



On 2/6/16 Vision Russell Neighborhood Outreach Workers, Julia Robinson, Jackie Floyd and Amy Lockett hosted a kitchen conversation on home ownership at Baptized Pentecostal. The group of 7 participants started with introductions and a brief overview of what Vision Russell and the Choice Neighborhood Initiative.

The first question the Neighborhood Outreach Workers asked was who in the room was homeowners. Three participants said they owned their homes the other 4 participants did not.

Jackie started the conversation by asking if the group believed owning a home was still the American Dream. The first respondent said "not anymore because more and more people are able to rent and you still have all the luxuries without the extra hassle of maintenance." She also said that older residents have a problem dealing with the maintenance of the home. Another participant said "everyone she knows wants to own their own home." It was also noted that not everyone understands what owning a home can do for them. One of the participants, Micah, said she "feels excluded from the American Dream because her property value keeps going down, you're not going to be sending any kids to college off the values of your home in a depressed neighborhood." Ms. Bibbs said "at least she has something and that no one can take it away from her." She added she may not be able to do what she wants to do but at least it's hers.

Jackie then asked if the idea of owning a home was passed down by parents. One participant noted that no because generations had lived in Beecher, Parkhill, etc.

Jackie then asked the group why they have chosen to live in Russell. Ebonique responded that economic circumstances brought her to Russell but what keeps her in Russell is that her children are involved in many of the activities in Russell. Another respondent said she lives in Portland but that she attends church in Russell. Another respondent stated that the accessibility of Russell is appealing since she's looking to move. Micah said she choose to live in Russell because she fell in love with the house but now her thoughts are evolving and that she still likes her house but living in Russell is draining and wearing on her after 13 years. She said "there's a lot of trash from neighbors who are not interested in maintaining their home." Jackie said she understands, she had her home built and she had many reasons for choosing that location- close to St. Stephens, downtown, library, public transportation but she was very paranoid that others would judge her for living in Russell. Ms. Bibbs said she was there through urban renewal because it had come through on Preston and Madison. She said her husband took care of everything when he was alive and he was excited about the house and she moved

in when her son was 6 weeks old. She said there has been so many changes over the 50 years she has lived there. She lives behind City Trends, she said it was in terrible condition at the time but she still loved it because of the location. She also said her neighbors would allow their trash to be blown through the neighborhood. Jackie said she has recently moved into Hampton Place and she loves it because they take such good care of the gated community. She still has the conveniences without the worries of maintenance.

Jackie then asked what is the biggest challenge of owning your home, Micah responded first with upkeep. Ms. Bibbs agreed and said her house is so big and so old and she knows there are programs in the community which help homeowners but they don't do big things, like her house's foundation is settling and water is starting to come in her basement and the roots to the tree in the backyard are cracking foundation, she then asked the group if they knew of any programs that could help with such a big job.

Julia then asked what brought the homeowners in the room to being a homeowner. Ms. Bibbs said urban renewal, Micah said she was living in Beecher Terrace when she saw the house she lives in now and fell in love with it. She said she wasn't thinking about buying a house but that a realtor pointed her to a city housing program that allowed her to purchase the home. Others wanted to know more about the program that Micah was talking about.

Julia then asked what the biggest challenge is for those that want to become a homeowner. One participant said that most places want you to get your credit straightened up before you can own a home and that she had tried to do that by going to a class that was offered but that she was disappointed because they want you to get \$1,000 off your credit before you could get a certificate that you completed the course. Jackie recommended her looking into the Housing Partnership and Urban League programs and classes.

Jackie then asked the participants what they thought the biggest selling point in Russell was. Ebonique said that if they have kids there are numerous educational and developmental programs in the community. Jackie asked which ones she named, First EGOT Shawnee, youth achievers and black achievers, Urban Leagues, Louisville Central Community Center, Street academy, project ready, there are numerous things and they're building like urban league has a new director and now they have family chess night. If you don't have kids she said you would be missing out on a renewal of the Russell community, and it's going to have a face-lift and it's going to be a place that you wish you would have stayed instead of run away from like so many people are doing and she added google fiber will be in the area soon. Jackie asked what the community could offer to an older person like herself, Ebonique said that Oak and Acorn has numerous activities for older adults. Micah said she was glad Ebonique was there because Ebonique is more optimistic. Jackie asked Micah what keeps her in Russell and Micah responded that it's because it's cheap. One participant asked what Micah could do to make her neighborhood a better place, Micah responded that she doesn't know what she can do. She said she used to be fine with where she lives but then three families on a section eight vouchers have moved in and made it hard for her. Her car has been stolen, the kids have torn everything up, her electricity was turned off because she was mistaken for her neighbor. She said she

doesn't understand why they don't put trash in the trash bags, the drug traffic is heavy and she saw someone get shot in from her front window at 3:00 a.m. in the morning.

