’t mention any. However, one comment was made in reference to divisions between African American and Hispanic neighbors. When residents were asked about their dreams for the neighborhood every family desired to know their neighbors better.

All of the families that rent from UHW have very-low incomes and many of them share similar life circumstances as families that were interviewed in the CURA study on housing careers. However, despite the challenging circumstances that most UHW families face, when asked whether respondents had dreams to better themselves or their families they all responded with a resounding yes. Many of the dreams residents articulated were to finish their education whether it is a GED, high school diploma, or associate degree to find more stable work. Most respondents spoke of their dreams for their children. Finally, one family mentioned that homeownership was a very real dream and possibility for them someday.

**Urban Neighbors**

The community based research also included interviewing Urban Neighbors. It is important to note that most Urban Neighbors come from very different life circumstances than the families that rent from UHW. Most UN are single, young professionals, come from middle to upper middle income families, and have either earned or are seeking a college degree. Urban Neighbors commit to living in a rental unit with other UNs for at least one year. They also commit to volunteering in the city for 2-3 hours per week.

When asked about their experiences living in the neighborhood several themes emerged from discussions with Urban Neighbors. First, UNs love the culture and diversity of the neighborhood. Second, most UNs engage in relationships with neighbors, including UHW families. Naturally the depth of relationships ranged from surface level to deeply connected. Living in the neighborhood has offered a number of benefits to UNs. The experience has helped UN break stereotypes and
learn how to be good neighbors. In addition, most of the UNs felt safe and that there was little to no violence or drug trafficking. Interestingly UNs were quicker to identify the racial and cultural divisions on the block. Many of them noted a strong Latino presence and observed a tension between the Hispanic and African American community.

Anecdotally one UN pointed out that in December of 2010 there was a sexual assault that involved a woman and her children in Powderhorn Park. Subsequently the community gathered to, “take back the park.” However, 95% or more of the participants at that event were white and very few Hispanic or African American families were present.

Urban Neighbors had similar dreams for their block as the families that rented from UHW. They included a time and place for everyone to gather, something for the kids, and possibly a community garden or place for social connections to occur more frequently. One UN commented that while relationships are ok in the neighborhood there isn’t a sense that, “we are a community,” and that would need to be a precursor to a formal organizing event. When asked how UHW could strengthen its community building work UNs suggested several ideas. First, that the do no harm emphasis is potentially a little too strong in the UN program. Rather, UHW should play a role in facilitating community in its PODs and include UNs especially UNs with longevity. Second, UNs with longevity should be encouraged to play a leadership role in the community. Finally, there was a general desire for UNs to simply know their community more.

**Strategic Neighbors**

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with strategic neighbors within Urban Homeworks’ PODs. Strategic Neighbors (SN) are homeowners or long-term renters that may or may not be connected to UHW. Strategic Neighbors are people that are generally community minded, natural leaders, or gatekeepers in a neighborhood. Strategic Neighbors may be but are generally not Urban Neighbors. Urban Neighbors generally have a shorter lifespan in a community compared to Strategic Neighbors. SNs tend to have more bridging and linking social capital compared to the families that rent from UHW.

Several themes emerged from discussions and interviews with SNs. First, UHW has a high level of respect amongst strategic neighbors. Respect is the result of SN’s recognizing that UHW provides dignified housing, works to support and help families that rent from UHW, and is community minded. Second, there is a desire amongst Strategic Neighbors for UHW to facilitate more community building activities. While this was a common theme it is important to note that different individuals expressed varying amounts of commitment to their block and neighborhood. Some Strategic Neighbors spent a majority of their free time in the community while many others spent their free time outside the community. Throughout the interviews strategic neighbors were more likely to point out
problems with specific homes or people in the neighborhood than UN’s or families that rent from UHW. In addition, Strategic Neighbors noted that many divisions within blocks happen across cultural and social or class lines. Finally, most Strategic Neighbors envisioned a block or community in which there were no more violence, trust among neighbors was established, and the kids in the community were engaged and raised in healthy ways.

