

**SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY**



**Lerner Center**  
For Public Health Promotion  
**Maxwell School**

## Take Back the Streets

REPORT ON NEAR WESTSIDE RESIDENT & COLLEAGUE FEEDBACK MEETINGS  
NEAR WEST SIDE HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS INITIATIVE (2015)

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# Executive Summary

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In January 2015, the Lerner Center received funding from the New York State Health Foundation under its *Healthy Neighborhood Initiative*. The work on community health efforts in the Near Westside in Syracuse, NY builds upon a multi-sector collaborative and, in particular, the foundation developed by the Near Westside Initiative, Inc.

***Community engagement: Why?*** Communities living in poverty are likely to suffer poor health outcomes, in large part as a result of the social and environmental structures around them. Structural violence is one of the root causes of broad health inequalities. Community engagement is an essential ingredient for developing and implementing impactful, sustainable improvements that address health disparities associated with poverty.

Consistent with best practice principles of community engagement, the Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion, in collaboration with the Near Westside Initiative and other community partners, led a series of community meetings to learn about the Near Westside community's perspectives on health. These meetings took place from February to May 2015 and included neighborhood residents as well as staff of organizations working in the community ("colleagues"). A total of 98 community members and 19 community colleagues participated.

The goals for the meetings are described below:

## ***Goals: Community Resident Feedback Meetings***

1. To guide Lerner Center projects by obtaining the perspectives and suggestions of community members regarding health and physical activity
2. To conduct meetings in which participants felt like they were asked questions that mattered to them and that we listened to their comments
3. To strengthen the relationship between the Lerner Center, community residents, and partners by establishing respect for all participants

## ***Goals: Community Colleagues Meetings***

1. To take concerted time to learn about available services
2. To learn about activities specifically related to nutrition and physical activity
3. To learn about further areas for possible partnerships
4. To identify areas of concern for the neighborhood
5. To ask what resources each colleague is willing to commit to efforts on the Near Westside

## **Findings: Arising Themes Community Resident Feedback Meetings**

***Survival Mode (Individual Level)*** Residents in the Near Westside are concerned with day-to-day survival. While health, physical activity and nutrition are relevant to the residents; it is understandable that participants indicate that they prioritize these only after other areas of their life such as shelter and food have been secured.

***Lack of Social Support (Intrapersonal Level)*** Participants to the meetings perceive a lack of social support as a barrier to become healthier and more physically active. In this context, lack of social support should be understood as intense family obligations; lack of a supportive spouse and absence of other family members; and lack of support services such as childcare.

### ***Environmental Level***

- ***The Need for Social Infrastructure***

The lack of safe, culturally appropriate, and inexpensive (or free) venues to participate in physical activities for individuals and/or families was a common concern of all meeting participants. Most participants were not able to identify places in the community that they could afford where they can exercise safely, and where the entire family can participate.

- ***Violence and Safety***

Street violence and lack of safety were the biggest concerns among participants. Young children, teenagers, and adults all expressed concerns about shooting on the streets and reckless driving. A 6 year old child said: “*We don’t go to the park (Skiddy Park) because someone can steal you (kidnap) or kill you.*” The participants expressed the need to see greater police presence in the neighborhood and expressed the need to improve community-police relationships.

### ***Vision shared by the participants***

- A Community Center
- Family friendly events
- Programs, services and events that are culturally appropriate and welcoming and that include the voice of community residents

### **Findings: Arising Themes from Community Colleague Meetings**

***Rich in activities:*** There are a variety of services available to the residents in the Near Westside.

***Limited funding and capacity to address constant and emerging needs:*** While the area is rich in resources, there are real challenges that impact the health of Near Westside residents. These challenges include safety and violence (drug dealers, limited City police presence due to funding cuts, unsafe streets), the need for better infrastructure (more playgrounds, better lighting, safe corridors for kids to walk to school), and the need for classes for residents and their families.

***Desire to reach more residents:*** Many colleagues have noted that attendance at programming varies and note that sustainable programming is challenging to run when attendance is low.

