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Tenant Association Projects in the Iowa City Area: Practicum Report

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Tenant Association Projects in the Iowa City Area

Practicum Report

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Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa

April 2018
Abstract

The purpose of this report is to discuss the process and outcomes of two tenant association projects led by the Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa (CWJ). Since October 2017, CWJ has developed tenant associations in two low-income housing complexes located in the Iowa City area: Breckenridge Mobile Home Park and Pheasant Ridge Apartments. The Center for Worker Justice is concerned with the immediate living condition issues faced by low-income tenants. CWJ became involved in Breckenridge because of an issue with drinking water quality and in Pheasant Ridge because of an issue with cockroach infestations. CWJ helped both communities develop tenant associations to address the issues. Community organizing theory, planning theory, equity planning, and Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation all informed the tenant association projects. CWJ’s short-term goals were to form tenant associations in each community; organize, unite, empower, and educate residents in both communities; and hold meetings between residents and property owners. CWJ’s long-term goal was to improve the living conditions in both housing complexes. By April 2018 CWJ achieved the short-term goals. However, the living condition issues remain in both communities. Tenant empowerment and education at the micro level; direct dialogue between tenants and property owners, managers, and politicians at the mezzo level; and policy change at the macro level can all further the goals of both tenant associations in the future.
Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 4
Literature Review .................................................................................................................................. 4
Problem Statement ................................................................................................................................. 10
Objectives ............................................................................................................................................... 13
Methodology, Strategies and Actions ..................................................................................................... 15
   Breckenridge Tenant Association ...................................................................................................... 16
   Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association .................................................................................................. 24
Findings .................................................................................................................................................. 34
   Breckenridge Tenant Association Evaluation ................................................................................... 34
   Mobile Home Park Policy ................................................................................................................... 37
Policy Recommendation ....................................................................................................................... 40
Discussion .............................................................................................................................................. 42
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................. 45
Appendix ................................................................................................................................................ 48
References .............................................................................................................................................. 53
Introduction

“What makes community organizing especially attractive is the faith it places in the ability of the poor to make decisions for themselves,” said Paul Wellstone, U.S. Senator of Minnesota from 1991 to 2002. Community organizing empowers the disempowered. In Iowa City, the Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa (CWJ) is the most prominent community organizing agency. CWJ’s mission is to unite low-wage workers in Eastern Iowa across race and immigration status to achieve social and economic justice through education, organizing, direct services and community alliances. My final practicum as a Master’s student at the University of Iowa has been with CWJ for the 2017-2018 academic year. CWJ is currently organizing around the following priority issues: Just workplaces, decent and affordable housing, and civil rights. In 2017, CWJ focused largely on the priority issue of decent and affordable housing.

The voice of low-wage earning tenants is too often neglected, intentionally or unintentionally, from the affordable housing discussion. CWJ stands alongside low-income residents forging a new path toward respecting tenants’ rights and including residents’ voices in the fight for improved housing conditions, livability, health, welfare, quality of life, and dignity. My job, as a practicum intern at CWJ, was to help organize tenants of two low-income housing complexes in Iowa City into two new tenant associations. The purpose of the tenant associations was to better include residents’ voices in Iowa City’s affordable housing dialogue and empower low-income tenants through improved living conditions, health and welfare, and greater dignity. This report will discuss the process and outcomes of these two tenant association projects.

Literature Review

The literature review discusses community organizing theory, planning theory, equity planning, Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation, empowerment theory, and conflict theory.
Community Organizing Theory

The predominant theory I relied upon was community organizing theory. Two specific approaches within community organizing theory that I used to inform my practice were the Conflict Approach and the Blended Model. According to Weil et al. (2013), the goal of Conflict Organizing is to win real, immediate, concrete improvements for a community, whereas the goal of the Blended Model is to create a mutually-beneficial partnership between community members and the power structure. Both approaches recommend directing action at the power holder, which may be a company owner, landlord or politician. Another critical tactic of Community Organizing theory is one-on-one meetings (Weil et al., 2013). One-on-one meetings are a tactic used in Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), as well, to build relationships. The most important practice ABCD informs is relationship building. According to Green et al. (2009), power is in relationships. A group cannot function well without good relationships. A group of organized tenants is more powerful than an individual tenant. Relationships can be enhanced through simple yet often overlooked ABCD skills, such as active listening and spending time in a community.

Leadership development is an integral strategy of community organizing theory. In particular, issue-driven community organizing cannot be sustained without leadership from within the impacted community. According to Homan (2011), the core group of leaders ought to consist of six to ten people who are in steady communication with each other. A mixture of leaders from within the community and without the community is healthy (Homan, 2011).

A final important component of community organizing theory is Saul Alinsky’s theory of issue-driven community organizing. According to Alinsky’s theory, community organizing is a form of social action in which a network of people work to change institutional policies and
practices (Weil et al., 2013). Policy change is one of the intended outcomes of Alinskian-style organizing. In terms of issue-driven community organizing, Alinsky advises the selection of a community issue that is winnable and non-divisive (Weil et al., 2013).

**Planning Theory**

Communicative rationality and American pragmatism combined in the 1960s to inform planning theory (Fainstein, 2005). Jürgen Habermas helped establish the new direction for the field of planning. Under communicative planning, the planner’s primary role is to listen to people’s stories and attempt to forge a consensus among different viewpoints. Planners lead by forging a certain level of consensus and ensuring that no interest dominates the process (Fainstein, 2005). Also under communicative planning, people’s perception of a problem is the problem, regardless of the data. However, data is important in grounding people’s perceptions.

Today, planning theory is influenced by agonistic pluralism, which counters communicative planning’s principle of consensus. Agonistic pluralism deals with the issue of power, which is central to conflicts between tenants and property owners and managers. According to Pløger (2004), the communicative planning principle of consensus building does not solve the problems citizens – especially low-income tenants – face. Consensus steering denies citizens their democratic right to use strife and conflict as a way to improve living standards. Strife and conflict between tenants and property owners is unavoidable, which makes strife and conflict necessary to the democratic process of continual progress. In sum, Pløger (2004) encourages planners to utilize agonistic pluralism to inform the “ongoing, never-ending, critical and mutual inspiring dialogues between politicians, planning authorities and citizens” (p. 87). Fainstein (2005) elaborates on the role of power in planning theory.
According to Fainstein (2005), power imbalances between tenants and landlords can be addressed through communicative planning and agonistic pluralism. However, under communicative planning, the powerful can more easily repress communication that would lead to redistribution of power. Therefore, planning theory ought to heavily consider the importance of conflict, strife and tension in the process of power redistribution, which will grant the powerless a larger voice in the democratic process of creating a just city (Fainstein, 2005).

Finally, Inch et al. (2017) provide insight on the topic of power imbalance, opposition, and conflict in the planning process. According to responses from a roundtable of planners, conflict between tenants and developers or owners can lead to mutual learning. Conflicts of interest are unavoidable, as described by agonistic pluralism, and thus ought to be embraced by planners. Power can only truly be redistributed when interests are allowed to conflict through a fair process that “offers opportunities for diverse and conflicting community members to interface more powerfully with bureaucracy and for mutual learning at that interface” (Inch et al., 2017, p. 483). Communicative planning informs planners about the practice of consensus building, but agonistic pluralism informs planners about the importance of conflict/strife between tenants and property owners/managers when consensus cannot be reached due to power imbalances.

**Equity Planning**

Community organizing theory – and to an extent planning theory – informs the strategies and actions CWJ uses when organizing in low-income housing communities like Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge. However, the Equity Planning framework provides the larger reasoning for why an urban planning student would seek to become involved in the first place with a mobile home park and project-based Section 8 complex. Equity planning is a framework in which
planners advocate for the poor and working class by redistributing resources and power to them from the local elites (Brooks, 2002). Typically, equity planning is carried out by local government planners. Iowa City currently has an extremely progressive city council, which makes equity planning more feasible at the moment. The city council is largely supportive of affordable housing initiatives, a sign of equity planning in action.

I see myself as an emerging Planner and Social Worker who is guided by equity planning principles. Brooks (2002) highlights my role with the Center for Worker Justice: “The spirit of advocacy lives on most directly in the efforts of the growing number of planners who choose to work for private nonprofit organizations that deal with such issues” (p. 116). Likewise, as Norman Krumholz (1982) writes, the profession of city planning has an ethical responsibility to practice equity planning. The Planning Code of Ethics holds the planning profession to an ethical standard, and the Social Work Code of Ethics holds the social work profession to a high ethical standard, as well. As an emerging planning and social work professional that interned with the Center for Worker Justice, equity planning was a guiding framework in my practice.

Advocacy planning is related to equity planning. Paul Davidoff formulated advocacy planning in the 1960s as a pluralistic and inclusive planning theory meant to represent the poor and vulnerable in cities (Brooks, 2002). I also relied on advocacy planning theory in my practice.

**Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation**

Arnstein’s (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation is a helpful model in determining how community organizations can involve citizens in a planning and decision-making process. Arnstein’s ladder is particularly important in tandem with issue-driven community organizing. Community members must be involved in the plans and decisions that impact their community (Arnstein, 1969). The eight rungs of Arnstein’s ladder, from least involvement to most
involvement, are manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. Community organizing agencies, such as the Center for Worker Justice, want to avoid the rungs of the ladder that fall under ‘nonparticipation’. Community organizing expediency ought to be balanced with resident participation. Knowing the pros and cons of the top three rungs in Arnstein’s Ladder (citizen control, delegated power, and partnership) is important for community organizers [See Model]. Tenant associations are a method of encouraging more citizen participation and moving a group of people higher up Arnstein’s ladder, from ‘nonparticipation’ to ‘citizen control’ (Arnstein, 1969).

**Empowerment Theory**

Finally, I will briefly describe why and how I used two theories more specific to Social Work. First, I used Empowerment Theory as a guiding theory in my practice at CWJ. Empowerment Theory provides a framework for promoting human liberation, outlines specific strategies to achieve liberation and social justice, and utilizes a strengths-based approach rather than needs-based approach (Weil et al., 2013). For this reason, Empowerment Theory was a useful tool for engaging with the Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge communities – two communities that have been disempowered to various degrees. Empowerment Theory is closely tied to Equity Planning and Arnstein’s Ladder. Homan (2011) discusses important strategies, actions and tactics related to Empowerment Theory.
One important strategy related to Empowerment Theory – and highly applicable to issue-driven community organizing theory – is negotiation. According to Homan (2011), “negotiation is a good strategy to use when the response community is willing to work toward an agreement and your prospects for working out a favorable settlement will not be significantly improved in the practical future” (p. 393). Specific tactics of negotiation include being prepared, knowing your facts, having a clear goal, being willing to renegotiate, understanding the other side’s needs, involving third parties, and being willing to walk (Homan, 2011). If done well, negotiation strategy can contribute greatly to the empowerment of a community.

**Conflict Theory**

Second, Conflict Theory informed my practice at CWJ. Conflict Theory is interested in two phenomenon – power and change (Robbins et al., 1998). Conflict Theory assumes that conflict between the powerless and powerful leads to social change. Karl Marx’s theory of class conflict is a prominent example of Conflict Theory. Conflict Theory influences Community Organizing Theory in many regards, particularly the Conflict Approach of community organizing. Conflict Theory also informs agonistic pluralism. I mostly relied on Conflict Theory to contextualize my practice – that is, inform why a group of residents in a mobile home park had little power to improve their living conditions or why a group of residents in a low-income apartment complex were unable to solve a health and welfare issue. I used Conflict Theory to understand how power could be redistributed from the property owners/managers to the tenants.

**Problem Statement**

Tenants living in lower-income housing complexes experience health and welfare issues on a daily basis that impact their quality of life. In particular, Breckenridge Mobile Home Park and Pheasant Ridge Apartments are two low-income housing complexes in the Iowa City area
which face daily living condition issues. The Center for Worker Justice became involved in Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge in September 2017. In Breckenridge, approximately 85% of the residents have not been consuming their tap water since late summer of 2017, according to a survey conducted by CWJ in November 2017. In Pheasant Ridge, tenants report many apartment units being infested with cockroaches since the property began remodeling in 2017, according to another CWJ survey conducted in March 2018.

The Center for Worker Justice tested water from six tap sources in Breckenridge Mobile Home Park in the fall 2017 and five more in the spring 2018. In the fall, two sources tested positive for E. coli, in the spring no sources tested positive for E. coli. Yet, the drinking water in many homes is discolored and has an odor, according to the survey of 21 residents conducted by CWJ in November 2017 [See Table 1].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Do you drink the water in your home?</th>
<th>If not, when did you stop drinking your water?</th>
<th>Do you use the water to cook?</th>
<th>Do you use the water to shower and wash clothes?</th>
<th>Does your water smell?</th>
<th>If so, what time of day does your water smell worst?</th>
<th>Does your water have a color?</th>
<th>If so, what kind of color does your water have?</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Midday</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Morning, Midday and Evening</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Evening</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Since living here</td>
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<td>2 months</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>2 months ago</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Morning, Midday and Evening</td>
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<td>2-3 years</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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|       | 86%  | 38%  | 5%   | 81%  | 43%  |

Table 1. Breckenridge water quality survey from November 2017.
During spring 2018, the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Iowa determined the water and wastewater pipe system in Breckenridge Mobile Home Park to be a major contributor to the drinking water quality problem. According to the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, the pipe system at Breckenridge is old, constructed of a rare material, and in need of reconstruction.

In the spring 2018, the Center for Worker Justice surveyed 21 Pheasant Ridge tenants about cockroaches in their apartments [See Table 2]. According to the Illinois Department of Health (2018), “Cockroaches are known to transfer disease pathogens, such as the various bacteria that produce food poisoning in humans, by contaminating food, food preparation surfaces, dishes and eating utensils. How many human gastrointestinal disorders are attributed to the mechanical transmission of pathogens by cockroaches has not been fully assessed, but remains a valid health concern. However, the roach’s greatest impact on human health may be its ability to trigger asthma. Cockroach nymphs grow by periodically shedding their ‘skin’ (the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1) Cockroaches? (yes/no)</th>
<th>2) How bad? (1-5 scale, 5 is bad)</th>
<th>3) How long? (years)</th>
<th>4) Where in apartment?</th>
<th>5) Children?</th>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Kitchen, bedrooms, dining room, living room, bathroom</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Pheasant Ridge cockroach survey from March 2018.
Fragments of their exoskeletons, along with bits of cockroach feces, serve as antigens (foreign protein) that, when inhaled, cause allergic and asthmatic reactions.” Children are particularly prone to the allergens and asthmatic reactions. Cockroaches can spread easily in apartment complexes through cracks, crevices, and water pipes. Despite a clean apartment, cockroaches may infest an area if other apartments in the building are infested.

Tenants of Breckenridge, Pheasant Ridge, and similar housing complexes in Iowa City experience sub-standard living conditions as a result of: 1) Issues in the complex that stem from a power imbalance between tenants and property owners, 2) A lack of organization, awareness, and unity among tenants, and 3) Iowa laws that benefit property owners above tenants. These laws have facilitated a transformation of the mobile home park real estate industry in Iowa, in particular.

**Objectives**

The Center for Worker Justice’s (2018) main institutional change goal for 2017 was to preserve and improve low-income housing options. This institutional change goal remains a top priority for CWJ in 2018. The Center for Worker Justice is leading three housing campaigns in Iowa City to protect and improve the housing options for low income residents. The three campaigns are focused on the development of tenant associations in Forest View Mobile Home Park, Breckenridge Mobile Home Park, and Pheasant Ridge Apartments.

My final practicum project with CWJ focused on the creation, development, and sustenance of tenant associations in two of those three communities: Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge. The Center for Worker Justice’s short-term goals for Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge were to form tenant associations in each community; organize, unite, empower, and educate residents in both communities; and hold meetings between residents and property owners. CWJ’s
long-term goal is to improve the living conditions in both housing complexes. In particular, CWJ aims to make progress on the issue of poor drinking water quality in Breckenridge and the issue of cockroach infestations in Pheasant Ridge [See Logic Model].

Tenants of Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge are community partners in the Center for Worker Justice’s tenant association campaigns. Tenants of Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge wish to improve their communities’ living conditions, particularly the quality of drinking water and cockroach infestations, respectively. Tenant associations and tenant organizing are tools that can be used to achieve the community partners’ goals.

Tenant organizing began in the late 1800s in the United States with an increase in the rate of urbanization and the rise of industrial cities. Originally, tenants organized in cities around issues of eviction, rent increases, lack of heat, and dilapidation (Dreier, 1984). According to Thurber and Fraser (2015), tenant organizing specific to public housing dates back to 1933. Later and on a broader scale, tenant activism saw a wave of progress in the 1960s coupled with the
civil rights, poor people’s and student movements (Dreier, 1984). During the 1970s, three conditions led to more tenant activism: an increase in long-term tenancy, a decline in tenant transiency, and a growing number of tenants living in large complexes owned by absentee companies. The goal of the tenants’ movement that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s was to create public policy that viewed housing as a public utility and basic right (Dreier, 1984).

Nowhere was tenant activism more pronounced in the 1960s and 1970s than in San Francisco. Baranski (2007) describes the principles and ideals of San Francisco’s tenant organizing effort. Tenant activism in San Francisco was in part inspired by civil rights discourses that called for fair housing and employment. Tenants relied on principles of cultural and racial diversity by bringing together a diverse population of tenants in the fight for better housing and services. Low-income tenants and public housing tenants led San Francisco’s local tenant movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Baranski, 2007).

