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Transforming Communities: How People Like You Are Healing Their Neighborhoods

Sandhya Rani Jha
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Jha's stories of community-based change are both inspiring and informative.

Sandhya Jha's *Transforming Communities* demonstrates how ordinary people can come together to dramatically improve their communities.

As the director of the Oakland Peace Center, a nonprofit collective, Sandhya Jha has firsthand knowledge of what it takes to organize and implement a community-based effort. In this timely book, she plays the role of a different kind of organizer, assembling and telling the stories of several community efforts that started with the identification of a need and the willingness of dedicated people to meet it.

Each of the instructive chapters highlights a different initiative. The areas of need are diverse; they range from addressing homelessness to assisting returning veterans to establishing community gardens. Often, it is one individual who champions the effort, but that person's vision is quickly embraced by others in the community.

The Recovery Café San Jose, for example, was started by a church pastor to help people confront their addictions. At the café's core are the "recovery circles," which every member must attend to deal with challenges from homelessness to mental-health issues. They are shown to benefit from sharing meals, attending classes, or getting on-site support. The author shares excerpts from her interview with the pastor; her story, like others in the book, both inspires and informs.

Each story is unique and stands alone, but all concern helping a community in some way. At the end of every concise chapter, the author includes a section entitled "Learn More," in which she provides additional resources for exploring that particular kind of community involvement.

Jha bookends these stories with inspirational introductions and conclusions. Important closing observations deftly tie together the case studies, among them that

> *people creating change in their communities over time got really clear about who they were and who they understood their community to be, and that functioned as their lodestar throughout hard times.*

Transforming Communities is essential reading for those in search of creative, proven ways to make a positive impact in their communities.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (November/December 2017)

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