

Running Head: TEEN ACTIVITIES

Teen Community Life in Shaker Heights

Holley Martens

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History of Policy

The city of Shaker Heights, Ohio, founded in 1912, covers 6.3 square miles on the east side of Cleveland. With a population of about 29,000 it is the nation's oldest completely planned community. A mayor and seven elected council members establish policies and maintain fiduciary responsibility for the city (Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, 2004). The city department charged with upholding Shaker's values on leisure activities is the Community Life Department. Originally named the Shaker Heights Recreation Board, it was run by a collaboration of the school district, community volunteers, and the city. In 1987, the school district relinquished involvement and the city took over the responsibilities (personal communication with Kevin Crowe, 3-20-07). This \$ 3,000,000 department maintains facilities, offers programs, and leisure activities for Shaker Heights residents and Cleveland residents living in the Shaker school district (Shaker Heights Annual Budget, 2007). The naming of the park district "Community Life" rather than "parks and recreation truly brings about the feeling of live/work/play. It provides programs and recreational activities to residents, mainly young children and seniors. All the programs are open to both residents and non-residents with the exception of the Thornton Park swimming pool, which is limited to residents within the school district (<http://www.shakeronline.com/communitylife>).

Ideological themes of policy

Shaker, since its inception, has been known as the garden city. Its residents and leaders have long valued its green spaces and recreational activities. Free time and family time is an underlying value in the live/work/play community. A 1999 survey of Shaker residents identified the atmosphere of Shaker and the schools were the two top ranking reasons why families chose to live there. In this same study, taxes and cost of living were the least liked aspects of living in

Shaker (Institute of Policy Studies, 1999). Where the population overwhelmingly felt that the schools were the most important issue facing the community (31%) only 5.6% identified more youth activities as requiring attention by city council (fig. 10, Institute of Policy Studies, 1999). This leads to an assumption that the adults surveyed valued “adult” values (a good education) rather than “teen values” (socializing with friends and having fun). The aspect of camaraderie and free time was unrecognized in this survey.

Another value prominent in Shaker is home ownership. *This week in Shaker 5* (8) stated that:

“Shaker values families and owner-occupied homes. The city council proposes to adopt policies and practices that place financial and legal pressure on property owners as an incentive to change their behavior or sell their property and to encourage renters to change their conduct or move”.

This can be interpreted that there is little tolerance or acceptance of varied cultural norms, activities, or behaviors other than the ones espoused by residents that have the ear of city council. City council was going to spend the month February focusing on imposing strong financial penalties and mandatory landlord training on owners who are allowing this (*This Week in Shaker, 5* (7)).

The city values education in both in its youth and in residents. 61.7% of the population hold bachelors or higher degrees; 35.4% hold graduate or professional degrees; and 63.3% serve in professional/management level professions (<http://www.shakeronline.com/about/education/>).

Service delivery issues

Cleveland residents that live in the Shaker school district in the Ludlow neighborhood experience the juxtaposition of being a part of the suburb yet not fully part of the community.

The demographics are different compared to that of Shaker Heights. African Americans compose 66% of the Ludlow residents compared to 33.6% in Shaker proper. This could possibly stigmatize both Ludlow's residents' self perception as not belonging as well as the other Shaker residents' perceptions of their neighbors.

The 2007 Community Life budget of \$ 3,365,600 for FY 2007 is an \$120,000 increase from 2006 but a \$270,000 decrease from 2004 (Shaker Heights Annual Budget, 2007). According to Kevin Crowe, program director, the department eliminated the youth program coordinator and the assistant program coordinator in 2006, placing those responsibilities on the program director. The "Recreation Enterprise" part of the budget encompasses \$2,789,000 of the total budget, the majority being "personal service" with 14 FTE and other seasonal employees (Shaker Heights Annual Budget, 2007). There is a great deal of capital investment in this park, much of it aimed at the Shaker youth. The question is, which youth will utilize it? Will it be the youth that is currently using the library as its hangout? Will it be the youth that congregates in the local playgrounds and fields? The location of the park is on the far southeast corner of this 6.3 square mile city. Public transportation is nearby but the question of the utility of this park to all of Shaker Heights is concerning. (At time of writing, a request of demographic information of Thornton Park patrons has been placed with the business manager.) (personal communication with Kevin Crowe, 3-20-07).

All of the programs offered by Community Life are fee-based, with no sliding scale. There is a scholarship program available for summer camps but it is not advertised. The criteria for assistance is the resident needs to receive one form of public assistance (personal communication with Kevin Crowe, 3-20-07). According to the Community Life website, a pool pass for a residential family costs \$190 if the patron purchases before 4-16-07 and \$260 if after.

