



Connecting and convening leaders to work together for the improvement of their neighborhoods, communities, and cities.

Summer Newsletter

2021

Board of Directors

- Arlene DeYoung
- Dave Veltkamp
- Jay VanGroningen
- Ken Genzink
- Ren Broekhuizen

Help us grow the movement

- **Donate** to Great Lakes Urban to support our neighborhood strengthening activities.
- **Get to know** your neighbors.
- **Like and follow** Great Lakes Urban on Facebook!
- **Watch and share** our Lunch+Learn recordings and blogs with your networks.
- **Encourage** your church, business, etc. to get involved with a local neighborhood.
- **Visit our website** at: GreatLakesUrban.org to learn more.
- **Share** your ideas with us by emailing: info@greatlakesurban.org

To change how you receive this newsletter, send an email to: info@greatlakesurban.com
 In the subject line, say: "Please send via email"
 OR
 "Please take me off of your mailing list" and include your name.

Scaling Transformation: Catalyzing a National Movement

Summer is here! And I've been thinking of old family trips and the memories that were forged on the road visiting our national parks out west or points of interest to the south and east. This newsletter is going to give you an opportunity to travel to these places from the comfort of your couch!

In this case, we are traveling in search of transformation. Transformation implies, according to Oxford Languages, "a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance." But how does a thorough or dramatic change happen in the places where we live and play, in the neighborhoods we call home?

To answer that question, we're going to visit with leaders in neighborhood revitalization from California, Tennessee, and Virginia. We'll also travel to Washington, D.C. to visit with Sara as she reflects on community building there. And we'll learn about resources to help us continue to explore the topic.

Since 2008, Great Lakes Urban has been strengthening neighborhoods in the communities of West Michigan, which was the focus of our last newsletter. This region will always remain the core of what we do, but we are also passionate about using what we've learned in our West Michigan work to help catalyze a national movement.

As part of this goal, we have joined with seven other founding organizations from across the country to launch the Network for Social Transformation. What binds us together is our dedication to relationally-driven, ground-up, asset-based, and place-centered neighborhood transformation.

We are taking the opportunity of this quarter's newsletter to introduce a few of the organizations to you.

Whether you support Great Lakes Urban with time, talent, or treasure, know that you're helping to strengthen neighborhoods locally AND you're helping to catalyze a movement nationally. For that, we're grateful!



Eric Smith, Director

The Network for Social Transformation: An Introduction

The Network for Social Transformation is a network of eight (and growing) intermediary organizations from across the US who, along with Great Lakes Urban, strengthen communities through approaches that are asset-based, resident-driven and that build social connections. Our goal is to spark revitalization at a national scale. We believe that transformation happens when people are united around a shared vision, use their gifts, and take ownership of their preferred future, creating belonging and well-being across their local neighborhood and community.



Being in a network together offers opportunities for peer-to-peer support and the sharing of ideas, encouragement, and expertise; for fueling social transformation by inspiring innovation and collaboration; and for linking community-led action in our respective regions to systems level change.

Talking Transformation: A Visit with 3 Thought Leaders

We had the honor and privilege of having three of the members of the Network for Social Transformation join us for a delightful and insightful conversation at our June virtual Lunch+Learn. If you missed it, you can Listen to the full video at greatlakesurban.org/events and scrolling to the video link listed under past Lunch+Learns. Below we introduce these luminaries in neighborhood and community revitalization.

Cheryl Groce-Wright, Founder & CEO

I have thirty-five years of experience in education, program management and community development. I currently serve as Founder and CEO of Kaleidoscope Collaborative RVA, a Richmond, VA-based consulting firm championing racial equity, empowered communities and inspired citizens. I am deeply into Asset Based Community Development and co-creating change with residents. Insight about the quality of our connections from the Lunch+Learn:

"What I am longing for, and what draws me to this work, is the opportunity to really see someone, to sit down over a cup of coffee, or at a doorway, or a community meeting, and really listen and see them, and have them see me. That for me is what's so important and gives me so much hope about building community in this way. We've gotten so far away from that ability, but it isn't that complicated. Let me see you, and you see me."



Cheryl Groce-Wright

To learn more, visit:
<https://www.kaleidoscopecollaborativerva.com/>

Monika Grassley, Founder & Executive Director

I am the Executive Director of Lifeline CDC, based in Merced, CA. Early on in my career I realized the tendency of individuals, churches and groups to give 'hand-outs' which often only perpetuated the problem of people in poverty. I received training on Asset Based Community Development principles and practices and now equip community members and coach churches and organizations. Insight about the pandemic from the Lunch+Learn:

"For my middle class friends, the reminder is that what you just experienced over the last year, and the chaos that it caused you in your personal life, in your emotions, and your stress level, that is what my communities that live in poverty always experience. Everything is uncertain. Nobody knows if the schools are going or if assistance will be available or what transportation will look like. Our communities living with poverty don't have security in any of it."



Monika Grassley

To learn more, visit:
<http://www.lifelinecdc.org/>

Amy Moritz, Founder & Principal Consultant

I am a Social Change Consultant who specializes in organizational development and community engagement with over 25 years of professional experience. Consulting led me to found and lead two nonprofit organizations: Uptown Alliance CEDC and the Center for Transforming Communities, where I trained and coached eight neighborhood coalitions in Memphis, TN and over 40 congregations. Insight on the power of community from the Lunch+Learn:

"I believe it was Margarette Wheatley that said, 'Whatever the problem, community is the solution.' My daughter got married in April 2020, and we ended up having to scrap the big plans and to have the ceremony in our home and at a nearby park. And I just put out a call to my neighbors to help with candles and linens. It was amazing the abundance, I had more stuff than I could use. It proved to me once again that whatever the problem, community is the solution."



