

Principles and Practices of Community Leadership Development



Women's Community Revitalization Project

October 2007

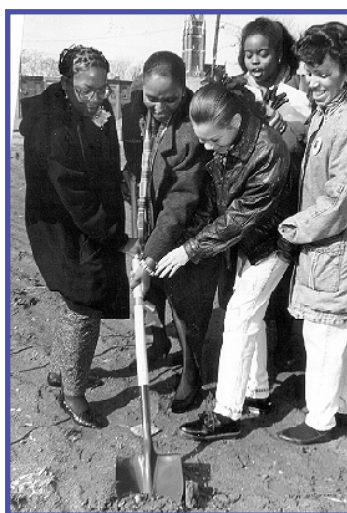
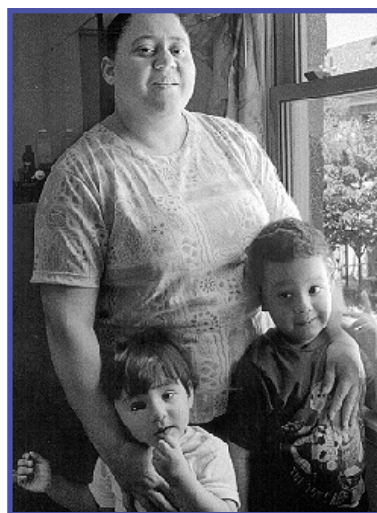
Community revitalization is about leadership for change. Over the past twenty years WCRP has proven that women working together in communities can make change happen.

In 1987, the Women's Community Revitalization Project (WCRP) incorporated as Philadelphia's only community development organization that was created by and for women and their families. Today, WCRP is nationally recognized as an innovative developer of affordable housing, and as an organization which involves women in the process of community building, self-empowerment and change.

Although obtaining safe, affordable housing is critical, WCRP knows that it is only a first step. In addition to developing and managing rental housing, WCRP builds childcare centers and other community facilities; provides supportive services; advocates for a more equitable distribution of resources; and convenes coalitions to build leadership and power. In each area of its work, WCRP stresses the development of individual women, knowing that our growth and success will lead to stronger families and communities. WCRP has learned that women have real power when we value each other's experience and stand together to take collective action.

Over the years, four distinct, yet complimentary components have emerged as critical to WCRP's approach to leadership development:

- **Inclusion and Participation;**
- **Mutual Accountability and Support;**
- **Risk-taking, Learning and Growth; and**
- **Voice, Collective Action and Change.**



"I Matter and What I Say Matters"

" WCRP has been an excellent springboard to learning and leadership development. WCRP appreciates the "perfection of imperfection". The organization is all about working with women where they are by creating a supportive environment where you can learn. There are many barriers to women with families becoming leaders – the time and commitment that must be balanced between home and community. WCRP works consistently and creatively to address these barriers – child care, dinner at meetings, whatever it takes for the women and their children to be cared for. The experience of WCRP has really changed me. Through WCRP, I know that I matter and what I say matters. WCRP has integrity and honesty – two important values expected of WCRP's leaders.

– Staci Moore, WCRP Board Co-Chair

Inclusion and Participation

“Now, I Know I Am A Leader”

“I started working in community at age 22. Even though, I was a board member with another community organization before ever learning about WCRP, I really learned how to be a leader at WCRP. The way I was treated and supported by other women was different right from the start. The women of WCRP asked me what I was interested in doing. Most organizations don’t ask what you want or need --- they tell you what the organization needs. I love gardening and was happy to know there was a community gardening project at 7th Street. I just pitched in! Those gardens were just the start! Then came housing and the child care center! When people at WCRP kept saying Nancy, you are a leader of the community, I would say I am not a leader, I am a doer. Every experience changed me and changed the community. Each time I drive near the houses or the gardens, I say to myself, I know I contributed to making this happen. I never say that out loud. I just say it to myself. I know I had a role. WCRP gives me and other women a chance to lead – a chance to serve. Now, I know I am a leader. Leaders serve.”

