



CARE: Community Alliance for Research and Engagement

CARE Community Dialogues Report June 2010

OVERALL SUMMARY

In the fall of 2009, CARE collected health surveys from 1,205 residents in six of our highest-risk neighborhoods. Residents were surveyed over seven weeks by a team of 20 trained interviewers from the New Haven community. Reflecting its commitment to reporting research results directly back to the community, CARE organized a series of six 'Community Dialogues' between February and April of 2010. At these dialogues CARE shared survey results, individualized for each neighborhood. In turn, community members shared their ideas and strategies for improving health in New Haven during guided discussion. Nearly 100 residents came out to hear about the health status of their neighborhood. Included herein is a summary of these discussions.

Many common themes arose across all six neighborhoods during the dialogues. Participants discussed the many obvious barriers to achieving health. New Haven residents are concerned about access to healthy foods and cited several barriers, including the closing of Shaw's, the sale of junk food in the city's numerous corner stores and the disproportionate amount of 'fast food' restaurants in New Haven.

Participants in the dialogues also made complex links between socioeconomic status and health. They discussed the impact of poverty, the related issue of stress and the impact of associated factors on health. Neighborhood safety was a topic in each neighborhood and residents clearly indicated that we must stop violence and other dangerous behaviors in order to improve health. They recognize that our neighborhoods must be safe so that their neighbors can safely walk, run, bike and play in New Haven streets and its abundant parks. Many participants discussed the idea that creating better community cohesion will improve safety.

Much dialogue revolved around our youth. Participants expressed a need for more activities for children, including exercise and nutrition education. Families would also like access to schools during non-school hours for recreation and exercise.

CARE staff was pleased to learn so much from our neighbors during all six dialogues. We hope that community members also learned from CARE's work. CARE will utilize the insights and information shared by New Haven residents to inform our next steps as we work with our many community partners to improve health in our city.

Together, we can improve health in New Haven and make our city stronger!

DIXWELL NEIGHBORHOOD: FEBRUARY 24, 2010 DIXWELL-YALE COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER

Ten people participated in the Dixwell Community Dialogue. The open dialogue that followed CARE's presentation covered issues including access to healthy food at local stores, concern about the high rates of smoking in their neighborhood, issues related to stress, community cohesion, and the need to reach out to our young people.

Access to Healthy Food – Attitudes of Neighborhood Store Owners and the Closing of Shaw's

Several participants expressed concern about the pervasive lack of respect for local consumers in neighborhood stores. A perception among neighbors is that many store owners do not reside in New Haven and/or are of a different cultural background. Participants suggested that store owners are not necessarily invested in the community or interested in improving the health of the community. Store owners are more concerned about the economic bottom line. Some articulated the differences of inner-city stores when compared to suburban counterparts. There was strong agreement that people are treated with more respect in other neighborhoods and suggested that store owners become more familiar with their local neighborhood and its residents. One participant noted that it is important to speak up in these situations; let store owners know when you feel disrespected and compliment those who are doing well. Participants suggested confronting store owners in an organized effort. A connection was also made between consistent feelings of disrespect and its contribution to chronic low-grade stress, which in turn, can affect health and well-being.

Shaw's closing was announced in New Haven just prior to the Dixwell Community Dialogue. Participants ruminated over this news and the toll that will likely take on the neighborhood. Some neighbors subsequently raised the difficult issue of attracting businesses into a neighborhood that lacks resources. One participant suggested that businesses should attend Management Team meetings to attain a true sense of neighborhood rather than making assumptions.

Smoking Statistics and Stress

Participants expressed surprise and concern over the smoking statistics, which are twice the national average in Dixwell. CARE staff suggested that researchers tend to find higher rates of tobacco use in areas with high poverty and unemployment rates because of stress. The relationship between low-grade stress and chronic disease was noted again. CARE staff also added that social marketing has a lot to do with tobacco use. Youth who conducted CARE's asset mapping were particularly struck by excessive marketing of tobacco products in stores. They saw the amount of marketing for harmful products as a sign of disrespect to the community. Participants also commented the impact of the illegal sale of 'loosies' (single cigarettes) in local stores on smoking rates.

Community Cohesion

Participants discussed the link between neighborhood safety and health. Some participants also expressed concern that community members have become disconnected and do not always interact and communicate in productive ways. This lack of positive personal interactions is detrimental to the community as a whole. Establishing personal relationships with one's neighbors builds a sense of community, fosters community cohesion, and can increase perceptions of neighborhood safety.

