



*“Personal Change-
A Community’s
Renewal”*

*How Listening To Wisdom Transformed
A Community*

A Health Realization/3 Principles Services Division Project

Personal Change - A Community’s Renewal

How Listening to Wisdom Transformed a Community

A joint project of
The Housing Authority of the County of Santa Clara
and
County of Santa Clara Department of Alcohol and Drug Services

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2005

Acknowledgements

The community transformation at Poco Way was possible due to the support and assistance of numerous organizations and individuals. First, without the support of Robert Garner, Director of the Department of Alcohol and Drug Services and Alex Sanchez, Executive Director of the Housing Authority of the County of Santa Clara this project would not have been possible. We also wish to acknowledge Housing Authority Director of Property Management Richard Warren, Resources for Families and Communities, Sergeant Will Montano and the San Jose Police Department, City of San Jose Project Crack Down, Asian Americans for Community Involvement and AACI ESL instructor Patricia Edward and Dora James, volunteer ESL instructor, Philip Solis, child care coordinator and field trip chaperone, Asian Americans for Community Service and American GI Forum for their support of our pride celebrations.

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Introduction

In the fall of 2000 the San Jose eastside community of Poco Way was beginning to show signs of deterioration. The community of low-income residents operated by the Housing Authority of the County of Santa Clara had received a windfall of attention, support and funding during a massive rehabilitation campaign in the 1990’s. Now, unfortunately, crime was again on the rise. Violence and drugs had staged a comeback creating fear and distrust that permeated the neighborhood and threatened to tear the community apart.

Liz Paredes-Bahnsen, Housing Authority Resident Programs Coordinator, had come to Poco Way when it was newly rehabilitated in 1996. Serving as interim resident manager, she became acquainted with many of the residents and the challenges their community faced. After a stay of six months, the Housing Authority appointed her Resident Program Coordinator. By this time she was acutely aware that the community was in need of help:

It took about five years for us to really see the visible results of the deterioration. Gang members who had been in prison were now released and coming back...and trying to take over again. Some of the residents who had relations with these gang members were allowing them to live in their units. Crime was on the rise...the gangs were taking root again...they also began recruiting kids.

Previous to these events, Liz had initiated an “After School” program at Poco Way. Volunteer facilitators in this program were concerned over the lack of parent involvement. A parenting class was suggested to teach parents more effective parenting skills as well as the importance and advantages of community involvement. Shortly after this suggestion Liz was introduced to the 3 Principles based program and Barbara Faye Sanford, Director of what was then called Health Realization Services Division of the Santa Clara Department of Alcohol and Drug Services. (DADS) Liz had an idea:

I knew that the model I was learning about, the Health Realization model, could be a vehicle to eventually create an environment where the (parents) parented more confidently, the residents interacted with one another, authority figures, city services and such. They could become more confident to report crime...not be intimidated. The Housing Authority could do great stuff with the buildings...the lighting and landscaping, but we needed Health Realization expertise to help us with the social and (psychological aspects) in the community.

Liz saw the possibilities that introducing the DADS program might bring but she also believed there would be a “learning curve,” and it would take time to implement the changes she desired. A future meeting with Linda Ramus, the new

Director of the 3 Principles based DADS division called Health Realization Services Division (HRSD), later confirmed that 3 Principles based facilitators were available to introduce a Principles based parenting support/education group. Subsequently, in October of 2000 Gabriela Maldonado, HRSD Analyst, began teaching a weekly class for Spanish speaking residents of Poco Way. In 2001, a second parenting class, taught by Sister Margarita Tran, also a HRSD Analyst, was added in Vietnamese. Shortly thereafter a third class was started for Cambodian speaking residents also taught by Sister Margarita with assistance from a Cambodian translator.

Intervention Impact

Over the past four years since DADS Principles based classes were first introduced to the residents at Poco Way, the program has evolved into a full-scale community project that included not only class members but also the community as a whole. Though only a small percentage of residents participated in the classes, the knowledge and confidence this group gained impacted the entire Poco Way community.

Unlike interventions that focus on fixing problems, this intervention focuses on the wisdom and mental health inherent in every individual. The intervention attempts to create an environment that invites those attributes to reveal themselves. Based on interviews with those involved, both facilitators were highly successful in creating that environment within this San Jose community and the overall results of the program were reflected in the following outcomes:

- A positive shift in the overall atmosphere of the community.
- Improvement in communication among all ethnic groups.
- Improvement in acceptance and tolerance between ethnic groups.
- Reduction in fear within residents in the community.
- Increased co-operation and willingness to help and participate in community events.
- Greater sense of community solidarity.
- Improved relationship with San Jose Police Department.
- Improved relationship with the Housing Authority.
- Dramatic personal realizations for both participants and facilitators manifested as confidence, patience, deep understanding and a sense of overall well-being.
- The awarding of a Resources for Families and Communities grant leading to the creation of the “Poco Way Community”, numerous celebratory events and field trips.

Liz Paredes-Bahnsen sees the changes at Poco Way as a positive step forward:

There is a different vibe. I see kids playing out on the street whereas before they were all shut up. They feel safe enough to play outdoors. That’s huge. Neighbors acknowledge one another; they are friendly to one another; they are getting to know one another. Residents have a lot more confidence. Whereas before the tenants were just very untrustworthy... pointing fingers at one another...blaming management... Now...since the HR(Principles) classes, they are not so quick to blame one another but they are quicker to say, ‘O.K. what do I need to do to help alleviate the situation? What did I do to contribute...to make this issue?’ To me that speaks just volumes.

Liz also believes that if this program had not come to Poco Way there would have been a major crisis:

I think there would have been a major crisis because during this whole process there still have been shootings in the neighborhood. One of these shootings or knifings would have resulted in huge fear and actual retaliations happening. Because of HR there is less fear here.

San Jose Police Sergeant Wil Montano, assigned to the Poco Way area, has also seen a transformation in the community:

I see that the ethnic communities are working together. That was unheard of! There was no coordination. Now they are working together toward the same goals.

This report describes the immense value teaching the three psychological principles of Mind, Thought and Consciousness, - the foundation of the DADS program - has in a community. Understanding these three basic psychological principles inspires individuals to greater personal confidence, creative solutions and more graceful movement through life challenges. Taught within a community, the program is rooted in an unshakable belief that all people possess innate mental health and profound depths of accessible wisdom. The program embraces all as equals; all possessing full potential; all capable of compassion, tolerance and acceptance. It is hoped that this report will act as a guide and inspiration for those interested in positive community development.

Three Principles-Based Services in Santa Clara County

The principles upon which the HRSD program is based were first introduced to Santa Clara County’s Department of Alcohol and Drug Services (DADS) in 1994. Based on the teachings of Sydney Banks and subsequent work of George Pransky Ph.D. and Roger Mills, Ph.D., these principles have slowly but steadily gained acceptance in the county as the basis for a dynamically viable service to clients and staff. In 2000, DADS created a separate division for the purpose of teaching the principles. This expanded the teaching of the principle-based program to drug and alcohol professionals, county government employees and those in the general human services community.

Through the years the program has grown steadily and now includes a training program to develop principle-based community and clinical practitioners. It also provides drop-in classes for the general public, programs at schools, mental health facilities, adult and juvenile correctional facilities and drug and alcohol recovery programs. The Division continues to enjoy the enthusiastic support of the County Board of Supervisors.

