

# CASE STUDIES

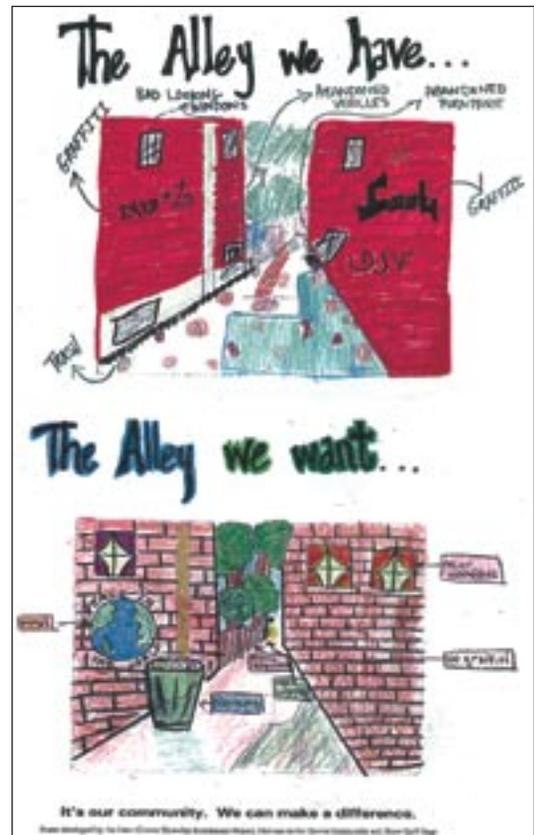
## DEVELOPING YOUTH LEADERS AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN COMMUNITIES

What do you think of your community?  
Are there things you would like to change?  
Do you feel your community is a great place for youth to grow up? Your voice is important to the future of your community, and at Shaw EcoVillage, we help you express that voice.

At Shaw EcoVillage, we show you how to look at your community in a new way, then help you build a better, more sustainable one. The first step is to get a new set of eyes. Consider this question:

*What makes a sustainable community?*

To get your answer up and running, make a list of everything you would like to see in your ideal sustainable community. Include the types of businesses, parks, houses, grocery stores, jobs, schools, and recreation facilities you would have.



Poster hand-drawn by students who wanted to renovate an alley near their school where a stabbing had occurred.

Now put yourself in the shoes of one of the following people. What does the community have to look like to meet this person’s needs?

- a person in a wheelchair
- a five-year-old child
- a teenager
- a person with asthma
- an elderly person
- a new mother without a job
- an artist

Imagine yourself as the person you’ve chosen, and explore your neighborhood from his or her point of view. Explore a street, a block, or a number of blocks. Take a map with you, and as you walk down the street—slowly—make a list of those things you find that are good (pros) and those things that could be improved (cons) (figure 1). If you have enough time, take on another role or explore a second neighborhood and compare your notes. Once you’ve completed your list, decide which cons are the most important and select one that you think you can do something about. You’ve just taken the first step toward making your community more sustainable.



Figure 1: A map created by Wilson Tobar, from the Shaw Ecovillage project in Washington, D.C.



*Defining a sustainable community*

Think of a sustainable community as a stool with three legs. Without all the legs, the stool cannot stand up. A sustainable community must

- have an environment that is healthy for all residents to live in.
- be economically balanced so that people of many different incomes can live together.
- have a social environment that supports the interests and needs of all residents.

A sustainable community is a place where people of all ages, races, ethnicities, genders, and abilities can meet their own needs without compromising the needs of others.

### *Taking action*

Now your job is to take your idea and make it a reality. The Shaw EcoVillage TEAM-UP process has six easy steps. In each of these steps, you can use a variety of Community Action Tools to successfully achieve your mission. Most of these tools are easy to use: paper and pencil, for instance. Some tasks may call for a computer or special testing equipment.

Students in the Shaw EcoVillage work on many different issues affecting their neighborhood. In the past, students have landscaped public spaces, designed a mural for the public library, built community kiosks for posting information, and presented proposals to the D.C. Office of Planning and the National Park Service. Here's a closer look at one Shaw EcoVillage project.

### *Community action tools (partial list)*

- **Map** your community (can be hand drawn or created on a computer using GIS software).
- **Interview** residents, government officials, or community activists.
- **Photograph** your neighborhood and the people who live there to explain what your issue is and what you want to change.
- Create **brochures, newsletters, and/or Web sites** to educate people about your concerns and plans.
- Use **scientific methods** to explore soil, air, and water quality.
- Draw a **proposal** for changing your community (can be free-hand sketching or technical drawing with the assistance of an architect or urban planner [see sample poster at the beginning of this section]).
- Write **letters** to community leaders and decision makers.

