Growing NearWest: An Urban Community Gardens Pilot Project

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People-centered Design is an approach and methodology to creating innovative solutions through focus on designing with people, rather than for people. This approach combines a process that utilizes Design Thinking and Participatory Design Research methods in order to empower the people who ultimately use a product, service, or system—along with those who have the most to gain or lose—to collaboratively create positive social impact and innovation, and improve quality of life.
Designing People-centered Services:
Part II

- Visual Communication Design
- Senior-level / Spring Semester
- 2.5 hours / 3x week / 16 weeks
- 9 students
Course Process

DESIGN RESEARCH PROCESS

Basadur, 1994

Phase 1:
Formulating Problems/Opportunities

Phase 2:
Formulating Solutions

Phase 3:
Implementing Solutions
Reach
COMMUNITY PARTNERS & COLLABORATORS

Herron School of Art and Design, IUPUI

IUPUI Office of Neighborhood Partnerships

Near West Side Community Neighborhoods

IUPUI DIGS

Patrice Duckett
(Near West Coordinator)

Starla Officer
(Near West Steering Committee Co-chair)

Haughville
(Residents)

We Care
(Residents)

Stringtown
(Residents)

Hawthorne
(Residents)

Four Girls Design
(4 Junior VCD students)

Andy Skinner
(A to A Studios)

Rachel Bennet
(DIGS President)

Designing People-centered Services Course
(9 Senior VCD students)

We Care
(Residents)

Stringtown
(Residents)

Hawthorne
(Residents)
Quality of Life Plan

Beginning in 2003, the Near Westside neighborhood has been developing and implementing a Quality of Life plan as part of the Great Indy Neighborhoods Initiative (GINI).

As a result of the GINI planning process, the Near Westside has focused on seven priority areas for the immediate and long-term vitality of the neighborhood: housing, public safety, beautification, economic development, education, health, and civic/youth engagement. Agency and resident leaders want to restore older homes in the area, reduce crime so residents feel safer, and beautify the area with public art and community clean-up events. They want to encourage new businesses to locate in the area to revitalize their main corridors. They want to increase high school graduation rates. And they want to work through an expanded base of stakeholders to accomplish and sustain these goals. These leaders share a collective vision for renovated, affordable homes along clean, tree-lined streets with bustling shops and businesses along its busiest corridors. The Near Westside envisions itself as the ideal urban Indianapolis community where people choose to live and work because of its close proximity to downtown and to other state and national attractions along its borders.

The Near Westside has a solid foundation of existing community assets upon which to realize its vision. This area has always been rich in strong leadership and is home to a multitude of organizations. It boasts 19 parks and recreational areas, 41 churches of various denominations, 14 licensed child-care programs, six public schools
phase 1 :: Formulate Problems/Opportunities

Understanding the current situation
Research

Students conducted contextual, people-centered research in and around the Near West.
The initial meeting brought up many factors, both internal and external, that had to be considered during our research. Some internal factors included neighborhood diversity and dynamics, neighborhood relationships, and income levels. External factors included availability of fresh and healthy foods, garden plot availability, the Near West Quality of Life Plan, budget, and urban community garden best practices.

Our methods of research ranged from standard web and print-based exploration, cultural probes, ethnographic research, and community observation.

**Internal factors:**
- neighborhood diversity and dynamics
- neighborhood relationships
- income levels

**External factors:**
- availability of fresh and healthy foods
- garden plot availability
- the Near West Quality of Life Plan
- urban community garden best practices

One of the most important things we learned is that the near west neighborhood area is a food desert. A food desert is "any area in the industrialised world where healthy, affordable food is difficult to obtain." By documenting the various fast food places in the near west neighborhood, our group was able to see how much these communities needed these gardens.
Team Identity: strategy + development
Branding the team.
Mission:
Through facilitation, we will help build a foundation upon which the Near Westside Community of Indianapolis will improve quality of life and serve as a model for other communities.
Growing NearWest branding done by: 

