

**Neighborhood Planning  
for Community  
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**Center for Urban and Regional Affairs  
University of Minnesota  
330 Humphrey Center**

**Elliot Park Neighborhood  
Jobs Project**

Prepared by  
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August 1998

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Center for Urban and Regional Affairs  
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1980-1986

# Elliot Park Neighborhood Jobs Project:

An Examination into  
Training Opportunities and Employment Possibilities  
within the Elliot Park Neighborhood

Research Assistant Nicole Derse  
Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc.  
August, 1998

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## Executive Summary

Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc. chose to focus on the job question because they understand the importance of meaningful employment on the neighborhood's stability and future potential. They also recognize the unique obstacles many residents face as they seek meaningful employment.

My research sought to address the neighborhood's employment question from several different perspectives. I developed resource tools to share practical information with residents. This report attempts to further analyze the reactions to Elliot Park's employment question.

### *Research Objectives*

- \*Grasp the unique character of the Elliot Park neighborhood
- \*Better understand the employment concerns of local residents
- \*Obtain a profile of neighborhood businesses and the employment opportunities they offer
- \*Research and illustrate neighborhood educational and job training programs available at no cost to local residents

### *General Reactions*

- \*Elliot Park's old, varied history and proximity to downtown help explain the neighborhood's complex employment profile.
- \*A significant number of Elliot Park residents remain unemployed and/or live below the poverty line.
- \*Few Elliot Park residents look to neighborhood businesses for employment.
- \*There are close to 3 jobs for every 1 resident within the Elliot Park neighborhood. The vast majority of these positions are filled by people living outside of the community.
- \*Most neighborhood employers have concerns about the quality of recent applicants, but few are offering programs to address this dilemma.
- \*Social service agencies offer a wide range of educational and job training programs offered in and around the Elliot Park neighborhood. Participation is consistently high in these programs, but many residents remain unaware of the available services.
- \*Many Elliot Park residents (particularly the emerging Somali community) face significant cultural and language barriers.
- \*Employers and service providers must acknowledge the value of the employee as a holistic human being in order to achieve genuine "full" employment within the Elliot Park neighborhood.

## Introduction

### *Why should Elliot Park focus on the job question?*

The Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc. understands the extreme importance of meaningful employment on the neighborhood's stability and future potential. They also recognize the unique obstacles many of their neighbors faces in terms of obtaining this meaningful employment. My research sought to address the neighborhood's employment question from several different perspectives.

### *Research Objectives*

- \*Grasp the unique character of the Elliot Park neighborhood
- \*Better understand the employment concerns of local residents
- \*Obtain a profile of neighborhood businesses and the employment opportunities they offer
- \*Research and illustrate neighborhood educational and job training programs available at no cost to local residents

Much of my research constituted learning about options already available to Elliot Park residents and developing practical resource tools to share that information with neighbors. This report poses many questions raised following this research, analyzes the different roles of neighborhood interests, and attempts to offer alternative approaches to confronting the employment question.

### *Report Objectives*

- \*Outline the history of the Elliot Park neighborhood and its relationship to the employment question
- \*Share research findings of current systems addressing employment concerns
- \*Assess the effectiveness of these systems
- \*Offer general recommendations for addressing the employment question which could be specifically applied to the Elliot Park neighborhood
- \*Lay the foundation for further research

## The Elliot Park Neighborhood in Context

Elliot Park is an inner city Minneapolis neighborhood that shares its name with the 111 year old public park which remains the heart of the area. Elliot Park is surrounded by downtown on the west, freeways to the south and east, and uses 5th Street as its north boundary, only a few blocks from the Mississippi River.

Elliot Park has the distinction of being one of the oldest communities in Minneapolis. In the mid 1800's, it began as a small settlement near the St. Anthony Falls. Until the Depression of the 1930's, Elliot Park drew many of the city's wealthiest residents. As a result of its proximity to downtown and to the industries along the St. Anthony Falls, Elliot Park became one of the most fashionable and attractive areas of Minneapolis.

Suburbanization, movement of the industrial employment base, and freeway construction all took their toll on the Elliot Park neighborhood from the 1940's-1970's. Much of the housing began to deteriorate as the value of property and ascetic draw of the neighborhood decreased.

For the last few decades, those concerned about the neighborhood have been addressing the ramifications of these obstacles. The neighborhood organization, EPNI (Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc.) began in 1974 and has focused primarily on community building and improving the quality of life for Elliot Park residents.

Today, Elliot Park exudes new hope. Much of the housing has undergone renovation. The booming downtown economy sits merely blocks away. With NRP (Neighborhood Revitalization Plan), there is an increased presence of neighborhood involvement in the expanding goals of EPNI.

