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Seeds of Promise Community Dialogue Report of Deliberative Findings One

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Grand Valley State University

Seeds of Promise Community Dialogue Report of Deliberative Findings One

**“Dialogue, Integration, and Action” (LIB 312-05)
Stephanie Hill, Ellerie Ambrose, Cassie Groters,
Joerdon Daldos, and Earl Whitney**

**Report of Deliberative Findings
Dialogue One
November 5, 2015**

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I. Introduction

As a team of Liberal Studies students at Grand Valley State University, we co-designed and facilitated a community dialogue in the fall of 2015 located at Seeds of Promise in the Madison Square neighborhood of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Residents from the surrounding neighborhood were invited to come for dinner and dialogue so they could share their concerns, prioritize their values, and begin to identify a broad range of interventions on issues of concern to them.

The dialogue focused on concerns surrounding crime and safety. It was collaboratively designed to build upon community identified issues through surveys and discussions with host neighbors Joanna Brown and Paula Collier.

As a team, our goals for this dialogue were to

- Empathetically listen to neighborhood residents,
- ensure all participants' voices were heard,
- integrate and analyze our findings, and
- report the findings back to interested community members so that they can use this information to further their work in the neighborhood.

II: Preparation

In preparation for the dialogue we utilized theories, skills, and tools from our LIB312-01 course designed to encourage empathetic listening, ensure all participants' voices were heard, integrate and analyze our findings, and report the information back to the neighborhood.

The full hybrid design of our facilitated dialogue can be found in the appendix. The most essential tools we used in order to ensure that all voices were heard include the use of round robing for facilitation as well as t-charts and a white board to clarify and visualize deliberative insights and uncover similar findings. We also utilized individual worksheets in order to help participants keep track of their thoughts and elicit final takeaways through a short survey. This tool helped to elicit essential information and allow the reticent the opportunity to share their feelings.

We first asked participants why they chose to come. This question was used to create an initial sense of community. We then asked every participant to share their perspectives about the neighborhood's best qualities and its most troubling challenges. After identifying challenges participants considered what they can do and what they want to do. These questions were designed to empower participant action instead of just talking about the issues in the neighborhood. Finally, our worksheet reflection questions were designed to give us a better understanding of individual perspectives as we compiled our findings as well as promote respect, action, and accountability in the neighborhood. These reflection questions asked participants what they learned, what was most beneficial about the dialogue, and what they could do to positively impact their community moving forward.

III. Findings

Attendees:

- GRPD Officer
- 10 Residents
- 5 GVSU Students
- 2 Seeds of Promise Staff
- 2 Host Neighbors
- Professor Danielle Lake

Participant Identified Best Qualities of Neighborhood:

- Homeownership as a value and a resource
- Concerned neighbors who value their neighborhood
- Churches
- Schools
- Food Pantry at local churches

Participant Identified Neighborhood Challenges (in order of highest priority):

- Security
- Lack of communication with police
- Lack of safety and high levels of gang activity
- Drug Use
- Low Income
- Prostitution
- Job Corps Issues (disruptive, lewd, and disrespectful students)
- Limited access to grocery stores
- Proximity to highway
- Children Bused to School
- Sexual Predators
- No Parks

Action Opportunities:

- Increase police presence & strengthen relationship with law enforcement
- Recruit more residents for future dialogue opportunities
- Figure out how to motivate neighbors to contribute to the well-being of the neighborhood
- More lighting in the neighborhood
- Increase awareness about the benefits of Block Leaders and Block Captains
- Train the youth for leadership & develop productive after school opportunities for children
- Recycling Contests
- Better housing prices and rental management

Findings from Reflection Questions:

- *What is one thing you learned from fellow community members this evening?*
 - Crime is a problem (specifically drugs and prostitution)
 - There is passion for the community
 - Do not hesitate to call law enforcement
 - If we work together we could build a better community
 - Everyone at the dialogue has common goals for this community
 - Togetherness and self sufficiency
- *What was your favorite idea from the dialogue?*
 - Take more ownership in community
 - Consider how we “connect” as “one”
 - Don’t turn a blind eye to crime
 - Increased street lighting and law enforcement presence are key
- *In what ways do you plan to make a positive impact on your community in the future?*
 - Meet more often as a community and include Seeds of Promise
 - Continue to come together as a neighborhood by learning about each other and how to help solve our problems
 - Get involved in making the change
 - Encourage our congregation to realize they are a part of the community too (Seeds of Promise and GVSU to include local churches in next dialogue)
 - Call the police when neighbors witness suspicious behavior
 - Attend more meetings and volunteer in the neighborhood
 - More neighborhood outreach to get residents, especially renters, invested
 - To **act** on problems rather than just **think** on them

Overarching Themes:

The old adage “**the people make the neighborhood**” seems to be an overarching theme from the dialogue. According to the participants, the best quality of the neighborhood, the people, was simultaneously contributing to the neighborhood’s greatest challenge. Neighbors state they feel less secure because there are several pockets of criminal behavior in the area. **The strongest next-step action opportunities emerging from this dialogue involve improving relations with local**

GRPD officers and building neighborhood cohesion. Our final analysis also demonstrates that participants are interested in reaching out to fellow community members in order to generate a movement for change.