Half a century later, tenant organizing still gives low-income tenants in particular a voice in the political process, though the organizing effort is almost always challenging and uphill. Tenant activism and tenant associations can transform communities. “Tenant organizing not only centers around the material goals that residents seek, but also opens up the possibility for a politics that can counter epistemological injustices, and imagine a present that could be otherwise” (Thurber and Fraser, 2015, p. 6).

**Methodology, Strategies and Actions**

The strategies and actions I used throughout my practicum project were shaped by theories mentioned in the literature review as well as guidance from the Center for Worker Justice staff and board. In particular, I relied on community organizing theory. However, academic theory does not always inform practice in the real world. In instances that could not be
informed by academic theory, I relied on the expertise and guidance of organizers at the Center for Worker Justice. Ultimately, the strategies and actions discussed below were selected and applied to CWJ’s tenant association campaigns in order to address the power imbalance between Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge residents and their respective owners; organize, educate, and unite residents of both communities; and work to address the issues in both communities.

The logic model included in the Goals section indicates the anticipated short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes of the Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge tenant association projects. In this sense, the logic model was used to evaluate progress in achieving the short-term and medium-term outcomes.

My practicum advisor in Urban & Regional Planning, Professor Charles Connerly, advised me to keep an up-to-date log of my intern experience at the Center for Worker Justice. Beginning in August 2017, I kept a journal to record the strategies and actions I used throughout my practicum project. The journal has been included and edited below.

**Breckenridge Tenant Association**

Breckenridge Mobile Home Park is located at 4494 Taft Avenue SE, just south of Highway 6 and approximately one mile southeast of Iowa City limits [See Appendix, Figure 1]. Breckenridge contains 95 trailer homes. In 2014, the former local owner of the mobile home park sold the property to a national corporation headquartered in Colorado. According to the Johnson County Assessor (2018), the manufactured home park was constructed in 1959 and remained under local ownership until June 2014. Residents of the mobile home park are predominantly Hispanic or White, families, and lower income.
In September 2017 Rafael Morataya, my supervisor at CWJ, became aware of a rising issue in Breckenridge related to water quality and management. At this point, I first became involved in Breckenridge beginning with research on this issue. The following week, Rafael and I met with residents at Breckenridge. Rafael and I met with Johnson County Supervisor Rod Sullivan the day before our meeting in Breckenridge to discuss the issue of water quality in mobile home parks. At the meeting in Breckenridge, Rafael and I talked with about twenty residents to hear their concerns. Most of the residents at the meeting informed us they were not drinking their water or using it to cook.

We sampled the kitchen sink water from one home and took the sample to the State Hygienic Lab for testing. Rafael and I found the Breckenridge residents to be organized and concerned, two qualities that indicated CWJ should become involved in the community. The water sample from the mobile home then tested positive for E. coli which drew us further into the issue.

According to Arnstein’s (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation, at the outset of CWJ’s involvement with Breckenridge our organization was on the ‘consultation’ rung – informing residents of their options and our services. However, after more time organizing in the Breckenridge community, CWJ began to encourage resident leadership and responsibility, which
placed CWJ on the ‘partnership’ and ‘delegated power’ rungs (Arnstein, 1969). Movement up Arnstein’s ladder from ‘nonparticipation’ to ‘citizen power’ took patience, though.

The Breckenridge residents who had taken the lead in the community came to the CWJ office and visited with CWJ in early October. We learned more about the living conditions from the residents and also began to involve more CWJ allies in the campaign. Three or four CWJ board members attended the meeting. At the meeting we determined our next steps, guided by community organizing theory: 1) Research, 2) Target and organize, and 3) Action. I offered to help collect more water samples for testing and draft a letter of complaint on behalf of the Breckenridge residents. Rafael and I collected six more water samples from the community. Two of six tested positive for E. coli, which was enough to grab the attention of the DNR and certain elected officials. On October 5, we met with Breckenridge residents again. The meeting was held outside of a resident’s home. Senator Joe Bolkcom was in attendance, along with approximately 35 residents. At the meeting we decided to meet regularly and begin formalizing the Breckenridge Tenant Association. Residents also signed the letter I had drafted and finalized. The Senator sent the letter to the Department of Natural Resources, Johnson County Public Health, property owner, and property manager the next day. As Alinskian theory informed, water quality was a good issue to focus on because it was winnable and non-debatable (Weil et al., 2013).

In mid-October, Rafael Morataya, Mazahir Salih (Organizer, Center for Worker Justice), and I met with Dr. Peter Thorne, Director of the UI College of Public Health’s Department of Occupational & Environmental Health, and Dr. Nicole Novak, postdoctoral research scholar at the Prevention Research Center in the College of Public Health. Both Dr. Thorne and Dr. Novak were very helpful in dissecting the Breckenridge water issue from a public health perspective.
Dr. Novak is a recent board member of CWJ and has volunteered extensive time on the Breckenridge water quality issue. Later that day, we met in Breckenridge with residents again. I created a survey for the meeting to hand out to residents. The purpose of the survey was to analyze the water quality in Breckenridge [See Appendix]. Initially, 16 residents completed the survey. We discovered that 94% of those residents were not drinking their water, 50% not using it to cook, 81% had an odor in their water, 56% a color, and residents were spending from $10 to $50 per week on water from the grocery store.

At this meeting with Breckenridge residents, we determined that we were going to create a list of demands for management at our next meeting, and that we were going to schedule a time to meet with the manager and owner soon. Community organizing theory directs action against power holders (Weil et al., 2013). Previously that week, DNR and a representative of the corporate owner responded to the letter of complaint and visited Breckenridge to test the water in person. The source water was determined to be safe, although we learned that the system pipes were in a state of disrepair. Senator Bolkcom assured residents the water was safe to consume, although most residents and CWJ remained skeptical. The meeting was a positive step, nonetheless. The Breckenridge community had the attention of the DNR and property owner, two power holders. The next goal was to create a list of demands so as to have one clear voice from the tenant association before we organized negotiations with the property owner.

On October 19, CWJ met in the Breckenridge community. The meeting was smaller, with perhaps ten to twelve people in attendance. We considered this to be the core group of engaged residents and allies. According to Homan (2011), the core group of leaders in an organizing effort ought to consist of six to ten people. At the meeting, we discussed the water treatment and monitoring options that Breckenridge residents could take. We also created a list of demands for
the Breckenridge Tenant Association to present to the corporate owner at the meeting scheduled for November 11, 2017.

The Breckenridge Tenant Association met in Breckenridge in late October. Two Johnson County Board of Supervisors, Rod Sullivan and Kurt Friese, attended the meeting with approximately ten to twelve residents, again. Rod Sullivan and Kurt Friese’s involvement represented Equity Planning principles. Supervisors Sullivan and Friese discussed the root of the water quality issue in mobile home parks such as Breckenridge: State legislation. Policy change is one of the intended outcomes of Alinskian-style organizing (Weil et al., 2013). Policy change would help with the water quality issue in Breckenridge. The mobile home park was not alone. Des Moines Register reporter, Lee Rood, wrote a series of articles beginning in 2010 called “Trapped”. The articles highlighted the bleak living conditions in trailer home parks across Iowa. The root of the issue appeared to be with state laws that benefit mobile home owners above mobile home tenants and renters. Breckenridge is another mobile home park that has been on the receiving end of poor landlord-tenant legislation. However, Breckenridge created a unique opportunity to improve conditions through the formation of a tenant association.

On November 4, CWJ hosted a tenant rights workshop intended to train low-income tenants about their rights as renters. Iowa Legal Aid facilitated the workshop. Twenty people attended the workshop, including several residents from Breckenridge. On November 9, Rafael Morataya, Nicole Novak, and I invited Breckenridge residents to the meeting on November 11 with the corporate owner, RV Horizons. We also collected more water quality surveys. After door-knocking, we met with a handful of residents to prepare for the meeting with RV Horizons. The purpose of the meeting was to determine which residents would present which demands at the meeting.
On November 11, the Breckenridge Tenant Association met with two representatives from RV Horizons, Robert Thomas and Diane Sikes. The Center for Worker Justice and Breckenridge Tenant Association’s organizing strategies were directed at the owners and managers of the property, as informed by community organizing theory (Weil et al., 2013). The meeting was 2.5 hours. The meeting began with the Breckenridge residents reading their list of demands. The Breckenridge Tenant Association came with five clear demands of the owner: 1) Clean, drinkable, reliable water 2) safe, well-maintained roads 3) safe environment for children 4) improved garbage removal process and 5) respectful and responsive management.