The Three Principles

The Division’s programs teach an understanding of human psychological functioning created by the interaction of three basic principles. First understood and articulated by Sydney Banks, these are the principles referred to as Mind, Thought and Consciousness. Understanding how these principles interrelate in everyday human experience is the purpose of this educational approach.

The teaching holds that a formless, creative indestructible life force exists within every human being. This life force is the principle of Mind. Mind is the seat of wisdom, intuition and creativity. Indeed, all the positive attributes that can be applied to humanity are encompassed in the Principle of Mind.

The second principle of Thought relates to a creative function. It is via thought that we create every experience of life. If we are creating negative thoughts our experience is negative and we produce negative feelings such as stress that are often followed by unhealthy behavior. In like manner, positive thoughts such as love and joy produce feelings of well being thereby supporting higher overall functioning and more fulfilled living. This experience of life created by the function of thought could also be viewed as our personal reality.

The third principle of Consciousness is defined as the ability to experience what our thoughts have created. Consciousness broadcasts our thoughts, either negative or positive, and gives us our perception of life, others and the world. It also provides the awareness that we are the thinker and that all experience is thought

based. It is this awareness of ourselves as the thinker that brings us the power to “see” what our thoughts are creating and to understand where our experience of life comes from. This realization can produce powerful insights leading to healthy changes in perception and more sustainable peace of mind.

Learning how these three principles interrelate moment-to-moment produces more conscious living. Once we realize that what we are experiencing is the result of our own personally created thinking, an opportunity exists for a quiet but profound shift in our state of mind. By calmly entering a more reflective, relaxed state of mind, the wisdom inherent within us is more readily accessed. This state of mind brings creative solutions to life’s problems, more compassion and unconditional love. Here, we become aware of our own personal sense of well-being or what principle-based practitioners calls, our innate health. Regaining this sense of well being through understanding the principles is the core of the teaching. Not surprisingly, a deep gratitude also arises for the extraordinary peace and freedom understanding the three principles can help create in our lives. When we understand the role of Thought, we are no longer limited by past memories and self-concepts nor do we wait on the future for fulfillment and satisfaction. Instead, we realize our individual potential for innate creativity and wisdom.

The Facilitators

Gabriela Maldonado, a graduate of San Jose State University, has been employed in the human services field since 1991. She has been training people in the Principles since 1996 and has been employed by DADS to teach the Principles since 2000. As a facilitator, she trains in a variety of multicultural settings including schools, juvenile and adult detention facilities, low-income communities and rehabilitation centers. Gabriela has also conducted trainings on the Principles throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. A native of Mexico City, her bi-lingual\bi-cultural capabilities and understanding have been instrumental in developing training programs in English and Spanish and made her an ideal choice for Poco Way.

Sister Margarita Tran, a Sister of The Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, has worked serving the poorest of the poor from Vietnam to the Philippines to the United States. Born in Vietnam, Sister Margarita is a trained physical therapist, social worker and registered nurse and has worked with children suffering from polio, terminally ill cancer patients, lepers and the mentally ill. In Saigon, before 1975, she was the leader of a small community clinic where she not only helped with medical needs, but also developed programs for troubled youths, widows, seniors and the incarcerated. At the end of the Vietnam War in May 1975, she was airlifted, against her will, to the United States. Learning the Principles, she says, has helped her release her thoughts about the past.

It is best...to let go of the past...because the past is gone and it comes back to you through your thoughts only. If you realize it is gone...(you) don't live there; (you) don't dwell there.

She now believes that learning the Principles is highly beneficial for anyone who has been through a war. She sees how understanding one’s psychological functioning helps put in perspective disturbing past memories and assists in the creation of a more peaceful life.

A very important component of training in the Principles is referred to as “the health of the helper.” This means the effectiveness of the facilitator is dependent on his or her own “health” or understanding of the Principles. Therefore, for Gabriela and Sister Margarita to see and support the realization of innate health in the residents, it is first necessary that they themselves experience and understand this reality for themselves. Their ability to drop rigid thinking, judgmental criticism, personal insecurity or attachment to results directly affects their teaching. It also directly affects their ability to connect to the residents.

As each facilitator deepens her understanding of her own personal psychological functioning, she becomes more grounded in her own innate health. She is now more capable of positively impacting others. Since this inside process is continuous, Gabriela and Sister Margarita are always aware of the need to stay connected to their own understanding of the Principles whenever they are teaching or interacting with the residents. This personal grounding, the ability to remain in an optimal state of mind, allows wisdom to flow more easily into each teaching situation.

The History of Poco Way

It was said, if you wanted to experience a slice of hell, you could walk the streets of Poco Way.¹ For thirty years, this eastside community in San Jose was a breeding ground for drug pushers, “gang bangers” and addicts. Violence and fear ruled against a soundtrack of gunfire, sirens and police helicopters. Nearly 200 families lived in 130 decaying apartments. Broken windows, ubiquitous vermin, leaky roofs and structural rot were devouring the buildings. Outside their homes, on streets even police wouldn’t walk alone. Gang battles terrorized despairing residents.

Constructed in the early sixties, Poco Way was part of an optimistic Model Cities program. The design and state-of-the-art buildings were considered glamorous and desirable. However, just a few years later, it was discovered that the architectural layout had helped turn the community into a haven for undesirables. Poco Way’s out-of-sight nooks, hidden alleys and sheltered yards became a harbor for vagrants, drug addicts and criminals on the run.

Through the 1970s, low-income refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam poured into the neighborhood. New arrivals clashed among themselves and with the predominantly Latino population. By the early eighties, a bad situation had become even worse. Lou Henry, principal at neighboring Arbuckle Grammar School, concerned by the students’ attitudes of hopelessness, decided to get proactive. “You can judge” he said, “the value of schools by seeing what role they play in the betterment of the community. We decided to make our school the focal point for taking back the neighborhood.”¹

By fall 1988, committees consisting of political and community leaders, parents, educators, and heads of city and county departments such as probation, housing and welfare, were meeting regularly at Arbuckle School and pulling grant money into the neighborhood. New hope was brought into the community. While Poco Way lurched into the ‘90s clean-up efforts, rent strikes, rallies against drugs and gangs, job fairs, ESL classes and Head Start programs etc. were enacted. However, a Task Force assigned to assess the status of the community at large concluded that piecemeal attempts at fixing the neighborhood would never work. When the city also realized that the slumlord owners of Poco Way were never going to do anything constructive to help the community, they decided to buy the property, lock, stock and barrel. By late 1992 that acquisition had begun and a plan of re-vitalization was created.

At a final cost of \$19.9 million, the re-vitalization would become one of the biggest neighborhood projects either the City of San Jose or the Housing Authority had ever undertaken. The apartment buildings were tastefully painted in subtle shades of green, yellow and burnt orange. Drive-through archways, manicured lawns, lilies, camellias, and fruit bearing trees surrounded buildings with new windows and appliances, strong roofs and modern plumbing. A new era had begun at Poco Way.