Jackie then asked the home owners in the room, who they hold responsible for the bad renters, the landlords or the tenants. One participant said many landlords don't care who they're renting to. She said she had an experience where a landlord wasn't concerned about an application if she had the cash but that she didn't want to live there because everything in the area seemed vacant and/or abandon. One participant said she holds them both responsible and suggested that landlords should be required to visit tenants in their current living situations before renting a new place to them. Ebonique responded she's on a section 8 voucher and she said there is an owner and a property manager. She said she's only met the owner once and he didn't want to fix anything she she had to call codes and regulations on her house so he would have to fix her house and that took about 6 months before she the house was taken care of.

Jackie then asked what should be done to hold people responsible. Micah said she's called Oracle because they built 62 houses one summer and a few of them are next to her. One of many obstacles she ran into is they switch management companies every six months and the response she has gotten is that they think she's supposed to live in those conditions because she's on 18th Street. Ebonique said sometimes it's necessary to get a third party in when landlords and neighbors won't step up. Micah said she has tried that by calling IPL about the trash the neighbors had left in their yard and they gave everyone on the street a citation because by time they arrived the trash had spread down the street. She also said the neighbors knew she was the one to call because she's the only one that cares and she eventually got tired of calling because it wasn't doing any good. Micah said the section 8 office tries to reconnect you to the owner of the property and the owners don't do anything. Jackie said if you call to complain three times to report something they're supposed to take action.

Jackie then asked if the group if they thought these problems (trash, drugs, negligent landlords) goes on in other communities and if so, how do those communities deal with these problems. Ebonique said we don't have a neighborhood watch or neighborhood association in the Russell community. She added that you have to find the people who are willing to work and organize in the community and more people will join once that gets started. Another participant said she doesn't think other neighborhoods has the same problems. Micah said that many of the West End neighborhoods have similar conditions but neighborhoods outside of the West-end don't have the same economic conditions, unemployment or anything, it gets to be too much when most of the population needs help. Micah said that she was in a neighborhood association for many years but that everyone got tired and they had to sit down because they were working full-time, raising children, and there were only 6 or 7 members and it was too much work but that they were thinking of reestablishing themselves since they already have their non-profit status and everything but she's struggling to get everyone back together again.

Julia then asked what could come into the Russell Neighborhood to make it a better neighborhood. One participant said "get rid of the ones (neighbors) that don't care first." Ebonique said not necessarily getting rid of everyone but helping their minds evolve, she said

people have been conditioned to believe there's only one way to be. She added "mainly the youth because they're creating crime and getting hurt, so reaching the youth and letting them realize there are other avenues to take is how we can change the neighborhood."

Julia asked if the group thought that people have lost touch with what it takes to be a good neighbor. Ebonique said she does but that sometimes it's been generations since a family knew how to be a good neighbor. Another participant said that single parents don't have a mindset of change and hope and that she would start with changing their minds and having programs for them. Jackie said no one has mentioned holding the government officials accountable. Jackie said there are landlord laws, section 8 laws but that it's just about picking up the phone and calling 311 and writing letters. Ebonique said she thinks the newsletter plays a vital role and that it's also about connecting and showing up and letting officials know who you are. Nannie said that one person doesn't make a difference all the time it takes many voices saying the same thing. Nannie asked if the newsletter could publicize the avenues of complaint such as 311, she said if people speak up and speak out that could help to build a stronger community and they could do that anonymously and they don't know about that. Nannie said the truth is she would not leave her area because she loves her house and she can do some repairs but that she's on a small limited income. Jackie said she grew up in Victory Park and that there was a lot of crime there when she was growing up but they respected her mother and that her mother always felt safe because they would never mess with her because of respect. Nannie said that she had experienced that as well but that the problem is the neighbors are changing. Many people are inheriting their relative's homes and they don't have the respect their parents and grandparents had. She said she has a young guy next to her into drugs and that's been her fear and she has been woken up at 6:30 in the morning with people there hollering and carrying on. Ebonique said she's experienced something similar at her home. Jackie then asked the group that if life circumstances have effected the physical and mental health in Russell. The group responded by saying yes and Jackie then asked how that carries over into being a neighbor. Ebonique said people become reserved, introverted or they just don't care. Nannie said they're just not taught to be kind. Jackie asked why we allow stores in the Russell community to make people check their bags when they don't do that in other parts of town. One respondent said it's because people steal everything. Jackie said people steal everything everywhere so it's unacceptable, and we need to start changing our mentality to revitalize the physical part. Ebonique says that people get complacent and that we have to create motivation within the community again. Jackie said she's a letter writer and by writing many letters she saw results but that it's the citizens job to be proactive.

Julia then asked if the housing in Russell satisfies people who live in or want to live in Russell. Micah responded that's one thing about Russell is the size and character of the houses are wonderful, it's just about finding the pockets of safe areas in the neighborhood. Jackie said the housing meets the needs but she wishes there were amenities. She asked why can't we have more than just the physical house we should have the other parts of a community such as tennis courts.

Amy thanked the participants and adjourned the meeting for time.