

Community Organizing Manual

Produced by:



What Mobile Justice Means to Me

“I see Mobile Justice from the perspective of our situation in my park. I have big concerns with the community’s perception of us. The relationship between the homeowners and the park owner is also a problem. Mobile Justice is about overcoming these issues. This is particularly needed in communities of color as well.”

John Freeman, Chisago City, MN

“Mobile Justice means fighting for our rights, education, and working for justice within parks. We need to challenge park prejudice that takes place against us, but we also need to address it within our own community. Too many manufactured homeowners draw a dividing line between themselves and ‘those kind of people’ who live in ‘those kind of parks.’ This has to stop. Mobile Justice has to include everyone.”

Pat Freeman, Chisago City, MN

“Mobile Justice means empowerment. It’s a matter of educating people of what they can accomplish if they are organized and unified.”

Bev Adrian, Bloomington, MN

“Mobile Justice is about getting the same rights as everyone else. Anyone who lives in a manufactured home and calls it their home should have equal rights to stick built homeowners. We should be treated fairly and not treated as lower class. Sometimes people classify us as being lower class and we are labeled as problem people. I live in a park and I am not trash!”

Mary Hamilton, Anoka

“Mobile Justice is freedom. We want a community where families can move in and their kids can grow up healthy and happy. The stigma of ‘trailer trash’ is gone. It has got to go away.”

Betty Bailey, Lexington, MN

“Mobile Justice is about being a part of the family of homeowners who keep working to make people look at manufactured homes just the same as stick-built homes, so people can live there by choice and not face any judgment. What we do for Mobile Justice reflects on me and everyone in parks. We can get rid of the negative images; and everyone sees the fruit of our labor. I’m proud to know that we can make people so interested, upset or happy with us that we can be in the news. As long as there are still issues that need be fixed, I am going to stay involved.”

Pat Therrein, Lakeville, MN

“Mobile justice is about winning legal justice for people residing in mobile home parks. I can’t wait to face the park owners in person and see what they have to say. Park owners need to find another way to make a living that doesn’t destroy other people’s livelihoods.”

Wayne Britz, White Bear Lake

“Mobile Justice is when residents of manufactured home parks stand up for themselves. It’s understanding what you can do and then doing it. Mobile Justice is about not having to take it anymore.”

Paul Wissmiller, St Anthony Village, MN



This Manual is Dedicated...

To leaders who fought to lay ground for the work we do today;
To ordinary people doing extraordinary things to stand up for their communities; and
To the next generation of leaders, who will defend our victories and take us further down the path of Mobile Justice



Acknowledgements

Community organizing obviously existed long before APAC. As an organization we have been fortunate enough to benefit from the wisdom of people who have been doing this work much longer than we have. We have tried to capture many of their ideas and experiences in this manual, while at the same time adding tools and ideas that are unique to APAC.

Special Thanks go to Jay Clark, Beth Newkirk and Salvador Miranda for training generations of APAC organizers.

To compose this manual we drew on nearly 30 years of experience in the field organizing in communities across Minnesota, and more recently in the northwestern states. Other organizations have added to our knowledge through their collaboration, training and materials along the way. They include:

- Applied Research Center
- Arden Manor Resident Association
- Association of Manufactured Homeowners (Washington State)
- Bennett Park Cooperative
- Bonnevista Resident Association
- The Gamaliel Foundation
- Housing Preservation Project
- Latinos Unidos
- Lowry Grove Resident Association
- Minnesota Center for Neighborhood Organizing
- Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless
- Midwest Academy
- Minnesotano Media Empowerment Project
- The Northwest Regional Working Group
- Organizing Apprenticeship Project
- Shady Lane Resident Association
- Skyline Village Resident Association
- Sunrise Estates Resident Association

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Writing about manufactured home issues inevitably brings up the question of terminology. Various players in the world of manufactured housing use a variety of different terms to express the same idea, and many of these players have strong opinions as to which term is most appropriate.

This manual does not attempt to resolve these conflicts, or come up with a new standard. Many of these debated terms are used interchangeably throughout the manual. Some examples include “manufactured home park” and “manufactured home community” and “homeowner” and “resident.”

We chose the language that we used to try to balance two specific objectives - making the materials as readable as possible to the widest possible audience, while at the same time eliminating terminology that we found to be offensive.

It may be possible that the preferred terminology in Minnesota will be different than the commonly accepted terminology in other states. The materials are a working document meant to stimulate conversation and action, not to be the final word on all things manufactured housing.

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Manufactured homeowners across the nation are organizing for justice. For far too long residents have been treated as second-class citizens by public officials, businesses, park owners, and the media. The results are park closings, deteriorating living conditions, and the all too familiar stereotypes used to marginalize our communities.

Right now there is a war of values that is raging in our country that will influence our efforts to promote positive social change in manufactured home parks. Manufactured homeowners are organizing around a clear set of values: family, home, community, justice, and equality. Our opponents on the other side also share a common set of values: profit, development, private property, and a notion of progress dictated by the “highest and best use” of land.

In order to win effective changes, we need to look at the world we live in. Park owners, developers, and governments have deeply rooted institutional power that they use to promote their values. The resulting state of manufactured home parks is no accident but is rather the result of deliberate practices, ideas, and policies. People who benefit from this will likely oppose change, using their power to cling too unjust privileges.

Park residents are perceived to be powerless and are usually portrayed as victims (at best) by the media. “Park prejudice” is rampant in our society. Racism and class prejudice compound this problem.

Therefore, changes in the world of manufactured home parks cannot rely on a group of outsiders, regardless of their intentions. It's useless to rely on the goodwill of people trying to solve resident's problems especially when they don't include residents at the table when decisions are being made.

What we are talking about instead is building a powerful movement with manufactured homeowners at the helm creating a vehicle for their own social, economic, and political power. We need to promote our values and build our power by organizing people, ideas, and actions. We need to stop portrayal of residents as victims, and confront park prejudice, racism, and class prejudice. None of this can be done without a strong leadership base of manufactured home park residents.

This manual is a tool that we hope you will find useful in working for justice in your community. All Parks Alliance for Change (APAC) is an organization of manufactured home park residents in Minnesota. For 30 years, we have been fighting to win victories to strengthen resident rights and to give residents more control over their lives. This manual brings together knowledge accumulated over years of experience on the front lines of the battle for mobile justice.