Still, though, residents of the Elliot Park neighborhood face many challenges. Elliot Park remains one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city and many people who live there lack the resources to provide basic necessities for themselves. Many are simply struggling to maintain a decent quality of life. Few businesses have moved into the neighborhood in the last 5 years. Elliot Park residents, geographically isolated from much of the city, often lack access to transportation and thus jobs located outside the neighborhood. The employment question continues to be one of the most severe and immediate issues facing the Elliot Park neighborhood.



## Residents Confronting the Employment Question

Clearly, the most important group facing the employment question is the residents who are seeking a decent job.

### *Section Objectives*

- \*Outline the larger factors which limit employment options on a national scale

- \*Highlight the current employment picture in Minneapolis

- \*Use sample populations of Elliot Park residents (from the 1990 census, several neighborhood apartment building's 1998 demographics, and an in-depth focus group which I conducted in July 1998) to illustrate the concerns of neighborhood residents in regards to employment

### *National Employment Trends*

Despite all of the optimistic talk about the booming US economy, a central feature of this new economic landscape deserves immediate attention- the growing division that exists between wealthy Americans and the rest of the country's residents.

Throughout most of our country's history, real wages have risen for all Americans. Since 1979, however, the hourly wages of middle and low income people have decreased significantly (Brouwer, 18-19).

Table 1: Real Hourly Wages of Low and Middle Income Workers

| Distribution Group      | 1979    | 1994    | Percentage Change |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|-------------------|
| 10th Percentile Males   | \$6.80  | \$5.49  | -19%              |
| 10th Percentile Females | \$5.82  | \$4.84  | -17%              |
| 20th Percentile Males   | \$8.73  | \$6.93  | -18%              |
| 20th Percentile Females | \$6.31  | \$5.77  | -9%               |
| 30th Percentile         | \$8.11  | \$7.50  | -11%              |
| 50th Percentile         | \$10.70 | \$9.98  | -7%               |
| 70th Percentile         | \$14.56 | \$14.00 | -4%               |

Along with the falling wages most Americans confront comes a consistent lack of employment options. The demand for low skilled labor has significantly decreased in the last 20 years. The loss of many good jobs for low skilled workers is most commonly attributed to these factors (Freeman, 7).

- \*Changes in technology due to computerization which eliminates the need for many low skill jobs
- \*Increase in international trade and outsourcing
- \*Pressures of low-wage immigrant labor and cheap imports
- \*Decline in unionization
- \*Falling real value of the minimum wage

Central city residents encounter some unique obstacles. Low income residents have become highly centralized in our nation's inner cities. In general, our primary cities have shifted from being production bases to centers of highly specialized information and areas of service to the adjacent downtown.

Those who live in the inner city usually have poor access to transportation which limits the feasibility to working in suburban locations where many desirable jobs have moved to. For various reasons, these people are often faced with restrictions to residential mobility and do not see moving to the suburbs as a viable option (Trost, 3-7). Therefore, central city residents are currently at an inherent disadvantage in obtaining reasonable employment.

### *Minneapolis Employment Outlook*

The Minneapolis area has been dubbed one of the nation's "beacons of economic growth". The unemployment rate in the Twin Cities has not exceeded 3% since May of 1997, about 2% less than the nationwide unemployment rate. On the surface, finding a job in Minneapolis would not appear to be a difficult task.

The problem for most perspective employees remains the question of finding a decent job. Like most of the country, the majority of the jobs in Minneapolis are in the service industry. Many of these positions pay low wages symbolic in Table 1. Minneapolis is not immune to the problems created by this two-tiered system of employment that the United States seems to function within. In fact, its effects are consistently illustrated in neighborhoods like Elliot Park.

## *Elliot Park Residents and Their Employment Concerns*

Unfortunately, the most recent data available concerning the Elliot Park neighborhood and its employment picture is the 1990 Census. The census usually undercounts residents, particularly in low income neighborhoods where many people may live in one housing unit, or where a rising immigrant population (in this case mostly Somalis and other East Africans) lessens the value of the census soon after its publication. Still, it is the most comprehensive analysis of the people who live in Elliot Park available to date.

The 1990 Census claims the Elliot Park neighborhood to be home to 5,156 people. The neighborhood comprises 1% of Minneapolis' total population. Only 8% of Elliot Park's population consisted of people under 18 years of age, and 21% of residents were over 65 years old. Of people over 25 years of age, 27% had not graduated from high school. Of neighborhood adults, 17% hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

A significant feature of Elliot Park is the small amount of people who are in the labor force, meaning people who are working or actively seeking work. In 1990, only 51%, or 2,225, of all working-age persons (16 years and over) were in the labor force. These people are not included in the unemployment statistics discussed later. The most significant explanations of their large numbers seem to be

- \*The large Somali refugee population- many of whom are in school or eligible for government refugee assistance
- \*A significant number of people who live in an institutional type setting and may be unable to work (e.g., chemical dependency programs)
- \*People who stay home with children
- \*The large portion of retirees who live in the neighborhood

## *1990 Census Employment Picture*

Of those living in Elliot Park who are in the labor force, 9% were unemployed in 1990, higher than the national average of that year (which was less than 6%), but not particularly alarming. The striking thing about the unemployment rate, however, is the emphasis on the younger population of Elliot Park. Of all working age persons from 16-19 years old, 71% were unemployed in 1990. Among those who did not graduate from high school, 100% were unemployed.

