

**Dominican Center  
&  
The Amani Neighborhood:  
Supporting Resident-driven  
Social Change**

**2016-18 Strategic Plan**



## **Mission**

The Dominican Center works with Amani residents and partners to build a better future.

### **Amani United Sustaining Membership**

Lulu Alison	Julia Johnson
Beverly Bell	Wesley Landry
Edward Bellamy	Pat Ott
Verlee Bishop	Octavia Parker
Ellie Boone	Arlene Patterson
Brandon Culpepper	Alice Pugh
Minister James W. Brown	Pepper Ray
Quan Caston	Brenda Hart-Richardson
Pastor Oscar Dillon	Liza Russell
Blanche Duggar	Belinda Sims
Jerome Edwards	Ular Smith
Brenda Giles	Katherine Turner
Michael Gill	Dennis Walton
Augustine Harper	Leatha West
Earnestine Henderson	Arthur West
Dorothy Israel	Patricia Winfrey
Jerusa Johnson	

# Dominican Center & The Amani Neighborhood: Supporting Resident-driven Social Change

## 2016-18 Strategic Plan

### Introduction

Change... For decades, the change confronting the Amani neighborhood too often has been negative. Too often, the change has been happening **to** residents, rather than being driven **by** them. Over the last several years, however, residents and the Dominican Center have been working closely together to define a more positive future for the Amani neighborhood. Together, they have been concentrating on building individual and neighborhood strengths; establishing institutions for residents to gather, collectively address common issues, and advocate for community improvements; and sustaining the positive momentum.

Throughout, the Dominican Center has been, and remains, dedicated to helping residents make *positive* change happen for themselves and the Amani neighborhood. This document represents the next phase in the organization's strategic planning, describing how the Dominican Center will support resident-driven social change and neighborhood leadership.

Retained by the Dominican Center for a second consecutive time to facilitate its strategic planning, Jericho Resources, Inc.:

- Facilitated a session with Amani neighborhood residents at the Dominican Center
- Conducted a Dominican Center staff retreat hosted at Northwestern Mutual

- Interviewed representatives of principal partners, including the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Northwestern Mutual, and Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin
- Presented to, and received insights from, the Dominican Center Board of Directors



## Past is Prologue

*“What’s past is prologue” [The Tempest, W. Shakespeare]*

The residents of the Amani Neighborhood have been at the heart of everything the Dominican Center does. They are the reason the Center exists, and that is reflected throughout its history.

The Amani neighborhood was among the last to benefit from the economic expansion of the early 2000s. The neighborhood suffered from chronic unemployment/underemployment, low

home ownership, vacant homes and lots, drugs and alcohol abuse, crime, etc. To assist more residents in improving their lives and being able to benefit from that economic period, the Dominican Center offered a variety of services, including:

- Advocacy
- Financial Literacy
- Adult Basic Skills/Literacy
- Home Buying & Repair

In the wake of the Great Recession, which began in December 2007 and was the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, much of the effort to help residents purchase homes and reclaim their neighborhood was negatively impacted.

Families lost homes. Absentee landlords purchased more properties and, in some cases, rented them to individuals who contributed to still more turbulence in the area. Other properties were abandoned and/or boarded up, with some being used as drug houses.



Homeowners who remained in the neighborhood were confronted with dumping in alleys and empty lots; some experienced individuals stealing their fences, air conditioning units, etc. for recyclable metal.

Residents who contacted the authorities about dumping, drug houses, and other criminal activities destabilizing the

neighborhood felt ignored. The relationship with the police, code enforcement, and other government officials was adversarial with little common ground or relationships.

This is the context in which the previous strategic planning process began for the 2013-2015 period.