The largest impoverished population of Shaker Heights that could use Thornton Park lives in the Ludlow neighborhood, on the far west/central side of Shaker. 52 % of the children that live in Ludlow live in single parent homes where 18.3% of the children 5-17 years old live in poverty status (www.shakeronline.com). When the utility and ease of transportation of this population getting to Thornton was posed to Kevin Crowe, he seemed surprised at the question and as if accessibility to ALL residents was an assumption with no regard to logistics (personal communication, 3-20-07). The worry is that the lower income youth cannot participate in Thornton Park due to its location and financial constraints.

Problem Definition

The developmental task in adolescence is the formation of identity. These self conceptions develop through the process of interacting with peers, family and community. In addition, they are partly shaped by the views and attitudes of others that an adolescent has determined to be important (his or her perceived label). The process one must go through to successfully attain identity is through group membership, which can be facilitated by the child's perception of successfully engaging in extra curricular activities, forming close friendships with people of both genders, and developing a cohesive sense of self (Hughes, 2002). As their independence increases, teens attempt to figure out who they are and what they stand for. Hughes and Demo examined self esteem versus personal efficacy in African Americans. This study looked at 1609 African American and found that personal self esteem was influenced by micro social relations with family, friends, and community (Hughes & Demo, p.132, 1989).

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According to Kevin Crowe and Councilman Brian Gleisser, many residents complain about loitering youth and do not want them “hanging around in their neighborhood”. One example provided was there were basketball hoops in each neighborhood school playground but the city took them down due to the pressure of residents complaining (personal communication, 3-20-07 and 3-3-07).

The only programs Community Life currently offers teens (ages 13-17) are lifeguard and drivers' education (20-30 participants per season) and for \$230 (resident price), up to 20 teens can attend a 3 week summer camp program, “Teens Learning to Connect” (program status report 2004-2006 provided by Kevin Crowe Mar 20, 2007). This lack of programming suggests Shaker does not truly value its youth.

In the past, community Life has offered art, drama, exercise classes (targeting the off season athlete, and ski club. The census dropped so the department dropped the programs. In addition, past programs that were eliminated due to census, funding, and facility unavailability were the “Friday Night Tight” teen socials / hang out center and the drop in center in the mid 1980s at Woodbury. Alternatives have not been developed for teens for several years.

Concilman Gleisser and Kevin Crowe see the need and the value of offering youth something to do. Community Life seems to have more pressing issues or no viable plan or alternative for either of them to offer or adopt. This is possibly too overwhelming and overtaxing for one person to handle the responsibilities of what originally was handled by three. The details that one needs to be mindful of the “big picture” and peripheral programs are sure to be neglected due to the lack of time to plan and execute. If the necessity of youth programs or alternatives goes unnoticed and lacks a prominent civic “champion” it could easily be pushed aside to address the multitude of other issues that arise.

Community Life is aware of the library's struggles with loitering youth and adolescents disturbing people in the parks and without a clear vision on how to handle it or fix it. The department seems to be incapable to handle this problem due to time and money. Given no mandate by the city enable this "passing of the buck" to another agency or department.

Evidence

Complaints of loitering youth seems to be prevalent in Shaker currently as well as in the past. The library struggles with serving the public and dealing with its adolescent consumers behavioral problems. Realizing the youth need a place and time for socializing, the library struggles with pleasing all types of consumers simultaneously (personal communication with Meghan Hays, March 12, 2007).

According to a community survey of 881 residents performed in 1983, the degree of seriousness of "use of illegal drugs and alcohol by youth" received a severity of 2.37/3.0. Concerns of loitering youth followed with a severity of 1.55 / 3.0 whereas availability of programs and support services (e.g. recreation and leisure) received a problem severity of 1.15 / 3 (Confidential Community Opinion Survey p.12, 1983). Loitering youth was a greater concern for those residents that lived in Sussex, Moreland, and Lomond neighborhoods. White residents and single family homes were more satisfied with the availability of recreational programs for youth than black residents or families living in two family dwellings (Confidential Community Opinion Survey p.59, 1983).

In a diverse system such as Shaker Heights, the disparity between the highest income and lowest income students is extreme. Huge disparity in the student makeup of the students that live in Cleveland but attend Shaker Schools. Shaker Heights city is made up of 37.9 % African

American, 56.5% European American, 2.3% multi racial and 2.7% Asian. The Ludlow area, in comparison is comprised of 66.2%; 28.9; 2% and 2.5%, respectively (www.shakeronline.com).