Approximately 30 residents attended. Many residents attended after seeing the flyers we distributed the Thursday before the meeting.

Approximately ten allies were in attendance, including faith allies and Senator Bolkcom. According to Suffolk University (2018), an ally is a person who is a member of an advantaged social group who takes a stand against oppression. With the two RV Horizons representatives, more than 40 people were at the meeting. After the presentation of demands, Robert from RV Horizons followed up with a response to the demands. He promised to make certain changes, including looking into new management and repairing the roads. Robert asked for 90 days to meet the residents’ demands. A follow-up meeting with Robert was scheduled for the week after Thanksgiving to look into the water issue on the property.

The first meeting between the Breckenridge Tenant Association and RV Horizons representatives was an example of agonistic pluralism. As agonistic pluralism informs, power can only truly be redistributed when interests are allowed to conflict through a fair process that “offers opportunities for diverse and conflicting community members to interface more powerfully with bureaucracy and for mutual learning at that interface” (Inch et al., 2017, p. 483).
The meeting was also an example of the consensus organizing strategy of negotiation (Homan, 2011). CWJ used negotiation tactics during the meeting between the property owner and the park residents. During the first round of negotiation, CWJ and the Breckenridge Tenant Association had a clear list of goals, involved third parties (such as local politicians and pastors), and were willing to escalate (Homan, 2011). The Breckenridge Tenant Association and property owner scheduled a follow-up meeting for December 20 in which residents were invited to see the changes to the community.

The week after Thanksgiving we received notice from a Breckenridge resident that the water line in the trailer park had ruptured. Though the notice from management to the residents was later than CWJ would have liked the notice in and of itself was a positive sign of our organizing efforts in the community. Management notified all residents of the water main rupture by posting notices on doors and erecting a large yellow sign near the park entrance.

In mid-December, CWJ met with three residents in Breckenridge. CWJ was informed that changes were happening on the property, but that many issues still remained. For example, the potholes had been fixed, but the water was still poor quality. We invited the residents to the meeting with Robert from RV Horizons on December 20. Numbers and momentum had dwindled in Breckenridge since the first meeting with RV Horizons in mid-November.

I text messaged all Breckenridge residents on the contact list to invite them to the meeting with RV Horizons on December 20. I prepared an agenda for the meeting focused on improvements, commitments, and continuing issues. On December 20, Robert of RV Horizons forgot about the meeting and did not attend. Approximately ten residents and five allies were ready for the meeting. The ‘no show’ was poor form, we agreed. The meeting was rescheduled for 6:00 pm the same day. I could not attend, but I text messaged residents about the change of
plans. According to residents and Rafael, the two representatives from RV Horizons were at the meeting on the evening of December 20. Approximately 20 residents attended. Apparently the meeting was intense and escalated quickly. Residents became angry with the owners and management. The meeting did not sound productive or helpful from the reports I heard from CWJ staff and Breckenridge residents. The relations were moving from Consensus Organizing to Conflict Organizing (Weil et al., 2013).

In January I interviewed four residents from Breckenridge for my Advanced Practicum Seminar course for the School of Social Work. I interviewed four residents who were involved in the Breckenridge Tenant Association. The interviews were used to evaluate the Breckenridge Tenant Association. The findings from the interviews will be further discussed in the Findings section of this report.

In late January, Rafael, Dr. Nicole Novak, a Breckenridge resident, and I met with a professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (CEE) in the College of Engineering and two of his students. CWJ was working to develop the leadership skills of that particular Breckenridge resident, a strategy in line with community organizing theory (Homan, 2011). We discussed a plan for CEE’s involvement in the water quality issue in Breckenridge. We scheduled a time for CEE to visit the mobile home park, examine the water system, and eventually collect samples. The three contacts from CEE were knowledgeable, helpful, and willing to contribute to the effort in Breckenridge. In mid-February, Rafael informed me that the CEE professor and his colleague visited Breckenridge. The professor determined that the waste water pipes in the mobile home park needed to be replaced. The water system overall was in poor condition, leading to greater potential for cross-contamination between waste water and drinking water in the community.
In early March, the CEE professor and his colleague collected five tap water samples from Breckenridge. Each sample tested clean in the State Hygienic Lab. CEE planned another sampling visit for later in the spring. The Center for Worker Justice decided to collect water samples to gather more information about the water quality problem. Data collection is a strategy of community organizing theory. Per one CWJ board member, the first step in an organizing campaign is problem identification. The next step is research, followed by coalition building, and finally action. Collection of evidence strengthens the organizing purpose regardless of the stage.

By mid-April 2018, this report’s due date, the Center for Worker Justice was continuing to organize in Breckenridge with the focus on drinking water quality. The organizing efforts were slower in the spring than in the fall. Center for Worker Justice organizers expressed interest in arranging a meeting between the property owner and tenant association, again.

**Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association**

Pheasant Ridge Apartments are located at 2626 Bartelt Road in Iowa City, directly east of West High School [See Appendix, Figure 1]. The apartment complex contains 248 apartment units between 32 buildings, ranging from one-bedroom to four-bedroom. After an interview with the Director of the Pheasant Ridge Neighborhood Center, I learned that the complex opened in 1971. The demographics of the apartment complex have changed over time. During the 1980s, the complex had a large Southeast Asian population. During the late 1990s and early 2000s is when the Sudanese population began to arrive. Today, the complex is a diverse mixture of ethnicities and immigrant groups. Fifty to 75 percent of the population is estimated to be English as a Second Language (ESL) speaking. According to a representative from the property company, Pheasant Ridge is under a project-based Section 8 contract with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development until 2033.
In September 2017, Rafael and I met with Sara Barron, Executive Director of the Johnson County Affordable Housing Coalition. One idea in particular stood out from that meeting: The creation of more tenant associations in Iowa City. According to Sara, tenant associations are good for both tenants and landlords. In September I also began working with Fatima Saeed, CWJ board member and resident of Pheasant Ridge, and Mai Salih, business student and former resident of Pheasant Ridge. We set a plan to begin organizing in Pheasant Ridge. Mai had 10 hours to volunteer for a leadership class and I had the opportunity to supervise her. We agreed to use the 10 hours as volunteer work organizing in Pheasant Ridge. My supervision of Mai was a leadership development strategy of community organizing theory (Homan, 2011).

By late September Mai Salih and I were organizing in Pheasant Ridge. We spent two hours door-knocking upon each visit to the community. Initially, our goal was to meet people, educate them about CWJ, collect contact information, and invite them to CWJ’s upcoming educational workshops. We estimated 50% of the Pheasant Ridge tenants to be Sudanese, meaning the majority of the tenants speak Arabic. Mai speaks Arabic and lived in Pheasant Ridge at one time. We formed a good duo for door-knocking.

In early October, CWJ became aware of a proposed rent increase in Pheasant Ridge. CWJ received a forwarded notice from a Pheasant Ridge tenant that the property was proposing to increase rents by $109 to $136 per month. Initially, CWJ was alarmed. We immediately began
researching the issue. Two days after the notice, we returned to Pheasant Ridge. Mai Salih, Fatima Saeed and I spent the afternoon discussing the rent increase, determining a plan of action, and door-knocking. Our plan of action, initially, was to collect signatures for the tenant association, draft a letter of opposition to the rent increase, and call a meeting to collect signatures for the letter. We had 30 days from the property’s notice to submit comments, which gave us approximately three weeks to organize. However, the first step was to continue door-knocking in Pheasant Ridge to form a tenant association to organize the community.

Throughout October Mai Salih and I visited Pheasant Ridge frequently. During door-knocking, we collected signatures for the tenant association and informed people about the proposed rent increase and CWJ’s plan. Pheasant Ridge tenants were confused about the proposed rent increase and who would be impacted, considering 231 of the 248 units at Pheasant Ridge pay rent based upon income. CWJ’s new plan of action was to obtain the proposed rent increase materials that the Pheasant Ridge management was planning to send to the Iowa Finance Authority, finalize a letter of opposition, collect tenant signatures on the letter, and deliver the letter. The tenant association in Pheasant Ridge was secondary at that moment. I determined that Mai and I were going to continue to collect signatures for the tenant association; but, we were going to slow down and spend more time with people and listen to them before we moved too fast with the tenant association. According to Green et al. (2009), power is in relationships. Relationships can be built through simply spending time in a community and listening to people.

On October 23, Mazahir Salih, three tenants from Pheasant Ridge (including Fatima Saeed), and I obtained the documents Pheasant Ridge management was planning to send to the Iowa Finance Authority to justify the proposed rent increase. That morning, Rafael and I had
talked with Sara Barron at the Johnson County Affordable Homes Coalition. Sara told us the rent increase could be beneficial for property maintenance, that the 231 of 248 units on subsidized rent would not be affected, and that the tone of CWJ’s letter needed to change. We decided that CWJ would still send a letter to the Iowa Finance Authority acting as a tenant representative, but the letter would include a tone of concern rather than opposition.

