



THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO | ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO 87106

HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECT, 120 VASSAR, S.E.
TELEPHONE 505-277-3422

L. E. ROBERTS, Project Director

November 28, 1967

Dr. Hector P. Garcia
1315 Bright Avenue
Corpus Christi, Texas

Dear Dr. Garcia:

The enclosed information describes the University of New Mexico's Home Improvement and Training Project. The project is supported by the Office of Economic Opportunity's Office of Training and Technical Assistance Division. The project has proven that drop-out vocational training, neighborhood involvement and housing improvement can be combined into a single program.

The Office of Economic Opportunity has supported the demonstration phase of this project for two years. In all fairness to the Office of Economic Opportunity, other agencies should bear a part of the costs in continuing successful OEO demonstration projects. The University of New Mexico has attempted to secure cooperative funding from these other agencies. At this point response from other agencies has not been encouraging.

As a next step, I would like to ask the OEO Advisory Council for an audience at its next meeting to discuss the implications for program development of demonstration projects and inter-agency support for such projects.

Sincerely,

L. E. Roberts
Project Director

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Enclosures

The Home Improvement Project

Albuquerque, New Mexico



A Boy . . .

Danny Baca is one of eight children. He lives in the south valley area of Albuquerque, New Mexico. His father is an unemployed laborer, his mother is physically handicapped. At the age of fourteen, Danny left school . . . another addition to the nation's waste of human resources, a continuation of the poverty cycle which has limited his family for generations: poor education, resulting poor financial opportunity, resulting discouragement, and finally complete loss of motivation.

Yet, today, Danny Baca is gainfully employed by a large Albuquerque construction firm. He contributes to his parents' income regularly and through his work he has learned to overcome what generations of poverty had taught him . . . today he knows there is hope for his future, and he knows the pride of productivity.

Perhaps, for Danny's family, the poverty cycle has been broken . . .

WHY?



A Home . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Carlos Garcia have ten children.

Mr. Garcia has a third grade education and no productive skills . . .

he cannot find a permanent job. Mr. Garcia was given their home when his father died . . . three rooms for the Garcias and their ever-increasing family.

The house is adobe, but even adobe deteriorates when there is no money for repair. Life with walls crumbling on the heads of children . . .

Today, Mr. and Mrs. Garcia have four bedrooms and a living room with a solid roof to hold out the rain. It is not a home comparable to those of affluent Albuquerque, but it is comfortable and it is warm. More importantly, Mr. Garcia now belongs to a community committee for neighborhood clean-up.

HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE?



There are three classrooms, one each in Arenal San Jose, and Los Lunas. Areas served are Arenal, Atrisco, San Jose, Los Lunas, Armijo, Belen and Los Padillas.

Adobes: sun-baked bricks of clay-like mud and sand used in home construction. These bricks are laid with layers of mud and provide their own insulation.



A Project . . .

In July, 1965, the Home Improvement Building Trades in Impoverished Communities Project was first funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity. The project, administered through the University of New Mexico, trains underprivileged boys, like Danny Baca, in basic construction skills—using homes like that of the Garcias' for the training.

While taking part in the project, Danny attended classes in basic mathematics and English for two hours a day in the project classroom. Through the classroom teaching and individual guidance given him by professional counselors employed by the project, Danny learned that there are people who are concerned about boys without an education . . . people who understand and want to help. Danny's counselor, too, was raised in rural New Mexico, and had previously taught in New Mexico's public school system.

For six hours each day the project teaches actual construction skills. The supervisors and foremen for on-the-job training are from local communities, and have years of experience in the construction field. The boys learn to build homes from the foundation up—concrete, flooring, frame work, adobe making, plastering, roof tarring. And basically

the Home Improvement Project is designed to approximate regular job conditions, teaching the boys punctuality, rigid building code requirements, and an understanding of the effort needed to succeed in a job.

Project trainees and homes to be improved are selected by local community associations, working with project officials. Materials are supplied by the homeowners themselves, or, in the case of extremely low-income families, donated by generous companies and businessmen in Albuquerque.





The Result . . .

Because of the Home Improvement Project and the very nature of its organization, Albuquerque valley residents have learned to operate through community action, for the benefit of individual boys who eventually become wage earners, and for the benefit of families who once again have a home and a community in which to take pride.

Possibly changing the face of poverty changes the outlook of those trapped in the cycle and renews the spirit of hope.

