

## ***YOU DON'T HAVE TO MOVE TO LIVE IN A BETTER NEIGHBORHOOD...***



### ***TRY FORMING A BLOCK CLUB! – HERE'S HOW TO BEGIN***

#### ***Step 1: Find a Block Buddy!***

The toughest part is getting started. If you can find another person on your block that shares your concerns, the process will be much more enjoyable. If you're not sure who to team up with, consider a spouse, friend, a neighbor, or maybe even someone you meet while walking your dog. If you're able to find more than one interested person – Great! You're in good shape if you can form a small group of 2-5 people for an initial team.

#### ***Tip #1***

**Don't already know anyone on your block? Here are a couple of suggestions to help break the ice:**

- Comment on your neighbor's garden or landscaping. Ask for tips.
- Do yard work at the same time as your neighbor.
- Take frequent walks on your block and take time to stop and chat with your neighbors.
- Acknowledge the awkwardness of the situation. "We've lived on the same block for years, and I decided it was time to introduce myself..."

Ok, now you're a familiar face in your community! You've also found a small group of people who are interested in starting a block club. Extend an invitation to these people to meet in your home to discuss topics such as these:

- Neighborhood block conditions/manageable improvements
- Neighborhood activities (i.e. block parties, gardening, garage sales, holiday activities, etc.)
- Physical boundaries of your block club (depending on factors like how large the block is, population density, size of available meeting places, and nature of the problems in the neighborhood)
- Set a consistent meeting time and place, inviting **all** the residents within the proposed boundaries try meeting in at a home, church, or school
- Agree on a plan to invite everyone to the meeting

## ***Step 2: Getting More People Involved***

For the very first official block club meeting, **personal contact** will be the most effective tool in recruiting members. This sort of contact conveys a sincere interest in the other person and allows an opportunity for a brief exchange of ideas between you and your neighbor. Also, a personal visit guarantees that your neighbor won't be a stranger if they come to the meeting: they will at least know you!

An effective way to contact everyone on your block is to divide the block into sections and send **teams of two or more** out to visit specific sections. You should proceed to contact **everyone** who lives in those boundaries: owners, renters, new-comers, and older residents.

### ***Tip # 2***

#### **Try to include everyone.**

It's important to invite even those who you would consider to be a "less-than-model citizen": those who don't cut the grass, put the garbage in the can, keep up the exterior of their property, etc. Gaining their membership might influence them to keep the wishes of the rest of their neighbors in mind.

*(Remember: people should never be invited to the meeting to be lectured about their undesirable behavior; it is by including them in the decision-making about what will be good for the whole block that they may come to live by better standards.)*

Before going door to door, here are some things to do:

- Develop a flyer to hand neighbors
- Consider the best time of day/week to go door to door in your community
- Make a plan of what to do if no one is home

Remember, when calling on people, first introduce yourself as a neighbor and explain the purpose of the call. Tell the new person about the community interest in starting a block club and your interest in having them at the first meeting. Emphasize the opportunity of getting to know neighbors and the fact that problems can be solved through the organization. Some people will want to socialize; others will be interested only in problem-solving. Actually, most successful block clubs include both kinds of programs.

### **Step 3: Meeting Starters**

First things first – make your meetings fun! Here are some simple ideas that can help make your meeting successful:

- **Food:** having a variety of snacks available gives something for people to do as they mingle and discuss. It also provides an added incentive to even attend! Providing some unique choices (maybe a family recipe or creative snack) could facilitate more conversation and will provide an immediate example of how more community interaction has its benefits as well. Have each person from your original team bring something to the meeting. Try cooking out!
- **Name tags:** this is an obvious tool to help remember each other's names. A lot of people prefer not to wear name tags, but even this can be made more interesting. For example, if your first block meeting is in a summer month, ask each person to write down their first name, followed by another summer-related word that starts with the same letter as their first name (ex. "Rebecca Rainbow"). The combinations can get very silly and will create an amiable atmosphere.
- **Start with a simple "Getting to Know You" activity.** This could include any number of things. For suggestions, look at the next tip box.

#### **Tip #3**

##### **"Getting to Know You" (Human Bingo)**

Before your meeting make up a grid sheet or list with varied personal characteristics in each square or line. Characteristics might be: sings in shower; been to another country; never had a speeding ticket; watches a soap opera; has met a famous person; plays the lottery; speaks more than one language; etc. Distribute copies of grid sheet to your guests and have them go around and collect unique signatures of guests who have those characteristics. The first person to get all (or the most) squares filled wins a door prize.

***For more ideas, feel free to call the UW-Extension office.***

### **Step 4: Goals & Objectives**

Next is business. At the meeting, your new group will need to determine the organization's overall purpose. Why do we want to form a block club?

- Political
- Social
- Organizing
- Neighborhood safety

It is possible the members want to cover one or all areas. Whenever possible, request that neighborhood representatives be included on any political committee whose decisions affect the neighborhood.

The general objective of any neighborhood organization should be to improve living conditions for all neighbors in a given geographical area and the community in general. The goal of a block club is usually:

- To improve the physical and moral environment of the neighborhood
- To eliminate nuisances or unwholesome influences in the neighborhood
- To cooperate with various City departments and other agencies in improving health, safety, physical, economic, and cultural standards of residents.
- To develop a spirit of cooperation and social interaction among the residents

#### **Tip #4**

##### **Sample Agenda:**

##### **I. Introductions**

Each attendee stands and gives name and brief background information. Organizer and/or Community Officer will do the same. Or, replace with "Getting to Know You" game.

##### **II. Reason for Meeting**

Brief explanation by moderator, or designated block leader.

##### **III. Call to Action**

- Overview.* Give an overview of what block clubs can accomplish. Cite examples. Suggest that they take on one small project to get started, such as a neighborhood cleanup or rummage sale
- Meetings.* Establish regular meeting dates, times and location. Suggest that they meet regularly, even if only for a social event.
- Size of Group.* An organization can comprise one block (both sides of street), a few blocks, or any small area with common boundaries and shared problems.
- Administration.* The group should set up committees and develop simple organizational rules or, if following parliamentary procedure, by-laws and election of officers.
- Records.* Ensure that one person is responsible for transcribing and maintaining records.
- Issues.* Ask each attendee to write down the most important issues that they feel should be addressed in the neighborhood. You will collect these at a subsequent meeting.

## **Step 5: Gather Additional Resources**

Today, Block Clubs are critical in developing safe, healthy and vibrant neighborhoods. Due to this fact, there are countless resources available to help support and guide your Block Club. For more information about Block Clubs contact:

John de Montmollin at  
Kenosha County  
UW Extension  
(262) 857-1945.