During construction, residents were relocated and those who were known to have gang, crime or drug affiliations were not invited back. Those who returned or joined the community were required to sign a zero-tolerance drug policy. Residents agreed to live under stringent rules: they must report overnight guests who stay longer than 10 days; they must submit to annual inspection of apartments; they must agree to take part in an unofficial honor code for reporting criminal activity or drug use in the area. City and housing officials such as Richard Warren, property management director for the Housing Authority, hoped such measures, along with city programs and services and dedicated upkeep of the buildings and grounds would help prevent Poco Way from replaying the Model Cities tragedy of 30 years previous.¹

Unfortunately, several years later it seemed evident that the same scenario was about to reoccur in the same community. In response to this fear, The Housing Authority Program Director Liz Paredes-Bahnsen decided to invite this new

Principles-based program Poco Way. The Principles-based parenting classes were begun with the hope of facilitating a return to a more peaceful environment.

Phase One-Establishing Rapport and Listening

As has been stated, the principle of Mind holds that every human being possesses immeasurable depths of wisdom. A Principles-based facilitator recognizes and acknowledges this truth within themselves and all others. Here, the teaching begins. Despite whatever confusion or behavior an individual might be exhibiting, the facilitator looks beyond the outward appearances to the inner core of wisdom possessed by all. Bringing this perspective to the individual or group is the first step in the development of rapport. Rapport is thus rooted in respect. Rapport is the sense of acceptance, harmony and affinity which flows between individuals when respect and trust have been established, a respect so palpable that trust can blossom freely. Gabriela and Sister Margarita brought this understanding and sense of respect and trust to the Poco Way community. They both understood that rapport is a prerequisite to working with any individual, group or community.

For the first three months only one woman came to Gabriela’s weekly class. Although flyers had been sent out and posted around the community, only one woman, Adelita Gloria Ponce², came. During class Adelita was listened to in a way that was new for her. This new way of listening that Gabriela learned and values as a Principles-based facilitator, removes static from the ears of the listener. When one listens with respect, a space is opened within the listener to hear even beyond what is being said. No judgment, assumption, or criticism creeps in. Time seems to slow down as both are now engaged in a process of connecting that creates a sense of acceptance, harmony and closeness. Within this space, the wisdom present within facilitator and participant can blossom.

For three months Adelita never missed a class. When Gabriela decided to celebrate the feast of the Epiphany on January 6th as a way of reaching out to others in the Latino community, Adelita invited four friends to the festivities. Shortly after this class party the group increased to twelve participants. Gabriela, being from Mexico knew that the sharing of food in the Latino culture was a friendly way to bring people together and deepen rapport:

The first year and a half we always had food. You know, ‘if there is food, they will come’. I realized (the class) was at dinnertime for the participants and I figured if they come with their children that would be one less thing they would have to worry about. They could have dinner here. At first I brought food but then we started taking turns. People started to say, ‘I’ll bring this, I’ll bring that’.

Childcare was also arranged through the Housing Authority. This allowed the parents to be in class without worry because they knew their children were being cared for right next door.

As new people entered the class, Gabriela continued listening and deepening rapport. After several months when rapport had been established between facilitator and participant, teaching could begin. Participants now know they are safe with someone who has listened to and understood them. There is a very gentle outpouring of goodwill even before any discussion of the three Principles has begun. Thus, in an atmosphere of trust, when the feeling in the room has opened each one to their innate ability to listen deeply, share freely and learn insightfully, facilitator and participant enter a level playing field. All are teachers and all are participants now; each connected to their wisdom; all able to achieve guidance for their life; each capable of understanding the interplay of the Principles to experience realizations that foster possibilities for a better life.

However, within this multi-cultural environment where among other things language barriers made communication among members seemingly impossible, Poco Way residents, themselves, rarely spoke to one another much less had any rapport with each other. Resident Lupe Rodriquez² remembers:

I never walked down the street. I would just go from my apartment to my sister’s apartment. Usually you never talked to your neighbors. We would see each other but we would never say hello.

Sister Margarita found the same situation when she first arrived:

When I first came to Poco Way, it was like a deserted place. People were very suspicious. People did not talk. The Vietnamese who lived there would (later) say, ‘Your face looked familiar but (because) we never talked, I didn’t know you were Vietnamese’.

Many residents were afraid to raise their heads as they walked through the neighborhood. Drug dealers had confronted them in the past. Parents hesitated to let their children play outdoors. People closed their blinds and didn’t go out after dark. The history of Poco Way’s troubled past had seeded distrust among its people. An outsider like Gabriela was suspect at first. Allowing time for rapport and trust to grow was essential to the success of the project.

Luckily, Liz Paredes-Bahnsen was well aware of the time factor involved and knew this process was different and might be slower than she expected or desired. However, the rapport Gabriela established between herself and Liz helped solidify Liz’s commitment. Liz explained:

The relationship I had with Gabriela...our working relationship was such that we were talking about the frustrations both of us were

having...we were seeing and understanding each other’s perspectives and so there was a lot of trust. I trusted not only in her abilities but also in her heart for it...her commitment and her investment is truly a fruit of who she is...so that in itself was like ...I don’t care how long it takes.

A year later Liz completely supported the addition of another Principles class for the Vietnamese residents within the community.

Since first learning about the Principles, Sister Margarita Tran’s wish was to teach them to the Vietnamese people living in San Jose. In January of 2002, she was given the opportunity to do so at Poco Way. Sister Margarita began knocking on doors and introducing herself to the Vietnamese residents, once again in the manner of Principles-based facilitators: to establish a connection, to establish rapport. Her efforts were greeted with resistance from some and welcoming from others.

The first challenge I found was because of my habit. I am a nun so they had ideas...oh she is going to teach us about the Faith. So I had to always introduce myself as a county employee. I am not here to teach about the Catholic faith.

Sister Margarita took time to sit and listen. She explained to the residents in their native tongue about the parenting class she was beginning. Some were very interested in attending, others more hesitant. Today, Sister Margarita and some of those who initially resisted her, laugh remembering their first encounter with the Sister’s persistence:

The first time I knocked on their door, the wife said, ‘We are Buddhist and we don’t want to see a Catholic nun. We are happy with our religion’. And she closed the door. I stood there for a few minutes and then I knocked on the door again. She opened the door and I said, ‘I am not here for the religion. I am here as a (county) employee. We are starting a class here. May I come in?’ She allowed me to enter and have a few minutes.

Sister Margarita had another wish: to bring the Principles to the Cambodian population of Poco Way. A short while later, she found herself knocking on the doors of Poco Way’s Cambodian residents. Accompanied by an interpreter, she introduced another parenting class. Undaunted by the history of unfriendliness and wars between the countries of Vietnam and Cambodia, Sister Margarita broke through the memories of past hostilities to develop a lasting rapport. This rapport supported the involvement of the Cambodian community in the DADS project.

Phase Two-The Teaching

At first Gabriela and Sister Margarita focused on teaching Principles-based parenting classes. However, through listening and observing it quickly became apparent that the soul of any community, the human connection and trust between members, was non-existent at Poco Way. Gabriela recalls:

The city had come in and gotten the community inspired by the rehabilitation of buildings...but then it left. The community was physically more attractive but had nothing internally self-sustaining. They feared and had misconceptions about one another. This was contributing to the deterioration. When we started working, Sister Margarita and I never thought that it was going to be a community project. It was apparent (that was needed) and little by little it turned into what we have now.

