

Uptown 5 Community Demonstration Project
Chicago, Illinois
Program Report

People have deep compassion for their community. Caring is not something one must create. The creation which is necessary, however, is that of breaking through the inertia which holds people fixed in a spot of deep cynicism and apathy where they cannot move. Such is Uptown - a place of over 95 social action agencies where 20 could do the job; where the major tasks out of that concern have primarily been emergency "bandaid" responses to overt requests. 95 Concerned agencies have not been able to "stem the tide" of deteriorating structures, collapsing systems, and the apathetic spirit. Uptown remains the community with the highest crime rate of the City of Chicago, the greatest number of those, violent. Its unemployment rate now hits 30 percent, with an expected increase to 50 percent by Summer, 1975. In a housing situation of decaying apartment complexes, landlords despair of receiving adequate funds for repair and remodeling, and find it virtually impossible to fill their space with stable tenants. Many businessmen closed up their shops, and those left behind spoke of leaving soon. But here and there have appeared signs that the tide is turning. Where once people spoke of Uptown as being the "meanest place in town," they now speak of it as a "Community of Possibility." The stream of those just "passing through" to better communities has stopped, and people are deciding to stay. Here and there patches of grass and plants and tiny parks are appearing. The community gathers together in a festival celebrating its unique cultural makeup and its life together. Posters appear in windows declaring "Uptown is a great place to be alive" or "Uptown - the global community of the future."

INTRODUCTION

A handful of people decided Uptown was worth saving, and that its population could express its rich cultural heritage as a unified community. Out of that concern and the awareness of the needed long-range planning and solutions which would have a lasting effect in the community, the following immediate objectives were articulated:

1. Analyze the economic, political, and cultural situation in order to grasp the internal systems and external forces at work in the community;
2. Create an entry plan which would give permission to move through the community and seek out the depth issues and create proposals for adequate response.
3. Build a comprehensive Community Development Plan out of the discernment of the community needs;
4. Develop the operating principles for working in the community with its unique configuration of people and issues;
5. Obtain comprehensive authorization from community leadership;
6. Capture the community's imagination by reverbalizing its history, understanding its mindset, and enabling the creation of a story of its future, in order that possibility can be seen where it has not been seen before;
7. Bring structures to the local community which allow it to see itself as one community - through communication, symbol, organization, celebration, etc.;
8. Initiate leadership training in corporate skills and dynamical planning;
9. Dramatize serious intent and remotivation through improved appearance of community space, total community activities such as festivals, etc.;
10. Catalyze participation in community concerns by all ages, races and traditions.

Uptown's great cultural diversity presents a dramatic sign of possibility for the new urban community. The complexity

of its social problems makes it an ideal place to demonstrate the re-engagement of the disrelated of the world.

HISTORY

Uptown has been a trend-setting community for Chicago since its founding along the Indian trading trails to Green Bay. It led the way in creating new, attractive living space out of swampy wasteland long before the great lakefront fill-created Lincoln Park along its borders. It was one of the first "suburban" communities, settled by those desiring to live beyond the congestion of the city. In the first years of this century, enabled by the building of the "L" train, Uptown became the symbol of economic and cultural success. As part of the great Gold Coast of Chicago's North Side, it was a major center with fine ships, wealthy homes, and great hotels. Also, Uptown was the center of the early movie industry.

With the coming of the depression and the labor needs of World War II, Uptown became a port of entry for the immigrants into urban life, with many older homes and apartment buildings providing cheap housing. The presence of numbers of ailing apartment hotels make a likely place for Elders' retirement homes and half-way houses. The collapse of the social action projects during the 60's left it a deteriorating and seemingly unsafe neighborhood with culturally diverse, unsettled and unattached people who lost their vision of a future, or the capacity to forge one.

