

Russell 'miracle' appears to be mostly ballyhoo

Results claimed for neighborhood don't match facts

By NINA WALFOORT
Staff Writer

Federal Housing Secretary Henry Cisneros has spoken in glowing terms about Louisville's HANDS program, and President Clinton mentioned it during a speech to the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

A recently published federal housing book called the program — whose goal is to transform the Russell neighborhood and the La Salle public-housing project in three years — “the Russell miracle.”

But closer to home, neighborhood and housing leaders say that whatever success it has had is clouded by the inflated claims and promotional overkill of its director.

“It's doing lots of publicity and taking credit for a lot of things that would have gone on without it, and as a result it's hard to see what it's really done,” said Joe Gliessner, executive director of the non-profit

housing program called New Directions.

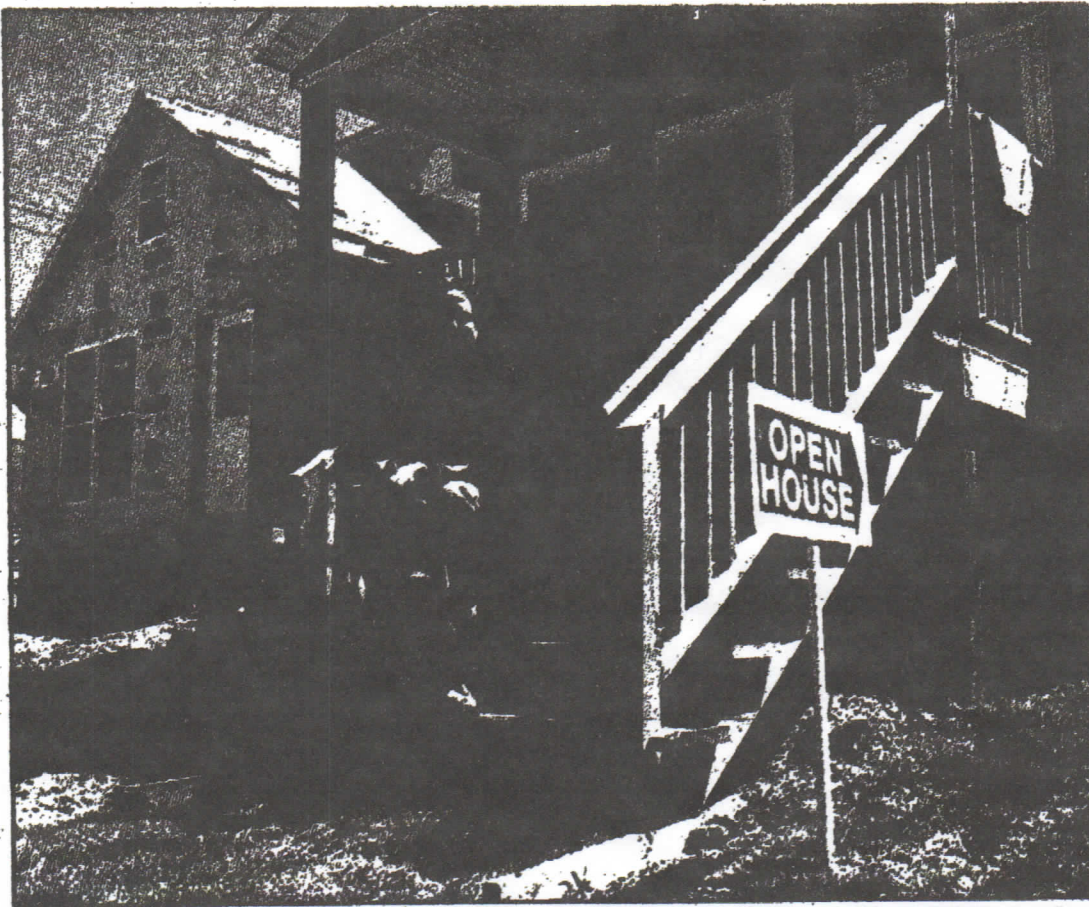
An examination of HANDS — an acronym for Housing and Neighborhood Development Strategies — shows that it has fallen short of its original goals, misrepresented its achievements and failed to keep an accurate account of its activities.

Funded by a \$1.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education that had to be matched by more than \$500,000 in local contributions, HANDS set ambitious goals.

HANDS' director is John Gilderbloom, a lanky, 41-year-old Californian with a 60-page resume who has been an associate professor of economics and urban policy at the University of Louisville since 1988. He wrote the request for the grant and now makes \$58,400 a year to direct the program.

The grant proposal said HANDS intended to put 400 families under the management of social workers and nursing students to help members of the families get more education, find jobs, become community leaders and, ultimately, buy homes in the low-income Russell area and the La Salle complex. Some HANDS

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STAFF PHOTO BY TRACEY STEELE; STAFF CHART BY STEVE DURBIN

John Gilderbloom, director of Housing and Neighborhood Development Strategies in Louisville, said a lot of the criticism of HANDS has been "sour grapes and jealousy." He expressed confidence that the program will be successful in the end.