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Home Improvement Project
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The Home Improvement Project is
supported by the Office of Training
and Technical Assistance, Community
Action Program, Office of Economic
Opportunity, Washington, D. C.

photography by Albert Vogel
design by Ruth Anderson

**CABINET COMMITTEE HEARINGS
ON
MEXICAN AMERICAN AFFAIRS
El Paso, Texas**

INTER-AGENCY COMMITTEE ON MEXICAN AMERICAN AFFAIRS, 1800 G Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20506

REHABILITATION OF HOMES, JOB TRAINING, AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

presented by

JOE R. ROMERO

Inadequate housing for the poor in both rural and urban areas of the United States remains a serious national concern. The issue is compounded by problems which are unique to the areas involved. Big city slum clearance and urban renewal projects involving tenement housing encounter some problems which have little in common with those of isolated rural and semi-rural housing, and vice versa. This does not mean, however, that housing renovation is completely different for an urban and a rural area; two important aspects of any program are community pride and the willingness of the people involved to help themselves, and these ingredients can exist in both the large and small community. What it does mean is that those individuals who initiate renovation and renewal projects must be familiar with both the physical characteristics of their community and the populations involved. With this in mind, let me discuss for a moment the physical and population characteristics of the University of New Mexico's Office of Economic Opportunity housing project located in Albuquerque and surrounding areas. The basic ideas behind our program are, we feel, applicable to a physical setting quite different from those in Albuquerque, but the Home Improvement Project is rather unique in a number of ways.

The communities in Albuquerque which are being served by the Home Improvement Project are, for the most part, peripheral urban communities which have many rural characteristics. That is, the houses in these communities are single unit, rather than tenement or apartment-type houses. In addition, families living in the houses are usually the owners, rather than renters, and this is probably important from the standpoint of developing a sense of community pride. The people involved are more willing to develop a community in which they feel they have a real interest.

The communities involved in the Home Improvement Project are also primarily inhabited by a Spanish-American population. The Caucasian and Negro populations of the communities are only a small segment of the total population. Thus, the problems one might encounter in a racially mixed community have not arisen in our project.

Another important aspect of our project in Albuquerque is the fact that the people involved are permanent residents of the communities, and have been for a long time. These are not transient or migrant populations. The homes which have been renovated through the efforts of the Home Improvement Project were, at one time, adequate residential units. They have deteriorated within the past few years, but they have not been abandoned by the original owner or his descendents. Thus, the problem of absentee ownership does not contribute to the problem of this project.

In effect, we were confronted with peripheral urban communities which have become stagnant, communities which have not moved into the mainstream of contemporary life.

The two most pressing problems we have encountered in these communities are inadequate housing and unemployment of the youth of the community. The solution, as we saw it, was to consolidate our approach, and to attach both problems at the same time. If we could provide a means for training the unemployed youth to become contributing productive members of the community, we would be utilizing one problem to solve the other. This is what we attempted to do.

Specifically, we found it feasible to train the unemployed youth of the communities in construction related skills, skills which qualify them for the job market at the end of their training, and thus help them acquire a sense of self-determination and pride in their own ability to achieve a productive place in society. The training program involves the renovation of community homes, which we considered our other major community problem. I think our concept will become somewhat clearer to you as I explain the training program in more detail. The Home Improvement Project training program is initiated somewhat as follows.

School drop-outs who have few or no marketable skills are selected for training by a board of community members who live in the area of rehabilitation. These boys range in age from 17 to 25 years. Approximately 350 boys have been involved in the program in the last two years.

The duration of the training period is approximately five months, during which time trainees receive two hours of classroom instruction a day, consisting of basic English, mathematics and citizenship. This instruction, whenever feasible, is related to the field training. In addition to classroom instruction, six hours of the day are spent in the community, repairing homes, adding rooms, and, in some cases, building entire homes. The trainees receive a stipend of \$1.40 per hour while in the field.

During the training period the boys are given a set of tools, for which they are responsible at all times. The tools are carried back and forth from their homes to the job training, and boys are encouraged to use the tools in the evenings and weekends to supplement their income or help a relative or neighbor who does not qualify for help from the projects.

Classroom instruction is provided by professionals who speak

Spanish, have a teaching certificate and know building skills. On-the-job training is supervised by local community sub-professionals who have building skills and experience. This further ties the project to the community.

Occupational information is given to the trainees in order that they might receive some impression of a number of different occupations. When a trainee shows a desire to obtain a specific kind of work for which he can qualify, applications are obtained from business firms in that field and a prospective employer is contacted by the trainee and his supervisor. After the trainee has been employed, constant follow-up continues for a certain period of time, in order that the trainee and the employer have a mutual source to come to in case of grievances. Approximately 75% of the trainees have been placed or have found jobs on their own after the training period. Many of these boys had never worked before and they are proud to be able to perform in a skill they had no idea they could learn.

We have found counseling to be a significant factor in helping the trainees adjust to a work situation and to retain a job once they are employed. Because of limited work experience, some of the boys have very little familiarization with punctuality and dependability on a job. We feel that the training program provides an opportunity to learn these essential attitudes by making each trainee responsible for his own tools, and by requiring punctuality on project jobs. In addition, personal problems are brought to the attention of counselors who are in a position to make responsible professional suggestions. The boys acquire the knowledge that someone does care.

