

## ***Organizational strengths***

We are strongly faith-based in a broad sense. We believe in the ultimate value of love as respectful, caring relationships between neighbors. We believe in justice as the social form of love expressed at the local level as the presence of systems, facilities, organizations, and programs that make possible full human development.

We are ecumenical, having on our Board and staff persons of several faiths. We are inter-racial and multi-ethnic at all levels. We serve people without regard to their faith. We do not infuse a specific faith content on the content of our programs. People of all backgrounds are drawn to our events and programs.

We staff our agency with a strong preference for a high level of academic achievement and a strong capability of understanding the theoretical basis for our work.

We are research-based, focusing our energies on strategies that have proven value.

We are collaboration-oriented. We bring multiple agencies into our communities, placing the emphasis on service and outcomes, not on control.

We are asset-based. By building on a community's existing physical and human assets, we gain efficiency and effectiveness.

We address facilities development as well as educational and recreational programs. We recognize the importance of having physical that allow the community to address its needs.

## ***Multidimensional approach***

Our belief is that community, family, and individual development are best addressed through a single unified strategy. This accomplishes the following synergistic benefits:

- A community that achieves basic amenities and deals effectively with negative features or “dissatisfiers” is a community that will strengthen the desire of its residents in favor of staying in the neighborhood as they prosper over time.
- A community that retains its successful families is a stable neighborhood with effective leadership. It will evolve strong bonds between families and a healthy environment for the nurture of the young.
- Community success is enhanced as residents succeed in achieving their personal and family goals.

We address community and individual goals simultaneously. Failure to do so has all the effectiveness of trying to cool a hot frying pan over an open flame by adding water one drop at a time. Our tactic is to target a limited area that functions as a living neighborhood. There, we ask residents to identify the key issues that will make the biggest difference for the quality of life. We identify together the key human, organizational and physical assets that can be brought to bear on those issues. We then go to work creating action plans that make the desired changes.

For example, in the All Saints Neighborhood Center area, complaints were:

- A dangerous intersection
- Absence of activities for children

- Adults, especially parents, needed English and GED instruction
- The sewers were backing up
- Need for computer training
- Home deterioration

Our resources were:

- Residents willing to circulate and sign petitions
- Politicians willing to give us their time to listen
- A closed church
- Lots left vacant by demolitions
- Connections with universities, governmental agencies and other nonprofits
- The capabilities of residents to repair their own homes if they had confidence in their neighborhood's future.

After six years, we have:

- Traffic lights
- A park under construction
- A neighborhood center busy five days a week, mornings, afternoons and evenings
- Renovated sewers
- Adult education programs
- Many private homes renovated with new siding, windows, gutters, porches, and roofs.

More importantly, adults are achieving life goals, children feel wanted and challenged, and families are putting down roots to stay.

## ***Family***

**Goal-Setting:** We find that some low income families think in terms of a short time horizon – the week-to-week challenge of survival. While many have long term aspirations, they often lack comprehensive plans with systematic objectives that will take them step by step to their goals. Some try various training courses but when prospective employers find that they lack required complementary skills or traits, they become disheartened about prospects for advancement. Also, families may support long term achievement goals of family members but do not support the means to those ends (e.g., quiet time for study or nurture of self-confidence of spouse or children).

NCI addresses community, family, and individual development through a single unified strategy centered around the creation of "Family Achievement Plans (FAPs)." We create a FAP each time we have contact with a new family. The plan expands over time as we get to know the customer and his or her family. The plans in the aggregate drive agency program planning. The Family Achievement Coach (FAC) reviews programs to assure that family needs drive program planning.

We explored several ways of involving families in activities that improve family relationships. Formal classes on parenting did not attract participation from our residents. However, our parents are very interested in Friday evening activities that they could bring their children to with a meal being part of the event. Two trials of this format attracted large family turnouts. Parents said they would also like to address personal and intergenerational recreation as well as community issues in this context. Clearly, infusing parent/child activities, parenting information and community issues content into family events is the way that we will go with future programming.

## ***NCI Project Areas***

### ***Academic:***

When we talk with our neighbors about their life goals, the term “GED” comes up quite often. People recognized that this high school equivalency certificate can open doors for them. The Census 2000 data underscores the challenge – 55% of the adults in the ASNC area do not have high school diplomas and 24% do not have a ninth grade education. We have therefore implemented a strong GED program in English and Spanish with advanced computer software support.

We are convinced that there is a direct correlation between parental educational attainment and the high dropout rate of our young people. We believe that part of the solution for young people lies in helping parents achieve their educational goals. Parents who can tutor their children in middle school math and who are confident in talking to teachers will have a much stronger position in challenging their children to complete school.