– Nancy Gonzales, Community Leader
and Former WCRP Board Member

Board and Committees:

The majority of the members of the WCRP board are community residents. Board members are drawn from committees. Committees are open to everyone. The opportunity to serve on a committee is shared widely with community residents and others coming into contact with any WCRP staff person or board member. Board meetings and Committee meetings are open to everyone to attend. A regular schedule of Board and Committee meetings is set at the beginning of the year and is rarely changed. All Committees meet on the same night at the same time following a group dinner where the committee members mingle and network with each other. The fellowship around a meal is an important ritual that creates an opportunity for leaders to check in with each other.

Physical Development:

WCRP has crafted a development strategy that makes it possible to build very affordable housing. Before this housing was developed, women and their families with very limited incomes were unable to find safe, decent affordable housing. Now, these women are leaders and participants in the community’s programs, projects, activities and services. They are board members who are making decisions about WCRP’s budget, program priorities and organizational policies.

A Commitment to Process:

WCRP has a long history of using process as a tool for power-sharing throughout the organization. Process is not easy and often requires more time and a great deal of patience but, by its very nature, process is inclusive and provides the opportunity for participation and learning. Over time, WCRP has found the attention to process has had impressive results.

Inclusion and Participation

From its inception, WCRP made the commitment to create an organization that is a nurturing and safe environment for women to discover and develop their leadership skills and potential. To achieve this, board and staff are intentional about designing structures that are inclusive and encourage participation. By practicing inclusion and creating opportunities for participation that resonate for each individual, new participants are welcomed as partners. For example, from a woman's initial point of contact with WCRP, she is asked about what she needs, what her family needs and her long-term goals. She is affirmed as a leader in her own right for what she has already accomplished and encouraged to participate in organizational activities and tasks that advance her goals while building peer relationships with other leaders. Thus valued, inclusion and participation are fundamental expressions of respect.

Strategies for Inclusion and Participation

- **Make participation easy and accessible.** An inclusive environment encourages risk-taking. Create boundless opportunities to participate. Inventory the organization's "participation opportunities" to ensure that the organization is "participation-friendly."
- **Anticipate and remove the subtle barriers to participation,** including the date and time of meetings; availability of on-site and at-home child care; transportation; food; safe and welcoming meeting space; and information in advance about the meeting or event.
- **Notice when a person indicates interest in participating.** The desire to be involved should be the only prerequisite. Guard against any unnecessary hoops to jump through. A person must be engaged at the moment the interest is expressed. Take the time to get to know the person. Remember, a significant example of respect is to simply make the time to listen to someone. "Face time" is golden.
- **Support the person in finding the activity that is the right "fit".** Offer an array of compelling participation opportunities that provide choices in level, intensity and time commitment. Make sure that tasks and activities include learning opportunities.
- **Be open and respectful regarding a person's level of engagement.** Recognize that changes in a person's circumstances could result in a change in her/his level of participation. Participation in the work of the organization must reasonably fit within the margins of the person's life.
- **Define leadership broadly.** Across the organization, establish an array of leadership roles as necessary and complimentary. Build in opportunities for leaders to participate by playing different roles.
- **Create a culture in which new leaders have opportunities to work with seasoned leaders.** The benefits go both ways--- new leaders have access to knowledge and are helped to "learn the ropes" while seasoned leaders will become re-energized.
- **On an annual basis, survey board, staff, members and other stakeholders** regarding the status of inclusion and participation within the organization. Solicit ideas and strategies for improving opportunities and support for inclusion and participation.

Risk-Taking, Learning and Growth

When I called them to see about housing...I needed everything. I had four children, I needed a job and life skills. I needed everything to get back on track again...WCRP took the time to get to know me and my needs...(I became) active on the Supportive Services Committee and I attended Board meetings. The interactions with those committees helped me build up my self-esteem and prepare me to look for employment. I am starting to be more involved with children. I am running for vice president of the committee for the community playground to get things started for children. The involvement with the Supportive Services Committee and the Board helped me to want to become more involved in the community.

