

## MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

### The Neighborhood Revitalization Project

“I have, of course, some horror stories about the bureaucratic side of things. Lost documents. Incompetent people. [Enduring] the wrath of contractors who waited 90 to 120 days to be paid. Being assigned a limited person in...city government: the only person I’ve ever encountered who could communicate a blank stare over the telephone. But, would I back up three years and go through it all again? Yes, I would.” So says George Roberts, a director of Homewood Studios, reflecting on their participation in the Neighborhood Revitalization Project.

In 1987, many Minneapolis neighborhoods were clearly in decline. The Mayor and City Council said “Maybe people don’t care enough. Let’s find a way to help our neighborhoods build their own community, and by building their community, solve their own problems.” By 1990, The Neighborhood Revitalization Project was launched and the City Council dedicated \$20 million each year for twenty years to fund it.

One neighborhood program funded was Homewood Studios, a community arts center. “What was especially nice about our NRP funds,” says George Roberts, “was that they were voted on at a neighborhood meeting at which we presented our project. Our plan was very highly rated. We felt our community really wanted us, and so we went ahead with the project even after its costs skyrocketed. We eventually re-mortgaged our house in order to continue. Now, Homewood Studios is doing what we wanted it to do. Local professional artists have a place to work. We offer classes and other community events. We are bringing together people across ages, across genders, across cultures and races. The arts provide a common language.

“We have a large Hmong population in the neighborhood. Mostly rural people from Laos and Cambodia, many of them raised without a written language. The size of their cultural shock is enormous. Most of the Hmong adults seem hesitant, trying to hang out in their own culture. But most of the kids want to be American, and a number of them took art classes with us. We had a show of the art made by all the local kids in our classes. More Hmong adults came out for the arts show than for any other event. They tend to have trouble with English, but when they stood side by side with other parents and they all looked at their kids’ art, all of a sudden people didn’t have to figure out what to talk to each other about. The ice was broken. A bridge seemed possible.”

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