According to the 1990 census, working people in Elliot Park work in a variety of different occupations. Most people, 91%, worked for wages or salaries for a private company, business, or individual. About 7% held Federal, State, and local government positions. Only 2% represented self-employed persons.

The 1990 Census also listed the kind of work that Elliot Park residents do. Following is a listing of the percent distribution of persons in the six summary occupation groups.

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Technical/Sales/Administrative Support | 35% |
| Managerial/Professional Specialty      | 31% |
| Service                                | 19% |
| Operators/Fabricators/Laborers         | 14% |
| Precision Production/Craft/ Repair     | 2%  |
| Farming/Forestry/Fishing               | 0%  |

The 1990 Census also tracked individual incomes as indicators of a population's economic well being. The median income in 1989 of households in Elliot Park was \$11,645. The median income for families was \$19,209. According to the census, 1,525 persons (35% of Elliot Park residents) were below the poverty level. Families who live under the poverty level constituted 23% of all families in Elliot Park.

### *Current Sample Employment Demographics*

Central Community Housing Trust, a non-profit community developer, surveys annually the residents in its buildings. CCHT owns approximately 20% of the neighborhood's housing stock. This survey provides a further insight into the employment picture of Elliot Park. It is very current, and includes the 31% of building residents who describe themselves as East African.

In their 1998 survey, CCHT found 69% of the 479 respondents to be employed, even higher than the neighborhood as a whole. The average income of CCHT residents which combines that of both employed and unemployed individuals was \$12,541. No poverty statistics were available for 1998. With the given income information, it does appear that the number of people below the poverty line in these buildings rates above the statistics given for Elliot Park residents in 1990, although the extent of this difference is unknown. Further research could compare and contrast poverty levels amongst the different Elliot Park residences. This would provide a more clear picture of neighborhood poverty, and would help to identify groups in most need of employment services.

### *Employment Focus Group Analysis*

On July 13, 1998 I conducted a focus group which 16 people attended. The meeting was held in the community room of the Elliot Twins building, one of Elliot Park's subsidized housing complexes. It included a very specific group of residents. Therefore, it most likely does not reflect the diversity and situations of all people living in the Elliot Park neighborhood.

The purpose of the discussion was to share compiled information on local training and placement programs as well as to get a better sense of the neighborhood's employment needs from those currently seeking employment.

The focus group brought a wide cross section of participants. Nine of the attendees were female. Of these, 5 were Anglo-American and 4 were Somali. Seven of those participating were male. Of these, 4 were Somali, 2 were Anglo-American, and 1 was African American. A Somali interpreter was available to translate discussion points and questions.

The mood of the discussion was, for the most part, comfortable. People were willing to listen to the viewpoints of others. Everyone respected me as a moderator and each other. There was no one person who dominated the discussion and everyone asked at least one question which I was able to answer. We did face cultural barriers as two discussions began to develop, one amongst the Somalis and another amongst those speaking English. This seems to be expected though, and the presence of the interpreter hopefully prevented any participant from feeling alienated.

Obviously, each member of the discussion faces unique obstacles in their effort to obtain employment. Following are some generalizations from the focus group which may help qualify the employment experiences of Elliot Park residents.

\*Despite the vibrant economy, 100% of the participants stated that it was very difficult for them to find a job. Several people mentioned the barriers of disability, language, and discrimination.

\*Virtually all of the participants expressed frustration in the lack of jobs available within Elliot Park. Most were unaware of many neighborhood's businesses and their available employment opportunities. Participants cited the existence of numerous businesses downtown and all cited the downtown area as their primary site for employment possibilities.

\*Most participants still utilize traditional methods of obtaining employment. The majority of the participants said they've used temporary agencies at least once in the past. Several had utilized Disability Rehabilitation Services, but most had little experience with

job seeking agencies for permanent positions. None of the participants had heard of Job Link, a computerized data base of employment opportunities, but seemed optimistic about its utility.

\*Few of the participants said they've used local job training programs. Many were very interested in computer classes and training. Most of the Somali participants placed high value on the emergence of a neighborhood ESL program.

\*Participants had varied experiences with employers and training. Many stated that on the job training is common, but that basic skills necessary to initially get the job are expected and not included in any training they've encountered.