## FROM THE FARM TO THE CITY

One summer, a group of our students decided to research the types of food available within the Shaw neighborhood. After surveying and mapping, they discovered that most of the food was fast food or junk food. They also found that fast food and junk food were typically much cheaper than fresh fruit and vegetables, but poorer in nutritional content. This presented a big problem since there were many people in the neighborhood who were considered low income. If healthy food was more expensive, then poorer people would have to buy more junk food, resulting in increased health risks later in life.

The students' mission was to provide healthy food to the community at a price that everyone could afford. Their solution was to develop a Saturday farm stand—called



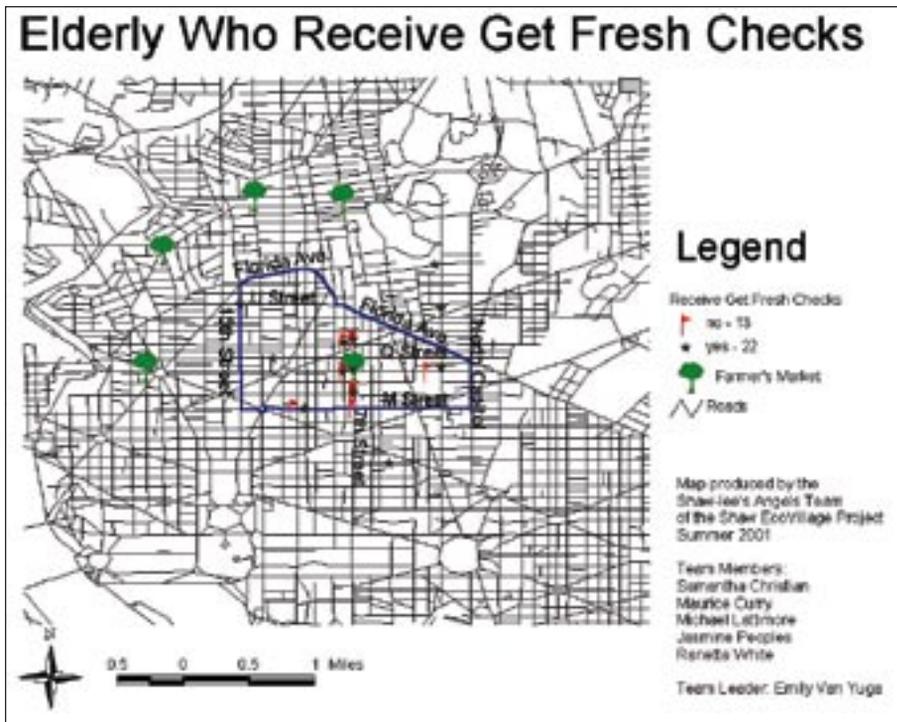
“Shaw ‘Nuff”—that would purchase organic and conventional produce from local farmers and sell it to residents at an affordable

rate. Flyers printed both in English and Vietnamese were distributed to residents within a five-block radius of the stand. Cooperation with another organization allowed students to accept government issued WIC checks (Women, Infants, and Children food subsidies) from lower income customers. Shaw 'Nuff was a great success and operated through the summer and fall.

During the winter, students evaluated their project, asking themselves if they had achieved their original mission. It was readily agreed that the farm stand had succeeded in providing healthy, fresh produce and that their prices were definitely cheaper than any nearby grocery store's. In many ways, yes, they had clearly achieved their mission. But students had another concern. They had hoped to provide produce to lower income residents, but the only way to estimate the income levels of

their customers was to count the number of WIC checks that had been used. Reviewing their records, they found that only a few of their customers were definitely low income. This meant that they would have to find a way to redesign their project if they wanted to reach these residents more effectively.

Over the next summer, students met with staff at Emmaus Services for the Aging, a local organization that provides food delivery to low-income elderly residents. Students found that while Emmaus was providing a much needed service, all of the food being delivered was canned and boxed, preserved with high levels of sodium. They also learned that for elderly individuals sodium can increase health risks. They decided to team up with Emmaus: students would provide fresh produce, and Emmaus the monthly delivery system.



## TEAM-UP: SIX EASY STEPS TO CREATING A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

**Team Building** Find others who are interested in the same issue that you are. When you're on the same mission, working toward the same goals, your strengths and resources are naturally multiplied: more ideas to add to the mix, more skills to draw on, more accomplishments to keep your momentum up—and you'll be building a small community while you work.

