

Community Participation: Old Wine in New Bottles?

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ABSTRACT. This article reports a study conducted on a citywide partnership seeking to mobilize community members, city government and other partners toward substance abuse prevention. This community development effort attained mixed results during its planning phase. This study's mixed qualitative/quantitative research design is imbedded in the citizen/community participation literature. The views of community members and agency representatives about their experiences and the meanings they attach to their involvement provide insightful information about community participation in a large Southwestern city. Different community participation themes are identified and presented as lessons learned, suggesting ways in which practitioners and researchers can support communities as they organize through partnerships. (Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpr-essinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthzPress.corra>>J

KEYWORDS. Community, participation, partnerships, substance abuse, narrative

The involvement of social workers with neighborhood initiatives in addressing locally identified needs has a long and proud history. Al-

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though practitioners and researchers have expressed mixed reviews of social work's involvement with local initiatives, the legitimacy of community social work is well established (Lindeman, 1937; Burke, 1968 and 1983; Garvin & Cox, 1987; Rivera & Erlich, 1998; Gilbert, 1970; Weil, 1997).

Several trends make local initiatives very important as we face the twenty-first century. First, the development of policies and programs is being decentralized rapidly in many fields that are central to social work. Decision-making is becoming more local. The devolution of policy decisions about public welfare and health care from national to state and local levels, the self-determination process that is revolutionizing Native American programs, and the decreased roles and scope of the federal government are just a few examples. A second trend is reflected in the communitarian movement, an energetic reconsideration of what makes us social beings in mutual, reciprocal relationships with others. Boyte (1980) refers to the "backyard revolution" as a grass roots movement largely overlooked by professionals wherein neighbors collaborate on common local interests, needs and problems.

Finally, many professionals recognize that our most perplexing social problems do not seem to respond positively to even our best professional treatment or service interventions. Consider, for example, racial, gender, sexual orientation and age discrimination, poverty, family and youth violence, school drop outs and substance abuse. In each of these areas, professionals are increasingly recognizing the necessary roles of families, natural support networks and communities if these troubling problems are to be addressed effectively (Rivera & Erlich, 1998; Saleebey, 1992; Berkowitz, 1982; Whittaker & Garbarino, 1983).

This article reviews selected literature related to citizen and community participation, and uses the evaluation of the initial phase of a community partnership that seeks to mobilize local residents to illustrate a number of issues that relate to partnerships and to community participation. It also provides the opportunity to hear the voices of community residents and agency representatives involved in a partnership to prevent substance abuse as they reflect on their experiences.

BACKGROUND

The involvement of neighborhood residents in identifying common needs, challenges, and opportunities and developing action strategies

has a long history (Garvin & Cox, 1987; Rivera & Erlich, 1998). At various times, local participation has seemed more or less central to efforts to solve problems and to improve the community's quality of life. For example, early in this century an ambitious effort to cultivate local initiatives, the Cincinnati Social Unit Plan, was attempted (Slhaffer, 1971). From the late 1950s to the early 1970s, the Ford Foundation Gray Area Projects, War on Poverty, Model Cities and community mental health and health planning efforts provided exceptional opportunities for the involvement of local residents in policy making and program development and implementation (Altshuler, 1970; Gilbert, 1970; Kolter, 1969; Marris & Rein, 1967; Mott 1969; Moynilian, 1969; National Commission on Community Health Services, 1966; Spiegel, 1968; Van Til & Van Til, 1970; Verba, 1967). This same period was notable for efforts to mobilize youth/students, ethnic groups, women, gay men and lesbians, persons with disabilities, the elderly, the poor and groups that sought to influence other policies, for example the effort to stop the war in Vietnam.

From the late 1970s to the early 1990s some observe that community initiatives were less vital and central in American society than before those decades. This line of thought often notes the loss of a sense of community, withdrawal from community life and the acceptance of the values of individualism, consumerism and even greed as it correlates to decreased community involvement, especially by society's "haves" (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1991).

At the same time the communitarianism movement flourished (Etzioni, 1968) and on a highly decentralized basis, ordinary residents continued to mobilize themselves at the local neighborhood level (Boyte & Kari, 1996). Recent efforts to involve residents in community life include a rich array of single issue groups (for example, pro choice, right to life, death penalty, etc.) and highly effective efforts to support "traditional values," variously defined.

Recent conceptualizations have suggested that partnerships and coalitions also may serve as a health promotion intervention designed to address a variety of individual level social problems. Such models address concerns that interventions focused only on individuals fail to consider the social, cultural, economic and political influences on behavior (Butterfoss, Goodman, and Wandersman, 1996; Cook, Roehl, Oros, and Trudeau, 1994; Kumpfer, Turner, Hopkins, and Librett, 1993). Because individuals exist within a larger social environment and in

order for sustainable gains to be made in health status, multiple interventions must target multiple levels of the social ecology (Hawkins and Catalano, 1992). A wide variety of such coalitions have been identified in the literature including partnerships to prevent substance abuse (Butterfoss, Goodman, and Wandersman, 1993; Saxe, Reber, Hallfors, Kadushin, Jones, Rindskopf, & Beveridge, 1997), HIV prevention planning groups (Gomez and Goldstein, 1996), and coalitions addressing tobacco-use and cancer prevention (Best, Thomson, Santi, Smith, and Brown, 1988; Shopland, 1989). This research studies one of these partnerships from a citizen/community participation perspective.

