

# Report from Strengthening Neighborhoods 2009-2010



Strengthening Neighborhoods  
A program of The Denver Foundation

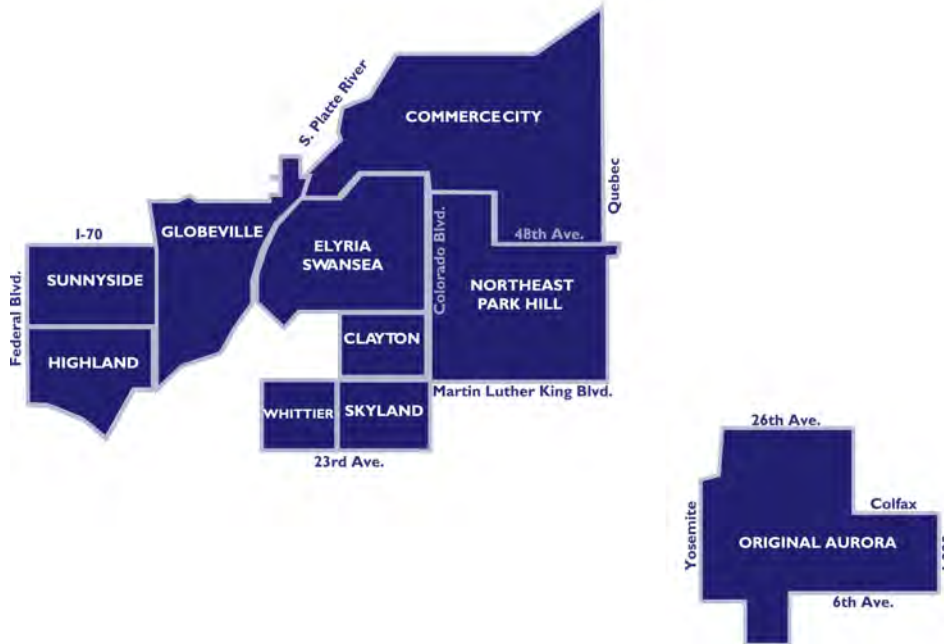


*Partnerships*

# Strengthening Neighborhoods (SN)

is The Denver Foundation's grassroots neighborhood development program.

This map shows Strengthening Neighborhoods partner communities.



A complete list of 2009 grants is available at [www.strengtheningneighborhoods.org](http://www.strengtheningneighborhoods.org).

## SN helps neighborhood residents in its partner communities by:

- Awarding planning and project grants to groups of neighbors seeking to make change in their communities
- Offering advice and resources as people are getting their projects started and throughout their project
- Providing leadership development classes in English and Spanish

## Goals:

- Support positive relationships among residents based on equality and the valuing of everyone's contributions
- Support resident leaders
- Help residents organize to create positive change in their communities
- Connect residents and resident-led groups across neighborhoods so they can learn from one another and take action on common concerns
- Bring new partners to the work of resident-centered community building



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[www.strengtheningneighborhoods.org](http://www.strengtheningneighborhoods.org)

Cover artwork: "Neighborhoods at Work" by Jeff Slemmons

# The Power of Partnership

Through our work in the community over 13 years, Strengthening Neighborhoods has witnessed and taken part in numerous powerful partnerships – among neighbors, among residents and nonprofit organizations, and among communities and institutions. When all of the partners involved recognize and honor the gifts, insight, abilities, shared goals, and desired outcomes of the others, an authentic connection blossoms and real community change happens.



Mike Green from the Asset-Based Community Development Institute and Mario Flores from Strengthening Neighborhoods

In this report, you'll read stories about how institutions in Metro Denver have discovered and adopted practices that support their commitment to develop true partnerships with the communities they serve.

These institutions have learned to value:

- The importance of **RELATIONSHIPS** with community residents, seeing them as partners instead of clients or the recipients of services
- Intentional **LISTENING** to community input
- **SHARED LEARNING**
- Creating the space for **PARTICIPATION** of community members within the institution
- **SHARED LEADERSHIP**
- Effective **POWERFUL** partnerships resulting in positive community **CHANGE**

We hope these stories illustrating the power of partnerships will inspire dialogue, collaborative action, and stronger communities.