\*No participants had used job counselors to obtain permanent positions.

\*Some participants explained that difficulty lied in keeping a job. Their most common responses for this were transportation concerns, boredom with the job, the possibility of illness or relapse, the loss of benefits, and the cost of child care.

\*Participants had many ideas for the development of future programs in the Elliot Park Neighborhood. They suggested the implementation of an ESL program, a clothing bank to help those in the interviewing process, development of a neighborhood transportation system which would help people get to jobs, and the offering of consistent mini seminars on the job seeking process and other neighborhood concerns

## *Conclusion*

Elliot Park residents seeking employment face issues common to the nation. They're having a hard time finding jobs which pay a living wage. They remain geographically isolated from most emerging positions. Residents often express disillusionment with American corporate life and doubt the appreciation of their skills and self.

Those who live in the Elliot Park neighborhood also possess unique concerns. Many confront significant cultural and language barriers. Some suffer from a physical or mental disability. Unfortunately, residents are for the most part uninformed of many of the options available to them- both in terms of job openings and programs designed to help address the employment question.

## Elliot Park Neighborhood Employer Profile

Often those researching the employment question choose to leave out the employer. There seems to be a distinction drawn between helping the perspective employee and appeasing the employer. I think the issue must be more complicated than that. In order to sincerely understand the employment picture, one must delve into the world of the employer. One must recognize the importance of the health of local businesses in maintaining a healthy neighborhood. Relationships among employers and activists does not have to be combative. Mutual respect ideally leads to sincere conclusions around issues of employment justice.

As part of my research into Elliot Park's employment question, I created a survey which I sent to 75 local businesses. Through persistence, I obtained responses from most of them. After compiling their information I developed a Jobs Contacts directory. The purpose of this directory is to

- \*Help neighborhood residents in their job searches
- \*Create new networks among local businesses
- \*Encourage local residents to patronize neighborhood businesses.

### *Section Objectives*

- \*Report and analyze specific categorical results of the employment survey
- \*Assess the strategies in which neighborhood businesses recruit and train employees

### *Years in Neighborhood*

Of the 70 profiled businesses, 59 (84.3%) responded to the question which asked how long they had been located in the neighborhood. For the most part, the respondents answered this question as it was intended, by stating how long their business had been at that location. Some participants obviously interpreted the question differently. Particularly businesses located downtown answered that they had changed buildings but were previously in the same neighborhood. In this case, I used the answer indicating that they had been in the neighborhood for a longer period of time. A few other businesses, it appears, answered the question in terms of how long their building had been in the neighborhood. In this

case, I did utilize the older estimation because of the historic value of the commercial building and the current owner's emphasis on that.

I found the mean average for amount of years businesses located in the Elliot Park neighborhood to be 39.75 years. Because of the presence of several very old businesses, I also computed the median which was 27 years in the neighborhood.

This data suggests two very important things.

\*Elliot Park has a vibrant history still illustrated in the many businesses which have preserved for decades in this neighborhood.

\*On the other hand, there is a genuine lack of recent business ventures in Elliot Park (there have been only 14 businesses still existing which entered the neighborhood since 1985). This indicates the extreme importance of further economic development within the Elliot Park Neighborhood.

### *Numbers of Site Employees*

Of the 70 profiled businesses, 64 (91.4%) responded to the question, "How many people are employed specifically at your Elliot Park/Downtown East site?" Most of the businesses from which I did not get data were unable to locate it for me, most often due to time constraints, or difficulty in getting in touch with the correct person. Three very large neighborhood employers, NSP, Hennepin County, and the HHH Metrodome were unable to give me total numbers on employment because of their complicated hiring and/or job distribution systems. Although all 5000 city employees do not work in or near the Elliot Park neighborhood, I did choose to include them mostly as compensation for the employers for whom I could not include representation. These estimations are not entirely scientific and do not reflect a completely accurate estimate of jobs available in Elliot Park. It is, however, the most complete listing I have been able to obtain thus far. More research should be done to obtain an exact amount of jobs available within the area.

From this survey, it appears that there are at least 15, 620 jobs available within the designated areas of Elliot Park and Downtown East, a region accessible to neighborhood residents. This is more than three times the number of people living in Elliot Park (according to the 1990 census, there were only 5156 people living in Elliot Park). Therefore, it seems obvious that there are more than enough jobs available within this region. The problem remains that these jobs are not being filled by Elliot Park residents.



### *Annual Openings*

Of the 70 profiled employers, 60 (85.7%) answered the question asking "How many positions are available in your company annually?" Several businesses gave ranges of which I calculated the average. The total number of job openings each year in Elliot Park (from these businesses only) is 2887. This means that there is an average turnover of 5.41 years for each job in the Elliot Park neighborhood.