*Citizen/Community Participation:
A Selective Literature Review*

Although the phrase "citizen's participation" is helpful in framing the present study, the terminology needs some clarification. This term might give community residents who are not U.S. citizens the wrong impression that they cannot participate in community projects or that their involvement is not recognized or valued. For this reason, we generally use the terms communities, community member(s) or community resident(s) instead of the word citizen.

Semantics explained, community participation has been studied by a number of scholars providing ideological, theoretical or empirical insights into community participation as a focus of community practice. Citizen participation as it relates to social work has been defined by Gamble and Weil (1995, p. 483) as: "the active, voluntary engagement of individuals and groups to change problematic conditions and to influence policies and programs that affect the quality of their lives or the lives of others . . . It takes place primarily through two types of structures: Citizen-initiated groups that engage in a full-range of social and economic problem areas, and government-initiated advisory and policy-setting bodies." Roland Warren (1963) provides a splendid body of work that conceptualized locality-defined communities as social systems. The notion of geographically defined community action episodes owes much to Warren. Similarly the social systems framework found in his work has wide acceptance in many social work practice models, including models of community or macro change. Warren (1963: 308) distinguishes episodes of purposive change from the ongoing change processes that exist in every community.

Other theorists direct attention to various aspects of community participation. Jack Rothman's conceptual work on models of community organization has become progressively more complex over the years, reflecting the complexities of community institutional life and community interventions. Rothman incorporates explicit attention to the roles of community members in the descriptions of his model (Rothman & Tropman, 1987; Rothman, 1996). Burke directly addresses community participation forms and purposes (strategies) and provides useful historical perspectives on community involvement (1968; 1983). Alexander (Alexander & McCann, 1956; Alexander, 1976) provides a conceptual framework for understanding involvement of community members using a representative mechanism. Alexander alerts us to the dynamics of the representational process and points out that this often overlooked factor is very important to community involvement, since the legitimacy of broadly based community change efforts often is influenced by the manner in which representatives are chosen and relate to the constituency that they represent.

Sherry Arnstein developed the notion of a "ladder of citizen participation" (1969). Arnstein's perspective is explicitly political. She notes that when working with disempowered groups, any involvement that does not entail a sharing of power is a cruel joke on the community members. She describes a typology of community involvement that ranges from nonparticipation to full participation-new power relationships. This explicit power orientation is reflected in much of the literature on feminist practice. Feminist writers extend the concept of working with individuals and groups to encompass larger/macro systems (Bradshaw, Soifer, & Gutierrez, 1994; Gutierrez & Lewis, 1998). Saul Alinsky (1971) both practiced power-based community work and wrote with elegance of this approach to community involvement. His notion that community members would decide to be involved based on their self interest fits both Arnstein's requirements of power redistribution and later theorists use of the social exchange framework to conceptualize practice.

Social exchange theory has been proposed by a number of scholars as a promising framework for understanding the dynamics of community members' participation at both the community and organizational levels (Daley, Applewhite & Jorquez, 1989; Widmer, 1985; Levine and White, 1961). Building on the pioneering work of Blau (1964), Clark and Wilson (1961) and Homans (1958; 1961) conceptualized the notions

of incentives and incentive systems as key to participant motivation providing both understanding of human behavior and guidelines for professional practice (Daley, Applewhite & Jorquez, 1989; Windmer, 1985).

Daley and Kettner (1986: 59-60) note the need to provide special encouragement, support and accommodations to persons and groups that have not traditionally been involved in similar community change efforts. One key task in preparing for change is the identification and engagement of the members of a set of change systems. Further, change agents should deliberately encourage overlapping memberships among change systems, especially with the planning and implementing systems.

Even this selective review of the literature suggests the extensive history of community participation and key conceptual frameworks that have been used to understand and guide practice. We now turn to an episode of practice that used community participation as a central element of a citywide effort to prevent substance abuse.

*A Case Study of an Episode of Community Involvement:
The Partnership*

The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) funded a national demonstration project, the Partnership, in a large Southwestern city to test a set of grassroots approaches to substance abuse prevention. The Partnership called for a comprehensive, community-based, EMPOWERING and collaborative effort. In essence, the Partnership sought to mobilize community residents, neighborhood leaders, city government leaders and federal seed funds to address substance abuse and related phenomena in selected neighborhoods and in the city as a whole. The concept and proposal of the Partnership were originated by the city and the local university. Once funding was attained, community groups and individuals were recruited.

