



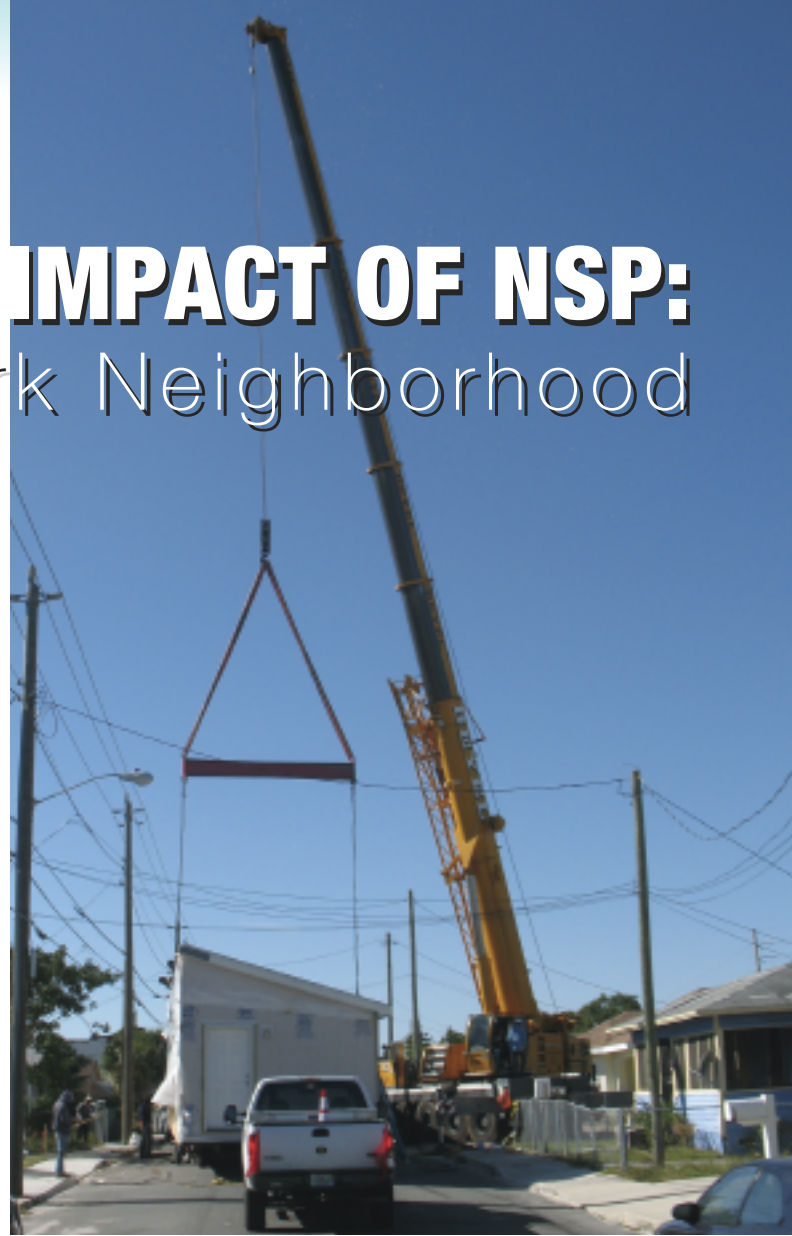
MEASURING THE IMPACT OF NSP: The Coleman Park Neighborhood

By Gladys Schneider

When Congress enacted the Housing and Economic Recovery Act in 2008 authorizing the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP), the intent was to aid U.S. cities and towns to arrest the blighting decay of neighborhoods brought on by the abandonment of homes and apartment buildings that had undergone foreclosure and were now vacant. The vitality of people living, playing and learning in American neighborhoods that once hummed with activity and investment was ebbing. The affordable housing industry, both private and public sectors, got right to work purchasing homes for rehabilitation and resale or rental to lower income families. NSP burst forth with mega dollars that by Congressional mandate had to be invested immediately.

Given this massive investment, can we understand the forces at work that lead to genuine stabilization in any given area? Can we ensure that NSP is not just a Band-Aid: that it will lead to sustainable vitality in neighborhoods where the housing market becomes balanced and the external effects of foreclosure and abandonment are treated and eliminated? Does increasing homeownership stop decline and lead to improved values and a stable market? These questions are the subject of a collaborative study, combined with technical assistance by the Florida Housing Coalition and the Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing. With funding from the Bank of America Foundation, and the participation of NSP grantee West Palm Beach, we are studying the impact of NSP funded homeownership on the Coleman Park neighborhood to understand and evaluate the effectiveness of various strategies and develop models that can be beneficial to other lower income neighborhoods.

