

# **TRANSFORMING MILWAUKEE - ONE NEIGHBORHOOD AT A TIME**

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## **Abstract**

Milwaukee is the largest city in the state of Wisconsin. Like many cities, neighborhoods in the urban core are lacking basic services and necessities for those who live there. This article describes how two Christian organizations, Neighborhood Transformation and Eastbrook Church are working together to transform their city on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis. First, an introduction to Neighborhood Transformation is given, followed by an account of Eastbrook Church's journey towards transforming their city.

*Keywords:* Urban, Christian, neighborhood transformation, Eastbrook Church

## **Introduction**

Stan Rowland started Neighborhood Transformation (NT) in North America about three years ago. It is modeled after Community Health Evangelism (CHE). CHE originated in Uganda through the Agape Movement of Campus Crusade for Christ over 30 years ago (Rowland, Interview, 2012). It has been very successful in changing lives and villages in 118 countries all over the world. CHE was modified to better meet the needs of the urban environment in North America; however the basic principles have not changed. The urban version of CHE is now called Neighborhood Transformation (Rowland, "From Rural CHE", 2010). Currently, Neighborhood Transformation is making a large impact on the city of Tucson, Arizona, where one church is currently assisting five neighborhoods on their transformation journey (Rowland, Interview, 2012).

The purpose of Neighborhood Transformation is to:

Establish a holistic, transformational ministry with the purpose of bringing together Jesus' Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20, and His Great Commandment to love God first and then your neighbor as yourself found Matthew 22:36-40 in multiple neighborhoods within a city. This intertwines word and deed. (Rowland, About CNT, 2012)

## **Relationships Transform Lives**

NT stresses creating relationships between people, so that they share their assets, skills, and talents to help those in their surrounding neighborhood. Three different models are commonly used today to serve individuals and communities (Rowland, "NT Overview", 2012). They are:

- 1) Relief/Doing For - Providing a service to meet a short term need. Over 90% of ministries use this method to assist the poor.
- 2) Betterment/Coaching - Creating short-term, positive relationships that offer participant's relief as well as positive experiences. It provides a first step towards individuals helping themselves.
- 3) Development/Transformation - Changes the knowledge, skills, abilities, and overall conditions of ministry participants. As an aggregate, the transformed individuals transform their neighborhood. Engagement of an entire neighborhood is essential.

The table below contrasts how NT compares to other ministry types (Rowland, "NT Overview", 2012):

Table 3  
*How NT Compares to Other Ministry Types*

	<b>Relief/Doing For</b>	<b>Betterment/Coaching</b>	<b>Development/Transformation</b>
<b>Appropriate Situation</b>	Disaster, life and death situation, emergency	Persistent need not going away, generally on individual basis	Chronic poverty, "normal" life that people in community want to improve
<b>Duration</b>	Short-term	Mid-term, up to one year	Long-term
<b>Resources</b>	Bring outside resources	Outside person stands beside individual they are coaching	Maximize the use of local resources
<b>Ownership</b>	Outsider	Generally outside with insider participation	Local people, as group changes the community takes ownership
<b>End result</b>	Return to normalcy	Changed individual	Long term improvement, sustainable progress that community made happen
<b>Type of action</b>	Doing things for the people, reactive, curative	Coming alongside to coach people in need	Enabling, teaching people to accomplish by themselves, pro-active, prevention



Figure 1- An active urban neighborhood (Rowland, About CNT, 2012)

The NT strategy brings together churches, non-profit organizations, and Community Based Organizations (CBO) to equip individuals in their neighborhoods to take more responsibility for their lives so that the neighborhood can be transformed from the inside out. This is accomplished by helping people find and use assets found in their community. These assets are then utilized to help people do things for themselves instead of just doing or giving things to people (Rowland, About CNT, 2012).

Once individual neighborhoods are transformed, they are linked together as a network so that the entire city can be impacted. The city is changed again from the inside out, one neighborhood at a time (Rowland, About CNT, 2012).