The Partnership embraced an empowerment approach with community participation as the cornerstone of the effort. During the first two years, city residents were convened through different means to express their opinions, assess conditions in their neighborhoods, and develop a plan of action to address locally identified needs and problems. A large community assembly was used to launch the Partnership at a citywide level. Based on the results of this assembly and on the feedback of city and Partnership staff, sets of issue-based community

forums (working groups) were established. The Partnership used community forums as the main vehicle to involve a broad base of community residents and institutional stakeholders. Seven forums were established (crime, neighborhood empowerment, faith, youth leadership, youth involvement, prevention services, and public education and awareness) by areas identified at the community assembly. The forums typically consisted of community activists, members of neighborhood associations, agency representatives, city staff, and unaffiliated community residents with a personal interest in the issue at hand. Forum sessions were public meetings open to any city resident. Efforts to recruit forum members were also conducted by target area. For example, religious leaders from various denominations were invited to city hall for a dinner and lecture to introduce the Partnership and recruit members for the Faith Forum.

The stated purpose of the forums was to provide a broad based, grassroots mechanism to assist the Partnership in developing a comprehensive, citywide strategic plan. The views expressed and proposals developed by the forum participants were channeled to a central Steering Committee. This Steering Committee consisted of representatives from each forum and city staff representatives. The Steering Committee was responsible for integrating the views and proposals developed in the forums into a single, comprehensive action plan to address substance abuse and other locally identified issues.

The forums met for approximately six months (September 1995 to February 1996). The attendance at the forum meetings varied from forum to forum and within each forum varied over time. Some forums were later merged due to low attendance and changes in focus. Toward the end of the planning phase attendance was low at all forum meetings.

RIETHODOLOGY

This study explores the first two years of the Partnership from the perspective of participants who attended three or more forum meetings and who were not members of the Partnership's Steering Committee. Interviews were conducted face to face by the authors during the summer of 1996. Most of the data reported in this section were gathered during the authors' interviews with forum members. Data were also gathered through the authors' participant observation of forum meetings. At the same time that we interviewed forum members

who were intensely involved with the Partnership, other members of the evaluation team were conducting brief telephone interviews with forum members who were less involved and in-depth interviews with members of the Steering Committee and staff members from the city who had Partnership responsibilities. Whenever data from these other sets of interviews were used, the source is Palumbo and Associates' report to CSAP (1997).

Twenty-six forum participants who were not members of the Steering Committee were identified as having attended three or more forum meetings. This group constituted the second concentric circle in terms of degree of participation in the project next to the Steering Committee members. Significantly, forum participants who were not part of the Partnerships' Steering Committee experienced a unique process of community involvement at the grassroots level. Steering Committee members were interviewed by other members of the research team and their opinions were only used for comparison purposes due to their leadership role in the process. Forum members who participated in fewer than three forums were interviewed briefly by phone and their opinions were also used for comparison purposes. The identified forum participants were treated as expert informants about their forum experiences.

Twenty-one active forum members were successfully contacted by telephone. Five had moved or terminated telephone service leaving no avenue for further contact. Of those contacted by telephone, 15 (70%) agreed to be interviewed. Of the six participants who did not want to be interviewed one expressed lack of time, two expressed summer scheduling conflicts, and the remaining three expressed no interest in being interviewed. All six individuals who declined to be interviewed reported having no contact with the Partnership for more than six months.

The fifteen face-to-face interviews were conducted in homes, business offices, and restaurants. The interviews tended to run between 60 and 90 minutes. An interview guide was developed to help participants explore their experiences with the Partnership, and to assess the process and initial outcomes. Both open ended and closed questions, including scaled items, were included. A number of analytical frameworks were explored in attempting to understand the experiences of forum members. Differences in the views of respondents were analyzed controlling for their representational status in the Partnership. Would

their self reported status as concerned residents or neighborhood association representatives distinguish their views from the views of city officials or representatives of social service or religious organizations?

The words of respondents were recorded verbatim whenever possible. Extensive notes were taken during the interviews to capture the wording used by respondents. As we reviewed the participants' direct quotes about their experiences and the meanings they attached to their experiences with the Partnership a number of common themes or topics emerged. As participants reflected on these themes, a rich diversity of expressions was apparent to us. We combined the comments or several participants into single narrative mosaics. While this device is not perfect, we think the larger number of quotes in each mosaic provides a richer and more realistic picture of the participants reflective comments than if we had used the more traditional devices of selective quotes or measures of frequency of comments. Within each narrative mosaic, changes of speakers are indicated by the use of a single *.

