Lancaster Housing Opportunity Partnership

Southwest Neighborhood Improvement Program

Phase Two Report

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Background

Lancaster Housing Opportunity Partnership and Millersville University (MU) Sociology/Anthropology Department and MU Center for Public Scholarship and Social Change began a partnership in late spring 2013 focusing on the Lancaster Southwest Neighborhood Improvement Program. The first phase, conducted in summer 2013, assisted LHOP in familiarizing residents in the Strawberry Street target area with the improvement program, identifying residents in the target area, and learning what kinds of residential improvements the residents were interested in pursuing. A report on phase one was issued in October, 2013. Phase two began in November, 2013 with a focus on community perceptions. Phase two consisted of door-to-door surveying the West Strawberry Street area in order to collect baseline data on community perceptions of this area. The purpose of phase two of the study is to assess the degree of community cohesion and collective efficacy in the area, identify the problems residents believe are most serious and determine the kinds of changes they hope to see occur. The plan is to survey the neighborhood again in two years to measure the extent to which community perceptions have changed and to determine if residents believe their needs have been addressed.

Method

The Strawberry Street target area consists of the following blocks: 00-100 blocks of West Strawberry Street, even addresses only of the 300 block of West King Street, even addresses of the 00 block of South Mulberry Street, and the 300 block of West Mifflin Street. Surveyors utilized a spreadsheet of addresses compiled in phase one.

In November 2013, MU Center for Public Scholarship and Social Change sent letters to residents explaining the study and offering them an opportunity to decline to participate. The letter included a self-addressed business reply envelope with a portion to mail back if the residents wanted to decline participation. No one mailed in a decline. Surveying began in December, allowing the residents a few weeks to decline to participate.

Millersville University students went in pairs and surveyed at various times and days in attempt to accommodate residents’ varying schedules. Students went out on eight separate occasions over a two month period of time. The survey was administered in both Spanish and English. One Millersville
student was available to translate for the Spanish residents. One community member, a former Nepalese refugee, translated for two Nepalese residents. Due to the cold, winter weather, some residents choose to take the survey inside and mail it back to Millersville instead of completing it in person.

Survey Questions

The survey was divided into six sections. The first section contained 13 questions focusing on neighborhood conditions that might affect how people feel about living in their neighborhood as well as indicators of collective efficacy. The answer choices ranged from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” The second section had 18 questions focusing on conditions local residents felt are problems in their neighborhood. The answer choices were “No Problem”, “Some Problem and “Big Problem.” The third section had ten questions focusing on what changes in the neighborhood were important to residents. The answers choices ranged from “Not Important” to “Very Important.”

The fourth section asked whether respondents would like to move out of the neighborhood. Those who said “yes” were given the opportunity to choose a reason why they would leave. The fifth section asked respondents if they needed additional information on 14 different “situations that come up in our lives [that] are difficult to handle.” Respondents were able to check as many as they wished. Finally, the survey collected demographic information on each respondent including gender, age, how long they lived in the neighborhood, highest grade of school completed, presence of children in the home, whether they rent or own, percentage of income spent on housing, racial and ethnic self-identification and employment status.

Results

Demographics

Twenty-six residents completed the survey. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are as follows. The largest category of respondents by age was 46-55 (29.6%). The racial/ethnic identities of those surveyed were 45.8% White, 25% Black/African American, 8.3% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 20.8% other. Nineteen percent consider themselves Latino/Latina/Hispanic. The
highest level of education for 36.8% of responses is a high school diploma, 26.3% have some college or advanced training, 10.5% earned a bachelor’s degree, 9.8% have less than a high school diploma, and 5.3% have an advanced degree. Most of those surveyed are working full time (50%). Of the remainder, 16.7% are disabled, 12.5% are unemployed, 8.3% are working part-time, 8.3% are retired, and 4.2% are going to school.

Sixty-four percent of the people who answered the survey were renters. Of the 17 people who answered the question regarding the percentage of their income that they spend on housing, nearly two thirds (64.7%) spend more than one half. Nearly half (46.2%) of the respondents had lived more than five years in the neighborhood. The next largest group of respondents (26.9%) had lived there less than one year.

**Neighborhood Conditions, Problems and Changes**

The survey addressed people’s attitude about living in this city neighborhood and their sense of connection to each other by asking respondents to indicate agreement or disagreement with a series of statements that describe positive features of a neighborhood. At least 50% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with each statement. The statements with which the highest percentage of respondents agreed or strongly agreed were:

- “I speak to my neighbors when I see them” (87.5%),
- “I am satisfied with police service in this neighborhood” (76.9%),
- “I would be willing to work with a neighborhood group to solve a problem” (79.6%).