***Willingness to contribute:*** Despite limited financial resources, every provider is eager to provide space and people power to on-going community efforts.

### **Overlapping Themes:**

***Neighborhood Safety:*** For those in the neighborhood, continued drug activity and violence are barriers to use of neighborhood resources, especially Skiddy Park. There is a desire for more police presence though there is limited ability for community policing due to shrinking City police numbers.

***Building Community:*** Each conversation with residents and colleagues highlighted the need for more positive activities in the neighborhood. There is a groundswell of support to “take back the streets” with positive events and group activities (e.g., picnics, festivals).

***Community Engagement:*** Some colleagues expressed lack of involvement of residents in programming as a concern, making sustainability of new initiatives difficult. Meanwhile, residents expressed that they often feel their voices and input to be an afterthought. There is a desire both with residents and colleagues to develop more trust. As one colleague participant stated “We have to cultivate “power with, not power

over” residents and participants. Discussions indicate that the definition and mechanics of what “community engagement” means is not universal.

## **Opportunities:**

### ***Short-term:***

- To address awareness among residents and to increase attendance at programs in the community, the Lerner Center will create a community calendar of activities highlighting colleagues’ programs and connecting residents to programmatic opportunities.
- To address feedback from residents and colleagues about concerns with existing programs, the Lerner Center will pilot physical activity programs that are family friendly, working with existing providers.
- To address concerns among residents and providers about safety, the Lerner Center and Near Westside Initiative will continue discussions with the Mayor’s Office to request moving the West-end police substation to the Skiddy Park Fieldhouse.

### ***Intermediate Term:***

- To find funding opportunities for more community policing efforts.
- To have conversations among community colleagues about the definition of community engagement, and the expansion of community engagement efforts.

# Introduction

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*"If you have come to help me, you are wasting my time.  
But if you have come because your liberation  
is bound up with mine, then let us work together."*  
**Lila Watson, Aboriginal Australian woman**

In January 2015, the Lerner Center received funding from the New York State Health Foundation under its *Healthy Neighborhood Initiative*. This initiative focuses on increasing availability of healthy affordable foods, improving the built environment and linking community residents to programs. The work on community health efforts in the Near Westside in Syracuse, NY builds upon a multi-sector collaborative and, in particular, the foundation developed by the Near Westside Initiative, Inc. The NWSI is a 501(c)(3) that was formed in 2006, whose mission is to combine the power of art, technology and innovation with neighborhood values and culture to revitalize Syracuse's Near Westside neighborhood.

***Community Engagement: Why?*** Communities living in poverty are likely to suffer poor health outcomes, in large part as a result of the social and environmental structures around them. Structural violence is one of the root causes of broad health inequalities (differences in the health status between those who have resources and those who don't have). Community engagement is an essential ingredient for developing and implementing impactful, sustainable improvements that address health disparities associated with poverty.

The concept of community engagement incorporates two important principles: social knowledge and empowerment. Given the socioecological factors that impact health inequalities, these inequalities are best addressed by engaging community members who can bring their own experience, viewpoints, and community knowledge to find appropriate solutions in context of that community's culture. This is ideally done through empowerment- the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make effective choices and then transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. The process of "increasing power" can liberate individuals and communities that poor socio-economic conditions exercise upon them. This is best achieved by increasing self-empowerment in parallel of developing social structures.

Thus, the betterment of the community's health cannot be achieved in absence of the community participation. Meaningful community participation extends beyond physical involvement to include generation of ideas, participation in decision making, and sharing of responsibility for implementation. This kind of community engagement is grounded in the principles of fairness, justice, empowerment, participation and self-determination.

Sustainable change in the Near Westside will not occur without systematic, structured and appropriate engagement of the community. Accordingly, this report presents the perspectives of Near Westside neighborhood residents and community based organizations, on health and other important topics that have naturally arisen during conversations with the community during the first series of community meetings under the *Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative*. More community engagement, both at the resident and community-based organization level, will be needed in the future.

