

# (Anthro)policy in Chicago Lawn: Answering the Call for Collective Community Experience

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## Preliminary Note on the Character of Research

*"I have a problem with all this research. We know the answers to every problem. We cannot do our work with the community without knowing these things. It's just new to the academy. Until we change that – the way research dictates what needs to happen – we are going to be in the same cycle."*

–Community Organizer, SW Side Resident

The primary challenge in this project was entering a neighborhood for six weeks and capturing information relevant to an organization that has been working there for over a decade. As the above quote indicates, any dedicated social change agent in Chicago Lawn knows infinitely more about the area than a short-term ethnographer. The value of this type of research is that it provides a fresh perspective on an issue and region while retaining the views of those more intimately involved. This report does not attempt to add fundamentally new knowledge to those voices and energies that have brought consistent insights to their work in Chicago Lawn. Instead it attempts to archive and contextualize the views of residents and social change agents about local planning processes. This archive is most clearly represented in the longer sections of quotes found throughout the paper. The following pages should be understood as one summer's catalogue of insights that seem crucial to a neighborhood in the midst of dramatic shifts.

## Methods

This paper was written as part of the Urban Research and Curriculum Transformation Institute (URCTI) at the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change (CCUC) in The Field Museum.

The qualitative data archived here is intended to inform planning processes currently underway in Chicago Lawn. The hope is that anthropology's grasp of everyday life will help to account for those aspects of life consistently erased in the practices of community planning. For the purposes of this report, qualitative data has focused on organizational relationships, formal and informal service provision, resident activity patterns and neighborhood dynamics such as class and race tensions. Interviews drew from over fifty-five informants from across the spectrums of age, ethnicity, class and gender. The community narra-

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tives were gathered using ethnographic methods that interwove structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. All narratives and realities presented from these interviews are partial truths at their best and potentially misguided at their worst. As one informant put it, "Imagine you come and ask me a question and I mumble out something that's unintelligible and you go off and interpret it however you want. I might have been given the wrong medication earlier that morning but you didn't want to push your role as a researcher and ask about that."

I have tried to do all I could throughout the interpretation process to complicate my role as a researcher in order to accurately interpret my informants. Nonetheless, because analysis is focused on themes of residential empowerment and community planning, it fails to account for numerous factors that would alter the

reported findings. Moreover, like many of the professional social service providers in the area, I do not live in Chicago Lawn. The majority of my research was conducted during daylight hours when most of the violence shaping the neighborhood does not occur.

## Southwest Youth Collaborative

*“Every other house is a ‘for sale’ sign, there is not a real sense of inclusiveness anywhere around here. The only one who creates inclusive space is the Southwest Youth Collaborative, they’re very hands-on.”*

—Chicago Lawn Social Service Provider,  
SW Side Resident

Sixty-four hundred South Kedzie, the address of the Southwest Youth Collaborative (SWYC), is arguably the most diverse place on the Southwest Side. Located in Chicago Lawn, a neighborhood with a notorious history of violent racial tensions, the daily functions of the SWYC enable relationships that would not have been imaginable in the area just decades prior. As anyone who has been there will tell you, the SWYC is a busy place. It is busy providing a hub of intergenerational and multicultural activity. It is busy maintaining a youth-governed environment for teenagers that are alienated from many other aspects of their daily lives. And it is busy placing power in the hands of young people who have the energy, vision and capacity to create substantial social change before they even turn eighteen.

The building functions as a multi-organizational affiliate office for between four and five community organizations at a time. These organizations range from the Latino Organization of the Southwest to the 8th District Youth Net. The SWYC’s own programs are primarily for Black, Latino and Arab youth from middle class and low-income backgrounds. Many of the youth that go to the Collaborative come from all across Chicago’s neighborhoods, but those that frequent it most are from right in the area. According to some of the young people I spoke to there, those youth from across town come for specific political and cultural programming that is not provided in their own neighborhoods. Many of the

one hundred youth hired for the 2004 Summer Liberation Institute fit into this category. These teenagers work around issues ranging from the criminalization of youth of color to the zero-tolerance disciplinary policies that detrimentally affect their high schools. Those youth who come from Chicago Lawn generally live between the 63rd and 67th streets corridor. For these young people the Collaborative exists as both a place with dynamic activities and as an after school drop-in center. When I asked about those Chicago Lawn youth who live outside of this corridor and are not involved in the programming, one young man said “it too much to cross through to get here.” This statement refers to the gang boundaries that divide the neighborhood. Each gang is outfitted with otherwise alienated youth and each has its own visions for the neighborhood’s future.

