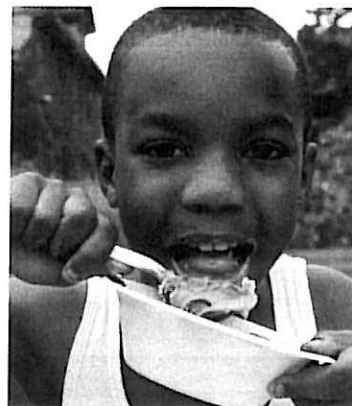


# Community:

Taking a  
Closer  
Look



A Hope Community  
Listening Report  
April 2001

# About Hope Community, Inc.

## Our Mission

Hope Community is building a neighborhood model through community organization, active education, leadership and housing development. Located in Minneapolis' Phillips Community, for 24 years Hope has been a catalyst for change, growth and safety in our neighborhood. We build strong community networks that support multi-cultural exchange, interaction and relationship, while furthering the development of affordable housing and economic vitality in south central Minneapolis.

## Community Engagement – Youth And Adults:

All our work is grounded at the center by relationships with people who live in the neighborhoods like those surrounding Hope. Through Hope Community, hundreds of people have been involved in learning opportunities, listening projects focusing on key issues, leadership and strategy sessions, engagement with children and families, and community events.



## Community-Based Development and Children's Village

Hope Community has taken on a leadership role in developing a vision for a community-based redevelopment initiative named *Children's Village*. The visionary plan for over 30 blocks of the Phillips Neighborhood redefines a neighborhood by looking through the eyes of children and their families. Hope Community's history and mission provides a unique source of understanding of the neighborhood, of children and families, of cultural respect and of the political realities surrounding neighborhood revitalization. The plan evolved from Hope Community's experience with creating a "village" on the Hope block. It assumes that the quality of life for children and families is the heart of a successful reclamation of the economic and social vitality of a city neighborhood.

# Community: Taking a Closer Look

## Hope Community Listening Report

April 2001

### The Listening Project

In about 30 dialogues, over 300 people—youth, adults, elders, people from diverse cultural traditions—discussed the meanings, pride and struggles they experience in their communities and neighborhoods.

The power of the Hope Listening Project started in every session where strangers became neighbors and problems became opportunities. People talked about things they want to change, and things they want to

hold on to. All of their voices make this report a complex whole that raises questions instead of giving answers. The questions highlighted in these pages illustrate ideas and issues people wrestled with during the listening sessions, what people had in common, and what it all might mean for everyone invested in this idea of community.

# Introduction

By Jackie Byers, Lead Organizer, Hope Community

The listening process came from Hope Community's commitment to use the age-old organizing tool of relationship building in a creative and in-depth way. Everyone seems to have an idea about what is best for community. Books are written about indicators of strong community and healthy community. Advocates, intellectuals and policy makers often talk at great length about what inner-city communities need. We decided that we would pose questions about community to regular people who live, work and volunteer in a variety of communities. Hope Community lives in the Phillips Neighborhood. An inner-city neighborhood in South Minneapolis, Phillips is full of diversity, history, struggle and great people who have worked hard to build a strong community. Like many similar neighborhoods, it all too often is labeled only for its crime, its poverty, its problems. We wanted to do a significant number of listening sessions with people who are not traditionally heard in Phillips and similar communities in Minneapolis.

The intention of the Listening Project was not to come up with a scientific study or even a model process. The idea was to create space for people to come together as a community to listen to each other and challenge each other around the meaning of "community."

## How Did the Listening Process Begin?

I have been a community organizer for about four years. I have worked on issues of police misconduct, affordable housing, tenants' rights and some things in between. When I was approached with the idea of taking the time to move back from all the issues and the actions in order to go into the community and listen, I was a little skeptical. I thought this through and it seemed to make sense. Listening is really the backbone of community organizing and certainly seemed to be a missing piece in the efforts of people on all sides of the table.

