

## **THE VISION**

### **A Project H.A.V.E. H.O.P.E COMMUNITY**

**„, living out Christ’s transforming principals daily...**

#### **CREATION OF A COMMUNITY**

##### **DESIGNED TO BUILD BETTER PEOPLE**

The reality: Life is hard. Always has been. Always will be. Here on Earth. God knew this and designed us/ wired us to be in relationship – relationship with Him and in relationship with others. Our relationship with Christ offers us ~~much~~ strength from which to draw upon particularly during the dark times of our lives. Our relationships with others - where people knew us, and we knew people – offers us help when life is “too much for us to handle alone”.

In the past we lived in such environments – called communities. Smaller groups of families (regardless of how you define family) who knew each other – knew each other’s strengths and each other’s weaknesses. An individual’s strengths were used not only for that individual’s benefit but for the benefit of the other members of the community who did not possess those strengths. For example: if a man was good at vehicle repairing/maintenance, he would use those skills to help his neighbors with their vehicles, either doing the repairs/maintenance himself or teaching his neighbors how to do their own vehicle care. If a woman was a good cook, she would use those skills in hands on settings where younger women learned this set of skills. The individual’s weaknesses were acknowledged (granted maybe not as openly as would have been ideal but still everyone knew what the weaknesses were). So a woman raising children on her own would find her neighbors helping with repairs, with befriending the children, etc.

But with the changes in our society we have lost our sense of community and we have lost our relationships (both with God, in many cases, and with each other). Some changes were promoted to ‘give us more leisure time’; to ‘help us keep in better touch with each other’, etc. Other changes have just become a way of life – the quest for more and better (aka materialism) – the transient nature of our lives (the average person changes jobs 10 to 15 times during their career; and moves 11.4 times during their lifetime).

Some of the corresponding statistics are, in my opinion, frightening. 2 out of 5 Americans (or 40%) ‘lack companionship’, ‘have relationships that aren’t meaningful’, and ‘are isolated from others’. This isolation leads to a 29% increase in the risk of death. And while there are many other statistics that could be quoted, I think that we know, on some deep level, that this loss of community is very real and is harming many of us and many of our brothers and sisters.

It is my position that we still desperately need such communities if people, as a whole (not the super star who can overcome just about anything) are to be able to thrive. Attempts have been made at creating communities – we see that in our churches, we see that with social services organizations, etc. But many of those attempts at creating communities require, at least at the onset, for the individuals to actively seek such community. For example: my church promotes small groups. But to become a member of a small group you have to: (1) first come to church to learn about the opportunity; (2) then come to a special meeting about small groups and get assigned to a small group; and (3) then come to the place where the small group meets. The key components in this example are: (1) the individual's understanding of their need for community and seeking it out; and (2) the individual "going to" the small group. But the individuals this ministry aims to serve are paying 40 to 50% of their income on rent and just struggling to survive. So, when they are done with their jobs – the last thing on their mind is "going to" church or community centers, etc. Not only can they not afford to do much else, all they have the energy for is to go "home", eat, and get ready for the next day.

I believe that the level of intimacy ("into me see") needed to truly help people thrive is only found in communities that live in close proximity to each other. In these communities the individual does not "go to" the community – the community naturally surrounds the individual. In these communities it is almost impossible to hide – to physically hide and be isolated – to hide the reality of what is occurring in each other's lives. For it is that day to day interaction that generates the intimate knowledge of each other that is crucial to being able to determine with some degree of accuracy what type of community support an individual needs to develop and thrive – to become the person God designed them to be – to be the best version of themselves.

In the world as it exists today, where do people live in close proximity to each other? The most common is in apartment complexes. While many of the individuals who call an apartment complex 'home' will never buy a house, just living in close proximity to one another, even for extended periods of time, DOES NOT, in and of itself, create community. Typical non-profit affordable housing developments do not utilize one of the most valuable assets of a project – the individual and the collective resourcefulness of the residents themselves. Call it social capital or just old-fashioned usefulness. If those hours watching television can be translated into a recycling program or attending landscaping classes or playing games or even cooking for a neighbor in need, then an impersonal housing development can be transformed into a meaningful community.

