

The Power of Intentional Spaces, Practices & Networks

Prepared and Written by Frankie Blackburn with Trusted Space Partners,
in collaboration with the Edgewood Team at CPDC
(Khyati Desai-Seltzer, Yerodin Avent, Jennifer Lumpkin, Joanna Giddens)



The Starting Point

The April 2013 murder of another young man at Edgewood Terrace, a well-known affordable housing complex in the northeast area of Washington D.C., seemed inevitable in this neighborhood, despite years of good intentions, complicated public financing and innovative arrays of programs and services. In the weeks after his murder, a stroll across the 9 acre community revealed a culture where people rarely made eye contact when passing a stranger and some staff members appeared uncomfortable when in direct contact with residents.

Peeling back a layer to see below the surface, one discovers that the norm is for residents to live on the same hallway for years and rarely speak or lend a helping hand to one another, and only a handful of the 2,000+ residents are connected to the active civic life in the larger neighborhood surrounding the complex. A few inquiries make it clear that these **feelings of isolation, cynicism, and, in some cases, fear and anger**, are also prevalent among the 32 staff members charged with keeping the community clean and safe and in compliance with the many layers of federal rules and regulations.

None of these descriptions are surprising. Some professionals accept this reality as the cultural norm; the price we must pay to have basic affordable housing, especially in newly gentrifying areas like Northeast Washington DC, which is only two miles from the U.S. Capital and literally borders anchor institutions like Catholic University, Children's Hospital and Washington Hospital Center.

Not true for the gutsy staff of **Community Development and Preservation Corporation (CPDC)**, a 20 year old nonprofit housing organization which owns Edgewood Terrace (792 units) and over 4,900 units of housing in the D.C. region.

Determined to preserve Edgewood Terrace as a new hybrid of mixed income housing that can be a positive participant in the changing neighborhood, CPDC faced a moment all too familiar for those involved in urban renewal: Significant planning for the renovation of Edgewood Terrace had occurred with limited involvement of residents. In late April 2013, just two weeks after the murder on the property, the time had come to introduce the renovation plans at a resident meeting. There was both a sense of dread and a resigned acceptance among CPDC staff that the meeting would be challenging. As a small team gathered the Friday afternoon before the Tuesday meeting, the unspoken bubble above everyone's head was: **"The majority of those who will show up at the meeting will want to talk about the murder or will be there to complain about something, most of which we have little power to control or change"**.

Here's where the gutsy spirit comes in: A newer team member proposed using a radically different meeting format, one that provided more choices for two-way dialogue and participation, combined with some good old-fashioned food and fun. It had been piloted by Trusted Space Partners in the Roxbury/Grove Hall neighborhood of Boston. She argued that it made sense to try out something new, precisely because **it was a heavy moment and a lot was at stake**.

This moment provided the strategic crack needed....the chance to **begin shifting the ways things work at Edgewood Terrace**. To her surprise, her on-site partner jumped in and agreed to facilitate the meeting, knowing very little about the format, but willing to take the risk. And, to everyone else's amazement, CPDC's real estate person (the person with the most skin in the game) also agreed to try it out.

As a result, a new and more honest set of conversations with and among residents took place at the meeting that Tuesday. More importantly, this relatively small moment provoked a decision to support an 18-month campaign to shift the challenging culture at Edgewood Terrace to one of aspiration, connection and co-investment.

Understanding the Environment at Edgewood Terrace

Edgewood Terrace is a tough place that can be characterized in a number of ways. Here are some of the early observations that led to our assessment that the current operating culture was one of fear, anger, isolation and division.



- People do not speak to each other when they pass in a hallway or outside on a pathway.
- Residents are very hesitant to invite anyone into their housing unit.
- Very few people exchange small favors.
- Most people show no interest in attending meetings or programs.
- Some people will say they are interested but will not come or follow up.
- For those who do come to a meeting, many will not make eye contact or visit with those sitting next to them in a circle or in line to get a plate of pot-luck food.
- Staff members, especially those coming from different disciplines, rarely talk or have meetings to discuss common issues and strategies.
- Very few residents sign up to use the abundance of common area spaces available in the complex.
- Security guards treat everyone as if they are doing something wrong the minute they enter the lobby.
- People do not pick up trash as they pass it by in the hallways, and on the sidewalk or report other issues that occur, like a broken light.