Through several one-to-one meetings with people connected to community organizations and people actively involved in their community, I found individuals who were really committed to supporting community but somehow felt isolated from it themselves. One person was working to find jobs for people who were just out of prison, another was working with children, two others were interested in educating people about HIV...the list goes on. The comfort was, of course, that so many great people are working in the community and working for the community. The challenge was and continues to be that many of them didn't know each other. So, I brought this beginning group of leaders together. They are leaders because they work hard at improving and strengthening the community. They are leaders because they bring other people with them, by supporting new

leadership and developing skills. These are not leaders who were given some prescribed authority by the city or who became experts through numerous degrees. These are leaders that move things even when it goes unnoticed.

This first group of 15 put together the principles and structure of our listening process. They said it was worth it to listen to people and find out what they think about community. They said we should connect with the people who often are missed—homeless people, various cultural groups, tenants, children, elders—and with anyone else who is really interested in community. They said we should not make tokens out of those groups but just create a respectful process that is broad enough to be interesting. They said they would each help organize a group of people. That is what we did together.

### Who Participated?

Over 300 people dialogued in about 30 groups. We held listening sessions with men and women. We met with youth and elders and people in between. Participants included people living in shelters, transitional housing residents, tenants, and homeowners. They were employed and/or involved in school or job training programs. Some were living with HIV and AIDS. In addition to people from the South Minneapolis neighborhoods surrounding Hope, our networking connected us more broadly and

sessions included people living in the city's north side, in St. Paul, and some suburbs. Participants represented Latino, Somali, Native American, African American and European American cultural groups. We connected with long-time activists and soon-to-be-activists.

Participants wrote their names on a sign-in sheet but completed no forms. We learned about the communities important to people because they spoke about them during the dialogues.

### What Is A Listening Session?

The first session was pretty typical of what most were like. I sat down with a community member who was part of the leadership group. He talked about some of the folks he would like to bring together. We organized the first session around relationships he had in the recovery community.

We met with this first group at Hope Community, had dinner and then began the listening session. I asked questions like these: What is community? What makes it work? What doesn't? Someone talked about how hard and complicated it can be to be part of so many communities. Someone talked about the need for doing something about crime on Franklin Avenue, but another person brought up the fact that "those folks" on Franklin Avenue are part of the community.





Another session at Simpson Shelter drew a group of about 15. They talked about how they didn't feel part of the community because they were homeless and people don't see them. One of the participants pointed out, "but we are a community together."

People connected in dialogue sessions like these. Some came back and helped form other listening circles or participated in the leadership group, and others got involved at Hope or in other parts of community.

### Now what?

We know that people who do good work in community always have had listening circles and always relied on relationship building. Strengthening and expanding on the foundations of community that already exist will continue far into the future.

The particular listening process described in this report started late in the summer of 1999 and ended in the spring of 2000.

This report is a non-linear discussion of community and it does not fit into neat little "problems and solution boxes." It promotes new ways of looking at community that truly honor its strengths, its diversity and most of all the valuable insights of the people who live, work and volunteer within their various communities.

The report is meant only to be a glimpse through the lens of some people talking about their community, and hopefully it will take the reader away from the usual lens of outsiders' perceptions. The report poses questions that illustrate ideas and issues people wrestled with during the listening sessions, what people had in common, and what that might mean for all of us who are invested in this idea of community.

The listening process poses the toughest questions to those of us who are organizers of community: How do we view organizing for power and change within community when community is so multi-layered? It would be easy to say there are no strong communities because people are apathetic. It is more difficult to dig deeper and realize that people may actually be so involved in several communities that they feel both overextended and disconnected from other people. What does this mean for decision-makers who rely on going to one group to represent the opinions of a particular community? These are just some of the questions we all face. Hopefully this report will be a useful conversation piece in that community discussion.