Before coming to Neighborhood Centers Incorporated, our Executive Director completed dissertation research that documented that low educational attainment was the strongest predictor among urban minority males of mortality related to homicide and drug abuse. The preponderance of research in substance abuse prevention support the central thrust of our program efforts: We can lower substance abuse rates by focusing child and adult development, community standards, and structural support of long term community recreation programs that bring adults and children together.

### ***Arts:***

NCI promotes art in public places to achieve multiple payoffs for our community. We have a 12' x 14' wall at the wall in the former altar area of the All Saints Neighborhood Center. We used the removal of poor quality faux stained glass and paneling at that point as an opportunity for our youth program. Our teens created a giant mural reflecting their view of the City from the vantage point of southwest Detroit. Bold images of smokestacks, skyscrapers, the Ambassador Bridge, the river and the homes of their neighbors tell the story of life as they experience it.

Not only is the Center a more exciting place. The teens now have the satisfaction of having created something over an extended period of time that becomes their lasting contribution to the community, mastering skills in the process.

We also learned that garage doors present an endless source of canvases for public art and that, as art replaces graffiti, it also seems to repel future graffiti. Again, youth contribute in a lasting way to the betterment of the community and feel valued for their contribution.

## ***Childcare:***

NCI recognizes the implications of brain development research for the healthy neighborhood. Seventy-five percent of the potential effective intelligence of an adult is created by the “wiring” of the brain that occurs in years 0 through 7, and most growth occurs by age 3. The potential of the child’s developing brain is realized only when both nurture and developmental stimuli surround the child on a daily basis from birth. Some families still view the early years primarily in terms of physical growth and make little provision for stimulation of brain development. Others recognize the need but lack the means to respond. Further, many parents are forced by work demands to make childcare arrangements that are affordable but substandard. Increasingly, grandparents become the primary caregivers with limited energies and means to meet children’s needs.

We, however, know that the glass is half full. The neighborhoods we serve have dormant facilities that can become splendid childcare centers. On almost every block there is at least one adult who is under-employed, who loves children, and who would be delighted to have the opportunity to receive training to become a childcare professional. We have partnered with professionals who can provide the training and organization to create childcare environments that contribute daily developmental experiences to preschool children, challenging their brains to the more complex levels of organization that will make them highly successful adults.

In Detroit’s Michigan Avenue/Livernois neighborhood, NCI located unused classrooms in a parochial school. We brought a wing of the school up to demanding health, fire and infant/childcare codes for less than \$5000. With the help of the McGregor Fund, we partnered with Children’s Outreach Inc. to brightly and completely furnish these rooms to the highest childcare standards. Our partner is now offering the only full service licensed childcare service in southwest Detroit.

Recognizing that childcare is a daily service that must be conveniently available to benefit work-harried and transportation-hampered families, we are preparing the way for a second facility in southwest Detroit’s Springwells/W. Vernor/W. Fort St. neighborhood. There, our home base, All Saints Neighborhood Center, a former church building, is undergoing extensive renovations. While more costly (about \$500,000 of which \$379,000 is already raised), the completed project will be a multi-service facility, open 15 hours a day for adult education, youth programs, community activities and childcare. We expect to begin childcare there in the fall of 2004, again with Children’s Outreach Inc. as the service provider.

## ***Computer skills:***

From the beginning of All Saints Neighborhood Center, we responded to the desire of our community’s residents to participate in the Information Age. We offered dozens of Computer Basics classes. Our young people have daily access to computer resources through the youth program and use this technology for school and center projects as well as recreation.

At the adult level, we now recognize the need to move into a more specific area of technology support to the goals of our residents. Many of our residents are skilled in construction trades and landscaping. As they make efforts to move into contracting, their limited education creates multiple hurdles. For example, some may not know how to balance a checkbook and may try to handle business out of their personal checkbooks. Estimates are done intuitively and payroll is handled informally. We can show them how to use simple software programs for project design, estimating, and basic bookkeeping so that they can build business success more rapidly.

Our computer lab for public use mirrors our staff resources: Pentium III computers, networked to a file server, Internet linked via DSL, with Office 97 and Houghton Mifflin GED software.