Amy Moritz

To learn more, visit:
<https://www.amymoritzconsulting.com/>

On Building Community: Lessons from Minerva Clients

The following is reprinted with permission from the Minerva Strategies blog at <https://www.minervastrategies.com/blog/>. Sara Veltkamp, on Minerva's staff, helped Great Lakes Urban revamp our messaging platforms.

I'm not going to mince words: I've struggled during the pandemic. While I am grateful that I am healthy, haven't lost loved ones, and have a good, steady job and a safe place to live, seeing people close-up and in-person shouldn't feel like a special occasion—or a risk. We are all meant to exist within a rich tapestry of relationships, not just with a few people you see occasionally from a safe distance or over a screen. As a result of these conditions, I have felt more alone this past year than I have ever thought possible.

What I've learned during the pandemic is that community is not something I can continue to assume will “just happen.” Building a community of people you want to live with—and more importantly, rely on when things get hard—takes intention.

Fortunately for me, one of Minerva's clients helped me figure out my next steps.

Great Lakes Urban is a nonprofit organization based in Michigan with the goal of connecting people to build stronger neighborhoods. Drawing from a strengths-based framework, they look at the wealth of resources in a neighborhood and help people take advantage of the gifts and talents they have to build the communities they want to live in.

Through our partnership with Great Lakes Urban to level-up their communications platforms, we supported an online event where two neighborhood residents and a community police officer talked about the changes they've seen and been a part of in the neighborhood of Holland, Michigan. Sergeant John Weatherwax described these efforts succinctly, “the residents have turned these neighborhoods into communities.”

In preparation for this event, I spent time with the panelists to make sure they felt comfortable and confident. Toward the end of this prep call, we started talking about life in a pandemic, and I mentioned how challenging it has been to find and build community. Great Lakes Urban Board Member Jay Van Groningen asked me point-blank: “How many of your neighbors' names do you know?” I sheepishly made excuses like “I'm new to the building” and “I moved here during the pandemic.” These things are true, but they are excuses, nonetheless. Several neighbors have attempted to start conversations with me, and our building has held COVID-friendly outdoor events.

The truth is that I have not prioritized building community in this new space. Jay was simply pointing that out—and offering a simple path to start.



Sara Veltkamp

Give the Gift of Neighborhood Transformation



Will you consider contributing toward our vision of reaching 100 neighborhoods with our connector program in the next three years?

You can make a tax deductible donation by sending a check to:

Great Lakes Urban
100 Pine St Suite NW-4
Zeeland, MI 49464

Or via our secure online system by *visiting www.greatlakesurban.org and clicking the "Donate" tab.*

ABCD Training: An Engine for Transformation

Neighborhood participation is the substance of community. Moving from isolation to active participation and care for one's neighbors takes intentional effort. On May 25th, Great Lakes Urban and 3sixty teamed up to provide an introductory 3-hour training on Asset Based Community Development (ABCD).

Participants learned about the six layers of gifts to harness for the common good in every neighborhood, "care" as the currency of participation and action, strategies for discovering both gifts and what residents care about, and how to move from collective dreaming to collective action.

Would you like to attend the next training or host an ABCD workshop at your church, organization, or community? Register your interest by emailing info@3sixty.org. We would like to extend a warm "thank you!" to our host for the May 25 workshop--Providence Church of Holland Michigan--and our partners in the Community Policing Team.



Jay VanGroningen



Wendy McCaig

Transformation Stories: A Journey to the Streets

One of the member organizations of the Network for Social Transformation is Embrace Communities, which Wendy McCaig founded and directs. For our occasional series about community building resources, we thought we would introduce you to Wendy's 2010 book, "From the Sanctuary to the Streets."

Wendy spent the past twenty years doing community building in communities across Metro Richmond using Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) principles and practices. As a coach and a trainer in ABCD, Wendy has gained experience working with a variety of stakeholders from community leaders to governmental agencies.

Recently, we asked Wendy about her book and here's what she says. "Many Christians find themselves at a crossroads. Cultural shifts and growing ethnic and religious diversity are causing Christians to question the essence of the Christian faith. Is it an hour on Sunday spent inside a building with people who look, think, and act much as we do, or is it something more incarnational that seeks out those who are different, the ones living in the margins?"

"In 2004, I felt called to venture outside the church walls and into the world. Through a series of encounters I experienced the mysterious power of Christian hospitality that turns strangers into family. My encounter with a young homeless mother led to the formation of a ministry that mobilizes neighbors to care for one another.

"For centuries Christians have gotten it backwards; we have presumed that we are to take the gospel to the poor. Instead, I invite you to receive the gospel from the poor. These true stories of the least, the lost, and the forgotten will bring you face to face with the Good News in the midst of poverty in a way that inspires you to join the fight for justice.

"With our eyes opened to the needs and gifts of our under-resourced neighbors, we can begin to dream God-sized dreams for a hurting world and make them a reality. And as we pray *thy kingdom come on earth*, we can live in such a way as to make it happen in our own neighborhoods."



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