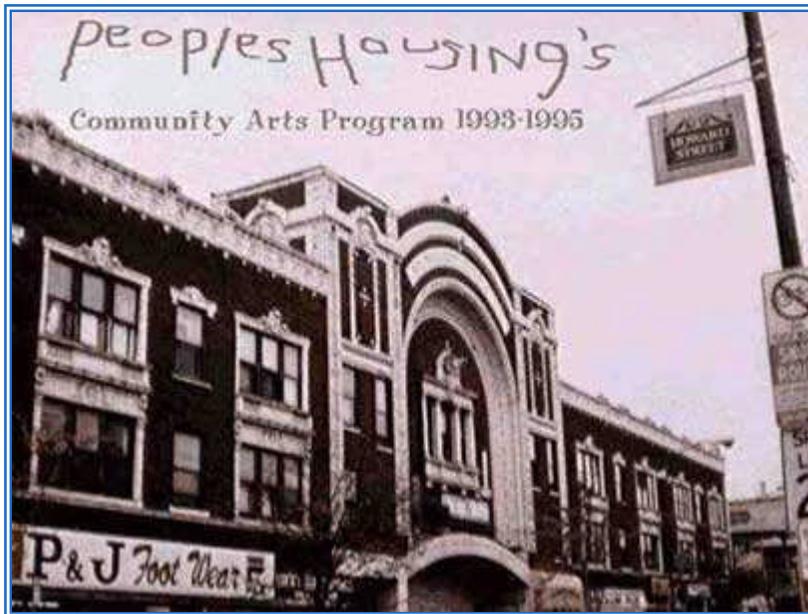




## Peoples Housing's Community Arts Program 1993-1995

### I. INTRODUCTION TO PEOPLES HOUSING AND ITS EVOLVING VIEW OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



The Howard Theater, Rogers Park, Chicago

improvement programs. Its main area of work was the development of 19 properties for low-income housing. In 1994 over 400 people lived in these properties. Half of the buildings are located in an area known as North of Howard, a neighborhood about 20 blocks with a reputation for high levels of poverty and crime. The bulk of this neighborhood is contained in Census Tract 101.

Approximately 51% of the residents of the Tract 101 are African-American. Whites and Latinos are roughly 25% each. The median household income in 1989 was \$16,549. There are many young people in this community. In 1989, 1,353 residents or 21% of the total population of North of Howard was in the range 11 years old or younger. There were also 671 teenagers, or

Peoples Housing was a nonprofit community development corporation founded by neighborhood activists in 1979. Peoples Housing was located in the north east corner of Chicago, in north Rogers Park. It ceased formal operation in December 1995.

Over the years Peoples Housing developed a number of initiatives and community

This essay outlines the experience of Tom Tresser's work as Director of Cultural Development at Peoples Housing, Chicago, 1993-1995.

#### **JUMP TO THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS OF THIS ARTICLE**

- I. [Introduction to Peoples Housing and Its Evolving View of Community Development](#)
- II. [Peoples Housing Initiates a Community Arts Program](#)
- III. [Peoples Housing Conducts a Community Arts Survey](#)
- IV. [Results of the Survey](#)
- V. [Lessons and Actions from the Survey](#)
- VI. [Summary of the Arts Activities at Peoples Housing](#)
- VII. [Musings and Conclusions of a Community Arts Developer](#)
- VIII. [Pithy Quote from HUD Secretary Cisneros.](#)

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10% of the total.

Over the years, Peoples Housing had expanded and revised its concept of community development. Originally concerned with issues of housing justice, it turned to producing affordable housing development in the early and mid-eighties and completed its first rehab project in 1983. Peoples Housing was one of the first organizations in Chicago to use the low income housing tax credit vehicle of financing projects. By 1995, Peoples Housing had generated \$23 million of reinvestment in north Rogers Park.

At first, Peoples Housing was concerned with acquiring properties, renovating them and moving in low-income residents. But as time went on, Peoples Housing moved into a variety of community organizing and civic improvement issues. They hired community organizers who helped create block clubs, organized local school council elections, operated a youth drop in center and participated strongly in a pilot program for community policing. Peoples Housing also spent a great deal of time and resources perfecting a low-income co-op model where residents "rented to own" their units.