## **Accomplishments: 2013-2015 Strategic Plan**

Despite the challenging environment, the Dominican Center has continued to persevere and walk with residents as they work toward social change in their own lives and the life of the neighborhood. And, ***positive change is happening.***

A number of actions were outlined in the 2013-15 Dominican Center Strategic Plan. The following are among the major activities that went from concept to achievement:

- Dominican Center worked with residents to establish Amani United for collective advocacy for the neighborhood.
- Residents involved in Amani United and other Dominican Center services are demonstrating their ability to advocate for themselves and their neighborhood.
- Dominican Center has continued to help residents gain adult basic skills, earn G.E.D.s, improve financial literacy, and learn basic home repairs.
- Dominican Center expanded its partnerships with community-based organizations, governmental officials (e.g., Milwaukee Common Council, Milwaukee Police Department, Neighborhood Services/Code Enforcement,

Department of Public Works, etc.), and major partners (e.g., Northwestern Mutual, Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin, and Greater Milwaukee Foundation).

Given its strong relationships with, and mutual respect for, residents and partners as well as the levels of engagement and service achieved, it was a special honor to be selected by the Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee for the 2015 Community Organizing Award.



## **Mission, Values & Vision**

After carefully considering and revisiting its reason for being throughout the strategic planning process, the Dominican Center has adopted a clear and direct mission statement.

Simply put:

**The Dominican Center works with Amani residents and partners to build a better future.**

While the nonprofit will adapt its range of programs and services over time to meet the dynamic challenges of the future, residents and partners will always be able to count on the Dominican Center to live by the following beliefs and values:

- Residents of the Amani neighborhood are experts in their own lives, experiences, needs, and motivation. The Board of Directors and staff of the Dominican Center understand only the residents truly can drive sustainable social change. Residents will always find Dominican Center staff committed to supporting their efforts toward positive social change.
- The Dominican Center Board and staff are dedicated to serving as a resource for residents, offering its neighbors broadly defined educational services in a safe, welcoming, compassionate, and responsive environment.
- The Dominican Center not only offers a variety of educational services to the neighborhood, but also understands the Center must be a learning organization, continuing to improve its skills in order to support growth among others.
- The Dominican Center values every resident and partner, and believes each possesses something positive that can be contributed toward the improvement of the Amani neighborhood.
- The Board of Directors and staff of the Dominican Center are accountable and trustworthy stewards of all resources generously shared with the nonprofit, using each asset exclusively for the achievement of the organization's mission.

The residents and Dominican Center staff have developed a collective vision of helping Amani generate the kind of social change that will result in it becoming:

- An empowered community that is safe and well-maintained with healthy, lead-free, owner-occupied homes and quality neighborhood schools, strong faith institutions, affordable healthcare, and employment opportunities within walking distance
- Home to citizens who are educated; possess strong skills in a variety of areas—from advocacy and leadership to nutrition, financial literacy, and home repair; and who are committed to giving back and serving their fellow neighbors
- A place where residents are responsible, engaged, politically active, and organized as a means of coming together and holding each other and elected representative accountable to the community, and maintaining positive relations with law/code enforcement
- An area where neighbors have pride in themselves and their community, and create opportunities for residents living in other areas to become educated about/experience firsthand the values of the Amani neighborhood and its people
- A neighborhood that attracts a wide array of resources to the community (e.g., AODA treatment/prevention, job training, ex-offender support, etc.), and facilitates locating those resources conveniently within the community

# Primary Strategy & Areas of Focus to Support Social Change

The Dominican Center will accomplish the organization's mission by focusing its energies, expertise, and experience in supporting social change through its



primary strategy of education. Education—whether educating residents and/or helping them educate themselves—is central to the Dominican Center's approach to its work. Broadly defined, the nonprofit will support education in many forms, including in the areas of:

- Literacy
- Advocacy
- Leadership
- Other Skill Development
- Giving Back/Service to Others

## SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis provides a framework for thinking critically about both internally and externally driven positive and negative factors affecting the organization's viability. Strengths (S) and weaknesses (W) are internal in nature, and they describe the positive and negative attributes of a given entity as that entity is currently positioned. Opportunities (O) and

threats (T) are external dynamics over which the entity does not have control, but could influence the entity's future for the better or worse.