— Eva Wanamaker, WCRP Tenant

Outreach and Advocacy:

When WCRP made the decision to launch its Affordable Housing Campaign, the risks to the organization were clear. But so were the opportunities for incredible growth. While this work put the organization in a vulnerable position in terms of the many relationships that are needed to carry out its mission, it also had the tremendous potential to create new opportunities and power for the organization. The Affordable Housing Campaign required leaders to learn how to: develop a campaign, create coalitions, understand the power dynamics at work in the city, and undertake extensive research on the affordable housing crisis. The results:

- The creation of three successful coalitions – the Philadelphia Affordable Housing Coalition; the Eastern North Philadelphia Coalition; and the Philadelphia Campaign for Housing Justice.
- More than \$20 million in funding for affordable housing through one time city council allocations;
- A new Housing Trust Fund that generates \$15 million in new resources for housing each year;
- Dozens of new leaders who for the first time have spoken in public about the need for housing;
- Draft legislation for inclusionary housing; and
- Four publications that are highly regarded by the academic, advocate, and policy world.

Supportive Services:

Many families in the Eastern North Philadelphia community have been denied the opportunities extended to families in other neighborhoods. Without the necessary support, family members are reluctant to take risks. WCRP encourages learning and growth by first acknowledging the knowledge and skills the family has acquired through life experience. WCRP staff are skilled in helping families transfer a skill learned in one situation to another situation. The family gains confidence and then is positioned to take increasingly large risks. The families are able to chart their growth and development as individuals and as a family unit. Confident parents are in a better position to build the confidence of their children. Children's confidence can be seen in their school performance and behavior at home.

Risk-Taking, Learning and Growth

WCRP grew out of women individually and collectively taking the risk to create an organization that had never existed before in Philadelphia — a women-led community development organization. With little experience in physical development, the new organization took the risk that women could not only learn the necessary skills, but master them! Over twenty years, learning and growth associated with risk-taking have become central to every aspect of WCRP. The organization is committed to being a true learning community where women are challenged to summon the courage to try – to test themselves, to stretch and to grow. Because it values the effort as well as the result, WCRP has been able to create an organization which has a culture of both high expectations *and* unwavering support. It is little wonder that one will often hear “what we do not know, we will learn”.

Strategies for Risk-Taking, Learning and Growth

- **Establish the principle that “each person knows something and no one person knows everything”.** Model practices that underscore the importance of learning, that support access to knowledge, and encourage people to risk in order to learn and grow.
- **Define the organization as a “learning community”** where everyone is recognized as a learner and a teacher, where it is safe to ask questions, take risks and test ideas, and where learning and growth are promoted as essential aspects of the organization’s mission. Identify learning opportunities throughout the work of the organization. Learning can be unintentionally suppressed if the opportunities are not clearly presented.
- **Create a culture that supports risk-taking as a strategy for learning.** Increase everyone’s willingness to take calculated risks by reducing the blaming and non-supportive criticism when people try without successful results. Encouragement to try must be followed by encouragement to learn from all outcomes – victories and disappointments.
- **Be transparent in all the organization’s processes, systems and structures.** Understand that decisions can be important learning opportunities. A clear decision-making process can increase knowledge and skills development. Develop a process for decision-making that ensures the appropriate information is provided, discussion and debate occur, and time is allotted for everyone to fully understand the issue before the decision is made. Learning and growth enable people to be equals in decision-making.
- **Organize the work at the board and staff level with learning in mind.** Design staff positions with intentional learning curves and the structural support for staff to develop the knowledge and skills to take the next step. Develop jobs and tasks for leaders that are continually evolving to keep the leaders interested and engaged. Coupling responsibility with learning keeps leaders involved.
- **Utilize meetings as learning opportunities.** Organize meeting agendas — particularly committee meetings – that include a “learning agenda item” where everyone sharpens their knowledge or skills in an area related to the work of the organization or committee.
- **Build culture, art and celebration into the learning.** Encourage the sharing of stories, music, dance and food as ways that people learn from and teach each other. Affirm and celebrate people within the organization who take risks – personally, professionally, and/or within the community. Encouragement is a powerful tool for development of leaders.

Accountability and Mutual Support

Our role as advocates or community organizers or as supportive services providers is to help build community with our tenants, with the residents, with our constituency. We (even though we're staff) are part of that community. And in creating community, this space for people to bring their gifts to be heard and to be seen, we have to be able to acknowledge and affirm our own gifts and that which people bring; we have to learn and teach skills, particularly communications skills, we have to question and unlearn some things; and many times we have to take actions together. Acting together allows us to express ourselves and to take the risks necessary to grow.