Outreach to Young People

A few individuals noted that creating a sense of welcome for youth is important and that young people need to have positive role models. Others noted that it is important to be proactive with young people and to provide more opportunities at an earlier age (e.g., to promote healthy eating and exercise) so that we don't need to "undo things" later on.

CARE staff noted that healthy children are better able to learn and that it is important to reach out to kids and their parents through the schools.

Ideas for Moving from Data to Action in the Dixwell Neighborhood

- 1) Organize local store owners to stock healthy products and become more accountable to the neighborhood.
- 2) Involve youth in health promoting activities at a younger age.
- 3) Mobilize neighborhood organizations, churches, Yale, and schools to promote change around public safety and health in at-risk neighborhoods.
- 4) Promote more positive interactions among neighbors to breakdown stereotypes, foster a greater sense of cohesion and increase perceptions of neighborhood safety.

FAIR HAVEN NEIGHBORHOOD: MARCH 3, 2010 NEIGHBORWORKS/NEW HORIZONS

Nine people participated in the Fair Haven Community Dialogue. The open dialogue that followed CARE's presentation covered issues including access to health care, communication about health, children and obesity, and smoking.

Access to Health Care

Several representatives from Fair Haven Community Health Center (FHCHC) were present at the event. The high proportion of people who do not have access to health care was not surprising. FHCHC does not have the capacity to serve all Fair Haven residents who do not have access to care. They currently see 130 new patients each month, most of whom are undocumented immigrants. Other participants noted that Fair Haven's issue is emblematic of the national problem of health care access. It was also noted that a lot of Hispanic/Latino patients utilize the ER for a variety of reasons, including fear of identification and cultural differences in seeking/receiving care.

Health Education and Communication

Participants expressed that many people, including those of higher socioeconomic status, do not understand the importance of health and disease prevention. Efforts on the part of public health professionals to communicate with people have failed. Other neighbors noted that CARE has been successful in raising awareness of its 'brand' in Fair Haven. Neighbors recognize the name and the orange color associated with our outreach efforts (jackets, flyers, etc). CARE should capitalize on these efforts.

Corner Stores and Access to Healthy Foods

Participants were struck by the high concentration of corner stores in Fair Haven. Some pointed out that corner stores serve as a multi-purpose venue where people are able to buy many basic foods (milk, eggs, bread, etc.), which is important for people who do not have cars. One participant noted that CARE's maps show the proximity of corner stores to schools. One neighbor described her observation of the foods kids are eating at Clinton Avenue School, where she volunteers. She sees children with potato chips and soda that they purchased on their way to school. She also noted that these products are more expensive at corner stores

when compared to C-Town. Neighbors also suggested that trips to corner stores serve a social function – to go somewhere outside with somebody else – with purchasing food as a secondary purpose. Activities are needed for youth where they can foster their sense of independence and bond socially with peers. Another person added that many children have TVs in their rooms because they do not have options to engage in many activities – particularly outside. Parents are trying to keep their kids safe and make them happy.

Neighbors suggested that targeting corner stores may have an impact on health.

Children and Health

The conversation about corner stores led to a dialogue about the data CARE collected in 12 schools. CARE surveyed 1,175 5th and 6th grade students from 12 schools (88% response rate). Nearly one-half (47%) of students are overweight or obese. The data also showed low rates of exercise, high rates of soda consumption, and high rates of food insecurity. This data has been presented to Dr. Mayo, and CARE is advocating the inclusion of a health agenda in school reform efforts.

FHCHC providers indicated that they regularly screen patients for overweight and obesity. Rates of families with diabetes and pre-diabetes are extraordinary.

Smoking

Participants expressed alarm about the nearly 30% smoking rate. Neighbors would like to take advantage of these data to determine how to best work together as a community and city.

Ideas for Moving from Data to Action in the Fair Haven Neighborhood

- 1) Collaborate with corner stores to stock and market healthy foods.
- 2) Advocate for city-wide initiatives and policies addressing obesity and chronic disease.
- 3) Focus on public safety so that the environment is conducive to people exercising, particularly for children and youth.

WEST RIVER/DWIGHT NEIGHBORHOOD: MARCH 17, 2010 NEIGHBORWORKS/NEW HORIZONS

Sixteen people participated in the West River/Dwight Community Dialogue. The open dialogue that followed CARE's presentation covered issues including asthma, smoking, access to food at corner stores, advertising and public safety.

Asthma

One participant inquired about CARE's reported rates of asthma, as she had heard that there are higher rates of asthma in West River. CARE staff pointed out that many people may be undiagnosed due to lack of regular access to health care. Urban areas tend to have higher rates. Neighbors pointed out that the Route 34 connector may influence rates of asthma. Many cars and trucks pass through the neighborhood, often idling near schools. There has been suggestion in the past of trying to pass an ordinance that would regulate truck idling in town.