## Thank You, Elizabeth Hoffman

Elizabeth Hoffman, who was an intern for a human services networking project, came to Hope for a meeting to find out more about the Phillips Neighborhood. She took a special interest in the listening process and offered to help with the writing. She attacked an enormous challenge with a commitment to helping create a report out of the voices of those who participated. Following are some of her thoughts about the process:

*The challenge was to take 50 sheets of paper with hundreds of fragments of quotes from 30 different conversations and make something coherent. How can you write a report about 50 hours of conversation, when every time the discussion got really interesting, the note-taker became so involved she forgot to take notes? The point of the listening sessions was to create a snapshot of community, an hour in time, a fleeting experience. Translating that into a report is something like making a movie out of a book—how can you ever show everything, go into every detail, paint every character as richly and fully as in the book? You can't, because a book and a movie are completely different mediums.*

*I tried to approach a report of the listening sessions as if I were writing a screenplay from a very long, deep, and complex book. I took the themes that appeared most often, the quotes that were most resonant, the ideas that seemed to capture the essence of the listening sessions most successfully.*

*When you read the report, think about 20 people in one room, 7 in another, 14 in another. Think about one group speaking in Spanish, another group speaking in Somali. Think about a group of seniors, a church group, a group of single mothers, a group of people struggling with HIV and AIDS. Think about autumn, winter, and spring.*

*I tried to create a conversation between all of these people, many of whom will never meet. The report can, of course, convey none of the force or dynamism that real interaction between human beings brings. One hopes that it can put forth ideas to provoke renewed interaction between other human beings.*



# Redefining Community

With so many layers of community, how do they connect?

*"There are communities within communities."*



*"Maybe we need to develop a new way of looking at community"*

The desire for community is universal; it transcends culture, age, gender, and geography. Though day-to-day life presents many obstacles, listening session groups value the ideal of a close, nurturing community. Everyone in the listening sessions spoke of a yearning to feel connected to the people around them.

After one listening session, someone observed, *"People from all over had common ideas about community."* Even across so many diverse groups, we found this to be true. People from every conceivable background shared the same definitions of what community could and should be.

At the same time that definitions coincided, the listening sessions brought to light different ways of looking at community. For the people who came to these conversations, community is not limited to

endorsed neighborhood groups. Some groups spoke of community primarily in terms of their cultural communities. Others spoke of community in terms of specific peer groups: homeless people, youth, racial groups, churches...

Who belongs to a community? Can we box people in and out of certain narrowly defined groups? The listening sessions revealed a more complex reality, that each one of us is a part of many communities. Some we are born into, some we choose, some we simply find ourselves in by circumstance. Instead of living in isolated boxes, we live in an intricate overlay of community: *"There are layers of communities—communities within communities."*

One of the most intriguing ideas to come out of the listening sessions was that *"communities are like overlapping circles."* Parts of those circles connect through common values and issues, but each circle has its own distinct traditions and purposes. Many of us hold on to the idea of community



depicted in shows like "Leave It To Beaver," where mom stayed home and connected with other moms in the neighborhood while the children went to a neighborhood school with the neighborhood people. The idea was that the people you worked with would be the same people you went to church with, played sports with and socialized with and those were the people in your neighborhood. Maybe that only really existed in TV land or maybe times have changed, but community takes people into many different places. This makes things a little more complex.

As one woman said, "*Being a part of so many communities can be hard.*" The crossovers and in-between spaces complicate our lives, as we try to balance every part of our identity.

Membership in so many communities also complicates any simple definition of what *community* is. Instead of seeing community as something that can be defined once and for all, we see it as a continuing process, one that we can understand only by talking about it, listening about it, and, most of all, participating in it.

## Don't Box Us In! Is community more than a neighborhood?

Community:

"It's not just where you live"

During listening sessions, people talked about how community goes deeper than physical boundaries. Your neighborhood can be a community, but community is not limited to your neighborhood. When we say community is "*a group of people living together,*" where you're living together is not as important as how you're living together.

Community, participants said, is more about relationships among people than it is about lines arbitrarily drawn in the dirt. It takes "*trust,*" "*respect,*" "*communication*" and "*cooperation*" to build community.

Listening session groups agreed that a strong community does not magically appear. "*A community is what people make it,*" one participant observed. Healthy communities require commitment,

investment, and cooperation from their members.

