

Learning about settlements houses

I. The Research

To help understand the importance to a community of a settlement house like Peace Corps House in their midst, following is section from the Executive Summary of the essential 2015, 71-page research paper: “The Settlement House Advantage,” which was commissioned by New York’s United Neighborhood Houses with its 37 settlement houses, 600 sites, and 17,500 staff and volunteers providing services each year to over 500,000 New Yorkers. The study involved 3,000 program participants from 25 UNH settlements who completed a 188-question survey:

The Settlement House Model

UNH settlement houses are guided by a distinctive model of neighborhood-based work that provides essential social services while recognizing the value of building communities and promoting social justice. The settlement house model encompasses *four* basic service principles: Embeddedness, multiple points of entry, reciprocity, and community building.

Guided by these principles, the work of the settlement houses generates *three* definable outcomes for participants: A sense of belonging, a sense of efficacy, and a sense of possibility, known here as the Settlement House Advantage. This report documents the cumulative impact of the settlement model, in ways that benefit individuals and local communities while rippling through the entire city.

The Findings

This study clearly documented the Settlement House Advantage. Results showed that settlement house participants recognize and value the four basic principles that guide the work of the settlement houses and benefit from them. They see the settlement as a community hub, embedded in the neighborhood, which acts as a gateway to multiple services, addresses basic needs, brings local residents together around mutual concerns, builds solid relationships, and empowers residents. Respondents credit the staff for valuing their contributions, possessing the knowledge and skills needed to address their daily life challenges, nurturing community leaders, and mobilizing resources for social change. Positive outcomes increased with the length of time participants had been with the settlement and with the amount of time they spent in programs there. The findings confirm the value of settlement house programs to individuals, families, and neighborhoods and reveal an important multiplier effect: The outcomes of settlement house programs also contribute to the well-being of the city as a whole.

A précis:

II. OVERCOMING THE ODDS:

The Settlement House Advantage

The Principles:

Embeddedness

Multiple point of entry

Reciprocity

Community building

The Outcomes:

Sense of belonging

Sense of efficacy

Sense of possibility

III. Community learning as a driver of economic and social change

Community learning refers to the creation of new knowledge and skills as a result of people interacting with each other to affect change within a locality. Jointly-created knowledge and skills build the efficacy of individuals as well as the capacity of the group to further its purpose. Community learning is a driver of economic and social change because community learning creates stronger and better communities, increasing the knowledge-base both individually and collectively, and generating social and economic productivity.

— Citizens Changing Ideas Into Action: A Study of Community Learning, by Eleanor McCallie Cooper, doctoral dissertation for the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, August 2013.