### *Neighborhood Employees*

Only 42 of the 70 (60%) participating businesses had records of the number of employees who were Elliot Park residents. Many of these businesses were smaller firms which could easily calculate their percentage of neighborhood employees. Most of the neighborhood's largest employers unfortunately did not respond to this question. The total number of employees at these businesses consists of 1405, less than 10% of the available jobs in the neighborhood. Still, because these businesses represent a wide cross section of types of employment offered, it seems reasonable to apply these findings, with restraint, to all participating businesses. These 42 businesses stated that 15.3% of their employees are Elliot Park residents, 215 out of 1405. Here is a listing of the number of responding businesses at each percentage interval.

| Percentage of Employees that Live in Elliot Park Neighborhood | # of Businesses at Each Percentage |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 0%  | 16                                 |
| 0-10%   | 10                                 |
| 10-20%  | 7                                  |
| 20-30%  | 2                                  |
| 30-40%  | 5                                  |
| 40-50%  | 1                                  |
| over 50%  | 1                                  |

There seem to be several reasons for the lack of neighborhood residents employed at local businesses.

\*Several of the largest neighborhood employers operate large scale institutions with little to no identification with the neighborhood.

\*There does not seem to be a strong commitment on the part of local businesses to reach out to the community around the issue of hiring.

\*Many of the types of jobs available in the Elliot Park neighborhood do not reflect the general skill level of most residents.

Elliot Park businesses employ individuals in a wide cross section of careers. Among surveyed respondents, the most common available opportunities were in the service field, with professional openings a close second. Following these were positions in clerical, administrative, sales, light industrial, general labor, and information technology.

While there is no real solid data which illustrates the careers of Elliot Park residents, CCHT demographics found most people working in service, light industrial, and general labor careers. For varied reasons, many Elliot Park residents seem to find themselves on the lower of the economy's two-tiered system. There are a significant amount of jobs in these sectors available in Elliot Park. Still, most of the neighborhood's positions will be filled by outsiders, usually because they bring more education and skills.

### *Applicant Concerns*

Many neighborhood businesses recognize the gaps they face when recruiting employees. Especially in today's economy, local employers feel the pressure of unfilled jobs. Over 66% of interviewed employers said they feel concerned about the applicants that are drawn to available positions. The most common reasons cited for these concerns were the lack of basic skills, reliability, and experience among applicants. Many others cited poor attitudes, attendance records, and lack of initiative.

This concern raises many questions. Many local businesses seem to have an attitude of frustration around the employees who are coming to work for them, or at least trying to. According to many, this new breed of workers lacks the dedication and ambition to be successful in the world of work. Unfortunately, this argument misses the central point. Businesses and their employees are now operating within two different worlds. Mutual animosity only furthers the divide which isolates them. It is not as simple as the decline of the American work ethic. The problem it seems stems from the fact that businesses have failed to prove to their employees that they are of value to the company. The responsibility of loyalty seems to disintegrate as the company grows and its workers feel more and more separated from the product or service produced.

Businesses should take an active role in addressing these concerns. Although most large employers expressed frustration over the skills of their employees, many failed to connect this responsibility to the role of the employer. Almost half of the

interviewed businesses offer on site training for their employees. Still, over 89% of these employers only train for specific positions. The vast majority of these employers cited concerns other than knowledge of the specific position in their applicant search. Yet, employers still seem to operate under the traditional belief that it is not their job to cultivate other qualities which they see as desirable in applicants.

Not all businesses have the resources to offer widespread programs designed to improve the capabilities of their employees. However, they do have the option to utilize programs which already exist to help fuse the gap between what they desire in an applicant and what they actually see. Most are not. Few businesses look to new methods of job recruitment, to agencies which often offer personalized attention and training. Less than 20% of the 70 surveyed businesses use outside training programs to address their employee concerns. Despite consistent discussion around the lack of qualified applicants, businesses in Elliot Park do not appear to be actively addressing their very own concerns.

Still, the outlook in Elliot Park remains at least somewhat optimistic. The fact that almost 90% of businesses responded to this survey suggests a value employers place on reaching out to prospective employees. Almost 50% of those surveyed also expressed interest in the creation of internships with a neighborhood organization in Elliot Park. The purposes of these internships would be to ensure that specific positions would be available for those in the Elliot Park neighborhood and to train residents for better jobs with local businesses. More research needs to be conducted concerning the internship possibility. The genuine interest among many local businesses, however, appears to be a significant first step in its creation.

## Elliot Park Educational and Job Training Programs

Several different organizations in and around the Elliot Park neighborhood have attempted to address the employment question through educational and training programs designed to better prepare individuals for the world of work they now must face.