It is also important to understand that the fear-based operating culture at a place like Edgewood Terrace is comprised of ALL the participants in this culture. While it is difficult to group people into categories, for purposes of understanding the foundation for our “campaign”, we divided the operating culture into four distinct “camps”—Residents, Property

Managers, Resident Service Providers and Asset Managers. As you can see in the chart below, each group—including the one that our team grew out of, Resident Services—brings differing quests, challenges and assessments. The list of assessments are based on informal conversations and observations over the course of a year, but were not collected in any scientific way.

PARTICIPANT GROUP	SPECIFIC QUEST	SOME CHALLENGES	SOME UNDERLYING ASSESSMENTS
Residents	To live a quality life within an individual opportunity and resource frame.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited and poor quality education • Systemic racial barriers to employment • Long term public assistance dependence and stigmas • Little or no family system of support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will not survive unless I do everything in my power to hang on to this subsidy. • I’m better off keeping to myself and making sure that I can continue living here. • He only sees me as a “poor person” and doesn’t get how smart and knowledgeable I am. • I deserve this public benefit because of my hard life.
Property Managers	To provide quality services to the property owner within both a compliance and profit making frame.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly regulated and constantly changing industry • Multiple layers between ownership and service delivery structures • Long term distinctions and stigmas attached to affordable versus market rate housing. • Customers who are very fearful of any approach or question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why should I worry about customer service when there are plenty people who would give their right arm for this kind of public benefit? • Why don’t they appreciate that I am doing the best I can to run this property on a shoe string? • Those do-gooders may be here today helping out with their next initiative, but tomorrow they will be gone. • No one really understands what it is like to collect rent and conduct re-certifications in this environment.
Resident Service Providers	To provide quality services to residents within a social service, third party and program budget frame.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term tradition of adversarial relationship between service providers and managers. • Tension between a relationship building approach and myriad rules/regulations of nonprofit housing organization. • Mis-match between funding and expected outcomes. • Limited accountability via a third party approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents need my help to solve their problems. • Residents are too busy surviving to be involved in the community. • Property managers do not care about residents and are not interested in working together. • The most effective strategy is for the residents to organize for the purpose of demanding change. • It’s normal for only two or three residents to always run everything.
Owners/Asset Managers	To ensure thriving communities within a third party partner and property budget frame.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry practice of focusing on front end development versus back end operations. • Limited support and accountability practices within the housing industry. • Inadequate funding framework for affordable housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The best accountability tools are the monthly financial reports. • I shouldn’t ask this question because asset managers are not supposed to micro-manage. • The development of affordable housing – and not management - is the most challenging and most important aspect of our business.

Our Strategy:

While it is early in the change process at Edgewood, it is important to describe our strategy and our early successes and lessons learned thus far. Billions of dollars are invested each year in the development or preservation of communities similar to Edgewood Terrace, with little to no **attention focused on the underlying power dynamics and operating culture**. It's past time to weave the relatively simple strategies we've been using at Edgewood Terrace into the larger affordable housing development approach throughout the United States.

STEP ONE:

Understand the Importance of an “Interdependent” Versus an “Altruistic” Framework

The hypothesis we are working from at Edgewood is this: *If we are going to create high quality places to live and work, we must **recognize that everyone in that particular eco-system (residents, staff, partners) is a human being with something to contribute** AND that we, as human beings, are interdependent on one another's contributions in order to achieve a high quality of living and working.* For example, if my goal as a property manager is to operate and come to work daily in a community free of trash, I really need residents – my fellow human beings in this eco-system - to use their good will, ingenuity and discipline to share in the collection of trash, despite the rush of daily living and occasional sloppiness. Or, if my goal as a mother in the community is to cook really healthy meals for my children, I may need to find a few neighbors who can share rides to the better grocery store or trade tips for cooking on a budget.

Unfortunately, most affordable housing communities operate under a very different framework that can be articulated in this way: *Poor people need us, the professionals, to provide them with the physical structures and social programs to pursue a quality life.* While this intention is noble, and may be true on one level, history has proven that this underlying assumption—if allowed to persist and grow—undermines the self-empowerment process, which in turn undermines our shared collaborative pursuit for a high quality of life for everyone in a particular place. For example, if a resident picks up the vibe that the property manager thinks he or she is a needy person “to be taken care of”, as opposed to a valuable customer, then he or she might not feel compelled to throw away trash or ask others to do so. Or, if a resident repeatedly experiences outside do-gooders coming in to deliver program after program on healthy living, she might start believing that she can't do it on her own. And, it is important to acknowledge that even in these altruistic cultures, those with positional power, who may have started with good intentions, can become frustrated and end up misusing their power. This misuse of positional power, in turn, encourages fear or anger-based behavior on the part of those who do not have positional power.

