

inCOMMON encourages neighborhood involvement

By Kayla Eggenberg

While expansion of Omaha's downtown and midtown bring profit and new local business to the city, it also can displace families who have lived in the area for generations.

inCOMMON, a community development program located in the heart of midtown, recognizes the importance of cultivating a strong sense of community within these neighborhoods.

Rachel Bahl, partnership director, focuses her time on building relationships within the community, partnering with organizations and businesses and coordinating volunteer efforts.

"Our mission is to alleviate poverty at a root level by uniting and strengthening vulnerable neighborhoods," Bahl says.

inCOMMON focuses most of its community outreach efforts on Park Avenue in midtown by offering programs for members of the community in an effort to establish a sense of support within the neighborhood.

Bahl explains that inCOMMON does not change the neighborhood or tell residents what to do in order to be strengthened. Instead, the group lets residents identify their own leadership so

that they can develop and build upon those strengths.

This creates sustainable change for the neighborhood. inCOMMON offers community programs at its headquarters, 1340 Park Ave. Programs include English as a second language classes, workout classes and spiritual groups.

"Sustainable change happens when the neighborhood takes ownership, and that's what all of our programs revolve around," Bahl says.

Members of the neighborhood lead classes and join in anytime they want. They can also take advantage of the community room and cyber café available during the week.

inCOMMON also provides GED classes and the Common Good job program which hosts job skills training and resume building.

In addition to the classes and support services offered at inCOMMON, the nonprofit focuses on how it can improve the area-housing crisis.

In November 2015, inCOMMON purchased the Bristol apartment buildings to provide affordable housing to low-income residents. Without such assistance, these residents would be forced to relocate due to the increasing property values and development of the area.



Youth in the neighborhood come together to play games at inCOMMON's annual summer block party.

Bahl says rising costs and popularity of the area displaced many families who called the neighborhood home.

"We recognized this as a priority need for Park Avenue – to preserve affordable housing so these established families could stay in the neighborhood and continue to grow and develop," Bahl says.

inCOMMON partners with many other local organizations, including the GED Program, the Literacy Center, the Latino Center of the Midlands, as well as several local churches.

"Our philosophy of community development is asset-based," Bahl says.

"We believe in identifying the strengths and talents of a community and local leadership and building the community through that."

inCOMMON asset-based philosophy also applies to volunteers. Bahl says they focus on understanding people's strengths and their passion when applying volunteer efforts. This ensures continued leadership is possible even after they have moved on from that program.

"Neighborhoods are the context where life happens," Bahl says. "Providing that neighborhood security – that vibrant neighborhood – is alleviating poverty for future generations."

For more information and volunteering opportunities, please call 402-933-6672 or visit www.inCOMMONcd.org.



Students study during one of inCOMMON's GED classes held at their headquarters, located at 1340 Park Ave.