Smoking

Participants were surprised by the high rates of smoking in their neighborhood. They discussed the use of ads in corner stores as a source of revenue for these small businesses (businesses get paid by tobacco companies to post ads). A participant who used to have a business on Whalley Avenue indicated that there is an ordinance requiring the inside of a store to be visible

from the outside (i.e., windows should not be covered/obstructed). Because police are focused on priorities related to safety, this ordinance is not enforced. Participants expressed interest in advocating for enforcement of the ordinance. One neighbor suggested using the media to bring attention to this issue.

Beyond targeting advertisements and sales of cigarettes, the issue of *addiction* needs to be addressed. Participants asked what resources and programs are available to help people quit. Another participant mentioned that St. Raphael's and Yale-New Haven Hospital have smoking cessation programs and are seeking places to conduct their trainings.

Corner Stores and Access to Healthy Foods

Participants suggested working with corner stores to stock more fresh foods. Neighbors expressed that we need to show storeowners that there are concerned citizens who are interested in buying healthier foods. Neighbors should pressure stores by repeatedly requesting healthy options. Store owners order based on consumer demand. Participants suggested that stores will continue to stock high-profit, top-selling items (junk food, soda, etc.) and won't bother with more expensive and risky products unless they see a market. Stores need to see that consumers are ready to spend on these healthier options.

Advertising

Participants questioned how to compete with the incessant "brainwashing" people are subjected to (cigarettes, soda, junk food/fast food). It is challenging to promote healthy behaviors in this type of environment. Neighbors agreed that there is a need for better public service campaigns regarding health.

Public Safety

Participants expressed concern about the impact of safety on their neighbors' ability to exercise, noting "exercise is about security. People don't feel safe so they don't walk. Edgewood Park is right there!" Participants pointed out that the park has great facilities, but if people do not feel safe they are not going to use those facilities to exercise.

Ideas for Moving from Data to Action in the Fair Haven Neighborhood

- 1) Advocate for the enforcement of the city ordinance mandating that the inside of stores be visible from the outside (ie: catalyze to remove tobacco advertising).
- 2) Promote smoking cessation resources.
- 3) Collaborate with corner stores to stock and market healthy foods.
- 4) Create a public service campaign that promotes healthy behaviors.
- 5) Mobilize to increase neighborhood safety.

HILL NORTH NEIGHBORHOOD: MARCH 17, 2010 WILSON LIBRARY

Fourteen people participated in the Hill North Community Dialogue. The open dialogue that followed CARE's presentation covered issues including access to healthy foods, the open use of schools, and developing exercise programs for adults and youth.

Farmers' Market

The residents of Hill North have been advocating for a Farmers' Market for a couple of years. They would like to see one started to help increase access to fresh produce.

Use of Schools

John Daniels School has a track that can be better utilized. One participant reported that she started the Community Fit Club 1.5 years ago with another resident. The group walked from 6-7:30 AM at John Daniels track. They described challenges to participation: other residents weren't aware of the program, lack of time to commit to the program, and issues of safety (people brought dogs). Participants in the dialogue agreed it would be beneficial to revive this program and brainstormed ways to overcome these challenges, including advertising the program and working with the Hill North neighborhood group to promote the program.

Another participant pointed out that there is an open gym program at John Daniels. There is also a free karate program, but funds are insufficient to cover costs for this summer. CARE staff indicated that this could be a potential program around which to partner.

One participant stated that the community should also have access to Career High School in the winter.

Youth

There is a basketball program in place for older youth, but after school and younger children's programs were cut due to lack of funding. Participants expressed a need to teach youth about the importance of exercising, especially in the winter months.

Other issues

Some participants expressed concern about asthma, suggesting that it needs to be tracked better in New Haven. Yale and local health centers could be involved with this.

One resident mentioned that Hill North is very transient, and this affects participation in programs and activities in the neighborhood. It also affects social cohesion.

Ideas for Moving from Data to Action in the Hill North Neighborhood

- 1) Work with CitySeed to bring a Farmers' Market to Hill North.
- 2) Revive the Community Fit Club, and utilize new strategies to promote the program among neighbors.
- 3) Collaborate with CARE to extend the free karate program at Daniels School.
- 4) Advocate for the open use of schools by the community.
- 5) Develop programs targeting youth.

NEWHALLVILLE NEIGHBORHOOD: MARCH 17, 2010 STETSON LIBRARY

Six people participated in the Newhallville Community Dialogue. The open dialogue that followed CARE's presentation covered issues including access to healthy foods, community cohesion, and health education for children and youth.