# Circle of Involvement



Strengthening Neighborhoods is working to forge new linkages among nonprofits, municipal groups, and the communities they serve. Professionals from nine different agencies have joined in the "Aurora Learning Circle" to discover how they can work with residents to better accomplish their missions and strengthen their communities.

Patrick Horvath, Director of Strengthening Neighborhoods, explains why this is important: "For communities to grow stronger, service agencies and residents need to work together. Instead of delivering 'aid' to 'poor clients,' nonprofits and municipal services providers need to think about partnering with residents who can work with them to transform community life. Community change takes effective programs and people working together, and always with residents at the center."

One member of the Aurora Learning Circle is Ruben Medina, Supervisor of Moorhead Recreation Center in Original Aurora. "I grew up in a small town in Southern Colorado where the community center was the center for everything - from preschool to youth sports to social services," Ruben recalls. "When I came to Moorhead, I wanted to see more visibility for our center, so my goal was to go out into the community." Ruben spent time walking around, finding people - especially young people - where they congregated and asking them what they needed and wanted from a community center.

About the same time, he connected with the Strengthening Neighborhoods Aurora Learning Circle and met Mike Green, a consultant from the Asset-Based Community Development Institute. "Mike Green and Strengthening Neighborhoods suggested I do something called a world café for neighbors," Ruben says. "This was so that everyone's voice could be heard - not just the most talkative." The assembled residents identified their top ten areas of concern. At the very top of the list? Safety.



*Original Aurora residents participate in a community outreach event at Moorhead Recreation Center*



Ruben Medina, Supervisor of Moorhead Recreation Center connects with neighbors

“So we brought in the police department to talk to people about how to take care of themselves,” says Ruben. “And we’ve worked with OACIC (Original Aurora Community Integration Collaborative) to teach self-defense classes to Bhutanese refugees.” Many other activities emerged from the world café exercise, including nutritional cooking classes in partnership with Operation Frontline.

Strengthening Neighborhoods staff have been excited to watch Ruben’s success connecting with residents, and they are pleased that the City of Aurora is using a resident-centered outreach method to bring neighborhood residents into discussions about a bond issue to fund new and expanded rec centers.

“Our goal with the Aurora Learning Circle has been to encourage people to reach out beyond the walls of their organization or city department and see residents not just as clients but as partners,” says Patrick. “Now the members of the Learning Circle are working together on a huge mural to be painted on one side of Moorhead’s

building.” OACIC, Downtown Aurora Visual Arts, and Ruben and his staff are gathering dozens of volunteers to plan and execute the mural in the coming months. There will be a community kick-off this fall.

Contact Patrick Horvath at 303-996-7356 for more information on how your organization can increase its effectiveness by connecting to residents and their communities.

### Aurora Learning Circle Participants

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Norka Ayllon<br>Malu Ramos<br>Robin Waterman   | <i>Aurora Community Connection</i>                                 |
| Elise Becker<br>Ameedah Khalifeh<br>Rita Poundstone<br>Melinda Townsend<br>Belinda Woodall | <i>Aurora Housing Corporation</i>                                  |
| Mary Hupp  | <i>Aurora Warms the Night</i>                                      |
| Glenn Fee  | <i>Bluff Lake Nature Center</i>                                    |
| Dawn Carmin<br>LeAnne Figueroa   | <i>Colfax Community Network</i>                                    |
| Sarah Heid<br>Susan Jenson   | <i>Downtown Aurora Visual Arts</i>                                 |
| Ruben Medina   | <i>Moorhead Recreation Center</i>                                  |
| Jenny Pool Radway  | <i>Original Aurora Community Integration Collaborative (OACIC)</i> |
| Jackie Voigt   | <i>Warren Village</i>  |

# The Holly:

## *A Journey Toward Community Ownership*



*Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú Tum blessing the Holly Redevelopment space*