"*When people give of themselves, there is community,*" summarized another speaker. If we all give, we are able to draw upon a font of shared resources.

*"Community is people coming together and making a better life..."*



# The Power of Relationships

In a community full of people working, going to school, speaking different languages...how do you create trust among strangers?

## "People knowing each other"

The perfect community, one woman felt, is where *"everybody knows everybody."*

Another participant affirmed, *"I feel a part of the community in my neighborhood—we all talk to each other, we know each other. It doesn't matter what language we speak."*

Community cannot exist among strangers. Communication and trust were seen as two crucial components of community.

One woman saw the projects in North Minneapolis as an example of perfect community because of the trust level:

*"Community is communication and trust."*

*"Adults looked out for kids, there was a corner store where you could get stuff on credit, kids playing together..."* Another woman mused, *"If you trust your neighbors, there's no danger. If my child is in the street and my neighbors are watching out for her, [that is community]."*

Someone said, *"Community catches you when you fall down."* Communication and trust are the foundation of community support structures; they tell us how we can help each other, and allow us to believe we will.



# Make Room for Community

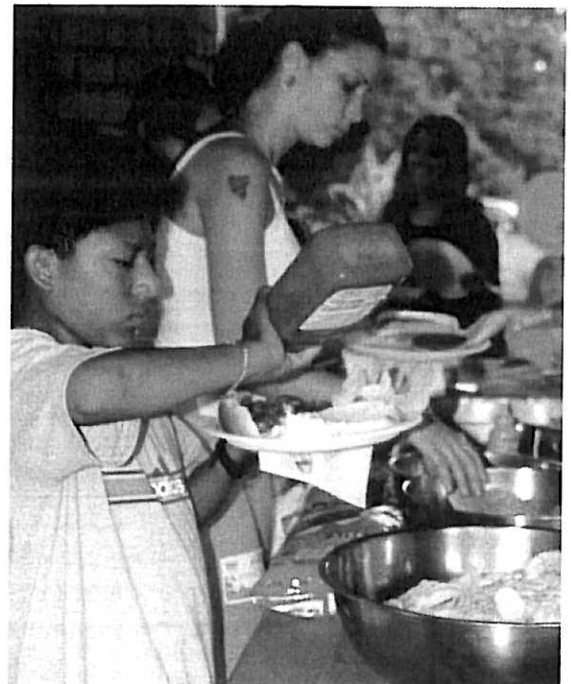
How do you create public space  
for people to meet each other?

## "People coming together"

People talked about needing meetings – *"both chance meetings and intentional ones"* – to get to know each other. These meetings don't need to be scheduled; they can occur at any gathering place *"where people interact frequently."* Often people who would not necessarily meet in private spaces run into each other by chance in public ones. Community, then, can be any meeting ground where people can come together to make connections.

Listening session groups gave many examples of shared spaces where people come together: church, a homeless shelter, a community center, a neighborhood store. One speaker at Santo Rosario related that *"because of the school, we parents know each other, and we talk to each other."* Another person observed that *"businesses create connections to the community for people."*

Organized events can also be meeting grounds. Several people commented on the success of gatherings like National Night Out. One youth recalled, *"Last year [there was] a big religious party in Peavey Park. Everybody was there, rubbing elbows. Especially in that park it was cool to see."* Participants valued opportunities like this, which enable and encourage people to come together.



# Something About Sticks in a Bundle are Harder to Break

How do we find the common values  
that tie us together?



“People working together for  
the same purpose”

People observed that community springs up around *“what we have in common”*—cultural background, religious faith, a common interest, where you live. One man talked about the homeless community on the East side: *“We would hang together. We would look out for each other. We were accepted with each other and we had each other’s back. It was all Blacks, Indians and Whites together.”*

Community, someone else elaborated, is *“people who identify with each other.”* When we identify with each other and feel a sense of belonging, we are more intimately concerned with each others’ lives; we become *“people who care.”* For example, one participant related a story about a *“girl being beat up by her boyfriend. Some of the tenants in our building watched out for her to keep her safe—called the police if we saw or heard anything.”*

Sometimes, certain issues bring people together. In one listening session, someone observed how *“people do unite when they have to.”* They offered the example of Highway 55, a recent protest against expansion of a local freeway. This cause

brought together environmentalists, cultural groups, peace activists and affordable housing advocates. Unity around a common goal can either spring from community, or give rise to new community. However it happens, when people work together, they *“have power in the community.”*



# Threats to Community

What are the barriers to having a powerful community?