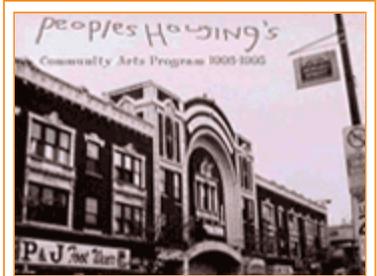
In the late 80's the board and management developed a more complex framework for looking at community development. Asking themselves, "What makes a strong community?", Peoples Housing developed the concept of "a hospitable community" as a framework for talking about the kind of community they were working to develop.

Basically, the management of Peoples Housing came to the conclusion that a strong community needed four essential dimensions: (1) a stock of affordable and decent housing units, (2) a safe and neighborly streetscape, (3) a strong and effective public school, and (4) a set of vibrant and accessible cultural resources.

Over the years, Peoples Housing became more concerned with issues of human development and less concerned with physical development. Although Peoples Housing continued to produce low income units, its senior management became increasingly involved in issues of human development, community coalition building, crime and safety projects, gang intervention programs and economic development.

In terms of a mind set, one might say that in the early days of Peoples Housing, they considered their job essentially accomplished once a building was developed and brought on line for management. But, in the late 80's and early 90's that view changed to the realization that their work was only beginning when a building was completed.

children and youth at risk: View their site [Coming Up Taller](#).



The Howard Theater, Rogers Park, Chicago



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## Peoples Housing's Community Arts Program 1993-1995

### II. PEOPLES HOUSING INITIATES A COMMUNITY ARTS PROGRAM

It is in this context of a more complex view of community development that I enter the picture.

Peoples Housing purchased the Howard Theater Building in mid-1992. This building was built in 1918 and anchors the east Howard Street area. It is adjacent to the Howard Street CTA transit station and contains 30 apartments, 10 store fronts and the Howard Theater.

The Howard Theater consists of a 20,000 square foot single floor movie theater and several other spaces. The main auditorium is unsafe and contains water damage, decades of stored junk and debris and was even home for a while to an owl. The theater had not been used since 1977, when the last movie shown there was "Deliverance".

I was hired in March of 1993 to organize a community arts program that would restore life to the Howard Theater and advance Peoples Housing's goals of community development through grass roots cultural programs. I decided to concentrate on putting activities into the lobby of the theater, which is 4,000 square feet. We built a small stage and got over 100 chairs donated from people in the community. Eventually, we operated programs in the lobby, which we called the Lobby Theater, a large open room over the lobby (the Upstairs Space), and in a community arts studio on the first floor of our headquarters building.



**The first chairs for the Howard Theater lobby space were donated by dozens of community residents and then a nunery in Wheeling called and I drove out in a truck to find these Brady Bunch era chairs neatly arranged on a bright green lawn in front of the dining hall.**

**I also got sound equipment, speakers, ten pianos, several thousand used books and over \$2,000 worth of percussion equipment donated to our community arts program!**

Consistent with Peoples Housing's belief in bottom-up action, grass roots accountability and its success in bringing resources into a disinvested community, I tried to craft a cultural arts program that had three main goals. They were:

1. create community unity by providing free, accessible and relevant cultural programs to the people of Howard Street;
2. create positive youth development through after-school arts classes, leadership development, special events and other cultural programs; and
3. create jobs and economic opportunities through cultural micro-enterprises. I will refer to the overall arts program at Peoples Housing as the Community Arts Program (CAP).

My title was Director of Cultural Development and I created this job to be a sort of cultural and creativity coach for the neighborhood. I spent the first 18 months listening and trying short term, low risk, no cost pilot projects. We made modest improvements to the spaces only as activities were developed that were popular and supportable.

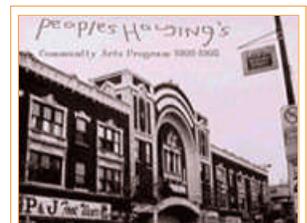
I was determined not to plunge ahead with a grand rehab scheme and capital campaign before we knew what types of activities the community would support and help grow. We needed to build a solid base in order to guide our program development and also to show skeptical funders that residents of the Howard Street community wanted and would support a community cultural center. (This is a subject for a separate analysis -- funders place many more obstacles in the way of community based arts programs and facility development. It remains easier to raise \$1,000,000 for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra than it is to raise \$10,000 for a program like the one we created at Peoples Housing)