Multiple levels of training are a key component of this ministry's success. First, a local church or community agency is prepared for becoming a change agent in a local neighborhood. Next, local leadership is trained on how to lead their neighborhood. Finally, a database of over 1,500 lessons is used to train people in the neighborhood on

topics that are of interest to them. Emphasis is placed on going where the people are, having them do what they want to do, and utilizing their assets to help their fellow neighbor (Rowland, About CNT, 2012).

### **Neighborhood Transformation and Eastbrook Church**

Eastbrook Church is a vibrant interdenominational church located in urban Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They currently operate several on-campus community transformation ministries including, the Bread Of Healing Free Clinic, Eastbrook Food Pantry, Neighborhood Learning Center, and Sports With a Purpose (Eastbrook Church). Their journey with Neighborhood Transformation started in 2011. Richard Dassow, a church member at Eastbrook, started working with Stan Rowland of NT to build a vision for reaching the inner city of Milwaukee and those in need for Christ (Dassow, 2012). Richard personally made over 60 calls and sent over 200 emails to inner city churches inviting them to a workshop to share his vision for Milwaukee's inner city and the potential that Neighborhood Transformation offered (Dassow, 2012).

The "Envisioning Workshop" was held in October of 2011 to provide interested people an opportunity to learn of this opportunity to transform the community around them (Dassow, 2012). Over 30 people attended. The majority of the attendees were from Eastbrook Church (Dassow, 2012).

With a strong interest from members of the Eastbrook congregation, Richard scheduled a follow-up training session in February of 2012 (Dassow, 2012). Stan Rowland delivered the training in person. Over 30 attendees were trained to facilitate the engagement of individuals in transforming their neighborhoods using the training materials and methods the NT ministry provides (Dassow, 2012). With a foundation in place, Eastbrook Church is now ready to start their journey of transforming the community around them.

### **Start In Your Backyard**

One of the first decisions that must be made when starting a Neighborhood Transformation initiative is determining what geographic community to begin working in. According to Adam Shidler, the current Community Transformation Pastor at Eastbrook, they decided that the best place to start was in a four to six block radius behind their church campus (Shidler, 2012). According to Adam, this area not only provides an opportunity for the church to give assistance where help is needed, but it also allows relationships to be built with those in the neighborhood where Eastbrook is located (Shidler, 2012).

Another benefit that Adam hopes NT will bring is a geographic focus to their ministry efforts (Shidler, 2012). Adam says, "Our current on-campus ministries are more reactive in nature and serve larger groups of people in the city. Neighborhood Transformation gives us an opportunity to focus a portion of our resources in specific areas of our community more proactively." (Shidler, 2012)

Eastbrook's current plan is to gather data on assets and opportunities available so that a church-wide plan can be developed on how to best engage individuals in the neighborhood (Shidler, 2012). Adam wants to encourage people in the community to see the local assets and strengths that are available in the area and take ownership of them and their transformation (Shidler, 2012). They don't want create dependency (Shidler, 2012).

Scott Karstenson, who works at the Bread of Life Healing Clinic, also see opportunities for Neighborhood Transformation to positively impact the on-campus ministries. (Karstenson, 2012). Scott said, "Our health care ministry will have opportunities to serve those who need immediate care in the neighborhood. It is also our hope that as those who have been helped by our health care and other on-campus ministries will take advantage of the opportunity to give back to their community through Neighborhood Transformation." (Karstenson, 2012)

An important step in the plan was completed on May 1, 2012 when a group of NT volunteers completed a prayer walk through the neighborhood, getting to know their neighbors (Shidler, 2012). Progress is slow now, but momentum is building as these volunteers take each step forward in building relationships with those in their community.

### **Conclusion**

While Neighborhood Transformation on a national and local level in cities such as Milwaukee, Wisconsin are still in the beginning stages, the ministry shows much promise for growth and tremendous impact in transforming our cities in North America. It is rooted in a strong biblical foundation, with relationships and neighbors helping neighbors as its cornerstone. It has been proven successful on an international level, where village-by-village, people and communities are transformed through the power of Jesus Christ. It will only be a matter of time before our cities will also see a transformation occur, neighborhood by neighborhood.

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