

**Testimony at the Public Hearing on the  
Milwaukee Common Council Public Safety Action Plan  
City Hall Room 301-B, October 3, 2016**

Science shows that individual past trauma and collective neighborhood trauma holds people and communities back. It's passed on from one generation to the next, holds us back and is often a source of violence and unproductive behaviors. Often not addressed is the lack cost effective ways to deal with it. The key to healing trauma is creating safety to let go of past trauma.

For the past 3 years in Milwaukee with funding from the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, we have been implementing and bringing to scale the use of an intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship technology called Community Building, which creates an experience of unusual trust and safety in a short period of time. Community Building has been demonstrated to work, has champions in institutions and programs here in Milwaukee and has research from reentry and prison programs.

In order for any public safety plan to work, you need real collaboration, not just getting together because the Mayor says so, or because money is on the table. Real trust and effective relationships need to be built. Community Building can break down walls quickly and build the real trust and collaboration needed for long-term success.

We need real dialogue and conversation and healing around race and segregation in Milwaukee, not politically correct conversation or surface conversation. Community Building allows people to come together and have those real conversations and to build relationships while allowing room for differences.

To overcome the divide between the police and the community, and all the differences that separate us, we need to be able to build real rapport, relationship and trust quickly. Community Building is a proven, effective and efficient way to do that. It helps level relationships and build true trust and acceptance in a weekend that might take 3 months or even 3 years using status quo communication.

Lastly, adding Community Building to existing programs accelerates and enhances outcomes. We have good programs in Milwaukee, by adding Community Building to existing programs, we can get better outcomes. Currently, about 35 organizations in Milwaukee are involved in the Community Building Milwaukee Initiative. There are more certified facilitators of Community Building Workshops in Milwaukee than anywhere in the world. Milwaukee is the first city anywhere to attempt to utilize Community Building on a citywide basis. We must continue to increase the utilization of this resource and technology with social service and criminal justice programs in correctional centers, neighborhood centers, churches, and schools to bring about the reduction in violence and trauma and the healing that we seek for our city.

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## Community Building Workshop Testimonials

What our group experienced in the Community Building Milwaukee workshop was nothing short of transformational healing. We began as 40 individuals from diverse walks of life . . . police and correctional officers, politicians, neighborhood leaders, community builders, pastors and healers. The workshop's safe environment and peer support gave us the courage to share personal experiences, often deeply painful, and life experiences that were the underpinnings for racial and role prejudices. Yes, there was conflict, but also respect as we grew in our acceptance of one another. From the raw honesty emerged empathy, dismantling walls, and bonding us in our mutual love for our Milwaukee community and the strong desire to work as one for its healing.

Lois B.

Another testimonial illustrating extraordinary respect....

Hello Jim & Tim, I feel strange, a good strange I don't know how to describe it but I'm still in the air. The workshop was great, and has had a big impact on the responses I give to people in discussions doing my daily routines now, I stop to think before I respond when answering them, and I listen close with paying attention, its like a cleansing of old negative or passive ways. I look at life in a different way and have a different outlook on life. I wish I had did this sooner. I met a couple of my community team members, and it seem to have affected them as well. I wish I had the chance to tape or record the memorable session. wish you well in your next community adventure, I might be able to be a part of another one.

Ruth M.

A third testimonial on the transformative power of community building workshops....

My Community Building experience has become one of the most memorable moments in my life. This opportunity created a chance for me to remove the mask that's imprisoned me for many years. I've always been reluctant to expose my truth in fear of judgment by my peers. Having the opportunity to become transparent within a room of strangers helped me move past my fear of negative exposure. Some say I'm resilient, overcoming continuous trauma, I say I'm simply blessed. The trauma I've endured created psychological barriers that affected me socially and professionally. As a professional in Human Services, the ability to present my whole self to clients is vital. The only way I could truly do this was to address my internal issues. The art of building Community was the one experience, I attribute to my success. By helping me remove the walls and see who I could be, and who I am.

Shyrida T.

Here is another testimonial....

I read the book *The Different Drummer* by Scott C. Peck before I attended my first CB workshop. I knew a bit of what to expect. What got me at the beginning was the vision. People coming together with their hurts...that stuck with me. Then when going through chaos and emptying it became clear how poignant these stages are to achieve community. It was like psychotherapy, even deeper. The honesty and acceptance that followed made me feel this

beautiful and loving bond with the participants. It helped me develop a deeper sense of acceptance. I did not imagine this!!

Then the facilitator training took me to a deeper sense of acceptance and love for people. I felt so much hope for humanity. It was not easy though, the stages can be agonizing. But to arrive together in community after clearing a lot of the pain that each of us have been carrying with us is the ultimate gift.