The SWYC has been active for over a decade and its current budget is around one million dollars. In the



photograph of Ryan Hollon and young woman by Hannah Anderson

words of one of the Collaborative’s directors, “Part of our role has been to help build other organizations and get them on their own two feet. We provide additional institutional resources in the neighborhood [because] we’re just trying to find people who want to work and build partners.” Most recently, the SWYC gave the Southwest Side CeaseFire Violence Prevention project its insurance policy so that they could obtain the necessary space to run a safe haven for gang-affiliated youth. Beyond helping to

build the capacity of affiliate organizations, the Collaborative sets a standard for reflective community practice among area agencies. As the executive director of one peer organization asserted, "For me what is exciting about the Collaborative is that there is a more comfortable space to feel okay radically challenging the framework in which we are constantly working. This becomes part of the social process of how we deal with each other... there is a challenge to be more perceptive." In a neighborhood where the organizational power of social change agencies determines much of the spectrum of political possibilities, this call to perceptiveness is crucial. As will be further elaborated, Chicago Lawn is currently at a moment in neighborhood history when the framework in which social change agencies are working is largely determining the plans and resources drafted for the coming years.

## Chicago Lawn

*"I live five blocks from where a Nazi flag used to hang on a daily basis. Now it's a center for the remembrance of Elijah Mohammed. I never thought I'd live in this area. I remember driving through here seeing little babies in diapers throwing rocks at the cars saying, 'Nig, Nig,' they couldn't even get out the whole word. Never thought I'd live in this neighborhood."*

—Terry, Chicago Lawn Resident

Chicago Lawn was once known for its white working-class families, Nazi flags and the stoning of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Despite a drastic shift in demographics, the current class and race tensions in Chicago Lawn are intricately tied to this history of socially constructed racism. While the large majority of those who once sympathized with Nazi flags in the area have either died or moved out, current neighborhood divisions are still premised by an inherited social space that is based on community isolation and exclusion. Chicago Lawn's physical infrastructure was largely determined at a time when the community sought to keep out non-whites. Today a neighborhood of extreme diversity is largely separated into ethnic enclaves. Very few have stopped to create the type of broad-based multicultural spaces that are necessary to challenge the obstacles posed by such a legacy of racism.

The clearest example of this is Marquette Park. An expansive neighborhood green space with a central field house, the park is the most physically open land in the

area. While people of color do not face the threats of violence they did for attempting to use the park years ago, Marquette Park still does not provide community-wide spaces that could challenge the remnants of that legacy. Residents assert that the park lacks sufficient programming, while social service providers attest that their attempts to run programs in the park are continually frustrated by its bureaucracy. Often times those programs that do exist are largely divided into ethnic enclaves: Arab American youth playing kickball, Caucasian youth playing golf, African American youth playing basketball.

The dearth of space for positive multicultural interaction means that the "Chicago Lawn community" lacks opportunities to facilitate neighborhood-wide political participation. One elderly African American resident whose neighbor's home was firebombed over thirty years ago says, "There are no clear boundaries anymore, now there are more Mexicans around and Palestinians." This comment is consistent with others that indicate awareness of diversity but a lack of access to it. While there has been talk of creating a commemorative statue of Martin Luther King's justice work in Chicago, the construction of places that can facilitate the coming together of diverse groups around common concerns is drastically underrepresented on neighborhood agendas. As the neighborhood increasingly becomes the home of a broad range of displaced individuals and groups seeking refuge on the Southwest Side, the need for such spaces could not be more pressing.