### *Section Objections*

- \*Explore the different types of programs available to local residents
- \*Discuss the role different players take in preparing or empowering local residents
- \*Analyze the different philosophies of local programs
- \*Address the gaps that seem to exist within the present educational and training system

As part of this project, I created a brochure designed to inform Elliot Park residents of educational and training programs offered to them at no cost. In developing the brochure, I interviewed several people at a wide variety of agencies which offer services designed to educate, train, and empower local people as they enter new jobs. On the whole, these programs seem to offer a fairly complete set of choices for those confronting the employment question. Most choose to approach the question from a specific position, however.

Following is a breakdown of the different types of services as defined by the agencies which offer programs. I have also included my own perceptions of these various tactics. My conclusions are based upon limited information, and are coming from an obvious outsider bias. They should be considered only in that context and followed with further research.

### *G.E.D. Instruction*

Perhaps the first level of training, these programs offer instruction and techniques for those pursuing their high school equivalency diploma. Most agencies which offer this service are multitudinous providers which include classroom instruction as part of their larger educational plan. Some are more similar to educational institutions, often holding basic literacy classes which include reading, writing, and math instruction. Others may be a part of a computer collaborative which offers computer software designed for G.E.D. preparation.

The central philosophy behind these programs is usually for individuals to obtain that certificate, a piece of paper often necessary to get the job. The training seems to be as extensive as is needed by the student. For many students, the acquisition of the G.E.D. marks a very proud event.

Although most of these agencies clearly value the importance of education, the programs seem to stop at the earned G.E.D. There is rarely knowledge presented or explored for the purpose of education. The agencies seem to reinforce what the student often believes- the point of a G.E.D. is to enter the workforce as it currently exists. G.E.D. education is clearly practical and important. Unfortunately, its inherent focus must consistently be on reaching specific requirements. This could limit an individual's perspective of education and its empowerment potential.

### *Long Term Employment Education*

Some providers, specifically universities, now offer extensive programs (usually the equivalent of a semester) designed to enhance job skills. These programs often require a high school diploma or G.E.D. and attempt to move people beyond the level of entry employment. They often provide training in computers, communication, quantitative, and problem solving skills.

Programs like these can truly move people to a new level of employment. Taught by teachers knowledgeable about the business world, these programs tend to meld practicality with furthering education. Their philosophies include an expectation of students' students.

A program like this one may seem out of reach to many Elliot Park residents. The program is available at no cost, but the consequences of not working for 10 weeks are often too extensive for residents to risk. This program also presents the business world as it is and encourages students to excel in it. It does not seem to offer alternatives which would shift the emphasis to self-development and risk taking. Like most G.E.D. training, it is practically driven and has had a complicated impact on the world of employment.

### *General Job Skills Training*

Several social service agencies have chosen of late to focus their employment programs on the development of "soft skills". They've started to realize that specific job training programs change with employment trends and are often best left to other groups more connected to the industries. These programs usually center around

basic skills necessary in the job seeking process. They offer services like resume and job application assistance and mock interviews.

The purpose of these programs are clearly to help people get a job. The focus on basic job skills emphasizes practicality for those who are clearly seeking it. According to most, these programs have proven to be extremely helpful for many Elliot Park residents. Unlike educational training, their purpose is more clear cut- an opportunity to practice basic skills one will need in order to get any job. Many participants in these programs have been out of work and are in serious need of employment. Supporting them in their effort to become self-sufficient must begin with the furthering of their basic employment skills.

### *Computer Training*

Numerous agencies are joining the technological age and including computer training in their employment programs. Several non-profits now offer typing tutorials and software programs which introduce residents to the most popular technology used in the business world. A few select Twin Cities organizations also offer Job Link, the city's most comprehensive job development program. This computerized service is used by over 3500 employers in the metro area. It lists the most up to date employment positions and allows users to post their resumes or apply for jobs directly on line.

Computer technology can be a very optimistic development for employment programs. Once clients have access to this world they automatically share in a plethora of opportunities they otherwise may not be aware of. They can develop practical skills and receive practical information which will better position them to obtain a job. Computers also offer an opportunity for exploration. While participating in these useful programs, many individuals will discover new interests over the computer which may or may not help them in their job search. Either way, computer technology offers new ways of looking at the world. It seems essential that social service agencies in the Elliot Park neighborhood recognize this and continue to open up this world to their clients.

### *Government Programs Toward Self-Sufficiency*

With the extensive reform of welfare laws, many agencies have had to drastically change the way in which they address employment. Since the initiation of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), most financial aid recipients have been forced into finding jobs. The city of Minneapolis designated 7

independent agencies as MFIP providers. These organizations in particular have seen huge increases in case loads and all of the handicaps that come with that.

The philosophies behind programs like MFIP are obvious- get people to work so that the government and the taxpayers do not have to continue supporting them. Most people agree that the welfare system was in need of change. The programs that have resulted from these changes, however, remain stressed and are unable to offer what seems truly needed in the transition from welfare to work. Cities which reduce their welfare rolls receive more federal dollars. The goal then becomes job placement first.

