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"A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work"

SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS: AGENTS OF COMMUNITY CHANGE

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Abstract

This workshop demonstrates how social work students from a Christian university are serving as agents of change in a low-income community. Vital partnership with the neighborhood association and social work program has students operating a neighborhood storefront social service center and providing needed community organization activities community-wide.

Workshop Description

Social work students can be mobilized as agents of social change. This workshop shows how the social work program at Oral Roberts University collaborates with various organizations and agencies to improve the lives of residents in a low-income neighborhood, some three miles away. Since the spring of 2005, social work students have operated a store-front service center, providing for basic needs (food, clothing, and bus tokens), needs assessments, computer center access, referrals, and after school

programs for area children. Additionally, students assist the neighborhood association with organizational activities, through developing and maintaining partnerships with area churches, social service organizations, police, schools, and Tulsa's planning department. Students from other university disciplines are funneled into performing needed projects in the community as well: Education, Communication Arts, English, Business, Art, science, Music, and Honors. Student involvement in the community, over the past several years (since 1998), has been an important ingredient contributing to improved neighborhood conditions: reduced crime, improved test scores in area schools, improved infrastructure development in the neighborhood, and provision of basic needs to area residents.

Workshop Objectives

Those participating in the workshop will: (a) discover how social work students can be a force for positive change in the community; and (b) learn how networking and collaborative activities (involving student participation) with local governmental, religious, and social service organizations can strengthen a community.

Community Description

The Riverwood community, the name adopted by the local neighborhood association as one attempt to help combat the area's bad image, is a four census tract area surrounding a key intersection: 61st and S. Peoria in South Tulsa. The area is bounded by Interstate 44 to the North, Riverside Drive (the Arkansas River) to the West, 71st Street to

the South, and Lewis Avenue to the East (which runs adjacent to Southern Hills Country Club, 2007 home of the 89th PGA Championship). See Map in Attachment A.

The community is known for its high density population from 40 apartment complexes, located within the neighborhood perimeter (21) and adjacent to the community (19), its crime problem, and poverty. There are over 1000 Section 8 apartment units within the area, along with a substantial number of units for low-income families sanctioned through various tax exempt programs (or tax exempt financing) approved in past years by city government. A number of dilapidated apartment complexes are owned by local and out-of-state investors. Census data for the four census tracts from 2000 indicate: a population of 16,171 living in a 2.4 square mile area; an average family income of \$28,686, including 5.7 % earning under \$5,000, 20.3% under \$15,000, and 39.0% under \$25,000; a racial composition of 70.9 white, 19.0% Black, and 4.8% Hispanic (but, this population has grown substantially). Two elementary schools service the area: Marshall and McClure. Marshall's enrollment stands at 385, with 26% African American, 49% Hispanic, and 84% on the school lunch program. McClure's enrollment is 405, including 52% African American, 21% Hispanic, and 97% on the school lunch program.

In 1998, the Riverwood community was portrayed as the top crime area in the city of Tulsa. Since then, the crime has slowly fallen, leaving the area no longer at the top. Nevertheless, the high concentration of low-income persons and crime (real and perceived) in the area serves as a deterrent to economic development.

The neighborhood has stabilized in its downward trend. According to the Life Cycle Model (Homan, 2004) for understanding community change, the community went

from a stable and viable community in the 1960s and 1970s to one of minor decline and clear decline in the 1980s and 1990s. It is thought the community may have avoided reaching the final two stages of a heavily deteriorated neighborhood and an unhealthy and nonviable neighborhood. Collaboration between the local neighborhood association (South Peoria Neighborhood Connection Foundation, Inc.), City Council (the area is split by two Council Districts), Tulsa Police, Tulsa Planning Department, local churches, area schools, Oral Roberts University students, apartment managers, social service agencies, and area businesses has led to improvements in the Riverwood community. The following discussion will describe those forces contributing to community improvement.

