



## **2008 Jim and Patty Rouse Award Recipient Lawrence CommunityWorks**

Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW), of Lawrence, Massachusetts, is the 2008 recipient of the Jim and Patty Rouse Award for excellence in community revitalization. Established in 2002 to honor Enterprise's founders, the Jim and Patty Rouse Award celebrates the important work being done by community-based and regional nonprofit organizations and eligible tribal entities that engage in affordable housing development and comprehensive community revitalization. The award is sponsored by Enterprise's Network Advisory Board, a 24-member panel of leaders in the affordable housing and community development industry. The award winner receives a grant of \$10,000 in unrestricted funds.

### **The Organization and Community**

Lawrence CommunityWorks was originally founded as the Immigrant City Housing Corporation in 1981 by affordable housing activists. Their first accomplishment was to develop a 140-unit limited equity co-op housing development. Several additional housing projects were completed over the years; however, by the late 1990's the organization was languishing and faced an uncertain future. Credited with leading the complete revitalization of the organization is William "Bill" Traynor, a Lawrence native and community development professional who had recently returned to Lawrence and was working with three MIT graduates in urban planning and organizing. In 1999, Bill was hired as LCW's executive director and the three MIT graduates joined him. Since that time, LCW has emerged as a powerful vehicle for community revitalization in Lawrence.

Today, LCW dubs itself "A Community Network, Powered by People!" As a nonprofit community development corporation, LCW is "dedicated to the sustained revitalization of Lawrence through the creation of a growing network of residents and stakeholders who are building family and community assets, providing each other with mutual support, and engaging in collective action to rebuild the city." The work of this comprehensive CDC can be broken down into four main areas: 1) family asset building; 2) real estate development; 3) youth leadership development; and 4) network organizing.

Located 25 miles northwest of Boston, Lawrence was built in the 1840's as the nation's first fully planned industrial city. The City's vast mills and promise of higher-income factory work attracted families from the neighboring countryside and successive waves of immigrants. Eventually Lawrence became known as "Immigrant City." Today, Lawrence has a large Latino immigrant population, low wage employment and low levels of education. This population forms their base of membership and is reflected on their Board of Directors and staff.

A 13-member Board of Directors (which can expand to up to 17 members) that includes community residents and representatives from the public and private sector currently governs LCW. Ten members of the Board are elected by the wider membership, while the balance is recruited from the community at-large to gain certain strengths for the Board and all serve staggered three-year terms.

The full board, which is 53% Latino, 40% Caucasian, and 7% African-American, meets monthly and also has sub-committees governing human resources, finance, and development. Moreover, board members serve on joint board-community task forces such as the City Budget Campaign or the Our House Committee.

LCW is supported by 60 full- and part-time employees; 80% are Latino and bilingual in Spanish and English. In addition to the core program areas, LCW employs full time staff members in accounting and financial management, human resources, member support services, IT and resource development. Each program has one or more resident committees, ranging in size from 8 to 30 people, that assist with outreach/recruitment, program design/development, and grassroots fundraising. The majority of staff are local Lawrence residents, and several started with LCW as program participants or as active volunteer members.

LCW has demonstrated capacity to leverage substantial and multi-year support from local, regional and national funders. Finally, LCW is an affiliate of National Council of La Raza and NeighborWorks America and is a technical assistance provider to the Casey Foundation's Making Connections Initiative.

### **Quality and Strategic Nature of Community Building**

Community engagement and network organizing is at the foundation of LCW. Their website proclaims "Network organizing is not a role or a task undertaken by a specific department but the core practice of Lawrence CommunityWorks." LCW boasts a membership of over 3,500 residents and other stakeholders, the majority of whom are latino immigrants and working poor families.

Regular neighborhood summits and an annual planning meeting help to maintain communication with membership and recruit new members. LCW's current strategic plan was developed in September, 2007 and includes a market analysis, outlines their program areas and specifically addresses the foreclosure crisis. They do point out, however, that it is a flexible document, able to adjust to the needs of the time.

Real estate deals are preceded by heavy involvement from the community. Design charettes, community focus groups and ongoing committees are several ways in which LCW ensures broad participation in projects.

Strategies to further encourage engagement include a "NeighborCircles" program in which 8-10 families come together 3 times over the course of a month for dinner and conversation, under the leadership of a resident "host" and trained facilitator. Some go on to generate new projects or provide ideas for existing LCW programs. Another program is the PODER Leadership Institute, a five-month long training focusing on organizing and facilitation skills, collaborative governance, conflict resolution, and basic political and macro-economic literacy. Graduates from PODER go on to leadership roles both within the organization and community at large.