Mai Salih and I continued door-knocking in Pheasant Ridge, though more for the purpose of the tenant association than the rent increase. The rent increase issue had calmed down. Again, we determined to slow down, get to know people and their issues, and build the tenant association through one-on-one meetings. That afternoon, Fatima Saeed and I collected many signatures for the tenant association from Pheasant Ridge tenants. We talked with people as they were leaving the city council early voting booth at the Pheasant Ridge Neighborhood Center. Ultimately, the one-on-one meetings with residents of Pheasant Ridge laid the foundation for CWJ’s organizing effort to develop a tenant association in the community (Weil et al., 2013). CWJ met with people in their homes in Pheasant Ridge to help the tenant association form as democratically as possible. Door-knocking and one-on-one meetings allowed CWJ to uncover thematic issues in the community and unite people by shared experiences. Green el al. (2009) and Asset Based Community Development informed my practice of relationship building in Pheasant Ridge.

On Halloween, I finalized the letter of concern to send to the Iowa Finance Authority on behalf of certain tenants in Pheasant Ridge. We mailed and emailed the letter to the Iowa Finance Authority and property owner. More than anything, the letter was CWJ’s method of advocating for Pheasant Ridge. Through door-knocking we were able to educate tenants of
Pheasant Ridge, as well. I did my role to help with research, outreach, advocating and planning. The next challenge in Pheasant Ridge was to form a tenant association.

By November, Mai Salih and I had collected approximately 40 signatures for the Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association and contact information from 10 others. On November 4, CWJ hosted a tenant rights workshop facilitated by Iowa Legal Aid. Four residents from Pheasant Ridge attended. Four more would have attended but got lost with driving directions. The week after Thanksgiving we established a plan for Pheasant Ridge. The first tenants’ meeting was scheduled for December 18. The purpose of the meeting would be to discuss the idea of a tenant association, hear resident concerns, and plan as a group. As with the Breckenridge Tenant Association, a tenant association in Pheasant Ridge would move residents up the rungs of Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969). In November I learned that a former resident of Pheasant Ridge attempted to organize a tenant association while he was still living in the community. He could not sustain the association, which gave me concern for our ability to sustain the association. He raised an important point about tenant association sustainability without outside guidance.

After a discussion with my Social Work practicum advisor, Ben Woodworth, one point in particular stood out to include in this report. With regard to citizen participation strategies, different cultures will call for different strategies. Participation strategies that work for City Planners in predominantly White, English-speaking communities may not work for the Pheasant Ridge or Breckenridge communities. Culturally, these two communities are atypical of Iowa City. Therefore, participation strategies were adjusted for cultural differences.

In mid-December, Fatima, Mai, and I met to plan the first Pheasant Ridge tenant meeting. We planned an initial agenda, and decided on text messages and flyers to advertise the meeting -
in English and Arabic. I met briefly with Brian Loring, Director of the Pheasant Ridge Neighborhood Center, and he agreed to provide space for the meeting. Two days before the meeting in Pheasant Ridge, I canvassed in the community to promote the meeting. I finalized the flyer with Mai Salih, in English and Arabic. From the door-knocking, I was encouraged for the potential turnout at the first tenant association meeting.

On December 18, we held our first Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association meeting. I spent the day preparing for the meeting. At the meeting, only a few people were there by 5:00 pm. I was afraid it would be a low turnout. However, slowly but surely people came. By 5:45 pm the room was full - approximately 20 people attended. In terms of cultural differences in participation strategy, the slow turnout was because of the evening prayer time for Muslims, which I should have accounted for. After a round of introductions, Fatima Saeed and I introduced CWJ and our work with two other tenant associations in Iowa City. We explained why a tenant association would be good in Pheasant Ridge. We opened the conversation up to residents - to hear the issues and concerns in the community.

The discussion was good. I took notes. Fatima, Mai and I facilitated the meeting and involved nearly everyone. Finally, we closed the meeting with a plan to meet again on January 8, 2018. The group unanimously voted to form the tenant association. We left understanding the tenant association needed more people to be successful. During the meeting I acted as the facilitator. The following day I typed the list of issues from the tenant meeting and determined a schedule for the Pheasant Ridge campaign in the spring.

On January 8, the Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association held its second meeting at the Pheasant Ridge Neighborhood Center. No residents arrived at the scheduled time of 5:00 pm. By 5:30, five residents were in attendance, plus a Neighborhood Center staff member, Mazahir
Salih, and I. Mazahir and I conducted the meeting. We went through the issues discussed at the last meeting, then discussed new issues that had arisen. The challenge posed was to keep interest and continue working in the community without high community buy-in. The plan we created was to do more research on specific issues and focus our attention on one issue in particular. We decided to focus our time and energy on the issue of cockroaches, considering almost every unit reported an infestation to us. We decided to focus on the most pressing issue.

One week following the second Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association meeting, Mazahir, Rafael and I talked about a plan for the Pheasant Ridge project. Again, our decision was to focus on the issue of cockroaches. According to Alinskian community organizing theory, winnable and non-divisive issues are good for organizing (Weil et al., 2013). Therefore, widespread cockroaches are a good issue to organize around. I offered to create a survey to collect information from tenants about the cockroach issue. I contacted Medo Mohamed, a volunteer who was willing to help with the work in Pheasant Ridge. Later that week, I met with Medo. We planned to work together in Pheasant Ridge until May. We planned weekly times to work in Pheasant Ridge, to begin with surveying residents about the cockroaches. As with our previous volunteer, Mai Salih, Medo showed leadership potential. Community organizing theory urges leadership development (Weil et al., 2013). CWJ determined to develop Medo as a leader in the Pheasant Ridge campaign. Equity planning theory also influenced the Pheasant Ridge campaign. Mazahir Salih was elected to the Iowa City Council in November 2017. Equity planning was on full display with her and CWJ’s involvement in the Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association, though she was representing CWJ and not the City Council (Brooks, 2002; Krumholz, 1982).

In late January, Medo and I went to Pheasant Ridge to survey residents about the cockroach problem. In two hours we surveyed twelve people, only one of whom did not have
cockroaches. As we were nearly done surveying for the day, the property manager confronted us and asked us to leave. Initially, he was confrontational and suspicious. We did not ask for his permission before beginning to organize in the community. However, Medo and I talked to him, introduced ourselves, and explained ourselves. We agreed to meet and talk about the cockroach problem at another time. We discussed the option of management and tenants working together to address the problem of cockroaches. I scheduled a time for Medo, Mazahir, and I to meet with the property manager. We knew the property manager was one of the power holders in Pheasant Ridge (Weil et al., 2013).

On February 1, Medo, Mazahir, the property manager, and I met in Pheasant Ridge to continue the conversation from the previous encounter. Medo, Mazahir, and I introduced ourselves and CWJ’s intentions in the community. We met for over an hour. The meeting was helpful in breaking the ice between management in Pheasant Ridge and CWJ. The management agreed to collaborate with CWJ to work on a solution for the cockroach problem in the community. The meeting was an example of the consensus organizing strategy of negotiation with a power holder (Homan, 2011). We used negotiation tactics. We presented our goal for the community, listened, did our research and information-gathering beforehand, and aimed high. However, we were not willing to walk away, which was a flaw in our negotiation strategy. The property manager granted us permission to continue with the cockroach survey.

On February 20, I met with Brian Loring, Director of the Pheasant Ridge Neighborhood Center. We discussed the history of Pheasant Ridge; relations between property management, NCJC, and tenants; and collaboration in the future. On February 22, Rafael, Medo Mohamed, Mazahir, and I planned a strategy for Pheasant Ridge. Rafael, using his organizing experience, suggested we involve more residents and empower tenants to meet with the property manager.
Medo and I planned to contact Pheasant Ridge tenants, meet with them, and eventually organize a meeting between the property manager and the tenants. However, Medo and I met the following week and adjusted the plan. We decided to continue the process of bridging the gap between tenants and property management. We determined to pass translated flyers about cockroaches and educate tenants about the health concerns of cockroaches. The challenge would be to keep pressure on property management while creating more urgency amongst tenants.

After consulting with Rafael, Mazahir, and Medo, I called the property manager of Pheasant Ridge on March 8. I took an aggressive approach in the conversation to understand why the property manager had not fulfilled his end of the bargain. The conversation was divisive, mostly due to me. However, we settled on a date to meet and agreements to fulfill before the meeting. After the conversation, I consulted with Mazahir. Mazahir let me know we would still try to work with the property manager, but after the meeting with him we would have to determine whether or not to escalate the organizing efforts in the community. Escalation is a community organizing tactic often used in conflict organizing.