- False perceptions and stereotypes within communities and between communities: People have ideas about other races and cultures that keep them isolated from each other. Someone summarized, *"There is not enough cultural understanding, [so everyone] ends up within their own cultural groups."*
- Hopelessness can also be a tremendous problem. When people are *"sick and tired,"* they have no motivation to make changes. Financial fears and anxiety over unemployment or housing contribute to this. One woman explained, *"People have been down and/or in a bad area for so long they can't trust anyone."*
- Crime and fear: In every session, people mentioned the dangers of crime, guns, and drugs. People become afraid not only of them, but of each other. A woman said, *"I've seen too much shooting, killing. My apartment got shot up. For two years of my life, we stayed mainly in the house."*
- Transition: When people are moving often, they have no incentive to put down roots and invest themselves in a particular neighborhood. One participant told the group, *"I look at this as a transition—it's not a permanent place, so I might have an attitude that I'm not going to get involved."* The other threats to community, such as lack of housing and fear, may contribute to some of the transition.
- Negative perceptions by outside influences: Listening session participants observed that media, police and city officials often promote and react to negative perceptions of a community, and can be more a liability than an asset. Furthermore, community members sometimes internalize negative perceptions from outside.
- Fear of deportation: Recent immigrants listed lack of documentation and the INS as definite threats to the establishment of community.
- No gathering places: Unless people have a place to meet each other, to see each other, and to carry through community tasks, community cannot be built: *"Community is destroyed if there are no gathering places."*
- Lack of basic resources: Lack of affordable housing, not enough jobs, lack of transportation to jobs, and poor availability of necessary goods and services were all listed as threats to community. If people cannot meet basic needs for themselves, they said, how can they worry about community? This reality also contributes to transition—many people are forced to move because they can't find what they need in their current community.

*"Community is destroyed if there are no gathering places."*



# Ideas for Strengthening Neighborhoods from Some of the People Who Actually Live There

*"People in the community should have the first chance to apply for community jobs."*

*"I like to think things can happen," one participant admitted, "but...this area does not have good things; we need something."* Listening session groups gave many examples of concrete assets that make communities stronger.

## Affordable housing

For many listening session participants, housing is the most important issue. *"Without a roommate,"* said one participant, *"you can't afford rent."* People were disgusted by the number of uninhabited houses in Phillips, and they also complained about absentee landlords and slumlords.

Credit screening and *"unlawful detainers on your record"* make it difficult for some people to have access to existing housing. Participants also protested that *"landlords operate around stereotypes."* The Somali group, for whom affordable housing is an especially serious issue, had their own specific barrier: *"We are informed to bring rent history, while we are new people."* Listening session groups felt that there is a "need for flexibility and fairness."

Listening session groups asked for affordable housing that is *"no more than 30% of your income."*

## Employment

The availability of jobs was also a concern—*"good jobs, service-type, solid jobs, prosperous jobs, not nursing home shifts."* Participants complained that there are few opportunities to move up in the jobs that are there; they want *"somewhere you could build a career; no one's going to build a career in a convenience store."*

One speaker voiced a central problem: *"Companies are built in the neighborhood that do not employ community members."* Participants agreed that *"people in the community should have the first chance to apply for community jobs."*

## Transportation

Transportation was an issue for many people: *"Community access to transportation affects employment, because if your community lacks transportation it may be difficult to get jobs."*



## Access to quality goods and services

People emphasized the importance of neighborhood commercial districts within walking distance. One participant said, *"We need more shops,"* places where daily needs can be met and people can interact: a coffee shop, a lunch or breakfast place, a shoe repair, a laundromat, *"a decent, small grocery store, not a chain one that will rip you off."* Phillips residents were also aware of the need to patronize locally owned businesses: *"We need to put back into the community—shop at little stores, not at Target."* Another crucial piece of the puzzle was *"at least one bank,"* or a better credit union.