Neighborhood Rebound

The following activities and forces have contributed to the neighborhood's rebound over the past several years (since 1993):

- The South Peoria Connection Foundation, Inc. (neighborhood organization referred to as the SPNCF) as a 501 (c) 3 not-for-profit organization was founded in 1993 to address neighborhood decline, crime, and issues of poverty and lack of social services to the area. The neighborhood was later changed to Riverwood (near the Arkansas River), but the legal name of the organization remains the SPNCF.
- The SPNCF obtained a moratorium (in 1993) from the City Council to block further proliferation of Section 8 housing.

- In 1996, the SPNCF, working with city government, was able to secure Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to raze the dilapidated Village Square and Newport Square apartment complexes.
- In 1996, the SPNCF established the South Peoria Neighborhood House—a storefront social service center providing food, clothing, and referral services to residents. The House came into being through a grant from the CDBG program. Family and Children’s Services, Hillcrest Medical Center, and the Red Cross were early collaborators in providing services to the community through the Neighborhood House. CDBG funds continue to finance services sponsored by the Neighborhood House.
- Increased police presence was enabled through Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grants in early 2000. The Tulsa Housing Authority secured HUD funding (Safe Neighbors and New Approach grants) to provide extra police coverage of the area. These grants provided overtime pay to officers electing to work the area.
- In 1997, the SPNCF contracted with the University of Georgia, College of Environmental Design, to develop a neighborhood master plan. Jack Crowley, the college’s director and four of his students, spent time in the community drafting the plan which was subsequently approved by the neighborhood and Tulsa City Council. The Master Plan continues to function as a guide for infrastructure development in the area.
- In 1999, the SPNCF worked with the Tulsa Housing Authority (which held the land where the Village Square and Newport Square once stood) and private builder Jim Beal to divide the land into lots for building private homes. Two years

later, 80 new homes had been built and sold at market rate prices. This project became an example of urban infill for the city.

- During the fall semester of 1998, Oral Roberts University social work students first began working in the neighborhood by conducting a telephone opinion survey of 265 households. The survey sought to determine an array of viewpoints from citizens residing in the area. Surprisingly, most residents were found to be positive about living in the Riverwood community. Following this initial involvement, social work students became regularly involved providing assistance to the Riverwood community. Most notable are the following activities:
 - Senior practicum students operate the South Peoria Neighborhood House providing food, clothing, bus tokens, after school programs for children, and computer access (including high speed internet) for area residents. Since January of 2005, two students have acted as co-directors of Neighborhood House operations. They administer House services during fall and spring semesters and through the summer. View Attachment B at the end of this paper for Neighborhood Statistics from October 2006 through January 2007.
 - Relevant surveys for the SPNCF regarding business interests in the community, evaluation of Neighborhood House services, and needs surveys for two area apartment complexes have been conducted by social work students. Students helped organize tenant associations in two Section 8 apartment complexes.

- Character classes (Impact) for area school children have been provided by social work students at the Neighborhood House since 2000.
- Students have organized Thanksgiving and Christmas parties and dinners for two Section 8 complexes.
- Inhofe Plaza, a Tulsa Housing Authority apartment complex for handicapped and elderly residents, has benefited from social work students providing support group activities.
- Oral Roberts University's Community Outreach has provided services to the community. In 2000, the Outreach Department provided music, food, games, drawings, and a three-on-three basketball tournament for some 2,000 residents. During the fall of 2006, a similar event was held in an area park, co-sponsored by Community Outreach and the Neighborhood House. This event attracted between 300 and 400 residents. The Spring Outreach event for 2007 will again be held at the same neighborhood park.
- Organizing activities (identifying and contacting participants, taking meeting minutes, and providing follow-up communications) have been conducted by social work students in working with area church, apartment manager, and local business owners' task groups.
- Recently, students helped organize a local neighborhood (a subgroup comprising of one of the four census tracts). They worked with neighborhood leaders to pass out fliers and invite residents to participate in planning for renovations in a neighborhood park.

