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NCEI@NEXUSCP.ORG

STORIES OF IMPACT: HOPE COMMUNITY

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We encourage you to share your feedback with us and tell us how you are using the tool or resource. Nexus Community Engagement Institute and our partners intend these documents and tools to introduce practitioners, funders, evaluators, and community members to community engagement and to give the field clarity in its language and principles. However, community engagement is not a field that can rely on written materials alone; it takes a community of practitioners to support one another in practicing community engagement effectively, meeting its challenges, and tapping the strengths within each unique context. We encourage you to seek out experienced practitioners to support you in implementing these tools, principles, and concepts.

Nexus Community Engagement Institute is available for consultation. Please contact us at www.nexuscp.org/ncei or email NCEI@nexuscp.org.

Nexus Community Engagement Institute is continuing the work of the Building the Field of Community Engagement (BTF) collaborative. The BTF collaborative was a partnership between Casa de Esperanza, the Cultural Wellness Center, Hope Community, Lyndale Neighborhood Association, the Native American Community Development Institute, and Nexus Community Partners.



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HOPE COMMUNITY, INC.

Building the Field of Community

Engagement is a collaborative initiative designed to magnify and elevate the power of community engagement to change the way problems are solved and resources are invested. Community engagement is a process that includes multiple techniques to promote the participation of residents in community life, especially those who are excluded and isolated, by engaging them in collective action to create a healthy community. With funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Building the Field is bolstering the work of community engagement practitioners and encouraging other organizations to integrate community engagement into their work. The partners have produced a film, *Community at the Center*, and host the Engaged Learning Series, which are community conversations on critical community engagement topics. This report is part of a series of case studies that document the partners' knowledge and learning throughout the project.

Building the Field partners:

Casa de Esperanza
Cultural Wellness Center
Hope Community
Lyndale Neighborhood Association
Native American Community
Development Institute
Nexus Community Partners



Over the last 20 years, **Hope Community** has built housing, developed community spaces and supported neighborhood businesses. Over time, Hope also has built an approach to deep community engagement. Hope staff now call this systematic and still evolving approach a **Platform of Connection and Leadership**.

The Platform is a model that invites people to engage around their individual interests while building their own lives and their community together.

This story provides a brief look at Hope's history and the key learning points that helped contribute to the developing model. The point of the story is not about a finished product—that doesn't exist. Hope is conscious of having learned from other people and organizations, and offers this story for other organizations to learn from as they develop their own organic models for community engagement. This story is about Hope's ongoing learning process, which staff hope will be helpful to others on the journey.



Hope Community's building with office and a community center on the first floor and apartments on the three floors above.

PHOTO BY BRUCE SILCOX

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THE HISTORY OF HOPE COMMUNITY

Hope Community began as St. Joseph's House in 1977, a small shelter and hospitality house in the Phillips neighborhood a mile south of downtown Minneapolis. By the mid-1990s the area was going through a difficult time. Half the houses were abandoned on the shelter's block. Neighborhood residents were convinced the city had given up on them, and in many ways it was true. There were more than 200 vacant, city-owned houses and almost no investment. The crack cocaine crisis overwhelmed public institutions. In a city known for wonderful parks, families stayed away from the local park where crime was rampant. Abandoned gas stations dominated the four corners of the

intersection at the north end of that block. There were few strategies for change except wholesale gentrification.

In 1996, the small staff and board of St. Joe's, as it was called, made the difficult decision to close the shelter to take on a new community revitalization mission. When so many were leaving, they decided to stay and became Hope Community. A small staff with a few used computers began to work out of the three-story house that had been the shelter. They would respond to the challenges of abandoned land and the critical need for quality housing. They also had another vision: they would put people from the community at the center of their work.



PHOTOS BY BRUCE SILCOX

Two of Hope's renovated houses, now affordable rental buildings, and one of Hope's community gardens.

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The Wellstone building with 49 rental apartments, developed with long-term partner Aeon.

PHOTO BY BRUCE SILCOX

PHYSICAL REVITALIZATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This document is about the community engagement side of Hope's story, but there is an important story not told here: About acquiring land no one else wanted and rehabbing house by house on the block where the shelter was. About challenging so many who had given up on the neighborhood and building allies. About finding a way with partnerships and stubborn staying power to build a vision and then the reality of quality housing on all four corners of that abandoned intersection. About building a community center, indoor and outdoor community gathering places, and neighborhood businesses.