There are some people who will argue that hoping for such an environment is idealistic. Maybe it is. But I would argue that it is not only doable, but it is essential for basic healthy personal development (spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally and financially); and ultimately for helping to create and sustain a viable society.

### **“How to Build” the Community - Aspects of the Initial Design:**

To do this, to stitch the residents together into a stable social community, the ministry must be intentional about what we do. It is “not just going to happen”. The “How?” is answered below.

It will be crucial that the expectations for community participation be clear and obvious before tenant move in. Those expectations would include:

1. Participation in resident advisory board which would meet regularly to discuss issues within the complex, the needs within the complex, the programs needed, etc.

The first three of these meetings would be structured as follows:

- i. First meeting – personally invite all residents to come to the common plaza for dinner. The goal of this meeting is to come up with a list of possible activities.
  - ii. Second meeting – would be spent prioritizing the possibilities.
  - iii. Third meeting – defining the group's highest priority activities and beginning to put together an implementation plan.
2. Attendance at common dinner once a week in the common plaza. Common dinner makes life more convenient, more economical, more practical, more interesting, and more fun. Dinner would be followed by a time of worship followed by a short Biblical lesson that has practical application (with separate lessons for adults and children).
3. Contribution of time - at least 4 hours a month.
    - i. This can be done through Work Days - one or two Saturday mornings a month – and can be either a complex related project or a community related project.
    - ii. Further, depending on the project, the children will be encouraged to join their parent(s).
      - One of my family’s memories is a time spent delivering food to the elderly. My 11-year-old daughter had friends sleep over Friday night. Saturday morning we picked up the food from one of the food ministries and began delivering food to elderly resident. These children quickly became aware of the very different conditions that other people lived in and how they each had much to be grateful for.
    - iii. This can be done by taking care of children during adult complex events – advisory committee meetings – Work Days.

There must be consequences for non-participation. Non-participation in the advisory committee meetings and the common dinner have yet to be determined but will need to be determined prior to the move in of the first tenant. Non-participation in the workday is set out below.

### **Consequences for non-participation in the work days.**

There would be a three (3) levels of consequences.

#### **Level 1:**

- Special Projects can be set up for a tenant(s) who cannot attend the scheduled Work Days.
- Tenants who didn't log 4 hours a month can be charged a non-contribution fee – initially \$40.00 per hour.
- A tenant would only be allowed four (4) such Level 1 consequences in any twelve (12) month period.

#### **Level 2:**

A tenant who had more than four (4) Level 1 consequences would be asked to come in to meet with the ministry staff to see what alternative contribution might be created for that tenant.

#### **Level 3:**

If a tenant refuses to contribute by not attending the scheduled Work Days or by not participating in a Special Project or by not paying their non-contribution fee or by not meeting with the ministry staff to determine an alternative contribution or by not participating in the alternative contribution; the tenant will be given a notice of 'termination of their tenancy.

Any monies collected under Level 1 will be allocated to maintenance supplies or to pay outside professionals to complete any work that was not finished during the Work Days or Special Projects.

**Caveat:** It is our hope that the official Work Days end up being not only productive but FUN. If this occurs, the frequency of alternative work assignments (Special Projects) should diminish precipitously as tenants make attending the Work Days a greater priority.

### **“How to Build” the Community - Expansion:**

This structure can be expanded as the needs of the tenants are determined and mechanisms are created to address those needs in a way that moves the tenants towards being more independent and more growth (in the physical, mental, emotional, financial, and spiritual realms of their lives). But the expansion of the structure must be done from a “joint venture” perspective – i.e. a joint venture between the ministry and the tenants.

I think that it is crucial that the ministry not go into creating this community with too many preconceived ideas on what is needed and wanted; and how those needs and wants should be tackled. We, as the shepherds of the ministry, have, for the most part, not come from the same background as the tenant population, may not have struggled with the same issues as the tenant population base, etc. To create effective tools for tackling the wants and needs of the tenant population we need to get to know them and they need to get to know us. We need to trust each other – we need to share openly and honestly with each other – we need to know each other strengths and weaknesses. It is only when that trust is built that we can, together, begin to build the “programs” that meet the wants and needs that exist.