Response to Data

Participants in the Newhallville dialogue spent considerable time discussing the results. One participant commented on the selection of six resource-poor neighborhoods and expressed concern that using this data to describe all of New Haven might encourage the stereotype of the city as a ghetto. CARE staff clarified that the data is not being used to describe all of New Haven.

Participants found it surprising that 45% of people didn't feel safe walking during the day (not just at night), which has a big impact on physical activity and sense of community. Another participant suggested that safety could be related to the high stress levels as well.

Some participants commented on the higher rates of everyday vegetable consumption in Newhallville in contrast to high rates of food insecurity.

One participant asked about unemployment rates. CARE staff has not analyzed this data yet and will start looking into it soon.

Access to Healthy Foods

Neighbors in Newhallville are being impacted by the loss of Shaw's Supermarket. Participants agreed that another supermarket is needed. Participants also expressed interest in bringing a Farmers' Market to their neighborhood. The vouchers that CitySeed gives out to seniors to purchase produce are very valuable. Farmers' markets are seen as promoting nutrition and health while also improving sense of community and social environment.

Community Cohesion

Participants noted the link between improving community cohesion and health. Improving community is not just about fixing a broken window or starting a garden, but reveals how engaged the community members are in solving problems. Neighbors pointed to the success of a mural painting project last year. The project taught painting skills, cooking with fresh foods and cultural awareness. More activities like this are needed.

Children and Youth

Participants described the need to educate children and pointed out recent issues in the public schools, including the exclusion of recess and limited health education.

Ideas for Moving from Data to Action in the Newhallville Neighborhood

- 1) Increase access to healthy foods – explore options with CitySeed.
- 2) Link health-related activities to promote community cohesion.
- 3) Advocate for health-related programs/activities in schools.

WEST ROCK NEIGHBORHOOD: APRIL 28, 2010 WEST ROCK DEVELOPMENT CENTER

There was another meeting taking place at the West Rock Development Center on the night of CARE's dialogue. CARE was invited to present at this meeting of the West Rock Development Corporation/West Rock Implementation Committee,¹ which included approximately 40 people. We were warmly welcomed, and the CARE team was remembered by many in the room (i.e., *"you were the people with the orange jackets who asked about our health"*). There were several people in the room who had completed the survey. The Committee was very interested in what

¹ In December 2009, the New Haven Board of Aldermen approved a zoning map amendment establishing a planned development district for the Brookside and Rockview housing complexes in the West Rock neighborhood. The \$173 million project will bring 357 rental units, 38 owner-occupied homes and 38 elderly housing units. The meeting we attended was related to broader issues of this development project, including issues related to community outreach, home buying plans, and use of local and minority contractors.

we learned from their West Rock neighbors. We were asked to present all of the findings; however, because there were other agenda items for the meeting, there was slightly less time for general discussion.

Access to Healthy Foods

Participants expressed concern over Shaw's closing. They recommended economic incentives to attract another grocery store, and stated how important this was to residents in the entire city. They expressed concern about how few stores and restaurants there were in their neighborhood, and the burden for families in terms of getting access to food, let alone healthy food. They were really struck by the maps of the West Rock neighborhood compared to the other New Haven neighborhoods we mapped in terms of the lack of resources of all kinds. The Board of the West Rock Development Corporation/West Rock Implementation Committee asked for access to CARE's maps; they intended to use the maps later that week in a meeting to promote healthy economic development. [Note: Maps were sent the following morning.]

One participant asked about farmers' markets. CARE staff explained that CitySeed organizes farmers' markets and links growers to markets. Another participant pointed out that CitySeed delivers to the elderly complex in West Rock as a part of their Community Supported Agriculture program; they valued this service.

A resident stated that she's arranging a meeting with Common Ground to discuss collaboration with West Rock residents and families (gardening, farming, etc).

Schools

Residents would like to see schools open to the community for recreation. Recess needs to be added back into the school day.

Other Issues

There was discussion about West Rock's isolation, which is a public safety issue. Improved lighting and sidewalks are needed. This will be part of the plan in terms of on-going development of the neighborhood.

Participants pointed out the need to support community change. A link was made between creating a sense of community and improving health.

Ideas for Moving from Data to Action in the Newhallville Neighborhood

- 1) Advocate for a new grocery store.
- 2) Collaborate with Common Ground to teach residents about gardening and produce.
- 3) Advocate for health-related programs/activities in schools.
- 4) Promote economic development with an eye toward building a healthy community.

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