– Claire Yoo, Former Staff Member

Outreach and Advocacy:

Individuals are often reluctant to step forward and speak out about issues or concerns. There is fear and often intimidation. WCRP encourages community leaders to join together with their allies for mutual support. Leaders have taught each other how to practice personal advocacy for themselves and their families. Often, this has taken the form of sharing their stories and strategies. Leaders also work as a collective on structural advocacy issues. There is the belief that if one leader steps forward to speak out, others will step forward to support her.

Physical Development and Property Management:

Developing and maintaining very affordable housing requires a close alliance between the tenants and the landlord. To keep the rents as low as possible, the residents demonstrate personal accountability by understanding how paying their rents on time each month actually supports housing for everyone. In those instances where a rent increase cannot be avoided, the link between responsibility and accountability is key. Armed with a comparative analysis of market-rate rents and rent hikes in comparable and even less comparable housing, the tenants are able to demonstrate their leadership by explaining to others the “economics” of being in community relationship.

Accountability and Mutual Support

WCRP believes that every human being has power. This innate power of people is often suppressed and undervalued by oppressive systems and structures. Over time, without the opportunity to practice and exercise individual power, the belief in one's own power begins to diminish. Without this belief, one's confidence to affect change is undermined and one's willingness to take on responsibility for shaping change is lost. Low income women and their families are particularly vulnerable to feelings of powerlessness. WCRP recognizes the impact external forces have on the self-image of women and has developed a set of strategies that encourage individual responsibility within a supportive framework of mutual accountability. Once a woman experiences responsibility in partnership with others, she begins to feel more powerful. With positive reinforcement and the support of other women leaders, a woman's leadership begins to emerge in different parts of her life: family, work, at WCRP and in the larger community. The values that underlie these experiences – accountability and mutual support — help form an internal compass that defines and guides her future actions and decisions as a leader.

Strategies for Accountability and Mutual Support

- **Heighten commitment – personal and organizational – as a statement of responsibility and accountability.** Any person who takes on a task, assignment or position can do so understanding that support and assistance, as needed, will be available to her or him. Upon agreeing to the responsibility, the person will be held accountable by the organization.
- **Challenge each individual to develop personal goals that are supported by the organization and the community.** Provide assistance through peer and group support to individuals as they work towards their goals. Identify ways that skills and knowledge developed are applauded and valued in organizational and community settings.
- **Encourage and support each person's ability and right to say "no"** to taking on a task, assignment or position. No one should be coerced into a role or responsibility against their will.
- **Design opportunities for leader-to-leader sharing and support.** Match a leader with a task by linking the leader's expressed interests and goals with the work and activities of the organization. The intersection of self-interests and organizational interests is very powerful.
- **Create a team-oriented culture** where each person feels that she/he can ask and receive the support needed. When support is inherent, the level of responsibility increases. Link individual success to the success of the team.

Voice, Collective Action and Change

Initially, when I first attended meetings at WCRP, I would just sit at the table and not say anything. I was not quite sure why I was there. I was a single mom on welfare. Then, I started listening to the women describing their lives and the challenges they were overcoming. The women taught me through their stories and inspired and encouraged me to grow as a leader. At WCRP, I learned about my rights as a person, a woman and as a stable parent. I learned to be vocal and independent. It was through the work on the child care center that I learned how to organize. I remember being really surprised and happy when I spoke and everyone listened and said what I said was important. WCRP has a strong commitment to fairness and family. Over time, with the support from WCRP I got a job and became a homeowner. My kids are doing well and are on their way. I am now stronger as a woman, mother and community leader.

– Isabel Lopez, former tenant and WCRP leader

Board and Committees:

Over two decades, WCRP has developed and maintained relationships with scores of community leaders who have developed or deepened their leadership skills through the work of the organization. On the Board and through the committees, leaders have developed presentation and debating skills that have prepared them for tough battles. Leaders have raised their voices with community residents and policymakers to make the case for the development of each of WCRP's housing developments as well as its child care center. Perhaps, most compelling are the personal stories that board members regularly share to illustrate the power of people in the community working together.