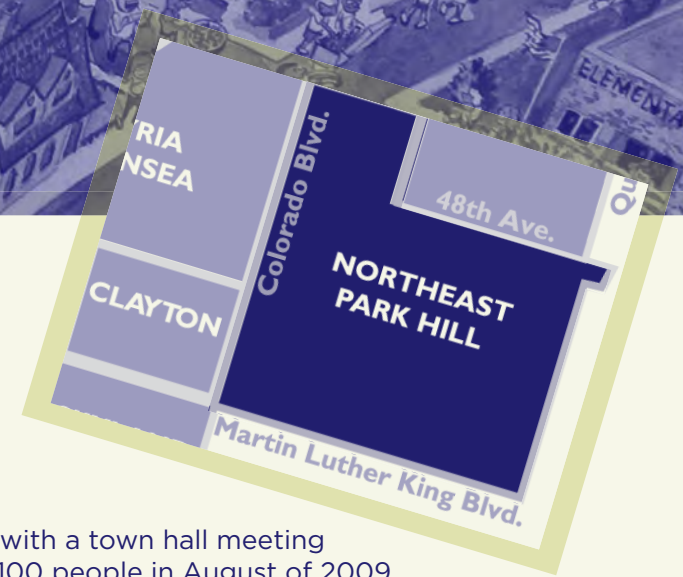
**Aaron Miripol, Executive Director of the ULC, addresses residents at the blessing event**

On a July morning in 2010, Strengthening Neighborhoods' Director Patrick Horvath sat amidst the leveled grounds of the former Holly Square Shopping Center, in the company of Northeast Park Hill residents who had watched, for years, the downward spiral and fiery dissolution of the site. All were present for a blessing of the site by Nobel Peace laureate Rigoberta Menchú Tum. Señora Menchú Tum grew up in a poor Indian peasant family in Guatemala and became a leader for her people.

"It brought tears to my eyes to have an international figure, who has overcome so much and is a symbol to so many, stand in our midst and speak of how things can be different," Horvath says. "It brought home the value of the work we've been doing with the residents in the neighborhood."

### **Where there is hope, change is always possible.**

The vacant lot was purchased in 2009 by The Urban Land Conservancy (ULC), a supporting organization of The Denver Foundation, with assistance from the City of Denver. ULC then asked Strengthening Neighborhoods to facilitate a community input process so that the voices of the neighborhood's residents would be heard and included in the redevelopment plans.



The process began with a town hall meeting attended by about 100 people in August of 2009.

Two subsequent community design meetings brought together another hundred residents and community leaders. Together they established the Holly Area Redevelopment Project (HARP) and created a Steering Committee of about twenty-five committed residents. The HARP Steering Committee then planned a fair to bring even more neighbors into the mix. In late April 2010 over 500 people came out to review design concepts, offer input, and celebrate the possibilities for rebirth.

The concepts included such things as a central plaza, a playground, and a community garden surrounded by multi-use buildings. The first phase of the project – a peace mural and basketball courts built atop the ashes of Holly Square Shopping Center – is expected to be finished by fall of 2010.

While the community's vision for the site is developing, challenges still exist. "Finding funding in the current economy is very difficult," says Aaron Miripol, President of ULC. "We also know that many of the residents would like a grocery store, because this area is considered a 'food desert.'" Because the site is not on a main thoroughfare, it likely won't attract a big chain grocery store. A smaller store or farmers market is still a possibility.

The process is underway to rebuild on the torched Holly Square site and to restore the community's sense of hope. The good news is that the Urban Land Conservancy understands that it must take the lead from the people who have invested their lives in their community. Strengthening Neighborhoods will be there to encourage them and to help residents find their voice every step of the way.

