

Wichita Youth Empowerment Partnership: A Community Assessment of District 1

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Abstract. District 1 of Wichita Kansas is primarily formed by African American population and faces multiple economic and social challenges that require greater collaboration and improved capacity of local faith-based (FBO) and community-based organizations (CBO). The Wichita Youth Empowerment Partnership (WYEP) is an initiative facilitated by the Center for Community Support & Research (CCSR) and includes 10 partnering faith-based and community-based organizations (FBCBOs) that address youth violence and gang activity in the mentioned district. A participatory community assessment was conducted to obtain information and establish future directions for services and activities of the organizations, from the youth's perspective. Community assessment was a participatory process that integrated mixed methods to collect information: youth survey, focus groups, photovoice, and archival data. Information obtained was quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. Adult collaboration and inclusion of a youth research team were central aspects.

1. Introduction

District 1 of Wichita Kansas is primarily formed by African American population and faces multiple economic and social challenges that require greater collaboration and improved capacity of local faith-based (FBO) and community-based organizations (CBO). A greater percentage of youth in Sedgwick County, in comparison to Kansas, reported participating in some type of violent behavior in the past year, having friends who participated in violent act or gang activity (i.e. carrying a handgun), and having favorable attitudes toward violent or gang activity [1]. The Wichita Youth Empowerment Partnership (WYEP) is a three-year initiative facilitated by the Center for Community Support & Research (CCSR), Wichita State University. WYEP includes ten partnering youth-serving faith-based and community-based organizations (FBCBOs) that address youth violence and gang activity in the mentioned district. Initiative is designed to improve the efficacy and efficiency of the organizational

practices through a capacity building process that also includes a youth empowerment component, especially ethnically diverse youth. WYEP conducted a community assessment process to identify strengths, assets, and problems that impact youth in the district. This assessment was a participatory process that promoted youth's participation and adult collaboration.

2. Method, Results, Discussion, and Significance

The data collection methods used included: (1) youth self-administered survey, (2) focus groups, (3) photovoice, and (4) archival data.

Photovoice. Photovoice is a participatory tool in which participants photograph their perceptions about the community's situation [2]. Photovoice is considered a powerful technique for individual participation, community discussion, and promotion of critical dialogue and shared production of knowledge [3]. This method is culturally appropriate to work with African American youth. A youth research team was formed by 26 youth ranging from 9 to 19 years old. Youth answered (a) Who youth are and how they are doing, (b) common challenges youth in district one face, (3) opportunities available for youth (4) who and what supports youth in the district, and (5) what needs to change in the district to make a better future for youth.

Self-Administered Survey. Survey was administered to 51 youth who attend five of the ten partnering organizations to gain information regarding youth experiences in the community and community resources and needs.

Focus Groups. Three focus groups were conducted to obtain information about community needs, what youth like to do, challenges youth face, opportunities available for youth, how adults in district one view and support youth, and what WYEP and other organizations can do to make a

better future for youth. Groups included youth and adults.

Archival data. Local data sources were reviewed to better understand the social, economic, and demographic background of District One. Sources include: Helping America's Youth, U.S. Census Bureau, Wichita Police Department 44 Beat Community Survey, Kansas Health Statistics Report, The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, National Institute on Drug Abuse, The November Coalition, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, and the Kansas State Department of Education.

Results. Collected data was grouped in four general aspects: youth, community strengths, community needs, and what adults and organizations can do to support youth. Some of the most salient aspects are described.

Youth. Descriptions of youth in the community were that they are happy, self-aware, nice, peaceful, friendly, and engaged in the community. Youth are perceived as able to make good decisions. 58.8% of youth feel connected to northeast Wichita; 56.9% of youth feel at home in northeast Wichita, but only 33.3% feel it is important to live in this area. Youth like sports (78.4%), church-related activities (66.7%), extracurricular activities (66.7%), and volunteer work (58.8%). Identified challenges related to youth were academic struggles, environmental issues (e.g. contamination, pollution, trash), lack of family support, peer pressure, unrealistic and low expectations, and concerns about the future related to community problems (e.g., violence, gangs, urban blight).

Community Strengths. Best things about the community are: people, youth who can be your friends, other kids, schools, organizations, and churches. Identified strengths are availability of scholarships, existence of after school programs, related educational opportunities such as volunteering, and summer activities, youth organizations, visible Black leaders, role models and mentors, and strong family structures. 49% of youth perceive the people in the community as having positive attitudes.

Community Challenges. District 1 has lower average housing values (\$135,022 vs. \$ 52,289), lower household income (\$39,939 vs. \$24,079), relatively higher unemployment (5.3% vs. 12.0%), and more rent-occupied homes (54%). Education gap persist for African American youth. African American youth, especially males, are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system. Their offenses are frequently of a violent nature, and the number of agencies offering

services to address these issues is limited because of scarce funding. Other community challenges identified were: a) need for more responsible adults engaged in community change, b) need for local positive role models with increased positive adult-youth interaction, c) decreasing the availability of alcohol and other drugs, d) infrastructural needs (e.g., abandoned buildings/houses, progressive infrastructure decline), e) progressive economic decline and the need for more job opportunities, and f) the need for more unity and less violence.

3. Conclusions

Involvement in community life can create a youth-adult and youth-community synergy. Adults and organizations can support youth in diverse ways such as tutoring and mentoring, being involved, trust youth, work with youth and reward them, provide funds and resources, promote more activities for youth, and elicit support from parents. Results served to establish strategies of intervention that will be implemented by the WYEP partnering organizations.

Youth engagement in WYEP provided an opportunity for them to express themselves and reflect on the issues that they witnessed daily in their community. Not only did the process provide a new opportunity for youth to be involved, but it served WYEP organizations as they developed new strategies for working with a more empowered and involved youth.

4. Acknowledgements

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[1] Communities That Care (CTC) survey (2006)

[2] Wang, C.C. & Burris, M.S. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior, 24*(3), 369-387.

[3] Wang, C.C. & Redwood-Jones, Y.A. (2001). Photovoice ethics: Perspectives from Flint Photovoice. *Health Education & Behavior, 28* (5), 560-572.



WYEP Youth Research Team