*FourGirls Design* 

(4 junior Herron VC students)
phase 2 :: Formulate Solution
Using visual tools with community members
Walk-in Cards
To understand the community members’ daily experience.
Ideal Garden Collage Kit
Community members visualized and shared their ideal gardens.
Community members came up with many ideas for dealing with food storage, security, tool storage and irrigation.
**Plot Location Map**

Community members selected and ranked their ideal plot locations.
WE CARE COMMUNITY

* Please rank your top 3 choices from 1 to 3 for potential garden plots in the boxes below *

- Preferred Areas +
  - Abandoned Houses
  - Empty Lot
  - Church / School Park

* Considerations *
  - Why might this area be appropriate?
    - Sun, Wind, Contamination?
  - How many people are you expecting to be involved?
  - Community garden or individual residency garden?
    - Specifically, where else might be successful areas for the garden's foundation?

* Garden Size +
  - Small
  - Medium
  - Large

* Distance +
  - Convenience of garden's location
    - High
    - Low
    - McCarty Ave
      - See map
      - The opening
      - Warner to McCarty

- Carrots need raised beds 
  - Need really good soil (Compost)
- Trees can go in the bottoms
  - Not in smaller plots
- Cucumbers
- Sunflowers & Corn & Pumpkins
  - go together
**Pick-A-Plant**

Selecting plants based on labor, climate and compatibility.
**Accessorize**

Community members *selected* and *ranked* their desired and donated garden amenities.
phase 3 ::

Implement Solution

Action and sustainability

COMING SOON
WE CARE GARDEN
During the fifth meeting, we presented garden layout designs to each neighborhood based upon their collages, the “Pick-A-Plant” activity, the plant compatibility matrix, and the finalized plot locations. The layouts were designed with the help of Rachel Bennett from DIGS (Developing IUPUI Gardens Sustainability). She was a great asset and helped us to understand some basic gardening principles that were key in designing a layout. After some minor adjustments and suggestions from the residents, the layouts were finalized and ready to be put into action.

Plot Design
Community members reviewed and made changes to the students’ proposed plot designs before implementation.
WE CARE
Suggested Inventory

(30) 4' length planks
(32) 8' length planks
(4) 11' length planks
(2) 20' length planks

Soil
Mulch
Compost bins
Trash bin(s)
Gazebo
Basketball hoop
Seeding Event
Preparing and planting hundreds of seedlings.
Volunteer Day Promotion
Designing and deploying promotional materials.
A volunteer day was scheduled to prep the gardens for planting. The day included clearing debris, tilling soil, creating paths, building raised beds, and other activities. Community involvement had been somewhat underwhelming, so we knew promotion would be key in attracting volunteers. Our group brainstormed on ideas for areas of Indianapolis to promote within, methods of promotion, and target audiences. We discussed viral and guerilla marketing techniques, along with press releases to local news stations, radio stations, and newspapers. We designed and developed a guerilla marketing campaign on a non-existent budget to raise awareness for Volunteer Day. We used readily available materials to screenprint on canvas scraps to create posters and banners with pull-off cards that included logistical information.
Volunteer Day
Creating the gardens together.
**Sustaining the Effort**

Students left the communities with **tools** to assume ownership over the gardens, including a **leadership chart** and **contact information kits** for each of the four communities.
We had the opportunity to create something of great value for the residents of the Near Westside, and the gratitude expressed by them was both powerful and moving.

- TakeRoot
Student Team
I believe the students brought new ideas and techniques that captured the interest of the residents.

- Patrice Duckett
  Near West Coordinator,
  Greater Indy Neighborhood Initiative
I believe the students brought new ideas and techniques that captured the interest of the residents.

The students were also able to bring information about different produce and how to design the garden itself.

- Patrice Duckett
  Near West Coordinator,
  Greater Indy Neighborhood Initiative
Hawthorne Community Garden

Near West Collaborative
The neighborhoods of Hawthorne, Haughville, Stringtown, and West Creek
754 people like Near West Collaborative.

Check Us Out on Twitter! NearWestIndy

We Care

We are really moving along. As you know we started this from scratch this year but we are very excited about this project this year. We currently have 22 beds planted as of today and planted 2 peach trees as well. The gazebo has been built and ready to be roofed. We are also going to do some more work in the other two parks as well.
Thank You!

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