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#### JUMP TO THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS OF THIS ARTICLE

- I. [Introduction to Peoples Housing and Its Evolving View of Community Development](#)
- II. [Peoples Housing Initiates a Community Arts Program](#)
- III. [Peoples Housing Conducts a Community Arts Survey](#)
- IV. [Results of the Survey](#)
- V. [Lessons and Actions from the Survey](#)
- VI. [Summary of the Arts Activities at Peoples Housing](#)
- VII. [Musings and Conclusions of a Community Arts Developer](#)
- VIII. [Pithy Quote from HUD Secretary Cisneros.](#)

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The Howard Theater, Rogers Park, Chicago



**I used a lot of street level tactics to get people's attention and find allies. Here a drummer performs in front of the Howard Theater. An ice cream vendor came by to watch and I started playing the cart's bells! We did things like this all the time.**

I engaged in a wide variety of listening activities. I sat out in front of the Howard Theater with a model of what a "dream" vision of a rehabbed Howard Theater might look like and I signed people up who were interested in helping build the CAP. I visited local community service and youth service agencies, including the neighborhood school and parks, and sought out any artist or arts program operating in the area. I visited block clubs and various advisory councils and a number of local churches. I used my own extensive list of arts organizations and artists to search out those in the 60626 zip code (there were 24 arts organizations and 236 artists) and I visited the arts organizations and brought groups of artists together for open house meetings and other projects.

Performing arts program director, Oba William King worked with young people from the community from the beginning of the program. Our doors were always open to them!

We organized a number of committees to help guide our early efforts. There were artists and non-artists on these committees. There was a Teen Committee, which helped organize parties and dances; a Visual Arts Committee, which created a temporary art gallery and curated a "drop off" art exhibit; a Circus Arts Committee, which led to the one-time performance of a mini-circus; and a Performing Arts Committee, which created several of our cornerstone programs.

The most systematic listening effort I made in the early development of the community arts program at Peoples Housing was the undertaking of a community arts survey.

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## **Peoples Housing's Community Arts Program 1993-1995**

### **III. PEOPLES HOUSING CONDUCTS A COMMUNITY ARTS SURVEY**

During the Summer of 1993 Peoples Housing conducted a community arts survey in the streets of Rogers Park as part of a community organizing and listening process for the establishment of CAP. The survey was funded by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council's Build-By-Design program.

Seven residents of the north Rogers Park area were hired for four weeks to create and administer the survey. A special effort was made to include young people, and four of the surveyors were teens. One team member was Latino and administered the survey in Spanish.

The survey team went through a training period which included an overview of Rogers Park and Peoples Housing, an introduction to community organizing techniques and an introduction to the Community Capacity Mapping approach to looking at communities. Dr. John Kretzmann of Northwestern University's Asset Based Community Development Institute gave an overview of the Community Mapping approach to community development and also gave the team a short course on survey taking. I gave an explanation of how CAP fit into the overall work of Peoples Housing.

The team members helped design the questionnaire, which was to be administered rapidly in the field. The survey had four basic objectives:

**MARKETING RESULTS** - We expected that the results of the survey would help reveal what kinds of events and classes people wanted at the Howard Theater, which would be the centerpiece of Peoples Housing's community arts program.

**COMMUNITY TALENTS** - We wanted the survey to start to uncover the variety of skills that our neighbors have. This was a crucial element of the survey. I intended to recruit our neighbors as instructors, performers and advocates for the arts program. I was building an open door policy where local artists, bands, rap groups, impresarios and youth program leaders were aggressively encouraged to use the Howard Theater. I intended to support and coach all community users to help them put on shows, classes and special events.

**LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT** - By hiring, training, and sending community members into the neighborhood to interact with other neighbors, we were seeking to develop a core group of people who would be able to work with Peoples Housing on other arts and non-arts community projects. Survey respondents were given the opportunity to indicate interest in participating in the community arts program, and we intended to (and did) contact those respondents to invite them to participate in leadership roles in creating events for the Howard Theater. Two members of the survey team became quite familiar with Peoples Housing's operations and were very effective and positive community ambassadors. They were hired by our community organizer for short term projects after the survey was completed.

