

Mural Arts Conversation
'This We Believe'
March 18, 2009
Report

Facilitators: -----

Location: Honickman Learning Center - 1936 Judson Street

Total participants: 33

Neighborhoods Represented: Strawberry Mansion

Logan

West Oak Lane

Fair Hill / St. Hugh

South Philadelphia

Nostalgia

- "It was family oriented when I moved here 39 years ago and we helped each other"
- Children playing outside games like handball ????????
- The Mural in the neighborhood which depict drill teams, GED Graduate, Sewing Class, kids playing in the street – an accurate representation of some of the things going on in the neighborhood
- There is history here – generations grew up here – there are many long term families here who have seen the community change – the old timers are connected
- Kids are inside more, we played outside more
- Varied communities across the city have strong roots, culture, economics but changing because of gentrification

Change Is Different

- Development funding helps some not other
- Kids are more inside

Sense Of Abandonment

- Sun shines on one side of the street and not the other- look out the door and there is an abandon lot – "It's a fence around it and I am grateful for that" - When it snows, on the sunny-side the snow melts 3 weeks before the other side...
- Neighborhood businesses now owned by others – Asians- they don't live in the neighborhood – felt good to be owned by neighbors, they employed each other
- Isolation – lack of stores hurts community – (supermarkets)

Pain and Suffering

- Murder of young people by young people - violence
- The transformation of neighborhoods to drug culture – drugs tear communities apart
- People staying in homes because it feels safer – no one outside – living in fear
- Kids want to be outside but can't if violence and drugs are there – no outside activities, not comfortable being outside – impact on young people in school (i.e., grades, sense of well being)

Honickman Learning Center - 1936 Judson Street

March 18, 2009

Page 1

- Children inside on video games that are violent and questioning about their perception of what is real
- Services are lacking, need help
- Concern in Fair Hill Community about loss of language, culture and that which bonds the community – changes in the business structures - the loss of tradition and fear of displacement
- Fewer homeowners in neighborhood- renters don't take care – older residents can't keep up with the changes
- Without family/community it feels “cold”
- Adults not talking with adults – arguments
-

Changes in Neighborhood

- Redevelopment in neighborhood- before this over ½ of houses were abandoned- change to growth and beauty – Project Home helped
- The drill teams come from all over
- We have had problems but people come together to rally for change
- People stick together in the same way in Logan/Olney
- We've changed for the better by (transforming the housing, the interactions with one another, the relationship with the police, use of the Honickman Center)
- People from outside coming into the neighborhood for events – people who used to live in the community coming back
- Sense of belonging of those from outside – block parties, barbeques,
- Remember in bad times it was not always like this – it takes hope and determination to take our blocks back- “There were gangs here but we came together and created a plan to bring positive change”

The Work

- It takes determination to take our blocks back
- You must keep at it, do it more and more – constantly
- Other will join in when they see that you are consistent
- Identify block captains
- Must have block meetings – no matter how many – start with them
- Involve young people and the elders
- Involve the police
- There is a need to break the fear “snitch” stop fear and stand up
- Need to get more people to come out

Organizing

- We need to bring newcomers in- we have to make them feel welcomed – we have to invite them in
- Organizing block captains are important
- We need to give kids attention and involve them and teach responsibilities
- Involve community in decision making (?)
- Need adults to break the fear and work together in order to do this
- Adults should bring kids outside and teach them the games that older adults used to play
- “We have to lead the young people and show them the right thing to do”

- Honor the youth who are willing to speak up
- Work together as a group to take the neighborhoods back – one person can not do it – we are stronger as a group
- There are places for support and safety who will help if you ask
- Need community businesses to employ people from the neighborhood – economic stability
- Keep at it for “Tipping Point” (reference to a book that describes how graffiti on NY City subways was eliminated)

Values

- Hope, determination, power, peace – no drama,
- Community day – Annual Event- August –(collective interactions)
- Family atmosphere – family feel
- People come together to help each other
- Love the neighborhood – been here for 9 years – people are loving and caring
 - o Watched my son
 - o People get together
- Elders keep the community clean
- Important to have positive role models
- It can be better for the children
- Kids need some place to go, something to do

Overall, the conversations were energized and more deeply discussed around the issue of transforming the community. The deep discussion led to a rich and engaging exchange of the complexities of this North Philadelphia neighborhood, particularly, with the added support and connections made by members from other neighborhoods. The engagement went beyond the notion of the mural project as content but how to engage in transforming the community. The conversation around the mural project served as stimulus but also it was a way for the folk having the conversation to imagine what they wanted and to share how they are working to get what they want. People listened and were willing to support the concerns of a mother and daughter who did not belong to the neighborhood but who needed help in making change in their neighborhood.

The added bonus to this conversation was the input from the two young (16 year olds) girls who provided a backdrop for the adults to hear different voices and a different perspective. The engagement with the young people moved the conversation vertically. The expressed emotions present in one of the teen’s mother’s voice helped the group to not only respond to the agenda of the mural arts project, but to share the work of the community with each other and to move towards taking action to support and expand the work already going on to another neighborhood.