



Syracuse University

Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs

Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration

Elusive Community in South Park

Epilogue

By June 2006, Claudia had been working in the South Park neighborhood for over a year trying to build a relationship between South Park's Latino community and the City and to work with the community to identify its priorities for City services. Challenged by a seeming lack of interest among the neighborhood's grassroots Latinos, Claudia suggested that the City support the community in a committee-led process to identify the neighborhood's priorities for City services. The South Park Action Agenda committee began as a multi-ethnic effort, with both Anglo residents and Latino residents and service providers working together, but racial tension erupted into chaos when the Latinos on the Community Engagement subcommittee suggested that the group undertake a survey to give grassroots Latinos the opportunity for input. Undercurrents of racial tension had come to the surface in a dramatic meeting, and most Latinos dropped out of the Action Agenda process, citing what they considered to be a racially antagonistic environment in the meetings.

Claudia was never able to bring the Latinos back to the table and the South Park Action Agenda planning meetings continued without Latino participation.

This case was an honorable mention winner in our 2008 "Collaborative Public Management, Collaborative Governance, and Collaborative Problem Solving" teaching case and simulation competition. It was double-blind peer reviewed by a committee of academics and practitioners. It was written by Denise Rodriguez of the University of Washington and edited by Khris Dodson. This case is intended for classroom discussion and is not intended to suggest either effective or ineffective handling of the situation depicted. It is brought to you by E-PARCC, part of the Maxwell School of Syracuse University's Collaborative Governance Initiative, a subset of the Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration (PARCC). This material may be copied as many times as needed as long as the authors are given full credit for their work.

Concerned about the lack of Latino voice in the process, Claudia went to the Mayor. The Mayor confirmed that he would not accept a document that did not include the input of the Latinos in the neighborhood, which forced the Anglos who had opposed the survey idea to change their stance. The Mayor also authorized Claudia and the Latino community to move forward with the proposed survey of grassroots Latino perspectives, and provided funding to hire an outside facilitator to support the survey and manage subsequent meetings in South Park regarding the Action Agenda.

The survey was a resounding success with the Latino community: over 200 surveys were completed, mostly through living room forums hosted in the community. Some of the Latinos who had been on the Community Engagement subcommittee opened their homes and invited all their neighbors to come over, talk about community issues, and fill out surveys. The city provided food for the forums and interpreters for each living room forum. By the time the results of the survey were announced, most of the Anglos had forgotten they had ever opposed it. The survey demonstrated that both the Anglo and Latino communities shared the same vision for the neighborhood: a safe community with thriving businesses, welcoming public spaces, and a supportive environment for families and children. According to Jacque Larrainzar, “It was a huge moment for everyone when they realized that they actually agreed on what they wanted all along. They just thought about it and talked about it in such different ways. When they finally realized that they shared a common vision, there was a big, collective ‘A-HA!’”

Implementation of the South Park Action Agenda, however, came to be hampered by the same neighborhood divisions. The lack of organization in the Latino community continued to inhibit information sharing with other neighborhood groups and the City. Despite these lingering issues, substantial changes have emerged in the neighborhood. A new park was under development, and the City and community made plans to expand the South Park Community Center, which provides numerous services to youth, seniors, and other residents.

Because organizing the community was one of the top priorities in the final version of the South Park Action Agenda, the community applied for a grant from the City Department of Neighborhoods to fund a Community Organizer position and several Trusted Advocates—designated leaders from key sub-communities who assist with the community organizing work. SPARC, the official recipient of the grant, hired Lora Suggs, the former Chair of SPNA, as the Community Organizer. Lora, with no previous organizing experience, started at the position in

January 2008. Though committed to the work of organizing, she had no deep connections to the Latino community and little understanding of how to begin reaching out. Lora and the Trusted Advocates therefore had their work cut out for them from the beginning of their efforts. Only time, hard work, and creativity would determine whether they could build successfully on the relationships Claudia had initiated to organize the Latino residents of South Park.

Both the City and the Latinos in the community who participated in the Action Agenda process count Claudia as the driving force behind the success of the South Park Action Agenda. Mayor Nickels said, “The best thing I did was pick Claudia, because she was committed to this as a Latina, and her own views about social justice added to her enthusiasm for the job. From the community’s perspective, this was someone who spoke their language, looked like them...it really helped her connect with the community. Claudia was key.”

In June 2008, Claudia Arana left her position in the Mayor’s Office and moved out of state. The South Park community held a farewell party for her at the South Park Community Center. Community members retained great hopes that the work she started would continue with help from the new Community Organizer and Trusted Advocates.

Appendix A: Map of South Park