## The Near Westside: Background

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Erie Blvd, Gifford, Geddes, and West streets bound the Near Westside of the City of Syracuse. The Near Westside, once affluent, is one of the city's oldest neighborhoods. Today, the Near Westside is an

economically disadvantaged neighborhood. The City is the 23<sup>rd</sup> poorest city in the U.S, according to the U.S Census Bureau and the Near Westside neighborhood is one of the poorest neighborhoods in Syracuse.

The neighborhood is racially and ethnically diverse with an African American population of 44% (versus 30% for the City of Syracuse) and Hispanic or Latino population of 28% (versus 8% for the City of Syracuse). Children and youth under the age of 20 make up 38% of the population, while the majority of the population (51%) falls between the ages of 20-59. Only 55% of NWS residents have a high school diploma compared to 80% of Syracuse residents and only 6% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Over half of NWS residents live in poverty compared to 33% for the City of Syracuse. Nearly 70% of children under the age of 18 live in poverty, compared to 48% for the City of Syracuse. About 70% of households have an annual income less than \$25,000. Almost 60% of residents have had Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits within the last 12 months. (American Community Survey, 2008-2012 estimates). Over 50% of the 5,765 purchases made weekly at Nojaims are paid for using SNAP benefits.

The NWS is home to Syracuse City schools: Seymour Dual Language Academy (K-5) and Westside Academy at Blodgett (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>). Both Seymour and Blodgett have higher percentages of free or reduced price lunches than the District (87% and 100%, respectively). The recent release of the math and English language arts test results show that students within the District disproportionately struggle with academic achievement.

Twenty percent of the NWS population lack health insurance. Of those who are insured, 82% have public coverage (compared to 41% for the City of Syracuse). The overall disability rate is 20% for the area- 6% for children under 18 years of age, 24% for those between 18-64, and 64% for those 65 and older (ACS, 2008-2012). Within one NWS zip code (13204), there are increased rates (120-225% increase over expected) of congestive heart failure, diabetes, asthma, and COPD compared to the county. The area also has increased rates of overweight/obesity (health.ny.gov), teen pregnancy, late prenatal care as well as alcohol, tobacco, and drug use during pregnancy (NYS PQI).

**But what do these statistics actual look like in the day to day lives of residents?** Many of the participants in the Near Westside live in poverty and experience stress. Although this statement can be inferred from the available statistics, the conversations held during the community meeting were a “reality check.” Low-income families living in disadvantaged neighborhoods struggle to make ends meet and are more likely experience more negative life events such as unemployment, marital disruption, financial loss, marginality, isolation and powerlessness. This is precisely the reality of many of those living in the Near Westside of the City of Syracuse as expressed by meeting participants.

The following quote from a participant helps describe the context:

*“Personal time, sleep, feeling overwhelmed with life gives me insomnia and then I feel tired during the day. Family – I am a single mom and the day-to-day just get repetitive- family comes first but then there is no time for me. I work two jobs, and have for a long time, so I feel like I am playing catching up in my personal time. It is a mental barrier – I ask why I am doing the day-to-day routine just to get by, it’s draining. I just keep going, but I don’t see the end result.”*

This quote is a good example of other similar expressions of powerlessness. It reflects a sense of dissatisfaction where the effort (amount of time and energy spent in activities) is great and the return is insignificant, and a sense of lost purpose, that affects the overall health and motivation to be healthy.

Children are not spared from these stressors. During the meeting with 4<sup>th</sup> graders in Seymour school the facilitators asked, “What else do you want to do in this class together that relates to health and wellness?”

Their responses were: “*Help the poor people when they ask for money*”, “*We could have money to give them*”, “*Pick up bottles and return them for money to give to the poor people,*”, “*Have a bake sale to raise money to get poor people a home,*” among others. Their responses reveal a practical sense of the reality and the relevance of poverty (homelessness, lack of resources) in their lives.

## Framework

The Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion, in collaboration with the Near Westside Initiative and other community partners, led a series of community meetings to better understand the community’s perspectives on health. These meetings took place during the months of February to May 2015, and included neighborhood residents as well as staff of organizations working in the community (“colleagues”).