According to Ogbu (p. 191, 2003), peer group formation in Shaker Heights is based primarily on race at the Middle School and High School. African American peer groups were described as more cohesive and oriented to physical self defense than white peer groups. This leads to an assumption that if a facility were built in a largely African American populated neighborhood, white students may feel uncomfortable utilizing it and conversely, African American students would feel uncomfortable attending a “white group” social club.

In 1992, the city conducted a playground assessment on its playgrounds, city owned parks and mini-parks. Gaps in services were found to be lacking in playgrounds, and parks in the Lomond and Onaway neighborhoods, and lacking in playgrounds at Mercer, Fernway, and Sussex neighborhoods (Playground Study, 1992). It is noteworthy that the lower income areas, Lomond and Sussex, were deficit in all three areas of the study. One could infer that these areas’ youth may need geographically convenient areas to congregate and would be less likely to afford structured planned programs offered by the city Community Life department. The fact that Shaker performed the study shows its interest in its neighborhoods and services it provides. One recommendation the study had was to consider upgrading or relocating Chelton playground. According to Kevin Crowe, Chelton Park was upgraded by removing unsightly overgrown brush and mowing maintained. The only equipment is a backstop (personal communication, 3-20-07). Council recognizes it needs to do something for the youth and their answer is Thornton Park.

Alternatives and Criteria

This year, the mayor and city council will focus on neighborhoods (This Week in Shaker, 5 (7), 2007). It makes sense that a portion of their focus pertain to enabling / creating places in

each neighborhood for youth to congregate. When Shaker was designed, central to each neighborhood was an elementary school, equidistant from every house. It would be rather simple to reinstate basketball hoops and even open a portion of the buildings as a drop in center. In 1992 the city leased an empty Sussex school and turned it into the Shaker Family Center. It houses a family playroom which services families with young children (This week in Shaker, 5 (8) & email communication with Meghan Hays on 3-16-07). Surely, a space in this building could be used as a drop-in center for adolescents. The operating times would not interfere with the services provided for the younger ages.

Shaker Heights states that it values its youth, values its schools, and is proud of its diversity. Unfortunately, many residents are afraid of what they don't understand. The way in which some youth dress and speak scares them (personal communication with Councilman Brian Gleisser, 3-3-07). A public education / relations campaign could ensue in order to change perception and lend public support for a youth drop-in center. The perception of what a "scary teen" looks like needs to change. The campaign would need to dispel the misconceptions and teach facts about crime rates and the real behaviors that the youth are displaying. The police department could take an active role in this. Tolerance for youth just wanting to be adolescents and "chill" with their friends needs to be embraced and condoned. It would be beneficial to all if there were safe and appropriate places for this to exist.

An increase in tolerance between African American teens and White teens needs to be fostered. This is a daunting task. It is imperative that a solution to this problem is providing a facility or program that all youth will enjoy. In John Ogbu's (p. 181, 2003) book about Shaker High and Middle School, he describes sports as being either "white" or "black". Tennis, skiing, golf, and lacrosse are "white" sports. When a black student crosses the racial lines, he or she

experienced criticism. This is important to take into account during the planning process of a youth program / facility. "...Black Americans general opposition to White society or their anti-White establishment tendency...thus because of their marginal position in US society and in white institutions, Blacks developed anti-establishment beliefs and behaviors..." (Ogbu, pp 210 – 211, 2003). If a proposed drop in center / coffee house / youth center were established, the African American community would need to feel ownership in it.

Another alternative to addressing this problem is to do nothing. The library could continue to deal with the masses of teens who want to socialize and act like normal adolescents, the police could continue to dispel congregations of youth in parks and sidewalks, and residents could continue to complain to city officials about the demise of the neighborhood.

Projected Outcomes

Creating drop-in centers would recreate a neighborhood feel / sense of ownership and a safe place for youth. A higher sense of belonging from residents that live in the peripheral neighborhoods could be the result by feeling valued. Residents could coexist, complain less about nuisance and there would be more time to spend on prevention by the police. The reputation for Shaker as a whole would improve as well as individual neighborhoods.

The positive outcome could be evaluated by the number of nuisance phone calls to police and the number of police interactions. Testimonials provided by the librarians and Community Life employees on the number of negative interactions with youth would also be a good measure. Lastly but most importantly, a survey of the youth could be conducted, and demographics tracked at the drop-in centers.

The teens do not seem to have a voice or sponsor so their needs go unmet. Community Life, the library, Shake Heights Youth Center, and the Shaker Prevention Coalition should collaborate to provide safe place for teens to call their own.

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