Transition in today's Chicago Lawn is less visible than the white flight that took place in the 1990s or the wide-scale displacement processes that are redefining other Chicago neighborhoods. Meanwhile, Chicago Lawn is increasingly understood as a point of re-entry for individuals leaving the prison system, and as a place of hope for those forced out of inner-city neighborhoods such as Pilsen and Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) dwellings. The neighborhood continues to be a primary point of entry for Mexican and Palestinian immigrants. More and more people are moving to Chicago Lawn, making clear its status as one of a shrinking number of areas available for low-income Chicagoans of color. While these newer trends are currently changing class patterns in the area, the area's ethnic diversity was initially composed of those residents of color who could afford to move into what was then a middle class neighborhood.

The short history of neighborhood diversity is thereby compounded with today's changing income patterns. This creates a complex mixture of class and race

narratives that indicate feelings of and calls to exclusion. Consider the following resident perspectives:

*"Relations aren't good between African Americans and Latinos. We relate them with drugs. And I never get the chance to talk to someone to see what they think about us."*

**–Eve, Immigrant from Mexico**

*"White and older Latino families see blocks going down, there is somebody out here saying 'the people from the projects, the city is giving them houses,' I ask who is saying that and they say 'somebody'."*

**–Gertrude, White**

*"I just don't want the neighborhood to get dumped on... Nobody wants Section 8 and the problems that come with them."*

**–Terry, African American**

*"They talk about Mexicans like they're gonna take over. I'm like—did you forget how you grew up? Things go in cycles. That's what happened to black folks in the 60's. Each community that we've had has been a leftover."*

**–Paula, African American**

*"The people speaking Hispanic that were here first, they are moving out because they say they don't like the Hispanics that are moving in—because they say they're Mexican hillbillies."*

**–Judith, White**

*"No other neighborhood on the South Side is this diverse. None of the other diverse neighborhoods in Chicago—even Roger's Park—has the historic presence of the African American community in its midst. In dealing with its borders there are some very clear relationships in the discussion between safety, violence, and race. The drive to maintain an ethnic identity has been part of the community narrative."*

**–Rasha, Palestinian**

The perceived conflicts captured in these statements conflate identity with race, class, language and/or background. In many cases, residents' everyday understandings of these factors contribute to the preservation of segregated social interactions. This segregation, in turn, can contribute to acts of violence like hate crimes and gang shootings. Yet while the above quotes display a spectrum of community tensions, they also indicate an array of community consciousnesses. These varying levels of awareness often determine the types of social interplays that people try to create for themselves and for others. While everyone in the neighborhood is aware of the demographic shifts at some level, some people are also trying to overcome stereotypes and raise awareness with the hope of engaging diverse residents.

## The Challenge of Planning Political Will

*"That's all just background. When we looked at this community we knew there are a lot of folks that are new who don't know what this community is, and there a lot of folks who have been here who don't know what this community is now but know what it used to be."*

—John, an organizer in the NCP process

Though Chicago Lawn is many different things to many different people, the above quote implies that there is presently nobody in the neighborhood who knows what Chicago Lawn is today. The quote came from a sector of the neighborhood that is trying to outline a comprehensive plan for what Chicago Lawn will be like in the future. At a time when state budget cuts have prompted Illinois social change agents to think about ways to reduce their dependence on government funds, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) has catalyzed a major non-governmental planning process in Chicago Lawn. One of the sixteen designated New Communities Programs (NCP) in Chicago, the Chicago Lawn NCP is attempting to plan the neighborhood's future while drawing from a pre-existing network of area institutions (e.g. church parishes, established social service providers and the like). Across Chicago, the NCP community development strategies aim to work collaboratively and non-confrontationally to draw up five-year Quality of Life plans for the given community areas. For those organizing the process in Chicago Lawn, their institutionally-oriented approach

is possible because the area has, according to one coalition member, "done a very, very good job at networking at the executive level." This is further evidenced by the representation of social service executives on the NCP task force.

