

The Woodson Principles

Kimi Gray: An Example Community Leadership

Kimi Gray never saw just problems in her neighborhood. She also saw potential. Ms. Gray worked hard to find solutions to the problems and help her neighbors reach their potential.

Kimi Gray spent most of her life living in public housing. As a young mother, she moved into Kenilworth Courts in Washington, DC. For the rest of her life she worked hard to make her neighborhood better. Although Ms. Gray was a single mother of five and received public assistance, she still graduated from college. Ms. Gray also encouraged her children to go to college. She wanted the kids in the neighborhood to go to college, too. In 1974, she and other neighbors started a college scholarship fund called College Here We Come. In 20 years, the scholarship helped more than 1,000 students pay for college, a big change in a neighborhood where few had attended college in the past.

One of the biggest changes Kimi Gray made to her neighborhood was helping to create the Kenilworth-Parkside Resident Management Corporation (KRPMC). Ms. Gray believed that her neighborhood would get better if the people who lived there had a say in how things were run. The KRPMC began to manage Kenilworth Courts in 1982. When it started, it was one of the first resident-run management corporations.

In 1988, federal housing funds helped the KRPMC purchase the Kenilworth-Parkside Projects. KRPMC hired tenants to work on the property. This meant jobs for residents. It also meant that repairs would be done quickly, because the people doing the work would have to live with the problems until they were fixed. As conditions improved and residents started to trust the KRPMC more, people paid their rent on time. Having rent money helped KRPMC keep the property in good shape. Residents were fined for things like littering and breaking windows, and treatment programs were started to help people with addictions. Residents also worked with the police to reduce crime. All of these things made Kenilworth Courts a better place to live.

Kimi Gray died in 2000, but her life's work is an example of what a community can do to turn itself around.

Questions:

In what city did Ms. Gray live?

What are three ways she improved the neighborhood she lived in?

What Woodson Principles did Ms. Gray demonstrate?

Source Material:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1980/09/25/kimi-grays-dream-project/a9f38144-d9da-42da-93f5-c9287a85df83/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2000/03/04/public-housing-advocate-kimi-gray-dies/5a9cc90c-c993-4c33-a129-14bb9fc90089/>

<https://offbeatenpathdc.com/kimi-gray/>