

Health and Wellness Program/Summer

Abstract:

The recognition of the East Riverway District as an integral part of the City of Asheville is an effort by local organizations and community members to rectify the disruption of communities during urban renewal projects of the 1970's. As this project gains momentum and funds from the Sustainable Communities Initiative Grant are allocated, special attention must be paid to the health of individuals within this district. The East Riverway District is characterized by higher poverty rates than surrounding regions and is a predominately African American community. This socioeconomic profile has direct implications for health as communities that meet these criteria often battle with higher rates of diet-related disease. The food environment of the East Riverway District is characterized by a lack of reliable and convenient transportation, a sparse landscape of grocery stores, as well as economic and social barriers to the consumption of healthy food. This project seeks to empower youth to voice their unique opinions regarding their food environment using photovoice and focus group methodology. This research will support the goals of the Sustainable Communities Initiative by valuing, supporting, and investing in the community in question while uncovering both the real and perceived barriers to the consumption of wholesome, healthy food in the East Riverway District. The creative mediums of photography and writing will be used to generate policy and environmental change. Not only will this project illuminate the needs and desires of community members with regard to their food environment, it will also allow youth the opportunity develop oral, written, and artistic communications skills that will aid them as they enter the job market.

Objectives:

- Gather data pertaining to the concerns, hopes, and visions of East Riverway youth concerning their food environment.
- Build the capacity of youth to convey their opinions confidently and comprehensibly using a variety of communication mediums.
- Further the goals of the Sustainable Communities Initiative.
- Initiate new and support existing policies that promote positive health outcomes in this community.

Description of Research:

Urban renewal projects of the 1970s disrupted neighborhoods and social support systems of many Asheville neighborhoods (City of Asheville, 2010). The East Riverway District, an area that has been directly impacted by this process of gentrification, has roughly 68 Latino American, 1,840 African American, 22 American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1,294 white residents according to Census data (US Census Bureau 2010). The poverty rate of Census tract 9 is extremely high at approximately 42% with 65% of households below the income limit to qualify for a low-income housing tax credit (US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2011). Nationwide studies have found that predominately black neighborhoods have roughly half the number of supermarkets available to its residents as opposed to zip codes with a majority of white inhabitants (Treuhaft and Karpyn, 2009). Urban areas with limited food access experience greater difficulties in preventing diet-related disease because they are often typified by income disparities and greater racial segregation (USDA, 2009).

While the USDA has not identified the East Riverway District as a “food desert,” it is clear upon exploration of the physical landscape that this community faces serious challenges with regard to access to healthy food (USDA, 2011). Data gathered through a windshield tour of this area, conducted for an assignment in Dr. Batada’s Health and Community Outreach course, highlighted that grocery stores, farmers markets, and convenience stores are located on the periphery of the East Riverway District. Curtis James at Just Folks, a non-profit organization working with homeless individuals in the East Riverway area, posits that these food-vending locations are difficult to travel to because public transportation in and around this area is inconvenient, unreliable, and not particularly time efficient. In addition, pedestrian paths within the East Riverway District are disjointed, making walking to these locations difficult.

In creating a health needs assessment for Dr. Batada’s Health and Community Outreach class this semester, it became evident that there is a need for future research in this community. Our research team found the assignment particularly challenging because community leaders were extremely hesitant about allowing “outsiders” to conduct research in the East Riverway District. The community has been studied on numerous occasions in the past. Yet, residents of the area have seen little, if any, recognizable, beneficial change.

The perceptions, values, beliefs, and norms of community members regarding food may influence access to healthy food in this community. However, previous research initiatives have not involved the community to a significant extent, making it difficult to ascertain the influence these social constructs have on the health behavior of community members. Low consumer demand for nutritious food may be related to inadequate knowledge of the benefits of certain foods and/or personal or cultural preferences (USDA, 2009). Residents of the East Riverway District may not be familiar with particular foods or feel comfortable shopping at certain locations such as the French Broad Coop, which caters to a clientele that is both educated and concerned with purchasing local, organic products. This project will use focus groups to gain a greater understanding of how the values and attitudes of residents in the East Riverway area may influence health behavior in this community.

In addressing the needs of East Riverway District residents, it is clear that community members need to feel as though their voices are being heard. While traditional research typically centers on the researchers’ identification of a research question and subsequent avenues for addressing the issue, photovoice methodology encourages community engagement. Thus, it is an extremely effective method of data collection for projects that involve sensitive communities (Healthy Eating, Active Communities, 2009). Photovoice is also a valuable technique for encouraging youth to catalyze change within their communities. This project will provide youth the opportunity to develop communications skills, feel valued, and develop positive self-esteem (Healthy Eating, Active Communities, 2009). The advantages to participants include contributing to change, exchanging ideas, increasing access to power, and gaining credibility for their community through collaborative participatory action (Wang, 1998). Youth in the East Riverway District will become powerful advocates for their community as they can “really make a difference” by continuing their advocacy work beyond the scope of the project (Healthy Eating, Active Communities, 2009). Photovoice projects involving youth promote important inter-generational partnerships and have been successful in incorporating the youth perspective into policy and program design on numerous occasions around the world (Wang, 2006).