Amidst this executive-driven planning process there is a pressing need to advance a discussion that began at the Southwest Community Task Force (a task force which developed in response to a series of youth shootings in the area). This discussion centers on including a wider variety of grassroots agencies and community residents in the NCP. It is necessary for future planning energies to complement their executive focus with a simultaneous emphasis on youth empowerment at decision-making tables. Despite the dramatic growth of the youth population in the area, only one of thirty-five individuals on the NCP task force is under eighteen. At a time when organizations like SWYC are building the political capacity of youth, it is entirely possible to more actively promote the reinvestment of mainstream political power in youth. SWYC programs like the Summer Liberation Institute (mentioned earlier) and Generation Y, in which youth follow a democratic process in designing their own rules and disciplinary measures, show very clearly that young people in the community are prepared for civic engagement. Any well-planned efforts towards sharing the area's political power with youth would have significant multiplier effects. Such efforts would provide fundamental contributions towards the goal of building neighborhood capacity and diversifying connections to resources coming from outside the neighborhood (community strengths are treated in more detail in the "Current Efforts for Change" section below). Additionally, increased work on residential empowerment would more fairly distribute resources in a neighborhood whose social service providers are almost exclusively located along the 63rd Street commercial corridor. Currently the seventy-two program goals designed by the NCP process are set to be distributed to the two primary 501c3 clusters in the area (mainstream and grassroots) that are divided into three geographical camps along the 63rd Street corridor. Wherever possible, this distribution should be addressed in a way that does not continue to subdivide and subcontract out the social service labor of the area, but instead creates opportunities for residents to take more active roles in their own futures.

Furthermore, neighborhood-based policy interventions like the Chicago Lawn NCP are complicated by the lack of a Chicago Lawn community per se. Given the myriad of tensions that exist in the area, it is no secret that residents living between 59th Street on the north, 75th Street on the south, Central Avenue on the west, and Bell Street on the east do not universally consider themselves members of the Chicago Lawn community area. Some identify more with West Englewood, some with West Lawn, and some with Marquette Park. Even among those who under-

stand themselves to be living in the geographic region known as Chicago Lawn, no resident interviewed for this project links this understanding to a comprehensive “sense of community.” Meanwhile, the Chicago Lawn NCP is targeted within specific geographic boundaries. The challenge becomes creating an inclusive sense of community within these boundaries that then enables broad-based political participation. To get a sense for these challenges, look at some of the community perspectives on the NCP process included below and on the facing page.

*“It’s a controlled democracy.”*

**–May, resident not involved in the task force, at a NCP community forum**

*“The NCP is people in high classes, able to do something in the neighborhood. Sometimes they have too many priorities, it can be overwhelming.”*

**–Lithuanian Immigrant attending NCP forum**

*“The notion that it’s a controlled democracy is good but it’s easy to say. The question is what is the alternative. There are old players around that have really stuck around. There are still people here who fought the Nazis. You have a young population entering the community. For that reason it’s beneficial to bring all these groups together.”*

**–Community Organizer on the task force**

*“I didn’t like the idea that people from outside our community who maybe have organizations here are making decisions for our community. I think residents should be more involved.”*

**–Judith, lifelong Chicago Lawn resident**

*“A lot of times we’ve been utilized as that non-conventional symbol in the NCP process... As Muslims in a highly contested atmosphere we have to be selective about who we build our relationships with, but we don’t have the luxury of being that selective. If there is a space to raise contestations within an environment then I am comfortable working in that environment.”*

**–Rasha, Palestinian organizer**

*“We don’t want to be stuck with a plan that nobody is committed to doing. It’s about capacity, it’s always about capacity... We’re only gonna talk to people who know how to talk to other people. We set the process up to build relationships. If we wanted them on the task force but they don’t do the one-on-ones, we took them off the list. If they’re too busy to meet, they’re too busy to be on the task force. We had a Catholic Priest, a Lutheran Pastor, and a Muslim Imam basically to bless the task force members. Then they knew it’s an obligation that extends beyond normal meetings. It’s all about relationships. It’s all about commitment.”*