Outreach and Advocacy:

Tenants and community leaders – many who had never been involved in an advocacy campaign before – have become confident and compelling spokespersons for the Philadelphia Affordable Housing Coalition, the Eastern North Philadelphia Coalition, and the Philadelphia Campaign for Housing Justice. Speaking to all types of audiences, including City Council, the media and the community, these leaders bring first-person authenticity to the urgency of the housing crisis. The courage of these leaders continues to inspire others to participate in the campaign.

Voice, Collective Action and Change

In many cultures, the highest sign of respect one can pay to a person is to listen to her – really listen and focus on understanding what is being communicated. This is true in communities as well. With respect as a central organizational value, WCRP dedicates a lot of time to listening. Informal listening is woven into all aspects of WCRP's work. The impact of listening is particularly evident in the work of the Outreach and Advocacy Committee and OAT Staff Team. The individual voices of women and their allies have come together to develop an advocacy agenda to address the inequities and inequality faced by low-income families in Philadelphia. Building on its initial success in increasing funding for affordable housing, the OAT Team has recently completed a Listening Project in the Eastern North community to understand and inform future advocacy priorities. WCRP's commitment to advocacy is a tangible expression of its commitment to respect the voice of women – individual and collectively – to claim, shape and determine their own destiny.

Strategies for Voice, Collective Action and Change

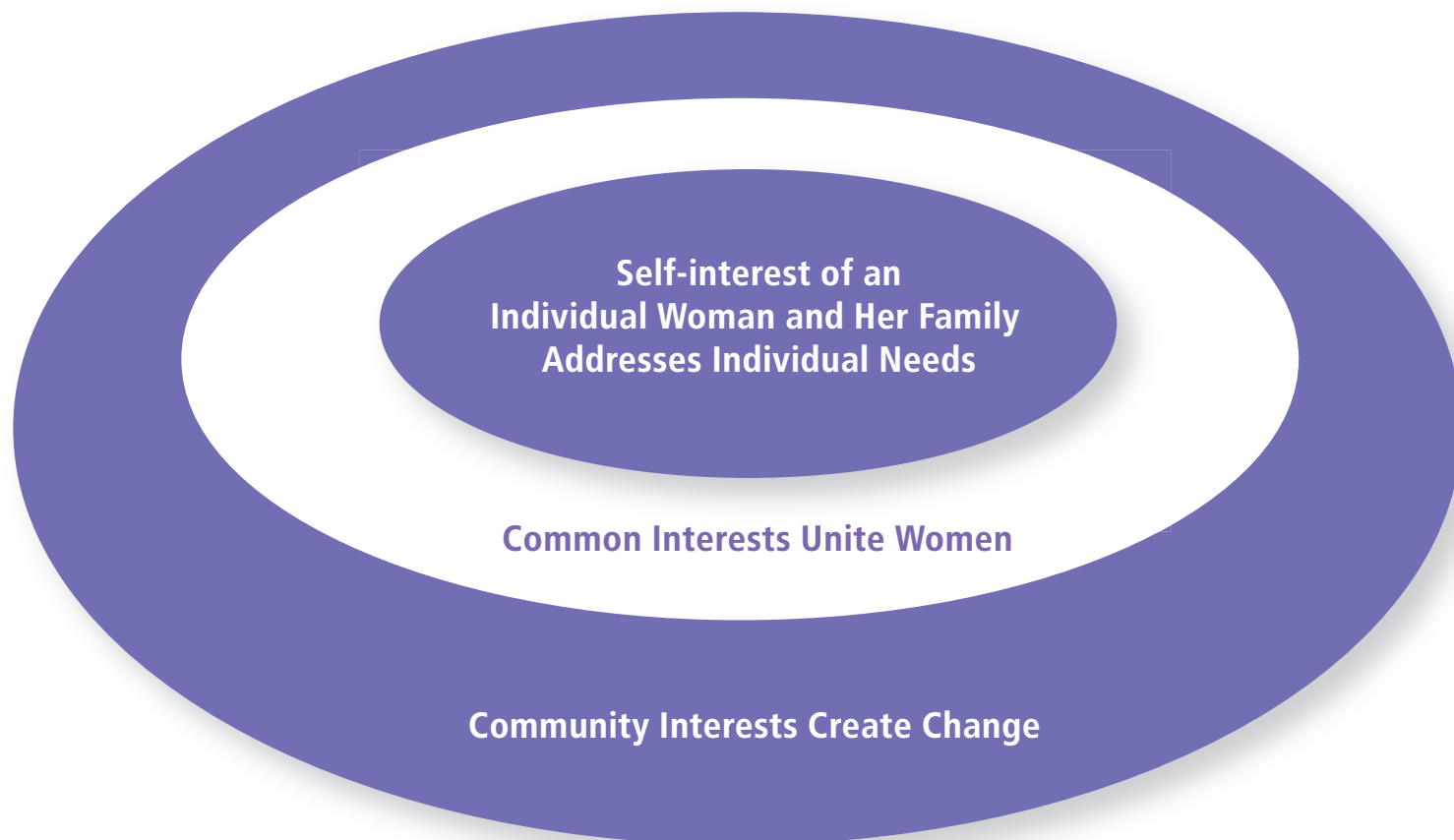
- **Create a safe environment where leaders can speak their piece in peace.** Remove the threat that individuals who disagree or have an alternative point of view or strategy will be ignored or marginalized. Use debate to understand different sides of an issue.
- **Encourage leaders to question the status quo** – in their lives, in the organization, and in the community. Questions should not be viewed as threats. Questions are vehicles for increasing clarity and achieving understanding. Questions are often the beginning of a much-needed change.
- **Seek opportunities for individuals to share their challenges and struggles with others.** Look for commonality of interest that could form basis for collective action. Identify strategic and tactical allies to support and advance issues and campaigns. Build the critical thinking skills of leaders to assess potential alliances and position the campaign. Ensure that the people most affected by the issue are in the leadership of actions, campaigns and efforts to address the issue.
- **Create a process for participation that encourages people to speak up.** Understand that silence is not compliance. People do not voice an opinion for multiple reasons. This does not necessarily mean that they are passive. Encourage leaders who generally speak less to speak more often. Encourage everyone to practice “active listening” – listening to fully understand.
- **Draw lessons of struggle and resistance from history to affirm diverse models of community leadership.** Underscore the importance of resiliency for leaders engaged in advancing long-term change.
- **Perform a power analysis on structures and systems that have power, control and influence** over the quality of the lives of the organization's constituency. Frequently reference this analysis when developing strategies for systemic or structural change.
- **Develop a process for examining multiple strategy options.** Make sure that all ideas receive a hearing and are tested side-by-side. This transparency encourages the sharing of ideas and the opportunity to reach real consensus.
- **Establish the right demand.** Go for what is really needed, knowing that campaigns can't win what they don't demand or fight for.