Later in March, I consulted with Mazahir and Rafael. Rafael advised us to be prepared to escalate the situation with the property manager in Pheasant Ridge. Our plan was to meet with the property manager and express our interest in working together, but to be prepared to walk away. Our alternative option would be to write a letter to the property owner and city about the cockroach problem.

Mazahir and I discussed another important topic before our meeting with the Pheasant Ridge property manager. We changed our plan the day of the meeting. We were still willing to walk away and escalate. However, Mazahir and I agreed that a new priority would be organizing residents. We established a goal to organize 50 tenants of Pheasant Ridge to collect evidence
about cockroaches, speak out about the problem, and feel supported by CWJ. Empowerment theory informed the new strategy. CWJ’s mission is based upon empowering low-income tenants, not advocating for low-income tenants. I talked with several Pheasant Ridge tenants over the phone two days before the meeting with the property management. I informed people of the need to collect evidence and spread the word. One tenant sent a video of cockroaches in his apartment. The cockroaches in this particular unit were widespread. More evidence of this kind would provide a strong argument about the cockroach problem.

On March 22, Mazahir and I met with the Pheasant Ridge property manager. The meeting was fairly calm and respectful. We agreed to translate information about cockroaches into Arabic. Mazahir and I also planned to focus on working with the residents rather than property management. We proposed a future meeting between the property manager and Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association to discuss the issue of cockroaches.

By mid-April 2018, this report’s due date, the Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association was one of CWJ’s main campaigns. I discussed the campaign with my social work colleagues in our Practicum Seminar course. Many of my colleagues encouraged CWJ to focus on consensus organizing and work to empower residents, regardless of the issue or outcomes. Mazahir and I leaned toward the agonistic pluralism approach of organizing a direct conversation between the tenants and property manager. Our plan was to develop five leaders in Pheasant Ridge with a network of at least 50 other tenants to eventually meet with the property manager. This plan was a combination of conflict organizing, empowerment theory, and agonistic pluralism. Our plan was to start the targeted outreach in April and build into May. In mid-April I began to focus much more on incorporating principles of agonistic pluralism into the Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association. Because of the power imbalance between Pheasant Ridge tenants and the property
manager/owner, strife and conflict need to be brought out into the open. This can only happen through unfiltered meetings between the tenants and property manager where conflicting dialogue is both permissible and monitored. We aimed to hold the meeting in mid-May.

Findings

The findings section of this report is informed by coursework from my Social Work master’s program. I applied two Social Work course assignments, a practice evaluation and a policy brief, to the Breckenridge Tenant Association campaign. The following sections up to the discussion section are exclusive to Breckenridge Mobile Home Park.

Breckenridge Tenant Association Evaluation

During the spring 2018 semester I conducted an evaluation of the Breckenridge Tenant Association. The evaluation was a requirement for my Social Work course titled Advanced Practicum Seminar: Integrated Practice I & II. I interviewed four members of the Breckenridge Tenant Association. The purpose of the interviews was 1) to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the Breckenridge Tenant Association, according to member residents and 2) to discover how the Center for Worker Justice could better help the Breckenridge Tenant Association in the future. I scheduled 15 to 30 minute interviews with four participants, two of whom were consistent tenant association meeting attendees and two of whom were inconsistent attendees. A fifth interviewee was unable to participate. Ideally, I would have conducted interviews with more than four tenant association members, but I did not have the time or resources to do so. At each interview I presented a consent form, used an interview guide, recorded the interview, and took notes [See Appendix]. Using Thomas’s (2006) five-step process of general inductive coding, I then analyzed the interviews for common themes. Five themes emerged from the interviews, discussed below.
First, each interviewee highlighted the importance of resident involvement and participation to the mission of the tenant association. Two interview participants felt community participation was strong, two others weak. One interviewee was proud of the neighbors’ persistence: “They keep fighting the good fight.” However, another interviewee said, “It would be better if everybody could attend. It’s only the certain ones. It’s the same people who go every time because nobody else goes… They might be afraid of the management… Or they might be undocumented.” Another interviewee was no longer attending meetings: “What good am I going to be here, because nobody’s listening to me?” The interviewee has lived in Breckenridge for nearly thirty years, but felt unimportant to the new tenant association.

Second, due to issues with management and disclosure of documentation status, several interviewees discussed the need for privacy and confidentiality in the community. “Some people they just don’t like to be involved in stuff like that. They just like to live their life and not be involved in anything.” Another interviewee said, “All persons do not like the person who is the manager. We have a lot of trouble.” Therefore, privacy and confidentiality emerged as important areas to be sensitive about for the Breckenridge Tenant Association.

Third, interviewees voiced different opinions about progress in the community. Per one tenant association member, “We’ve seen a lot of progress… They’re listening to what’s going on, not like before. I know they’ve picked up the leaves after so much pressure. I know they covered up the potholes, not all of them, but some of them… Individual garbage cans… But the snow removal is half bad.” However, another member said, “You woke them up. You scared [the manager]. But now that you guys aren’t out there it’s just going back to the same routine.” Two interviewees were optimistic about progress, while two others were doubtful.
Fourth, interviewees thought the Center for Worker Justice gave residents a sense of power and a voice through the tenant association: “I think giving them that power to congregate in one area and speak about the issues, I think is giving the tenants a voice.” Through the involvement of local politicians, pastors, and activists, members expressed a sense of empowerment through association. However, one interviewee said the personal sense of empowerment from the tenant association was lost: “They 360-ed on me so I just quit coming.” According to the interviewees, CWJ is doing well to empower residents, yet the organization can be better about keeping residents meaningfully engaged.

Fifth and finally, interview participants disagreed widely about the focus and direction of the tenant association going forward. One tenant association member listed water quality as the most important issue. Two other members said the property management was the greatest issue. The final interviewee felt the roads were the greatest problem. Interviewees did not voice similar priorities. The tenant association reportedly needed direction. “I just think we need to bind our courses a little more. When we have a meeting we need to have a basic point about what we’re raising cane about and stick with it.”

The interview findings provide implications for the Center for Worker Justice. Most importantly, the Breckenridge Tenant Association is empowering residents. Therefore, the Breckenridge Tenant Association is fulfilling CWJ’s mission. However, the tenant association has room for growth. The recommendation of the Breckenridge Tenant Association evaluation is to create a greater sense of direction. According to the interviewees, the tenant association needs focus and direction. The Center for Worker Justice must establish greater direction until leaders from within the tenant association are able to guide direction. CWJ can continue to evaluate the tenant association on an annual or bi-annual basis to improve the group’s functioning.
Mobile Home Park Policy

A number of policies contribute to the current conditions in Breckenridge Mobile Home Park and similar mobile home parks in Johnson County. Two policies with the most influence on current conditions are Chapter 562B of the Iowa Code and the Safe Drinking Water Act of the Environmental Protection Agency. Before a discussion on these two current policies, one policy of the past must be discussed.

In the past, local zoning laws harmed mobile home park development. According to Bartke and Gage (1970), through the 1960s mobile home zoning laws were largely based on a period when mobile homes were truly mobile. Local zoning laws did not change with the growth of permanent mobile home living (Bartke and Gage, 1970). As is the case with many current laws, zoning laws for mobile homes did not change with the times. Although local zoning codes were originally intended to support the influx of mobile home residents after the Great Depression and World War II, the lasting impact of zoning has been the location of mobile home parks on the edge of city limits or just beyond city limits (Rivlin, 2014). Today, mobile home parks are out of sight and out of mind because of past zoning laws [See Appendix, Figure 2].

In Iowa, Chapter 562B of the Iowa Code currently guides mobile home park law. The Iowa state legislature enacted Chapter 562B in 1979. Chapter 562B is also titled the Manufactured Home Communities or Mobile Home Parks Residential Landlord and Tenant Law (Iowa Legal Aid, 2011). The full text of the law is available through the Iowa Legislature. Chapter 562B has not changed since 1979. In terms of court decisions, only a few cases have been decided about the law in nearly forty years (Iowa Legal Aid, 2011). Iowa Code §562B.1-562B.4 (1979) contains four articles about mobile home park general provisions, landlord obligations, tenant obligations, and remedies. According to the law, a mobile home park must
contain three or more mobile homes; make water, sewer and electrical services available; and rent lot spaces. If the mobile home itself is also rented then that landlord tenant relationship is covered in Chapter 562A of the Iowa Code (Iowa Legal Aid, 2011).