LCW cites a variety of strategic partnerships which help them attain their goals. They are a member of the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations and have a partnership with Lawrence General Hospital. With a CDC ally in Lowell, Coalition for a Better Acre, LCW is

working to create a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) that will focus on housing.

You can read more about their energetic approach to community building at [www.leworks.org](http://www.leworks.org), where several pages are dedicated to exploring and defining their “network-centric” approach to community work. One of the most surprising elements described is the concept of “New Quorum,” which requires the group to have at least one new member present at any gathering in order to do business.

### **Quality of Housing Development and Resident Services**

LCW has been responsible for over \$27 Million in community assets development, including over 250 units of rental and homeownership housing, a community center, and almost 3 acres of open space on over 30 vacant and abandoned properties in Lawrence.

At least one of LCW’s projects has received national acclaim: The *Reviviendo Family Housing* development consists of 17 scattered-site units of affordable rental housing in three historic structures and one formerly vacant lot. The project won The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Award for Affordable Housing and Fannie Mae Foundation’s Maxwell Award of Excellence for 2006 for the “most effective catalyst for community revitalization” in the nation.

Their current and largest undertaking to date is the Union Crossing Mill, the development of over 400,000 square feet of historic mill space as well as an additional ½ acre of vacant land and three additional abandoned buildings. This mixed-use and mixed-income development is intended as a “workforce support engine” and will include stable quality housing, childcare, supportive services, educational opportunities and a healthy community environment.

As a complement to their mission of providing affordable housing, LCW maintains a strong commitment to environmental sustainability. Citing the recent foreclosure crisis as an example, LCW draws a clear connection between energy efficiency and enabling low-income residents to stay in their homes. A recent project that demonstrates this commitment is Scarito Homes, comprised of ten 2 and 3 bedroom townhouse style condos. 95% percent of the construction waste was recycled, and eco-friendly systems were installed, including solar panels- the first housing project in Lawrence to do so.

LCW also provides or links to a wide spectrum of resident services -- see the next section - and built and operates a community center.

### **Community Services**

In addition to real estate / housing development, LCW operates a Family Asset Building program, providing financial and home ownership counseling, including foreclosure prevention education; home maintenance workshops; individual development accounts; daycare; job training; and educational advancements, including ESL instruction. LCW is the only foreclosure counseling and education site in the City of Lawrence that is connected to the Hope Now hotline.

LCW's innovative youth program, "Movement City," includes after-school activities and workshops intended to help them "think creatively and critically, expand their skill sets, and engage in a culture of college." The success of this program is evident in that 90% of their graduates go on to attend college.

As mentioned previously, community engagement is built into all the LCW's activities, but a specialized Organizing program seeks to build resident leadership and civic engagement skills. The program includes a Fellowship Initiative in an effort "to provide educational, part-time positions for senior network and resident leaders."

LCW's headquarters are now on the "Our House" campus, a community center created to serve as a gathering place and help families by being "another big room in our house." The Our House Center for Design and Technology building is a transformed old catholic school built in the 1920's that was closed and sat vacant for 25 years. This building now uses solar and geothermal technology in order to reduce energy costs as well as the building's "energy footprint." The second building on campus, a victorian that had served at one time as the church rectory, was renovated to house the residency program for LCW's youth network, Movement City, as well as LCW's community organizing, real estate development, member support and administration departments.

### **Organization's Impact and Innovation**

Lawrence CommunityWorks' true innovation and marker of success is the engagement of Lawrence's residents in building their civic future. Their focus is on creating networks - building relationship and leadership infrastructure. As they put it, the affordable housing, the community center, the reclaimed brownfields and abandoned lots, the jobs, educational attainments and youth development are all simply *products* of that relationship building. Since its rebirth in 1999, LCW has seen its membership network grow from zero to over 3,500 engaged residents, leading to significantly increased family, as well as community, assets.

Based not only on their accomplishments, but also on the method by which they are able to achieve their impact, Lawrence CommunityWorks is an estimable recipient of the 2008 Jim and Patty Rouse Award for excellence in community revitalization.

\* Information in this summary is drawn from LCW's original Rouse Award application, supplemental materials, and their website.