

31st ANNUAL NUSA CONFERENCE

The NUSA Conference this year was held in Kansas City, Mo. According to the official count there were 831 NUSA members in attendance. This was also the first time everyone was able to vote while at the conference. There were nine openings on the board that needed to be filled. It's nice to report we now have two people from Tacoma who will serve on the National NUSA Board, Elton Gatewood and John Hargroves.

There were many breakout sessions and workshops to choose from. All sounded interesting so it made it hard to decide which to attend. There were also 25 tours from which to choose and other activities, as well as, taking care of NUSA business. I was surprised by the variety of cities represented and found it interesting to hear about the different projects the various neighborhood councils were involved in.

I especially enjoyed the breakout session on "**Art, Technology, Youth and Jobs: Making our Community Better.**" This session showcased a Public and Private venture to help young adults build upon their talents and at the same time broaden their employable skills through an entrepreneurial program. Application for this program is through the county prosecutor's office. The young people (15 to 19) are put through a 72 hour internship and training program. Upon completion, they then begin paid employment, which is designed to develop highly skilled and dependable artists and technicians. During their internship they receive training through presentations, conferences, hands on training and independent research. The subject matter covered is:

Business Management

Entrepreneurism

Business Law

Accounting

Selling

Promotions/Marketing

Research

At the end of training they are interviewed and assigned a studio placement in one of the following: **Visual Arts, Textiles, Ceramics, Photography, Graphics, Sculpture.** This is where they begin putting into action what they have been taught. At the studio they receive a wage while actually working along side professional artists and technicians producing and marketing products. Profits from sales go back into supporting the program. When each person finishes his/her program they are equipped to move into the work world with employable skills. This program, for many of the worst offenders, provides the only avenue by which they begin to relate to society's norms.

The public support of this program is through "COMBAT" (Community Backed Anti-Drug Tax), which is a sales tax- supported network of 80 community agencies that help

law enforcement. This sales tax consists of ¼ of 1% increase of the sales tax, these monies are earmarked for the war on drugs and to help finance four major areas:

Prevention Programs that prevent youths experimentation with drugs

Treatment for non-violent offenders

Assist Law Enforcement of drug laws

Prosecution of drug and drug related crimes

The second session I attended was called **“Connections to Success.”** This was about helping offenders successfully re-enter the community. This is a work force readiness training and career development program. It is a faith based program where people in various churches agreed to mentor one person for a year after their release. They assist them in setting goals and helping offenders through connections, encouragement, providing transportation when needed for job interviews and getting back and forth to work until they can arrange their own transportation. They are there to advise, encourage, listen, guide or direct and support socially until that person has become stable and living successfully in the community. This program is in a couple of federal prisons and has just recently started in Kansas City. It is a fairly new program but thus far is doing well.

The next session dealt with creating safe and healthy communities through collaboration. The presentation was given by the Community partnerships of Springfield, Mo. and was titled **“One is The Loneliest Number.”** They talked about their collaborations with the city of Springfield, the Police Department, neighborhood schools, and neighborhood associations. They discussed how to build and sustain effective collaboration and stated that by listening, talking, and allowing sufficient time, strong foundations can be established. A shared vision can be developed, goals set, and strategies created that set forth ideas and actions that results in success.

Important points to remember:

- Be open to ideas from everyone as well as possible solutions from everyone.
- Value what is said by all.
- Work to find common ground.
- Be willing to bring in people from the outside, which can provide additional information and ideas.
- Realize sometimes you have to change directions in order to accomplish something.
- When a goal has been reached “advertise the success,” as this gets others interested and involved which provides new energy.

- Then move on to your next goal and never rest on your laurels.

They ended the presentation by saying: Depending on your collaboration, sustainability does not necessarily require funding. Many long lasting programs and projects have little or no funding but have been sustained by volunteers and in-kind contributions.

Another session I attended was **“Community Driven Collaborations and Partnerships – CAN Center”** this addressed triaging neighborhoods in distress. Community Action Network Centers (CAN) determine a list of priorities and then develop innovative collaborations and matching grant programs with the individual neighborhood’s needs. Each program had its own specific guidelines for qualifying but neighborhoods working together were able to partner with The Urban Forestry Program, The Graffiti Removal Program, and Free Paint Program, in meeting their needs and in the process was able to cleanup and beautify their neighborhoods, which improved the overall live ability of the area and increase the overall value of their properties.

Adjacent neighborhoods started cleaning up around their areas once they saw how much better things looked in the neighboring area. This helped to bring these neighborhoods back as well.

This goes to prove, a few determined people with a mission can do wonders in helping to reclaim and cleanup older neighborhoods.

I attended a session that discussed obtaining financing to increase home ownership which was very informative. They talked about **various types of financing available** but focused on **Neighborhood Finance Corporations**. They explained what a neighborhood finance corporation is and why it was created (a state licensed mortgage bank and a not-for profit corp. 501C3 determination), as well as, who decides NFC’s lending areas (city planners, mortgage bank and neighborhood associations). They also talked about the benefits of NFC to those who use the service, as well as, the neighborhoods and communities. There are other services offered by NFC such as home buyer education and the tool lending library. The positive impact the educational piece has in helping people to understand what things they need to consider when looking to buy a home. The counseling that goes along with that, also helps them in making better choices and contributes to lower loan delinquency rates and home loss. The tool lending library makes it possible for the home owners to make needed repairs before it gets beyond the point of repairing it at a reasonable cost. This is a good investment as it assists neighborhoods prevent distress and blight.

I selected the **Turtle Hill Neighborhood Tour**. It was a tour showing off the restoration of a downtown Kansas City, Kansas neighborhood. We also toured two other neighborhoods Strawberry Hill, and Strugglers Hill, as well as, the old County Court House built in 1911, which has been restored and renovated into 42 low to mid income apartments in downtown Kansas City, Kansas. We also stopped by Big Eleven Lake Park built by the EPA and listened to a brief presentation by Chester Owens, a local historian, regarding the history of Struggler's Hill and the lake project. We stopped at a local restaurant and were treated to authentic Mexican cuisine. Some on the tour walked to the local cemetery. It is interesting to note it's location in the heart of the city, as well as, the inclusion of native Americans buried side by side with the settlers.

Everyone was given plenty of time to meet delegates from all over the US to exchange ideas and information, exchange pins, view exhibits and meet the NUSA Board Candidates, vote and participate in the NUSA business meeting. I enjoyed all the various aspects of the conference and the unique learning situation it provided. This was my first time attending a NUSA conference and I have to say, I learned a lot and feel it was definitely well worth while. If given the opportunity again, I would not hesitate to attend.

Juanita McBride
Board Member