

TARGET Area DevCorp

Unearthing the Roots of Unrest through Surveying, Research, and Perpetual Evaluation

Since 1995, TARGET Area DevCorp (TARGET Area) has been working to improve, develop, and reenergize the communities of Auburn Gresham and Englewood in Chicago, Illinois. Through community planning, developing local leaders, and connecting systems and residents, TARGET Area has demonstrated that given the tools and opportunities, it is the residents who can best address and impact the challenging problems that plague our community. Through an aggressive surveying campaign from 1998 through 2000, TARGET Area interviewed over 2,000 residents in Auburn Gresham. Residents identified the following recurring issues:

- ✿ *Unrestricted flow of drugs:* There is seemingly an unlimited and unrestricted flow of drug sales and purchases in the Auburn Gresham community. The youth in Auburn Gresham report that they witness at least one drug trade transaction every week. However, this is not the case in Beverly, the adjacent neighboring community.
- ✿ *Employment, job training, & after school programs:* Employment, job training and after school programs are an immediate priority as alternatives for youth to the existing drug culture. Residents do not understand why scores of young black males appear to idly stand around with nothing to do. In addition, seniors express fear toward ex-offenders who are returning to the neighborhood in alarming numbers.
- ✿ *Community/police relations:* Strained relationships exist between residents and police. Residents do not believe police distinguish between law-abiding individuals and those who commit crimes. Drug trade and current police procedures result in the mass incarceration of young black males, creating a sense of fear in the community toward police, especially among youth.
- ✿ *School Improvement:* Residents understand that all schools in Auburn Gresham are on the State Academic Watch List. Residents believe youth require more academic support both in school and at home.

During the past six years, TARGET Area has worked to address the interconnectedness of these concerns. We understand that mass incarceration and the subsequent return of thousands of virtually unemployable young men has a direct effect, and in fact, stimulates and perpetuates the drug trade that results in the increasing rate of crime in Auburn Gresham. These issues impact and threaten all of the systems in our community, including education, public safety, economic development, and jobs. Moreover, it has disarmed many of the most vulnerable members of our community leaving many residents feeling defenseless.

As we came to understand the depth of these challenges, in late 2002, TARGET Area

leaders expanded our work to include building coalitions, commissioning research, grassroots organizing, creating demonstration projects, perpetual evaluation, and policy development. Using various research and evaluation tools, we unearth the roots of our challenges and we are empowered to address them. Along the way, we encourage each other to continue to work toward increasing hope, dignity, and opportunity as we build a healthy environment for all that reside or work in the Auburn Gresham and Englewood communities.

Patricia Watkins
Executive Director
TARGET Area DevCorp