One concern of participants was encouraging local and individually owned businesses: *"How many businesses in Phillips are run by residents...?"* People especially saw *"minority-owned businesses"* as a strength, and they called for *"ethnic businesses, to be better supported by banks."*

## Economic mix

One session brought out the need for *"a mixture of poor and middle income"* families in the neighborhood. This economic mix could be achieved with an emphasis on investing in people already living in the neighborhood.

## Educational opportunities and activities

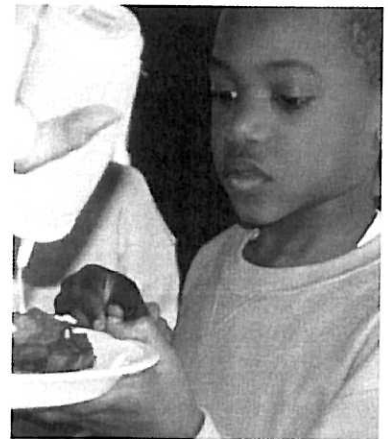
People saw technology, library programs, ESL, GED, parenting classes and after-school programs as particular strengths in a community. Some called for more organized activities for kids in the area; for example, one woman explained, *"Gymnastics classes are in the suburbs."*

## Beautification

Aesthetic concerns came into play. People wanted gardens and landscaping, trash off the sidewalks and garbage cans in place, good lighting on the streets. Most of all, they wanted well-maintained buildings and houses to *"show that people care."*

## Opportunities to meet people

Over and over, people voiced a desire to *"get the community together more."* People asked for more organized community events. In general, participants simply felt that they *"need opportunities to meet people"* in order to strengthen their communities.



# Crossing Cultures & Building Power

How does a cultural group maintain its identity without becoming isolated?

*"...to get to know each other and build trust."*



*"People of different cultures coming together"*

In the listening sessions, people talked about the difficulties of living in a cross-section of many different communities. Misconceptions and stereotyping isolate cultural groups from each other. There can also be intense pressure from one's own peer group not to venture outside of the circle.

In some cases, people felt that their whole community is judged unfairly because of the behavior of a few members of that community. Because people are so conscious of the stereotypes that other people have about them, they put pressure on each other not to fulfill those stereotypes.

Often, fragmentation seems as driven by internal cultural pressures as by external racial tensions. Among youth, especially, there is pressure not to associate with

people outside their culture. Because of ignorance, fear, and the lack of motivation to cross lines, everyone stays within their own cultural group, and the situation perpetuates itself.

Participants in the listening sessions recognized cultural isolation as a problem and stated that opportunities are needed to bring these groups together: *"An opportunity for people—ALL people, it doesn't matter what language that they speak, what race they are—to get to know each other and build trust."*



# Stop Judging & Start Listening

What role do youth play in community?

*"Change needs to begin"*

Youth deal in a world of perception—being perceived in terms of their cultures, in terms of their neighborhoods, in terms of their schools, but above all, in terms of their age. One listening session participant complained about how *"city officials and parents make generalizations about youth."* The youth we heard from felt that, as a result of these generalizations, they don't have a real voice and their opinions are disregarded.

Yet the youth who participated in the listening sessions are impacted by, aware of, and able to articulate the same issues as adults. Rather than being affected by

separate things, most of their concerns exactly paralleled the concerns of the older groups: *"lack of housing," "shortage of jobs," "racism and discrimination."*

The assumption that "kids don't get it" is wrong. They have a real concern about their safety and their environment. They simply don't have the same mechanisms that adults have to deal with issues. A major frustration of many youth was that *"kids are not considered a strength of the community."* Yet they were sure that *"the youth can help the community in a good way."* As one youth said, *"Change needs to begin with people our age."*



## Views on Gangs

What's the alternative?