**–An NCP Organizer**

*“How does Joe Smo who lives on 63rd and Washtenaw know about it? They’re not inclusive, they commissioned these forty-five members with priests and Imam, maybe a rabbi. And they told these people to go out and develop an agenda. It’s these people sitting around saying what we need...we need a statue...we need a...Every person on that task force has an interest. I look at it often like what are we doing.”*

**–Amelia, social service provider in Chicago Lawn**

*“The area we met in the other night is very different than where I live. What exactly are the goals for each community? I don’t know how this works, nobody has ever said what are the goals of this meeting. I don’t know anything about SWOP [Southwest Organizing Project], someone told me they were active in the early seventies... Are we all trying to do the same thing, what is that same thing. It’s only so long that people can keep up the feel-good momentum... will they eventually help us get those things? If there is money to be distributed, how is it going to be distributed? I’ve seen it before. People hold hands much better when they feel like they are getting what they deserve.”*

**–Terry, resident not involved in the task force, at a NCP community forum**

The challenge for creating inclusiveness involves negotiating tensions between newcomers and current stakeholders, as well as middle- and low-income agendas. The opening line of the vision statement for Chicago Lawn's Quality of Life plan reads, "Because we love Chicago Lawn and want to stay here, we envision a community that in five years would be voted one of the top ten most desirable neighborhoods in the county." The line suggests that those involved in the planning are people who have been in the neighborhood for years and feel their place in the neighborhood is threatened. The goal of making it a "desirable neighborhood" implies a will to attract people who would move there by choice as opposed to the people who are moving there due to processes of socioeconomic disenfranchisement. However, as one observer of the Chicago Lawn NCP process advanced, "communities come together to keep others out."

One level of community division marked by the NCP process is between existing stakeholders and already marginalized newcomers. Referring to the class composition of these two groups in the NCP process, Amanda from SWYC asserts:

When you look at these two levels, look at who they are composed of and who they represent, they are creating their own smaller network in order to survive. Can the new communities that have also developed get a share of the resources? If you're not thinking about the low-income constituency, then they are not in your plan. Our work is about creating political will. The issue for us is creating the discourse and political will to bring the low-income agenda to the table. When you work with the sector of kids we work with their agenda is just to survive. They're talking about the parks, hospitals, flowers. When we sit at this table we're concerned with the low-income group.

For Amanda, the NCP process is comprised of agencies (many of whom are social service providers) that focus on middle-income agenda items due to fear that the current influx of low-income residents will compromise the pool of those middle-income individuals barely hanging onto their class position. As she notes, this is occurring at a time in American history when increased economic stratification is leading to the disappearance of the middle class.

There are, of course, low-income residents at some levels of the NCP process. The division between the spectrums of agendas coming to NCP meetings is illustrated when you look at the way the call for a five-year plan breaks down at the individual level. Ray, a middle-aged African American male who has not been a part of any of the task force planning meetings says, "I am a convicted felon. I do security at church. This felony thing is something that happened when I was younger. I know friends that sell drugs, I was guilty by association. When I see somebody now I ask them, 'Where you think you're gonna be at in the next five years.'" Whereas Ray describes a sector of the neighborhood seemingly without control of their own horizon, Terry points to both a different sense of time and a different vision for the future. Her broader scope of concern articulates her desire to stay in the neighborhood and is partially determined by her class position. A middle-aged African American female who also has not been a part of the planning task force but has attended more NCP community meetings than Ray, she explains:

My sense is that in five years, this will be the new Englewood or Bronzeville [referring to the changes in investment patterns she sees in these communities]. There are some very nice small homes in this community. If we don't get dumped on within the next five years this community will be recognized as attractive... in that time I don't know what will happen.

Read together, Ray and Terry's comments reveal how the conditions of possibility for planning are largely determined by the conditions of possibility within any given individual's life. One's ability to maintain can thereby empower one's ability to make change.