GOALS... AND RESULTS

Chart shows the goals originally set by HANDS, its recently revised goals and where HANDS stands on meeting those goals. Numbers refer to people served in 1990.



GOALS
ORIGINAL REVISED ACTUAL

	ORIGINAL	REVISED	ACTUAL
	200	400	114
Job training and placement	60	60	8
	100	50	18
Family literacy	150	0	0
	100	75	15
GED program	108	45	13
	100	50	5

Numbers could be higher, says...

Agency's claims exceed reality

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projects appear to be thriving. HANDS offers self-esteem training for children, leadership training and home-ownership counseling. It has helped a non-profit community group build homes.

But Gilderbloom's assessment of HANDS' achievements was inflated, and in some cases, inaccurate.

For example, he said in an interview that HANDS has already succeeded in housing 150 people with the conversion of La Salle into condominiums.

But Kathi Whalen, program director for Louisville Housing Services Corp., said HANDS had nothing to do with the conversion of La Salle. "The HANDS grant didn't accomplish that," she said. Whalen's non-profit agency markets the condominiums and provides financing and counseling to buyers.

Also, a printed chart showing HANDS' accomplishments (which Gilderbloom provided to The Courier-Journal last month) said seven people completed literacy training last year, when in fact literacy training has not begun.

The HANDS chart also overstated the number of people who had completed job training.

Last Tuesday, after a reporter questioned the figures, Gilderbloom provided corrected numbers. He said a funding proposal sent to the U.S. Department of Education last month had also been corrected. But the newspaper found that even the revised proposal contains inaccuracies.

It reports, for instance, that a for-profit group has agreed to build 100 homes in the Russell neighborhood; the actual number is 20.

And it claims crime in one part of Russell declined by 50 percent since HANDS began, but the source of the statistic — a Courier-Journal article — attributed the drop in crime to a security force that was hired in Village West — independent of HANDS.

Gilderbloom said HANDS is only trying to promote a positive image of Russell. And he said a lot of the criticism is "sour grapes and jealousy."

The new proposal also scales back some of HANDS' goals. Gilderbloom acknowledged that HANDS' education and job-training

REALITY CHECK

These claims made by HANDS don't hold up under examination:



"A major, two-year rehabilitation project exceeding \$7 million has transformed Russell's outdated, 55-year-old La Salle Place public housing development into new condominiums." — Under the headline "The Russell miracle," from a book compiled by the American Institute of Architects. Russell section attributed to John Gilderbloom of HANDS.

REALITY: Louisville Housing Services program director Kathi Whalen said HANDS had no role in the construction at La Salle. Also, La Salle is not in Russell. (Gilderbloom contends that inaccuracies occurred in editing.)

"Fannie Mae has promised to provide several million dollars in loans for banks to provide in the Russell neighborhood." — "Changes in HANDS program in Year 2" submitted to U. S. Department of Education.

REALITY: HANDS has not applied for Fannie Mae funds. "We can't make any decision unless we have something to decide about," said Maria Kulczycky of Fannie Mae. (Gilderbloom modified the statement in a subsequent grant proposal. He said the original statement was in a draft and was incorrect.)

"HANDS has received national recognition as a model for rejuvenating an impoverished neighborhood and has been featured as an 'innovative model' in the Harvard Journal of African-American Public Policy." — HANDS' third-year grant proposal.

REALITY: The article cited was written by Gilderbloom.

STAFF ILLUSTRATION BY STEVE DURBIN

efforts have fallen short of expectations.

Plans to model a project after the National Center for Family Literacy were dropped because it was "too expensive and we were unable to recruit the number of people," Gilderbloom said. Instead, HANDS is now working with Jefferson County schools to start a more modest literacy program this summer.

The case-management component — which some say is the meat of HANDS' operation — also failed to fulfill the promise of the original grant. Nursing and education students do not work with the social-work students who provide referrals for needy residents.

Helen Deines, a social-work professor at Spalding University, pulled her students out of HANDS' case-management program and quit the HANDS oversight committee last year. "It was an issue of supervision and who was insuring accountabil-

ity," she said.

And a job-training program in computer skills was scrapped because, Gilderbloom said, it failed to attract enough people. Instead, HANDS decided to refer people to existing training programs.

But the Rev. Lawrence White, pastor of Hughlett Temple African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, said he has been "highly upset" in his dealings with HANDS, especially its job-training referrals. He said, for instance, that church members he has referred to HANDS were sent to a training program that required them to have cars.

HANDS has not "allowed the people who are the most disadvantaged the opportunity to flow into the program," White said.

Several people said HANDS has not gotten good response to its programs because it has not aggressively promoted itself in Russell.