**COMMUNITY MARKETING** - Members of the survey team showed people a rendering of

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#### **JUMP TO THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS OF THIS ARTICLE**

- I. [Introduction to Peoples Housing and Its Evolving View of Community Development](#)
- II. [Peoples Housing Initiates a Community Arts Program](#)
- III. [Peoples Housing Conducts a Community Arts Survey](#)
- IV. [Results of the Survey](#)
- V. [Lessons and Actions from the Survey](#)
- VI. [Summary of the Arts Activities at Peoples Housing](#)
- VII. [Musings and Conclusions of a Community Arts Developer](#)
- VIII. [Pithy Quote from HUD Secretary Cisneros.](#)

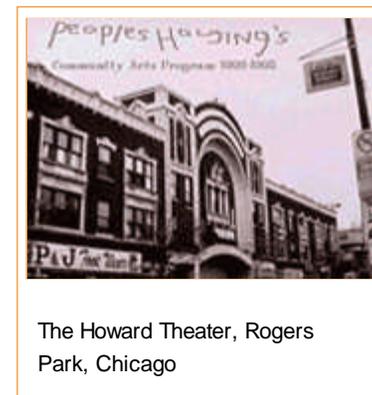
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the proposed Cultural Center, gave out information on Peoples Housing's rental and co-operative housing programs and distributed flyers for the first Howard Theater Family Arts Festival (September, 1993). These personal contacts helped get the word out about Peoples Housing and our various programs in an extremely positive manner. This was a very important point. Up till then, Peoples Housing's work was not widely known outside of the Howard Street area. Given the fact that we had virtually no program funds or advertising dollars, this word of mouth campaign was the announcement of intent by us about the arts program and the rebirth of the theater to the community.

The team covered all major business streets in Rogers Park, as well as several beaches, parks, and one elementary school. In addition, surveys were filled out by many people who attended Peoples Housing's first Howard Theater Family Arts Festival.

A total of 1,059 people completed the survey. This represents 1.8% of the total Rogers Park population (60,378). People were asked to respond to a series of questions, primarily by checking off a range of responses. Each question also allowed for open ended responses.

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### **IV. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY**

"WHAT I LIKE" - People were asked what sorts of activities they would like to see in the Howard Theater Cultural Center. The first choice for young people (ages 12-19) were rap (70%), followed by hip-hop (56%) and dance (55%).

"TALENTS I HAVE" - People were asked what skills or talents they have. This was often a cause for amusement and pleasure for the respondents. Many, upon first seeing the heading would exclaim "Oh, I can't DO anything!," but when the surveyor requested the person to look at the list, the respondent would then check off any number of skills.

Young people reported they could dance (49%), put on parties (35%) and sing (32%). People over 60 reported they could play an instrument (30%), tell stories (20%) and do photography (15%).

"I WANT TO HELP" When people finished answering the questions on the survey, they were then asked the if they wanted to participate. If the person said yes, they were given 5 choices of activities for participation.

The choices were:

- \* I WANT TO PARTICIPATE
- \* I WANT TO PERFORM
- \* I WANT TO TEACH
- \* I WANT TO SELL
- \* I WANT TO HELP ORGANIZE

Finally, if a person said they wanted to participate, they were asked for their mailing address and phone number. Many people elected to give us their contact information even though they said they did not want to actively participate, but just wanted future program information.

Overall, 42% of all the people who were surveyed said they wanted to participate. A higher percentage, 51%, of the young people said they would be involved in some way in the arts program

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- I. [\*\*Introduction to Peoples Housing and Its Evolving View of Community Development\*\*](#)
- II. [\*\*Peoples Housing Initiates a Community Arts Program\*\*](#)
- III. [\*\*Peoples Housing Conducts a Community Arts Survey\*\*](#)
- IV. [\*\*Results of the Survey\*\*](#)
- V. [\*\*Lessons and Actions from the Survey\*\*](#)
- VI. [\*\*Summary of the Arts Activities at Peoples Housing\*\*](#)
- VII. [\*\*Musings and Conclusions of a Community Arts Developer\*\*](#)
- VIII. [\*\*Pithy Quote from HUD Secretary Cisneros.\*\*](#)

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## **Peoples Housing's Community Arts Program 1993-1995**

### **V. LESSONS AND ACTIONS FROM THE SURVEY**

The entire survey process was a very valuable exercise for Peoples Housing. We gathered important information about what sorts of cultural activities people wanted to see in the Howard Theater. More important, we opened a channel of communication to our neighbors which was designed to tap their talents, and not just assess them. Surveying neighborhood talent is a positive community activity and revealed riches and opportunities for CAP.