Amanda from SWYC emphasizes the need to understand how the middle- and low-income levels are represented in the social service provision world. She says the middle class is worried about becoming the lower class, while many social service providers still target the middle class. Thus there is a lack of representation of low-income needs on neighborhood agendas as many social service providers still try to create a neighborhood for those they identify as their primary constituency.

While the planning process attempts to create links between diverse groups and gather community

input, due to the emphasis on institutional organizing, the process does not include the broader base of community stakeholders in the actual planning. It is this base of low-income voices that many of the grassroots agencies would like to see better represented during implementation phases, and at some level it is this base that grassroots agencies are charged with representing. As a whole the NCP undoubtedly provides a unique opportunity that could ultimately contribute greatly to multicultural neighborhood cooperation. Nonetheless, the five-year plan runs the risk of homogenizing institutional agendas while further dividing social service labor in the area. In order for the implementation of the NCP plan to intervene in a way that creates sustainable success, it is necessary for the available resources to be invested in new stakeholders.

As parts of the neighborhood have organized to take control of the community's future, there is a clear need to cultivate new leaders and redistribute power among a broader base of residents in order to make any attempts at democratic community change viable. There are numerous actors within the process that are willing to work towards this goal. Yet while the NCP's primary organizers are sincerely trying to build a sense of community at every step of the process, for many their approach is not effectively building inclusive paths for political participation. Due to under-addressed neighborhood dynamics, there is a potential gap between the organizers' intentions and the outcomes of their energies. Efforts towards building political participation are severely restrained by the limited "sense of community" that would otherwise motivate broad-based involvement. As has been illustrated, Chicago Lawn has insufficient dynamic multicultural spaces. This is compounded with class differentials that demand more productive attention on neighborhood agendas. In sum, this means an agenda needs to be developed that invests more resources in permanent spaces capable of catalyzing dynamic community participation for those residents who continue to be marginalized. In order for grassroots participation to be cultivated amidst determinations of the community's future, it is necessary for grassroots agencies to help lead these changes at the neighborhood level. As described below, many are already doing their part.

## Current Efforts for Change

Some of the residents that understand the relationship between awareness and action are actively working to create multicultural learning environments around these issues. One of these, a Latina social change agent in the neighborhood, is trying to organize youth forums on race. She explains, "There needs to be content. Kids are getting shot over this. The Arab American Action Network got burned down over this. SANAD [another Arab American and Arab immigrant agency] got a brick through their window over this." Still others try to create diverse spaces on the basketball court or in their church choirs. Any effort to unite diverse groups across differences will result in 'cohesion' much different than that previously experienced by longtime Chicago Lawn white residents who have stayed in the area.

Places where people regularly come together are post-shooting vigils, worship services, CAPS and Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) meetings, and the occasional community forum<sup>1</sup>. The challenge in today's Chicago Lawn is to stimulate cooperative efforts that allow for cultural differences in the absence of a single ethnic or class identity. Any shared social space developed today must explicitly depart from the legacy of violent social exclusion. As Rasha asserts, "For some what might have been a fond memory, was a nightmare for a large segment of the population." Diversity is presently something that is valued in official neighborhood discourses and begrudged during informal conversations. While an official premium should be placed on diversity, the reasons for this must be clear and there must indeed be content. An emphasis might be placed not only on cultural and intellectual growth, but also on the type of political growth that is made possible through cross-cultural coalitions built on the daily reinforcement of trust and common understanding. There are other existing efforts to create "spaces," both metaphorical and physical, that bring people together in a way that allows for cultural differences. These ongoing efforts, which include contributions by block clubs, cultural literacy programs, informal child care networks and organizations like Sisters Organized for United Leadership, are discussed in the concluding sections of this paper.

## Grassroots Agencies

Several organizations currently operating in Chicago Lawn are tremendous assets to the community, and regardless of their size (emerging, developing or mature), with additional support they each could have a greater impact<sup>ii</sup>. Both SWYC and the Inner City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) run regular programs that empower youth and their families through collective community experiences. Metropolitan Family Services, whose Southwest headquarters are actually in West Lawn, is a professional social service provider that does specialized counseling. Southwest Women Working Together enables women and their families to lead empowered and violence-free lives. Greater Lawn Community Youth Network, while working primarily with youth under twelve, provides an array of educational, cultural and recreational services. The Arab American Action Network, while already a mature grassroots agency, is now beginning to emphasize and develop their youth programming. Their focus is on Arab immigrants and Arab American youth.