In the beginning, the commitment to the community was deep, but the path was not clear. The small staff and board decided they would not build a social service agency. Although many of them had worked in community organizing and knew about asset-based community development and other strategies, they did not have a prescribed path.

The only way they knew how to begin was to talk with

people in the neighborhood. They began to reach out to neighbors, and soon developed a strategy called a listening project. Through a series of community dialogues, they heard strong messages. One woman, echoed by many others, said, "If it gets better (in the neighborhood), it's not going to be for us. We will be gone, because we won't be able to afford it." Another resident added, "You'll see a lot fewer people of color here."

Although community people acknowledged the challenges, they also saw strengths. Living in a diverse neighborhood was important to people, and the transportation was good. In one series of listening sessions, groups were asked about how outsiders see their community. The responses were three-to-one negative. The next question was about how they see their own community, and the responses were three-to-one positive. But there were many things people wanted—they wanted respect for, and investment in, their community, their families, and their children, as in any other community.

TWENTY YEARS OF STRUGGLE, LEARNING, BUILDING

These insights from the community led Hope staff to describe the core of Hope's community engagement mission as an alternative to gentrification. In a community too often dismissed by stereotypes and racism, people who lived in the neighborhood and others like them would shape the future of their own lives and their community. June Bouye, director of community engagement, said, "That's the part that keeps me connected to the work. We believe in people."

The work grew incrementally. Hope staff began organizing with residents around neighborhood safety and started a few programs that connected with kids and adults in the community. They were very clear that they would not limit their engagement to the residents of their housing units. Limiting involvement would limit impact. They organized more listening projects. They began to build partnerships and connections. A few new people joined the staff (everyone on the team has been there more than 10 years as this is being written). They struggled and learned together. They learned to focus on building on things that worked and changing or stopping those that didn't.

THE PLATFORM OF CONNECTION AND LEADERSHIP: THE WHOLE IS MORE THAN THE PARTS

Something began to change that deepened and focused Hope's community engagement work, increasing impact. There's no one time to pinpoint. But a major insight began bubbling up. The whole, Hope staff started to realize, was

much more important than the sum of its parts.

They began to call the organic model that was emerging the Platform of Connections and Leadership. The Platform is at the same time an internal structure, a way to work in community and the outcome of the work.

Staff had intentionally created an environment with multiple opportunities—entry points—through which people could engage around their interests. This was important because not everyone in the community wanted to be involved in the same way. As people became involved, they built connections and networks. The impact began to multiply when people became involved in more than one thing. Staff saw that this Platform created direct results for individuals and for the greater community, as people collectively took action.

As they worked with community members and studied this model, some key insights emerged:

- **Community members often discover opportunities for themselves when they get involved in more than one thing.** Over the last few years Hope staff began to work much more intentionally across program areas. Hope sees many people engaging across interest areas, digging in deeper, using the networks and skills they are building to make a difference in their own lives, and participating at a community change level. "People are not empty vessels for me to pour something into," said Chaka Mkali, director of organizing. "They have something to give. We know people as active participants shaping their lives, not clients who are broken and need to be fixed."

In a community too often dismissed by stereotypes and racism, Hope staff said, "We believe in people."

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PHOTO BY BRUCE SILCOX

“The most important work I do is teaching and training young leaders. It is exciting to tap into their imagination, knowledge, and fearlessness, and it is a long-term commitment and investment in future leaders who will take over this work,” said Hope’s Chaka Mkali (pictured here with youth art mentor Elijah Benson).

• **Because equity and community change are central, building community capacity for leadership has to be a core goal.** Hope staff knew that not everyone wanted to be a community leader or be part of community change—at least not initially. But they more and more intentionally built opportunities for growing leaders to learn and act together—staff mentor, teach and create spaces for experience. And community people have stepped up. “It’s the strategy behind the work that is getting the results,” says Youth and Family Program Manager Andrew Hopkins (Dhop). “Building confidence is the foundation of what we do. For example, kids need to learn to read. But even more importantly, they need to build their confidence so they can keep learning and ask for what they need.”

• **Layers of connections and networks build impact.** The collective learning and experience shared by Hope staff, hundreds of community members, and dozens of

partners within diverse networks and connections, make larger impact possible. Community members build networks with each other and with organizations and institutions. Staff in different organizations and institutions build new connections. Across it all, collective experience and accomplishment grows.

