Community Development in Northeast Washington D.C.

D.C. Residents Feelings of Trust and Homeownership at Carver Terrace

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Summary of Study
For the past year, we have worked with the residents of Carver Terrace, a housing community in Northeast Washington, D.C. In 2003, the Carver Terrace housing development was renovated by the Telesis Corporation as part of a neighborhood revitalization project. For the purposes of our project, we have gathered information on residents’ feelings of trust and distrust in their ability to become homeowners. We have also researched resident attitudes towards homeownership within the Carver Terrace community. We found that residents were generally distrustful of outside organizations working with their homeownership project. Furthermore, we found that residents were generally interested in becoming homeowners, yet they did not have a desire to own within the Carver Terrace community.

Methods and Data Analysis
A team of Georgetown University students, faculty, and staff collaborated to conduct four focus group sessions as well as a series of door-to-door surveys within the Carver Terrace community.

The focus group sessions were split between four different populations of Carver Terrace residents: residents selected by management, “protected” residents, Carver Terrace youth, and new residents. Focus group questions prompted residents on their feelings about the Carver Terrace property, the surrounding neighborhood, and their opinions on the community building and homeownership project. We coded three out of the four focus group transcripts (excluding the youth group). To answer our first research question, we recorded expressions of trust and distrust among residents. For our second research question, we recorded the number of times residents answered yes or no in response to questions about owning at Carver Terrace. We also noted the reasons, both negative and positive, for the residents’ decisions.

Door-to-door surveys were conducted in late February 2006. Student volunteers from three universities in Washington D.C. (GU, GW and Trinity) interviewed randomly selected Carver Terrace residents over the course of two field survey dates and two evening open phone calling. In total, we collected 92 surveys. The surveys were voluntary and confidential. Names were not attached to the surveys during data analysis.

Research Questions and Results
1. To what extent are Carver Terrace residents trustful or distrustful in the ability to become homeowners?
Residents were generally distrustful of the Telesis Corporation with 25 expressions of distrust across the three focus groups. Residents were generally distrustful of the Telesis Corporation in particular. However, 83% of survey respondents were willing to work with an outside organization to complete the homeownership project. Residents were largely suspicious of the GRT’s involvement in Carver Terrace and their planned use of the data collected at the focus groups. Residents were not trustful that the project would be completed successfully. 82% of survey respondents were not aware of the possibility to purchase their unit, however. And 67% of survey respondents believed that the homeownership project would be completed successfully.

2. What attitudes do residents have regarding the ownership of their current housing units? Will these perceptions hinder or support the Telesis Corporation’s plan to transition the residents from renting to homeownership?
The vast majority of residents, 83.5%, were interested in becoming homeowners. Yet, when asked about the opportunity to purchase their current housing units within the Carver Terrace community, many stated that they were not interested. Throughout the focus group sessions, there were 15 different mentions of reasons for not wanting to own within Carver Terrace. Primary reasons include a lack of quality construction during renovations, lack of safety and a lack of parking. When asked if they were aware of the possibility to purchase their units, 82% of survey respondents stated that they were not. When asked if the prospect of purchasing their current homes would make them more likely to stay at Carver Terrace, half of the survey population, 50%, said that it would not. Therefore, residents’ negative attitudes towards homeownership within the Carver Terrace community may, in fact, hinder the Telesis Corporation’s plan to transition residents from renting to homeownership.

Conclusions and Next Steps
The data from the focus groups and door-to-door surveys demonstrates that there is a lack of trust among Carver Terrace residents towards the Telesis Corporation, the Georgetown University Research Team (GRT) and toward the homeownership project. The residents’ sources of distrust were mainly frustration with their neighborhood conditions and lack of knowledge about the homeownership project and the outside organizations involved in the project. These finding also contribute to the fact that residents were generally unwilling to purchase within the Carver Terrace community, even though they expressed an significant desire to own a home in the future.

Future research is recommended to understand successful homeownership projects in urban areas across the nation and how their techniques and strategies could be applied to the Carver Terrace community. The lack of communication between residents and the Telesis Corporation has limited community involvement in the homeownership project. Further research and effort is necessary to create stronger bonds between the outside organizations working on the homeownership project and Carver Terrace residents.

The Carver Terrace community also must be developed internally so that they can create better communication strategies with outside organizations. A functioning residents association must be established so that community residents may be better informed of community developments and events. In the face of growing gentrification in Washington D.C., the residents must mobilize to protect their homes and their interests.

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