The Role of Social Work in the Revitalization of Urban Neighborhoods

East Cleveland, Ohio

A Case Study

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Overview

1. Social work in a community context
2. East Cleveland as a case study
3. What is the work and where are we at?
4. How is change taking place?
5. Strategies for social workers
Why does community matter?

Neighborhood is the chrysalis where people’s health is either destroyed or preserved.

“The community is the arena in which people acquire their most fundamental and most substantial experience of social life outside the confines of the home.”

Cohen (1985)
The Community in Social Work Practice

1. **Community** forces shape and limit client behaviors.
2. **Community** provides opportunities for and limits to client empowerment.
3. Client empowerment requires that **clients** be able to access, manage, and alter community resources and forces.
4. **Clients** need to be able to contribute to, reciprocate, and affect the welfare of their communities.
5. **Community involvement** provides clients with a capacity to affect their communities.

MSASS Community-Based Practice Statement (1999)
A Key Bridge Between Direct Practice and Macro Practice

“Preparing students for social work practice in the 21st century requires new attention to community-based and innovative approaches for meeting the complex needs of individuals and families.”

“A community-based approach to service delivery and practice” involves understanding and intervening to change “multiple system levels.”

“Involving service users and other citizens in the design and delivery of services is fundamental to developing an integrated service system that is responsive to its neighborhood or community context, culturally responsive, and empowering.”
Urban Neighborhoods and the Need for Revitalization

Children, families, and individuals impacted by increased poverty and decreasing population

• Public resources and services diminished (libraries, schools, parks, etc.)
• Market and economy are not sustained, leaving food desserts and far away big box stores
• Concentration effects (high crime, lack of opportunities, discrimination)
• Isolation and deteriorating quality of life
East Cleveland: A Case Study

East Cleveland began as wealthy suburb, summer home of John D. Rockefeller, the world’s first billionaire. Forest Hill Neighborhood with its historic homes and Forest Hill Park continues to be a desirable neighborhood.
East Cleveland and University Circle

East Cleveland represents one of many older inner-ring suburbs in the US struggling for survival.

As a result of white flight, government corruption and institutional disinvestment, now the poorest municipality in Ohio (95% Af. Amer.)

Next to University Circle and over $2 billion investment in “eds, meds, and cultural” institutions.
Understanding the Need

• The City of East Cleveland has limited public revenue and does not have the range of fully staffed departments
• The nonprofit sector is weak (e.g. no CDC)
• Potential external partners have avoided East Cleveland
East Cleveland Population Decline

• Larger trend of declining old suburbs hit by the foreclosure crisis and loss of jobs
• East Cleveland lost 34% of its population from 2000 to 2010 (Cleveland lost 17%)
East Cleveland Population Decline

East Cleveland Population

White Flight

The East Cleveland Partnership
East Cleveland Population Decline

East Cleveland Population

Middle Class Flight

The East Cleveland Partnership
East Cleveland Population Decline
A New Threat
The New Threat
Family Flight

The proportion of households comprised of families fell below 50 percent in 2010 for East Cleveland.

The nuclear family

- Married couples with children plunged by 28 percent from 2000 to 2010
- Married couples with children account for less than 4 percent of all households in East Cleveland (the national average is 21, Cleveland is 8 percent)
East Cleveland and Ohio Today
Concentration Affects

Nearly three out of four black Ohioans live in the state’s most disadvantaged neighborhoods.

The widespread financial crisis has reversed economic gains made in the 1990s by Ohio’s black residents.

Systemic institutional and structural challenges negate any claim that we are in a “post-racial” society.

Pervasive racial and economic segregation remain the norm in public schools, resulting in long-term harmful effects on our children’s educational and social development.

Kirwan Institute, State of Black Ohio 2009
East Cleveland & Ohio Today
Barriers to Prosperity

Imbalances in educational achievement and opportunity
Pervasive poverty and unemployment
Deteriorating neighborhoods
Poor health and limited access to health care
High family stress
Soaring incarceration and recidivism rates
Persistent “softened” racism
A fast-growing class divide

Kirwan Institute, State of Black Ohio 2009
East Cleveland and the Mandel School

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnekhaBC2P
East Cleveland Assets

- Forest Hill Park
- Forest Hill Historic Homes
- McGregor Home for Seniors
- East Cleveland Public Library
- GE NELA Park
- Public transportation
- Euclid Corridor to University Circle
- Loyal, committed residents
- Local churches
Why East Cleveland?

• Our neighbor with a history of connectedness
• Tremendous need and tremendous potential
• Limited internal capacity
• New window of opportunity (Mayor Norton, Neighborhood Stabilization Program, and County Land Bank)
• MSASS students advocate for partnership
What is the work?

Phase I: Service Learning (2007-2009)

Phase II: Formation of East Cleveland Partnership (2008-2010)

Phase III: Assessment and Planning (2010-2012)

Phase IV: Capacity Building (2011-2013)

Phase V: Revitalization Project (2011 on)
Community Assessment by First-Year MSSA Students

All first year students worked with NOAH organizers to conduct a survey of all vacant housing and vacant lots. The findings included:

- 20% of all parcels with residential structures are vacant
- 40% of all vacant structures need to be demolished (D or F grade)
- 236 vacant lots (4% of all residential parcels)

Community leaders met at East Cleveland Public Library to receive students’ recommendations to address the impact of vacant housing on education, safety, employment, and on senior citizens.