Circles of Interests: Transforming Self-Interest Into Community Interests

Women's Community Revitalization Project is committed to social and economic justice for low income women and their families. The interests of women are the core of the interests of families and communities. WCRP's advocacy begins with the expressed self-interest of individual women; unites women through common interests; and

transforms community interests into policy change. Self-interest is not the same as selfishness. Self-interest requires self-awareness and a degree of personal responsibility. WCRP spends time with individual women to listen to their stories and understand their aspirations and challenges. Through WCRP's programs, projects and

campaigns, women grow and discover their common interests. Once common interests are discovered, the development of community interests creates the environment for the leadership and constituency to demand and achieve substantive change.



Women's Community Revitalization Project's Approach to Leadership Development

The Women's Community Revitalization Project (WCRP) knows that the lives of women are dramatically changed by opportunities for leadership. In every aspect of WCRP, women and their families are engaged in decision making. This includes:

- Serving on WCRP's Board of Directors and Committees.
- Fighting for more resources and policies that work for low-income families and their communities.
- Spearheading efforts to build housing and improve neighborhoods.

WCRP's leadership development objectives include:

- Working to overcome barriers that impede the participation of women in decisions of the organization
- Focusing on building a strong and diverse team

Leaders that have been most effective in their work with WCRP have demonstrated the following key characteristics:

- **Courage:** Willing to be a risk-taker for deeply-held causes and beliefs.
- **Trustworthiness:** Delivers what is promised. Is accountable and expects accountability. Maintains integrity and fairness.
- **Sharing Spirit:** Provides support that makes others shine. Considers and respects all opinions.
- **Relationship-BUILDER:** Builds a cohesive group of people with different skills. Recognizes the power and synergy of groups.
- **Persuasive and Inspiring:** Speaks in a clear, compelling voice from her own experience. Overcomes fear to express concerns of others in public forums.
- **Questioning:** Is guided and strengthened by values and beliefs. Unwilling to automatically accept the status quo.