When CPDC first began exploring the shift from altruism to

interdependence, we began every small planning meeting with a re-statement of this underlying belief and framework, with diagrams and pictures posted on the walls to remind the team as the conversation unfolded. We used simple devices within these meetings to begin practicing interdependence with



each other, even though we were only a few staff members within a particular division at CPDC and no residents were involved at this point. Yes, everyone was extremely busy and came to meetings in a rush, but we set aside 5 to 10 minutes at the beginning of each meeting for a personal check in. At first, it was difficult for staff to reveal things going on in their personal lives, but as the months passed, the process of opening up became easier and we learned more and more about each other's stories. This new understanding made it easier for us to keep taking steps together, especially steps that felt risky. We also devoted time at the end of each meeting to check out and to share one thing we learned, one thing we appreciated and one thing we would change. By the time we began hosting meetings with residents and property management staff at Edgewood Terrace, these new "interdependent behaviors" came easily to several people, making it less scary to introduce the "check in" device (and other devices) in a setting with people who were initially resistant or fearful or angry.

STEP TWO:

Seek to Change the Operating Culture Instead of Starting a New Program

As busy professionals of any type, **we often miss or ignore the huge impact of our shared operating culture on the other "more concrete" goals we are pursuing.** (An operating culture is the pattern of social beliefs, behaviors, norms and habits that guide us in our everyday lives). Or, we pause to understand the operating culture in a particular community only as it relates to our specific objectives in the moment and not as an asset or a challenge that needs to be strategically addressed or incorporated, together, across our parallel disciplines.

The particular challenge in pursuing a new culture of interdependence in the context of an "affordable housing" community is that **our attention is either on the physical/financial plan or on the creation of a social service program.** In each of these very different disciplines, we are driven by the specific outcomes we are trying to achieve, as well as held hostage to the rigid accountability structures built by outside "experts" in government and private funding institutions. As a real estate developer or owner/manager, I am focused on the construction/repair plans or the financing spreadsheet or the governmental compliance report.

As a resident services provider, I am engrossed in a complicated array of program options, resident needs, funder-prescribed outcomes, best practice research and staff burnout issues.

Our strategy as an initial team of “sparking stewards” at Edgewood was to first agree among ourselves that we need to focus on and understand the operating culture, before jumping in with specific programmatic interventions. We developed a clear hypothesis and visual diagram of this agreement and showed it to everyone we met with and to ourselves. (See attached as Appendix One). Our basic hunch was that there was a lot going on in the Edgewood Terrace culture that we did not know or understand. We went into a listening mode, reaching out and building relationships with a wide range of people involved in the Edgewood Terrace eco-system.

Our teammate, who was on site five days a week, took walks around the property each day, talking to both residents and staff. He insisted on moving his office from a dark basement area to a very visible space right next door to the leasing office and he created an open door, friendly atmosphere to those he was meeting and greeting on his daily walks.

In these early days of **reaching out in a new way**, it became clear that in order to really listen to and build relationships, more people and greater diversity was needed among our core team of sparking stewards. (Even though approximately 20% of the residents at Edgewood Terrace are Latino, all of the previous programs and staff positions were designed to support African American households). With support from CPDC management, the resident site coordinator, a middle aged African American man, secured a Public Allies position and filled it with a young Latino man who had grown up in the neighborhood and hired a young African American woman, with a very different personality than his own, to serve in a part time position.

This newly constituted team was able to take on a more proactive form of outreach. They began to hold weekly community chats outside the elevator in each of the three high rise buildings. Initially, residents took the free waters and fruit without stopping to chat, but the team learned how to negotiate on the spot and be honest about the deal being offered – water and fruit for a short conversation. With a team of three very different people fanning out and following up with different people in a variety of intentional, yet informal moments, the new resident services team and office quickly became a hub of buzz and activity . . . and learning.