It has been stated that a Principles based intervention is an “organic” process. It takes root and grows according to the soil in which it finds itself. Goals are set based on what comes from the residents’ wisdom and their understanding of their community. The facilitators’ recognize that their focus needs to be aligned with what is needed by the community not what they, the facilitators, think is needed. Based on their observations from their parenting classes they realized they were not just there to teach parenting. They were there to help bring a frightened, fractured community together.

Teaching the Principles to point participants toward their innate wisdom and an understanding of how they were creating and experiencing their parenting, community and life was the logical starting place. Once participants became aware that they, and all others, possessed wisdom and common sense and a naturally healthy state of mind, a different life perspective could evolve. This state of mind was ever present and readily accessible. For most people the realization of this truth is quite new and quite powerful. It beckons self-esteem out from hiding. It inspires confidence and equality. It gives permission for inherent wisdom to flourish.

Wisdom was definitely flowing when class member Lupe Rodriquez² became aware of a different type of parenting:

I thought that the only way you could discipline was the way I was disciplined at school. I used to think that things were black and white. If you were told that you had to do something, you should do it! There was no arguing with elders. Now I feel that having a dialogue is important. If you have a dialogue with your children, they develop trust in you.

Lupe’s children are still very young but she feels talking with them sends a very clear message; I value you and the wisdom you possess. She believes she is creating a foundation of trust that will support healthy communication throughout her children’s adolescence. Previous to this class, she had a great deal of apprehension about parenting through this stage.

Learning about the Principle of Thought, the resident participants began to understand that every human being creates the reality that they experience as their personal world. Using this remarkable ability to create, each person formulates their own set of beliefs, opinions and habits; each creating their actions, reactions and interactions from thought. People, however, have just never understood they had anything to do with the creation of this personal world. Without this understanding people will innocently act out of old habits of thinking without oversight from their wisdom. When people understand how this function of thought creates, they no longer act from old habitual ways but rather from their innate wisdom. A more peaceful life and community atmosphere can then be realized.

When a problematic situation arose between Lupe and the Resident Manager, Lupe became aware of how the power of thought could blow something out of proportion or serve to create a different outcome:

I had a problem with the manager. I caught myself saying, ‘Why am I getting so upset about this?’ I realized that even though he was not completely right, he did have a point because he was only doing his job. So then I learned to calm down. I am learning. I have a sense to control my temper and not react. (I realized) the problems that were going on were simple problems and he made them bigger. I went and talked to him. I told him, ‘You know what we are talking about is something really, really small and there are some other things that are really big and we need to focus on those.’

When asked about her present relationship with the manager, Lupe smiled:

I had my calmness and he gave his and now we talk. There is not a problem. We are neighbors. Before, I wouldn’t explode or anything but I would have kept my distance. Now we are fine. We are both on the Board of Directors. We are not best friends but we talk and things are fine.

In a similar manner, Roberto Ramirez² learned in class he could change his thinking and therefore, his reactions:

I learned how to have control of a problem. If you have an argument with someone and that person tells you something

strong and that person becomes aggressive, it doesn’t mean that just because that person is telling you that, that you have to get upset...they’re just words.

Eventually, as participants began to discover that everyone acts from their own personal thinking, they came to the understanding that nothing should ever be taken personally. An opening to more tolerant communication could follow. This particular realization profoundly affected Consuela Garcia’s² relationship with her husband:

My husband used to be very quiet. I used to blame him a lot and I really thought he didn’t care for me. I used to get blinded by hatred about why he didn’t talk to me. I used to ask him, ‘Why don’t you talk to me?’ He would say, “Because of the way you are with me”. As I started to understand that I had wisdom, I started to understand that he feels alone in this country and that at least I have my sister here. Now, I am not as judgmental and negative with him as before. I am taking him where he is at, just where he is at. I am not as close-minded. I am a lot more open-minded and I have a little perspective. Now, we actually have a communication and we talk. If I have wisdom like you say, then...I just have to see that he is tired and he doesn’t feel like talking which happens to me sometimes. I’m not taking everything so personally. He has noticed I am calmer. I calmly express my thoughts. Things between us have really changed.

Consuela had learned in class that if one person changes in a relationship it gives the other person permission to change likewise. Indeed, the ability to ‘see’ a person or situation differently has a dynamic impact on the quality of our lives.

Consuela also disliked her neighbor. She judged that he was aggressive and had a bad temper. Then one day she noticed something different. She noticed what the class called his “psychological innocence” :

I noticed he has a softer side and now I see him as that. Before I used to see him as an aggressive person and now I see somebody - yes maybe he has a temper and maybe he has problems, but there are a lot of things that are good. He is just like any other person.

In a manner of speaking, all people are psychologically innocent. Anyone who is unaware of how they function psychologically, unaware that they are the creator of their own thinking, does not realize another choice is available. The interplay of the Three Principles must be understood before a choice becomes evident. With this understanding, participants began to see how, not only individuals, but also whole communities and cultures formulate their own set of philosophies,

customs and conventions. This is what is referred to as creating “separate realities.”

Influenced by this teaching, Vietnamese participant, Vinh Nguyen² had a dynamic shift in his ideas about parenting:

The class taught me how to help my (children) behave and especially not to beat them. In Vietnam it was considered all right to beat children because of the culture. We have also stopped them from watching too much TV (We have limited the time). Now we have time to talk. It’s much better.

We all live in our separate realities surrounded by familiar thought patterns and attached to engrained habitual thinking. Understanding this can, as with Vinh, bring a personal insight that directly brings about profound change. It can also bring compassion and tolerance as with Rosa Hernandez²:

Maybe not everybody sees the other as a human being but what I see now is that everybody really has the same needs...all the cultures. Everybody is human even if they have different ideas, different education, and different cultures. Each person needs to lead their life however they want.

Vietnamese participant, Dang Vu² also agrees:

Everybody thinks a different way so we should accept that, and not force them to do things our way all the time.

Duc Tran², another Vietnamese participant, summed it up simply:

Through this teaching, I have learned to see myself and accept myself and others better.

Another valuable lesson concerns moods. Having moods is part of the human condition. Some days we feel on top of the world, other days, down in the dumps. It is very helpful to understand that this is cyclical. Knowing that low moods will eventually transform into better feelings makes ‘down’ times considerably more tolerable. Participant, Roberto Ramirez² found this teaching very helpful:

I had never known about saying that you were in a bad mood. I had never known that it was just temporary. I didn’t know that you could make a little problem into a huge problem just by using your imagined (thought).

Roberto learned that he could make a low mood lower by judging it to be more important than it was. He saw that acceptance of this human condition relieved

the stress and tension which can actually cause the mood to become more intense and last longer.

As participants experience the validity of this teaching, they also discover a tender compassion. They begin to respect the mood changes of those with whom they live. Consuela Garcia² spoke of her son:

My son is an adolescent and he gets moody. All of a sudden he gets moody without really knowing why. There are times when he comes home, that he is in a mood. So I have learned to understand and not be reactive. You know we get onto each others nerves but I know how to put a limit and not to start screaming and loose my temper and that is what has helped me so much...I have learned to calm down.