Because Chapter 562B of the Iowa Code was largely shaped by mobile home park owners in the 1970s, mobile home park residents are at a legal disadvantage today (Rood, 2010). As one example of the tenant disadvantage, landlords have five different methods of ending rental agreements while tenants have two different methods. The property owner may end a lease in the following ways and because of the following reasons: 1) 3-day notice for nonpayment of rent, 2) 3-day notice for clear and present danger, 3) 14/30 day notice for a tenant violation, 4) 14-day notice for a tenant violation, and 5) 60-day notice for any reason. A “notice” means the property owner will file an eviction if the non-compliant action is not corrected within the allotted time. For example, if a mobile home park tenant is late on rent and the park owner gives the tenant a 3-day notice, the tenant then has three days to pay the rent before the owner may file an eviction. Therefore, mobile home park residents in Iowa may face evictions for minor infractions with little time to arrange for moving, potentially less than a week if late on rental payment or if presenting a clear and present danger. In this instance, a tenant’s greatest legal protection is to bring the case to court. On the other hand, the tenant may end the lease through: 1) 14/30 day notice of intent to move for material noncompliance with the property owner’s duties, and 2) 60-day notice for any reason (Iowa Legal Aid, 2011).

As a second example of the tenant disadvantage in Chapter 562B, landlords have the right to charge any amount of rent for lot space, assuming the market will correct for excessive rent (Iowa Legal Aid, 2011). Because mobile home parks are often the last refuge for low-
income individuals and families, if rents rise above the residents’ means they do not have the option of finding cheaper housing elsewhere.

The Safe Drinking Water Act, passed by Congress in 1974 and reauthorized in 1986 and 1996, established current public water quality standards (US Environmental Protection Agency, 2017). Most mobile home parks, including Breckenridge, receive drinking water from public wells. Public wells are under the same regulatory requirements as any public water supply. The Environmental Protection Agency works with states, localities, and water suppliers to ensure regulation of public wells. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (Iowa DNR) administers the Safe Drinking Water Act standards in Iowa (Iowa Department of Natural Resources, n.d.). The Iowa DNR Field Services and Compliance Bureau office in Washington, Iowa is responsible for monitoring the public well in Breckenridge.

The Safe Drinking Water Act benefits and disadvantages mobile home residents simultaneously. In terms of benefits, the act establishes important standards for public water quality. The Iowa DNR regularly monitors the public wells at Breckenridge for E. coli, chlorine, lead, nitrates, copper, and other contaminants or chemicals (Iowa Department of Natural Resources, n.d.). In terms of disadvantages, the act controls for public health standards (bacteria, chlorine, etc.) but not aesthetic standards (taste, odor, discoloration, etc.). Therefore, if nine out of ten sampled residents at Breckenridge report not drinking their water but the public health standards are met then the water is deemed safe to drink per the Iowa DNR and Safe Drinking Water Act. Aesthetic standards are neither required nor enforced. A mobile home park landowner is not obligated to maintain aesthetic standards of water quality.
Policy Recommendation

This report recommends a two-part policy proposal to address mobile home park tenant rights and drinking water quality. The first recommendation is to reintroduce the 2011 Mobile Home Park Tenants Bill of Rights to the Iowa Legislature. The second recommendation is to establish higher public drinking water quality standards and enforcement of those standards in Johnson County, Iowa.

Senator Thomas G. Courtney (State Senator District 44) proposed the Mobile Home Park Tenants Bill of Rights to the Iowa Legislature in 2011 (Scherf, 2011). The bill was intended to grant equal rights and benefits to those living in mobile homes as those living in other types of rentals. Scherf (2011) quotes Senator Courtney in an interview, “It was also our goal to stop a small percentage of park owners who prey on their tenants” (p. 10). Senator Courtney supported the bill because he believed the state had a duty to set higher minimum living condition standards for tenants, whether mobile home residents or apartment tenants. However, the Iowa Senate defeated the bill by three votes in 2011. Yet, current local and state elected officials may support a reintroduction of the bill to the Iowa Legislature in the 2019 session. The set of mobile home park problems that inspired the bill have spread to other mobile home parks in Johnson County and Iowa since the bill was defeated in 2011. As discussed in the findings section, the way Chapter 562B currently stands, park owners are able to evict mobile home residents on short notice and rent can increase without limit.

The second recommendation is to establish higher public drinking water quality standards and enforcement of those standards in Johnson County, Iowa. The Johnson County Board of Supervisors can establish an improved public water quality code in the county’s Code of Ordinances. The code would require greater accountability from the Iowa DNR, mobile home
park owners, park managers, and county government to provide consumable drinking water to residents in Breckenridge and similar mobile home parks in Johnson County.

The policy recommendation comes with advantages and disadvantages. The main benefit of the Mobile Home Park Tenants Bill of Rights would be greater balance between property owner and tenant rights. The main disadvantage would be the burden placed on park managers. Managing mobile home parks is a difficult job without additional regulatory policies, according to the Regency Mobile Home Park Manager (Scherf, 2011). Regency, like Breckenridge, is located just outside of Iowa City limits to the south. The greatest benefit of the Johnson County public water quality proposal would be aesthetically clean, safe and dignified drinking water for those reliant on a public water supply in Johnson County. The greatest disadvantages of the water quality proposal would be bureaucratic challenges. The Safe Drinking Water Act is controlled by a large bureaucracy in the Environmental Protection Agency. The Iowa DNR is one part of that bureaucracy. The Johnson County Board of Supervisors is a separate bureaucracy. Change within overlapping bureaucratic systems will be difficult to attain.

In 2016, the “Consumer Confidence Report” indicated that Iowa City drinking water far surpassed all federal and state drinking water quality standards (City of Iowa City, 2016). Yet, according to a 2018 County Health Ranking report, Johnson County ranks 83rd of 99 counties in the state for physical environment, which includes drinking water violations (Draisey, 2018). Families and individuals living in Breckenridge and similar mobile home parks deserve the same public water quality standards as residents of Iowa City. Drinking water quality was poor in Iowa City decades ago, but that changed when residents raised concerns based upon their perceptions. Perceptions, if widespread enough, can change the drinking water quality in Johnson County, too. Mobile home park residents in Iowa also deserve a review and update on their rights.
Ultimately, the two-part policy recommendation would be fair and just at advancing mobile home park quality of life.

Discussion

The logic model included in the Objectives section of this report was used to determine progress achieved by the two tenant association projects. In particular, the short-term outcomes of the logic model were used to determine progress. The short-term outcomes of the logic model included: 1) Form two tenant associations, 2) Organize, educate, empower, or simply reach 100 residents between Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge, and 3) Meet with the owners and managers of both complexes to discuss living condition issues and begin addressing those issues.

The tenant association projects achieved the short-term outcomes of the logic model, which is a step towards solving the living condition issues for Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge tenants. First, the Center for Worker Justice helped establish a tenant association in Breckenridge Mobile Home Park and Pheasant Ridge Apartments. Both tenant associations are recognized as legitimate by residents of the communities, property owners and managers, and Center for Worker Justice. Second, as of April 2018, the Breckenridge Tenant Association had 29 members. The Center for Worker Justice had contact information for 13 other Breckenridge residents. The Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association had 51 members who signed to join the tenant association. CWJ had contact information for 29 other Pheasant Ridge residents. Between both communities, CWJ was able to reach 122 residents, surpassing the goal of 100 residents. Outreach efforts included one-on-one meetings, large meetings, education, advocacy, training, and door-knocking.

Third, the Center for Worker Justice and two tenant associations met with their respective property owners. The Breckenridge Tenant Association met with regional representatives of the
property owner in November 2017. This was the first conversation between Breckenridge residents and their current property owner, after more than three years of ownership. The Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association met for the first time in December 2017. The Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association has not yet met with their property owner or manager, although the Center for Worker Justice has on several occasions. As of April 2018, CWJ was working to organize the first meeting between the Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association and property manager. In both Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge, the property owners and managers are aware of the main issues impacting their tenants’ lives. In both communities, the Center for Worker Justice is facilitating a conversation between the residents, owners, and managers to address the issues.

Yet, residents of Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge had goals to solve their respective issues. Neither issue has been solved. As of April 2018, most residents of Breckenridge do not drink their water. Many residents in Pheasant Ridge have cockroaches. These issues remain on top of others. Other issues in Breckenridge include poor road conditions and concerns about the property manager. Another issue in Pheasant Ridge is the cultural barrier between the property manager and majority of tenants. From the community partner perspective, the tenant associations have led to marginal progress. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the tenant associations is sustainability. Neither tenant association is self-sufficient without the Center for Worker Justice’s guidance. The Center for Worker Justice, with finite resources, will ultimately need to establish independent and sustainable tenant associations in Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge.

Nonetheless, the two tenant association projects were a step forward because they accomplished the goal of getting residents involved in discussion and gave momentum to collective action, which is empowering in and of itself. This is the first step towards solving the
living condition issues and the many more that will emerge in the future. Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge can inspire other low-income housing complexes to participate in the effort for decent living conditions in affordable housing units. Iowa City can achieve the ideal of strong tenant involvement in the city’s social, political, and development process. Tenant associations will help create a more just city.