As some initial trust and connection emerged, residents and staff began to reveal some of the unspoken assessments that drove many of the negative behaviors present in the operating culture, as noted in the beginning. With this initial base of understanding and connection, as limited as it was, the team agreed to pursue the following sub-hypothesis: ***If we create intentional spaces, practices and a network for mutual exchange and collaborative action, we can shift the operating culture of isolation and anger to a culture of aspiration and connection.***

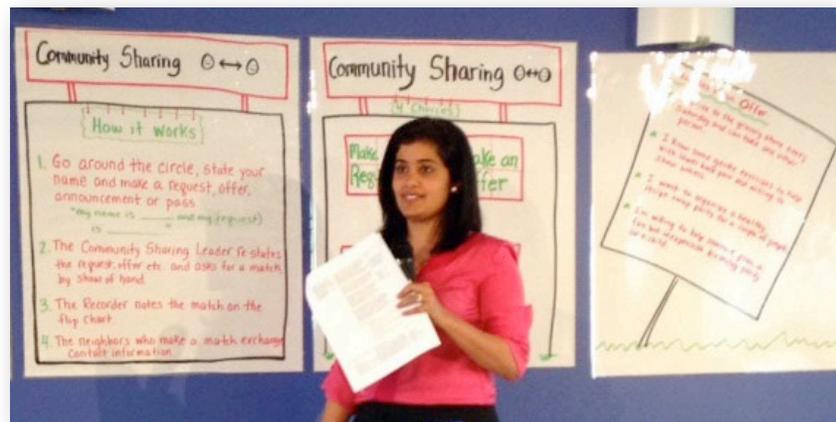
STEP THREE:

Introduce New Spaces and Practices, With Quality, Zest and Consistency

The only way to change the operating culture in a particular eco-system is for a small group within that eco-system to begin acting and behaving according to new norms and habits that embody the desired shift in culture. As others within the eco-system witness and experience a positive benefit from these new behaviors, they may decide to try it out and, in turn, as they enjoy a positive outcome, others may be willing to jump in. Eventually, the set of new behaviors will reach a tipping point, and while the old ways may remain and linger among some, most people in the eco-system are practicing a new way of living and working together.

So, to pull off this strategy in the context of a housing community, you need:

- Agreement and clarity about the desired shift in behaviors you are seeking
- A small group of diverse pioneers who authentically inhabit the eco-system and agree to try out the new behaviors
- Intentional spaces within which people can intentionally practice these behaviors together
- An effective invitation for new people to join in
- Constant repetition and consistency in using these practices and spaces, over time, among a growing group of people.
Remember....old habits die hard.



In the very early days of this endeavor, the CPDC team did not have a small group of authentic pioneers with whom to work at Edgewood Terrace but we were very clear about the desired behaviors for a new culture:

- SPECIAL HUMAN BEINGS vs. NEEDY RESIDENTS:** The first and most fundamental behavioral shift needed is for those who feel labeled as “needy low income residents” to claim and offer their unique personal power and gifts to one another and to the collective whole.
- APPRECIATIVE HUMAN BEINGS vs. EXPERT HELPERS:** Another important behavioral shift is for professional helpers to put some of their “expertise” on hold, and instead, focus on “receiving” the genuine value of the resident contributions, as peers and fellow human beings in the same eco-system.

- **REPLACING NEGATIVE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE OTHER:** A core behavior shift on everyone’s part is to take the time and risk to share their personal story with each other, in order to break down negative assumptions and begin building some initial trust for continued exchange and relationship building across deep lines of difference and positional power.
- **SHARED PROBLEM SOLVING AND INNOVATION:** The most important new behavior, emanating out of those listed above, is to begin experimenting with creative ways to make both small and big changes together, in small groups and teams. This means taking action, even if we do not have it all perfectly figured out. We learn best by doing, and talking TOGETHER about what we are doing, while we are doing it.

The field of cognitive behavior and habit change research has taught us that **you CANNOT change group or individual behavior simply by expressing the desired new behavior** (as set forth above) and asking people to try it out. You have to create an intentional moment or “space” in which people can try out the new behavior, based on modelling or prompts, and enjoy the positive benefit from the shift.

The Key Intentional Space: Network Night

As mentioned in the beginning, the CPDC team made a quick decision to use a very different “resident meeting” format in the heat of a challenging moment when the real estate division needed to share the renovation plan, soon after the murder of the young man on the property. Because the meeting produced a higher quality of exchange among staff and residents and between residents than was the norm, the team decided to keep holding the same kind of gathering once a month, holding true to the exact same format, ritual and practices each time. The team was also bolstered by the range of positive experiences Trusted Space Partners had experienced when using this same meeting format in similar settings.