V. Consultative Interviews

Through the research process three consultative interviews were organized with other community and urban housing organizations. Organizations that were interviewed include Hope Community, Lawrence Community Works (LCW), and Project for Pride and Living (PPL). The Community Building team desired to learn a range of community engagement best practices that were developed or used by urban housing organizations. Hope Community and PPL were selected because of their proximity to UHW. Both organizations have strong reputations within the urban housing sector of the Twin Cities. LCW was selected because Mary Keefe, the Executive Director of Hope Community recommended that UHW learn about their Neighbor Circle model as an effective means for community building work. The purpose of these interviews was learn about effective models used to build community and provide support to families with very low-income.

Hope Community

Hope Community is an organization located in the Phillips Neighborhood of South Minneapolis. Below is a description of Hope’s mission taken from their website.

Hope Community is a catalyst for change, growth and safety. We are building a sustainable neighborhood model through community organization, active education, leadership and affordable housing development.

Hope implements its mission in two ways.
1. Development of affordable housing and public spaces that include a community center, playgrounds and gardens.
2. Extensive community engagement that involves hundreds of youth, adults and families each year in learning, leadership and community opportunities. (Hope Community)

Hope Community has 173 units of affordable housing and 29 market-rate units. All of their units are concentrated around the Franklin and Portland Ave intersection. On June 27th UHW sought a consultative interview with Mary Keefe the Executive Director of Hope Community. The purpose of the interview was to learn about Hope’s community engagement model, their lessons learned, and best practices.
Hope Community has 4 staff members that are responsible for community engagement. Hope structures all of their engagement programs into what they call points of entry for neighborhood residents. Examples of Hope’s points of entry include a community garden, youth leadership groups, small business workshops, and adult education. All 15-points of entry for community engagement are open to all people including but not limited to residents of Hope Community.

A core function of Hope’s engagement model is their community listening process. Community listening is a form of action research that connects the voices and opinions of community members to the staff at Hope Community. The work done by the Community Engagement team is largely driven by listening sessions. Additionally, listening sessions give Hope Community platforms to organize communities around political, inequity, and racial issues that residents often experience.

The consultative interview included an insightful conversation about Hope’s organizational structure. Hope’s previous structure had the property management and community engagement responsibilities managed by the same people. Keefe highlighted the need to separate the two functions of the organization. According to Keefe, property management constantly competed for time with community engagement. Hope’s new structure contracts all property management to another non-profit. Hope maintains an internal community engagement team. An important lesson from this new structure is that while the two teams do different work property management and community engagement relate to each other. It has been very important for the two teams to meet on a monthly basis to ensure coordination and cooperation between the two functions of the organization.

**Lawrence Community Works**

Concluding the interview with Mary Keefe she recommended that UHW research the Neighbor Circle model that was developed by Lawrence Community Works (LCW) in Maryland. A description of LCW that was taken from the website is below.

Lawrence Community Works (LCW) is a nonprofit community development corporation working to transform and revitalize the physical, economic, and social landscape of Lawrence, MA. We do this with a growing network of residents and stakeholders who are:

- Engaged in building family and community assets,
- Providing each other with caring and mutual support,
- Building leadership and civic engagement skills, and
- Engaging in collective action for positive growth and change in Lawrence (Lawrence Community Works)

On August 4th, a consultative interview was conducted with Alma Couverthie from LCW. Couverthie is the individual responsible for developing the Neighbor Circle...
In the late 1990’s LCW ran a program designed to strengthen the capacity of neighborhood associations. However, after running the program for only a year LCW realized that neighborhood associations created power dynamics that kept residents with less social and financial capital at the margins. The end result of working with the neighborhood association was less trust in a community. LCW decided that if they wanted to organize the city it would mean that they would have to pull the plug on working with neighborhood associations and create a model that built community and trust. The model that LCW created was the Neighbor Circles.

Neighbor Circles are a series of three dinners held at a home of the host. The host is someone who is willing to open their homes to people of different races, ethnicities, and generations within their neighborhood. The host recruits neighbors to participate in a circle by knocking on doors, making phone calls, and sending out emails. Hosts are generally trendsetters in a community or natural leaders. In addition, they are responsible for putting together a light appetizer for at least the first circle meeting. LCW has a $100 budget for all the meals to help subsidize the cost of food for the group.