• **Staff must build in reflection time with community members and with each other to continue to learn and grow.** Hope uses a database to capture who is involved in what and when, including partnership relationships. Three recent evaluation projects are revealing a continuum of leadership that exists at Hope, which has been illustrated through interviews with staff and community members. A large interview project documented how people use opportunities at Hope to develop and practice their own leadership.

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WHERE IT LEADS

If you spent a week in Hope's community center you would experience the energy. There might be an intensive Sustainable Progress through Engaging Active Citizens (SPEAC) class with 20 people involved in an eight-month organizing, leadership and action program. If the weather is warm there will be gardeners, garden mentors and cooks. There would also be strategy meetings of the food

justice team—community members planning a listening project about food access. Kids will be in the garden, in a program that builds literacy and reading confidence where community members tell their stories to kids, in a Girl's Empowerment group, or learning leadership through group mentoring. Some adults come to an entrepreneur class, while others learn about personal

empowerment. During tax season hundreds of people come for free tax assistance and many start savings accounts. Others come to listening sessions about financial coaching and communities of color. Community members and Hope organizers might be planning strategy around racial equity issues like how park resources are invested. Artists might be organizing cross-cultural community dialogues. There would be many meetings with partners planning and reflecting about common work.

“This is a happening place, filled with the kinds of activities that would be going on in any strong community—people learning, laughing, doing things together, caring about each other, working to change what needs to change,” said Organizer and Program Manager Betsy Sohn. “Hope creates space where all of that can happen.”

Hope's Andrew Hopkins (Dhop) said,
“We try to create a space where kids can invest in themselves. That space includes believing in youth and communicating an expectation that kids can be leaders and do important things. That's the starting place.”

Pictured with (from left) Audeava Lewis-Booker, Shuaiya Haynes and Mamie Hopkins.



PHOTO BY BRUCE SILCOX

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UNPACKING SOME KEY ELEMENTS

More than 3,000 people have been engaged in Hope’s listening work and 1,500 people each year are part of the Platform. The evaluation studies show that these adults, youth and families are building stronger lives for themselves and a stronger community.

COMMUNITY LISTENING

Listening sessions are not focus groups. Hope’s model intentionally creates dialogues where people learn from and connect with each other. The listening work is a pathway to power—community people play roles as facilitators and organizers and build their own skills, participants are heard (and get to hear each other), and new relationships are built. Hope stays immersed in community perceptions, challenges and opportunities. The collective voice of people also becomes an important political tool to build credibility, leverage and pressure for change.

The key to good listening is to know how to move from dialogue to action. Many organizations are either paralyzed into inaction or they try to do everything that has been suggested. Hope considers listening “critical action,” a necessary step in the process that always leads to forward motion. Formal projects focused on specific topics are one way Hope uses listening. But listening is a daily, essential tool used in planning, reflection, one-to-one meetings and smaller gatherings in specific contexts.

COMMUNITY LEADERS

Leadership in this model is not about an individual, where a person holds a position of power in an organizational



PHOTO BY BRUCE SILCOX

Recent SPEAC graduation celebration. Lula Mohamed Nur, graduate, in forefront.

hierarchy. Leaders step up, get things done, learn and engage others. Hope’s evolving leadership continuum moves from people participating in something, through deeper engagement and relationship building, to advocating for self and others, and finally moving to adaptive leadership, taking on roles in the community. “It’s about building community capacity, developing leadership, so that people can create their own community and their own future for themselves,” said Bouye. Across all of Hope’s work, staff use projects, programs and campaigns to develop and mentor individuals and groups.

Hope considers listening “critical action,” a necessary step in the process that always leads to forward motion.

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As of October 14, 2014

THE MODEL AT WORK: HOPE COMMUNITY

This story is an example of how impacts build upon each other, as shown by the **Impacts of Community Engagement model** developed by the Building the Field of Community Engagement partners. 1,500 people are engaged every year in Hope Community.

HOPE'S WORK IS BASED ON A **FOUNDATION OF RELATIONSHIPS** WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS. COMMUNITY LISTENING DIALOGUES HAVE ENGAGED 3,000 PEOPLE AND GROUND ALL THE WORK. ONE-TO-ONE MEETINGS, PLANNING, REFLECTION, TRAINING, AND ACTION MEETINGS EXPAND AND DEEPEN RELATIONSHIP.