# Back to the (Grass)Roots



Cross Community Coalition's New Home



It started as a community center begun by the people. Lorraine Granado and Eric Wright helped found the Cross Community Coalition (CCC) in 1987. Focusing on the often-ignored communities of Elyria Swansea and Globeville, they moved into a storefront in Swansea in 1992. They wanted to help community residents – their neighbors -- work together for positive change by providing opportunities for individual advancement and by working to improve the quality of life for all residents in their communities. Sometimes they had to take on toxic polluters; other times they pieced together funding and created programs for youth, parenting, or English as a Second Language classes. But they were always committed to being a place for neighborhood action. When Lorraine challenged the local funding community to help build a community space for Elyria Swansea and Globeville that would become CCC's permanent home, a number of donors stepped up and helped finance a Family Resource Center. The spacious new building was completed in October 2005.

As Lorraine retired in 2009, however, Eric noticed that CCC's two-decade struggle to provide more services to their struggling communities had overwhelmed the organization's capacity to listen to the residents of those communities. Expanded service delivery did not always flow from or lead to participation by community

residents in CCC's work and vision. And each new project came with its own grant requirements, mandatory evaluation activities, and reams of paperwork. The CCC board and staff felt the strain.

Early in 2010 Eric finally took time to step back and think with his board about how to re-focus CCC on the grassroots community that had given them life. He engaged Strengthening Neighborhoods consultant Mike Green to help the CCC board create a plan for listening to the community and adjusting the organization to be a true neighborhood partner. After one retreat, a board member exclaimed, "It's time to do *with* the community instead of *for* the community."

The CCC board and staff have begun to do just that. They have scheduled a series of one-to-one listening conversations, the first of which gathered individuals who are enrolled in CCC service programs like English as a Second Language and Parenting. They've begun to set up meetings with neighborhood leaders, everyday folks involved in block-clubs, soccer leagues, PTO's, and neighborhood gardens. "Like everyone else," says Eric, "we are moving ahead with this re-focusing effort regardless of the economic strain our organization is under. This is important work. It's like going back to our roots!"

# About Strengthening Neighborhoods



## SN Staff (L to R):

Patrick Horvath, LaDawn Sullivan,  
David Portillo, and Mario Flores

**Strengthening Neighborhoods (SN)** is The Denver Foundation's grassroots neighborhood development program. SN helps residents of ten partner neighborhoods use their existing strengths and assets to make their communities better places to live.

**History:** In 1996, The Denver Foundation asked 100 leading members of the community to share ideas about how the Foundation could expand its impact. Their number one suggestion was "Neighborhood and Community Capacity Building." In response, The Denver Foundation created Strengthening Neighborhoods.

**Partner Neighborhoods:** Commerce City, Original Aurora, and the Denver neighborhoods of Clayton, Elyria Swansea, Globeville, Highland, Northeast Park Hill, Skyland, Sunnyside, and Whittier.

**Grants:** For a complete list of grants, please visit [www.strengtheningneighborhoods.org](http://www.strengtheningneighborhoods.org).

## Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee

Mark Berzins  
Linda Campbell  
David Goens  
María Gonzalez  
Cookie Hansen  
Michael Martinez, Chair  
Patrick Ridgeway, term ended 2009  
María Zubia

**How it works:** SN makes grants directly to residents for projects that the residents develop and lead.

**Grants:** SN has two grantmaking programs:

- Planning Grants up to \$500 (average grant size is \$250)
- Project Grants up to \$5,000 (average grant size is \$2,300)

## Guidelines:

- Grants are limited to residents and projects in the ten partner neighborhoods.
- Although the maximum grant size is \$5,000, proposals with much smaller budgets are strongly encouraged.
- All proposed projects must be created and led by residents.
- Projects must build on assets or strengths already existing in the neighborhood, such as residents' specific skills, a local park, or the resources available in an existing neighborhood group.
- Groups do not need to be tax-exempt nonprofit organizations to qualify for funding.

**How to Apply:** Please read the Strengthening Neighborhoods Guidelines before applying for a grant. The guidelines, as well as the online grant application, can be found at [www.strengtheningneighborhoods.org](http://www.strengtheningneighborhoods.org). You can also receive the guidelines by calling The Denver Foundation at 303.300.1790.