I'm looking forward to participate in as many workshops as I can either as a participant or facilitator. It doesn't matter. I love to see the magic unfold. My sense of gratitude is deep towards all the people who made this possible.

Thank you!

Milta M-R

Parts of a testimonial from a Pastor who attended a Community Building Workshop...

Last May I was chosen to participate in a life-altering, three-day event. It's all part of a collaboration between a whole alphabet of nonprofit and government organizations, but the primary players are Wisconsin Community Services (WCS), the Community Building Institute (CBI) and Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF). This partnership was formed to introduce a specific form of human interaction to the city of Milwaukee. It is a training program that has had remarkable success uniting people and changing lives in populations ranging from Fortune 500 to Maximum Security. But a program encompassing an entire city has never been attempted before. So this is really cool and really different.

I have seen statistics that confirm that the insights and interpersonal skills gained in this community building process have had remarkable effects on what social service and criminal justice folks call "at risk" populations. If you're interested, I'd be happy to show them to you as well. But the most compelling evidence for me is the three days I spent sitting in a circle with 43 strangers – men and women ages 27-77, black, white, and many points in between, each with his or her own agenda, biases, and personal baggage. I'm not going to lie to you, it was extremely hard work – there were moments in day two when I really wondered just what the heck I'd gotten myself into. But, in the end it only made me celebrate more joyfully. These people, once fearful outsiders, had become friends. I felt closer to some of them than to people I've known for years; and even if our paths never cross again, I will never forget them or stop caring about them.

Rachel O.

Quote from participant of the Community Building Workshop at UWM, February 2016:

I got many things from the workshop, but the experience I gained that I am the most grateful for is a feeling of acceptance and trust for myself and others. Feeling such open trust and acceptance for the individuals involved in the Community building process helped me realize how much I don't extend that onto myself. Since the workshop, I've felt this calming strength with myself that feels so comforting and empowering. Thank you.

Michelle B.



## Community Building Workshop Testimonials from Joan Blakey and Lee Valentyn

I attended a community building workshop in February 2016. Although I moved to Milwaukee three years ago, this was the first time I felt connected to a larger community. I felt loved, accepted, and affirmed. It was challenging at times because I am a social worker and I wanted to step in and fix things, but the only thing that was required of me was being present and sharing if I felt moved. My life is crazy busy and I found peace and solitude amongst a group of people that was there for the same reasons I was: to make Milwaukee safer, better, more peaceful and healthier. I continue to apply the principles of community building in my everyday life. The one practice that has been the most powerful is the use of "I" statements. I use them all the time. I never realized how I hide behind words. I have found my voice and it is beautiful. The community building experience was life changing and I would recommend it to anyone or any community that is wanting to heal and move forward with their lives in a collective, cohesive way.

Joan, Community Builder

Here is my statement! Use all or parts. You can say my whole name and tell that I am a professor at UWM. Whatever will help get people to come.

Joan

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My name is Lee. Here is a not-very-brief testimonial from me:

I attended my first Community Building Workshop in January of 2014, and I would describe it as a milestone event in my life. If I might borrow a phrase commonly used by Jesuit Volunteer Corps alumni, the experience left me ruined for life. Not only did I learn ways of communicating openly and relating closely with people I had never met before in my life, I simultaneously put those lessons into practice through the Workshop experience. My first Workshop unlocked ways of being with other people that I thought took months or even years to develop.

Since the original Workshop, I have participated in and co-facilitated several more Workshops as a Facilitator-in-Training and now as a Certified Facilitator. It is remarkable to me that Dr. Peck was able to develop such a powerful method for building that safe space where concerns about being judged or of saying something "wrong" are put aside and

substituted with honesty and vulnerability. I remember hearing that the more a person puts into a Community Building Workshop, the more that person gets out of the Workshop, and I can honestly say that I have seen this hold water time and time again.

It took me some time to understand how the Workshop helps in a more professional setting, but I can confidently say that a Workshop experience, combined with ongoing "maintenance circles" helps work groups function at a higher level. Groups really are more productive and more teachable after having gone through this experience. I can only imagine the potential if a company or organization were to incorporate CBWs into their company culture.

I strongly believe that Community Building Workshops are an important piece in helping members of the greater Milwaukee community to not only get to know one another better, but also, and perhaps more importantly, helping us get to know *ourselves* better. I urge every resident, professional, elected official, and any other individual who has an interest in the well-being of Milwaukee to make the time to participate in a Community Building Workshop.

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I could go on, Jim, but I think that might be more than you wanted. If you use any of this, feel free to mash it up, switch sentences around, use it to make it work however you feel makes the most sense.

Lee

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