The CeaseFire Safe Haven at St. Rita's church, with the support of SWYC and SWOP, will be developed as a model drop-in center for gang affiliated youth. It will provide activities for the most violence-prone youth during the most violence-prone hours of the day. This brief list of organizational assets in the Chicago Lawn area demonstrates local efforts to be more inclusive of the diversity, as represented particularly by youth, and suggests pathways for building future efforts toward positive social change.

## Building on Existing Assets to Create Sustainable and Inclusive Solutions

The need to invest neighborhood power in the residents is clear. And, according to many residents in Chicago Lawn, so is the need to constructively deploy underutilized buildings and foreclosed homes. Several examples of community activities and organizations already at work in Chicago Lawn have been given, and more are described below. These forces should serve as a foundation for future efforts and planning in the community. Specific recommendations include:

- Team up with capable mainstream organizations to secure spaces that can foster grassroots political participation; provide mainstream organizations

a way to contribute to an inclusive community mission (e.g. attaining space, deploying NCP resources); create spaces that build multicultural and intergenerational interaction with leadership that represents Chicago Lawn's diverse composition.

- Work with other grassroots agencies to develop a plan for "Homebase Community, Family and Youth Organizing Centers" modeled after the previously existing West Englewood Youth and Family Center run by SWYC.
- Model the proposal to provide holistic community programming that will counter the division of social service labor in the area. Consider designing the attainment of these spaces as a system to reward blocks that get organized.
- Work with pre-existing resident organizations (e.g. block clubs) wherever possible around the government of these spaces. Help develop a block-based network to work with the already growing youth empowerment movement in the area.
  - Create intergenerational organizing strategies that allow these groups to work collaboratively, while maintaining spaces for both adult and youth ownership.
- Create spaces allowing for integrated and cross-organizational programming.
  - Work with blocks near Homebase Centers to create awareness that, as one Neighborhood Housing Services employee says, "there aren't problems with Section 8 renters, the problems are with absentee management."
  - Continue pattern of collaboration between fellow grassroots organizations and youth-led groups.
    - Co-develop community organizing curricula with area organizers interested in creating resident power bases (e.g. how to organize for changes in schools).
    - Address the rise in teen dating violence and create dialogue among parents/adults and youth through a regular workshop designed by Sisters Organized for United Leadership and Southwest Women Working Together.

- Work with CeaseFire to create more spaces for programs like “In These Shoes” that catalyze intergenerational dialogues and the pressures of gangs.
- Target existing cultural literacy programs to deal specifically with changing community patterns.
  - Facilitate multicultural potlucks for “new neighbors.”
  - Develop workshops that address where people are moving from (e.g. West Bank, Mexico, a downstate prison, a demolished high-rise).
- Lend space/program resources to pre-existing informal child care networks wherever possible. Investigate programs to help informal day care networks establish formal homecare programs.
  - A resource library for homecare providers.
  - Create a system where homecare providers can cover for each other when emergencies arise.
- Provide grant-writing trainings for residents and other initiatives that will enable Chicago Lawn community members to compete for social change positions in the neighborhood.
- Where possible, develop those few vacant lots that do exist with intergenerational urban agriculture programs.

## Bibliography

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New Communities Project

N/D Quality of Life Plan: Chicago Lawn.  
Handout at Southwest Organizing Project meeting, summer 2004. Chicago: SWOP.

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i While school and to some extent the workplace also provide cross-cultural interactions, these institutions are often largely shaped by both the extra-school community dynamics and persistent institutional racisms.

ii The wording and content of this section is tied directly to the geography of Chicago Lawn on a land use map. Find this map at [www.fieldmuseum.org/urbanresearch/](http://www.fieldmuseum.org/urbanresearch/)