

**MEMBER ORGANIZED RESOURCE EXCHANGE (MORE) PROGRAMS IN ST. LOUIS,
MISSOURI: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY RESOURCE EXCHANGE PROGRAMS IN
NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION**

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Abstract

The quality of life in any community depends on the social capital. Communities with abundant social capital exhibit a strong social network and a willingness of residents to work together to work on projects that improve the quality of life for everybody. Unfortunately, many low-income, inner-city neighborhoods have seen their vitality drained and social capital decline due to the suburbanization of jobs, urban sprawl and several other factors. The main concerns of these socially and financially struggling communities are therefore to formulate strategies that can help strengthen social ties and revitalize their neighborhoods. One answer might rest in local currency and community exchange systems. These programs are designed to utilize local resources and exchange services between members in a community. In this context this study evaluates one such program, the Member Organized Resource Exchange (MORE) Programs, operated by Grace Hill Neighborhood Services in St. Louis, Missouri.

The purpose of this study was to investigate and evaluate the level of success attained by the Grace Hill Neighborhood Services in providing a social safety net for community neighbors. It examined the ability of Grace Hill to create a sense of community, and develop mutual trust, a component of social capital, among local residents, through its Member Organized Resource Exchange (MORE) programs and also determine what factors might affect the service delivery process.

A questionnaire was used to identify the perceptions MORE participants had about the different components of the MORE program that they used. Altogether 414 surveys were collected with a response rate of 94%. Descriptive statistics, including

frequency analyses, cross tabulations, and chi-square statistics were used to analyze the data.

Analyses of the results indicate that the MORE has been very effective in providing a safety net and a sense of community to its neighbors by encouraging them to be more involved in the community. The study also suggests that the MORE Time Dollars program has been particularly effective in connecting people to each other and to services. Participants who were involved in Time Dollars reported higher levels of satisfaction from other components of MORE than those who did not participate in the Time Dollars program. The results also indicated that most of the MORE programs were highly rated and frequently used by its participants and these programs were successful to meet their intended goals.

This study also suggests that some members of the community did not regularly utilize MORE programs. The uneven and sometimes sporadic use of some of the MORE services suggests a need for further assessment of service needs and availability. The broader implication of this study is to show how a community resource exchange system can increase social capital in a community by helping local residents to identify their own strengths and talents, and how they can use these skills to help other in the community.