

# An Innovative Approach to Housing Education for Adults

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*How are you getting along with your home? Has it taken advantage of you lately by inviting rain into the closets or letting winter winds creep across the floors? Do you want to call a halt to this situation before your house begins to think it owns you? If so, arm yourself and show that house who's boss. New reinforcements have arrived to put unruly houses in their place. Knowledge and skills are the homeowners weapons, and your ammunition is being issued by Community Education.*

## **NEW LIFE FOR YOUR OLD HOME**

The age cycle of Minneapolis' housing stock is such that rehabilitation offers the most important opportunity to provide competitive housing. This article will describe the existing situation and examine the innovative housing education program developed in response to consumer needs.

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## **Housing Situation**

The quality of existing housing stock is crucial to the basic social and economic vitality of older cities. In Minneapolis, 81 percent of the housing was built during the period of rapid growth prior to 1940; 66 percent is more than 50 years old. Minneapolis government officials recognize that redevelopment of housing, despite its age, will prolong the economic life of public investment (i.e. paving, sewer, services, etc.). Housing rehabilitation has become a top priority. Rehabilitation loan and grant commitments as well as public and private services have increased. Despite substantially increased but limited investments,<sup>2</sup> public officials realize that tax and bond supported efforts must be magnified. To more effectively use these funds as an economic lever, community groups encourage preventive maintenance and improvement strategy for owner-occupied dwellings as well as condominium and cooperative rental-to-ownership conversion strategy to contain and retard deterioration of the housing stock.

One of the most active citizen's organizations

has been the Citywide Advisory Committee on Home Improvement Education (CACHIE). The group was organized in 1972 to provide expertise in developing consumer-oriented housing classes for the Minneapolis Public Schools, Department of Community Education.<sup>3</sup> The following year, a pilot program was initiated in a Minneapolis neighborhood based on expressed concerns by community residents for home improvement education. *New Life For Your Old Home*<sup>4</sup> proved successful in addressing preventive maintenance through education.

Seeking to expand and strengthen housing education city-wide, CACHIE sought and received Community Development Block Grant funding to hire a housing educator with expertise in curricula development and implementing strategy. CACHIE's objectives were to:—maintain and improve the quality of housing by providing a coordinated outreach to housing consumers

- expand, complement and integrate existing housing education resources and
- encourage participation of community groups in home improvement education.

Since July 1977, Community Education has increased housing programming 1000 percent.<sup>5</sup> This outreach has included the following emphases: *NEW LIFE FOR YOUR OLD HOME*. The theme of the home improvement education program, *New Life For Your Old Home*, was modeled after the 1973 pilot program. Fourteen courses offering 84 topics have been held since Fall. Program locations are selected after an assessment of housing condition and tenure, neighborhood interest, and the availability of other opportunities for home improvement education. Program content is selected with resident input and has ranged from assessing structural and mechanical systems in older houses to simple plumbing repairs. Subjects such as home improvement financing, code requirements and sub-contracting have general appeal, but most

popular are “hands-on” learning experiences involving do-it-yourself skill development.

*HOUSING ALTERNATIVES: A PLACE TO LIVE*. Supporting the “stay-in-the-city” movement, Community Education and the County Extension Service co-sponsored a sequence of noon “brown bag” seminars in downtown Minneapolis. The program was scheduled and planned to attract young adults who do not attend evening housing classes. The objective of the six 50-minute seminars was to familiarize the participants with inner-city housing options: renting, purchasing old or new homes, condominiums, cooperatives and financing. More than 500 persons attended the seminars, and additional requests have been made to re-offer the seminars on the University campus.

*EVALUATING THE CONDITION OF OLDER HOUSES: A TOUR WITH THE PROS*. Since many older home buyers and owners have limited knowledge of mechanical systems and structural components, an opportunity to learn deficiency assessment procedures was created. This experience combined “tour houses” with the expertise of city building inspectors, housing authority rehab specialists and other qualified individuals. These professionals escorted small groups and identified structural and mechanical problems and ways to remedy them. Following the tour, participants received literature pertinent to housing condition evaluation, housing education opportunities and other home improvement resources available to them.

#### **Application to Other Communities**

There are several important relationships that should be considered when contemplating development of similar housing education efforts in other communities. These include establishing a cooperative interface between the sponsoring institution and local residents, city government and

agencies, the financial and business communities and other organizations with housing interests. *Sponsoring Institution (Minneapolis Public Schools, Department of Community Education).* The adult education unit of the public school system offers an ideal mechanism for implementing neighborhood-based home improvement classes. The community school is often the focus of neighborhood identity. It is centrally located and easily accessible. Subject matter expertise when coupled with field staff and administrative support facilitates implementation of responsive home improvement education from the neighborhood level to citywide.