- Social work students have also participated in various grant search and writing activities. One grant provided funds to develop the initial character program at the Neighborhood House. The \$10,000 grant from the Oklahoma Juvenile Authority (1999) provided materials and start-up costs for developing the Character First program (today known as Impact).
- Currently, social work students are working with business majors to create a micro business program for low-income residents who have an interest in starting their own businesses. They also are making plans to consult with area businesses to assist them with establishing objectives and enhancing growth.
- Students are also helping organize a mentoring/tutoring program for area youth as a part of the after school program sponsored by the House.
- In addition to social work student class and practicum projects, ORU students from other disciplines have been involved in providing programs in the community through service-learning activities. Marshall and McClure schools have experienced the participation of students from the disciplines of music, art, honors, science, communication arts, education, and English. Additional students from various disciplines are soon to be involved in a newly developed mentoring focus at the two schools—a program given priority by the Mayor of Tulsa.
- Another positive development in the neighborhood came in 2003, with the opening of two renovated apartment complexes. Kohner Properties, of St. Louis, purchased and rehabilitated two dilapidated and bankrupt complexes in the area.

The apartments are now rented at current market rates and are esthetically attractive.

- The largest Section 8 complex implemented a gated-community concept, with guard house and perimeter fence to restrict trespassing by non-residents. This action has substantially slowed a one time rampant crime rate in the complex.
- In 2003, the SPNCF Board requested that the Mayor of Tulsa provide an urban planner to work with the neighborhood to revise the Master Plan and conduct planning activities to improve infrastructure concerns. Subsequent planning has produced ideas for improvements at a neighborhood park, planning for construction of a community center at another park, entry-way signage on key streets, and widening of a street including new traffic light for a private school. With the help of the planner and City Councilors, \$9.8 million has been allocated for storm water drainage, street, and intersection improvements through passage of a Third Penny Sales Tax.

NACSW Presentation

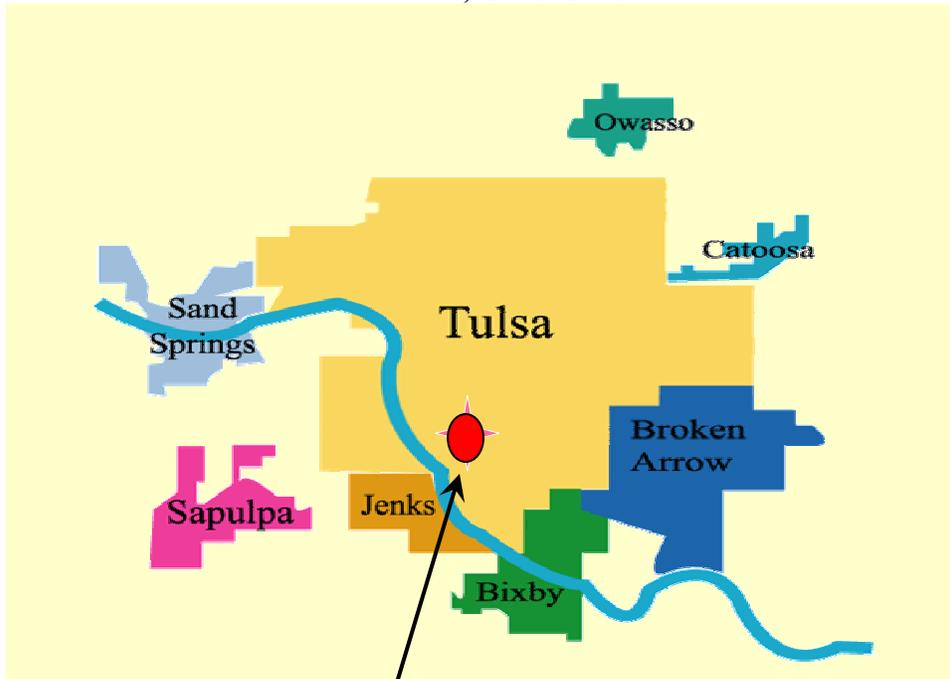
The NACSW presentation, *Social Work Students: Agents of Community Change*, will focus on these forces contributing to the Riverwood community's rebound. Particular attention will be given to the role of students from Oral Roberts University who provided significant manpower resources (i.e., casework, group work, and community organization) over the past nine years. To co-present with Lanny Endicott, director of the ORU social work program, are three students currently working in the community through class projects and practicum activities.