Someone other than the host facilitates Neighbor Circles. The facilitator is usually someone that has been trained by LCW and is generally from the broader community. The facilitator controls the process of the meetings including discussions and mapping activities. The facilitator generally outlines the purpose of the Neighbor Circles and leads neighbor circles through conversation topics that help neighbors get to know each other. Circle members practice listening and affirmation skills with circle members and develop consensus-building skills amongst those in the group.

The first meeting includes a brief introduction to LCW and the concept of Neighbor Circles. During the first meeting the facilitator conducts a mapping exercise with circle members. The exercise draws out how and why each community members is in the neighborhood. The purpose is to identify what members have in common and what is different about each person’s story. Homework is given to each circle member to complete before the second meeting.

For the second meeting each members is asked to make a list about what they like about the neighborhood and one thing they would like to change. In the second meeting the discussion is centered on the answers to these questions. Circle members connect and share their likes and concerns with the neighborhood. By the end of the second meeting a list of potential activities that the group could accomplish is created. Activities have to be small, clear, and require only a short amount of time. The idea is that if a neighborhood can do something small it is more likely to do something big when it is really needed.

The third meeting is generally a potluck. It is also where the circle chooses if they want to take on an activity. If they do then this is where they begin to prepare and plan. It is very important for the facilitator to be prepared to help support whatever
action the circle might agree to take. That means bringing along as many resources as possible in order for the group to act. This may be phone numbers, training manuals, and suggestions for planning processes. The goal is to help build capacity by ensuring community actions are adequately supported.

Neighbor Circles take the idea of network building outside of a building and institution. They create open spaces for people to share, connect, and support each other. Neighbor circles attempt to rebuild the fabric of community and help members see that different people come from different places. There are several things that Neighbor Circles are not. First, Neighbor Circles are not neighborhood associations or gang/crime prevention groups. Second, they are not a project or activity generators. The only expectation of Neighbor Circles is to build trusting relationships to prepare the groundwork for action. Third, it is not a strategy to develop a pre-set agenda in a community. Action is not required or expected but is often an outcome of Neighbor Circles.

**Project for Pride and Living**

On August 16th, 2011 a consultative interview was conducted with Peter Elwell a Services Coordinator at Project for Pride and Living (PPL) to learn about PPL’s service enriched housing model. “Project for Pride in Living (PPL) is a nonprofit agency working with lower-income individuals and families throughout the Twin Cities metro area to achieve greater self-sufficiency through housing, employment training, education, and support services.” (PPL Overview 2009) PPL’s programs and services target four primary impact areas including; “housing stability, economic advancement, family stability, and youth achievement.” (PPL Overview 2009)

The purpose of PPL’s service enriched program is to help families move towards greater self-sufficiency. PPL has seven housing sites with roughly 100 families in each site. Each housing site includes programs designed to help families establish self-sufficiency. Programs include family literacy, job search, adult education resources, and other activities.

PPL uses several staff members with different responsibilities and skill sets to implement their service-enriched model. At the grassroots level of the model are Community Builders. Community Builders are Ameri-Corp Vistas that are responsible for organizing 2 community events per month at each housing site. Community events are organized around different themes. Community events can be fun or educational. They range from movie nights, to health and wellness lessons, workshops on the environment, and presentations on child and parent relationships. Community building events are designed to help residents connect with each other, learn and develop new areas of interest, and connect residents more deeply with PPL’s voluntary services. Community building events and the afterschool programs are the primary means for getting families more deeply connected to PPL’s services.
Service Coordinators are the staff responsible for connecting PPL’s families to the variety of services that PPL offers. Service Coordinators are the social workers version of the jack-of-all-trades. Coordinators connect with residents and develop trusting relationships. They help residents identify their strengths, weaknesses, and the obstacles that prevent them from establishing housing stability and self-sufficiency. Coordinators work with participating residents to develop a plan to address barriers to self-sufficiency. Each plan is specific to the needs of each resident and family.

