Seaman A. Knapp:
Won't You Please Come Home?

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Seaman A. Knapp is recognized as the father of the County Demonstration Agent System and is known for his innovative way of helping people help themselves. The author, unhappy with current attempts in programming in 4-H in the inner cities, quotes from one of Knapp's speeches: "Your mission is to solve the problems of poverty, to increase the measures of happiness, and to harness the forces of all learning to the useful and needful in human society." Westwood raises the question of what Knapp would do were he alive today and faced with the crises and dilemma we find in the inner cities.

I'm no "ol' timer" in Extension by any means. However, you don't need a long work history to become caught up in the functional philosophy of education promoted by such an impressive pioneer as Seaman A. Knapp, affectionately called the schoolmaster of American agriculture.

Knapp said, in a speech given to the Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College, June 30, 1894:

> Now let us have an education of the masses for the masses, one that will fit them to become a great, honest, faithful, intelligent, toiling, thrifty, common people, upon which alone great nations are founded.

Your mission is to solve the problems of poverty, to increase the measures of happiness, and to harness the forces of all learning to the useful and needful in human society.[1]

In Knapp's farewell address at Ames, he spoke such prophetic educational philosophy as:

> It is a sad comment on the hundreds of colleges in the United States that almost without exception they devote more time to the dead languages than to the living. . . .
>
> At least, let the social philosophy (of the colleges) deal with the social conditions of our own times for the betterment of our own people.[2]

Unconvinced, begrudging—even hostile—attitudes were overcome by this bold innovator who bridged the gap between the educational institution and the needs of rural America. His social invention, called the County Demonstration Agent System, was an effective method of getting badly needed technological and sociological knowledge from colleges and laboratories to the groups furthest from the sources.[3] The result of such pioneering was a programming philosophy that created educational conditions in which learning came from action rather than absorption.

Knapp's educational activities emerged *directly* from the life experience of the learner. He didn't impose a predetermined program from a setting other than the student's lifestyle.

The task before us in programming for urban youth will require the same courage, foresight, and determination. I am firmly convinced that like Knapp we must create a bold new approach in programming for the inner city. We must be ready to face those who are unconvinced, begrudging, and even hostile.

Organizational Renewal in 4-H and Youth Programs

If 4-H and youth programs plan to develop programs appropriate to the needs of the inner city, extensive organization renewal is necessary. When we force inner-city youth to conform to the 4-H program, we put the requirements of an institutionalized program before human needs. It's dishonest to identify a new audience with unique needs, establish new objectives, and continue to use the "same old program methods."

Function (addressing the needs of youth) must come first and tradition (4-H and youth programs) must be secondary. This is why I say that organizational renewal is necessary.

According to Gordon Lippitt, real organizational renewal is the process of initiating, creating, and confronting needed changes to make it possible for organizations to become or remain viable, adapt to new conditions, solve problems, learn from experiences, and move toward greater organizational maturity.[4]

First, we must be concerned with the way the organization's people confront situations and search for solutions to them. Second, we should address how the 4-H approach copes with the facts and circumstances in implementing solutions. It's my observation that to date, 4-H and youth programs have been concerned first with their structure and tradition and second with the functions necessary to work effectively with youth. This process must be reversed. Too much looking at the past while endeavoring to operate in the present can result in what John Gardner has appropriately identified as "organizational dry rot."[5]

In this article, I'll deal with only a few basic aspects of inner-city programming, hoping these will stimulate your imagination further.

We're living in a period that isn't merely unique in the history of 4-H; it's unique to the life of this nation and all mankind. Today's organizational leaders—4-H and otherwise—must realize as Alvin Zander has said that

> . . . in an important sense this world of ours is a new world, in which the unity of knowledge, the nature of human communities, the order of society, the order of ideas, the very notions of society and culture have changed and will not return to what they have been in the past.[6]

The changes facing our society, our organizations, our leadership, will demand the maximum knowledge, skills, and courageous attitudes of those of us who bear the responsibility of managing complex problems with the human resources available to us. This means we must honestly face our basic assumptions, program methodologies, and future directions in programming—especially as they relate to the inner city.

Assumptions

There are some basic assumptions of inner-city programming that I believe can be divided into three categories.

Assumptions About the Approach to the Inner City

First, changes, which have come about with breathtaking speed in the past decade, still haven't cor-rected the evils of racism, discrimination, and inept bureaucratic practices that continue the perpetuation of demeaning poverty experienced by residents of our inner cities.

