

11-2015

## Seeds of Promise Community Dialogue Report of Deliberative Findings Two

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### ScholarWorks Citation

Baldwin, Bryan; Calderon, Adalberto; Dickerson, Jordan; Hamilton, John; and Ranger, Crystal, "Seeds of Promise Community Dialogue Report of Deliberative Findings Two" (2015). *Undergraduate Research*. 5. [https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/lib\\_undergrad/5](https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/lib_undergrad/5)

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# **Grand Valley State University**

## **Seeds of Promise Community Dialogue Report of Deliberative Findings Two**

**“Dialogue, Integration, and Action” (LIB 312-05)**

**Bryan Baldwin, Adalberto Calderon, Jordan Dickerson,  
John Hamilton, and Crystal Ranger**

**Report of Deliberative Findings**

**Dialogue Two**

**November 5, 2015**

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## **Introduction**

As a part of Grand Valley State University's LIB312: "Dialogue, Integration, and Action," we – a team of Liberal Studies majors in the fall of 2015 – codesigned, facilitated, and analyzed a community dialogue with residents in the Grand Rapids neighborhood surrounding Seeds of Promise. Occurring on November 5th, this community dialogue was designed to

- Provide a space for residents to share their stories,
- Prioritize their key values,
- Identify a broad range of possible interventions for addressing the issues of most concern to them.

The design of this dialogue was informed by a range of skills and techniques from a variety of course materials and readings. Some of the titles and authors that informed this project include:

- Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together (1999), William Isaacs.
- Justice and the Politics of Difference (1990), Iris Marion Young.
- Democracy in Motion (2012), Tina Nabatchi and John Gastil
- Healing the Heart of Democracy (2011), Parker Palmer
- The Deliberative Democracy Handbook (2005), John Gastil and Peter Levine
- "Citizen Participation and the Democratization of Policy Expertise" (1993), Frank Fischer
- "Confronting the Implications of Wicked Problems" (2004), Hal Salwasser

The following is a report summarizing the findings from the dialogue.

## **Preparation**

In the design phase of this dialogue we integrated a number of theories and tools, considered research providing context to the neighborhood and the issues under discussion, and revised our plan with feedback from neighborhood residents. Upon facilitating the dialogue, we found the following tools to be most beneficial:

- Round robinning
- Sticky dot charting
- Facilitation of short periods for silent reflection and note-taking.

Given our research conducted on issues of crime and drugs we prepared the following six questions for discussion:

1. What do you think led to the amount of crime in the area?
2. How do you think the community differs from others in the area?
3. How and what do you think outsiders feel when they come to the community?
4. How do you feel drugs are affecting this community?
5. How have drugs in the community personally affected you?
6. What do you feel is perpetuating the drug cycle?

## Summary of Findings

### Initial introductions (0 – 6:08)

**Dialogue Participants** included nine residents from the community and a police officer that patrols the community.

In our initial introductions we explained who we are, what brought us here, why these conversations matter to us, what we are hoping to capture, and finally, what ground rules we intended to employ in order to encourage a fruitful dialogue.

### Participants' Engagement in and Connection to Neighborhood (6:09 – 15:40)

- Participant 1: A senior housing board member and resident coordinator seeking to maintain stability in their building.
- Participant 2: A resident and local church member in the community (works with a program that connects Seeds of Promise to the church).
- Participant 3: A host neighbor hoping to gather information and seeking to better his community.
- Participant 4: A GRPD officer that has patrolled the community for over 25 years.
- Participant 5: Co-Founder and Executive Director from Seeds of Promise.
- Participant 6 & 7: A married couple that live in the community and attend church in the community. They want to develop positive ideas to better their community.
- Participant 8: A community and local church member helping to organize a block club at south gate.
- Participant 9: An ordained minister and serves as the Chaplain for Seeds of Promise.
- Participant 10: A host neighbor and a member of the community since 1966.