Each resident that decides to participate in the Self-sufficiency Program requires and desires different amounts of support. Coordinators meet regularly with all participants. However, the amount of time varies from resident to resident. This is based on several circumstances including the needs, the availability, and the desires of each resident. PPL has a variety of tools available to the coordinator in order to help track a resident’s self-sufficiency capabilities. The self-sufficiency matrix is an example of a tool that tracks the circumstances that affect the stability or sufficiency of an individual or family.

The self-sufficiency matrix quantifies qualitative circumstances in the lives of program participants. The matrix includes outcomes such as housing situation, literacy, education of children, life skills, mental health, and financial literacy. The matrix is used by both the Services Coordinator and participating resident. Together they rank where the resident is at on the scale for each outcome. Then together they develop a goal for each outcome, and a plan to reach that goal. The matrix allows for the Services Coordinators and resident to measure and track the progression towards self-sufficiency. See Appendix IV for an example of a self-sufficiency matrix.

**VI. Recommendations**

The purpose of this research project is to make recommendations to improve community building and housing programs within Urban Homeworks. The goal is to help families with very-low incomes obtain more stability in their housing careers and to build a stronger more strategic network of good neighbors within PODs. While recommendations are based off of interviews conducted in the community it is important to recognize the value of the research published by CURA on the housing careers of individuals with very-low incomes. The interviews conducted for this research confirmed many of the same findings discovered in this research.

Recommendations that are included in this report are intended to create a framework for UHW and the Community Building team as they prioritize and plan
through the ways in which they will build or change their housing and community engagement programs.

Below is a concentric circle that visually depicts the intended participants of each recommendation. If the diagram were placed within an UHW POD the innermost circle would represent service enriched housing that focuses on the families that rent from UHW. The next circle would represent community-building efforts that would include Strategic Neighbors, Urban Neighbors, rental families, and other neighborhood residents. The third circle would include the same stakeholders as the other circles but be expanded to include nearby churches, businesses, and neighborhood associations into a participatory community development strategy that could influence UHW’s redevelopment of abandoned and foreclosed properties. The fourth circle would include all previously mentioned stakeholders but would involve stakeholders from across neighboring PODs.

**Recommendation #1:** Develop a formal service enriched housing model that is designed to support families with very-low incomes to establish stability and self-sufficiency in their housing careers.

There are at least four reasons Urban Homeworcks should develop a service enriched housing model. First, it is clear from the research that service enriched housing
models can provide the kind of support that families with very-low incomes need in order to establish stability and self-sufficiency. Second, UHW has broad connections in the social service community that includes the Northside Achievement Zone, Lutheran Social Services, and various other institutions. If UHW’s service enriched model can initially connect families to existing resources and institutions little is required in terms of start up capital. Third, UHW has a philosophical desire to help families establish stability and self-sufficiency. Fourth, UHW has reached a point in with nearly 100 rental units where a formal system of service enrichment needs to be built in order to for UHW to provide direct support to families in establishing stability.

Moving from an informal and adhoc system to a formalized system of service-enriched housing requires a number of organizational changes. First, in order to be successful at connecting families to resources there needs to be a dedicated staff member to this objective. An important lesson learned from Hope Community is that community engagement staff need to be different from property management staff. Second, a service enrichment program needs to build in a system of metrics to measure the stability and self-sufficiency of residents. An example of this type of system is the Self-Sufficiency Matrix. The matrix can be used to identify housing and non-housing related barriers to stability, create goals with a resident, and be used to measure a resident’s progress or final outcome. Third, UHW should consider running/developing a program that recruits residents into services.

An example of a potential feeder program would be to replicate the Jeremiah’s Porch model of mentorship and tutoring with Urban Neighbors. Jeremiah’s Porch is a community service house in South Minneapolis that is owned by PPL. Jeremiah’s Porch is rented to the same demographic as Urban Neighbors. However, Jeremiah’s Porch connects its residents as tutors and mentors to youth living in PPL housing. This type of program could help residents develop enough trust with UHW to be willing to participate in a self-sufficiency program.

At this point it is helpful to return to the concepts of social capital and networks in the literature review to develop the language and structure of a service enriched program. If UHW developed a formal service-enriched housing model it would expand and use its network of social service institutions more intentionally. The purpose of that network would be to help families establish stability and self-sufficiency. This type of network is considered an institutional network. The network would help families build and strengthen bonding (get by) and bridging social capital (get ahead).