Also, those who find themselves outside the conventional community are labeled as the poor, deviants, and troublemakers. This alienation occurs primarily because of the majority's inability or unwillingness to provide the "outsiders" with the means to develop authentic identity true to proclaimed values of society. Much of what the established community views as "deviant" is behavior understandably resulting from the inequity—if not hypocrisy—by which the majority applies the rules of society.

Thirdly, the primary need of the inner city is more *power*. Its residents need the power to participate in decision making that affects their destiny. I'm not alone in observing that where there's powerlessness there'll be exploitation. The inner city needs help in social action to bring about a redistribution of power, wealth, and resources.

The inner city doesn't need more federal legislation creating new programs to be operated by those living outside the invisible walls of the ghetto. Token involvement of a few *carefully selected* poor to serve on boards and advisory committees shouldn't be confused with meaningful involvement of program beneficiaries. Nor will the employment of a sprinkling of nonprofessionals bring an end to the inequities characteristic of the ghetto.

Assumptions About the University's Posture

Presently, most of the knowledge available from the university in the behavioral sciences, program development, and educational technique isn't functional in attacking the problems of the inner city. University faculty and Extension personnel must learn about the special problems of the ghetto before they can be of any help in urban problem solving.

The university is a major institution in society today. When it does *nothing* to actively combat the causes of poverty, alienation, and discrimination, it contributes, by omission, to these conditions. In other words, the university must consciously choose to mobilize knowledge, resources, and social action that will contribute to the reordering of society's priorities, or by default contribute to devisive and destructive forces because of its failure to change.

Urban programs designed and promoted by the university to ensure visibility, good public relations, and the opportunity to capture additional power, influence, and economic resources must be judged as perpetuating the problems of the poor rather than contributing to their solution.

Assumptions About the Unique Role of 4-H and Youth Programs

The laboratories to work in for the solution of the problems of inner-city youth aren't on the university campus, nor are they located in an Extension office found in a government office building or decentralized to a middle-class shopping center. The 4-H and youth programs can and must play an important role in helping the university deliver its resources and expertise "where the need is."

Rather than "tinkering a little" with 4-H to try to make it fit, a kaleidoscope of approaches must be created. The problems of the inner city are broad, complex, and interwoven . . . and our solutions are too often narrow, single-minded, and fragmented. Usually, we limit our programs to activities that will ensure that we "get refunded next year." This means we count a lot of noses, relate those numbers to program goals under the guise of "observable performance evaluation," but fail to address the real needs of youth.

Professionals in 4-H and youth should play the combined roles of *analyst, innovator, advocate, and coordinator* of planned change. As *analyst,* we can assess the problems, causes, and existing resources. As *innovator,* we can initiate new concepts in programming techniques. As *advocate,* we can give voice to those who have none, conscience to those who won't hear, and be an ombudsman for those who can't see. As *coordinator* of planned change, we can press for a less bureaucratic and more "open system" that adapts to present-day realities.

Society needs a multidisciplinary approach to develop an overall

strategy of social change necessary to make our cities more favorable for human development.[7] The 4-H and youth programs are an integral part of both the university and the federal government—two of the most powerful forces in society. They're among the few organizations in this nation that can house delivery systems that include social action, community development, social planning, and a variety of educational strategies.

If we're going to take program resources rather than rhetoric to the inner city, 4-H and youth will have to redistribute present staffing and financial program resources. Not enough economic resources exist to serve the needs of present 4-H clientele. Trying to maintain all that we're presently committed to while initiating new programs for the "have-nots" in our cities won't work. Someone will be left out and it will probably be the inner-city poor . . . again. We must face the difficult and painful task of reordering resources.

Personnel in 4-H and youth programs have learned well the principle that "we must begin where the people are." However, we need to remember that's only the beginning and not the end. We need more than "instant programming" for our reports. One-shot programming—like a Saturday morning cleanup project—shouldn't be an end, but the means for developing an effective program on environmental quality. Initial program efforts should *lead us* to the primary issues confronting the youth in our society: (1) poverty; (2) peace; (3) prejudice; (4) pollution; (5) population; (6) law, order, and justice; (7) equal opportunities in housing, education, and employment; and (8) emerging lifestyles that challenge established values and ethics.