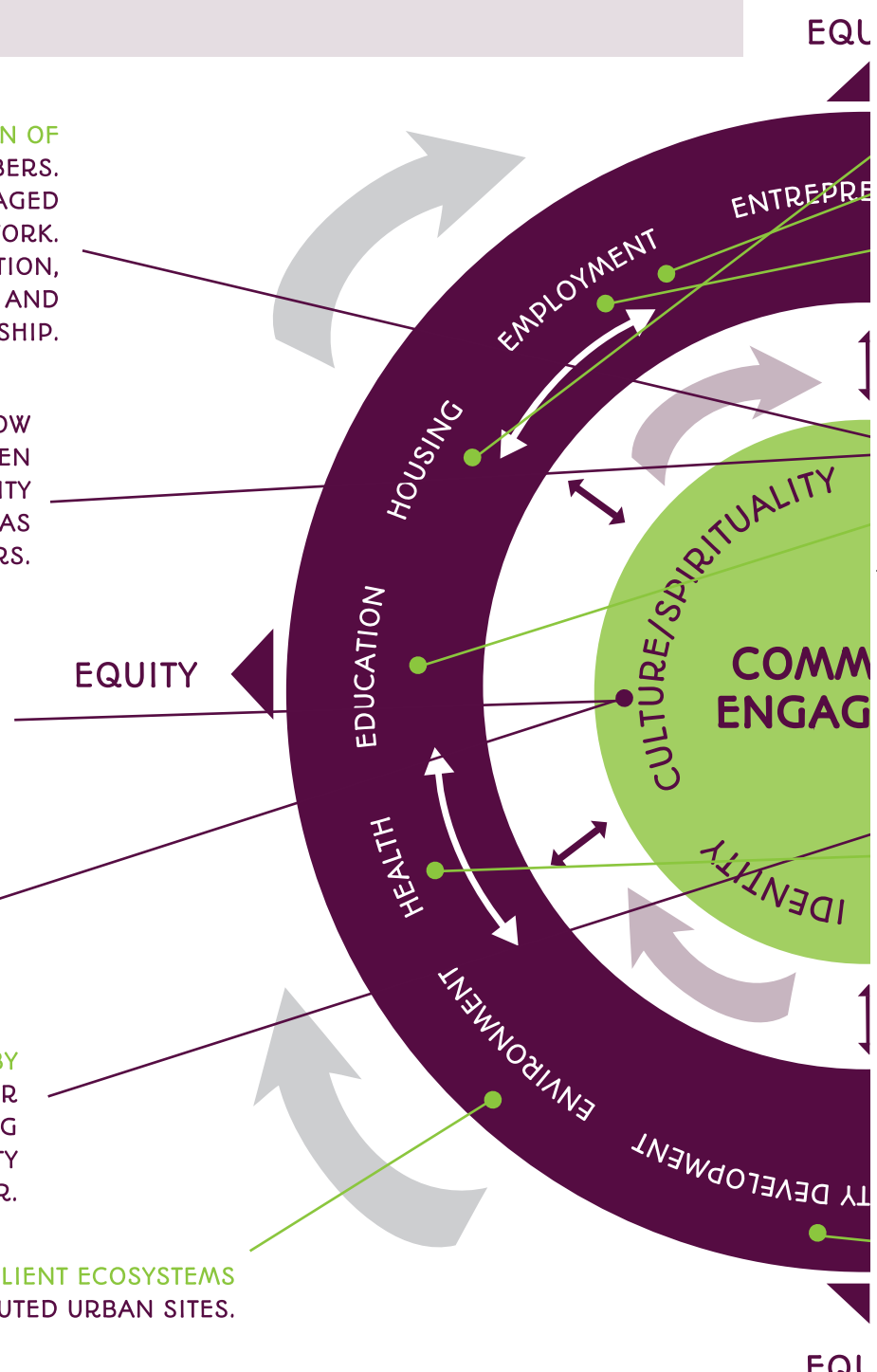
CONNECTIONS AND NETWORKS GROW BETWEEN COMMUNITY MEMBERS, BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS, AND BETWEEN COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND ORGANIZATIONS. HOPE HAS RELATIONSHIPS WITH MORE THAN 35 PARTNERS.

ENGAGING PEOPLE IN ART HAS PRODUCED MULTIPLE IMPACTS IN SELF-AWARENESS, LEADERSHIP, COMMUNITY CONNECTION AND SYSTEMS CHANGE.

HOPE ENGAGES IN LONG-TERM WORK THAT EXPLICITLY ACKNOWLEDGES **THE ROLE OF RACE AND CULTURE**.

