

Southeast Community Organization Video Transcript

Hi, thanks for joining me. I am Betsy Mowry Voss. I am the Executive Director of the Southeast Community Organization. Also known as the District 1 Community Council. And we are one of the many district councils here on the East Side of Saint Paul. And I'm glad that you're here to join me today to learn a little bit more about our work and what we do and why we do it.

I'm going to do a quick screen share so that you can see some images of what I'm talking about and get a better idea of who we are and what we do. Again, I'm Betsy Mowry Voss, I live in the Southeast Community in the Highland Hills Community. Our family moved here 3 ½ years ago. I have a husband and a 14-year-old stepdaughter who also goes to school in our district at Twin Cities Academy. In addition, we have three animals living at home with us. And I thought I'd show you some paintings that my daughter made of them this summer. This first picture of the dog with the smiling face is our dog Luna – she is full of mischief. The second picture is our dog Nori who just turned 6 years old and is mostly well-behaved but gets into trouble with Luna. And then our cat is here and she is as grumpy as her picture looks. I imagine many of you also have your own pet or animals that you know and love so I thought I would give you an idea of the animals that I'm trying to work around as I work from home these days. And I've been working from home since March. We have an office at Sun Ray shopping center and my coworker Shaquonna Jackson has been working there.

So here's our mission – to share knowledge and power, to organize and to advocate with the people who live and work in our neighborhoods. And to build leadership to seize opportunities and work for social and racial justice. You can see at the top our name is the Southeast Community Organization. We also had a new logo created that we launched this year, here on the left hand side of my screen. Might be on the right hand side of your screen. A tree and someone swinging and some community members sitting on a bench. And it gives you a good idea of some of what the community believes in, which is nature and the sense of bringing people together for community.

So often when I talk about district councils, many community members don't know what I'm talking about. It sounds like we might be government or we might be a department from the city of Saint Paul. We are actually a small nonprofit organization and part of our work is to bring community members together, not only to enjoy each other's company and to celebrate community, but to help make decisions about our district, to advocate for those who are not able, or are unavailable to do so themselves (so this might be because someone is unable to make a meeting, or if they may not understand some of the issues that are happening that may directly affect them and their families). To listen to community members needs (so we hear from community members on such issues as the increased need for safety on McKnight Road, or more stores available at Sun Ray Shopping Center, and those are all the types of issues that we work on getting resolved. Sometimes it can take a little bit of time, like a month, and sometimes this is years and years of a long process, so it all depends on what's happening. We communicate between government and residents. We work most closely with our local city council member, who is currently Jane Prince. We're in city council Ward 7. But we also talk with our state representatives, and our state senator, and our county commissioner, so the most important thing we can do is have a good idea of what's happening in the community that's important for community members to know, and especially if we want them to weigh in and give feedback on whatever that happens to be. And we help build community leaders. So, our ultimate goal is to have community members like you stepping forward and taking the lead on some of these big issues and projects.

So here is a list of the work that we've done over the past year. As I've said, we advocate for residents needs, we weigh in on businesses that might be coming to the community, housing, and transportation. Transportation especially related to our bus lines in our community. There are often a lot of community concerns with that. I'm sure you probably have some of your own, and we're always happy to take that information and pass it along. We connect with youth and families. We have a newer project that started a year ago called Youth Organizers. Mostly for middle school students. And that's a way for us to educate the next generation of community organizers and activists. And we ask these young people to do essentially the same things that we expect our board members to

do, which is to play an active role in decision making and tackling issues in our district. Help serve community elders. And we do that through a lot of our regular work and also partnering with great organizations like East Side Elders. We also partner with churches, businesses, and other organizations. Our role is to be kind of an in-between group, so it doesn't make sense for us to be starting our own programs and projects if someone else is already doing it; we want to lift up the work that they're doing. We examine ways to maintain a healthy environment and that's important because we want there to be clean soil, clean air, clean water for our community members. And we also help manage, or rather oversee two of our community gardens. We only have two in our district. Maybe about 70 gardeners. And of all ages and all ethnicities, and we want people to get out there growing their own healthy food and being active outside. This is really just an overview of some of what we do, but as a district council we really do a little bit of everything.

Here's a map of our district. You can see here there are four neighborhoods in our district: Eastview, Conway, Battle Creek (which is what we're usually known as) and Highwood Hills, which is the neighborhood community that is furthest south. Our district is physically the largest one in the city. We have a lot of space – we go all the way down to the Mississippi River. We encompass Pig's Eye Regional Park and lake. So we're a really big district and we also have about 20,000 residents, so a lot of people and a lot of space.

Here you can see some pictures of different activities we've done over the last, probably, ten months. In this upper left hand corner you can see some of our really strong volunteers who helped with food distribution last month, the end of August, where we would load boxes into people's cars so that they could have some fresh food at home. In your upper right hand corner, or it could be your upper left, you see a picture of some of our community members speaking at a peace vigil to bring people together and help promote healing in our community. On the bottom you'll actually see people wearing winter coats. Which this weekend felt like we might have needed, especially yesterday on Labor Day. That was a meeting about transportation and the buses that are serving our community. That meeting was last winter – seems like a really long time ago, and it's already approaching winter again. And then on the other side you can see U.S. Senator Tina Smith wearing a pink top. She visited us at Sunray to hear more

about the needs of the community, including some of the riots that happened and some of the activities surrounding Sunray. It is our community hub, so as a district council, we are actively working to see more businesses at Sunray to make the space safer and cleaner for everybody.

So we are always happy to answer your questions and provide you any assistance that you might need. And we also welcome you to join a committee or even sit it on committee meetings or board meetings and activities. Right now, everything is online, which is unfortunate. It's not ideal for most of us, but the one good thing about it being available online is that it allows more people to participate. So you're not having to drive to Battle Creek recreation center, you can tune in. And I'm more than happy to help you figure that out if you'd like to join us.

Our website is listed here: Southeastside.org. There is information there about our work and current activities. And lastly we do have a monthly newsletter that we email out to community members and anybody that signs up. And we provide a lot of information on social media, especially Facebook. But by getting our newsletter, you usually get select information that's really important to our district and it helps give you that information in advance. Because on social media, stuff can happen so quickly and move through so quickly that you might not see it all. We're also on Next Door and that's a good way to find out what's going on in our area.

So we welcome you to call or email us, ask questions, check in. We're happy to assist you any way we can. Thanks so much for joining me this afternoon.