Respondents' Profile

Respondents tended to be older, female, long term residents of the city who participated as concerned community members or representatives of neighborhood associations, or who represented religious or social service organizations. Of the 15 respondents, 14 (93%) were 40 years old or older, 10 (66%) were female. All of the respondents identified themselves as concerned community members. In addition to that role, six (40%) described themselves as active in their neighborhoods or neighborhood associations, four (26%) as representing religious organizations and five (33%) as representing social services organizations. All the neighborhood representatives were unpaid while six out of nine (67%) of the representatives of religious and social service organizations were employed by their organizations. Thirteen respondents (86%) reported completing high school and seven (46%) had post secondary education. Nine (60%) of the respondents were European American, four (26%) Mexican American, one (6%) African American and one (6%) American Indian. Respondents reported living in the city for a mean of 25 years. The demographics of these active forum members closely parallel the demographics of the Steering Committee members (Palumbo, Ferguson, Daley, and Marsiglia, 1997).

Respondents reported attending between three and 20 forum meetings, with a mean attendance of 12.6 meetings. Ten of the fifteen

respondents (67%) attended 10 or more forum meetings. Thirteen (86%) reported reading the Partnership's written materials and five attended other Partnership meetings or activities (mean of 2.3 each). Thus, while a criterion for inclusion in the sample was that respondents attended at minimum of three forum meetings, this set of respondents can be characterized as comprising active Partnership members.

RESULTS

Forum Members' Views:

A Good Idea ... Promising First Steps in Implementation

Many participants reported that their initial interest in becoming involved was associated with the concept of the Partnership (citizens and city working collaboratively on substance abuse and other issues) and with the Partnership's focus on bringing people together to improve community life. As one participant reported, "As a community member and youth worker, I believe in these kinds of programs." Another participant noted, "The purpose of the Partnership is to get the city and the communities to work as partners, rather than having the city act as the patron (i.e., boss)." As respondents became involved with the Partnership, many viewed the central focus of the Partnership as preventing substance abuse and youth crime. Respondents also viewed the Partnership as an effort to bring city residents together to deal with other issues identified by community members. Terms such as empowerment, collaboration, participation, planning, and decision making emerged from the interviews to explain participants' understanding of the purpose of the Partnership.

Many participants originally became involved with the Partnership through their own community/neighborhood volunteer activities (six respondents). Others became involved through their work (4), because they were invited by project staff (2) or due to their overall concerns about youth, gangs and substance abuse prevention (3).

Participants expressed a strong consensus about the relevance and timeliness of the Partnership and high levels of enthusiasm about their initial involvement. A participant stated, ". . . through the Partnership, I thought different players will come together to the table and set aside their agendas in order to save the children of our community." Partici-

pants understood the importance of collaboration as a means of effectively dealing with critical issues communities are facing.

At the time they became involved with the Partnership, interviewees described the relationship between the city and its neighborhoods in terms of low expectations, feelings of isolation and lack of city involvement in issues related to drug use and trafficking. For some participants this bleak picture started to change during the Partnership's early implementation. Participants noted a number of positive outcomes that they attributed to the early work of the Partnership: increased police visibility, improved neighborhood cleanliness, better attitudes of city staff toward neighborhood leaders, increased awareness of common problems, providing youth a chance to be involved in positive activities, and the development of a strategic plan to address drug abuse issues. In addition, some participants identified Partnership meetings and the discussions that took place in those meetings as positive experiences in their own right.

*Good Ideas Alone Do Not Go Very Far:
The Absence of Accomplishments*

The high enthusiasm expressed during the launching phase of the Partnership (approximately the first year) diminished as implementation progressed. At the end of the second year, participants expressed frustration that the Partnership did not produce the results that they hoped for or expected. When asked to identify groups, organizations or neighborhoods that have been impacted by the Partnership, two-thirds replied "none." Comments of respondents reflect the intensity of their frustrations and disappointment with the Partnership:

(Results?) Absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing; lots of meetings, lots of people disillusioned, same old, same old; things are not getting done; ideas (but) no action. *No results visible to me; it seems to be safer to spend funds in planning. *The Partnership was overkilled with planning.

The less involved forum members and Steering Committee members reported stronger support for the Partnership than did the forum members who were more involved. Perhaps the more involved forum members were a "notch group" that felt their investments were not being reciprocated by the Partnership (see Table 1).

Although the more involved forum members were more critical toward the Partnership than the other two groups, the low N (of the more involved forum members and steering committee members) may explain why the chi-square indicates that the relationship between degree of support and type of membership was not statistically significant.

Less involved forum members had attended one or two forum meetings. When asked why they were not more involved or stopped being involved they responded that they did not have time, had a health problem, their work kept them too busy or that the forum meeting times conflicted with their schedule. The leadership role of the Steering Committee members may have influenced their stronger expressed level of support for the Partnership. The limited participation of the "less involved forum members" and its consequent lack of knowledge may have influenced their tendency to express support for the Partnership.