*"There's a lot of pressure to join gangs"*

Gangs were one issue that came up repeatedly in youth listening sessions. For many youth, *"there's a lot of pressure to join gangs."* These youth saw gang activity as a threat to community, but they also pointed out that gangs are a form of community: *"Gangs stem from a lack of community. It fills a void, like it or not."* One speaker

explained, *"Gangs...make you feel safe, they help each other, they back you up."*

When asked about possible alternatives to gangs, youth in the listening sessions asked for *"someone to listen to them," "someone to help you feel pride."* Several participants expressed a desire *"to have a tutor or mentor."* They also asserted a need for *"more recreational spaces, like a movie theater and museums," "places to practice sports,"* youth programs, and community centers – in general, *"more places to go to have fun."*

*"Gangs stem from a lack of community."*

# More Cops in Community or More Community in Cops?

How does community shape the role of police?

*"We need more police about the community"*

Participants in the listening sessions had various emotions about law enforcement. On the one hand, people often said, *"We need more police about the community."* But on the other, many shared the sentiment one speaker expressed: *"I don't trust that the police will treat me well."*

People of color felt more threatened than protected by the police. Racial profiling was a serious concern, and it was felt that police are harassing the wrong people. Youth, especially, felt that they were stereotyped. Several participants exchanged accounts of mistreatment at the hands of police. Stories like these fuel a sense of powerlessness and the feeling that the police get away with whatever they do. People also expressed frustration that the police do nothing when they're really needed.

Though many listening session participants were ambivalent about the existing role of police, they were very articulate about the kinds of changes that would make them more comfortable about police presence. Above all, people wanted police who interact more effectively with the community. They specifically called for training in cultural diversity and an end to racial profiling.

In general, community members wanted to see a new approach toward policing. There was a desire for real communication, as opposed to the prevailing power dynamics. People want real relationships with the police, relationships which will allow for the rebuilding of trust. Ideally, people wished for police who live in the neighborhood, who interact on the street more regularly, and who are cooperative rather than combative.

*"People want real relationships with the police..."*

# Taking a Closer Look at Crime

How do we really feel about "those people"?

"We can do things about crime"

A complex attitude toward crime came out in the listening sessions. Everyone readily acknowledged the presence of crime and its danger to the community, but participants were careful to point out that the "bad" people are part of the community, too.

People saw rehab as a big part of the solution to crime. In addition, they stated that other avenues need to be introduced to people who break laws.

People realized that they themselves have a role in maintaining security in the neighborhoods: *"We need to handle our own issues instead of always depending on the police."* One suggestion was for community members to *"talk to the people on the street that are hanging out and let them get used to seeing your face."* Many thought that it is possible to cut down on crime by getting to know people on the street.

*"...talk to the people on the street..."*

# We Want to be Involved

So, what's stopping us?

"People want to participate"

Participants in every listening session recognized that community cannot exist without the efforts of the people it includes. Almost everyone expressed a desire to be more involved in their neighborhood community, but many faced barriers to involvement. One of the greatest barriers is time; people want to go to meetings, but with jobs and other responsibilities at home, many feel they just don't have the time or the energy to put in.







For new immigrant groups, language was also a barrier, since in some areas several different languages are spoken. Even at school, one youth explained, *"There are interpreters, but not enough for parents to participate."*

Block club and neighborhood meetings were mentioned as important ways to get involved, but few of the listening session participants attended these meetings. They listed many reasons why involvement can sometimes be difficult, including the problem of transportation to the meetings and the lack of childcare at the meetings.

There was also a feeling that block clubs are organized from the top down, and neighborhood groups often are composed of white homeowners. Many listening

session participants said that they don't understand what's going on in established groups. As one woman explained: *"We feel intimidated going to block club or neighborhood meetings because of the current situation—being renters, racism, being low income, and not understanding what they are talking about."*

Still, we heard that there are many, many ways that people participate in their communities without attending block club meetings. People attend a variety of gatherings, and they participate in traditional organizations at church and school. Latino youth offered that lending money to others and participating in protests against the INS were ways in which their parents participated in the community.

