

TEACHING THE HUNGRY TO FISH

Group Helps Inner-City Neighborhood Help Itself

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Calling themselves the Catholic Consortium of Stark County, a group of Catholic organizations is collaborating on projects that serve poor and underserved people in Canton, OH. Catholic Community Services, Walsh University, St. Joseph Care Center, the House of Loreto, Central Catholic High School, St. Thomas Aquinas High School, Columbia Mercy Medical Center, and two priests representing the county's 27 parishes formed the partnership in 1994, when Bp. James W. Malone urged groups in the diocese to seek opportunities for collaboration.

The consortium decided to focus its work on an impoverished neighborhood, selecting Skyline Terrace in Canton. Skyline Terrace is a privately owned, federally subsidized, inner-city housing development, inhabited by about 1,000 residents, most of whom are poor. It has a high crime rate. In 1994 Skyline Terrace's reputation was so bad that residents could not even get newspapers or pizzas delivered to them.

However, conditions have improved in the neighborhood in recent years, partly because of the consortium's efforts.

THE CATHOLIC CONSORTIUM'S PROJECTS

In 1994 the Catholic Consortium began by developing a questionnaire which each adult resident of Skyline Terrace is asked to complete. On one hand, residents are asked to list skills (plumbing or electrical skills, for example) they might want to share with the community. And, on the other hand, they are asked to list needs (tutoring for children, for example) the community might help them meet.

Partly because of the residents' responses to the questionnaire, the consortium decided to help organize the following programs.

Ask a Nurse Since 1994 the consortium has

arranged for healthcare personnel (including nurses, dentists, and pharmacists) to make monthly visits to Skyline Terrace's community center to screen residents for symptoms of illness and to answer any health questions they may have. The nurses—usually a member of Columbia Mercy's Parish Nurse program or a nursing instructor from Walsh University—also visit neighborhood senior citizens in their homes.

In 1995 the consortium also made it possible for some neighborhood residents to receive training as nurse assistants, after which several were hired by Columbia Mercy or one of the area's long-term care centers.

Campaign against Violence In May 1995 the consortium cooperated with organizations throughout the Canton area to hold a Stop the Violence Week. The groups involved invited John Alston, the author of a book called *Talking with Teens in Turbulent Times*, to come to the city to give talks and lead a workshop on reducing violence. A dance ensemble from Skyline Terrace performed after one of Alston's talks. During the week, the consortium helped coordinate a countywide program in which 281 guns were "bought back" with food, sports equipment, and gift certificates.

Scout Group Also in 1995, a group of Columbia Mercy employees began working with a Skyline Terrace mother to launch a Cub Scout den for her son and a group of his friends. Since the group's founding, the boys have learned how to make tacos, toured a candy factory, and journeyed to Cleveland to see a major-league baseball game. With the help of volunteers from a local parish, they also built and raced a vehicle in a local Pinewood Derby.

Summer Camps for Kids In 1995 the consortium set up a week-long summer day camp for 40 Skyline Terrace children between the ages of four and six. Called Omode Alafia, which is Swahili for "Little

Children for Peace," the camp helped build the children's self-esteem and taught them peaceful ways of solving disputes. Students from area colleges, high schools, and junior high schools served as camp counselors.

Camp Omode Alafia was held again for 40 young neighborhood children in 1996. In addition, a second camp, called Camp Imani Na Umoja ("Faith and Unity"), was organized for 36 children between seven and nine years old.

College and high school students again acted as counselors.

After-School Tutoring In January 1996 the consortium began a program in which six student volunteers from Central Catholic High School tutor Skyline Terrace children after regular school hours. The volunteers focus on helping the younger children, students in grades one through five, with their mathematics and reading skills. The program has been so successful that the consortium has set up another one in a different Canton neighborhood.

Community Garden In the summer of 1996, several consortium members—including a local parish priest and the pastor of a nearby Baptist church—joined some Skyline Terrace residents in planting a community garden. Participants—including the neighborhood Cub Scouts—grow both vegetables and flowers in the garden, which is on land owned by the neighborhood's community center.

Community Newsletter Since May 1996 consortium members have helped Skyline Terrace residents publish a monthly community newsletter. The publication carries neighborhood news, recipes, household hints, and announcements of coming events. Partly written by neighborhood residents, it is published by volunteers from Columbia Mercy Medical Center and Catholic Community Services, with some financial aid from the Stark County United Way.

THE CONSORTIUM EXPANDS ITS EFFORTS

In the summer of 1996, the consortium decided to expand its efforts. It formed three subcommit-

In Project C.A.R.E., Skyline Terrace residents are trained as mediators and health educators.

tees, each of which was assigned to a specific topic:

- Parish outreach. This subcommittee serves as a liaison between the consortium and the area's parishes. This year, for example, it is replicating Skyline Terrace's summer camp program in three other Canton neighborhoods. The subcommittee will give "Back to School" supply bags to the more than 150 children attending the camps.

- Education. This subcommittee has established a program in which teenagers who

participate in consortium activities are given tokens of appreciation, ranging from certificates to mugs bearing the consortium logo.

- Skyline Terrace. The third subcommittee has recently launched Project C.A.R.E. (Creative Approach to Resident Empowerment), a program in which 10 Skyline Terrace residents will be trained as mediators and health educators. In return for their work in the development, the 10 residents will get rent reductions. The program is funded by several area businesses and a local foundation.

In addition, the consortium joined Direction 2000, the Youngstown Diocese's five-year plan, whose goals include bringing the diocese's parish nurse program into each of its parishes; expanding education on assisted suicide, care for the dying, holistic healing, domestic violence, and child abuse; boosting parish-level involvement in legislative advocacy; and assisting pregnant women.

In the future, the consortium plans to create what it calls the Catholic Center City Campus—various programs for underserved populations in Canton's inner city. These programs, like those in Skyline Terrace, will be constructed to fit the assets of the people served.

PART OF THE CATHOLIC HERITAGE

In showing the residents of Skyline Terrace how they might improve their lives, the Catholic Consortium has tried to follow the adage: "Rather than give a hungry person a piece of fish, it is better to teach him how to catch fish so that he can feed himself." □