*Good Ideas Alone Do Not Go Very Far:
The Participatory Process-Concept vs. Reality*

In order to explore further the possible reasons for participants' dissatisfaction, content analysis focused on the participants' views of the manner in which the Partnership was implemented. Additional themes emerged providing more understanding about the participants' perceptions of that process. Many forum participants distinguished their positive views of the concept or intent of the forums from their negative views of the manner in which the forums were implemented. One participant stated: "The forums had potential, but they did not

TABLE 1. Expressed Degree of Support Towards the Partnership by Type of Membership (N = 104)

| Degree of support | Less involved forum members | | More involved forum members | | Steering Committee members | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|------|--------------------------------|------|-------------------------------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Complete | 7 | 10% | 3 | 20% | - | - |
| Very strong | 28 | 39% | 3 | 20% | 11 | 61 |
| Moderate | 23 | 32% | 2 | 13% | 4 | 22% |
| Not very strong | 11 | 15% | 6 | 40% | 2 | 11 |
| None | 3 | 4% | 1 | 7% | 1 | 6% |
| Total | 72 | 100% | 15 | 100% | 18 | 100% |

Note: Chi-square non-significant for degree of support by type of membership.

live up to this potential." They reported that the "good idea" was subverted by logistical issues such as: (1) inconvenient time and place of meetings; (2) poor communication processes; and (3) lack of respect for community members' expertise. These three themes complemented each other discouraging participation.

(1) *Time and place of meetings.* Holding meetings in City Hall was identified as a major barrier. Respondents commented that it was inconvenient to many neighborhood members, but viewed it as convenient for city staff and Partnership staff.

Do not hold meeting on the distant university campus or at City Hall. Go where the people are. *Better meeting locations in neighborhoods, use media to inform ordinary people. I suggested these and was not heard. A good facilitator kept me coming back.

Although City Hall is centrally located many forum participants needed to commute long distances from their places of work or their neighborhoods to attend meetings in the evenings. Food was served in the first few meetings but the practice was stopped later.

(2) *Communication processes.* Half of the respondents reported problems related to notifications of meetings. Early in the Partnership, meeting notices seemed to arrive in a timely manner. Later, notices arrived only a day or two before meetings or even after meetings were field. Meeting times and locations were changed and meetings were canceled without notifying regular participants. A few respondents repeatedly asked to be placed on the notification mailing lists, but never received meeting notices. One received an empty envelope.

Inform people about meetings in writing and in advance. Keep people informed. *First inform people of meetings (including changes!), then do what you say you'll do (mailings, scheduling) then follow up on promises. *Send letters to programs for the elderly and to youth programs inviting them to get involved.

Participants were frustrated and angered by these problems. Most respondents viewed better communication between the Partnership staff and participants as central to improving implementation.

(3) *Lack of respect for community members' expertise.* The word "respect" was used repeatedly by the respondents. Respondents expressed concern about the lack of recognition of their expertise.

Most of them were experienced and effective community activists at the neighborhood level. Their knowledge could have been useful in implementing the Partnership. However, they felt ignored by the leadership and by staff.

Do not ignore people, (rather) nurture them, allow them to participate and make decisions. *Connect with existing neighborhood partnerships. Our Partnership can learn much from their experience and the way they have been involving people ... *Move to actions/solutions faster, get beyond plans, plans. Give weight to community people's opinions, stop patronizing them.

These three initial themes appear to have a common thread. Roughly stated, participants were asking for the Partnership to respect the unique expertise of community members, for activities to be planned for their convenience and for communication to be conducted in an accurate and timely fashion. Respondents' perceptions about the initial forum sessions indicate that those principles were followed at the inception of the process but not later.

A Large Table with Just a Few Chairs: Costs and Barriers to Participation

Respondents contrasted the early, well attended (between 40 and 60 people per forum), broadly representative forums from those forum sessions later in the project (less than ten people per forum). One observed: "In the beginning we had lots of neighborhood people. Now it's mostly agency people." Forum members noted a number of missing or under represented groups: youth, low income or less educated persons, ethnic minority groups and the faith community. Participants rated (by about a three to two-ratio) the following aspects of community involvement as having been poorly implemented: informing participants, establishing clear policies for decision making and recruiting new members. The most frequently reported cost of participation was the members' time and energy. A regular attendee commented: "I would not mind the time and travel if I could see some results." Other participants observed:

The amount of participation has been inadequate. The number of people in the meetings has not reached critical mass. There were

not many people coming to the meetings. People didn't know (about the Partnership). *There is a need to reach out beyond the middle class and to people of all ages. Most people attending the meetings were between 30 and 50 years old; there were no youth or elderly. *Hardly anyone knew about it. Ordinary people are not aware it exists.

Some participants viewed the attitudes of city staff as barriers: "They (city staff) feared people getting power." Respondents voiced concerns that involving neighborhood people might not be a priority for the Partnership staff and city staff. This puzzled and frustrated participants especially when they reflected on the stated mission/purpose of the Partnership. Particularly irritating to some participants was the lack of staff follow up to community members' ideas or initiatives. One participant stated: "We were not empowered to do things."