### Major Concerns Identified (15:41 – 26:00)

- Homelessness
- Crime : 1<sup>st</sup>
- Jobs & Poverty 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Economic development
- Alcohol vs Drugs
- Transportation
- Increase of traffic
- Education

### Interconnected Themes Emerging from the Dialogue (26:01 – 48:55)

- Drugs
  - Children grow up in broken homes and some are abused causing them to turn to drugs and alcohol. They bring it to the other children and it spreads.
  - Adults have a problem with alcohol because it is a “quiet killer”.
    - Alcohol stores continue to be placed in our neighborhood.
    - There are no local alcohol support groups in the area.

- People deal drugs because it's fast money and flashy life. They see other dealers with a flashy lifestyle (cars, women, and "easy money").
- Poverty
  - People are working \$9/hour jobs, absent fathers and do not feel they can achieve the "American Dream".
  - No prospect of jobs, no school so they start looking for things to do
- Education
  - A lack of educational resources and mentors has led children in the area to believe that they cannot further their education.
  - 75% of people in jail have dropped out of school. Need to address the issue of dropouts. We need to deal with root causes.
- Location
  - Gentrification: People get pushed out of the community into wealthier neighborhoods where they experience relative deprivation.
  - Expectations: Participant discussed witnessing a Molotov cocktail go through somebody's window for the second time. People know there is less oversight in this neighborhood.
- Heart
  - Much crime is caused by a condition of the heart. Drugs and poverty fuel the "I want it" attitude.
  - "Even when Jesus came down, he didn't try to change the political system or the culture, he tried to change the heart of the individual."
- Age
  - Southgate has had most of the teens move out of the area, and there's hardly any crime.
- Church
  - There are 15-30 churches in the area, yet none are reaching out to those on their own block. We can provide opportunity. There are dropouts raising kids and they have no parenting or employability skills. We need to lift their burdens and change their hearts.

***General group consensus at this point that a root cause of neighborhood issues is the condition of our hearts (hope, love, community).***

**What makes this community different from other communities?  
(48:56 – 01:05:59)**

- A lack of work skills
  - Individuals don't have basic work skills to help them at jobs. I.E. reading, writing, math skills etc. Lacking these basic skills will not help their future.
- Poverty
  - Again, participants stress how the community is poorer than other surrounding communities.
- Job Wages
  - Some believe that the job wages "are borderline slavery" Also, how the community has poor money management skills and no access to money. The

community doesn't have enough programs to reach individuals (Money Management).

- Place-based Pressures
  - “We have to stand up and do it ourselves, but we have families in the area that don't have the hope needed to accomplish long-term goals.
- Empower Agency and Accountability
  - “Community members need to stand up and be accountable.” More residents need to speak up and stand up. Using law enforcement to help the community, and speaking up when you have the opportunity needs to be the norm. The norm seems to be that the community promotes danger by not speaking up against individuals due to fear.
- Role Models and Relationships
  - Members stress how important it is to see positive role models in law enforcement. It seems that law enforcement wants to help, they just don't know where to help. Tying into community accountability it's important that leaders from the community bring in positive role models. Neighborhood youth need to see that law enforcement, Seeds of Promise, and community leaders are trying to help.

### **Brainstorming possible action plans to address these issues (1:06:00 – 1:22:00)**

- Mentoring program / Afterschool program
  - Need to improve the reading level as it's a foundation to education
  - Key to improving life chances
  - Help with homework
- Reach out to law enforcement
- Block club
  - Get to know neighbors. Neighbors knowing neighbors.
  - Neighbors who may be unable to go to police can report to the neighborhood club
- City can rezone liquor stores (6-7 in the area) out of the area
- Seniors (and others) need transportation to stores but can't afford the bus. Also, the stops don't go to Meijer where they can get better prices. A change in route can make it happen.
- Install Street lights in the unlit parking areas to deter drug use in the dark.
- Develop jail ministry and rehabilitation programs for incarcerated community members.
- Churches need programs to help children
  - Provide classes
  - Provide resources and food

Pastors need to be as active as the congregations in uniting white and black residents.

## **Voting on solutions (01:22:01 – 1:29:45)**

Participants voted that **Education** was the best starting point: The recommended action is to develop an after school program for children that will provide activities for children to do. They will also provide support for learning to read, providing books, helping children with their homework. Asking police officers to participate in these programs would additionally provide positive experiences with law enforcement. Such a partnership could build a foundation of positive police relationships within the neighborhood. The program needs to have people of integrity and character to provide children with positive role models and support.

