

## People Investing in People

The Presbyterian Committee on Self-Development of People began in 1970, growing out of the American Civil Rights Movement. As Ruth Uchtman, member of the National committee, carefully explained at each of the three community workshops held by the Chicago Presbytery's SDOP committee during April, 2008, "At that time an older gentleman told us that we should give small amounts of money directly to groups of poor people trying to help themselves because they knew what they needed to do to overcome poverty." Since that time, Presbyterians have been investing in people through our contributions to the One Great Hour of Sharing and grants made at the national and presbytery level to projects based on specific criteria.

The first and foremost criteria is based on what the older gentleman said, that projects "be presented, owned, and controlled by the group of people who will directly benefit" and projects "must address long-term correction of conditions that keep people bound by poverty and oppression.

This has been a busy and exciting year for the Chicago Presbytery's SDOP committee, made up of Mark Agerton, Luis Chavez, M. Coleman Gilchrist, Mathew Lang, Otis C. Monroe, Sarah Jane Moore, and Yvonne G. Moore and ably staffed by Bonita Gilchrist and Carlene Hyrams. Our community workshops at Goodcity on the West Side, Jack Clark's Family on the North Side and Marquette Bank on the South Side generated 48 applications, 17 of which met the criteria and were selected for site visits. We distributed just over \$30,000 in funding to 16 of those in amounts from \$500 to \$5,000. As you see, the amounts are small. For some groups, this grant is the first outside investment they have ever received and is a strong vote of confidence and almost a seal of approval that can lead to other funding.

This year's funded groups are CBA Juniors, Youth Empowerment Group, SPRED Parents with Disabled Children, Stepping Stones Women's Resource Center, ENERGY, Englewood Block Club Federation, Korean Single Mother's Support Group, Washington Park Advisory Council, Native American Veterans, Seniors Together Organizing Projects (STOP), Dialogue to Action, Soldiers on a Mission, Prisoner Relief Foundation, Englewood Lawn Care, FNA, and Hood Ministry.

Several of the applications reflected the tragedy of violence against Chicago school children. CBA Juniors is a rapidly growing group of youth in Chatham who are preparing themselves for job success through interviewing and internships with local businesses while spreading anti-drug and anti-gang messages. Youth Empowerment is a group of young women, ages 12 to 25 in Roseland who are starting a cleaning business to earn money and avoid the dangers of the street. One young lady, age 12, arrived at the site visit with her arm in a sling. When I asked her about it she said, "I got shot." She had been shot while standing on the corner waiting for a bus.

Other funded projects address prisoner re-entry into society and joblessness. Englewood Lawn Care and Hood Ministry are using their SDOP grant to purchase landscaping equipment for businesses that will employ youth and others. FNA is a shoe shine business to employ ex-offenders and others who need a job. As Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