THE HOPE PLATFORM **BUILDS POWER BY ENGAGING PEOPLE** AROUND THEIR INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS WHILE BUILDING THEIR OWN LIVES AND THEIR COMMUNITY TOGETHER.

COMMUNITY VISION LED TO **RESILIENT ECOSYSTEMS** ON FORMERLY POLLUTED URBAN SITES.



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475 PEOPLE (ALMOST HALF CHILDREN) LIVE IN **QUALITY AFFORDABLE HOUSING** IN HOPE BUILDINGS.

TWO START-UP BUSINESSES IN HOPE BUILDINGS PROVIDE **EMPLOYMENT** TO 40 PEOPLE.

WEALTH IS CREATED AS ENTREPRENEURS START BUSINESSES, YOUTH ARE MORE SUCCESSFUL IN A JOB PROGRAM, TAX ASSISTANCE LEADS TO MORE COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SAVINGS, AND QUALITY AFFORDABLE HOUSING BUILDS FINANCIAL STABILITY.

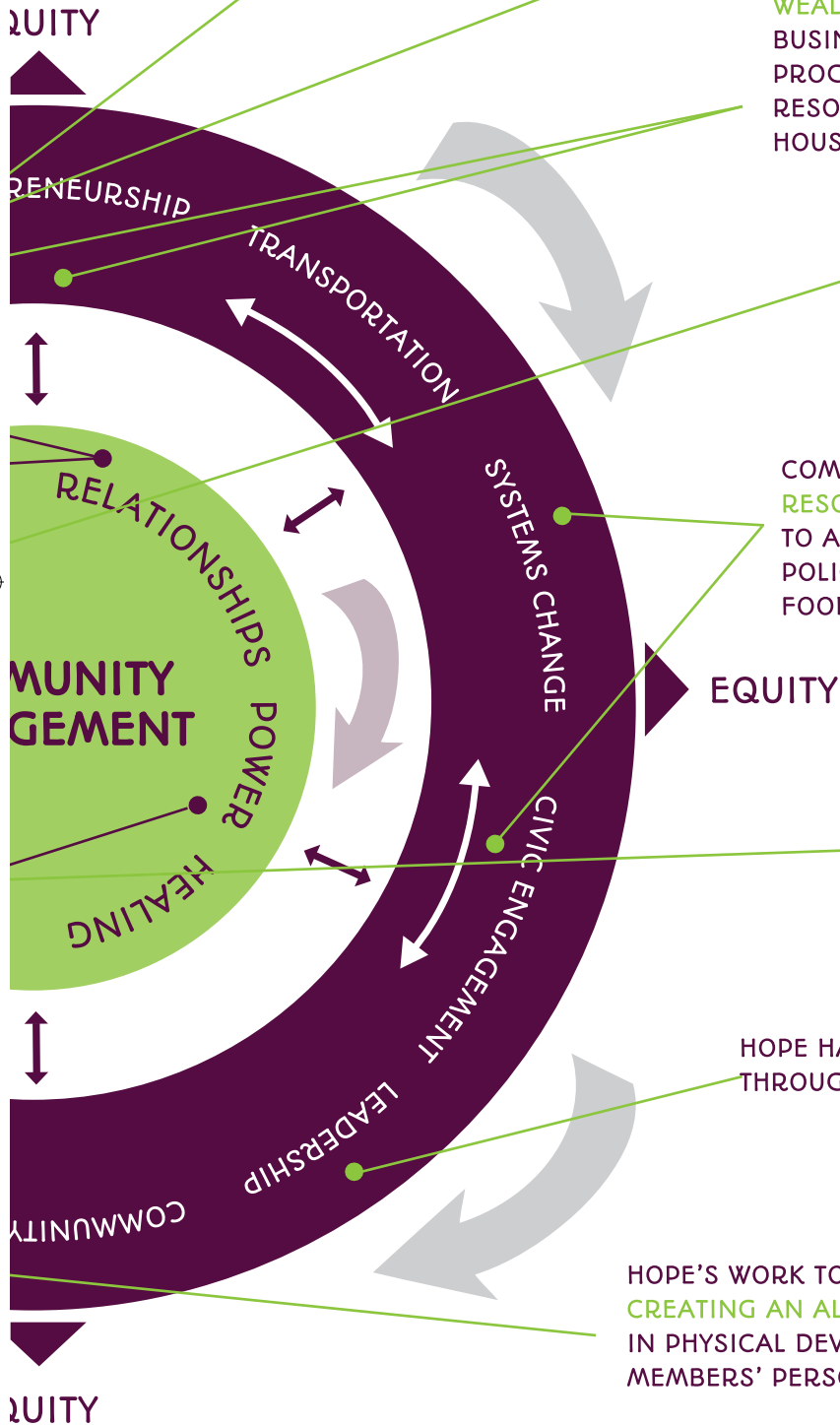
50 YOUNG CHILDREN ANNUALLY DEVELOP READING COMPETENCE AND CONFIDENCE THROUGH A **LITERACY PROGRAM**.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS ORGANIZE TO BRING **INCREASED RESOURCES** TO A LOCAL LIBRARY, INCREASED RESOURCES TO A LOCAL PARK, **EQUITY CHALLENGES** TO CITY PARK POLICY, AND CHALLENGES TO TRANSPORTATION AND FOOD POLICY IN RESPONSE TO LOCAL CONCERNS.