As family and community members calmed down and became less angry and afraid of one another, they began relating on a friendlier, more cooperative basis. Thus, the self-sustaining foundation so needed within the community could begin to emerge. This foundation’s roots sprang from a sense of confidence experienced by those attending the HRSD classes. Lupe Chavez² explained:

Before I used to go to meetings but I didn’t participate. I feel the class gave me more of a sense of comfort in developing myself as a person and participating.

When a treasurer was needed for the newly formed Poco Way Community’s Board of Directors, Lupe stepped up. Confident, she now believes she has the ability to inspire others:

I really want to impact the community to create a better relationship among groups.

Consuela Garcia², once frightened of speaking in groups, has also found a voice for change:

I didn’t feel comfortable talking to other people and before I would not even feel strong enough to participate. I would not even speak. Even with this interview, I would have said, ‘No, no. I have nothing to say, what would I say?’ I was timid. I kept all my opinions to myself. I was very negative. Now, I have lost my shyness. I have gotten to be more out-spoken. I have gotten to know myself and what I have to say. I feel more comfortable expressing my opinions.

Consuela and some other residents have been concerned about homeless, inebriated people wandering into the community. Before the classes she would

have felt hopeless about dealing with this situation. Her past thoughts would have been, “Oh that is going to be impossible” But now, she knows that change takes time. “You know, that is going to be hard...but with patience...things can change”.

Consuela’s fellow participant, Roberto Ramirez² had a dream to see his daughter, Christine², a talented gymnast, compete. He had worked tirelessly to provide Christine with the training she needed to foster her talent in the sport she loved. Through the years it became evident that Christine was destined for stardom. Today, she is a circuit nine gymnast and will soon represent Northern California at a national competition. When Christine was ready to enter high school, Roberto decided to send Christine to a private school. Father and daughter filled out many applications. Family and friends wondered how Roberto was going to bear this additional financial burden. Roberto never wavered. Miraculously, Christine became the first recipient of the Eastside Heroes Scholarship of \$40,000. Roberto became the recipient of a powerful new insight regarding his own self-esteem:

I always had the conviction with Christine that she could do anything she wanted to, but I didn’t have that conviction toward myself... that was the part that I realized in class.

The realization was so powerful that it encouraged Roberto to become President of the Poco Way Community’s Board of Directors. Following this success, he turned his attention to the local grammar school. He, his wife and several other parents were dissatisfied with the quality of education the school offered. Roberto, a Mexican native, had never had the opportunity to get an education. His desire to provide the best possible schooling for his other children drove him to spearhead a campaign to open an independent charter school:

I never thought it possible that I could open up a school. It was very difficult. We were involved for a year and eight months in that process. I’ve learned that even though I don’t know English, if I put something in my mind, I can get whatever I put in my mind. It’s really possible. I really see how people can reach their goals.

When asked about the class’s effect on her personal life, Catalina Ramirez², a resident also involved in the school project, grinned and responded:

You find that you start thinking that you can do more in your life than you thought you could do. It also helped with problems. If I think I have a problem, I think about the problem all day and it sticks with me. But if I don’t think about it, the problem can go away.

Members of the classes began impacting their neighbors many of whom couldn’t believe what was taking place. Roberto proudly recalls:

People didn’t think we would be able to do what we have done. They also didn’t think, for example, that it was possible to have a direct connection with the Housing Authority...to tell them how we feel (about things)...how we feel about living here.

Encouraged by what they were learning in the classes on the Principles that regardless of race, age, or education everyone possesses their own wisdom, residents as a community initiated a meeting with the Housing Authority management to present concerns they had with the apartments. At the meeting, they stood as equals with Housing Authority management. Sister Margarita’s words awakened them to a different type of communication:

...(speak) not with the idea that I am less than you are because I live here. I am the tenant, you are the owners...but on the same level.

Liz Paredes-Bahnsen was present at that first meeting:

Residents requested the meeting. Gabriela and Sister Margarita were available as translators and we talked a lot about the issues they had concerns for and we were able to give them answers. Maybe not solve the problems, but we had answers for them.

This was the beginning of a profound shift in the relationship between the Housing Authority and community members. Communication and understanding between these two separate groups could only bring positive results to the people of Poco Way.

The Poco Way Community

When both facilitators came to Poco Way they took the time to know, encourage and foster goodwill within the community. San Jose Police Sergeant Wil Montano feels HRSD’s weekly presence was one of the key factors in the success of the program:

I think that being there every week is a key. People tend to forget but when facilitators come every week it says, somebody cares and somebody is trying to change things for the better. It makes a big difference.

Class members began to feel the truth that they had value. As they embraced the teaching and felt the truth of the lessons and experienced its benefit in their lives, a new self-image quietly came forth. They did possess this remarkable innate intelligence. Wisdom was as available to them as to anyone anywhere. They now had power over their lives and a newfound sense of freedom.

While a member of the Asian Pacific Islanders Against Domestic Violence Association, Sister Margarita Tran, in early 2003 learned that Poco Way might be eligible for a Resource for Families and Communities Grant (RFC). Class members were told to spread the word. Flyers were distributed. Sixty residents attended a meeting in which Sister Margarita and Gabriela discussed this possibility. The grant money could be used for events and activities the residents thought would help create community solidarity. Volunteers would be needed. A Board of Directors would be formed. A checking account would need to be opened; grant money monitored. Additionally, the RFC grant required quarterly progress reports.

Sister Margarita asked those present, “Do you want to submit a proposal?” All were in favor. She then asked, “What do you want to call yourselves?” There was silence for a moment. Then one voice spoke up. “How about The Poco Way Community” Sister Margarita is still moved when she remembers this moment. It was the first time the residents of Poco Way had ever referred to themselves as a community. It was the first time a sense of togetherness had ever been openly expressed.

The grant amount requested was \$15,000. The grant amount received was \$13,000. This made Poco Way one of the top three community recipients. Residents were ecstatic. They began deciding what celebrations; field trips and fun activities might be planned. Rich in ethnic diversity, it wasn’t long before the community formed a list of celebratory events: Vietnamese and Cambodian New Years, Cinco de Mayo, a Children’s Festival. The Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Tech Museum topped the list of places to visit.

Guided by the facilitators and lead by class members, residents learned how to work together to organize events. Each ethnic group took the lead coordinating their cultural celebrations. The first holiday was Vietnamese New Year. It quickly became evident that for every celebration, food was going to be a major consideration. The grant money provided funds for the ingredients and residents cooked up or catered traditional holiday feasts. Music and decorations were loud and colorful. The whole community of roughly 800 people was invited. Many came out to witness and enjoy the celebration. The fear and misconceptions residents once had toward one another was slowly transforming into understanding and acceptance. Housing Authority Program Director Liz Paredes-Bahnsen recalls:

It wasn’t instant but some of the feedback we got after the first event...neighbors were more apt to smile at one another, to give one another a clue that they existed rather than just ignoring them and going about their business. It broke down walls...pretty soon they were saying, ‘Hi amigo, Hi friend’. The people who (began) doing this were the ones in the class. The leadership group was formed out of participants from each of the classes. They were the

same ones planning the events. So they were taking the lead in terms of breaking the ice with other people.

When Liz was asked how many people were involved in this outreach, she said:

A small group...six or eight. That small group helped to effect the change by their (own) change in perspective.

