



Connect San Diego (Connect SD) and the San Diego Asian Film Foundation (SDAFF)'s purpose of organizing focus groups was to reach out to multiple City Heights organizations in order to help fulfill the SDAFF mission of creating a "more compassionate, cultured society." Connect SD and SDAFF believe that storytelling through filmmaking helps people shed light upon issues that are often times ignored and silenced. We hoped to show examples of how films could serve the dual purpose of being community advocates while also empowering individual or group voices.

Connect SD and SDAFF held the focus groups in order to discover ways to help City Heights' organizations and residents create stronger community partnerships. Through the focus groups, participants were shown examples on how to use social media and media arts to help promote their causes. After the conclusion of the focus groups, Connect SD and SDAFF realized that the people working and living in City Heights could further community connections by simply using social media and media arts in their everyday lives. Gathering people together also showed how a stronger community could be built through an increase of joint programs between multiple organizations or individuals.

I. Summary of the Focus Groups

Connect SD held two focus groups that discussed City Heights, community advocacy, and the role of social media and media arts in giving a voice to disadvantaged people. Taking place on March 29, 2011 and May 12, 2011, the two focus groups were attended by a total of seventeen people from seven different City Heights organizations. The organizations in attendance were: Mid City Community Advocacy Network, Little Saigon Foundation, Proyecto de Casas Saludables, City Heights Community Development Corporation, Latino Youth Council, International Rescue Committee, and the Southern Sudanese Community Center. At both sessions, the discussion centered around three key issues: multiculturalism, intergenerationalism, and social justice. To develop the discussion about these issues, we showed three films: "Paty, Me Quiero Casar Contigo (Paty, I Want to Marry You)", "Age Strong Intergenerational Project", and "The Apollos".



The focus groups' participants were encouraged to talk at length about their ideas and any key issues that affected themselves, their families, their organizations and City Heights as a whole. Both groups came up with definitions of several key terms while sharing examples of each term in relevance to City Heights. In addition, there was room for an open discussion among the participants allowing them to delve deeper or to clarify any ideas that were shared amongst the groups.

Both groups discussed the concept of “multiculturalism” as the understanding and respecting of other people’s background and struggles while still voicing their own. Individual group members talked about being proud of their specific cultural traditions and appreciating diversity while also discussing their worries about assimilation and not being able to get along or even understand their neighbors (NOTE: paraphrased from group 1). Similarly, the idea of “intergenerationalism” was defined as the attempt to connect and respect multiple generations. The groups expressed that respect for elders was a natural part of their cultural traditions, and that this respect typically included teachers, family members, and community members (NOTE: paraphrased from group 1—respect for elders, and from group 2—specific examples). However, some concerns about intergenerationalism were also mentioned, such as ageism, which is the idea of age-based discrimination. Group members expressed their worries about both youth and seniors being automatically looked down upon or turned down from jobs because of their age (NOTE: paraphrased from group 1 and 2). Lastly, the idea of “social justice” was thought of as equality for all people, especially concerning the equal access of all people for basic needs. The participants spoke about the need for advocacy for bilingual education, community safety, and civil rights (NOTE: paraphrase from group 1 and 2). They felt that empowering people in City Heights would help the community fight against problems such as substance abuse, gangs, domestic violence, and police harassment (NOTE: paraphrase from groups 1 and 2).

II. Next Steps for Social Media and Media Arts Projects in City Heights

All of the focus group participants were strongly passionate and articulate about the key issues that were discussed. The descriptions above are only a brief summary of the ideas that were brought up. Connect SD and SDAFF hoped that by bringing people from different organizations together, some who



may not have had the previous chance to understand others' backgrounds and missions, would spark some new ideas of how to best serve City Heights' needs as a community.

As the groups shifted to discussing the use of social media and media arts, the participants sought to define these terms. Social media and media arts were thought of in many different ways. Some perceptions tied with these terms included local radio programs at PBS, murals, plays, music, spoken word, dance, and social networking in the form of YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter (NOTE: paraphrase from groups 1 and 2). While Connect SD and SDAFF have already partnered with the City Heights Community Development Corporation and Price Charities for free movie nights at Teralta Park, it was suggested that these movie nights be expanded to other City Heights parks in order to help create more public safe zones. Focus group participants also suggested enlisting the support and participation of other community organizations as well (NOTE: paraphrase from group 1).

As the focus group discussed the possibility of additional local film screenings, they gave suggestions of specific film that would relate to issues or places that relate with many, if not all, of the residents. For example, a film could be about the New Roots Community Farm at 54th Avenue and Chollas Parkway, which has encouraged immigrants from places such as Cambodia and Somalia to grow foods from their home countries while learning more about other people's foods and cultural traditions. During the second focus group, participants suggested that this film should include interviews of people from the International Rescue Committee, in particular by covering who helped start this project and the people working in their portions of the garden. During the group discussion on multiculturalism, food was mentioned many times as a way to begin to understand other people's backgrounds and traditions, which would make this film one in which multiple groups could participate (NOTE: paraphrased from group 2).

Likewise, another film idea that came forth was in regards to the police harassment of youth in City Heights. In the middle of the discussion about social justice, a group spoke about how they saw youth pulled over by police with little or no reason. Often, they felt they were being roughly questioned in public. This topic was viewed by the group as a good prospective film because news of police harassment is not as present in other parts of San Diego. Additionally interviewing youth who had been targeted by



the police for this kind of treatment may also expose the wide range of people that this behavior has affected. The group discussed how having City Heights residents see a film on police harassment could also start a discussion on how residents could create safety alternatives that are not dependent upon the police (NOTE: paraphrase from group 2).

Finally, a participant brought up a film idea that touches upon all three key issues—multiculturalism, social justice, and intergenerationalism—bilingual education. She pointed out that the lack of a bilingual immersion program results in the loss of strong family ties and respect for one's cultural traditions. The lack of such programs brings about assimilation rather than the balancing of multiple cultural and social lessons, and put a student at a permanent disadvantage in a school system. The other group participants agreed this would make a good film because of how it brought together three large issues that affect many immigrant families in City Heights and beyond. The making of a film about students who lose their bilingualism due to the lack of bilingual immersion education— could also lead to increased public support for such programs. This is the case where media arts showcase an urgent community issue and thus prompt action (NOTE: paraphrase from group 2).

Although some participants expressed concern about having enough time, access to equipment, and training to create successful films, Connect SD staff members firmly stated SDAFF's intention to become a community partner and resource for City Heights' people and organizations through programs such as the summer consulting program.

By hosting the focus groups, showing the films, and facilitating the discussions, Connect SD and SDAFF hope to build and strengthen community alliances inside and beyond City Heights for the residents and organizations. We appreciate the time and the thoughtfulness of the focus group participants, and we hope that these focus groups have created new ways in which social media and media arts can help City Heights celebrate its vibrant diversity, and its strong family and community connections.

transcriptions available upon request to info@sdaff.org