*Gate-Keeping:
The Insiders and the Outsiders*

Most participants in the forums were either neighborhood representatives or representatives of service agencies. A common theme emerged from interviews with agency employed professionals-a perception of themselves that bordered the prophetic and a perception of neighborhood representatives as less worthy or qualified. One participant voiced this view of superiority-inferiority:

There were a lot of individual common citizens who were not responsible. They were not representing anyone and had no power and saw this as an opportunity to be involved and gain status. Specially some of the women. I happened to know one of the women in my forum and she contributed nothing. She was just feeding her own ego. There were several people in that category . . .

Although this message was not verbalized during forum sessions, the neighborhood members appeared to have received the message. They were the first to stop attending meetings. What we observed emerging was a sort of stratification based on ascribed statuses (community members versus agency-based professionals). Although the overall goal of the Partnership was empowerment, the most disempowered among the participants (ordinary neighborhood residents)

appeared to have been marginalized within the forum structure. On top of the power and status pyramid we identified the city representatives, Partnership staff and consultants. In the second layer we placed the representatives from nonprofit agencies. The next layer down the pyramid was made-up by neighborhood activists and leaders, and at the bottom were the so called ordinary community residents. This stratification was defined and maintained through rituals and practices. An evaluator's participant observation report illustrates those practices.

City and Partnership staff might be introduced, but not others. Agendas might or might not be distributed to all attendees. Few efforts were observed to prompt input from silent members. Comments from members might not be acknowledged and often were not followed up on. Staff did not seem concerned about treating members with attentive respect. Meetings often ran beyond their scheduled time to adjourn.

Other meetings were canceled and members were not notified, and neither minutes nor agendas were distributed before many of the meetings. Most of the individuals facilitating the planning phase were professional facilitators hired from a consulting firm. Their levels of expertise and competency varied widely. Some facilitators were well prepared and effective, but others were not.

Import, erment:

From the Rhetorical to the Practical

A central theoretical foundation of the Partnership entailed the empowerment of community residents and neighborhoods. Participants were asked to indicate their views of the partnership in relation to statements anchored to Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (see Table 2).

Participants expressed a stronger level of agreement with statements measuring describing nonparticipation and tokenism (statements 1 to 3) and lower levels of agreement with statements describing citizen power (statement 4 & 5). These average ratings were used to conduct triangulations with their open-ended comments about community participation and power. Both sets of data complemented each other. Interview comments provide insights into the meanings attached by

TABLE 2. Perceptions About the Quality of Participation by the More Involved Forum Members (N = 15) (1 = Completely Disagree, 10 = Completely Agree)

| Statement | Mean |
|---|------|
| A few handpicked people are appointed to boards or committees, but can be outvoted by other members who are not ordinary city residents. (manipulation & therapy) U | 5.8 |
| City residents are consulted by the Partnership, but have no assurance that their input will influence the Partnership's decisions. (informing & consultation) U | 6.6 |
| The handpicked members are not accountable to their fellow city residents. (placation) U | 6.0 |
| Sufficient numbers of accountable city residents sit on the Forums and Committees to ensure that their views, preferences and interests will influence the Partnership's decisions. (partnership) U | 3.8 |
| City residents control the Partnership's decisions by having not only a voice in the process, but sufficient votes or other influence to ensure that their views, interests and preferences will prevail. (delegated power & citizen control) U | 4.5 |

Key: U = Statements anchored to Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation.

participants to community involvement in the Partnership. A mosaic of their comments follows.

Input was solicited, but it was not used; the forums were window dressing. *The Steering Committee does what it wants. *There is a big difference between the concept and reality (of implementation); people seem to be listened to, but I do not know what happened to their ideas. *Forum participants are consulted, but no assurance that ideas will influence decisions; staff controls things. City money manager tells us there is no money (to implement suggestions coming from the forums). *I was hand picked to participate, spoke up and city listened. But not enough people did. We need more people to speak out. *People can speak, (but) many are afraid, they think they do not have a voice. I'm here to tell them that they do. *Staff dictates . . . Low income people were looked down on. People were put down, then didn't return; I go home after the meetings totally tired and discouraged.

In summary, respondents viewed the involvement of community members as crucial to the purpose of the Partnership and recognized the value of community involvement. Yet they reported low levels of neighborhood-based power in the Partnership and were frustrated by their experiences. Their efforts appear to have been used to maintain

alive the empty ritual of participation (Amstein, 1969) without providing opportunities to forum members to attain real power.

A majority of respondents indicated that they were planning to continue in the Partnership, with one person observing: "I feel it's working, (but) we need more community people." Another participant observed: "I'm always optimistic." A neighborhood resident who did not plan to continue his involvement with the partnership stated: "This is a dumb question. They don't let me know what's going on. (It is) hard to stay involved when they (staff) don't value your input."