As a nation we have seen what coming into a group of people and instituting programs **that we think would work** – that will meet the recipients’ wants and needs. Those programs are, for the most part, very ineffective. And unfortunately create, in many cases, a dependency on the programs that is not conducive to recipients’ growth on most levels. So providing donors with specific detailed program descriptions goes against the overall philosophy on “how” effective community “programs” are created.

But I think that some form of the following “programs” will be part of the complex community.

- Tutoring – education is a crucial element in our society. If that is the 27-year-old person who does not have their GED; if that is the young women who is going to school at nights or online to get her CNA license; if that is the 8<sup>th</sup> grader struggling with math ... all can benefit from tutoring. We are blessed with a very educated community in CS/B; and as such can tap into these individuals through church groups, through retirement communities, etc.
  - This past semester a 21 year old young man who was attending Blinn after having flunked out his first year of college, was struggling with chemistry. A retired teacher agreed to tutor him. The young man not only passed the class but learned invaluable study skills that he can and does use in other areas of study.
- Mentoring – the reality of our world is that “life is hard”. That is said not to be negative but to be realistic. Life is hard – and it is harder if you do not have anyone there to help you negotiate most aspects of life.
  - I work with apartment maintenance men who are primarily Hispanic citizens. These hard-working family men want the best for themselves and their children. Several of those children have expressed a desire to get a college degree but none

believe that that is possible because his/her parents will not be able to pay for tuition, etc. This is a delicate situation to ~~begin to~~ explore. It is important not to have any preconceived ideas as to the family's situation. Further the family does not need to feel inadequate in any aspect. To be able to approach these types of matters requires that a relationship of trust has been built between the mentor and the family so that they can begin to share with honesty what the family's background is, what the family's financial situation is, etc.

- Life Skills – as individuals have become more and more isolated from each other, life skills seem to have been left untaught. People need basic financial planning, healthy cooking, how to clean, vehicle maintenance, child rearing ... to name a few.
- Child care – if the adults are to get an education or get trained or work to support themselves, then reasonable priced child care is essential. At this time child care is approximately \$225.00 per week. If an individual works for minimum wage (\$7.25 in Texas), that person has to work 31 hours a week just to provide child care.
- Recovery – almost every individual on the planet has been hurt or has hurt someone else. For the resolution of these emotional and/or mental issues (and their resulting symptoms) an on-going recovery program needs to be provided. While there are several recovery programs, the one that is not issue specific and therefore allows anyone to participate and which has been around for 25+ years is Celebrate Recovery, a Christ centered 12 step program.
- Spiritual development – because many people are overwhelmed with their “life issues”, worrying about or spending time on their spiritual development is last on their “to do” list. Statistically 75% of the general population feel “far from God”. And 60% of the general population feel uninvitable to traditional church ... because of preconceived ideas about traditional church ... because of negative church experiences ... because of negative experiences with individuals who hold themselves out to be Christians ... etc. However, the interesting part of this statistical information is the 78% (of the 60%) would be willing to study the Bible with a friend ... just not in church. Unfortunately, less than 15% of Christians have shared the gospel with someone in the last 6 months – we are wimpy Christians – willing to go on mission trips to foreign countries – but not willing to establish relationships with our neighbors and friends in which we are intentional about sharing the reason for our faith. Within this complex we can be very intentional about:
  - having all that we do within the complex be clearly based on Christian principals.
  - having Christian worship services available within the complex.
  - having small “life groups” within the complex.
  - having discipleship groups within the complex whose members are committed to reaching out to the other members of the complex community with the goal to share the gospel.

This very specific focus on Christianity as the core around which life is lived will begin to work on this much neglected aspect of our tenants' lives.

All of this can be done by having an apartment complex that does not have a mortgage – that is owned by the ministry free and clear. After the initial “donations” to purchase/build the apartment complex, the ministry is self-supporting because tenants pay reasonable rents and utilities. But by not having to include a mortgage and interest payment in its P&L the operation of the complex will generate additional monies/surplus. These funds can use by the ministry to fund the programs briefly described ~~to~~ hereinabove that work towards developing/creating a community of individuals and families who have strong relationships with God and with others; and who are thriving physically, mentally, emotionally, financially and spiritually.