Students conception of the role of social work changed as stereotypes fell away through personal relationships. They also realized the connection between community issues and clients’ personal problems.
Community Impact of Service Learning

Results of the vacant housing survey and technical assistance from the Mandel School helped the City receive $2.2 million in federal stimulus funds through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

The following year, MSASS students conducted detailed property investigations of each vacant house in the target area. This helped the City identify the 150 homes that are not being demolished with the federal funds.

As houses come down, residents live on safer streets and private investors are showing interest in developing the vacant land.
Phase II: Formation of East Cleveland Partnership, 2008-2010

• Initiated with a tour by Mayor Norton, the East Cleveland Partnership formed as a strategic alliance from across Greater Cleveland.

The purpose of the East Cleveland Partnership is to bring together the expertise and assets of institutions in University Circle and organizations in greater Cleveland to support the revitalization of East Cleveland by working in partnership with the City of East Cleveland, residents, and the nonprofit, business and faith communities of East Cleveland. Through this partnership, we also seek to increase engagement of East Cleveland within University Circle and vice versa, in ways that enrich and are beneficial to both communities.
What changes are being pursued?

• Increasing efficiency and effectiveness of city government
• Addressing crisis of vacant and abandoned houses
• Create a plan for redeveloping vacant land
• Initiate process to spur economic development and jobs
• Increase community development and support community engagement
Phase III: Assessment and Planning

Effective and Efficient Government

- Retreat for Mayor and City Council (March 2011)
- A plan for professional development sessions in the coming months:
  - Conflict resolution
  - CityStat data management system
  - Public finance and revenue streams
The East Cleveland Partnership

Workforce Development Committee

- External research on workforce and employment data
- Development of workforce training program
- City also making significant policy changes to promote employment of East Cleveland residents with all contracts
East Cleveland Partnership

Economic Development & Land Use Committee

- Monthly educational and network meetings
- Key issue is vacant land created by demolition of vacant homes
- Need heightened by the closing of Huron Hospital and opening of Cleveland Clinic outpatient center on Euclid
- Next step is to develop a Highest and Most Appropriate Use study of NSP 2 area (Euclid Corridor to Windermere RTA Station)
East Cleveland
NSP Boundaries

NSP1

NSP2

The East Cleveland Partnership
How is the change taking place?

• Reconnect the physical and social networks between East Cleveland and University Circle

• Establish trusting relationships that redefine the relationship between East Cleveland and CWRU, transcending differences in race and class that often divide.

• All research takes a Community Based Participatory Research/Action Research approach (with mutual benefit and decision-making)
Continuing Community Involvement

Measuring the shift in narrative: A Baseline Survey of Perceptions in East Cleveland and at CWRU

Asset mapping and elevation of community core strengths and values in the broader community

Dialogue and forums to educate community participants on issues and new realities affecting East Cleveland and Northeast Ohio
Empowerment Occurs when...

1. Empowerment is a psychological feeling that individuals have when they believe they can accomplish chosen goals.

2. Political or organizational strength that enables people to collectively carry out their will.

3. Occurs when ordinary people discover that they have the capacity to solve the problems they face, control the means to do so, and have final, authoritative say in decision making. Perkins, 1995

Rubin & Rubin, 2001
Today’s Challenge

With MSASS Involvement

Impact

INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS

CWRU
Cleveland Clinic
McGregor
KSU
OSU Extension
UCI
City of East Cleveland

EAST CLEVELAND INITIATIVES

Debut Collaborative
NOAH
Neighborhood Connections
County Land Bank
Bridges of Hope
Prevention Research Center
GUCI
County Health & Development
Re-Imagining Cleveland
Time Capsule
Neighborhood Stabilization Program

Community Building

Effective Government

Economic Development

A Revitalized East Cleveland as a Vibrant Community of Choice

A Welcoming University Circle with Engaged Neighborhoods

CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
EST. 1826
think beyond the possible
Anticipated Long-Term Impact on East Cleveland

• Shift the perception of East Cleveland and support its revitalization that is based on respect and reciprocity
• Positive impact on the residents and community of East Cleveland, Case students and faculty, and the university (revitalization without displacement)
• Blur the boundary between University Circle and East Cleveland, creating mutually beneficial connections
• Redefine the relationship of CWRU to its neighboring community
Social Work, from a community-based practice perspective, contends that:

We must make a lasting, sustainable difference to combat poverty and inequity.

Lasting change requires building capacity and power in addition to providing services and programs.

In the long run, changing systems is needed to improving peoples’ lived experience.
The Change Process is Multi-Level

Informal networks and relationships are as powerful as formal services in affecting people’s quality of life.

Empowering individuals, organizations, and communities is central for people to seek and sustain change themselves.
Strategies and Skills for Social Workers

Lessons learned through ECP

• Bring people together, listen and dialogue
• Identify a need or goal that motivates all
• Jointly conduct an assessment process
• Learn, adapt and grow, knowing action and change take time
• Commit for the long-term
• Be willing to be changed yourself in the process
Community Transformation

- Shift the Narrative
  - Reframe situation and narrative with alternative metaphors, rituals, and language. Engage in authentic dialogue.

- Shared Vision
  - Create a positive image and shared vision of an inclusive and just future, based on right relationships.

- System Change
  - Introduce innovation in structures. Change norms, policies and procedures to create equitable relationships and shared power at all levels.

- Collective Action
  - Mobilize and organize small and large actions that instill hope and create experiences of right relationships today.

Mark Chupp, 2010