## Community Resident Feedback Meetings

The Community Resident Feedback Meetings were conducted under the framework outlined in the Socio-Ecological Model of the Determinants of Health and Physical Activity (see Figure 1). This approach uses a comprehensive framework to explain that health, including physical activity, is determined by individual, social, environmental, and policy related factors. Facilitators during these meetings assessed these factors and their impact on the lives of community residents. The goals of the meetings were:

### Goals

1. To guide Lerner Center projects by obtaining the perspectives and suggestions of community members regarding health and physical activity
2. To conduct meetings in which participants felt like they were asked questions that mattered to them and that we listened to their comments
3. To strengthen the relationship between the Lerner Center, community residents, and partners by establishing respect for all participants

Figure 1.

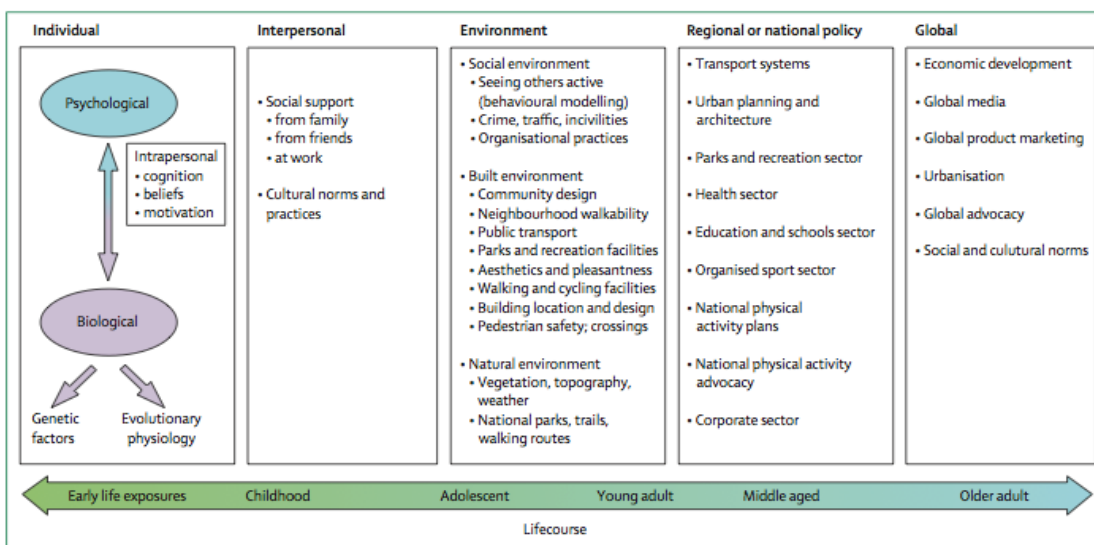


Figure 1: Adapted ecological model of the determinants of physical activity

Adrian E Bauman et al **Correlates of physical activity: why are some people physically active and others not?** (2012) *Lancet* 2012; 380: 258–71 (Retrieved from: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(12\)60735-1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(12)60735-1))



## Methodology

The community meetings were facilitated and organized by staff from the Lerner Center in collaboration with staff from community based organizations in the Near West Side Neighborhood. The community meetings were held at *Catholic Charities, Seymour School, La Casita, and Huntington's Family Center*, with, in most cases, already formed groups that meet routinely. A total of 98 community members attended the meetings, representative of all ages (40 children between 6-12 years old), 21 teenagers, and 37 adults), sexes, and races in the neighborhood (Table 1).

Table 1. List of Meetings, dates, venues, and number of Participants.

Organization Name	Date	# of Participants
Catholic Charities	Feb 23, 2015	4
Seymour School - fourth graders	Feb 25, 2015	25
Seymour School - Teachers	March 4, 2015	4
Seymour School - Parents	March 31, 2015	14
La Casita - Parents	March 6, 2014	6
La Casita - (Teenagers and children)	March 6, 2015	7
Huntington Family Center - Parenting Group	March 23, 2015	11
Huntington Family Center - (Children Ages 5-12)	April 1, 2015	13
Huntington Family Center - Teenagers	April 1, 2015	14

At each of the meetings the participants were asked the following questions:

- 1) Are you currently physically active? What do you do? Where do you do it? When? With whom? How often? What do you do when the weather is warmer?
- 2) Has anyone thought about becoming more physically active? What triggered this interest? What motivates you?
- 3) What physical activities do you enjoy?
- 4) Are there any physical activities that are part of or important in your family or culture?
- 5) Do you have any family or friends who are physically active?
- 6) What physical activities are easiest for you to take part in?
- 7) Where do you wish you could be more physically active?
- 8) What motivates you to be physically active?
- 9) What physical activities do you wish you could take part in more often?