HOPE'S YEAR-ROUND FOOD AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS AND HEALTHY HOUSING RESULT IN **INCREASED COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS** AND **IMPROVED INDIVIDUAL HEALTH**.

HOPE HAS TRAINED MORE THAN 200 COMMUNITY LEADERS THROUGH **ORGANIZING AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS**.

HOPE'S WORK TOWARD A LONG-TERM VISION OF **CREATING AN ALTERNATIVE TO GENTRIFICATION** RESULTS IN PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT, AS WELL AS COMMUNITY MEMBERS' PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE POWER.



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PHOTO BY BRUCE SILCOX

“We don’t talk with people about what’s missing or what they can’t do,” said Hope’s Betsy Sohn (shown here with Bonita Watkins). “We create opportunities for people to focus on what they care about, to build on their strengths and interests, and to work together to do what they can.”

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND VALUES

Hope changed its structure to build an even stronger team to lead the organization. Hope once had a traditional executive team, comprised of the executive director and department heads. Leadership began to struggle with who needed to be there to build innovative work at a community level. They decided to form an action team, which is comprised of the executive director, all four members of the community engagement team and the lead housing staff person. This team meets weekly to make important day-to-day decisions about the work, as well as to shape the long-term direction of the organization.

Core staff say all the time that they stay at Hope because of the innovative, entrepreneurial approach, and the opportunities for creativity and learning. To make it work, a strong team and mentoring environment is critical. Everyone is involved in planning and budgeting, and teams become a place for ongoing learning, adjustment and strategy.

Hope’s organizational culture pays explicit attention to the significance of race and culture in the Phillips neighborhood. Three of the four community engagement

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The work has to be both intentional and flexible to allow staff and community members to adapt and grow along with a constantly changing external environment.

staff are people of color, including the director of the work. Passion for the people of the Phillips neighborhood and others like them fuel the work.

FLEXIBILITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Hope operates in a complex environment. What keeps the organization moving forward is that Hope has

institutionalized a commitment to people, a responsive and flexible way of working, and a commitment to learning and accountability. Hope staff say the work has to be both intentional and flexible to allow staff and community members to adapt and grow along with a constantly changing external environment. “Hope isn’t just a wish, it’s active: expecting change and organizing it,” said Will Delaney, housing specialist and Action Team member.



PHOTO BY BRUCE SILCOX

Hope Director of Community Engagement June Bouye (right) said Hope’s model works because, “We believe in people.” (pictured with Kristy Clemons and Jamela and Egypt Pettiford, from left)

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PHOTO BY BRUCE SILCOX

Youth and adults learn and lead in Hope's community gardens. La Cora Bradford-Kesti is pictured with youth in a Hope garden.

THE FUTURE

Staff who do community engagement work will tell you they have learned there is no one path to effective community engagement. “We have learned that what the organization does isn’t as important as how we do it,” said Executive Director Mary Keefe. “That’s a big insight and not an easy one.”

What Hope does changes over time, because of the interests and talents of community members and staff, external opportunities and resources, and the context of what is happening in the community. But how the work happens does not change. The how has to be intentionally

grounded in core principles and processes, relationship with people in the community, and learning over time.

There is much more. There are daily challenges, the constant struggle to keep this complex work funded, and an ongoing tension between developing and managing millions of dollars of real estate while staying deeply grounded in community relationships. As they continue work with the community and build and learn from the Platform, Hope staff say, there will be more insights and more change.