The team at Edgewood refers to the meeting format as “Network Night” and its core essence represents a highly intentional and efficient space



in which to practice new behaviors and to spark individual and collaborative action. Since experimenting with it in April 2013, the team has never skipped a single month for any reason, even when things didn't always turn out as we hoped for or planned. We kept experimenting with the meeting format and our outreach techniques.

To illustrate its power, in one of the early monthly gatherings, one brave resident raised her hand and proposed a new kind of outdoor gathering called "Music in the Garden". With very little knowledge of her or her vision, the staff team leaned into supporting her and a newly emerging team of co-hosts, without seeking to control or dominate . . . and resisted the temptation to minimize the risk of failure or the occurrence of a big problem. Over the course of the next two months, this emerging resident-led team used Network Night to generate interest and excitement and co-ownership of the Music in the Gardens event. Over 200 people attended the highly successful gathering in August 2013. Some old-timers shared with us how different this event felt from past cookouts sponsored by management or nonprofit partners.



It's hard to truly understand the power of this one 90 minute format without directly experiencing it. We've attempted to set forth below an outline of the core elements and the outcomes each element produces.

INTENTIONAL COMPONENTS

Informal Gathering Time Over Dinner (30 minutes)

- Room set up is inviting and open
- Greeters invite participants to join in an easy icebreaker as they arrive
- Music, pictures, posters – anything to provide life – are in full use.
- Non-institutional food (i.e. moving beyond pizza)

New and Good Sharing Around Circle (10 minutes)

- Sitting or standing in a circle.
- Each person introduces herself, including where they live and shares one personal thing new or good in their lives.
- Important to emphasize brevity and high energy... 15 to 30 seconds each.

Mini-Marketplace or Community Sharing (20 minutes)

- While in the same circle, go back around and give everyone a chance to do one of four things within a 30 second time frame
 1. Make a request for a small favor
 2. Make an offer of a small favor
 3. Make a declaration
 4. Pass
- The facilitator looks for and calls out matches as the process unfolds and a recorder writes it all up on a large flip chart.

Table Talk or Small Circle Conversations (20 minutes)

- Facilitator announces time to take 20 minutes to have 3 or 4 smaller group conversations about common quests and issues.
- Facilitator asks for 3 or 4 volunteers to invite others to join them and to state the invitations.
- Small groups meet and host shares her question and invites other to respond.
- The full group reconvenes and each host, in one minute, describes one "take away" from the discussion.

Bump and Spark (10 Minutes)

- The facilitator encourages folks to stick around for 10 to 15 minutes, to connect informally.
- He or she emphasizes that this is the time to make firm any of the "deals" exchanged at the marketplace or in the small table conversations.
- It helps to use an example or two.
- Also helps to put on fun music and bring out dessert – to make it clear that participants are welcomed to stay

POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR OPERATING CULTURE

- New arrivals stay and do not turn around/leave.
- Helps shift negative mindset into a more positive frame.
- Reduces the fear of meeting new people or the fear of participating that many of us have.
- Reduces over all feelings of tension in the space.

- Signals that meeting is different than 99% of other resident meetings.
- Brings positive, aspirational energy into room.
- Every voice is heard, reducing fear in room.
- Sparks beginning of knowing each other's stories.

- Provides an easy, non-heavy way for people to reveal both needs and gifts.
- Generates specific and tangible value for some, providing motivation to come back again.
- Supports the continued process of getting to know each other and our stories.
- Offers a space for institutional representatives to "do business" in a non-dominating way.
- It is fun and high energy.
- Over time, it provides a very important form of documentation for the community.

- Provides an array of choices for everyone in the meeting to participate . . . even the choice to not join in.
- Allows for an efficient and more focused airing of a variety of quests and concerns.
- Creates an opportunity to "try out" new, somewhat crazy ideas or to get helpful feedback on touchy subjects, without overdoing it.
- Allows institutional representatives a more peer-based form of exchange around topics of concern to them.

- Participants have more one-on-one conversations with each other, building more of a sense of connection.
- Phone numbers and emails and web site information is exchanged, so that many leave with "real value" on which to follow up.
- Facilitates the "sparking stewards" in their continuing process of inviting participants into the process of owning and managing this and other intentional spaces.
- More people help clean up the room and have fun doing it.