Suggestions for the Future

Many of our finest institutions are still providing answers to questions that are no longer being asked. They're caught up in the massive revolutionary forces that are changing the political, social, economic, educational, and religious life of the world today—but choose to ignore these forces. Most frequently, established institutions respond to the changes in goals and objectives with the same old programs and services. I believe this is irresponsible. Helen Lynd in an article entitled "Identity" says:

> Most ailing organizations have developed a functional blindness to their own defects. They are not suffering because they cannot *solve* their problems, but because they cannot *see* their problems.[8]

After taking just this brief look at the problems of inner-city programming, the following suggestions seem appropriate:

1. The university—especially through 4-H and youth programs—should be instrumental in helping alienated groups to: (a) construct communica-

tion channels with the community, (b) channel energy and resources constructively in response to the needs of their peers, and (c) discover and articulate alternatives to violence such as the development of grievance—response and negotiation constructs.

2. The university should encourage the collaboration of 4-H and youth programs with various local agencies and institutions in urban problem solving.

3. Special funds should be allocated for bold new action research, youth components of urban training centers, college and graduate student field work placements, and curriculum development growing out of actual living situations.

4. The university and 4-H and youth programs should pursue the educational and actual problem-solving opportunities available in experimental learning techniques in transactional analysis, the concept of schools without failure, and the open classroom. Variations of "exposure" educational experiences that can lead to breakthroughs in conflict resolution, increased effectiveness in interpersonal relationships, and new concepts in planned social change need to be promoted.

5. Programs in 4-H and youth can help create *living laboratories* as the university searches to determine the size, scope, and projected future of emerging urban life styles involving a militant poor, the new left, the homosexual, and the use and abuse of drugs.

6. Program goals, objectives, and methodology should be directly related to the major issues and problems confronting inner-city youth. Top priority should be placed on projects designed to supplement the deficiencies of existing public education and, where necessary, alternative educational curriculums could be created.

7. The 4-H and youth programs must guard against being more busy building a complex organization than serving people. All too often, good administration and management are equated with the rational process that ensures that the bureaucratic machine will run smoother. Would that we "could lose our minds" and become irrationally obsessed with putting equal energy to the task of ending hunger, eradicating poverty, and doing away with racism. Whatever it costs the organization in losing "friends of 4-H" and old reliable volunteers, somehow it seems like the humane thing to do.

If Seaman A. Knapp were here today, what kinds of programs would he be advocating for the inner city?

Seeing the housing conditions and the quality of education in our inner cities, would he be promoting sewing and knitting, bicycling, or "window box" garden projects? No. I think he would put a top priority on tough-minded programs that would hit the major issues head on!

Feeling the hatred, racism, and polarization that separate people today, would he run the risk of being so busy with youth fairs, achievement days, and horsemanship events that there wouldn't be time or resources to work on the causes of distance between people?

Witnessing the hunger, rats, high death rates, mental retardation caused by lead poisoning, and the demeaning results of unemployment pressing on the residents of the core of our metropolitan areas, would he be concerned about running programs that provide "good exposure" to ensure the building of a larger budget for Extension? No. I believe this restless innovator would be developing projects to eradicate the rats, eliminate hunger, and end the selfish nearsightedness that causes unemployment and allows the ghetto to exist.

After discovering how well our rural poor have been aided in coping with their problems by "helping them help themselves," would Seaman Knapp be concerned about providing the inner-city poor with predetermined programs—developed for a different time and place? Would he, under the guise of the "rural mystique," claim to be able to save the youth of our large cities

with programs designed to serve the needs of the sponsoring institution rather than the youth themselves? No! I can almost hear Knapp saying:

It is a sad commentary on our land-grant institutions of higher learning when they devote more time to their bureaucratic needs than to the people trapped in the cluster misery of poverty!

Oh, Seaman A. Knapp,
won't you please come home?

Footnotes

1. R. K. Bliss, *The Spirit and Philosophy of Extension Work* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Extension Service–USDA, 1952), p. 38.
2. *Ibid.,* p. 41.
3. Joseph C. Bailey, *Seaman A. Knapp: School Master of American Agriculture* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), p. 106.
4. Gordon L. Lippitt, *Organization Renewal* (New York, New York: Meredith Corp., 1969), p. 1.
5. John W. Gardner, "How to Prevent Organizational Dry Rot," *Harper's Magazine* (October, 1965), pp. 20-26.
6. Alvin Zander, "Resistance to Change—Its Analysis and Prevention," *Advanced Management*, XV-XVI (January, 1950), 9-11.
7. Robert Oppenheimer, "Prospects in the Arts and Sciences," *Perspectives USA*, II (Spring, 1955), 10-11.
8. Helen Merrell Lynd, "Identity," in *Varieties of Modern Social Theory*, Ruitenbeck *et al.*, eds. (New York, New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1963), p. 7.