*Community Education Neighborhood Staff.* Field staff includes Community School Coordinators and student interns. Coordinators assume major responsibility for arranging classroom space, local publicity, registration and administration of New Life For Your Old Home classes when offered as part of their regular curricula. Because each topic covered in the series involves a specialized instructor, the Coordinator may recruit a neighborhood resident to moderate and manage the classes.

*Community Education Housing Program Staff.* Housing-specialized staff is the citywide Program Director. The role of the Program Director is primarily that of a consultant-facilitator. In this multifaceted position, the Director identifies the need for housing education in the community and subsequently organizes key community residents to define needs and priorities for home improvement education. Following needs identification, the Director develops curriculum and class outlines, recruits instructors, obtains visual and hand-out teaching aids, develops promotion plans, and formulates evaluation instruments. Three-way communication between the Coordinator (implementing responsibilities), Director (subject matter responsibilities) and instructors is essential.

Rather than one instructor assuming teaching responsibility for an entire six-week course, a team of specialists is recruited. Instructors may be experienced do-it-yourselfers, city inspections officials, Housing Authority staff or related housing service professionals from the business community (architects, contractors, mortgage officers, attorneys, etc.).

Instructors encourage "hands-on" learning experiences when appropriate. To enrich psychomotor learning, vacant dwellings are obtained through the Housing Authority for use as learning labs where participants can experiment with recommended techniques for refinishing floors, repairing windows, rewiring and so forth.

Course evaluation is an integral part of the home improvement program. Evaluation occurs in three phases: (1) formal feedback is requested via questionnaire from both participants and instructors to determine adequacy of content, effectiveness of instruction, and class organization; (2) annual longitudinal evaluation determines to what extent instruction may have been beneficial; and (3) periodic curricula assessment by CACHIE members and other housing professionals. Evaluation in each phase results in revised development and implementation strategy for a comprehensive housing education program that accurately addresses consumer needs.

*City Government Involvement.* The support and cooperation of the many housing-related city departments is basic to the successful implementation of a housing education program. The Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Department of Inspections, Planning Department, and the City Coordinator are responsive to the need for home improvement education. Their support is dependent upon an awareness that valid housing information is crucial to reversing the deterioration of the housing stock. By providing capable instructors and programming assistance, city departments and agencies are invaluable resources.

*Financial/Commercial Community.* The involvement by business interests contributes to the effectiveness of the home improvement outreach effort. Banks and businesses have an economic stake in their neighborhood. They are dependent upon local trade and recognize that by improving the housing stock and upgrading the neighborhood business will prosper.

*Other organizations with Housing Interests.* Coordination with other Minneapolis housing interest groups is facilitated through the Citywide Advisory Committee on Home Improvement Education. Composed of more than 30 housing and related service professionals, the group serves as a clearinghouse for housing information and outreach programs as well as providing a forum where members present strategies for addressing housing problems and concerns. This reduces duplication while expanding and intensifying individual program efforts.

Special attention is placed upon developing a positive relationship between Community Education, the University's Extension Service and on-campus departments. Each institution has unique resources and constraints which have been combined to effectively reach more citizens with increased educational impact. With its strong research and publication base, the Extension Service provides substantial literature support for instructors and participants of co-sponsored activities.

The Community Education housing program offers a variety of opportunities to assist students with integration of classroom study into "real world" situations.<sup>6</sup> Experience can be gained through such activities as designing curricula, classroom teaching, expanding promotion techniques, and working with community groups with the guidance of experienced professionals.

## Summary

The unique Community Education Housing Education Program in Minneapolis offers the housing curricula consumers request and need; provides the resources to effectively deliver that curricula; improves the interface of existing but fragmented housing interest groups; and encourages the maintenance and improvement of the existing housing stock.

## Notes

1. For example, between January 1971 and October 1976 there were 5,520 public programs for the improvement of 4,569 structures totaling \$30,983,822. Private services available to homeowners include Project for Pride in Living's rehabilitation assistance, Community Design Center's architectural services and Southside Neighborhood Housing Services' financial program funded by local savings and loan institutions to make monies available to individuals with poor credit ratings.
2. Financial assistance programs directly served less than 5 percent of the city's households. In 1977 more than 14,000 housing structures in Minneapolis were classed as having "considerable deferred maintenance" and 1,152 were classed as having "Major structural deficiencies".
3. Community education encourages the development and strengthening of the community through the utilization of educational services and facilities for all citizens in the community.
4. A series of six evening classes taught by experienced professionals, offered through the neighborhood Community Education program and providing applied housing information.
5. In 1973 Community Education home improvement programming resulted in less than 500 contact hours; in 1978 home improvement outreach will involve more than 6000 contact hours.
6. One University of Minnesota interior design student developed a course outline and taught a two-evening seminar to satisfy requirements for Independent Study.