

# Standing Tall in the 80s

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“You should have been there.”

This and other eager quotes by participants in ICA local youth forums was the ethos of many people and communities that participated in Standing Tall in the 80’s. Standing Tall was a three-year initiative between 1981 and 1984 that sought to utilize awakening forums to help mobilize communities in Chicago around addressing their challenges. It represented not just a continuation of the ICA’s mission and programs in Fifth City and Uptown, but also an extension of the Institute’s use of forums to tap into interest groups – communities, youth and women - since the 1960s. For instance from 1975-77 the ICA held 5,000 community forums nationally, at least one in every county of the United States.

“Standing Tall” began with research into what issues united citizens across Chicago. In 1979 and 1980, the ICA conducted an urban probe that consisted of numerous meetings with community leaders throughout Chicago. The goal of the probe and the broader “Cities Standing Tall in the 80’s” initiative was best articulated by the ICA’s “Radical Urban Alternative” [document](#), which laid out a five-year plan for the North American Urban Demonstration - one that would work to realize 1984 as the “Year of the human settlement.”

Chicago was identified as a city “ready to move.” Given the Institute’s successful work with Fifth City and Uptown, a concentrated four-year period from 1980 to 1984 was seen as an ideal time to address community issues by training residents in “effective leadership” and by helping to create and mold “common focus” and “shared consciousness,” among other forces. Kitty Cole and Georgianna McBurney took on the task of visiting each of Chicago’s 77 communities to offer a one-day program focused on community, youth, women, special focus, or LENS. Once a forum was scheduled, assigned ICA staff and volunteers facilitated the event. The reach and frequency of these meetings was enormous.

**Community Forums.** Of the many Chicago communities, four were identified as “beaconlights” due to their receptiveness, organization, determination to move, and “symbolic importance:” Uptown, Kenwood-Grand Boulevard, Humboldt Park, and Auburn Gresham.

- [Kenwood-Grand Boulevard](#), in particular, was defined by antagonistic relations between Black residents and prospective White ones, as well as issues of crime and a lack of political representation and public services. Participants in the Community Service Forum expressed hopes to “save the community for our own well-being and to live with the whites who are here,” as well as goals for more jobs for teens, safer and better-maintained streets, and more social participation in social events. In order to do so, residents proposed [measures](#) such as lobbying for greater federal funding for training programs, more trash disposal, business support, and the formation of community block clubs to assist in these efforts. Other youth forum meetings in venues like the Corpus Christi Catholic Church formulated [goals](#) ranging from tackling drug addiction to higher government spending for schools and safe streets by the year 2000. Community Youth

Forums in Hyde Park/Kenwood cited residents' concerns surrounding crime, poverty, and "community apathy" and proposed longer-term community collaboration to remedy them.

- Auburn Gresham inherited and addressed similar issues, as residents cited structural inequalities along with education, public services, and resources such as recreational equipment and programs along racial lines. Community Service Forums hosted by the Institute identified Auburn Gresham as a "progressive" and "middle class community" that, nevertheless, began to face inequalities in education, recreational facilities and public services for its majority-Black residents relative to the rest of the city. In particular, the Forum identified issues of concern to the community, such as the lack of community development and neglect due to perceived racism by the city, a lack of leadership in the community, and generally low self-esteem amongst residents. Therefore, the Forum helped residents to articulate proposals to create comprehensive community programs, including forums, seminars, workshops, celebrations, and other activities, to recognize and invigorate "Black heritage" and togetherness.
- Humboldt Park focused on issues obstructing community engagement and effectiveness. The Youth Service Project was one of many community projects to work with the Institute during Standing Tall. Through interviews and discussions with residents, it identified a general lack of "interest" among residents to cooperate and address issues ranging from poor sanitation to gang presence. "They feel they don't have to do it," said one resident. "[and want] to let someone else do it." To remedy this, the Project proposed creating regular community meetings and fostering partnerships between actors, such as parents, teachers, and law enforcement.
- Uptown. The work in Uptown, in many ways, built upon the accomplishments and vision of earlier projects, especially the Uptown 5 Guild system (see Uptown 5 for further information). The Women's Leadership Forum, for instance, identified and proposed responses to issues familiar to the community, including unclean and unsafe streets, the lack of recreational spaces for young residents, and jobs and housing for lower-income residents, among many others. The Forum advocated enlarging grassroots community action and crafting a more "effective neighborhood" by identifying and developing relationships with potential partner organizations in the community.

The experiences within these forums in these "beacon" communities were one part of the Standing Tall in the 80s. It is difficult to evaluate what progress was made due to the Institute's work in helping communities coalesce and identify political, economic, and cultural concerns. What is clear, however, is that its efforts helped Chicago citizens see themselves as part of a greater collective whole and with the ability to understand and work towards resolving broader problems facing them.

*Fifteen Community Forums* were held in Uptown, Lincoln Park, Edison Park, Dunning, West Garfield Park, East Garfield Park, South Lawndale, Grand Boulevard, Washington Park, Hyde Park, New City, Auburn Grisham, and O'Hare. 814 participated.

**Youth Forums** were held in collaboration with community organizations such as the Hyde Park YMCA, the Youth Service Project Inc. in Humboldt Park, and Hales Franciscan High School. Altogether 774 youth participated in fourteen youth forums between 1980 and 1981. The 1981 [Youth Presidium](#), for instance, worked with 73 youth to identify unique issues, including economic instability, the “collapse of family structures,” and a perceived lack of community engagement.

*Fourteen Youth Forums* with 774 youth participating were held with:

- Neighborhood Boys Club
- Youth Service Project Inc.
- Westside YWCA, Michelle Roberts School
- Youth Network Council
- St. Agatha’s Church
- Hales Franciscan School and Key Club
- Garfield Alternative High School
- Hyde Park YMCA
- Greater Roseland Association
- Southwest YMCA
- ICA Youth Presidium
- Four facilitator training sessions

**Womens Forums.** The ICA also held eight global women’s forums and symposiums that brought together more than three hundred participants in the diverse communities of Chicago. These [forums](#) espoused a vision of expanding “female engagement in the society’s economic life,” preparing women for leadership roles, and forging effective female/male partnerships capable of addressing shared economic and social concerns.

*Fifteen Global Women’s Forums* with 314 women participating were held with:

- International Visitors Center
- Chicago City-wide
- Women’s Leadership of Uptown Edgewater
- Loretta Academy
- Latinas Eager to Grow
- ICA Women’s Symposium

**LENS:** In addition five Leadership Effectiveness and New Strategies (LENS) were held with 99 participating:

- Mayors Office Employment and Training
- Chicago Alliance of Business Employment and Training
- Harper College
- McDonalds Inc.
- U.S. League of Savings Association

**Summary Report.** A [report](#) by the “Chicago Program team” estimated that the Institute visited at least 170 local groups and agencies, contacting all 77 communities. More than 50% percent of the communities sponsored a forum, with approximately 1,900 people participating.