Coleman Park is the historically black community where 1920's bungalows lined streets and baseball greats like



Hank Aaron and Jackie Robinson played ball for fun. Today the neighborhood has high crime, vacant lots, and collapsed property values. The City has made efforts to clear dilapidated buildings and fight crime but the foreclosure crisis exacerbated problems and the neighborhood was in need of serious investments. There are health care services, transit, and schools in the area, but without decent and affordable housing, along with a balanced housing market, desirable living conditions would not be realized. Dunbar Village, owned by the West Palm Housing Authority, provides good rental housing for the lowest income and Habitat for Humanity homes are an opportunity for ownership, true neighborhood stability would require more housing for both owners and renters.

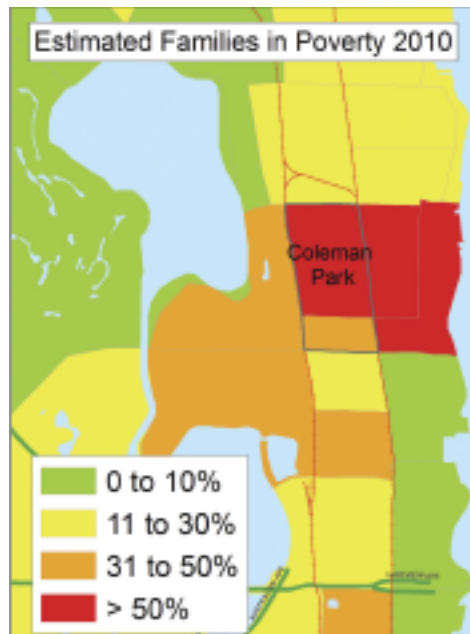
This fall, 18 new homes were built in Coleman Park for low income households. These homes are funded by NSP dollars and the City is working to finance-qualify interested buyers to purchase the homes with affordable mortgages.

The City plans to rehabilitate six more homes in the neighborhood. This infusion of investment is the largest in many years and the new homes replace demolished dilapidated and vacant housing. NSP funds will be used to subsidize the total per unit cost of \$60,000 to \$130,000 for very low and low income buyers.

The Coleman Park Neighborhood experience is being used as a pilot to develop programs that focus on stabilizing and preserving low and moderate income neighborhoods and communities through a strong emphasis on technical assistance and strategic planning to restore the homeownership market. The Coleman Park Neighborhood pilot study is underway with data collection on historical demographic and community measures. The preliminary review of findings below lay the groundwork for understanding prior conditions and help inform future investments and programming that will stabilize the neighborhood through homeownership and community development activities such as neighborhood associations, code enforcement, and public safety.

Preliminary analysis of historical patterns in the Coleman Park Neighborhood prepared by the research team headed by William O'Dell at the Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing based at the University of Florida is nearing completion. Although the study primarily focuses on Coleman Park, which is the main target area for NSP funding in West Palm Beach, data for two adjacent neighborhoods and Palm Beach County as a whole are being compiled for comparison purposes. Northwood and Pleasant City are contiguous to Coleman Park but show wide variations in characteristics being used to study the areas.

The initial findings of the study indicate that since 1980, poverty has become more concentrated in Coleman Park as



the population has decreased by 52%. The number of school-aged children has remained steady as the proportion of single female heads of households with children has increased from 24% in 1980 to 35% in 2010. While the racial composition of the total study area has become more diverse over time, in Coleman Park the percentage of black persons has remained constant. Coleman Park has a much higher ratio of renters to owners with 78% renting as opposed to the study area with 60% renters. Coleman Park also had the highest concentration of families living in poverty with 52% in 2010 compared to Northwood with 13%. It is notable that the number of families living in poverty in Northwood increased from 3% in 1980 to 13% in 2010. While the percentage of women in the labor force with children has been increasing in Coleman Park from 45% in 1980 to 53% in 2000, unemployment among women in Coleman Park experienced a large increase from 5% in 1980 to 27% in 2000. In the total study area, the percentage of females in the labor force who were unemployed was 8%.

The investment of new homes in Coleman Park will indeed increase the homeownership level and could possibly bring stability and permanence to

buyers who are female heads of household. The challenge is to target the marketing of the new homes to current residents but also to augment the housing influx with employment and social services to ensure sustainability for the increase in investment.

Over the next year, the Florida Housing Coalition will continue to provide technical assistance for the NSP activities and the Shimberg Center will use the baseline data collected to measure changes over time.

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