Vietnamese New Year was followed by Cambodian New Year followed by Cinco de Mayo. Next was the Children’s Festival which drew 200 people. Each event provided more experience in organizing, outreach and community building. Leaders went on to learn a new set of skills when they arranged for 75 participants to visit the Tech Museum and 148 went on the trip to the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Poco Way was becoming a community of friendly, caring people.

This friendliness even extended to the Police Department. In the past, the police came to Poco Way when there was a disturbance or someone was in need of assistance. Today, the police are invited to all the community events. They are invited not only for security reasons, but also because class members have learned about rapport and the importance of relationship building. The police share in the festivities and goodwill is showered upon them. Now when they come into the area they recognize residents who have become friends and they are recognized by many as friends who have come to help. As Roberto Ramirez² explained:

The phenomenon still happens that people from other areas come here to fight. Sometime our youth get involved and the police have to come. We have invited the police (to the events) because it is helpful to have them here...for the community to sense their presence and also to listen to their point of view.

This desire of the Poco Way community members to change their thinking about the police coincided with a new concept introduced into the San Jose Police Department. That concept involved the creation of what Police Sergeant Will Montano refers to as “a softer, gentler police force.”:

Every year we have classes about policing and community relationships. When this concept (started) it wasn’t really welcomed by everyone because we were tough crime solvers; dealing with criminals and throwing them in jail. A lot of people weren’t happy about being softer and gentler. But I think as we got rid of the old truths and got some new ones, we started becoming more sensitive to what the community needs. Now we are looked on as friends whereas in the past there were people who didn’t want to have anything to do with us. Obviously, the

criminals still feel this way. But now, even in that part of town I don’t get any bad feelings from (residents).

On one occasion the police were instrumental in helping create a spontaneous event that brought out hesitant community members. The second Cinco de Mayo celebration had ended and the area had been cleaned up. However coals in the barbecue were still burning brightly. Somebody said, “Instead of throwing them away, let’s just use them. Let’s roast some corn!” The police, still present, said, “We’ll buy the corn.” As the corn began roasting, many residents started coming out. Gabriela, witnessing the number of new residents who were participating, realized this could be a way to attract more people. She and class members organized more corn roasts as a way to reach out and dialogue with neighbors previously unreachable.

The class participants were learning about the Principles in action. They were beginning to use the power they had within themselves to affect the changes they desired in themselves and their community. To coordinate the last field trip to the Monterey Bay Aquarium many hands and much cooperation was needed. With 148 people signed up to go and with the group comprised of Spanish, Vietnamese and Cambodian speaking residents as well as a Russian and a Filipino family the population of Poco Way was well represented. In a proud and pleased voice Gabriela described the trip:

Everybody was on time; nobody was late and nobody got lost. It was amazing! A staff member at the Aquarium said, ‘I cannot believe how organized you are. Groups that are one fourth your size take one half hour to get organized.’ So what has been astounding to me is how during these celebrations and events, people are at their best, willing to collaborate, willing to help, willing to clean, willing to do whatever needs done.

Trusting the Process

In their training to be Principles-based facilitators, Gabriela and Sister Margarita had been taught to “trust the process.” This process starts with the facilitators’ ability to see the wisdom present in all people no matter what their life situation or life challenges. This is followed by the facilitators’ willingness to drop preconceived agendas, goals or attachments to results and be willing to be comfortable with the unknown. Only through the release of these usual considerations can a facilitator be totally present to hear what the community wants. At this point, intake can begin. Intake is time spent in deep listening. If a belief in each person’s connection to his or her innate wisdom is the starting point, then listening for that wisdom to reveal itself is definitely the journey’s next step. Intake is an open embrace to this possibility. Only by deep listening without preconceived ideas can a facilitator truly hear each person, each communities’

wisdom speaking. The environment created allows everyone to feel safe enough to allow this wisdom to come forth.

A situation thereby exists in which both facilitator and resident wait for wisdom to make an entrance. Insights will come to each. Facilitators are trained to look for these insights as a means to guide teaching. However, facilitators at times still get into repeating old formulas that have been used in the past forgetting to look at each situation with new eyes. In one instance, when a great deal of effort at outreach to the community failed miserably, Gabriela discovered why:

We (the facilitators) had it in our minds that if we sent out flyers and we announced what we were doing, we would reach a lot of people and they would come. First the flyers were in English and then in Spanish and all other languages. (We discovered) most of the residents don't read very well, so it didn't matter.

It was also an insight that led Gabriela to see that the Spanish speaking community might come if they knew food would be present. So she planned a party and asked her one participant to spread the word. Attendance increased and the program connected to more residents.

A similar insight arrived regarding the corn roast. Gabriela saw how many new people were willing to participate in this event. Creating more corn roasts could create the opportunity for more community togetherness and communication. Sister Margarita’s realization that funding could further promote community cohesion was another moment of unexpected insight.

Neither facilitator could have imagined or planned these happenings. They came forth from Gabriela and Sister Margarita becoming comfortable letting go of preconceived ideas and clearing their minds for new creative ideas to emerge. They were comfortable “working within the unknown.” Here, agendas and old paradigms are dropped and new direction is revealed naturally by listening to wisdom’s guidance.

Not only the facilitators but also the Housing Authority’s representative Liz Paredes-Bahnsen eventually came to understand this natural process:

The hardest thing was not knowing the purpose. I knew what I wanted to see; what I expected. I kept asking Gabriela, ‘How are you measuring this? Supposedly there is a pre and post test for the class but beyond that as far as community development, how are you measuring this? The answer was, ‘We really don't know how to measure it. It's kind of organic.’ So that was hard for me to accept but I came to realize, I can relax, I can enjoy watching the process.

As everyone involved learned to release expectations and attachments to ‘measuring results’ a more spontaneous guidance could emerge. This common sense guidance would arrive in the moment as all participants became aware of what steps needed to be taken next. Operating in this fashion the residents experienced a new sense of well being. Once they, themselves, began identifying this newly discovered sense of well being, the facilitators could gently point the way toward deeper understanding and commitment. Liz explained:

The facilitators started off with getting to know who these clients were through the parenting class, and through those classes (the clients) started realizing, ‘Oh boy, I’m thinking on a whole new level now and now I can see my community. Now I’m not just looking at myself and my family, I can see my community.’ They started identifying things and we were right with them along the way to say, ‘Oh, you’ve identified this, well here is something you can do.’ So because (of this process) we let the planning, the strategy come as it will.

When questioned as to the effectiveness of this approach Liz replied:

It is a completely different way of looking at how to help a community being part of this...the progress of it and the process of it...it seems so natural...of course this is the way it has to happen. This just makes so much more sense. You can’t force anybody to change. The change has to happen within them. As far as what is going on in the community...it’s the residents who need to change and they are only going to change themselves.

The facilitators refer to the above as an ‘inside-out’ approach. The wisdom inherent within each individual and each community is the best and most solid route to understanding what is really needed. As an awareness of this wisdom becomes evident, people naturally, in their own time, discover new possibilities. Liz explained that it is decidedly different from approaches that were tried in the past:

During the neighborhood revitalization it was all an ‘outside-in’ process; money was poured in; the residents didn’t have a choice. (They) got all these different agencies involved. (They said) the agency has this expertise and that agency has that and that is what these people need. Now it’s the residents who are identifying what they need. And they don’t identify it right away so it’s a drawn out process...it’s an evolution. And they are learning...maybe by their own mistakes...that’s O.K. too.