The Rev. E. Alexander Campbell,

who runs the Plymouth Community Center in the heart of Russell and provides services and food to people there, said he could refer clients to HANDS but he's never been approached about what HANDS offers or where to send people.

He said HANDS' impact in Russell has been minimal so far. "There was great anticipation and excitement at the beginning, and suddenly it's come to a halt," he said.

Many people defend HANDS, even if it is off to a slow start. They say it is Gilderbloom's promotional talent and energy that have brought new money and partners — particularly the University of Louisville — to an area of severe need.

"Dr. John Gilderbloom deserves a lot of credit for bringing the University of Louisville out into the neighborhood," said Sam Watkins, executive director of the Louisville Central Community Center. "This is a milestone."

At least two institutions that supplied money for HANDS' first year, the Kentucky Housing Corp. and National City Bank, said they are satisfied with HANDS and are considering giving more money. "They bring together groups and coordinate the efforts," said Terri Wilson, communications manager for the bank.

And Daniel Hall, assistant to U of L President Donald Swain, said the university recognized that HANDS' goals might need to be revised during the first year.

Hall said that Gilderbloom may at times be "overzealous" in promoting HANDS, but Hall thinks the program is "contributing positively to what's happening" in Russell.

Gilderbloom, too, said he is confident HANDS will be successful.

He noted that to address the job-training weakness, a full-time administrator was hired last winter and a new job-training program is being developed. And HANDS is planning to hire a full-time social worker this summer to supervise case management.

Whalen, of Louisville Housing Services, thinks HANDS has the potential to change the neighborhood, but so far "it's just barely scratched the surface."

She said HANDS should put more of its energy into the "nitty-gritty issues" — insuring that its projects work and that expectations are met. "Publicity will not cure Russell. It needs real services, real neighborhood involvement."

Lack of records makes effects hard to establish

By NINA WALFOORT
Staff Writer

One of the goals of HANDS is to see what works best to improve poor urban neighborhoods.

That requires documentation and evaluation of projects — efforts some say are sorely lacking.

"I would say that my challenge ... is to overcome in the HANDS program the somewhat weak link of evaluation," said Reg Bruce, whose job is to keep track of HANDS' results for the project and the U.S. Department of Education.

Bruce — the third evaluator to work with HANDS since January 1983 — said it's essential that HANDS compile information about Russell residents and their attitudes to provide a basis to which later results can be compared. "If that's not done in the next couple of months, ... to some extent my hands are tied."

HANDS director John Gilderbloom said he has not done that kind of survey because it's expensive, and he wants to wait until the end of the program to do it. But John Nelson, who oversees HANDS as director of the University of Louisville's Center for Urban and Economic Research, agrees with Bruce and said money will be found so the survey can be done this summer.

Other HANDS staff members also have indicated that data gathering

needs to be improved.

Case managers, who are the first staff members to deal with people seeking help from HANDS, keep assessment forms on their clients, but nobody accounts for what happens to the clients.

Brian New, who serves part time as director of case management, said clients are referred to Kentucky Tech, Metroversity, GED training and various job-training programs, but he couldn't say how many of HANDS' 200-plus clients have been referred to what programs.

He said Betsy Jacobus would have the job-training numbers, but Jacobus, who is paid \$38,000 as a full-time administrator and has been in her job for six months, didn't have the numbers either.

She said she and New have been working on that. "He and I are just going to set up a system so he lets me know when someone has been sent to training."

Gilderbloom said HANDS will soon have a full-time social worker tracking clients, and said he is confident that at the end of three years there will be ample measurement of HANDS' impact.

For instance, HANDS has surveyed the condition of homes in the area and put that information on a computer, compiled crime reports on Russell and adjoining neighborhoods, and completed assessment forms on all case-management cli-

ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS VS. SERVICES

HANDS has spent \$1.98 on administrative and research costs for each dollar spent on services for residents.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND RESEARCH COSTS: \$449,898

Administrators' salaries (12 positions, including project director John Gilderbloom, who makes \$58,400 a year.)

\$235,140

Research salaries (7 positions plus \$41,100 for unspecified research assistants. Some assistants may provide direct service to residents.)

\$89,526

Fringe benefits

\$59,340

Administrative costs (Equipment, travel, facilities and other expenses.)

\$65,882

DIRECT SERVICES FOR RESIDENTS: \$227,237

Field workers' salaries (five student case managers.)

\$18,800

Payments to residents (Transportation, child care, tuition.)

\$38,000

Service contracts (Funds to Louisville Central Development Corp., Louisville Urban League, Housing Partnership and Jefferson County Public Schools.)

\$173,737

STAFF CHART BY STEVE DURBIN

ents. Local and national advisory teams also monitor HANDS. And the third-year grant proposal outlines several additional methods of evaluation that will be used.

"Our feeling is you turn over every rock possible and try to get as much information as possible," said Gilderbloom. "We are driven by results and getting accountability."