The Uptown 5 Community Demonstration Project serves a population of 25,000 and covers approximately one fifth of the entire Uptown area. Still serving today as an international "port of entry" the entire globe passes through the streets. Twenty-nine different languages are spoken in the local high school and seventeen at the local bank. Into a community which, for some years, had been largely made up of Appalacian and non-Appalacian White, American Indian, and Blacks has streamed rising numbers of Latinos and Asians, creating a great montage of the world's cultures. Approximately ten percent of those are in the medical professions, serving the four general hospitals, one psychiatric hospital, one city clinic, and five to six private clinics. Twenty percent of the workers serve the many small businesses throughout the shopping streets of the community. About ten percent of the employed are day laborers, with the rest presently unemployed. On fixed incomes, and comprising at least thirty percent of the population, are the Elders who live mainly in retirement homes, with few on-going relationships with the rest of the community.

With the first LENS (Living Effectively in the New Society) in Uptown, a small group of people began to meet to consider the forming of the Guild in Uptown as a way to initiate practical problem-solving. Their first activity was to hold a second LENS course during the fall, 1973, with intensive recruitment from social agencies, businesses, and local residents. Over 65 people attended. At a follow-up meeting, with over 40 present, the decision was made to form the Guild and organize into task force arenas to probe into solutions for the problems of Uptown, initiate specific actions, and recruit more volunteers.

During this six month period they initiated a number of community activities designed to begin to attract community residents to the cause. Problem-solving sessions were held to build specific models for housing, the engagement of the Elders in the community, as well as building of a vision for the future of Uptown. An Elder's Ball held on Valentine's Day was a critical event in opening the door to cross-agency planning for the Elders. Another community LENS broadened further still the local leadership base.

In the Winter, 1975, the Guild did its first comprehensive planning, by first identifying the major contradictions which blocked the future of Uptown. This allowed them to direct their actions specifically in the following six months into programs and activities which could unblock the community. Through their planning together they clarified, from their analysis of the community, the following needs:

1. Comprehensive Community Care;
2. A Positive Community Identity;
3. Community Education for all Ages;
4. Long Range Planning;
5. Local Decision-Making Vehicle;
6. Access to Services of the City of Chicago;
7. Communication Throughout the Community;

The Guild's plan focuses on creating a unified community, common identity, a renewed self-hood, pride, and the creation of signs of possibility (miracles) to a community that has not seen anything happen in a long time.

PROGRAM

The Guild, composed of concerned community people, meets weekly to plan the various relationships and activities necessary to implement its plan, as well as setting aside occasional weekends for special planning and task forces on particular issues and tasks. It takes responsibility for the Ward meetings, recruitment for training sessions, and for development and training of new community leadership.

The Ward System divides Uptown 5 into five sections allowing for closer contact with the issues and needs of the community, and for the caring of each individual and family.

The Ward Meetings, with approximately 50 people, are held twice a month in community homes, and focus on community care and the planning of catalytic action. Through community workdays in the Wards, social events, and future planning, they awaken and encourage the neighborhood to join in the task. Also, the meetings provide an avenue for the concerns and decisions of the neighborhood residents to be fed into the Guild planning.

The Ward Leadership Meetings provide a setting for methods to be practiced and for skill to be obtained so that Ward leadership may be expanded as quickly as possible.

Through the Ward Projects the Guild initiated two neighborhood clean-up days a month. Also, a dozen small sitting parks were created, a score of buildings painted, vacant lots cleared, windows washed, hundreds of square yards of sod laid, and dozens of flower and vegetable gardens created. An entire quarter mile on Sheridan Road and another four-block section of Wilson Avenue are going through a "face lifting" job. Hundreds of neighborhood residents participate in these projects each year. City Government, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Small Business Administration cooperate in the planning and initiation of these Uptown 5 efforts.

Thus far, there have been three Community Congresses, held once a quarter, with approximately 50 - 60 in attendance at each. This is a community gathering and an experiment in local decision-making. Through the regular meetings of Guild, Ward, and the Problem-Solving and Task Force groups, plans and proposals are made and delivered before the Congress. The community looks at them, agrees or disagrees with them, and makes the necessary adjustments. This has become a way for the community to build a plan for the next quarter and year.

The Community Identity Program selects sensitive media to shift the prevailing images of futility and despair in the community. This program awakens residents to Uptown's local

gifts, enlists participation in local activities, and gives pride to the community. Montages and posters displayed in various store windows of the community declare the uniqueness, greatness, and future of Uptown. Through easily remembered phrases, such as "Uptown 5 is a great place to be alive," and "Uptown - crossroads of the future," ways of relating to Uptown are provided which curtail apathy and cynicism. At one point, a large billboard at a strategic corner shouted, "In any Language - Uptown is a Great Place to be Alive". The creation of a community newspaper, The Voice, provided a vehicle to carry the new story of Uptown to all the residents.