As a result of the MFIP program, many people find necessary employment and the benefits of self-sufficiency that comes with it. The reliance on the system disappears as does the stigma. MFIP does have the possibility to empower many people.

Still, social service providers consistently express frustration over the program. They no longer know their clients and are unable to understand their personal skills and limitations. Participants start jobs they are not prepared for or disillusioned by. Most people leave these jobs quickly. While the welfare rolls continue to decrease, the immediacy approach does not appear to be working. This type of job placement rarely takes into account the complexities of individual situations and circumstances.

### *Transitional Employment*

Numerous organizations offer different types of transitional employment. The most common providers are temporary agencies, contracted by local businesses to supply day labor. Other organizations work with specific populations who need or want short term employment opportunities. Some agencies actually own businesses which employ people in the short term to gain additional skills and establish a work history.

The philosophies of each of these approaches differ significantly. Temporary agencies, regardless of their rhetoric, usually cooperate with businesses under an agenda that often dismisses the value of the employee. Few agencies pay over minimum wage and rarely offer opportunities which could lead to long term positions. Particularly in neighborhoods like Elliot Park, day labor tends to trap people in its cycle which offers little hope and opportunity.

Some people seek short term or transitional employment. Social service organizations must recognize this and place people accordingly. Agencies which deal with people who are homeless or

individuals with chemical dependency problems often place clients in short term jobs like snow removal, gardening, or moving jobs. Most often, these people are paid significantly more than their day labor counterparts going through the temporary agencies. They are also working with job counselors who are usually sensitive to their needs and situations and see day labor as true "transitional" employment.

Large non-profit organizations occasionally operate businesses which allow clients to gain skills in supportive environment based on an actual workplace. Many of these businesses are for profit. These programs often emphasize the importance of the individual to the workplace. They can be very helpful to people seeking assurance concerning their abilities and capabilities. Sometimes they seem to cause problems however. Participants may grow very attached to their employers and then be forced to move on. They may get an unrealistic impression of business. Programs like these continue to work at creating a balance between the world of training and the world of work.

### *Permanent Job Placement*

Job counselors whose central purpose is to find meaningful employment for clients reside in numerous organizations. Many work at job banks. Some work with specific populations or residences. They often develop relationships with a few local businesses and consistently place people within those companies.

Permanent job placement remains the most important part of the employment question. Job counselors who know their client's skills and limitations can provide essential information and guidance. They can place people in a position which gives them the possibility of opportunity, advancement, and empowerment.

Job placement is extremely challenging. The counselor must appease both the client and the employer in the placement. They must be advocates for potential employees while maintaining relationships with local businesses. They must spend extensive time with a client in order to be effective. Therefore, they cannot see enough people.

Locally based job placement programs seem to be the most effective. If they are located in a comfortable setting within a neighborhood, people seem to be more likely to utilize it. They will also be more likely to identify with their counselor and vice versa. It appears that more agencies in Elliot Park need to employ job counselors and develop extensive and empowering job placement programs.



### *Culturally Specific Organizations*

Several communities have chosen to address the employment question from within. Strong organizations exist which focus their resources on job training and acquisition for particular racial or cultural groups. Many of these agencies have taken the lead in developing new approaches to employment. In recognizing the uniqueness and value of a specific community, they tend to extend that to the individual more effectively than other programs. These organizations are often more holistic. They attempt to address all of the needs and concerns of specific groups, and in doing so allow for more individual attention. Many people of color continue to utilize these culturally specific organizations.

Most of these agencies need to be large in order to offer the comprehensive scope of services. They usually locate in the center of the specific community. Still, many people must travel a distance to visit the one organization that may exist for their group. Also, emerging immigrant groups may be without an organization initially or other groups may lack the leadership or organization at any particular time. Finally, innovative services offered by these agencies may be unavailable to most city residents who are not members of the specific group.

In Elliot Park, the most obvious example would be the Somali community. The number of Somali residents continues to increase at a rapid rate. Because of the close knit nature of the community, most residents are aware of available services. Still, there is an extreme shortage. Social service workers are overloaded. Also, because of language barriers, most organization must be driven from within the Somali community itself. According to many, tribal conflict has followed many Somalis to Minneapolis and some organizations are accused of only catering to particular groups within the Somali community.

### *The Employer's Role in Training*

Social service agencies are not the only places where one can receive employment training. Most job training still takes place on the job. Employers continue to focus on training for specific positions. Some have begun to offer innovative programs such as English as a Second Language (ESL), extensive computer training, or leadership programs, but most businesses continue to act as if training and job preparation are not their responsibilities.