See Appendix B for a detailed list of the Network Nights to date at Edgewood Terrace, both the topics generated for Small Table Conversations and the list of requests and offers made during the Mini-Marketplace moments. Since Network Night was instituted as a consistent practice in February 2013, over 300 different residents have attended at least one gathering and over 100 residents have attended two or more gatherings. A core group of 40 residents are considered regular attendees.

The Importance of Small Group Spaces and In-Between Relationship Building

It is important to understand that the use of Network Night must be coupled with intentional one-on-one and small-group spaces and practices. ***These more intimate moments are the key spaces during which participants (staff and residents) receive the tangible value of new connections and new behaviors,*** thus encouraging the continued pursuit of a new operating culture and positive change for the community. The key to these moments is that they must flow out of an authentic burst of energy and they must mirror the new relational behaviors demonstrated during network night. For example, if three or four people discover that they have a shared interest or a common quest, it's important to act on this connection as soon as possible, before inertia or fear sets in again and to take time in that next meeting to learn more about each other, as well as making plans around their shared interest or quest. Or, if two people meet at network night and agree to follow up with each other, it's important to take time in this follow up meeting to check in with each other, share something personal and make clear requests and offers, as the conversation unfolds.

At Edgewood, a core group of three site staff were vigilant in doing one of three things after every network night: **(1) following up** with individuals with whom they had made a connection **(2) hosting** or nudging others to host a small group gathering that bubbled up out of network night and **(3) sharing with others the positive results** of their individual actions as a device for encouraging others to do the same. Some examples of the small gatherings and groups that have bubbled up from the monthly Network Nights are: Health & Wellness Circle, Job Search Circle, Playground Action Group, Daily Walking Partners, Rodent Control Action Team, Adult and Children Movie Nights, Saturday Flea Markets, Youth Bake Sale, Music in the Garden Planning Team, Photo Support Sessions, Weekend Neighbor Circle, and Neighborhood Field Trips.

A Constant Practice: Door Knocking

Door knocking has been a primary way for Edgewood staff and core residents to reach others who are not currently involved and to extend an authentic invitation to join the efforts underway. It takes patience and courage but the returns are enormous when you experience someone on the other side of the door moved by someone coming to their door not to ask for

something but to simply reach out as a human being. At Edgewood, the team discovered that several knocks at the door—at different times—was often needed to prove their genuine interest in making a connection and inviting participation. More often than not, an “initial no” was not a “real no”.

STEP FOUR:

Form a Network (which includes everyone) and Not a Resident Organization

To review, the Edgewood Team set out to create a new operating culture based on the hypothesis that a quality neighborhood can occur only when everyone in that neighborhood eco-system recognizes and practices their interdependence on one another for quality living. One of the barriers to this ideal of interdependence are the institutional boundaries and unnecessary rules we create by quickly jumping to the formation of rigid structures, such as tenant organizations, neighborhood associations and nonprofit institutions. Another barrier to exchanging mutual support and value with one another in a housing setting is the historic norm of combative behavior on both the part of landlords, be they nonprofit or not, and tenant associations. The Edgewood Team, through lots of trial and errors, settled on a six part strategy to overcome these two major hurdles within an affordable housing context (versus a larger and broader neighborhood setting).

- a. **Build a Network and Not a Resident Organization:** The team, when asked, explicitly refused to support the creation of a traditional tenant association, with clear statements of explanation about why a diverse network form that involves residents, staff, partners, and neighbors produces better outcomes. (of course, this is not true in all settings, like a slumlord situation).



- b. **Clear Invitation to Join Network and a Simple Message of Choice:** The team devoted great effort to clearly name and claim the network and to express the agreed upon network values/behaviors so that residents and staff can make informed decisions and choices about when/how to participate. The team decided on using the One Edgewood Network brand and developed common language around inviting others to join the network, based on a loose affiliation model. See Appendix C for a diagram used to explain the One Edgewood Network.