**Recommendation #2:** Expand and develop UHW’s community building model.

A strategic network of good neighbors is more then just connections to services and resources for families with very low incomes. It is the presence of trusting relationships within a neighborhood that strengthens and builds bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. Two dominate themes that emerged from interviews with
Strategic Neighbors, Urban Neighbors, and UHW residents that support this recommendation. First, there was a desire to know their neighbors within the block more. Second, there was a desire to be active in improving the community. Given UHW’s unique role in its PODs as trusted landlord and renovator UHW should leverage their relationships and be intentional about facilitating community building activities.

One specific approach to community building that UHW could adopt is the Neighbor Circle model developed by Lawrence Community Works. The Neighbor Circles are a series of three dinners that are hosted by a family in a neighborhood, in UHW’s case a POD. During each meeting a facilitator, connected to UHW leads, the group of neighbors through a series of conversations. By the end of the series the circle identifies what it likes about the neighborhood, what it would like to change, and whether or not it wants to organize a project.

Neighbor Circles as compared to a service enriched housing program have different program participants. A service-enriched model of housing support would only focus on families renting from UHW. Neighbor Circles would target every resident within a POD including families renting from UHW. Neighbor Circles is a transformational network environment. Strengthening the relationships within the network is the purpose of the network. All types of social capital can be built in a neighbor circle including bonding, bridging, and linking.

**Recommendation #3:** Explore ABCD in the Real Estate Development Team

Asset Based Community Development is a compass that assists community development projects in utilizing community participation and local assets. As Urban Homeworks continues to grow its rental and ownership portfolios the Real Estate Development Team should consider exploring how it can integrate additional ABCD strategies into their acquisition and renovation of foreclosed and boarded up properties. This would include knowing the demographics of a POD or potential POD and opening up spaces for existing residents to participate in shaping UHW’s community development presence in the POD. It is important to note that the scope of research in this project did not include analyzing the Real Estate Development Team. The recommendation is for UHW to explore the use of ABCD as a potential tool for including community participation in its Real Estate Development.

**Recommendation #4:** Introduce listening sessions as a means to build bridging and linking social capital in and across PODs.

Families with very-low income tend to have little or not social capital that links them to institutions that have resources required for community development. In addition to Neighbor Circles, listening sessions can help identify issues, problems, and opportunities for residents of neighborhoods to organize around. Listening sessions should include all of UHWs stakeholders from neighboring PODs. While some problems are isolated to blocks and specific homes many institutional and
structural obstacles to development are shared across neighborhoods in St. Paul and Minneapolis. Listening sessions can help residents share these issues and provide a potential platform for UHW and residents to organize around.

**Recommendation#5:** Integrate the language and conceptual models of social networks and social capital into all of UHWs programming.

Thinking precisely and using vocabulary that adequately describe UHW’s programs is important for several reasons. First, language can shape the culture and focus of UHWs community engagement program. Second, language can help staff members be precise in regards to the impact of a given program. Third, the language of social networks can help UHW map the different roles and functions that exist in its networks. These networks include the network of social service institutions and the transformational network environments that are created through community building activities like Neighbor Circles.
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Appendix I: Research Questions

Interview Questions for Strategic Neighbors and Urban Neighbors:

Disclaimer: This survey is being designed to understand how Urban Homewor[...]s to strengthen and build off community assets. The goal is to facilitate community building in ways that enhance the capacity of networks, families, and the neighborhood to overcome self identified needs and problems by building on existing assets. All of your answers will be kept confidential.

1. How long have you lived in the neighborhood?
2. Do you rent or own the unit you live in?
3. Can you tell me about your history living in the neighborhood?
4. What are your perceptions of the families that live in Urban Homewor[...] other rental units in the neighborhood?
5. What are your relationships like with your neighbors?
6. Are there churches or other religious centers in the neighborhood that you have connected with? Why?
7. What about outside the neighborhood?
8. Have you ever been to a neighborhood association meeting? Block club? Why?
9. What has the neighborhood offered you in terms of benefits for you and your family?
10. What have you been able to give or share with your neighbors?
11. Who are the leaders in the neighborhood? Do you feel like you could approach them?
12. What divisions exist in this neighborhood? How do you feel those could be overcome? What could you do to change the divisions?
13. What are your dreams for this neighborhood?
14. Have you thought about how you might make that dream reality?
15. What advice would you give to Urban Homewors as they look to be more involved in your neighborhood?