In meetings with school children these questions were asked using the River of Life Methodology. The facilitators presented the drawing of a river to the children, and gave them paper images of rocks, boats, and docks. Children used the rocks to speak about barriers to be physically active, boats as the activities they already take part in, and docs as motivators to be healthy or more physically active.

## Community Colleague Meetings

While there is a strong network of providers and advocates in the Near Westside and the broader City of Syracuse, awareness and knowledge of their activities varies and existing efforts are often in parallel.

### Goals:

The goals of community colleagues meetings were:

1. To take concerted time to learn about available services
2. To learn about activities specifically related to nutrition and physical activity
3. To learn about further areas for possible partnerships
4. To identify areas of concern for the neighborhood
5. To ask what resources each colleague is willing to commit to efforts on the Near Westside

## Methodology

From February 2015 to date, Lerner Center and Near Westside Initiative staff has met with 19 community colleagues (note: community colleague conversations are on-going):

- Onondaga County Health Department
- Huntington Family Centers
- Gifford Foundation
- Syracuse City Police
- Downtown YMCA
- Syracuse City Parks Department
- La Casita
- Syracuse City Neighborhood & Business Development
- Syracuse Housing Authority
- Center for Court Innovation
- Catholic Charities of Onondaga County/Vincent House
- Rescue Mission
- St. Joseph's Primary Care Center West
- WCNY (PBS)
- Westside PEACE
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Spanish Action League
- Home Headquarters
- CNY Community Foundation

Each partner was asked the same four questions:

1. What current activities are underway by your organization to address nutrition, physical activity, and/or quality of life that impact the Near Westside?
2. What projects or ideas do you/your organization have that have been tabled for lack of \$ or partners, that could benefit the Near Westside?
3. Do you and your organization have any other ideas addressing health or quality of life for the neighborhood, and/or beyond the neighborhood boundaries?
4. What are you/your organization willing to commit to the efforts on the Near Westside (people, space, resources, etc.)?

## Arising Themes

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### Community Resident Feedback Meetings

Four main themes were identified during these conversations:

- Survival being more important than health (physical activity),
- Lack of social support,
- Need of social infrastructure
- Concern for neighborhood safety.

These themes were identified within the Individual, Intrapersonal and Environmental categories, mapping on to the socio-ecological model of health (see Figure 1). A recurrent theme in all categories was violence/ street insecurity.

#### I. Survival Mode (Individual Level)

Adult residents in the Near Westside expressed that they are more concerned with surviving than they are about health. When asked: “What comes to your mind when you hear the words: Health, physical activity, and exercise?”, the participants’ answers revealed appropriate knowledge in the topics. Example of their answers are: “*Eating healthy*,” “*going to the gym*”, “*walking several days a week*”, “*eating vegetables and exercising three times a week*”, “*have high self-esteem*”. However, the volume, intensity, and complexity of day-to-day activities (situations of violence, poor relationships, and resource scarcity) take most of the residents’ time and focus, which results in less attention paid to health topics.

Health is also not high on the list of priorities for adolescents. Although teenagers seemed more interested in participating in physical activity than adults, they also face resource uncertainty/scarcity that undermines their ability to participate in health related activities.

Street violence and insecurity are high in the individual list of priorities. The need to ensure family safety is a common concern among all ages in the neighborhood. Parents spend more time making sure that their kids are safe, and restrict them from participating in outside activities.