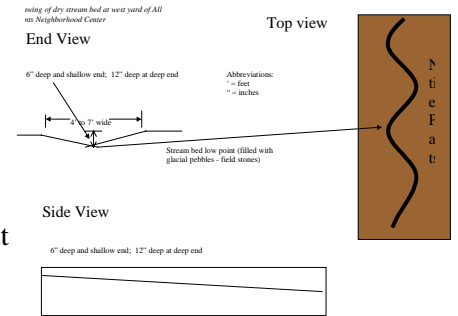
## Youth Programs at All Saints Neighborhood Center

### Daily After-School Program

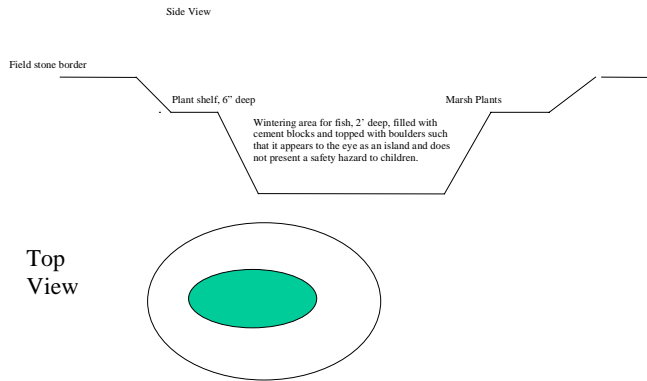
Under the direction of Sarah Helen Parmelee, M.Ed., our children and teens meet daily for homework assistance, computer play, and special learning projects that combine crafts, community service, exploration and recreation.

### A Recent Initiative – the Gardens at All Saints Neighborhood Center.

In connection with development of our park across the street, (a 28,000 square foot project in partnership with the Wayne County Division of Parks), we asked our young people for features that they would like to see incorporated in the design. We were surprised by their passionate advocacy for a wetland. We explained that it would not be possible at the park site but that we could incorporate wetland features into Center’s fenced side and back yard where runoff from the Center’s roof provides an ample water supply. This summer, our elementary and middle school children dug out and landscaped a swale and began construction of a marsh area that will provide a fish and frog habitat. The latter will be separately fenced and will incorporate design safety features that will leave only six inches of water exposed yet allow fish to find deeper locations for wintering.



Wetland Marsh Feature



We will develop butterfly, shade and meditation gardens adjacent to this area – all with direct participation from youth who will learn in the process how to do this at home. A raised bed in a sunny spot at the front will provide vegetable and flower garden opportunities.

## NCI and Churches

NCI and churches complement each other. Churches nurture the deeply held values that lead people to trust and serve one another, values that are the foundation of a healthy community.

NCI helps churches to wed their values to effective action strategies and to share their values through relationships with neighborhood residents.

NCI helps partner churches:

- Provide caring, safe settings within which adults of faith can share their skills and values with children
- Create a parish or neighborhood complement to Word and Sacrament ministries that communicates the church's sense of caring for its community
- Rally the limited resources of several churches in a community around shared goals
- Leverage the limited resources of churches with public dollars for programs and facilities
- Find secular partners for staffing and funding human and community development programs
- Create a social bridge to the community making it possible to form relationships and become acquainted with the people of the neighborhoods that the churches serve

Neighborhood Centers Incorporated operates its first site, All Saints Neighborhood Center, on behalf of All Saints Catholic Parish to communicate the care of parish for the needs of all people of the community. We developed the center in way that was consistent with Catholic social teaching on the development of peoples and on subsidiarity (encouraging the evolution of organized community life at levels close to the people). NCI also brought recruited Children's Outreach Inc., a group with Evangelical roots, to bring expert childcare services to parish neighborhoods. **We serve all people without regard to race or religion. Our Board includes members of many faiths.**

### ***Personal Statement by the Executive Director***

*(The NCI Executive Director has a master's degree in theology and experience in church ministry in a Lutheran church. He has ties to Evangelical traditions by personal history and to Roman Catholic traditions by membership. He has a growing acquaintance with Orthodox, Jewish and Muslim traditions. )*

Reared and educated (Wheaton, '62), as an Evangelical Christian, I have applied my Christian perspective to the challenges I have observed in the course of my career in public service, spent almost entirely in the City of Detroit. I've worked as a minister and as a program developer and administrator in substance abuse services. I volunteered as a community council president, Sunday school teacher, and church council member. I did my political science doctoral dissertation in research on factors contributing to urban epidemics of substance abuse and violence.

I concluded that my final contribution would be to create bridges of relationships between churches and their communities that would permit people of faith to demonstrate the integrity of their Christian commitment through joint, caring action on the problems that dishearten urban families – neighborhoods in disarray, children choosing the path to self-destruction, and personal goals unfulfilled. I found that urban Roman Catholic parish churches offer an exceptionally strong context within which to exercise this calling. From within the parish, our organization can help it to serve its own community as well as help other people and churches of other faiths participate in broad-based community and human development initiatives that they would not be able to launch on their own.

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Executive Director