Perhaps the most exciting finding was that 42% of the people reached by this survey, or 445 people, said they wanted to participate in some way in Peoples Housing's Community Arts Program. 23% said they wanted to help organize and plan activities. An astounding 51% of the youngest respondents, aged 12-19, said they wanted to participate.

Other key findings were:

The most popular type of activity selected was "Festivals & Street Fairs" (57%). We built on our 1993 efforts here and produced the Howard Theater Family Arts Festival in the Spring of 1994. Our Performing Arts Committee planned and provided volunteers for this event. The 1994 event was themed "The Drums of Rogers Park" and featured drumming performances of musical styles from around the world. Over 600 people attended the festival and barbecue.

We also expanded our Market Place Program by working with the City's Department of Consumer Services. We brought a weekly Farmer's Market to Howard Street, which ran from July to October, 1995. We surrounded the farmers with crafts people and small business people who sell a range of items off tables at local markets. We hired a market manager with extensive minority micro-business experience.

The most popular cultural activities selected were "Dance" and "Theater & Music Performances for Children" (48%). We held classes in African dance and hip-hop style dancing. We produced a weekly Saturday night teen dance for 13-17 year-olds. We also tried to get the Dance Center of Columbia College to set up a satellite center at the Howard Theater, but we did not get funded for a pilot project.

The most frequently mentioned talents that people reported having were Dancing (34%), Singing (30%), Party Making (28%), Photography (27%), Painting (24%), Acting (21%), Sewing (19%), and Rap (18%). We tapped these talents through a series of "Open Mike Nights at the Howard Theater". The open mike nights were produced by an actor and arts educator, Oba William King, who lives a few blocks from the theater. Oba saw a sign in the Howard Theater saying "Do You Have Any Bright Ideas About This Space? See Tom at Peoples Housing". He offered to organize and host the first open mike in January 1994. The event was enormously popular with young people and became bi-weekly in April. Oba was hired as a part-time arts activity organizer in October of 1994. His energies, talents and artistic networking led to many of the successful programs at CAP.

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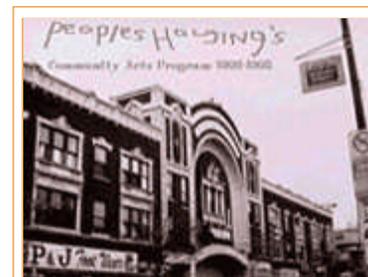
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- I. [Introduction to Peoples Housing and Its Evolving View of Community Development](#)
- II. [Peoples Housing Initiates a Community Arts Program](#)
- III. [Peoples Housing Conducts a Community Arts Survey](#)
- IV. [Results of the Survey](#)
- V. [Lessons and Actions from the Survey](#)
- VI. [Summary of the Arts Activities at Peoples Housing](#)
- VII. [Musings and Conclusions of a Community Arts Developer](#)
- VIII. [Pithy Quote from HUD Secretary Cisneros.](#)

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The community arts survey was also a good experience for the seven survey team members. Peoples Housing was committed to training and employing members of the north Rogers Park area for this type of work, and we sought funding for a year-round community intern program. We would have liked to have a team of community residents on retainer to do a number of community surveys, both for Peoples Housing and for other agencies. We also would have liked to expand the arts survey and make it an annual event. We were unable to accomplish these goals.

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The Howard Theater, Rogers Park, Chicago

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## Peoples Housing's Community Arts Program 1993-1995

### VI. A SUMMARY OF THE ARTS ACTIVITIES THAT GREW OUT OF OUR "OPEN DOOR" APPROACH TO BUILDING PROGRAMS

In the three years of its operation, the CAP has presented over 300 free events for the Howard Street community. Over 12,000 people have participated in CAP events. The activities fell into three broad categories: community unity, youth development and economic opportunity.