Although low-income tenants in Iowa City have less power than their property owners and managers, tenants may exercise power in important ways. Tenants have the power to lead rent strikes, threaten lawsuits, or shame and embarrass through the media. Ultimately, the exercise of slight power in the face of a powerful adversary requires courage and bravery on behalf of all those involved in the tenant association – residents and outside supporters.

More tenant associations can be developed in the future. One suggestion is to develop tenant associations in all low-income, non-student housing complexes in the Iowa City area. A second suggestion is to create a coalition of tenant associations in Iowa City. A third suggestion is to ensure that tenant associations are community-driven and serve the needs of the particular community. In the long-term, low-income tenants will earn equal rights and better living conditions through these actions.

The largest limitations of the tenant association projects were cultural barriers, limited resources, and outcome bias. First, as a member of a different cultural group than the dominant cultures in Breckenridge and Pheasant Ridge, I had to navigate barriers. Cultural competency and cultural humility training can address this limitation. Second, the Center for Worker Justice has finite resources – including financial, personnel, and time – to expend on tenant association projects. More student interns from the School of Urban and Regional Planning and School of Social Work can help with the resource challenge.
Third, the Center for Worker Justice has a biased perspective on the tenant association outcomes. I also have a biased perspective. Tenant association members may not view the outcomes as positively as CWJ. I believe the difference in opinions stems from the large number of people involved in the effort and the nature of non-profit self-promotion. Large groups must work to have all participants on the same page. Constant communication and a clear and direct vision will help tenant association members and CWJ view outcomes in the same light. Non-profits must promote their work to maintain community support. Because of this, many non-profits tend to exaggerate their success, out of necessity for funding. The Center for Worker Justice and I can be better about reporting accurate success from the Breckenridge Tenant Association campaign. Continual Breckenridge Tenant Association evaluation through in-person, in-home interviews will help CWJ and tenant association members report the same findings.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this report was to detail the process and outcomes of two tenant association projects. Since October 2017, the Center for Worker Justice has grown two new tenant associations in the Iowa City area through issue-driven community organizing. From CWJ’s perspective, both tenant associations are achieving progress, albeit slowly. However, poor drinking water quality remains in Breckenridge and cockroach infestations remain in Pheasant Ridge. Still, as indicated by the four interviewees from Breckenridge, the tenant association is empowering community members. Understandably, levels of patience and expectations differ between the Center for Worker Justice and the community partners.

Going forward, three ideas stand out from the two tenant association projects. First, tenant association participation must be balanced with community organizer expertise to create an action plan that best suits the community. Outside leaders should use Arnstein’s ladder of
citizen participation as a guide when working with tenant associations. The Breckenridge Tenant Association and Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association can both become more tenant-driven in the future. Second, the two tenant associations face deeply rooted issues. Especially within Breckenridge, issues are rooted in outdated policies that created a power imbalance between tenants and park owners and managers. Tenant associations cannot solve these issues overnight, but they can ignite policy change for the long-term. Along with the two-part policy recommendation in this report, another way to address policy is through tenant education. Community organizers and advocates must work to educate low-income tenants about both their actual rights and deserved rights. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, community organizers, activists, and planners can play an important role in redistributing power between tenants and property owners/managers. Power will not be redistributed through consensus building by communicative planning, because those with more power will make consensus difficult. Therefore, organizers and planners can use agonistic pluralism theory to guide the use of conflict and strife in open, honest dialogue between tenant associations, property owners/managers, and politicians. Organizers and planners must insist on direct dialogue between lower-income tenants and property owners/managers, developers, and politicians. Pløger (2004) argues that “it is necessary [for organizers, planners, and activists] to be able to work with strife – the ongoing dispute about words, meaning, discourses, visions, or ‘the good life’ – if the goal is to empower citizens and enhance their capabilities to participate in politics or planning processes” (p. 73).

Ultimately, the hope of this report is to advance the Breckenridge Tenant Association, Pheasant Ridge Tenant Association, and future tenant associations in the Iowa City area. Tenant associations give tenants a voice in the effort for greater livability, health, welfare, quality of life,
and dignity in lower-income housing communities. Tenant associations are critical to the
democratic process of achieving a just city with decent living conditions for all.
Appendix

Figure 1. Map of Iowa City, featuring locations of Breckenridge Mobile Home Park and Pheasant Ridge Apartments.
Figure 2. Location of mobile home parks within Johnson County, IA. Nearly all parks are located on the edge or beyond city limits (Source: Scherf, 2011).
English: Breckenridge Water Quality Survey (November 2017)

1) Do you drink the water in your home? Yes No
2) If not, when did you stop drinking your water? 
3) Do you use the water to cook? Yes No
4) Do you use the water to shower and wash clothes? Yes No
5) Does your water smell? 
6) If so, what time of day does your water smell worst? Morning Midday Evening
7) Does your water have a color? Yes No
8) If so, what kind of color does your water have? 
9) How many packets of water bottles do you buy per week? 
10) How much money do you spend on water bottles each week? 
11) Address: 4494 Taft Ave. SE, #_____
12) Other comments about the water:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Español: Encuesta de calidad del agua de Breckenridge (noviembre 2017)

1) ¿Bebe el agua en su casa? Sí No
2) Si no, ¿cuándo dejó de tomar su agua? 
3) ¿Utilizas el agua para cocinar? Sí No
4) ¿Utilizas el agua para ducharte y lavar la ropa? Sí No
5) ¿Tiene olor su agua? Sí No
6) Si es así, ¿a que hora del día su agua huele peor? Mañana Mediodía Noche
7) ¿Su agua tiene color? Sí No
8) Si es así, ¿Qué color tiene su agua? 
9) ¿Cuántos paquetes de botellas de agua compro por semana? 
10) ¿Cuánto dinero gasta en botellas de agua cada semana? 
11) Dirección: 4494 Taft Ave. SE, #_____
12) Otros comentarios sobre el agua:
Consent Form for Breckenridge Tenant Association Evaluation

Disclosure: I am a Master’s student at the University of Iowa. This interview is fulfilling a course requirement for the Social Work course titled Advanced Practicum Seminar: Integrated Practice I & II. The course instructors are Megan Gilster (fall) and Aislinn Conrad-Hiebner (spring) whose contact information is listed at the bottom.

You are being asked to take part in an interview that will serve to evaluate the Breckenridge Tenant Association. Three to five other Breckenridge residents will be interviewed. The purpose of the interviews is 1) to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the Breckenridge Tenant Association, according to member residents and 2) to discover how the Center for Worker Justice (CWJ) can better help the Breckenridge Tenant Association in the future.

If you agree to participate in this practice evaluation, I will conduct an interview with you. The interview will last approximately 15 to 30 minutes. I will write notes during the interview. With your permission, I will record the interview via cell phone. I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this interview. No benefits or compensation will be provided.

Your answers to the interview questions will be confidential. The records of this interview will be kept private. I will share findings from all of the interviews in a final report with the Center for Worker Justice. I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you in the report. Only I will have direct access to your interview answers. If I record the interview, I will delete the recording after it has been used.

Taking part in this interview is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Statement of Consent: By participating in the interview and answering the questions from this point forward you are giving your consent to participate in the practice evaluation for the course Advanced Practicum Seminar: Integrated Practice I & II.

This consent form is for your records.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact the instructors or I. Thank you very much.

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Interview Guide
Breckenridge Tenant Association Evaluation

**Research Questions:** 1) How do Breckenridge Tenant Association members understand their new tenant association? 2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the tenant association, according to member residents? 3) How can the Center for Worker Justice (CWJ) better help the Breckenridge Tenant Association in the future?

Schedule and conduct 15 to 30 minute interviews with four Breckenridge Tenant Association members. Elicit input from two consistent members and two semi-involved members.

Present consent form. If given permission, record interview on cell phone. Take notes.

**Interview Questions**

1) In your own words, how would you describe the Breckenridge Tenant Association?
2) What are the strengths of the tenant association?
3) How could the tenant association be improved?
4) What has CWJ done well to help the tenant association?
5) How could CWJ better help the tenant association in the future?

Open-ended questions, follow-up questions, lead-ins, prompts, probes, etc.:

- What do you know about the Breckenridge Tenant Association?
- Have you seen improvements on the property since the tenant association formed in October?
- Have meetings with the owners and management been productive, in your opinion?
- Why do you (not) come to tenant association meetings?
- What suggestions do you have for CWJ to be more helpful to your community?
- Do you have confidence in CWJ?
  - Anything else?
  - In what ways?
  - What would be an example of that?
  - How is that?
References


