Project Proposal for the Qualitative Study of Evictions in Brooklyn Park
The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)
University of Minnesota
Principal Researcher: Dr. Brittany Lewis

The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) connects the resources of the University of Minnesota with the interests and needs of urban communities and the region for the benefit of all.

Overview of Research to Date

In July of 2016 the Minneapolis Innovation Team in partnership with HOMELINE published a report on Evictions in Minneapolis, which was inspired by Matthew Desmond’s book Evicted. The Innovation Team’s report found that 50% of tenants in the 55411 & 55412 zip codes were evicted in a two-year span. The report effectively identified eviction trends in the City of Minneapolis using quantitative data and mapping of a small sampling of eviction court case files. In August 2018 HOMELINE in partnership with CURA completed a similar quantitatively focused analysis of evictions in Brooklyn Park and found that of the eviction cases filed in 2015 through 2017 in Brooklyn Park, 61% of eviction cases were filed by the top four frequent filer owner groups with most filings (98%) taking place along the Zane Avenue Corridor between 63rd Avenue N and 83rd Avenue N. These reports have enabled local policymakers and practitioners to begin the process of reshaping the narrative around evictions and helping to generate new and pressing questions many had not considered.

However, these reports did not take a comprehensive mixed methodological approach enabling community members and policymakers to address how and why these trends are taking place from the perspectives of tenants and landlords themselves. CURA believes that an in-depth qualitative analysis is central to the successful development of public policy solutions and the development of new programs or interventions for those tenants negatively affected by evictions and for landlords who value sustaining positive relationships with the communities in which they are investors.

CURA under the guidance of Dr. Brittany Lewis recently completed an in-depth qualitative study of evictions in the 55411 & 55412 zip codes in Minneapolis. This was a two-year study where 100 interviews were conducted with 32 landlord and 68 tenants with each interview lasting between 60-90 minutes. The findings were published in May 2019 in the report Illusion of Choice: Eviction and Profit in North Minneapolis.
Proposal for a Qualitative Study in Brooklyn Park

Goals

(1) Better understand housing instability and quality of life at Brooklyn Park apartment communities.

(2) Conduct interviews with tenants for the purpose of helping to identify the conditions that often lead up to housing instability and eviction as well as to gain a clearer understanding of these tenants’ housing composition/stability overtime and the various income streams they rely on to help better inform the development of targeted interventions, needs, and policy prescriptions.

(3) Conduct interviews with landlords who have evicted tenants to learn more about, a) what policies and procedures they have in place to determine that eviction is the best course of action for dealing with a tenant, b) how they determine the cost benefit of evicting a tenant and owning rental property more generally speaking, and c) what practices they employ once that decision is made and whether and why those practices are employed for certain rental populations to help better inform the ways that the city can work with landlords as partners in community building and help the city produce targeted incentives for landlords illustrating positive behaviors.

(4) Ensure that multiple stakeholders will benefit from this research including, but not limited to academics, philanthropists, the City of Brooklyn Park, Hennepin County, the Minnesota Multi Housing Association, the courts, tenant advocacy organizations, landlords and many others. CURA will make concrete policy and program recommendations for local government, housing practitioners and investors, and tenant advocacy organizations.

Research Design

In preparing for the project, the first step would be to connect with stakeholders and those most affected by housing instability in Brooklyn Park. The second step would be to convene an Advisory Council comprising of tenants, landlords, community organizers, community-based staff members, and staff members from the city of Brooklyn Park. These engagements would frame the project and inform the scope of work and methodology.

Dr. Brittany Lewis employs an actionable research model that uses a mixed methodological research approach to: (1) build community power, (2) assist local grassroots campaigns and local power brokers in reframing the dominant narrative, and (3) produce community centered public policy solutions that are winnable. This model relies heavily on the development of reciprocal relationships across sectors that embrace an open process where the collective develops shared understandings for the purpose of creating social transformation. This actionable research model embraces a racial equity framework that asserts that we must: (1) look for solutions that address systemic inequities, (2) work collaboratively with affected communities, and (3) add solutions that are commensurate with the cause of inequity.
Scope

For the purpose of CURA’s research capacity and the results of quantitative research findings currently available we propose the following scope of work. Please note that the final scope of work will be developed through a community-based action research model and may change from what is proposed below.

(1) Interview at least 10 landlords, focusing on the four frequent filers and the zip codes 55429 & 55443 (with potential inclusion of 55428) because Four ownership groups in particular accounted for 61% of all evictions in Brooklyn Park, despite owning only 28% of rental units in Brooklyn Park. Then we will do random sampling from the quantitative data analysis of landlords to fill the remaining 6 landlord slots with owners/companies with large portfolios who have low number of filings as well as owner/companies who filed many cases with very modest portfolios.

(2) Interview at least 30 tenants, focusing on residents that live within communities owned by the four frequent filers and the zip codes 55429 & 55443 (with potential inclusion of 55428) and communities experiences higher rates of crimes per unit. HOME Line oversaw a 2016-2017 University of Minnesota Humphrey Institute Policy Fellows team who observed that African-American females were both the largest demographic group in Minneapolis evictions and the least likely to be represented by an attorney. A survey of 2017 Brooklyn Park residential tenant calls to HOME Line’s free tenant hotline for eviction advice confirms similar demographic patterns in Brooklyn Park, which CURA’s in-depth study of evictions in the 55411 & 55412 zip codes also confirmed. The disparity in the demographics of households impacted by evictions suggest evictions are a civil rights issue with important Fair Housing implications. We have chosen to narrow our number of tenants to 30, because CURA already has supporting qualitative research on two zip codes in Minneapolis that can support and further explain critical trends found in Brooklyn Park, while also providing a distinct analysis on the two Brooklyn Park zip codes where eviction filings are most prominent.

CURA has chosen to interview 30 tenants and 10 landlords at a minimum, with some additional interviews as specific research questions dictate, instead of aiming to produce a much larger statistically significant interview sample size to assist with the development of immediate policy solutions. We believe that by conducting these in-depth interviews we can successfully identify a number of common factors/themes around quality of life and housing instability that will aide in the development of strategic policy and practice recommendations for all our partners. This is a scale much grander than that featured in Matthew Desmond’s work with the same ethics behind its approach. This also pays close attention to the City of Brooklyn’s Park desire to have a fairly compact and speedy engaged research process that gets results to community as soon as possible. Lastly, we prefer in-depth one on one discussion not large focus groups, because of the sensitive nature of the questions asked of both landlords and tenants. We want to ensure that we are getting honest and direct answers that are not influenced by the presence of other stakeholders.
PROPOSED TIMELINE:

Summer 2019
- Solidify research partnerships with City of Brooklyn Park and community-based housing partners to establish collective outreach efforts and identify community interview sites
- Finalize research design and fiscal support
- Complete early engagement process and solidify community research advisory council
- Submit Institutional Review Board (IRB) application for University of Minnesota approval
- Identify and make initial contact with the 30 tenants and 10 landlords
- Conduct initial intake of all interviewee(s)
- Begin interviews (complete 20 of 40 interviews)
- Transcribe and analyze simultaneously

Fall 2019
- Complete remaining interviews
- Transcribe and analyze simultaneously
- Meet with advisory council
- Produce a working internal draft of data findings

Spring 2020
- Write and deliver a final qualitative based report with data findings with policy recommendations by May of 2020
- Meet with advisory council & discuss the dissemination of findings

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<td>Principal Researcher (.40% FTE)</td>
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