

Key Highlights

Dismantling racism. Driving change. Create CommUNITY was founded in 2003 to respond to an increasingly diverse population in Central Minnesota, address key challenges facing the community and create a more welcoming, non-discriminatory environment with respect and opportunity for all. 2007-08 marked a pivotal year for Create CommUNITY as the organization seized key opportunities to be a catalyst for change.

In 2009, Create CommUNITY broke down stereotypes and built relationships across race, class and culture in Central Minnesota. We are creating transformational changes for both individuals and institutions by holding intentional conversations in a safe and supportive environment. The social capital built during these dialogues will help secure our future as a healthy, non-discriminatory, anti-racist community.

Key Highlights for 2009:

Create CommUNITY's work this year has focused on the root causes of racial disparities in educational attainment and access to healthcare and housing.

The Focus Areas

Educational Attainment: Create CommUNITY continues to engage families of color and other stakeholders to identify solutions to disparities in educational attainment.

Gaps: Students of color are still falling behind in math and reading achievement. Only 22% of Black student 8th graders were proficient in reading, compared to 69% of White students. For math, it is 13% for Black students, compared to 57 % for White students (*St. Cloud Public School District, Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment-II 2008-2009*)

Health Care Access: Create CommUNITY continues to support the Community Health Worker in Central Minnesota with its highly successful pilot project in the Somali community.

In 2009

- 228 home visits were conducted serving 105 households
- 9 forums, reaching over a hundred people, were conducted on asthma, obesity, infectious diseases, back injuries, pre-natal care, immunizations, mental health, autism and breast cancer
- 4 workshops for healthcare professionals were conducted on Somali culture, beliefs & health experiences and a summer health fair

The Community Health Worker program is improving access and patient satisfaction and would be highly beneficial for all communities.

Housing Access: Create CommUNITY continues to create awareness of the gap in home ownership rates among communities of color. Decreasing discrimination and building awareness continues to be critical to understand the role of systemic racism and how it affects people's ability to have a home.

In 2009, the successful Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota (FAIM) program has helped 30 families of color to purchase homes, learn money management skills, and receive credit counseling.

The Learning Circles Project

A major initiative of Create CommUNITY's work in 2009 is the Learning Circles project. Funded by a grant from the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation and Morgan Family Foundation, this project offers community members different opportunities to build bridging social capital and integrate New Americans into the community. The project also aims to close racial disparities and engage the community in developing strategies to dismantle racism through systemic change.

Learning Circles have proved highly effective in building a more healthy community. Many community members have forged common bonds across ethnic and racial lines, enabling new and old immigrants, business people and other community leaders to build authentic relationships. Create CommUNITY's consultants, Marnita's Table (MTI), and Minnesota Collaborative Anti-Racism (MCARI) Initiative, have also trained several dozen community members as facilitators in MTI's model of Intentional Social Interaction and as anti-racist facilitators, enabling them to lead the way in the different levels of Learning Circles.

The Learning Circles

- OMEKA! gatherings
- CommUNITY Tables
- Understanding & Dismantling Racism workshops
- Organizing Strategy Skills for Leadership groups and institutions
- Action-Learning Circles
- Movie Nights
- Annual Conversations on Race

Omeka! is a Swahili word meaning to display; to speak out; to spread out.

Omeka! participants in 2009 have experienced a monthly sharing of journeys, cultures and ideas. Omeka! built authentic relationships between more than 160 African and African American women in the Central Minnesota community, encompassing their families and other women across race, class and culture.

“Omeka! helps us build ongoing relationships and it really empowers the women as advocates for themselves and their children” says Eunice Adjei-Bosompem

CommUNITY Tables

By year-end, more than 200 Central Minnesota community members will have participated in vibrant cross-cultural dialogues over an abundant feast in a private home. While each of the four events focus on different topics, they all utilized the Marnita’s Table model of Intentional Social Interaction. The result has been to build social capital – the relationships that enable a community to come together for solutions around issues of common concern – for the creation of a more inclusive, welcoming Central Minnesota.

- “Immigration: Our Personal Stories,” was held at the home of Mayor Dave Kleis in March
- “Access: The Meaning of Home” was held at the home of Jim and Beth Knutson-Kolodzne in June
- “Learn This! A Conversation to Inspire Educational Attainment “ was held at the home of Noreen Dunnells and Jeff Stimler in September

- “Healthcare: A Personal View” will be held at Renner House, College of St. Benedict, in St. Joseph on November 1. Brunch is always served in abundance to serve any dietary concern from vegan to carnivore using Marnita’s table model (marnitastable.org). Reach out to someone across race, class, culture or age and invite them to join us!

A Community Conversation in a Box (CCB) will be available soon, enabling all community members to hold their own events.

Movie Nights

Create CommUNITY’s movie nights attracted more than 60 people to the beautiful St. Cloud Public Library for “Traces of the Trade” in June and “The Color of Fear” in August. The movies were followed by deeply engaged, facilitated discussions. Both

films represented further opportunities for the community to come together to talk about race and its implications in our society.

Action-Learning Circles

Action Learning Circles explored the impact of racism on community life in the greater St. Cloud area. The Circles were held in the Spring and formed a rich source of information for those interested in finding solutions to community issues. The issues focused on housing access, educational attainment and health care access - the focus areas of Create CommUNITY. In addition the circles addressed economic opportunities and the role of Faith Communities.

The Action-Learning Circles were open to all who have previously participated in an introductory anti-racism training and who were interested in applying what they have learned in our community. Our consultants, Minnesota Collaborative Anti-Racism Initiative (MCARI) trained facilitators to engage in an inquiry process in which learners gathered information, reflected, and shared their insights about possible action strategies.

Understanding & Dismantling Racism Workshops – have been held throughout the year in close partnership with the Community Anti-Racism Education Initiative (C.A.R.E.) and the Center for Continuing Studies of St. Cloud State University (SCSU). Hundreds of community members from all sectors have attended. MCARI facilitators have offered comprehensive and carefully designed workshops that cover:

- Defining Racial Justice and Racism
- Deepening the Definition of Systemic Power
- Access and Control
- Power and Privilege
- Power and Race
- The Need for Systemic Change & Institutional Transformation
- Follow Up Opportunities