WCRP develops, supports and nurtures leaders through...

- Believing in the power of every individual to develop leadership.
- Building and maintaining respectful relationships.
- Embracing the strength and power of different cultures.
- Creating an environment that continually encourages risk-taking, learning, growth.
- Practicing transparent and consistent communication.
- Making time and space to listen – really listen to each other.
- Employing inclusive decision-making and modified consensus.
- Recognizing a diversity of leadership roles, styles and traditions.
- Balancing individual responsibility and accountability with support.
- Encouraging honesty about self-interest while discouraging selfishness.
- Caring for the individual and the organization simultaneously.
- Valuing the power of storytelling as a knowledge and skills-building tool.
- Creating an environment that encourages leaders to share power by building other leaders.
- Transforming inequitable relationships (power over) into respectful (across) relationships.

Who We Are

Founded in 1987 by a group of women who lived or worked in Eastern North Philadelphia, WCRP became Philadelphia's only women-led community development organization. The majority of the organization's constituents then and now are either African-American or Latino-American single female heads of household who on average have household incomes of less than \$12,000 per year. Initially, WCRP recognized housing as the foundation for achieving greater individual, financial and family stability and focused its advocacy and organizing efforts on leveraging dollars for decent, affordable housing through the Community Reinvestment Act. Through innovative financing and strategic investments, WCRP has built 175 units of award-winning affordable rental housing with some rents as low as \$90 per month. Financing has been obtained for an additional 40 townhomes which will be constructed next year and WCRP has almost 100 more units of housing in pre-development.

Building on the organization's success as an affordable housing developer, WCRP expanded its work to employ a comprehensive set of inter-connected community development strategies. These strategies include providing supportive services to tenants, assisting residents in the creation of over 90 gardens, partnering with other community organizations in the development of facilities to serve low-income families, and spearheading a citywide affordable housing campaign to fight for city policies and resources that encourage the creation and preservation of affordable housing for the city's very low income households.

In all these efforts, WCRP's approach has been defined by its constituents, both its primary constituents – low-income women in need of affordable housing – and its secondary constituents – women of diverse backgrounds who want to work collectively to address community revitalization. These two groups have come together, building an astounding amount of knowledge and skills, out of necessity for survival and out of passion for this shared work. With support from WCRP, a diverse set of leaders of all ages, races and cultures has emerged.

WCRP believes that everyone has innate leadership characteristics and qualities. Leadership development is a strategy for revealing and nurturing these characteristics and qualities. We have found that by focusing on inclusion and participation; risk-taking, learning and growth; accountability and mutual support; and voice, collective action and change, we have been able to overcome many of the barriers that impede the participation of women in decisions of the organization and build a strong and diverse leadership team.

In this our 20th year, the women of WCRP would like to take time to celebrate what we have accomplished, what we have learned, how hard we have worked and how far we have come. We look forward to the future and to having new opportunities to:

- **Build communities where members can be seen, heard and share their gifts.**
- **Confront inequity by building alternatives together.**
- **Take risks and share power. Organizations, like people, learn through mistakes as well as successes.**
- **Create paths for constructive organizational learning. Build in regular and widely participatory internal process to assess, plan and evaluate.**
- **Be patient and consistent. Change that endures is pursued at a manageable pace and is often incremental in nature.**
- **Encourage and support the different ways in which women develop and demonstrate their leadership.**

Acknowledgements

The Women's Community Revitalization Project (WCRP) would like to thank our board and advisory committee for their tireless efforts, amazing leadership and passionate concern for neighborhood women.

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WCRP would like to exchange information, experiences and survival stories with women and organizations interested in recognizing the value of women's leadership. Please contact us at 215 627 5550 or nlichtash@wcrpphila.com.

Women's
Community
Revitalization
Project



*20 years of
groundbreaking
leadership*

Proyecto de
Mujeres para la
Revitalización
Comunal



*20 años rompiendo
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liderazgo*

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