#### (1) COMMUNITY UNITY & SECURITY

Events and classes have included:

- The Family Arts Festival at the Howard Theater, including the dynamic and popular "Drums of Rogers Park Music Festival in 1994.
- The All-Ages Open Mike Show at the Howard Theater.
- Rap, gospel, music, theater, poetry and talent shows.
- Weekly Farmer's Markets and Craft Fairs.
- Weekly writing, drama, drumming, tile making, clay and video classes.
- Weekly teen dances in the Upstairs Space at the Howard Theater.

All events and classes were free of charge, except the teen dances. CAP reached out to a wide range of organizations for collaborations and many groups used our space for their projects. Some of the groups we have worked with are:

- \* Kiwanis Park & Pottawattomie Park
- \* The Chicago Historical Society
- \* The Gale Academy and its Mural Project
- \* The Gale Academy Local School Council
- \* The Tavana Block Club - and a number of
- \* Arts Groups: Casa Guatemala, Music/Theater Workshop, Partners In Mime, Joseph Holmes Dance Theater, Dance Center of Columbia College, Merit Music Program, Ars Musica, Ba'hai Youth Workshop.

Over 50 people have volunteered time and materials to CAP. In fact, CAP provided the single most positive community organizing focus for Peoples Housing during 1995.

During the later part of 1995, we were beginning to meet with the block clubs, police, local neighborhood policing beat team, neighborhood leaders and parents about how the arts programs were the place to focus combined community energy to reach, deal with and employ our young people. As Peoples Housing went out of business, this was the single most important unfinished piece of business of our program.

#### (2) POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



**Oba William King with Cee, teen winner of first Howard Theater Talent Show, Sept. 1994.**



**Oba with Mrs. Oliver, who recorded two tracks on "The Best of Howard Street."**



**OPEN MIKE NIGHT LEADS TO RECORDING...the record release party in early Sept 1995 was a wonderful community celebration and was recorded by a videographer from the Moody Bible Institute.**

CAP instructors served as powerful mentors and role models for local youth.

Oba William King, the Director of our Performing Arts Program, became a trusted and honored person on Howard Street because of his dedication to young people and the energy and spirit he put into the "All Ages Open Mike Shows" at the Howard Theater.

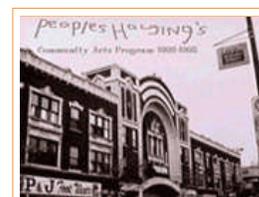
Oba helped a group of youth in the program organize their own leadership club, SUBS (Students United for a Better Society). This group of teens

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#### JUMP TO THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS OF THIS ARTICLE

- I. [Introduction to Peoples Housing and Its Evolving View of Community Development](#)
- II. [Peoples Housing Initiates a Community Arts Program](#)
- III. [Peoples Housing Conducts a Community Arts Survey](#)
- IV. [Results of the Survey](#)
- V. [Lessons and Actions from the Survey](#)
- VI. [Summary of the Arts Activities at Peoples Housing](#)
- VII. [Musings and Conclusions of a Community Arts Developer](#)
- VIII. [Pithy Quote from HUD Secretary Cisneros.](#)

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held car washes over the summer, took field trips and conducted their own events during 1995.

Under the guidance of Mr. King, young people in our drama and writing program have created original material and performed in public -- for pay -- at many venues:

- Dock Street Stage at Navy Pier
- Channel 50 "Kid's Talk" feature
- Guild Complex at the Chopin Theater
- Channel 19 cable television
- Barnes & Noble Booksellers
- Park District locations throughout Chicago
- The Howard Theater, "Saturday Show:"

Several young people have learned how to work sound gear, conduct grass roots marketing projects, organize and host special events, use computers and write for publications. Oba has stayed involved in arts education and his program JUSTUS Arts Programs for Youth is at [www.justusart.org](http://www.justusart.org).

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CAP operated a vibrant summer arts academy in 1995 under a DHS contract, offering 7 class sessions each week, serving over 145 people and employing 7 local youth as Arts Interns to help with the classes.

### (3) ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

CAP has created several micro-enterprises that hold great promise for learning AND economic development.

We produced a one-hour cassette album, "The Best of Howard Street, Volume 1". This album contains nine local people on 12 tracks. It is a vibrant mix of poetry, rap, blues and drumming. The youngest performer is 10 and the oldest is a grandmother who belts the old Billy Holliday standards. Local resident Gregory Crook produced this album in his living room.

