



Education – What We Heard

Conversation: Central illuminated areas of hope and hesitancy with respect to education. Focus group participants and providers in Central shared their perceptions of common barriers to academic success at both the k-12 and post-secondary levels of education. These obstacles reflect systemic challenges as well as individual stressors related to living and/or working in an impoverished community.

Common challenges related to accessing needed services, if available, are compounded by the need to effectively navigate a broad and complex system that is fragmented. In addition, participants in the community information gathering process indicated that the current educational system was often unresponsive to their needs. Contrary to popular rhetoric that suggests a general apathetic attitude among low-income families toward the philosophical and practical value of education, *Conversation: Central* revealed that participants of all ages understand the importance of education and desire to benefit from a quality education. However, what interferes with this aspiration for learning is the belief that educational resources are not readily available, accessible or adequate to bridge the gap between where residents are now and what they aspire to.

While there are differences in perspective among students, parents and providers with respect to how to improve educational outcomes in Central, *Conversation: Central* revealed a core group of individuals and organizations that are committed to identifying and overcoming the barriers to quality education in Central. Some of these organizations have a long-standing history and relationship with area residents and have established effective collaborations with education service providers. In many cases, organizational partners continue to grapple with old solutions and seek to develop new and innovative tactics that are responsive and effective.

The discussions identified several areas to explore to effectively reduce education disparities in this historical neighborhood:

- † Identifying new strategies
- † Ensuring accountability and responsiveness
- † Effectively preparing students of all ages to access education resources both in, and out of the neighborhood
- † Building supports and scaffolding services that will help people bridge the gap.

Based on an in-depth review of the findings of *Conversation: Central*, three key educational disparities that are common in low-income areas were found to be areas of greatest concern for Central Neighborhood residents: Low levels of academic achievement, low levels of post secondary completion, and low levels of high school graduation. After a review of the literature, consultation with local and national education experts, and a perusal of successful strategies and models, the Foundation Board selected as their focus for a 2009- and 2010 education strategy, the area of raising academic achievement for students in Central. This approach will require us to refine our target population and support interventions that will yield successful outcomes that lead to systems change and improved collaboration between residents and providers.

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Conversation: Central Report Back to the Community

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the Central Neighborhood of Cleveland. The neighborhood has particular meaning to the Foundation, as St. Vincent Charity Hospital, a key stakeholder organization in Central founded in 1865, is the source of 60 percent of the Foundation's assets. Both the Hospital and the Foundation were founded by the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine who for nearly 160 years have served the unmet needs of Cleveland. We honor this heritage through a special emphasis in Central.

This special emphasis also allows the Foundation to customize its strategies to the needs of a small community of about 12,000 residents with a unique history and composition. The Foundation is building its grantmaking strategies with research, dialogue and, most importantly, community engagement.

Discovering Central's Priorities

In 2006, the Foundation began an extensive process to discover the health and education priorities of the neighborhood from the perspective of those who know it best – the residents and providers who live, work and play in Central. Guided by a special committee of the Board, the Foundation first commissioned research by Cleveland State University and the Center for Community Solutions to better understand the demographic, health and educational intricacies of the neighborhood. Through informal discussions in 2007, the committee learned of the priorities of key stakeholders with a commitment to this neighborhood. The Foundation also engaged Ward 5 Cleveland City Councilwoman Phyllis Cleveland, who represents the Central Neighborhood, as well as Central's State Representative Sandra Williams to better understand potential political priorities for the neighborhood.

It became clear that no strategy would be successful if it did not arise from the community – its residents and stakeholders. In 2008, the Foundation requested proposals, on a one-time basis, to get a

Cleveland's Central Neighborhood, a diverse community of smaller neighborhoods, has a rich and storied history. Home first to German, Polish, Russian, and Italian immigrants, Central was a safe haven for African Americans who migrated in droves from the rural South in the early twentieth century, making it the most populated neighborhood in Cleveland. Housing developments and businesses flourished to support the vibrant growth of the community. Today, Central remains an asset-rich community of nonprofits, new housing developments, major educational and health anchor institutions and community gardens.

Sadly, however, the glory of Central's past is often overshadowed by the reality of its current high rate of poverty and subsequent poor health and education outcomes. But there is within Central's history the promise of what once was and a benchmark for what it can be again. The Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland understands that improving health and education outcomes are pivotal to breaking the hold of poverty in many inner city neighborhoods. The Foundation has made a special commitment to identify and improve key outcomes of health and education for

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snapshot of current programs and fresh ideas for reducing health and education disparities in this community. The initial investment of \$442,582 in June 2008 was also intended to continue to engage the community in determining the health and education priorities of the neighborhood. The Board meeting at which these Central Neighborhood grants were approved was held offsite at an agency within the neighborhood. Before the meeting, the Foundation's Board members took a guided tour of Central to see for themselves the rich assets of this community, such as the Stokes Museum, which chronicles the contributions of Carl and Louis Stokes, who themselves were raised in the Central Neighborhood and went on to become the mayor of Cleveland and a long-time United States Representative, respectively.