Strengths and weaknesses are essentially like taking a photo of the good and bad aspects of the organization; whereas, opportunities and threats are equivalent to a motion picture of the positives and negatives that might impact the organization's future. Below are primary strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as identified through stakeholder input:

## **Strengths**

- Dominican Center staff is well-trained, results-oriented, and committed to supporting social change in the Amani neighborhood, and is seen as effective in community organizing.
- Staff works as a cohesive team, is knowledgeable of public and private resources available to assist residents, and has earned credibility within the neighborhood.
- The organization has a proven track record, and residents trust the Dominican Center.
- The leadership is appreciated by residents, staff, and funding partners.
- The Dominican Center is conveniently located within the Amani neighborhood, and both residents and partners feel welcome.

## **Weaknesses**

- Physical plan infrastructure is a challenge, including an older building that is not ADA-compliant, and requires

investment to upgrade and support more effective telephony and information connectivity.

- Information technology hardware and software need to be upgraded in order to support greater networking and data management.
- While the Dominican Center is grateful for every funding partner and every penny generously donated, the organization's total annual funding currently does not support the level of programming, infrastructure improvements, and compensation needed for continued growth and employee retention.
- The organization currently does not have a data management system that allows it to integrate, analyze, and maintain metrics and outcomes more effectively.

## **Opportunities**

- Dominican Center can support social change among individual residents, Amani United, and the neighborhood as a whole by deepening and expanding resident-driven institutions.
- Dominican Center can support social change among individual residents, Amani United, and the neighborhood as a whole by expanding and diversifying partnerships with businesses, universities, and economic development entities (e.g., WHEDA, LISC, MEDC, IFF, etc.).
- Dominican Center can help improve neighborhood and community-wide perceptions by learning to tell the Amani story effectively, and helping residents to do so.

## Threats

- Building maintenance and repairs have the potential to be more costly than the Dominican Center can afford.
- While the Archdiocese of Milwaukee has been extremely gracious in making space available to the Dominican Center at a very reasonable price, the sale of the building and/or the adjacent lot is beyond the Center's control as a tenant.
- There is always the possibility of shifts in funding partners' priorities, which would impact the Dominican Center's ability to sustain and/or grow service and delivery support for residents.
- The potential loss of trained staff and/or experienced leadership within Amani United as well as the Dominican Center's Board and management team would impair momentum and hinder social change.
- Continuously negative media reports regarding the Amani neighborhood could make it more challenging to establish, retain, and/or grow partnerships needed to advance resident support and neighborhood improvement.

One drawback of a SWOT analysis is the possibility of “missing the forest for the trees.” The lists of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can appear disjointed and be difficult to process. The following represents a synthesis of major points for each quadrant.

## **Strengths**

### **[Positive Internal Factors]**

The Dominican Center's core strengths are found in its focused mission, resourceful and committed staff, and Board and management leadership. The human talent and leadership truly make the difference.

## **Weaknesses**

### **[Negative Internal Factors]**

The Dominican Center's core weaknesses arise from its (i) infrastructure, including its facility, telephony, and information technology, and (ii) the nonprofit's financial limitations.

## **Opportunities**

### **[Positive External Factors]**

The Dominican Center's greatest opportunities involve creating and expanding partnerships, and implementing new strategies to tell the Amani story more effectively.

## **Threats**

### **[Negative External Factors]**

The Dominican Center's greatest threats primarily involve the potential loss of facility/adjacent property, turnover in experienced leadership and trained professionals, significant loss of funding, and bombardment with negative media coverage.

## **2016-18 Goals & Objectives**

Based on all the input of stakeholders throughout the strategic planning process, the Dominican Center will focus its efforts on achieving seven primary goals and objectives.

### **Goal I**

By the end of 2018, the Dominican Center will support a robust neighborhood association that is led by residents, develops a strong leadership team, offers relevant neighbor-to-neighbor initiatives and activities, and engages a broader base of those living in the area.

### **Objectives**

1. Assist Amani United and/or other resident-led neighborhood association(s) to establish a strong and diversified leadership team
2. Assist the entity(ies) in developing recruitment and engagement plan(s)
3. Assist the entity(ies) in developing leadership orientation
4. Assist the entity(ies) in developing a leadership, governance, and advocacy training program

### **Goal II**

By the end of 2018, the Dominican Center will support, develop, and retain a well-trained, experienced, diverse, and culturally competent staff as well as governing and management leadership teams.