Interview Questions for UHW Renters:

Disclaimer: This survey is designed to understand how Urban Homewors can improve its work in the community to strengthen and build off community assets. The goal is to facilitate community building in ways that enhance the capacity of networks, families, and the neighborhood to overcome self identified needs by building on existing assets. All of your answers will be kept confidential. None of your answers will in anyway affect your rental agreement with Urban Homewors.
1. How long have you lived in this Urban Homeworcks rental unit?
2. What drew you to Urban Homeworks?
3. Can you tell me about your experience living in an Urban Homeworks unit?
4. How has this experience been different than previous rental experiences?
5. Can you describe what your experience has been like living in the neighborhood?
6. What are your relationships like with your neighbors?
7. Are there churches or other organizations in the neighborhood that you have connected with? Why?
8. What about churches or other organizations outside the neighborhood? Why?
9. Have you ever been to a neighborhood association meeting? Block club? Why?
10. What has the neighborhood offered you in terms of benefits for you and your family?
11. What dreams do you have for you and your family?
12. How do you think you can accomplish those dreams?
13. Who are the leaders in the neighborhood? Do you feel like you could approach them?
14. What divisions exist in this neighborhood? How do you feel those could be overcome? What could you do to change the divisions?
15. What is your dream for this neighborhood?
16. Have you thought about how you might make that dream reality?
17. What recommendations would you give to Urban Homeworks to help make them a better organization?
Appendix II: Instrumental and Transformative Network Environments

The following table has been taken from, *Ties that Bind: The Practice of Social Networks.*

Figure 1: To achieve individual and family results: more jobs, increased income and assets, healthy children, and improved school readiness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumental Network Environment Characteristics</th>
<th>Transformational Network Environment Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network is infused with lots of instrumental information, for example, about job openings or training opportunities</td>
<td>Network is infused with common beliefs and principles that guide how members act with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation is often incentive-driven</td>
<td>Entry may be incentive-driven but not ongoing participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional bridging opportunities</td>
<td>Intentional bridging to other people with diverse experiences and backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice environment includes access to jobs, IDAs, and other tangible things of value.</td>
<td>Choice environment includes tangible things of value but also expectation of leadership and opportunity to give as well as take</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members determine what to access or take advantage of</td>
<td>Members determine what the network offers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of weavers is to connect people to information</td>
<td>Role of weavers is to connect people to people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: To develop community results; mutual support and civic engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INE Characteristics</th>
<th>TNE Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network is infused with lots of skill and leadership development</td>
<td>Network is infused with shared values for the common good and for how the community should support its members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stipends are sometimes used to encourage participation</td>
<td>Resources for group projects, not incentives for participation, are often made available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional linking to people in power</td>
<td>Intentional bridging to next generation of leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice environment includes a range of leadership opportunities, celebrations, and support.</td>
<td>Choice environment includes expectation of leadership and menu of activities that meet individual, family, and community needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members determine choice of issues</td>
<td>Members determine network priorities, network shape, and menu of activities and opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of weavers is recruit and connect people across networks and groups</td>
<td>Role of weavers is to build leaders who in turn build other leaders and grow the network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: To develop systems change results: improved and responsive services and supports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INE Characteristics</th>
<th>TNE Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Network is infused with habits of attachment that replace habits of detachment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The incentive is change itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Members link the network to power as they begin to occupy positions of authority within or over organizations and institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choice environment includes how systems should operate and what they should offer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Members determine priorities and governance of organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role of weavers is to hold the vision and connect members to skills (organizing, policy development, social justice, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix III: ABCD Mapping and Community Building Tools

The Asset Based Community Development Institute has published a number of resources and tools designed to guide organizations through incorporating ABCD into their work. The following is a list of tools that may be practical for Urban Homeworks to use in its community building work.