Lack of motivation was another concern/challenge expressed by participants; though less common. The participants expressed that they were not always motivated to change habits, even when they knew change was necessary, mainly due to difficult situations. *"...No energy, overwhelming life situation. The last 7-8 months have halted what I want to do. I have a lot to do that I don't want to do .... It is stressful, I want to lay in bed all day."*

Therefore, health comes later in the list of priorities. Health, physical activity and nutrition are still relevant to the residents; nonetheless it is naturally prioritized after other areas of their life such as shelter, and food have been secured. This natural prioritization highlights the need of holistic interventions that target what residents have more concern for, in combination with other health promotions strategies. Failure to develop interventions that takes into consideration the context of the residents will result in failed attempts to help the residents improve their health.

## II. Lack of Social Support (Intra and Inter personal Level)

Participants perceive a lack of social support as a barrier to become healthier, and more physically active. In this context, lack of social support should be understood as intense family obligations. For example, lack of a supportive spouse/partner and the absence of any other family member to assist with every day responsibilities, as well as a lack of services with childcare. When asked about barriers to become physically active, the participants responded: *"... There is not enough time, not enough support and not enough places to share in the community, and the weather!"* Or *"There are not enough people to help me and not enough support in the community."* This is consistent with the results of qualitative research that have reported similar reasons as significant barriers to exercise.

## III. Environmental Level

### III.a The Need for Social Infrastructure

The lack of safe, culturally appropriate, and inexpensive (or free) venues to participate in physical activities as an individual and/or as a family was a common concern of all meeting participants. Most participants were not able to identify places in the community that they could afford where they can exercise safely and where the entire family can participate.

The idea of a community center was a shared vision among participants. Participants recognize the need for a center where parents could exercise while their younger children are cared for and where teenagers could participate in well-supervised activities.

- *"A center, a safe space for kids."*
- *"I <want> a big center to have multiple activities. But it needs to be supervised."*
- *"<we> need something to get kids off the streets. But it needs to be supervised."*
- *"Community Centers can help kids find talents. We don't have a lot of income to pay for activities, so have a center that offers those types of activities."*
- *"A Community place you can go and bring your child or grandchild while working out, a place with child-care."*

- *“More programs for teens, stuff that is later in the day. This would reduce boredom, prevent drinking, and drugging.”*

The need for family events was another central idea (vision) among participants. Participants mentioned the need to take back the streets, to take back the areas of the community that for too long have been used by gangs or drug dealers for criminal activities. *“We need to take the streets back, and to have family friendly activities,”* and *“<we> would like to see places where we could go as a family to enjoy.”*

Services should also be culturally appropriate, and provide a welcoming environment. One quote from a participant reflects a common feeling among community members: *“There are others in the community who want to do it one way, their way, not our way”* (Lerner Center Staff note: She then clarified that she didn’t want to come across as “us” and “them” and made a reference that skin color shouldn’t matter but implied that a division exists between those with authority and those who are the intended recipients of community programs/resources). Culturally appropriate implies a place where non-English speakers can communicate in their own language, or be assisted in some way—a place in which people with lack of knowledge, or expertise, could feel welcome and included.

Participants seemed to express a sense of being excluded from the decision making process. They hear people say that they want to help residents make changes but those who have the authority to make decisions do not take the right action, and do not really pay attention to what community members express. *“Organizations such as [name of the organization], doesn’t value our thoughts, decisions are made in advance. Even if they asked us.”*

### III.b Violence and Safety

Street violence and lack of safety were the biggest concerns among participants. Young children, teenagers, and adults all expressed concern with shooting on the streets and reckless driving. A child age 12 expressed after asked about barriers to being physically active: *“Barriers are easy to think about: shootings on the streets and reckless driving (prevent us from playing on the streets).”* A 6 year- old expressed: *“We don’t go to the park (Skiddy Park) because someone can steal you [kidnap] or kill you.”* Parents expressed: *“I lock my kids up and my house is a barrier. Kids aren’t accustomed to going outside. I don’t want to send my kids into the community.”* *“A curfew should be implemented in the city that mandates teenagers to be inside the homes at an early hour at night. This would prevent deaths.”* And *“[You are] not safe, even in your own yard.”* Violence is indeed a barrier to health, to becoming more physically active, but most important of all, it is a barrier to a good quality of life.