## Internalized Perceptions

Who do we allow to define us?



*"There is a misunderstanding of inner-city neighborhoods"*

Negative perceptions and stereotypes are among the greatest detriments to community. Many listening session participants from the Phillips Community described the impact of negative perceptions they hear from family, friends and even complete strangers about their neighborhood:

*"They think everybody's bad, on welfare, doing crime," that "everybody uses drugs, nobody cares what's happening, people throw trash around."* While it was acknowledged that problems do exist in Phillips, people expressed frustration that the problems were all anybody outside the neighborhood knows about.

More than once, the media's role in perpetuating this reputation was mentioned. People felt that the media glorifies the bad,



making Phillips seem much worse than it actually is. They worried that *"People will start to believe what they're told."*

Many residents have internalized the negative perceptions of Phillips and have little positive to say about the neighborhood. Often, however, people's descriptions of the neighborhood were substantiated not by their own experience, but by what they had been told. One woman lamented, *"We can't use places on Chicago and Franklin because we're afraid,"* though she was immediately contradicted by another participant who said, *"I go to Chicago-Franklin all the time."*

A student at South High felt that negative perceptions were due to the way people look at the neighborhood and stereotype it: *"City equals bad, suburb equals good."* Yet, there were few residents who agreed with this maxim. Despite all of the negative talk, people in Phillips maintain a fierce pride about their neighborhood. Many dismissed the idea that the suburbs are any better: *"The suburbs are considered the pedestal, but really they're not."* Indeed, they insisted on reminding each other that every place has problems and that the problems in Phillips are caused by only a small minority of its residents: *"There are 6000[sic] people in Phillips, and 300 people causing problems."*

*"People will start to believe what they're told."*

## Community on the Move

How do you organize in a neighborhood where there is a lot of transition?

*"Everyone has something to offer"*

The transitional nature of Phillips can make it difficult to keep people involved: *"Often people don't extend themselves because they won't be here long. But it can be a self-fulfilling prophecy: people don't make connections and relationships, so they move out."* Still, Phillips residents who stay recognize the attractions of their neighborhood.

One woman pointed out that *"In other communities, there is not a community life because the houses are far away from each other."* Another speaker said, *"I appreciate the diversity where I live—I can't wait to get {back} home when I am in suburban communities that are much less diverse."*

*{At home} I can travel to another country without going off my block."*

Overall, the general feeling seemed to be that Phillips has great potential: *"Everyone has something to offer..."* *"There is untapped strength, in spite of everything."* One woman revealed particular hope and commitment: *"I will stay here in Phillips if I can buy a home. I think that in the long run it will really be a community."*



# Special Thanks to the 300 Community Voices and to the Following Organizations Who Participated:

Aliveness Project  
American Indian OIC  
Brothers & Sisters in Recovery  
Catholic Charities  
Centro Cultural  
De Nova Academy  
Family & Children Services of Minneapolis  
Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches  
Harriet Tubman  
Impacto Juvenil  
Kaleidoscope Childcare  
Lutheran Social Services  
Minneapolis Human Services Network  
Minnesota Foodshare  
Park Plaza Residents Union  
PICA Headstart  
Pillsbury House  
PYC School  
Rage to Roses  
Santo Rosario Church  
Simpson Housing  
South High School  
2615 Park Avenue Associates  
VOICE in Phillips  
Waite House

*A special "Thank You" to  
Tanaka Advertising who donated  
all the creative time and energy that  
made the design and layout for this  
report so outstanding.*

if 300 people can  
raise up such a  
wellspring of hope...  
how, then, can we  
deny such giftedness?

We welcome your comments and your sharing of  
creative efforts that stem from this work in progress.

We invite you to find more ways to listen.

For additional copies of this report or for more information  
about Hope Community, Inc., contact us at:

Hope Community  
2101 Portland Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55404 USA  
612 874-8867  
[jbyers@hope-community.org](mailto:jbyers@hope-community.org)