There was also an understanding that learning from mistakes would apply to everyone, facilitators as well as participants. This encompassed the project in a veil of safety. Mistakes were lessons to learn from as opposed to failures requiring self-criticism. This allowed simple adjustments to be made without stress. For example, when facilitators believed that an *English as a Second Language* (ESL) class was needed, they asked the resident Board of Directors if they agreed. All were in agreement that the community needed to learn English. However, when the classes were started, the attendance was low. Those who said they wanted the classes attended sporadically. Liz recalled the attempts made to bring about more participation:

We went around for awhile with the scheduling because we were trying to make it so accommodating for the tenants. We changed schedules three or four times in a series of three months. It didn't help.

Those who organized the classes were frustrated. Then Gabriela had an insight:

If you have no attendance after you have informed people and have done outreach...then it is just really not a high need.

This insight extended to a profound realization about the value of true listening. Gabriela continued:

We need to be listening to the community CONSTANTLY. But I realized that sometimes we listen a little and then we make up ideas, we create ideas in our own minds about how it should be, what is needed...and then we wonder why things don't work. ...and then we (start making) judgments. You can ruin the whole point of the project by your perception of things. Using thought we really create our reality about this project whether it is successful or not and people notice that. They feel judged.

This realization led to the cancellation of the ESL classes. The ability to calmly make adjustments in the moment without anger or a sense of failure moves one more gracefully through disappointments and crisis. It brings creative solutions quickly to the forefront. It eliminates frustration and creates a more open-minded acceptance. Gabriela explained:

Can you imagine if we still had the ESL classes? If we hadn't listened? We would have pushed them and then people would have started feeling bad. The residents who were participating would say, 'People just don't care. They should have taken advantage of this.' I explained that it was not necessarily that they didn't care, it was just not working for this particular population at this time.

In a similar way, Sister Margarita discovered that the Vietnamese and Cambodian residents are not interested in meeting once a week. They are, however, interested in coming together to plan events and field trips. Sister Margarita’s reply: “If that’s what they are interested in, that’s what I am going to do!” The Principles are present and can be taught and understood no matter what framework surrounds them. If residents are getting in touch with their well-being while organizing and celebrating community events, then teaching them through this arena is optimal.

Facilitators and participants learned to acknowledge when an insight pointed them toward a deeper understanding of how to communicate better, how to teach better and how to delight in the knowledge that this guidance is always available.

Conclusion

When parenting classes were initiated at Poco Way, it was hoped they would help facilitate the community’s return to a more peaceful environment. Before the classes began, the sight of children playing outside was an unusual occurrence. Neighbors feared one another and lived behind shuttered blinds and locked doors. Their thoughts were full of fear and anxiety. These thoughts seeded misconceptions about their lives and their world. Life seemed difficult and hopeless to many. Relationships between families and community members were strained and sometimes violent. The police were regarded as the enemy, the Housing Authority as unapproachable. As Sister Margarita observed, “...*it was a deserted place.*”

Today, children from different ethnicities play outside together joyfully. The sound of their laughter echoes through the neighborhood as parents greet one another and stop to talk. Residents have joined in the festivities of varied ethnic celebrations and begun to learn how different, yet how similar we all are. Fear has lessened as human-to-human understanding and tolerance has grown.

This writer attended the most recent celebration at Poco Way and was warmly greeted by community members who were friendly and welcoming. Despite the challenge of intermittent rainy weather, the Hispanic organizers continued on with confident smiles and cheerful dispositions. The food served was fresh, excellent and abundant. Colorful streamers decorated the recreation area and music filled our ears. Obviously, a great deal of preparation had preceded the event and many helping hands had joined in and participated. Vietnamese children ate burritos; Cambodians danced to salsa music and a Filipina woman offered to bring some food to the celebration. The celebration was called Cinco de Mayo but it was truly a celebration of what a small handful of people can do when they realize the truth about who they really are; when they realize the tremendous human potential within themselves and all others.

The rapport that Gabriela and Sister Margarita developed between themselves and the participants in their classes and the residents of Poco Way laid the foundation for the above to flourish. Their deep understanding of the Principles and their willingness to move through the process of teaching, and trusting the wisdom that appears moment to moment for guidance, was exemplary. Unlike other models that focus on fixing problems, a Principles based intervention focuses on the mental health and wisdom inherent in everyone and attempts to create an environment that invites that wisdom and health to reveal itself. Both facilitators established that atmosphere in the Poco Way Community.

Sister Margarita feels that it has been a privilege to work at Poco Way. A privilege because she has seen positive results in her participants which honors the work she has done. Her Cambodian class consisted mostly of elderly people many of whom held age old, negative beliefs and stereotypes. Her face lights up when she speaks about their growth:

They really had prejudices toward a certain race...now they say, 'The more we know about this (the Principles), the less we have to judge people.' They are beginning to understand the culture of one another. There is a historical background of many wars between the Vietnamese and Cambodians and a difficult language barrier to overcome. But now they are celebrating each other's New Year. They are understanding each other more than we really expected. They can see the beauty in each person they approach and that is something we treasure.

Gabriela Maldonado also feels proud of what has been accomplished at Poco Way:

It is really, really amazing to see them coming out of themselves and taking care of themselves and there is such a sense of community and family within these people even among different ethnic groups. Now they know that they and their children have wisdom. They know about fear and how they create it. They have calmed down and can be reflective about their lives. They have come a long way in four years. I truly love the people at Poco Way.

It is obvious to any observer that this feeling is mutual. When Gabriela emerges from her car she is greeted excitedly by Poco Way children with hugs and kisses. Regardless of their culture or race they see her as friend, as someone who cares, someone who really ‘sees’ them and the truth of who they really are.

In the area of crime reporting, Liz Paredes-Bahnsen has noted a welcomed change. Crime has historically been a challenging and continuous issue for the community. Residents have been frightened and hesitant to report the illegal

behavior they witnessed. Those who did many times became discouraged because nothing seemed to change. It is a very difficult task for the Housing Authority, a public agency, to carry out an eviction without cause, without proof, without documentation, without the support of community residents. Liz notes this change in resident behavior:

Recently three families who were involved with drugs were evicted as a result of other people stepping up and reporting things. Before the courses, I think people were very impatient with the process to a point where they just gave up. They said, ‘I’m not going to report anything anymore because nothing happens.’ Well, through this process of education now they say, ‘Yes, we can do something about this problem, yes, it will take time but there will be an end result.

Now, when residents and the Housing Authority work together a safer community can only result. Liz believes that in the next phase of community development residents should be educated regarding the importance of working more diligently toward crime reduction:

We need to reach out to the general tenant population; get them more aware of this community effort...because, right now I think the tenants are just waiting for the next event...that’s all they are waiting for. We need to reach out to the community at large and talk about the really important issues like crime and reducing crime. People have come forward and we have evicted three families but there are other families that we have suspicions about.