We published a monthly community literary magazine, "The Written Word", which contains stories, poems and interviews by local youth. This project developed out of the Open Mike shows and is edited by local resident and freelance writer/graphic designer Sarah Beaudry, who also developed and taught our after-school writing class. Since the program ended, Oba and Sarah have published three issues of the magazine.

The Tile People was a small business start-up composed of kids and adults which has sold \$5,000 worth of hand-made tiles from 1995 to early 1997. This enterprise grew out of the free tile making classes taught by north Rogers Park resident and visual artist/arts educator Kay Hauck. We had hoped to do tile murals and provide handmade accent tiles for Peoples Housing's next rehab project.



**Tile People organizer and instructor, Kay Hauck, and a young artisan at an exhibit of the group's work**



### THE TILE PEOPLE LIVE ON

**Kay kept the program going and she and a team of artists created a mural for Loyola University's Center for Urban Research & Learning. In fact, they use it as a welcoming image on their website. The president of Loyola University officiates at the unveiling.**



Since CAP shut down in December 1995, Kay Hauck has formed The Tile People into a for-profit business. She continues to work with a core group from the CAP class. One 12 year-old, Ramon, has sold over \$400 worth of hand made tiles in the first six months of the program. This remains a pilot project with great promise. Since then, Kay has gone on to grow The Tile People and received a number of private commissions, using many of the people she met at Peoples Housing.

In 2000 she established **West Town Tile** at the Northwestern Settlement House, in West Town, Chicago.

Not as successful were our attempts at creating retail outlets for crafts and hand made items. We struggled with a weekly Farmer's Market and Crafts Fair in the Comerica Bank parking lot on Hermitage, just off Howard Street. We were rained out and blasted by 90 degree plus days all summer long. We also took a beating with a cart we established at Navy Pier, called "Crafty People". The Pier was not open until mid-July and cart operators were required to be open 7 days a week starting in early June 1995 when few people were present.

Basically, our retail efforts were not successful and I believe that arts initiated efforts such as these should concentrate on the wholesale market. The space we had at our headquarters building also lent itself more to a workshop, assembly plant or light manufacturing facility.

With the early support of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), through a grant program called the Community Building Initiative, we were able to offer our artists small stipends to teach and undertake some of these ventures.

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## Peoples Housing's Community Arts Program 1993-1995

### VII. MUSINGS AND CONCLUSIONS OF A COMMUNITY ARTS DEVELOPER

I believe that the integration of arts and cultural programs and enterprises at the grass roots level is an effective and powerful method of community development.



A drum jam outside the Howard Theater leads to a series of free drum classes and workshops featuring the drumming group, Primal Connection.



I have seen how the types of arts programs we created at Peoples Housing changed peoples lives and possibly saved them. There are a number of reports and studies that document this power (the most recent is Coming Up Taller - Arts and Humanities Programs for Children and Youth At Risk, The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 202-682-5409. You can visit their Web site at: <http://www.cominguptaller.org>).

I believe our method of creating programs was responsible and efficient. Given the scandalous lack of funding for neighborhood programming and infrastructure building, our adaptation of the asset based model of community building was logical and imperative.

We were making great strides in building a system of arts assisted community development programs when Peoples Housing collapsed and we were forced to cease operations.

There are several major conclusions I have drawn after three years at Peoples Housing and 16 years of work in the arts in Chicago.

Groups like Peoples Housing are masters of space creation and management. Most much of what we accomplished inside CAP could not have been possible without the several wonderful spaces that were put at our disposal. The power of easily accessible community space should be carefully noted. Many activities were initiated by people who entered the spaces and were inspired to create activities to fill them up.

I was not asked to pay for the use of the spaces and so our programs had a tremendous freedom to experiment, take risks and be open to the widest possible range of community uses. Peoples Housing paid my salary for the first year and provided about \$10,000 in programming expenses and about \$50,000 in physical rehab costs for the Howard Theater lobby and upstairs spaces (the rehab costs were financed by a loan from LISC). After the first year, I raised my own salary and funds for the arts staff and program supplies. While I was somewhat effective here, I found it extremely difficult to raise money for community based arts programs and arts facility improvements. Securing start-up and sustaining funds for this work was and remains problematic.