The participants expressed the need to see more police presence in the neighborhood. The following quotes express the sentiment of most of the participants: *“Police station that is close by that is always staffed,”* and *“Police officer there all the time.”*

They also expressed the need to improve community-police relationships. Most participants noted that the City of Syracuse police force provides better treatment to residents, when compared with the sheriff’s staff. A smaller portion identified both police forces as disrespectful to community members. *“Police don’t respond quickly to calls, especially toward people who aren’t white,”* and *“Sheriff police is disrespectful to the community residents.”*

## Community Colleague Feedback Meetings

**I. Rich in activities-** There is a variety of services available to the residents in the Near Westside. Huntington Family Centers offers programming across the life span, including day care, after school programming, senior programming, and family support. La Casita Cultural Center offers dancing classes for teens three days a week as well as tutoring services during the academic year. Syracuse Housing Authority, with the James Geddes Development in the Near Westside (four high rises for senior citizens and 39 row houses for families), has space in the buildings for community gathering, including a computer lab. Westside Peace offers family based case management, summer youth programming, and has a community garden in the backyard of its property. The Center for Court Innovation's new Peacemaking Project is located in the Near Westside at 601 Tully and offers free mediation services by trained volunteers. The relocation of parent and family programs to Catholic Charities Vincent House on Seymour Street brings more resources into the neighborhood. The Spanish Action League is also a multiple service agency, including such programs as a youth theater troupe, translation services, and a Spanish language radio program on 620AM. The Rescue Mission provides safety net services for the homeless and hungry, including meal services 3 times a day, 365 days a year, and emergency and transitional housing. The expansion of St. Joseph's Primary Care Center-West now offers more one-stop shopping, including pediatrics, behavioral health, and lab work, for patients.

The Onondaga County Health Department offers a multitude of services throughout the County, for example through Healthy Families (including WIC) and the Healthy Homes program and is eager to connect more with residents and colleagues on the Near Westside. The Downtown YMCA offers reduced family memberships as well as free youth and adult tutoring, music classes, and writing classes. Syracuse City Parks has numerous summer programming options including a mobile recreation van that has a presence at Skiddy Park. WCNY, the region's PBS station, relocated to the Near Westside over a year ago and offers many cultural and educational programs for families and youth. Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), through its SNAP-ED/Eat Smart NY funded initiative offers many workshops on food preservation, nutrition, and cooking for lower income families. CCE also offers a two-year Master Gardener program; to date CCE has trained over 50 master gardeners, many of whom volunteer their time with community gardening efforts. Home Headquarters has and continues to renovate many owner-occupied homes in the Near Westside, and also offers a variety of home improvement programs for low to moderate income home owners. The Gifford Foundation has been a supporter of the Near Westside from the start and currently offers "What If" grants for resident informed projects. The Community Foundation has made investments in art projects in the neighborhood as well as with Primary Care Center-West. The Syracuse City Police continue to be an active partner in the Near Westside.

**II. Limited funding and capacity to address constant and emerging needs:** While the area is rich in resources, there are real challenges. Vacant housing in the City is a constant concern (~1,800 vacant houses, many on the NWS). Lead in homes continues to be a pressing health concern. There are approximately 35,000 homes in Syracuse. Homes built after 1978 do not have lead paint, but only 10% of homes in Syracuse were built after 1978. Despite the efforts of the City and County to improve homes through modest fixes, full abatement is very costly and funding is limited.

All colleagues noted impediments to physical activity. Barriers to physical activity include safety and violence (drug dealers, limited City police presence due to funding cuts, unsafe streets); the need for better infrastructure (more playgrounds, better lighting, safe corridors for kids to walk to school); and the need for physical activity classes for residents and their families.

Many colleagues noted the need for more cooking classes and community gardens for residents, particularly those that are culturally competent (growing and cooking foods that residents are familiar

with). However, without a large community kitchen space in the neighborhood, modifications need to be made to either accommodate smaller class sizes or using different cooking techniques. All require a consistent infrastructure for sustainability.