### **Objectives**

1. Create Board and staff professional development plans, including leadership, governance, advocacy, and social change

2. Develop a recruitment and retention plan to attract and maintain a diverse Board membership (e.g., profession, skills, geography, affiliations, etc.)
3. Establish robust Board, management, and staff orientations
4. Develop a recruitment and retention plan to attract and maintain a diverse staff
5. Explore the possibility of creating a more competitive compensation benefit package to the degree the nonprofit's limited resources will allow

### **Goal III**

By the end of 2018, the Dominican Center will have in place a well-defined and implemented strategy to ensure there is a continuum of sustained leadership among residents as well as the Board of Directors and staff.

### **Objectives**

1. Research best practices in succession planning for resident neighborhood association leadership as well as for Dominican Center Board of Directors, key staff, and management
2. Develop a customized succession plan for resident neighborhood association leadership as well as for Dominican Center Board of Directors, key staff, and management
3. Implement succession planning
4. Review and revision succession planning annually to ensure appropriateness
5. Integrate succession planning into orientations

### **Goal IV**

By the end of 2018, the Dominican Center will have worked with its partners to articulate and document a detailed

understanding of potentially replicable strategies that advance positive, resident-led social change in vulnerable neighborhoods.

## **Objectives**

1. Develop an understanding of meaningful metrics and outcomes
2. Research and identify cost-effective networking and data management systems/strategies that will enhance the nonprofit's ability to gather, analyze, and share trends
3. Draft case study(ies) regarding progress made, including establishing and sustaining a robust resident-driven neighborhood association

## **Goal V**

By the end of 2018, the Dominican Center will have in place a diverse array of partnerships with businesses, governmental bodies, educational institutions, and faith- and community-based organizations.

## **Objectives**

1. Research the types of partnerships currently in place, those needed to continue advancing positive social change, and potential entities that may share values, vision, and mission
2. Focus more relationships with economic development partners, including the Wisconsin Housing & Economic Development Authority (WHEDA), Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), and IFF

3. Create feedback loops to ensure current and future partners are heard and are realizing the benefits of partnership over time
4. Identify strategies and venues for engaging partners meaningfully in advancing positive social change

## **Goal VI**

By the end of 2018, the Dominican Center will have grown its financial support and increased its financial sustainability.

### **Objectives**

1. Deepen existing financial relationships, where appropriate
2. Determine if/when funding for existing initiatives may sunset
3. Determine the additional resources needed
4. Research new potential financial relationships as part of developing a funding diversification plan
5. Implement funding diversification plan

## **Goal VII**

By the end of 2018, the Dominican Center will have helped regional media and potential partners expand their view and understanding of the Amani neighborhood and its residents.

### **Objectives**

1. Draft and adopt a communications plan
2. Reach out to regional media and potential partners to introduce Amani neighborhood
3. Establish partnerships with regional media and other partners to tell more of Amani's story
4. Communicate regularly with regional media and other partners to ensure they are aware of the Amani neighborhood's successes

## **2016 Board of Directors**

Chad Swalheim, President

S. Mary Howard Johnstone, OP, Secretary-Treasurer

Linda Bedford

Brandon Culpepper

Willie Davis

Andre Goode

Chuck Klawitter

Arlene Patterson

Sr. Patricia Rogers, OP, Executive Director, Ex Officio

## **2016 Dominican Center Staff**

Sr. Patricia Rogers , OP, Executive Director

Connie Poth, Office Manager

Pepper Ray, Building Neighborhood Capacity Program Site  
Coordinator

Octavia Parker, Building Neighborhood Capacity Program  
Community Organizer

Veronica Rogers, PhD, Education Coordinator

Wesley Landry, Housing Rehab Specialist

Monica Bastardo, Trinity Fellow/Communications & Community  
Engagement Specialist

Kathleen Brady, Director of Development