Success Lies with the People of Central

The Foundation's early research and community engagement made it increasingly clear that the ability to make lasting and meaningful change in the Central Neighborhood rests with its residents. Having met informally with key stakeholders and provider organizations, the Foundation designed a process to create dialogue with residents of Central and to continue the discussions with provider organizations in a more formalized way. Beginning in the summer of 2008, this process, called *Conversation: Central*, put the Foundation face-to-face with residents and providers in Central to learn of their understanding of the most pressing health and education needs in their neighborhood.

The *Conversation: Central* process involved a variety of community information gathering opportunities.

First, the Foundation held formal dialogues with 24 service providers in Central. These meetings focused on identifying current services available to residents, particularly vulnerable service populations in Central, and common barriers to delivering health

and education services. Following this series of dialogues, the Foundation held a provider convening – attended by about 120 people – to share the preliminary findings from these conversations and to receive additional feedback from providers.

Demographics of the Central Neighborhood		Focus Groups	Central
Race	African American	85.9%	93.3%
	Caucasian	12.1%	5.7%
	Hispanic	1.0%	1.3%
Age	Under 18	36.7%	41%
	65 and older	3.6% *	7.3%
Educational Attainment among adults age 25 and older	Without H/S degree	26.2%**	45.2%
	With H/S degree or more	73.8%**	54.8%
	Some College	N/A	17.8%
	Bachelor or Higher	N/A	4.2%
Poverty		N/A	65.1%
Uninsured Adults (ages 18-64)		20.8%	N/A

Having spoken with provider agencies in Central, the Foundation directly interfaced with the residents of the Central Neighborhood to hear their perceptions of the health and education needs in their community. From October until December 2008, nearly 200 residents were engaged through one of 17 focus groups held at various provider agencies throughout the neighborhood. Focus group participants completed a survey and participated in a guided discussion designed to illuminate their prioritization of health and education needs in Central. As shown in the table, the demographic characteristics of focus group participants are comparable to those of the Central Neighborhood as a whole. The Foundation recognizes that the perspectives shared in the focus groups arose from a variety of personal experiences which may not fully represent the neighborhood. Nevertheless, common themes arose to effectively guide our strategies.

*Age demographic is categorized as 62 and older

**Percentage of all adult focus group participants, not just those 25 years and older

Source: Northeast Ohio Community and Neighborhood Data for Organizing (Census 2000)

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Talking to the Experts

Most recently as our conversations continued, *Conversation: Central* consisted of the convening of two roundtables – one on community health and one on education – to allow for a more in-depth discussion of potential strategies for improving health and education outcomes in urban areas such as the Central Neighborhood. The Foundation convened regional and national leaders in community health and education who have participated in efforts to address education and health inequity in Cleveland as well as in other cities.

What We Learned about Central

The residents and providers in Central delivered an important message about the barriers they experience in receiving or delivering health and education services. From this knowledge, the Foundation has created a framework to guide our funding strategies. Called the “Five A’s,” the Foundation will use this framework to develop guiding principles by which to review a proposed service and program for whether it is:

AVAILABLE, the necessary services or facilities physically exist in Central

AFFORDABLE, residents have the financial means to use the service/program

ACCESSIBLE, residents are able to reasonably come into contact with and utilize the service/program

ADEQUATE, the real or perceived quality and quantity of the service/program

AWARENESS/ACCURACY of the service or program and whether residents have full and correct knowledge about its existence

Health – What We Heard

Conversation: Central further clarified some of the key challenges and barriers to accessing health resources in the neighborhood, such as gaps in health and social services and the capacity of existing organizations. The absence or limitations of such resources adds an additional layer to be addressed in order to improve health outcomes of Central residents.

Conversation: Central reveals critical insight into the unique experiences of both health care consumers and providers in the neighborhood. The high prevalence of health disparities among focus group participants, especially in the areas of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, asthma, diabetes and mental health, confirms earlier research in the neighborhood. *Conversation: Central* also validates what we already knew: preventive health services are underutilized by the residents of Central. This is likely due to what residents mentioned as the most common barriers to receiving health care: transportation, lack of insurance and inability to pay. Among providers, *Conversation: Central* highlights the need for greater collaboration and outreach to build awareness and ease the use of available resources and services.

Alongside the clear evidence of individual health concerns and the overrepresentation of certain diseases in Central, *Conversation: Central* also underscores the social context of health disparities. In fact, focus group participants indicated that improving health outcomes in Central requires change at the individual level as well as systemic change. Larger social issues of housing and environmental hazards, unemployment and lack of income and insurance, safety, access to healthy foods and fitness, transportation and health care equity emerged as critical elements to improving health in Central.

The community health roundtable underscored the importance of building the infrastructure at the community level to support health and enhance existing assets in the community. Collectively, this knowledge leads to a multi-dimensional, “upstream” approach to addressing health disparities in Central. As such, the Foundation has identified a focus on improving the health status of Central Neighborhood residents by supporting health eating and active living.

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† HOST LIST †

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