

**11/29/1997**

## **A PERSONAL WORD FOR YOU from Mack McCarter**

There is no doubt about it now. I am absolutely certain of something of profound significance. And it is this: We are stepping right up to the edge of an incredible revolution! Yep!! You and I are not only about to witness, but even better, we are actively participating in a breakthrough effort in rebuilding the basic infrastructure of community. We are making history! Let me show you the picture as I see it.

For years all of us have driven by neighborhoods that we have watched change and begin to physically deteriorate. We could see disintegration. We also sensed, accurately, that there was unseen disintegration occurring, too. The lives of people were in process of unraveling. For years we have been aware. And for years we have been concerned to do something.

Our helping effort took several paths. We made the choice someplace in the nebulous past to call on "government" to fix it. Massive program after massive program has not stopped the implosion and collapse. New terms described old problems. We learned of "urban blight" and we became even more aware, aware of fear and of rage in ourselves and in others.

We began to launch new efforts. We conducted "need assessments" of the increasingly isolated zones within our cities so that we could discover the "problem" and tailor a "program" to solve "it." We "need assessed" them to death. Then we began to construct an elaborate system of "service providers" to meet specific needs in the "at risk" neighborhoods. We learned much. And we have now a generation of skilled and caring professionals all seeking to meet the needs of those who are sinking around us. But the implosion has continued.

An accurate portrait of our scene includes these contemporary vignettes: Whole neighborhoods have been progressively turned into vast *consumers of care services*; Our "service provider" agencies have been built to meet specific needs and they are largely isolated from one another and therefore work in an uncoordinated manner with other agencies; joined by the venerable institutions which provided past stability and help, these agencies all circle about the boundaries of the *client* neighborhood but remain peripheral to any true transformation on a large scale.

The neighborhoods that we drive by remain an unknown blur. And the human lives within them remain terribly obscure. (I have come to learn that there are different kinds of "drive-bys" each just as deadly as the other!) Our "care system" has found no way into their lives and we have devised such a maze of services that our isolated neighbors have found no effective means to access the help or to navigate the agency seas. An occasional care agency "walk-in" emerges from the risk zone which activates the care giving expertise waiting to help. Then, because there is no sequence to follow to move the "client" onward through *inward change*, he or she slips back into the chaotic neighborhood sea from which they came. How can we paint a new picture?

One attempt has been to coordinate the care giving agencies. All over America the buzz word is “collaboration” or “coalition.” This is an important step indeed because it is an effort to solve the dilemma produced by the “one problem/one program” approach. It is crucial to be able to “sequence the resources” intended to help bring a new quality of life to the persons who have been on the margins of our society.

But all too often this effort has simply increased the efficiency of a passive care giving system which must still wait for “walk-in” traffic to activate the mechanisms of “help.” Problems might be solved but *the problem which produced the problems is left untouched*. There has been no change in the neighborhood which is the problem “factory,” because there has been no strategy to penetrate the neighborhood itself and change it from the inside out. Instead of neighborhood-circling agencies, we now have peripherally circling “coalitions!” A way in needs to be found. And so does a way out.

But neighborhoods cannot change unless the people who live within them experience true change in their own lives. That is the key! A whole new approach is vitally necessary. What steps do we need to take to move toward the light?

This is where you and I are participating in a movement of profound historical significance. *While the step of coordinating the care-giving agencies is of immense importance, what Shreveport Community Renewal is undertaking is absolutely critical. We are following a strategy to coordinate the whole neighborhood community!* We will be a door for the service providers into the neighborhood to help and a door for our neighbors to abandon their old neighborhood by changing it!

Here’s how: By moving into the neighborhood to live and to love, our ICU leaders will reestablish bonds through real friendship working first through children and youth. We prove our love by investing our lives in the most precious possession of each neighborhood, her children. We earn trust by serving our neighbors. Then we offer to help each person see a vision of a new tomorrow for their lives. We surround them with a “covenant/friendship team” who will help them journey. We note needs, but we emphasize gifts.

Every neighborhood is a treasure of talents. We will ask “What gifts can you give?” Gifts of the head - “What do you know?” Gifts of the hand - “What can you do?” and Gifts of the heart - “What will you commit?” Our aim is to turn each neighborhood from being just consumers of services into producers of a new community!!

Our Strategic Planning Committee under Bob Honig has produced a dynamic, practical, and revolutionary plan. It is an eight step outline of a process which will be a bridge between a coordinated service provider group and a coordinated neighborhood community. I will publish it in the next issue of RENEWAL NEWS. STAY TUNED!! ISN’T THIS EXCITING?!!!