References

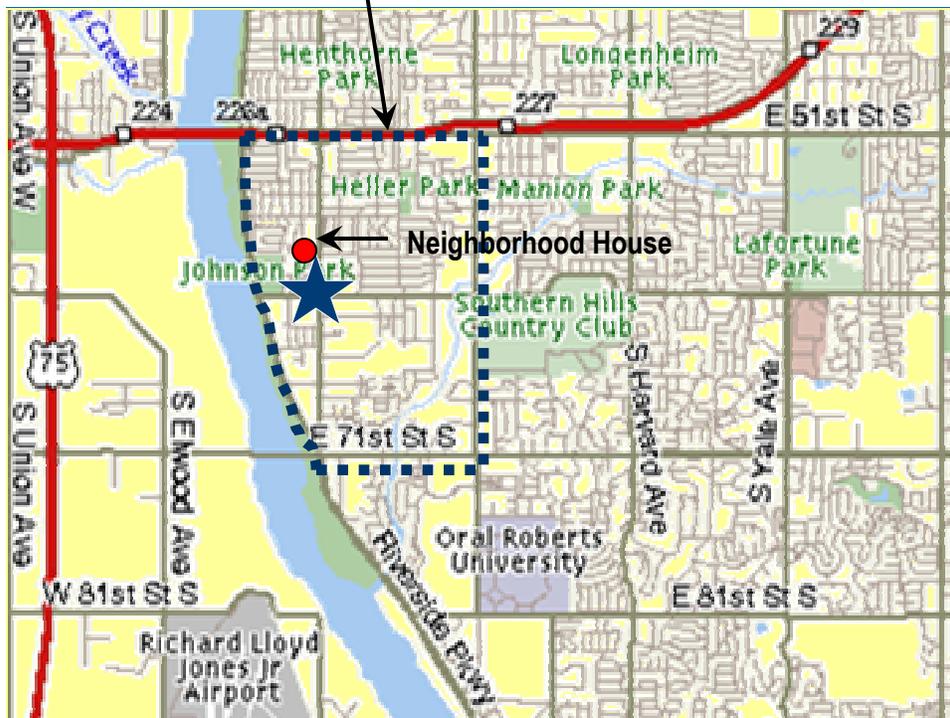
- Boatright, J.A., & Pollard, H. (2002). *The economic development of Riverwood*. Oral Roberts University Social Work Senior Paper.
- Homan, M.S. (2004). *Promoting community change: Making it happen in the real world*. (3rd ed.) Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
- Metro Tulsa Chamber of Commerce: 2000 Census.
- South Peoria Neighborhood Connection Foundation, Inc. and Neighborhood House.
- Tulsa Police Department: Crime Statistics.
- Tulsa Public Schools: Marshall and McClure profiles.

Attachment A

Tulsa, Oklahoma



Riverwood community



Attachment B

South Peoria Neighborhood House Statistical Data October 2006-January 2007

October 2006

Impact Kids:	575
• Average per day:	26
Computer/Phone/Fax:	189
Food/Clothing/Bus Tokens:	100
• Food:	54 Families
• Clothing:	38 Families
• Bus Tokens:	8 Individuals

*Note: The children involved in Impact go to school year round, and were out of school two weeks in October.

November 2006

Impact Kids:	403
• Average per day:	18
Computer/Phone/Fax:	167
Food/Clothing/Bus Tokens:	87
• Food:	41 Families
• Clothing:	34 Families
• Bus Tokens:	12 Individuals

*Note: The children involved in Impact go to school year round, and were out of school two weeks in November.

December 2006

Impact Kids:	549
• Average per day:	26
Computer/Phone/Fax:	166
Food/Clothing/Bus Tokens:	75
• Food:	44 Families
• Clothing:	24 Families
• Bus Tokens:	7 Individuals

January 2007

Impact Kids:	671
• Average per day:	40
Computer/Phone/Fax:	173
Food/Clothing/Bus Tokens:	126
• Food:	75 Families
• Clothing:	37 Families
• Bus Tokens:	14 Individuals