Qualifications:

I am an honors, Health and Wellness Promotion, and Sociology student with a 4.0 GPA. I am currently working with Dr. Reeve at the NC for Health and Wellness to create a data matrix of recommended childhood obesity prevention strategies for WNC Healthy Kids. I work as a research assistant in the Health and Wellness Department at UNCA, performing quantitative and qualitative data entry and analysis tasks related to evaluating a holistic approach to teaching Women's Health. I also work as a writing consultant for the UNCA Writing Center where I assist peers in improving their writing skills. I completed an internship at the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (2011) where I took photographs of and advertised for local farmers markets as well as the Family Farm Tour. I also volunteer as an Assistant Coach for Girls on the Run where I support the development of young girls' self-esteem and physical fitness.

Methodology:

I plan to recruit civic-minded youth from the East Riverway District by enlisting the help of contacts at Just Folks as well as Bruce Kennedy, a documentary filmmaker and community leader who works closely with Delta House. I will submit an IRB application and construct a parent consent form that participants will be asked to have signed by a legal guardian. After recruiting two sets of approximately five to seven youth in the East Riverway District and gaining IRB approval, I will conduct four focus group sessions per group. The initial meeting with each group will deal primarily with teaching basic photography and writing skills to these community members. Participants will be afforded the opportunity to practice photography and writing skills, over the course of this project, in order to feel comfortable with these mediums as well as with expressing themselves in a creative capacity. This project will include both the components of a research study as well as an intervention program.

Once participants are adequately trained, they will respond to questions or prompts in both photo and written form related to how they feel about their food environment. Participants will reconvene in a group setting, during 1 to 1.5 hour sessions, to discuss how and why they took particular photos and wrote certain journal entries. Food will be provided for participants during these focus groups as it serves as an incentive for attendance and participation. I recognize that providing food may alter the results of this study and I plan to account for this by engaging youth in a conversation about their perceptions of the food offered as well as of me, an individual interested in increasing the consumption of healthy food. These sessions will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for common themes. The images themselves will be used as a form of data and assessed for commonalities as well.

The youth will present their photographs and opinions at a reception open to the public. The event will be advertised in various local newspapers, magazines, and venues. Local vendors will be asked to contribute and sponsor the event in order to increase the number of attendees as well as to provide incentives for individuals who attend the reception. Community leaders and policy makers will be encouraged to attend. At this event, the youth will demonstrate their recently developed talents and become directly linked with policy makers responsible for making change in their community.

Budget:

Item	Description	Cost
Cameras	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$80 per camera and additional equipment (e.g. memory cards, data cables, etc.) • One camera per two participants (5 – 7 cameras depending on number of participants) 	\$560.00
Journals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$5 per journal 	\$70.00
Refreshments/Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$30 per focus group session per group • \$160 + donations from local sponsors for reception 	\$400.00
Display Easels and Framing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five \$30 display easels 150 • \$10 frames for 23 8x12 	\$380.00
Printing and Mounting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printing 23 (2 photos per participant) 8x10 high quality prints (\$115) + printing 5 16x20 mounted photos (at \$110) • Printing cards with art description (\$3 per photo) 	\$309.00
Stipend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$10 per hour • 25 hours total for preparation and conduction of focus groups • Approximately 30 hours of coding • Approximately 23 hours of analysis 	\$780.00
Total		\$2499.00

Time line:

Task	Deadline
Gather group of approximately 12-15 youth in the ERD	May 30
Purchase cameras and journals	June 5
Create workshop plan and draft focus group questions	June 10
Focus group (session 1): Intro to Project & Photography/Writing workshop	June 17
Focus group (session 2): Discussion of photographs and writings	June 24
Coordinate space for reception and transcribe/code data	June 28
Focus group (session 3): Discussion of photographs and writings	July 1
Focus group (session 4): Discussion of photographs and writings	July 8
Press release/media presence for reception and transcribe/code data	July 11
Data Analysis	July 25

Preparation for reception	July 28
Reception	July 29
Paper draft	August 20
Finalize research paper	September 5

Publication:

This research will be submitted to the *UNC-Asheville Journal* and presented at the Undergraduate Research Symposium in Fall 2012. The project will also be submitted for publication in a relevant journal such as *Public Health Policy* or the *American Journal of the Dietetic Association*.

Additional funding:

I plan to submit a modified version of my research proposal to apply for the *Keeping Value with the Farm* Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship headed by the Economics Department at UNC Asheville. If accepted, this project may include an additional documentary component and a discussion of perceptions of local food. I plan to submit my application in the coming weeks. While this funding may not influence my proposed project, there is the possibility that my research will include a local food and documentary component that will align with Dr. Batada’s research and be published in a relevant journal.

References

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