Participants were asked to rate two global satisfaction items (their experiences with the Partnership and the outcomes or results of the Partnership). Most of the participants (60%) answered that they were dissatisfied. Participants' comments reflect their reasoning when responding to this question, combining assessment of both the Partnership results and its process:

(I'm) learning a lot; concept and staff are good; long term, I'm seeing changes. *Slow process, not as many solutions as I'd like to see. Takes a long time. *Things are not getting done in my neighborhood, follow up cut off by powers above (City). *Good idea, didn't work. Started good and became self destructing. *I never understood what they were doing. *New people at every meeting, always reviewing, not moving forward. *Wasted time of busy people. Nothing coming back to neighborhoods. Not empowering youth. *Meetings at City Hall wasted money. *Good on paper, but no action. Not the first time the City has done this. *No staff to work with neighborhoods, or follow up on ideas.

In assessing their satisfaction with the results of three years of the Partnership, active forum members mostly expressed dissatisfaction with the process:

Not even honest explanations about why promises are not being kept. *Time and talent not being used; disappointed, but not surprised; after a few meetings, I knew it was going nowhere, (so I had) low expectations. *I was very involved, then communication abruptly ceased; (I'm) disappointed *Bad experience. *At some point in time, we may see ideas implemented. I'm not sure when.

People in leadership positions such as staff and Steering Committee members agreed with the challenges the Partnership was facing. It is a bit puzzling to understand why changes did not take place to address these challenges.

A final global question asked forum participants what else they would like for us to know about the Partnership. Respondents used this question as an opportunity to summarize their views and to repeat strongly held views. They made positive statements about the Partnership's concept of activating a coalition of city government and its residents around substance abuse issues. Yet they reported generally negative views of the manner in which the Partnership was implemented and of its outcomes after three years of funding. A final mosaic of respondents' reflections follows:

We need to put information (plans) into action. Meetings that lead to action would draw more people. *(We need) tangible results-for example, a tool kit for neighborhood use or reduced crime statistics. *We need communication with neighborhoods; only a few people active. What can a few do? Need to involve youth more; (need to) create more awareness of common problems among people. *Re-contact original people, put fires (participants' frustrations with the Partnership) Out. People feel they were hurt, not heard. *(The Partnership needs to) respond to citizens' initiatives; staff team worked well at first. *Prevention establishment, small groups always made decisions in the Partnership, but grant purpose suggests utility of broader base of citizens. *Use schools and churches to do outreach; started out as a wonderful concept. Lots of possibilities. (Now) not going anywhere; Not reaching people who need it.

Participants often prefaced their suggestions to improve the Partnership with comments that their ideas seemed to them to be little more than common sense or common courtesy. The idea was good, the implementation was failing, the remedies were clear but community members who articulated the remedies were not being heard.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings presented, the Partnership meets the criteria to be called a community participation effort as defined by Gamble

and Weil (1995) although it does not fall neatly into one of the two structures they describe. The Partnership was not a community-initiated effort. In fact, the Partnership was started and it was managed by representatives of the city government and the local university. Although the project was conceptualized using an empowerment approach, this concept was valued by the grant developers (city officials, university representatives and consultants) and the funding agency, but not by the core of implementers of the grant (city and project staff). After three years of funded efforts, the Partnership was not, in the opinion of various participant groups, empowering communities nor producing other valued results.

Why did the "good idea" of community participation in the Partnership fail to achieve its potential? A number of explanations are suggested by this exploratory study: (1) community participation was not valued during implementation as a key component of the Partnership, (2) different groups were motivated by different incentives, leading to changes in the composition of the change systems (negatively influencing community involvement), and (3) city and Partnership staff lacked the knowledge or skills needed to facilitate community participation. These three potential explanations are not mutually exclusive. Rather, understanding what happened as the Partnership was implemented may require seeing these themes as interwoven, or feeding each other. Finally, other factors may have shaped neighborhood involvement in the Partnership. For example, limited enthusiasm by community members, or judgments by local residents that substance abuse issues were not relevant or could not be addressed by local efforts. We will focus on the three explanations that seem to provide the most useful insights about the dynamics of community participation within the Partnership and that may raise issues that can be productively discussed with relation to other settings as community involvement experiences a resurgence.

Was community participation really valued during implementation as a key component of the Partnership? The original project proposal to CSAP clearly indicates the centrality of local resident participation to the project design. Interviews with individuals involved with the development of this design (city officials, university representatives and consultants) suggest that the significance of community involvement (including local neighborhood residents) was understood and intended, although the implications of involving residents may not

have been fully explored by this initiating group. As the Partnership was implemented, the commitment of city and Partnership staff to community involvement was tested, with good results initially that seemed to deteriorate over time. The community involvement aspect of the project was not assigned to any particular staff member(s). Although it was implicitly understood that all staff members and the Steering Committee members were responsible for promoting and nurturing community participation, no one was ultimately accountable for it. Involving local neighborhood residents requires staff time and effort. The task of involving community members competed (with limited success) with other expectations of staff. The facilitation of the forum meetings was assigned to professional facilitators (consultants) who were not involved in designing the Partnership—they only "appeared on stage" during the time of the forum meetings. Their role was purely technical and in most cases their priorities did not appear to include enhancing community participation. The Partnership staff and consultants had the difficult task of implementing a process that someone else designed. In essence, the concept developed by the project initiators (grant developers) was passed on to another set of players to implement. Overlap between this initiating and planning system was minimal. As suggested by Daley (1997), this fed into problems during the implementation phase of the change effort.