The high percentage of residents who agree or strongly agree with these items suggests that these respondents are predisposed to respond positively to improve neighborhood conditions.

The three neighborhood conditions with which residents were mostly likely to disagree or strongly disagree were:

- “People in this neighborhood do something if a young person is disrespectful to an adult” (50%),
- “I am satisfied living in this neighborhood” (42.3%).
- “People in this neighborhood can be trusted” (40.9%).
Following up on these items that earned the greatest percent of negative responses may provide insight into underlying sources of dissatisfaction with the experience of living in the neighborhood that the other items did not reflect. Further exploration with the residents regarding the impediments to trusting one’s neighbors and the perceived absence of appropriate responses to disrespectful youth may help identify aspects of neighborhood interactions that need to be improved.

The second question addressed what problems they see in the neighborhood. It read, “We would like to know whether you think the following conditions are problems in your neighborhood. Please say whether each of these 18 things is no problem, some problem, or big problem” (Question 2). As shown in Figure 2 below, the three items most frequently chosen as big problems/some problem were:

- “Speeding cars” (88%),
- “Illegal drug sales and use” (83.3%),
• “Garbage or litter on streets and sidewalks” (80%).

As Figure 2 also shows, a majority of respondents said that all the conditions mentioned except three were “big problems” or “some problem”. The only issues for which a majority said that they were “no problem” were:

• “Abandoned or empty buildings in this area” (66.7%),
• “People stealing cars or taking cars for joy rides without the owner's permission” (56.5%),
• “Vacant lots filled with trash or junk” (50%).

The residents’ responses to this question clearly illustrates that there are many circumstances in this neighborhood that require additional attention if the neighborhood is going to be regarded as a desirable place to live.

Figure 2 -- Neighborhood Problems
The third question asked residents which changes to the neighborhood are important to them. It read “We would like to know what kinds of changes in your neighborhood are important to you. Please say which of these possible changes is not important, somewhat important or very important to you” (Question 3). There was nothing on the list that a majority of respondents thought was not important. The things that received the greatest percentage of respondents saying this change is “very important” were:

- “Reducing trash and letter” (80.8%),
- “Improving conditions of the streets and roads” (80%)
- “Improving lighting” (72%).

As Figure 3 illustrates, a majority of residents also agree that it is “very important” to form a block group or other neighborhood group (60%) and to get to know their neighbors better (66.7%). These answers provide encouragement for the continuation of a process of community mobilization to address the other neighborhood changes residents would like to have happen.
Leaving the Neighborhood

When asked if they would like to move out of the neighborhood (Question 4), 61.5% said “yes” and 38.5% said “no.” Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of reasons given by people who want to move.

The three most common reasons for wanting to move out of the neighborhood were:

- “Parking” (24% of those who want to move),
- “Conditions in the neighborhood (e.g. litter, noise, building upkeep)” (21%),
- “Concerns about safety and crime” (18%).

One of the three respondents who chose “other” as the reason why they wanted to move, mentioned “drugs” as the reason. This response could also be categorized as “concerns with crime and safety”. It is noteworthy that the motivations for wanting to move are related to neighborhood conditions and problems rather than a preference for more space or for a non-urban lifestyle.

![Figure 4 - Reasons to Move](image-url)
**Things to Learn More About**

The final question was, “What are some situations that come up in our lives that are difficult to handle that you would like to know more about?” There was nothing on the list that a majority of respondents chose as something they would like to learn more about. However, ten people (38.5%) each chose “getting more education” and “stopping family violence”. Following closely behind with nine respondents (34.6%) was “getting a job”. To the extent that the community mobilization efforts in this neighborhood focus on things beyond neighborhood conditions and problems, these are topics on which resources might be made available to the residents.

**Figure 5 -- Want to learn more about**

![Bar chart showing topics respondents want to learn more about]

**Conclusions**

Phase one had identified 37 neighborhood residents who were made aware of LHOP’s plans to work in the West Strawberry Street neighborhood and who were willing to provide additional information about themselves and their concerns with the neighborhood to LHOP. Efforts to contact these residents resulted in 26 completed surveys for a response rate of 70%. Even though these are
small numbers, the high response rate and the diversity of the respondents create a presumption that the answers given fairly reflect the views of people living in the neighborhood.

The answers also suggest that the residents perceive a great many problems in their neighborhood and recognize that there are conditions that need to change; those problems and conditions are related to the desire of a majority of them to move from the neighborhood. However, a majority of residents also expressed a willingness to work with others to improve their neighborhood, a finding that supports the value of the efforts of LHOP to assist residents in becoming more effective advocates for neighborhood improvements.