- c. **Emphasis on Network Night as Problem Solving Tool:** The team had a constant and vigilant practice of encouraging everyone in the Edgewood eco-system (residents, staff, providers, maintenance workers, security) to use the monthly Network Night as a place to hold the first conversation needed to solve real problems and struggles occurring in the community (in addition to all of the other uses of Network Night already covered).
- d. **Intense Support for an Expanding Circle of Network Stewards:** After much deliberation, the staff team decided to create a Network Action Team comprised of three staff and seven residents to support both the expansion and strengthening of the initial network. The team met weekly for six months, and built in very intentional leadership development and trust building exercises, as well as devoting time to action planning for the network.
- e. **Intense Support for Resident-led and Entrepreneurial Action:** Instead of bringing in outside program providers or focusing on issues of organizational form, the staff team focused on supporting resident-led initiatives and entrepreneurial action—all within the network—by providing one on one coaching, action planning tools and a grassroots grant initiative with mini-grants ranging from \$50 to \$500 . The underlying principals for this strategy are: “residents know best” and “form follows function”.
- f. **Bridge Building within Housing Platform:** The team also devoted considerable energy to creating and implementing of a new network building device called “synergy meetings”, primarily for the purpose of engaging and including traditional property management staff in the network, many of whom did not attend the monthly Network Night. These quarterly meetings use an “open space” meeting format to identify shared concerns and action items. During these meetings, short term “cross-boundary” teams are formed to follow up and ensure that the shared plans are implemented. These small teams are encouraged to use Network Night as a means for including the resident perspective and getting the work done.

Some of the topics tackled by these teams over the last year are: **(1) a single common space use policy (2) identifying strategies** for reaching Latino and African residents **(3) creating a strategy for sharing information** about the upcoming renovations with residents **(4) protocol for communicating** across the asset management and resident services staff **(5) establishing new meeting schedules and norms** to ensure better collaboration among all staff.



One notable moment was a jointly planned retreat involving all 32 staff members and their home office supervisors. To ensure that the maintenance staff was fully engaged, many of whom are not fully bilingual, the Edgewood team secured two professional interpreters to help facilitate the meeting. The ideas and input flowing from the maintenance workers proved invaluable and an important building block for creating other moments of shared problem solving!

The Edgewood team remains committed to the goal of synergy and bridge building between and among staff and residents, but recognizes that positive outcomes will be difficult unless we also (1) address the high turnover among property management staff (and hence the need to repeat the habit shifting work over and over again) and (2) spark the transformation of deeper systemic obstacles built into the highly regulated affordable housing environment.

So What?

Many of you are asking yourself: Was all of this effort and intentionality worth it? **What did we really achieve?** Our first answer is that it is too early in this long term culture shifting process to be asking this important question. Stop and remember all of the bad and discriminatory public policy decisions that got us to the point of accepting and even embracing the reality of communities like Edgewood Terrace. We believe the appropriate question is: Are we heading in the right direction? What needs to come next? As a team of social change practitioners who have to decide every day whether a particular strategy is worth the struggle and pain of pushing up against a huge mountain of inertia and resistance, here's are the reasons we think we are heading in the right direction at Edgewood:

- A community of over 2,500 lower income people of diverse backgrounds, and the 30+ people who provide a wide array services, have an established and effective practice for coming together monthly to share food, exchange small favors and solve concrete problems.
- The shared operating culture of the Edgewood community now actively encourages and supports resident-led initiatives as the primary means of community change, as opposed to externally imposed programs and decision making.
- At least 300 people are actively connecting with and providing mutual support with neighbors in ways not possible one year ago.
- At least 100 people are pursuing better economic and social paths as a result of a new connection and/or relationship in the network.
- A core group of 30 diverse people (20 residents and 10 staff) are fully committed to and actively working to expand the One Edgewood Network, based on principals of interdependence and shared quality of life.
- Seven residents and three staff devoted 80 hours to increasing their leadership skills and their collective sense of trust and shared mission.

What's Next?

In the short term, we want to **spark active network members** in developing a clear sense of how they want to influence and participate in all of the changes happening in the surrounding neighborhood. We also hope to encourage neighbors who live nearby, as well as people who work in many of the surrounding health and educational institutions (three large hospitals and two universities, in addition to five charter schools and many nonprofits) to join the One Edgewood Network, **expanding the scope outside the boundary of a single housing development**. We recognize that many of the hopes and dreams of network members who live in Edgewood Commons cannot be realized without a broader network of connections and the ability to participate in and influence the redevelopment of the neighborhood.

In the long term, we hope that the **One Edgewood Network can be a model for a radically new approach to affordable housing communities, one which catalyzes a genuine and effective co-investment on the part of residents and owners** in both the physical and social capital of a particular community.



List of Appendices:

- A. Framework for Shifting the Operating Culture in Apartment Communities
- B. List of Network Night Results April 2013 to November 2014
- C. Mission and Framework for the Edgewood Network