Having looked at the project from the standpoint of the trainee program, let me shift my attention for a moment to the community member who lives in inadequate housing.

One only has to drive through one of many communities in the periphery of Albuquerque to see the condition of housing. Some homes are dilapidated on the outside only, but most are as bad inside. Since most of these homes are small and the families are large, the problem becomes very serious. It is not uncommon for entire families to own a two or three room house. In many cases there is only one bedroom. Lack of adequate space seems to be the main concern of the people. Addition of rooms to a small house with a large family has high priority in our program. I would like to note here that all homes improved and all room additions must meet the building codes of Albuquerque and the other areas served. The project follows the exact procedures required of a general housing contractor.

The same community board that considers trainee applications also considers home applications for improvement. The homeowner must meet the poverty guidelines as set forth by the Office of Economic Opportunity. The application is reviewed by the board members and his house is checked to see what repairs and additions are needed. Once the application is approved, someone from the project is sent to the house to determine what materials are necessary and what type of construction is desired. Then the homeowner buys the materials and work is begun on his home. The fact

that the homeowner is required to participate financially in the project leads to a feeling of having an investment in the community. There are three crews of trainees working on three different homes simultaneously. Each crew consists of one foreman, who has construction experience, and approximately eight trainees, depending on the size of the project. The foreman is also the instructor in the field. The trainees observe the foreman and at the same time practice the different construction skills: plastering, cement work, roofing, block-laying, etc. These boys learn by doing, and our observation has been that they readily acquire the basic skills needed to gain employment.

Having talked about the trainee program and the contribution of the homeowner, let me take just a moment to discuss the Home Improvement Board, a third important part of our program. Board members are elected by the people of each community involved, one Board for each community. These Board members, as I have indicated previously, make the decisions regarding which houses in the community will be renovated. Periodically, as each constitution requires, an election is held to replace or re-elect members of the Boards. From seven to nine members serve on each Home Improvement Board. Meetings are held twice a month to discuss problems, air out differences, and obtain further ideas which will help the community. Placing the responsibility for making decisions in the hands of the community members helps develop both the community pride we are seeking and a community sense of self-determination.

If there is one key to the success of a project like ours, we feel it is community involvement. The essential feature of the Home Improvement Project is community members working together to solve common problems. We do not have a housing re-development program imposed from outside the community. Renovation and the program decisions are a local community effort.

Having seen this kind of community involvement at work, we think there are two features of such involvement that are primarily responsible for its success. The first of these is a sense of community pride which is achieved when members of the community learn they can begin to control their own destiny. The second is the willingness of the community members to work toward the solution of their own problems. These two features of successful community involvement, at least in our situation, seem to have gone hand in hand. Community members are willing to work together, and in so doing, they achieve a sense of community pride, while their housing standards are being improved.

Let me temper this by saying that community involvement, in and of itself, will simply not get the job done. Financial resources from outside the community have been a necessary part of our project. Albuquerque businessmen have contributed in excess of \$30,000 worth of building materials to the project. The Office of Economic Opportunity has supported the project with \$600,000 in the last two years. The involvement of the private sector of the economy has generated needed support for the project. It appears to me that the businessmen will participate in alleviating poverty when involved with concrete projects which improve people and housing.

I should say something more about the possibility of the application of our program in other areas. I am not sure this approach would work in New York City or Boston, but I think the Home Improvement Project approach will work in the Southwest. I say this because I think most, if not all, of our Southwestern cities have housing problems and unemployment problems which are similar to those in Albuquerque. The problems of an urban ghetto are perhaps so fundamentally different that our approach will not work; I am just not sure. I am, however, vaguely familiar with the P. E. P. S. I. Project in Cincinnati, Ohio, which is utilizing an approach similar to ours. They are renovating urban slum housing that has been condemned. They are training the unskilled to accomplish this job much in the manner that we are, except that the trainees are not necessarily members or previous members of the community being renovated. Possibly, the Home Improvement Project can be used as a holding action in marginal neighborhoods slated for eventual urban renewal projects. Many urban development projects are several years in the future. In the meantime, the rate of deterioration of neighborhood areas could be slowed down by improving housing, generating community pride and training community members to fully participate in the nation's economy as wage earners.

In conclusion, I feel the project has demonstrated the feasibility of combining housing improvement, job training, and upgrading of community values. The Office of Economic Opportunity has supported the demonstration period of this project. It is now up to the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Labor to cooperate in developing a strategy which will continue this successful marriage between job training and home improvement.

Mr. Secretary, we would welcome any aid from your office.

Before I entertain questions concerning our program, I want to pass around a small pamphlet which will perhaps supplement what I have already said.