To help support this next phase, Liz and Gabriela both feel that training Housing Authority’s resident managers in the Principles would be optimal. Gabriela has invited Poco Way’s manager to participate repeatedly. However, except for occasional attendance at class, making coffee for events or reproducing flyers, he has been reluctant to join in. Liz feels his behavior reflects current Housing Authority policy but she is also convinced that this policy could be reevaluated:

A key to helping the residents build more trust and keep faith in the neighborhood is the management. The manager has really been separate from this due to the Housing Authority policy: ‘Run the property but don’t get involved with their lives.’ If we could get them trained and integrated into this process it would be helpful because you really do need to get involved in their lives. Gabriela really modeled that.

When residents come to Poco Way’s Resident Manager, Francisco Melgoza² with their personal problems he repeatedly refers them to Gabriela and Sister Margarita:

...they come in with problems...and they tell me about them ...so I say, ‘I’m sorry, I can’t help you with that but talk to Gabriela about it. Maybe she can find a solution for you’ ...and she comes up with a solution for them. They go to the class or they talk to her after class about their particular problem.

A Vietnamese resident shared a difficult problem with the manager:

About a month ago a Vietnamese women wrote me a letter that her husband was going to kick her out of the house... he beat her up... she had two kids. I gave the letter to Sister Margarita and she talked to her and everything got fixed. So it was a great help...so there is a kind of cooperation between Sister Margarita and Gabriela and me. They help me a lot and I try to help them as much as I can.

This co-operation, however, has not provided the incentive for him to attend the classes that he feels might put him in an awkward situation:

Sometimes they have to talk about the rules and regulations we have and this would be difficult.

He is grateful, however, for Gabriela’s help in explaining Housing Authority expectations to residents who sometimes have difficulty with understanding:

Sometimes it’s hard for the Mexican guys to understand what is going on in terms of the rules and regulations. I talked to Gabriela and I said, ‘Please tell them that this has to be done like this and that has to be done like that...tell them these are the rules and it has to be done in this way or else I will have to take some kind of action. And we want to avoid taking any action but they have to comply with the rules.’ So she helped me to explain to them what is going on. She and Sister Margarita have done an excellent job.

Although Francisco is quite aware of how effective both facilitators have been in helping individuals and the community as a whole, he has not embraced the possibility that he might be trained to acquire these same abilities. Liz, however, believes that this would be invaluable:

(The managers) would learn more mutually understanding ways of dealing with violators...not so much by the policy manual but in a more positive, more proactive, less reactive type of response. I would expect a huge decrease in the amount of violations because tenants are regulating their own behavior or

catching things; realizing the things they do or that other people do...educating their peers.

Indeed, at this time Liz, Gabriela and Sister Margarita are looking to see how self-sufficient the community itself has become. All three women have been gently guiding and lending immeasurable support for the last four years. They have shared moments of high joy as well as moments of frustration and doubt in this process of community building. They look back on what has been accomplished with pride but know there is a more to be done. Liz wants to see residents skilled enough to facilitate their own meetings, create their own agendas, find translators among their own residents, such as their own neighbors. This would be extremely helpful for the Cambodian population that has had difficulty in finding reliable interpreters. Without a translator, the Cambodian residents don’t know what is going on at the same level as the Spanish and Vietnamese.

Gabriela is interested in training class members to become facilitators and, in time, begin classes on their own:

I have invited them to teach but the reality of life is that they have children to take care of and feed and a couple of them don’t drive and some are very, very involved in the charter school. So the reality of life is they don’t want to be facilitators. It’s not the right time for them.

Sister Margarita has hope that one day the residents will discover even more self-confidence and self-sufficiency:

When I saw how they were able to organize the Aquarium trip, I saw they were able to work and put things together but they just needed us as ‘background support’ So we hope that by the time we need to leave they will just see that and say, ‘Hey, there is an issue here and how can we help each other to solve this or do that?’

Liz, the facilitators and most residents interviewed all feel that this can be accomplished. One thing that is agreed upon is the need for greater outreach to the community as a whole. Today, roughly 800 residents live in 130 units at Poco Way, yet only a small handful of people are involved in community leadership and development. Most of these have stepped up by way of the classes. Others within the community have been reluctant to participate fully.

Even after so many community successes, there are still cultural-based misunderstandings about the Principles based program and meetings within the community that need to be addressed. Additional information regarding the true value of the classes on the Principles needs to reach this population. Gabriela revealed one of the reasons she believes holds back the Latino community:

Part of the problem is that people in that community think: why would women meet? They are just gossiping. They don't have anything better to do. So there is almost like a fear in coming because they think: if you were proper women you would be taking care of your family.

Gabriela explains further:

The people who see the value in this are the core people who are coming to the classes but not the community at large.

Liz agrees:

The rest of the community still needs education on the Principles because even if the residents can plan the events that effect some change, if they aren't involved with that change they are going to stay where they are socially.

Lupe Chavez² wants to attract more people to the classes as well as increase members on the Board of Directors:

I want more people to participate. It's really a good program to learn but the majority of people are not interested. I had the thought to invite more people to come and help with the events because they like the events. I don't know why they come to the events but not to the meetings.

However, Gabriela has more of a reflective attitude regarding this challenge. She feels that often times we judge the outcome of a project against the background of old conditioning. Since an intervention based on the Principles encourages ‘present-time’ thinking, finding a more creative response to a situation can result:

I realized that we often think of services in a certain format and we attach ourselves to that format. If things happen the way we want them to, i.e.. high class attendance, we say we are successful. If they don't, we think we have failed. What I hear residents saying is, ‘We just want to organize the events. Perhaps we can teach in those times...providing services in a way they have never been provided in community development before.

Once again, the art of deep listening from an open-minded space brings about new perspectives and possible new directions. Indeed, Gabriela, Sister Margarita and Liz all see this four year milestone as a time for reflection and evaluation. They feel that something new is needed in order to shift things to the next level. A general meeting of community members to ask about their general concerns is

being considered as a possible new starting point. Gabriela thinks that re-examining the class format could lead to new class focus:

I think one of the reasons that we haven't attracted more people is that they think this is a parenting class. I think we need to get a little more specific and address the needs that the residents have and then use that to teach. For example, some weeks we could talk about safety, some weeks about how to communicate with people or with the Housing Authority, so classes have a specific topic each week.

Whatever the outcome of this new phase it is evident that the partnership in place at Poco Way will continue to support the transformation to healthier thinking, more tolerance and happier community living.

The classes taught here were only one of the many classes Gabriela and Sister Margarita teach around the county. When it became evident that this project was beginning to flourish, they each gave more of their time and energy than could ever have been called for by their salaried positions. Gabriela speaks with yearning of what could have been accomplished had she had more time. Upon reflection, it is obvious that what *has* happened solidly supports the effectiveness of Principle-based programs as a valuable model for community building and personal transformation. It is hoped that the example of Poco Way will be an inspiration to those interested in teaching and researching for similar results within other communities.

When Sister Margarita was asked what she would say to others engaged in this pursuit, she replied:

Just listen to the people. Learn things from them before doing any teaching...listen...learn...and then work together with them. Listening is the first and last step to help them realize their innate health. And that is just the most powerful way to teach.

Footnotes:

¹Jim Gensheimer and David E. Early, “Street Smarts” San Jose Mercury News, March 9,1997

² The names of the residents have been changed to protect their privacy.

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