## **Final Thoughts and Recommendations**

*Participants noted that much of the crime in the area is perpetrated by high school drop outs.*

### **Carrying the Torch**

- We really believe there was a lot of content in the dialogue and so much of what was said could be drilled into even further, possibly with separate dialogues. We also noticed how integrated many of the issues were. One issue seemed to lead to another which may have demonstrates the integrated nature of these problems.
- In future dialogues could focus on what is needed in order to create or improve upon an after school program that addresses the concerns listed above.

## References

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## Appendix

### Community Dialogue Facilitation Plan

#### \*\*\*Supplied materials

- Writing utensils
- Note pads
- Copy of Ground Rules

00:00 – 10:00

- **Jordon** -Introduction
  - Who we are, what brought us here, why it matters for us.
- **Bryan** - Purpose
  - Our purpose is to **facilitate** a dialogue between community members. We want to use the facilitation tools and skills we have acquired to create a safe environment of productive discussion. We are merely wearing Footlocker stripes and playing referee. You will be handling the ball, but we will make sure it stays in bounds.
  - We want to **document** the ideas shared and organize them well for evaluation. Eventually, we want to help deliberators formulate solutions to the issues identified.
  - We want to maintain **balance** and strive to look at issues from several different angles beyond our own. As deliberative scholars note, we hope everyone walks away from the table feeling heard, feeling challenged, and feeling productive.
  - We want this to be a **discovery process** and foster openness of our own ideas. We need to be okay admitting we didn't know, or we were wrong. We want to challenge our own thinking.
- **Beto** - Ground Rules (B-tools, B-9)
  - Honor and Respect
    - Assumptions
      - Everyone here is smart and knowledgeable
      - Everyone has a genuine concern for the community
      - All ideas are worth hearing
      - Everyone's time is valuable
    - Actions
      - We will allow speakers to speak their full idea
      - We will keep speakers to one at a time
      - Disagree with the ideas, not with the person (no personal attacks)
      - Make an effort to participate
    - Appropriateness
      - To respect time, we will ensure our ideas are thoughtful and concise
      - Limit ideas to around 2 mins: a signal will be given
      - Although we want expansive dialogue, we want to keep ideas relevant to the topic
      - Avoid interrupting

- Openness
  - We must admit we are all fallible and are sometimes wrong
  - We must acknowledge our viewpoint as limited and our own understandings are built upon our view points
  - We are not deleting parts of our understanding, but we are adding to them, expanding them
  - Even though it appears things are one side or the other, we must look for the ground between
  - We don't do this every day so recognize that it will take a lot of effort on our part. Don't get frustrated.
- Understanding
  - We want to build understanding not only of ourselves, but of our neighbors
  - If you're not sure, ask for clarification
    - Try asking to rephrase their idea
    - Try tell the speaker what you heard and if you heard them correctly
- Format
  - We will ask a question (3 min limit on responses)
  - 30 seconds of note taking
  - Verbal Responses

10:00 – 40:00

- **Jordon** - Round Robin
  - *“Name, age, length of residence here, rent vs. own and association to the community?”*
  - Name, when born, role in community, and why it matters to you
  - 30 seconds of note taking
- **Crystal** - List Values (Issues)
  - Using sticky dots, vote for the topic you are most concerned with

40:00 – 65:00

- **Bryan** - Analyze the issue using Dialogue questions
  - Questions
    - Crime
      - *What do you think led to the amount of crime in the area?*
      - *How do you think the community differs from others in the area?*
      - *How and what do you think outsiders feel when they come to the community & is this acceptable to you?*
    - Drugs
      - *How do you feel drugs are affecting this community?*
      - *How have drugs in the community personally affected you?*
      - *What do you feel is perpetuating the drug cycle & increase?*

65:00 – 85:00

- **Bryan** - Identify solutions to the issue

85:00 – 90:00

- **Crystal** - List solutions
  - Using sticky dots, vote for the solutions you feel is best
  - Choose a solution to present to Seeds of Promise

Post Dialogue will include uploading recording, reviewing the recording along with notes from the dialogue. We will analyze and organize ideas and content in a presentable manner for collaboration with the entire class.