Did different sets of incentives motivate different groups? The neighborhood residents who were involved with the community forums tended to be veteran neighborhood activists. They referred to themselves as representatives or delegates of their communities (Alexander & McCann, 1956; Alexander, 1976). They were joined by representatives of service agencies. This middle band of local representatives did not seem to include traditional *infuel tials* nor previously uninvolved neighborhood residents.

Both grassroots community members and agency representatives seemed to hold a positive generalized attitude toward community mobilization as a means to improving community life, much as Sower, Holland, Tiedke, and Freeman (1957) found in the concept of the generalized "fund of good will" or expectations that civic involvement made sense. Despite mixed experiences with earlier efforts to mobilize and work with the city on neighborhood priorities, many community members remained optimistic that the investment of their

time and effort was reasonable. One must marvel at the persistent optimism of these community activists. Despite minimal tangible achievements, inconsistent staff support and disrespectful treatment during forum meetings by staff and consultants, these participants retained a positive attitude toward this approach to change.

Both neighborhood residents and agency representatives spoke of needing to do something to address deteriorating neighborhood conditions. The Partnership promised improvements in community life. Community members expected to see their input used in developing effective strategies to address locally identified problems, needs and issues. They expected to see these strategies result in specific neighborhood improvements. They did not see these expected changes as the Partnership developed. First, they observed that often their input was not valued or used by city and Partnership staff. Second, they did not see specific improvements in their neighborhoods in substance abuse or other significant areas. This lack of results, combined with flaws in the Partnership implementation process, was a very bitter pill for community residents to swallow.

Many agency representatives noted organizational (work or career related) incentives as central to their involvement, while grassroots community members relied more on hopes and expectations of improving neighborhood conditions. Power differentials between agency representatives and local residents were, we believe, a factor in the manner in which the Partnership operated. Further, the declining involvement of community members over time reinforced this power differential.

Did city staff and Partnership staff have a commitment to inclusive community involvement and adequate knowledge and skills to involve diverse community members? Early staff efforts seemed to be committed to neighborhood participation. Staff appeared energetic and professionally competent in many respects. As the process developed over time, serious flaws were apparent in the staff's commitment to encouraging community participation. We think these flaws might have been related to limited staff commitment to community input, to a lack of clarity about what roles community members might play and what community members might contribute to the Partnership and to the low priority assigned by many staff to involving community members. Staff responsibilities relating to reaching out to community members came to compete with other staff responsibilities. As de-

scribed in the findings section, specific staff knowledge and skills related to community participation were inconsistently reflected in staff behaviors, for example treating community members with respect, keeping them informed and running effective, inclusive meetings.

In summary, it appears that community participation in the Partnership is treated by the city as advisory at best. The lack of action and consideration toward community members virtually eliminated their participation in the Partnership. Finally, a cadre of *professional imbricants* (agency representatives and core community activists) are maintaining the appearance of a community partnership.

Lessons Learned

What lessons can be drawn from the experiences of this selected group of community members in this community partnership? While the results of any case study must be treated with caution when applied to other situations, we have identified a few insights that may be of interest to policy makers, educators and practitioners.

First, a general commitment of the concept of community participation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for effective community involvement. In the Partnership, we found a strong commitment of project initiators and initially of staff to the *concept* of community involvement, but a weak commitment to do what is necessary to involve a diverse array of community members. Further, in change efforts involving complex social systems, attention needs to be paid to ensuring substantial membership overlap between planning systems and implementing systems.

Second, this willingness to do what is necessary, especially to involve groups that have historically not been involved (or who were kept out of the process or given minimal, "token" roles) requires sophisticated skills. Practitioners need to acquire and demonstrate specific knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to working with specific community groups (see for example Daley & Wong, 1994). Further, we need to understand the various forms of community involvement and to develop knowledge and skills to facilitate broad-based participation in progressively more socially diverse communities. By social diversity we mean a rich set of characteristics, including culture, ethnicity, language, gender, age, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and size of community of residence. Group facilita-

tive skills in community practice offer rich opportunities to enhance the involvement of diverse groups in civic life.

Third, scholars, educators and practitioners need to integrate leadership/power analysis as a central component of practice models. The literature of citizen (community) participation has long documented the centrality of intergroup power dynamics to this focus of practice (e.g., Alinsky, 1971). We need to highlight the significance of intergroup power dynamics as a key factor in facilitating community involvement.

As substance abuse partnerships and coalitions continue to emerge in many communities around the nation, traditional community involvement appears to be relevant as we attempt to understand the quality of community members' participation. More applied research in this area will provide the needed data to inform our practice and to refine the purpose and implementation of such community development efforts.

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