“Thank you guys because the way you ran this meeting really works. It makes us work and makes us not get obsessed with our own things and we get a bigger picture. I think it was a training for us to get together and be productive.”- Dialogue Participant

IV. Integration and Action

The feedback from both the dialogue participants and Seeds of Promise is encouraging in at least two ways: 1) Various opportunities for effective action emerged from the dialogue and 2) participant reflections emphasized a willingness to bring further awareness to fellow residents. With these findings in mind, we recommend the following next step dialogues.

Dialogue 1

- Have original participants come back, but this time with their friends.
- Talk about emergent action opportunities in this report (Anonymous Prioritizing)
 - Increase police presence & strengthen relationship with law enforcement
 - Recruit more residents for future dialogue opportunities
 - Figure out how to motivate neighbors to contribute to the well-being of the neighborhood
 - More lighting in the neighborhood
 - Increase awareness about the benefits of Block Leaders and Block Captains;
 - Train the youth for leadership & develop productive after school opportunities for children
 - Recycling Contests
 - Better housing prices and rental management
- Use Zig-Zag Decision making with the top three action opportunities
- Brainstorm ways these can work
- Prioritize most important and focus on next-step actions

Dialogue 2

- Take action on ideas from previous meeting
- Gain commitments of roles to play in this action
- Plan logistics
- Organize next meeting to further community actions

Final Recommendations

- Continue to ask police officers to be a part of the dialogues to strengthen the relationship between the community and the police. Request that police attend in plain clothes instead of uniform to help create a common ground, the uniform creates a divide in power.
- Consider offering drinks and appetizers before dialogue and having dinner afterwards; to encourage better one-on-one conversations based off of the facilitated dialogue.
- Consider using a handout with additional questions to answer. The answers to our reflective questions offered information vital to our findings.

V. References

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Rees, F. (1998). Facilitative Leadership. In *Facilitator excellence instructor's guide*. John Wiley & Sons.

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VI. Appendix:

The appendix below illustrates the structure, processes, timeline, and tools used in this dialogue.

TIME	STRUCTURE & PROCESSES	FACILITATION TOOLS & BEST PRACTICES	REASON/ VALUE	TEAM MEMBER ASSIGNED TASKS
00:00-00:10	<p>1.Introduce facilitators and share our goal for dialogue</p> <p>2.Make sure each participant is okay with being recorded for the sake of personal analysis (summarize insights of the group for brief to Seeds)</p> <p>3.Display ground rules</p> <p>Ground Rules:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.)Respect everyone’s time 2.)Respect other’s opinions 3.)Listen to one another 4.)Stay on topic 5.) Time keeper will raise hand if the person talking goes long or strays from topic 	<p>Eye contact, Interested and engaged body language</p> <p>Recorder(s) & Notetakers</p> <p>Draft rules, round robin revisions</p>	<p>Hospitality, establish community</p> <p>Future Analysis</p> <p>Palmer</p>	<p>-Lead Facilitator: Earl</p> <p>-Introductions: All</p> <p>-Manage recording devices: Joerdon, Stephanie</p> <p>-Record ground rules: Stephanie (on poster/whiteboard)</p> <p>-Identify & Record themes: Ellerie</p>
00:10-00:30	<p>Conduct introductions: What question(s) should be asked? How much time does each participant have to answer? “Introduce themselves, discuss how long they have lived in the neighborhood, and why they chose to come”</p>	<p>Round Robin</p> <p>Write down all names on large paper (name tags?)</p> <p>Write down all ideas about why they love the neighborhood</p>	<p>Establish an initial sense of community (Palmer)</p> <p>Establish the value of not just examining problems, but also the merit of place (Strategic Doing)</p> <p>See the full per (Palmer), the merit in dif (Young)</p> <p>-Shareholders in the neighborhood</p>	<p>-Lead facilitator: Earl</p> <p>-Manage recording devices: Joerdon, Stephanie</p> <p>-Identify & Record themes: Ellerie</p> <p>-Notes/Time: Stephanie (write what they love about the neighborhood down)</p>

00:30-00:45	Complete “what we want to do vs. what we can do T-chart” Discuss possible solutions from chart. Individually each person will try and come up with 3 ideas for what we want to do and what we can do. Then they will share their ideas.	T-chart	(facilitation tools)	-Lead Facilitator: Earl -Recording devices:Joerdon, Stephanie -Identify & Record themes: Ellerie -Time/Notes: Stephanie
00:45-01:20	dialogue on main themes from T-chart, participants major concerns with neighborhood	Display main themes	Allow participants to express their concerns on the common themes in T-chart	-Lead Facilitator: Earl -Recording devices: Joerdon, Stephanie -Identify & Record themes: Ellerie -Notes/Time: Stephanie
01:20-01:30	Wrap Up: Summarize what we can do moving forward (reference T-chart), Finish and hand in their handouts. Thank you...	Consult notes about major issues/themes Consult T-chart,	Ensure participants have a clear understanding of neighborhood values, goals, assets, and possible next steps	Summarize values and goals: Ellerie Summarize goals: Ellerie Summarize assets: Ellerie Summarize next steps: Stephanie Thank participants: Everyone
After	Upload Recording & Complete Summary	listen to recording, view T-charts, likes/dislikes in neighborhood	Review information for a better understanding of all matters discussed during dialogue	Upload recording: Joerdon, Stephanie Team members share their individual summaries on values, goals, assets, next steps (above).
	Analyze detailed summary...			All, share ideas on themes, outcomes, challenges

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