The Community Celebrations effort is designed to provide an opportunity for the community to hold up its gifts as a multi-cultural area and generate motivity in the community. Uptown community celebrations are held once a month. These have included a Christmas celebration, and an Inter-Cultural Festival in the summer. The first of these festivals was held in June, 1974, drawing 1,500 residents. Through requests from the neighborhood, this festival will be held again at the end of June, 1975, with a parade, games, street dancing, inter-cultural traditional entertainment, and food from the different nations served by the resturants of the community.

The LENS Program is designed to train residents in effective methods of community planning and work. Thus far, LENS seminars for the community have been held quarterly since the first one in 1973. From these seminars comes the new neighborhood leadership to launch the programs of Uptown 5. LENS seminars are to be held with the mentally and physically handicapped of Uptown before the Fall, 1975.

The Social Methods School and the quarterly planning done each quarter by the Guild are designed to equip Ward and Guild leaders to train other leadership. One Social Mehtods School was held in the Fall, 1974, and another is planned for Fall, 1975.

The Educational Program of Uptown offers a broad range of courses and training to demonstrate that local people can be comprehensively equipped to renew their own community. University 13 is a 13-week program offering remedial training and a university core curriculum for those who will never attend college. The Language School is designed to expand a non-English speaking person's ability to understand and speak the English language. The Uptown Pre-School demonstrates curriculum possibilities for children from three months to five years of age.

The Problem Solving Units and Task Forces are an important dimension of the community's planning process. These groups

enable the community to break loose new insights and enable a pin-pointing of problems and solutions. Though laid out on a regular monthly and quarterly rhythm of work, these sessions are also held as new issues emerge. The Problem Solving units are the planning groups and the Task Forces put these plans into concrete action.

The Cross Agency Consultation effort provides for long-range planning with the various existing agencies. Because of this work, an increasing atmosphere of cooperation is emerging, particularly with the Elders' agencies. Also, a good cooperative relationship exists with the neighborhood schools, churches and the Boys' Club.

The Community Services League provides coordination with other community groups and agencies. By using a common calendar of events these groups and agencies can work together removing graffiti, sand blasting, clean-up work days, painting projects, lot transformation, fencing parkways, etc. This is an attempt to enable the community to finally do the community itself.

The Uptown Guild is establishing a non-profit Community Redevelopment Program to deal with key economic issues of the community. One step toward this was the four-day consult of community leaders, merchants, financiers, and community residents to lay specific plans for economic support systems, housing rehabilitation, and commercial and industrial development.

The Businessmen's Task Force is a community involvement vehicle for Uptown business personnel. The task force assists in securing loans for new businesses. Also, they form the backbone for the economic redevelopment effort.

The Elders' Program was initiated with the Valentine's Day Ball, 1974. Since then, about 600 Elders have been through LENS seminars. Out of these courses has developed an Elders' Guild meeting weekly to plan for the ways in which the Elders can participate responsibly in their community. The Elders are presently looking for a larger office and meeting center.

The Community Node is a planning and meeting center. The facility provides space for Problem Solving Units, Task Force operations, long-range planning sessions, Community Congresses, education programs, and festivals.

The Summer Youth Project involves neighborhood youth in summer work projects in the Community Demonstration area. Some of their tasks will be the renovation of buildings, clearing of parking areas, park creation, and sod laying.

The Handicapped Reengagement Program involves the physically and mentally handicapped in Task Force operations, work days, and other activities as a demonstration of how every individual can engage in the life of his community.

CONCLUSION

Uptown, as a result of its unique history, has the possibility of pioneering the shape of the new inner-city. Chicago has taken the lead in forging patterns of urban settlement for Century 21. Its vibrant downtown area and its new plan of recovery for the central city is a challenge to those who say nothing can be done. Uptown already stands as a symbol of diversity, not melting away differences, by celebrating the rich treasury of the whole world in one spot.