Colleagues also spoke to the need for more social activities to build social cohesion, especially social activities for seniors to combat isolation.

**III. Desire to reach more residents:** Many colleagues have noted that attendance at programming varies, and when low, makes it difficult to continue running those programs. Transportation issues are persistent, as is affordable and/or free childcare during programmatic activities. Some providers have noted the need to move services to residents if they cannot or do not walk through the building doors. However, others have noted that the reason residents do not attend programming is that they were not asked if they wanted it in the first place.

**IV. Willingness to contribute:** Despite limited financial resources, every provider is eager to provide space and people power to on-going community efforts.

## Overlapping Themes:

The following themes are of importance for both the community participants and community colleagues working in the neighborhood. In a way, these themes represent a consensus of what matter most to those living or working in the neighborhood. The process of matching the interests of the participants to the interests of those working in the neighborhood was not a difficult task as there were natural commonalities between the two groups. The overlapping themes were:

- I. **Neighborhood Safety:** For those in the neighborhood, continued drug activity is a real barrier to use of neighborhood resources, especially Skiddy Park. There is a desire for more police presence though there is limited ability due to shrinking City Police numbers.
- II. **Building Community:** Each conversation with residents and colleagues highlighted the need for more positive activities in the neighborhood; there is a groundswell of support to take back the streets with positive events and group activities (picnics, festivals). There is also a need to build “community” among providers. Colleagues noted the need for better inter-organizational communication to prevent duplication of efforts and to help promote activities of partner organizations.
- III. **Community Engagement:** Some colleagues have expressed lack of involvement of residents in programming, making sustaining of new initiatives difficult. Conversely, residents often feel their voices and input to be an afterthought. There is a desire both with residents and colleagues to develop more trust. As one colleague stated, “We have to cultivate “power with, not power over” residents and participants.” However, the definition and mechanics of what “community engagement” means were not universal.

# Opportunities

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The reality is that the day-to-day lives of the participants are challenging. Nonetheless, there are elements within this reality that can be addressed to improve the lives of the residents and colleagues of the Near Westside. Perhaps the biggest opportunity is to match resources with concrete identified needs that matter to the residents in the neighborhood. Understanding the main issues that have to be targeted to improve the quality of life and the health of the residents can assist providers in the neighborhood in identifying ways to increase collaboration to realign or to find more resources to target resident concerns. Furthermore, a systematic approach to such improvements can provide an opportunity to develop benchmarks for evaluation. Looking years ahead, the question will be: were the issues that mattered most for the residents addressed? Were their needs met?

The following short-term and intermediate actions address the two main overlapping themes of neighborhood safety and community engagement. These are just the initial steps forward.

## *Short-term:*

- To address awareness among residents and to increase attendance at programs in the community, the Lerner Center will create a community calendar of activities highlighting colleagues' programs and connecting residents to programmatic opportunities. This can also increase collaboration among provider colleagues as they promote activities happening within other organizations.
- To address feedback from residents and colleagues about concerns with existing programs, the Lerner Center will pilot physical activity programs that are family friendly, working with existing providers.
- To address concerns among residents and providers about safety, the Lerner Center and Near Westside Initiative will continue discussions with the Mayor's Office to request moving the West-end police substation to the Skiddy Park Fieldhouse. While not a panacea, it is a small step to directly address resident feedback. City Parks noted that after the police moved their Northside substation into Schiller Park, the staff witnessed a doubling in the number of residents coming to the park. It changed the community's perception of the safety to the park.

## *Intermediate Term:*

- To find funding opportunities for more community policing efforts, for example the Near Westside Initiative and Lerner Center are seeking grant opportunities to support enhancements to this framework.
- To have conversations among community colleagues about the definition of community engagement and the expansion of community engagement efforts. As noted earlier, there are varying definitions of what this means and further conversations have also outlined the need to address **community cohesion**- or neighbor to neighbor positive interaction and pride in the neighborhood. The Lerner Center will connect with colleagues from other cities to learn more about successful community efforts that have the potential for replication in the Near Westside.