

Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center Executive Summary - September 2011

Background

Many challenges exist that threaten the long-term economic development of our community. Rockford was recently ranked as the ninth most dangerous city in America. Rockford lags behind local districts in high school graduation rates and leads the state in unemployment rates. None of these challenges are more evident than in the Ellis Heights neighborhood on the west side of the city. However, in the face of these significant challenges there is a sense of hope, which has materialized with a collaborative effort involving United Way, Banner of Truth International, human service providers, faith based organizations, churches and the neighborhood residents.

In June of 2010, Al Barsema of Northern Illinois University, Rodney Prunty of United Way, Rev. John Evans, Rev. Philip Williams, and Rev. Mark Williams (all of Banner of Truth International) formed a core team to begin the planning process to form a Neighborhood Resource Center (NRC). The purpose of the NRC is to act as a hub for resources, activities, and opportunities for the residents in the Ellis Heights Area. The core team strongly believed that the presence of the NRC would be critical to increasing educational attainment, strengthening family financial stability, and promoting good health practices and wellness. Once established, the NRC will be housed in the lower level of Banner of Truth International Church, 1401 West State Street. The NRC is scheduled to launch in the fall of 2011.

Community Conversations- Neighborhood Residents

During the strategic planning process, it became clear that input from the neighborhood residents about the formation of the NRC was vital to the success of the project. Feedback from the residents would play a key role in the structure of the NRC. On April 14, two separate forums were held where a total of 40 neighborhood residents articulated their hopes and aspirations for themselves and their families—and how the NRC could assist them in the pursuit of their goals.

The process proved to be invaluable. Residents shared the changes they would like to see in their neighborhood and the kind of resources and opportunities they would like to have available. Residents maintained that they viewed themselves key contributors to the success of the NRC in terms of forming volunteer committees and assuming more responsibility for the improvement of their neighborhood. They believed that the NRC would be the ideal vehicle for the long-term, sustainable change they sought.

The success of the community conversations with the neighborhood residents stimulated discussion from the core team to continue to hold community conversations with other stakeholders critical to the success of the NRC: clergy, human services providers, and local businesses. This would provide the steering committee with a “360 Degree” perspective of how

the NRC should be developed. In addition, involving all stakeholders in the planning process would create community buy-in for the project, thus increasing the likelihood of success.

Community Conversations-Churches & Faith Based Organizations

On May 14, representatives from 13 local churches and faith based organizations participated. In all, a total of 30 members of the clergy attended. Many attendees provided valuable input and ideas about how the NRC could be most effective in supporting the aspirations of the neighborhood residents. Ideas ranged from sponsoring neighborhood beautification projects, to helping women in crisis, to supporting youth programs.

One critical factor became obvious to all who were in attendance—the level of collaboration between churches is nearly nonexistent. All in attendance agreed that there was a pressing need for area churches to develop stronger relationships and partnerships. The forum concluded with commitment from all to create a collaborative to assist the NRC in addressing the most serious issues in the Ellis Heights Area.

Community Conversations- Human Services Providers

On June 7, community conversations were held with 16 representatives from 12 local non-profit agencies. Service providers identified by the residents (as well as other non-profit organizations) were invited to participate in the forum. Participating organizations included:

Rockford Housing Authority	Rockford MELD	Winnebago County Probation
YWCA	Rock Valley College	Rockford Health Council
Rockford Area Arts Council	La Voz Latina	YMCA
Big Brothers/Big Sisters	Easter Seals CDC	Winnebago County Health Dept.

Input from neighborhood residents was presented to the participants. Based on their own interpretation of the results, important information was gathered from the service provider perspective pertaining to the current condition of human service delivery in the community and how they could each lend their support to the NRC. The response was extremely positive and service providers believed that the project was imperative to the long-term improvement of our community. Since previous efforts that attempted similar collaborations and partnerships had failed, there was a heightened sense of urgency from the providers to succeed on this occasion.

Community Conversations- Business

On June 28th, community conversations with business leaders were held with 6 representatives from 6 local businesses. Businesses identified by the 'steering committee were invited to participate in the forum. Participating businesses were:

Members Alliance Credit Union	Crusader Clinic	UPS	ComEd
Rockford Chamber of Commerce	Rockford Area Economic Development Council		

Input from the neighborhood residents community conversation was presented to the participants as well as a brief history of the neighborhood. Based on their own interpretation of the results, much input was given by the business leaders to assist the resource center in how to communicate effectively with and connect with businesses. Many ideas were given as to how to solicit the support of local businesses to support the resource center. The responses were extremely positive and the dialogue was very open and honest. Two of our current board members came to this meeting as interested business people. One insight of particular interest was that some of the business people really didn't know much about the plight of this neighborhood and thought that if this case was presented well to local businesses they would be buy-in by the businesses in our community to assist in the efforts of a neighborhood resource center in this neighborhood.

Next Steps

Information gathered from all of these perspectives will be used to develop the framework and service delivery structure of the JNRC. Over the course of the next few months board of directors will define the goals and strategies for the NRC and begin the implementation process for the fall/winter of 2012.

Developments to date:

- 1 A steering committee consisting of representatives of the city, county, religious institutions, neighborhood associations and residents was convened and met on many occasions this past spring and summer to help construct a strategic plan.
- 2 A vision and mission statement has been developed.
- 3 The Banner of Truth International has dedicated it's lower level for use by Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center (JNRC).
- 4 The Banner of Truth International has dedicated a staff member to serve as JNRC's Executive Director, this staff member is Rev. John Evans.
- 5 JNRC was legally formed as a division of Banner of Truth International.
- 6 An executive board has been formed and duly elected.
- 7 By-laws have been adopted by the board of directors
- 8 Officers have been elected by the board of directors
- 9 The board has voted to name the organization Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center
- 10 Weed & Seed has agreed to relocate within the JNRC on a rental basis. All community events hosted by Weed & Seed will be held in our facility.
- 11 Neighborhood residents currently involved with Weed & Seed have begun to buy in to a partnering relationship with JNRC.
- 12 JNRC has entered into an agreement with five neighborhood groups in order to provide them with space for a collaborative community garden.
- 13 We have had discussions with Creig Day (who is a representative of Share Fest) about potential collaboration between JNRC & Share Fest. This collaboration would result in JNRC acting as a conduit for many volunteer community service projects throughout our neighborhood.

14 We have been in discussions with Rockford Health Council representatives about collaboration between JNRC & RHC in offering their services to our community. Banner of Truth International will be running a trial program that could be used as a template for JNRC for use in our community.

15 We have been in discussions with Tom Nobis who works for Know Sweat. We are discussing future collaboration potential for next year's community service project in our community.

16 Because of our community discussions with faith based organizations and churches Rev. John Specher contacted us about hosting a regular pastors prayer meeting and discussion focusing on reduction of crime in our community.

17 Renovations and improvements are being made to the Banner of Truth International facility to make it handicap accessible these renovations should be completed by November, 2011.

18 Weed & Seed residents have been using JNRC space for 'coffee time' on the first Wednesdays of the month. These have been very well attended by residents.

19 We have been in discussions with Northwest Community Center and are planning on hosting a computer training course that they currently offer at their location. This will be offered in January. They will also be offering a program designed to equip and empower single mothers at our site. They can offer both of these resources at our location.

20 We met with Katie Blake of Sisters Home Health Services and talked about how we could collaborate with them to make these needed medical services more accessible to our community.