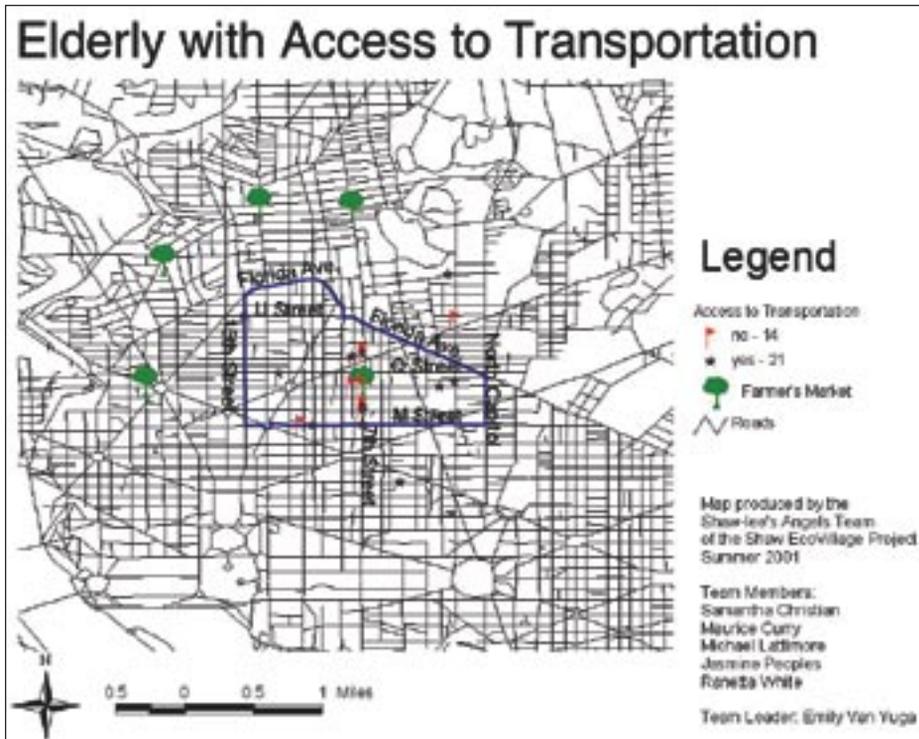
**Explore** Now that your team has a focus, you have to educate yourselves. You can conduct research at the library, talk to community leaders, interview residents, take photographs, and draw maps. This step is important: you may find that others have tried to tackle the same problem you have, and in the process learned some “do's and don'ts,” or you may discover experts who can provide you with important facts. Learning from others is a great way to ensure that your project will be a success.

**Action Plan** Your team has fully explored your issue and you have a good idea of how to go about proposing a solution that will make your community more sustainable. Now is the time to define your mission, state your goals, draw up a timeline, and create a budget for your project. Be sure to look at the definition of a sustainable community again. Does your solution take into account all parts of a sustainable community? During this step, it is important for team members to identify where their strengths are and where they can best be put to use.

**Mobilize** Make it happen! Make sure you have the time to complete all of your goals and that you have consulted with the appropriate individuals about how to implement and support your project—not only now, but in the future. For instance, if you are landscaping a library, have you talked to the maintenance person about how to water and care for the new plants over the next year or two?

**Understand and Evaluate** Taking the time to reflect on your project is vital to sustainability. An idea might sound great at first, but if it doesn't take into consideration all three “legs” of the sustainable community, it won't work in the end. Sometimes a project won't succeed in one area as well as you hoped it would, but successes elsewhere can show you what changes need to be made. Look at the big picture and at the details. Think about what might be going on beneath the surface.

**Present** An important part of your project is letting others know about what you've accomplished. Invite residents, government officials, and business owners to hear about your success. Your work may inspire others to do the same, and it could influence the types of decisions community leaders make in the future.



Students volunteered to pick excess fruits and vegetables from a local farm—a process called “gleaning”—and distribute them to the community for free. They also interviewed more than sixty elderly residents to find out if they had access to transportation that would enable them to visit a farmer’s market or stand like Shaw ‘Nuff. They learned that while many of the residents did not have transportation, they did live within walking distance of another local farm stand. The

final phase of the project called for the creation of a brochure that would be distributed to all of the neighborhood’s elderly residents, explaining where the farm stands were located and how they could purchase affordable produce at them. Through persistence and hard work, the Shaw EcoVillage students not only learned more about their community, they found ways to create positive and sustainable change for many of its residents.

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