From 1990 to 1995 I attempted to communicate the power of the arts to cultural workers and to professionals outside the arts. I have been to conventions of municipal officials; I have presented to groups of community development professional; I have lobbied the community lending staff of commercial banks; I have worked with commercial developers and urban planners; I have argued with grass roots community activists and I have written cultural policy statements for candidates for public office. There is a great deal of mutual education we in the arts arena need to do with our colleagues in the community development field. I find that arts folk do not know much about the development world and development practitioners need to know much more about the potential of neighborhood arts.

Finally, I would say that we concentrate on seeking out, nourishing, coaching and expanding our community based creativity pool. I believe one of the criticisms that can be leveled at Peoples Housing and many other CDCs is that it failed to powerfully develop the human capital of the immediate neighborhood. We need to pay much more attention to the dynamics of talent development and skill transfer and make them the overarching priorities of our community based development work.

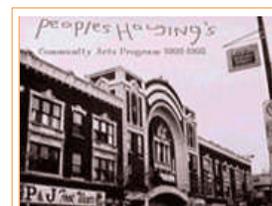
One of the most exciting aspects of the arts is its universal and transcending appeal to people of all ages, classes and educational experiences. The arts provides a tremendously engaging and effective way to involve people and get them to exercise their creative

This essay outlines the experience of Tom Tresser's work as Director of Cultural Development at Peoples Housing, Chicago, 1993-1995.

#### JUMP TO THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS OF THIS ARTICLE

- I. [Introduction to Peoples Housing and Its Evolving View of Community Development](#)
- II. [Peoples Housing Initiates a Community Arts Program](#)
- III. [Peoples Housing Conducts a Community Arts Survey](#)
- IV. [Results of the Survey](#)
- V. [Lessons and Actions from the Survey](#)
- VI. [Summary of the Arts Activities at Peoples Housing](#)
- VII. [Musings and Conclusions of a Community Arts Developer](#)
- VIII. [Pithy Quote from HUD Secretary Cisneros.](#)

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities has profiled dozens of community-based arts programs that serve children and youth at risk: View their site [Coming Up Taller](#).



The Howard Theater, Rogers Park, Chicago

muscles. There is a time honored principle in the organizing work of the Industrial Areas Foundation: "Imagination precedes implementation". Or, as we would say inside CAP, "If you can't imagine it, you can't change it". The arts is an immensely powerful vehicle for expanding a person's creative and imaginative facilities -- and by extension, those of an entire neighborhood.

**The Peoples Housing CAP sponsored dozens of activities - book stalls, circus classes, a youth newspaper and much, much more!**



I hope that community development practitioners will seriously consider adding grass roots arts and cultural programs to their tool box. I hope that they will seek out the artists and their other creative neighbors to aid them in the goal of rebuilding our cities and creating a just and balanced society



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## Peoples Housing's Community Arts Program 1993-1995

Housing and Urban Development Secretary, Henry Cisneros, spoke to a gathering of artists in Chicago in April 1994, at ARTS 21, a national conference convened by the National Endowment for the Arts. In his keynote address he made the following plea:

"At HUD, we see the arts not as an amenity, not as a luxury, but as a necessity in building America's communities. These children -- and every child in America -- deserve a chance to learn and to participate. So I encourage those of you whose work daily is in the arts to find ways to expand the accessibility of [the] arts to my world of public housing and distressed communities....Programs that would keep our children out of trouble and give them skills, give them help to develop talents that may pay off with a career or perhaps simply pay off in skills that enable them to cope with the stressful world in which they live. Help us build communities....all of us needs to do what we can to reconnect. What you do is the business of connecting human beings. Good luck in your work because ***we need you on the job to save our country.*** Thank you very much." (emphasis added)

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I would like to acknowledge the MacArthur Foundation and the Chicago Community Trust for their early willingness to fund the combination of grass roots cultural programming and community development that was the Community Arts Program at Peoples Housing.

The CAP staff and all the people we worked with also owe a debt to Donna Smithey, the former Executive Director at Peoples Housing. She served the organization for eight years and she risked a great deal in bringing me on staff and allowing the CAP to unfold as it did.

This article was commissioned by the Asset Based Community Development Institute at Northwestern University. You can visit their home page at <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html>

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- V. [Lessons and Actions from the Survey](#)
- VI. [Summary of the Arts Activities at Peoples Housing](#)
- VII. [Musings and Conclusions of a Community Arts Developer](#)
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