## *Conclusions*

Each of these types of educational and training programs are accessible to Elliot Park residents. A few organizations located within the neighborhood offer several different types of services. Most are provided within walking distance. Still, when I interviewed local residents few were aware of these agencies and their specific programs. Elliot Park organizations face several issues as they grapple with the employment question

\*There is a high demand for services in the Elliot Park neighborhood with few agencies having the resources to meet them.

\*The large Somali population often goes unserved because the largest neighborhood service providers are only accustomed to dealing with English speaking people. They tend to put their resources into further meeting the needs of their traditional clients who are still in need of service. Programs directed toward the Somali population generally need to come from within the Somali community in order to be effective in Elliot Park.

\*There is not enough cooperation amongst agencies. This seems to happen everywhere and Elliot Park has made the effort to create numerous collaboratives. Still, many people remain unaware of offered services because there are not enough attempts to consolidate information and present it to local residents.

\*Elliot Park organizations struggle with the role of the employment program. A few individuals or agencies have taken the lead in developing new philosophies around training programs. One local job counselor stresses to his clients the importance of the holistic individual. He comes from the belief that human beings are of importance standing alone- that they are, in fact, more important than the product or service they create for their perspective employer. From his experience, an emphasis on individual potential will lead to sincere employment success. Once employers, employees, and service providers understand this, it seems, we will be on our way to genuine "full" employment.

## *How Can We All Address the Employment Question?*

From the research I've completed, I've obtained both an ideal and practical sense of how this question can be answered. Most players in the Elliot Park neighborhood already understand the practical. They're doing what they can to address the employment question. However, the ideology of their actions may get lost in the midst of the daily workings, either accidentally or intently. Following are my own perceptions of the ways in which each group can address the issue of employment. I use broad language with the hope that these suggestions could reach beyond Elliot Park. My research, though, was limited to the Elliot Park neighborhood and would need to be reevaluated in different locations and situations. It is understandably idealist, but hopefully raises questions about the potential of each group in confronting the employment question.

### *Residents*

- \*Address their own barriers which prevent them from obtaining a job
- \*Utilize transitional employment as it is intended for those seeking short term jobs
- \*Break the cycle of temporary employment by actively seeking permanent positions when desired
- \*Develop empowering relationships with service providers
- \*When desired, take advantage of available opportunities

### *Employers*

- \*Create comprehensive training programs which allow for opportunities for advancement
- \*Pay competitive wages and offer benefits
- \*Develop a commitment to the community which includes an intent of hiring from within the community
- \*Maintain a supportive economic development relationship with the community
- \*Treat employees as valuable human beings

### *Social Service Organizations*

- \*Inform population of existing services
- \*Create training programs which address real needs- training for general skills in a realistic environment
- \*Collaborate with other agencies so as to not duplicate services

\*Reach out to neighborhood residents either directly or through other service providers

### *Neighborhood Organizations*

\*Become an umbrella group which is knowledgeable about available services and distributes information and resources to residents

\*Reach out to assess the needs of local residents

\*Include residents in program design

\*Balance between addressing resident needs and the future of economic development

\*Remind all parties of the big picture- the improvement of life within a neighborhood for all.

## Recommendations for Further Research

I addressed Elliot Park's employment question from a very broad perspective. Individual projects could be done on each of the tactics I examined. Following are some questions this research left me with, questions that could be explored in further research and analysis. The possibilities for further research on this topic are almost endless, however.

### *Residents*

A more complete survey of Elliot Park residents should be completed in order to better address their needs. All literature and focus groups should be conducted in Somali as well as English. In order to offer employment programs, we must understand the answers to these questions.

- \*Where are most people in Elliot Park working?
- \*What are the largest obstacles they face in their job search?
- \*How often do people use existing employment services?
- \*Which services do they feel are lacking within the Elliot Park neighborhood?

### *Employers*

The initial employer survey I conducted did provide insight into the practices of local businesses. Further research should focus on the examination of a few specific businesses which have varied approaches to the treatment of employees. A smaller sample could shed light on some of these questions.

- \*Which businesses report the highest morale amongst workers and why?
- \*Which training programs have businesses found most cost effective?
- \*How strongly do these different employers identify with the Elliot Park neighborhood?
- \*How would employers work with service providers and neighborhood organizations to create more comprehensive training or internship programs?

### *Educational and Job Training Programs*

A more in depth examination of local employment programs could be very helpful to many agencies. Further research could focus on the program's participants and an evaluation of their experience. It could also concentrate more acutely on the changing philosophies

of training programs and their impacts on the way participants are treated. It could work to answer these questions.

\*Which types of programs have had the most immediate effect on individual's employment prospects?

\*Which programs seem to have had most long term success with its participants?

\*How can different agencies create a more comprehensive system of addressing employment needs?

\*What role should these agencies play in the creation of new and meaningful employment?

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