



**The City of Easton Weed and Seed Initiative:
Evaluation 2008**



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The opinions expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Lehigh Valley Research Consortium, the Lehigh Valley Association of Independent Colleges or any LVAIC institutions. They are expressly those of the authors.

The Easton Weed & Seed Initiative Evaluation 2008

Introduction

Weed & Seed (hereafter referred to as W&S) is a community-based strategy originally created in 1991 by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). The W&S initiative is a collaborative effort including neighborhood residents, the public and private sector, and state/local government all working together to prevent, control and reduce violent crime, drug abuse and gang activity in designated high-crime neighborhoods throughout the country. This strategy's approach is two-fold: law enforcement and prosecutors cooperate to "weed" out drug abuse and violent criminals, while private and public community organizations and agencies work together to "seed" in human services such as prevention, intervention, treatment and neighborhood restoration programs.

The following report is an evaluation and needs assessment of Easton Weed & Seed carried out between September and November 2008. It includes background on the program and the target neighborhood, a description of the W&S programs, the results of focus groups conducted with target residents and members of the TALL team, and surveys of community residents. It will conclude with overall impressions and recommendations.

Background Information: Easton W&S Initiative

The Easton W&S Initiative became effective on November 3, 2000. The Initiative identified the West Ward of Easton as their focus as the neighborhood has undergone economic and social changes that may inhibit the growth and development of the area. The West Ward encompasses the portion of Easton from 6th Street west to 15th Street, and from Butler Street north to the Bushkill Creek. Predominantly residential, it houses several small business entities and includes the commercial extension of Northampton Street from the Downtown neighborhood. Row houses and detached single-family dwellings are prevalent, creating parking demands and other concerns for residents.

The Vision Statement, as adopted by the Easton W&S Initiative, is as follows: "To foster the establishment of a safe, stable, and thriving West Ward neighborhood that affords its citizens a fine quality of life and a good environment in which to live, work, and enjoy the benefits of recreation and a full civic life through building upon and improving the housing, recreation, health, safety, economic opportunity and physical qualities of the neighborhood and its greater community."

The Easton W&S Initiative is composed of several committees. They include the following:

- W&S Initiative Community Assistance for Impact Delegation (AID) Team, which includes key members of local public, private and community organization leadership. This committee provides leadership,

technical assistance and resource support for the initiatives of residents from the West Ward.

- Four Coordinating Committees based on the five primary quality of life issues for the West Ward: The TALL Team, Health and Human Services Committee, Safety Committee, and Youth Development Committee. The Purpose Statement's of the committees are as follows:
 - **TALL Team:** The Target Area Local Leadership (TALL) Team is a committee of motivated leaders drawn from the community led by a TALL team coordinator.
 - **Public Safety:** Inspires confidence, trust and respect between the Police and community residents so that the West Ward is a safe, supportive and a welcoming community.
 - **Health and Human Services:** Improves the quality of life and tenure of community residents through collaborative relationships and community supports.
 - **Youth Development:** Engages youth and their families in education, recreation and personal development activities through collaborative community partnerships.

Methodology

Two methods of primary data collection were used in this analysis. Using purposive, clustered sampling, a survey was administered in four locations within the target area of Easton: Centennial Park, Paxinosa Elementary, local public housing units, and a mailing list of current W&S residents. As shown in Table 1, 43 of the 300 mailed surveys were completed and returned; 500 surveys were sent through Paxinosa Elementary to the parents of school-aged children, of these 243¹ surveys were returned; 13 surveys were completed by residents living in public housing on the streets of North Union, Charles Street and Church Street, and 47 surveys were filled out during the Community Day at Centennial Park.

In total, 346 completed surveys were analyzed for this report. Surveys were developed as a one-page questionnaire, with English and Spanish translations. Survey questions began by asking the participant's racial status, home ownership and age. The remaining questions focused on what residents like and dislike most about their neighborhood, residents' knowledge of and participation in the W&S Initiative, and the level of safety residents feel in their neighborhood. In addition to analyzing results for the total sample of survey respondents, the research team also broke down the results by race, age, and home ownership.

¹ Originally there were 258 surveys, but 15 were voided due to respondents entering their age as under 18.

Table 1: Location of Survey

	Frequency	Percent
Centennial Park	47	13.6
Paxinosa Elementary	243	70.2
Public Housing	13	3.8
Mailed Survey	43	12.4
Total	346	100.0

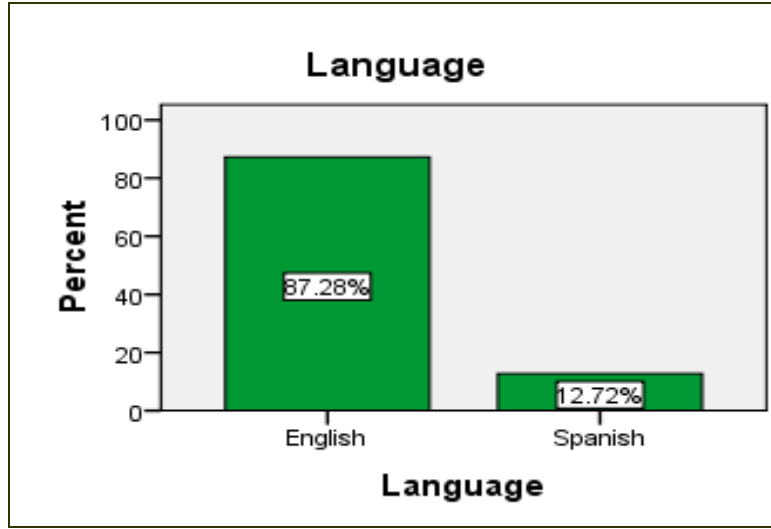
In addition to the surveys, focus groups were conducted with West Ward residents in order to obtain a more in-depth perspective on the neighborhood and their sense of the progress Easton W&S has made, and suggested additional programs. Members of the Easton W&S initiative decided on the times and locations of these focus groups, based on community programs occurring within the months of September and October in the target area. A total of three were conducted: one during the day at Centennial Park on September 20, 2008, another at Paxinosa Elementary during a parent and child “Read for the Record” program on October 2, 2008, and a third at the Salvation Army during a [monthly] Targeted Area Local Leaders (TALL) Team meeting on October 16, 2008. A total of 25 residents attended the focus groups: 10 residents at Centennial Park, 5 residents at Paxinosa Elementary, and 10 residents at the TALL team meeting. The research team used a semi-structured interview process, with two beginning questions on home ownership and residency in the West Ward area, and continuing with fifteen questions including what they like best and least about their neighborhood, suggestions for neighborhood improvements, safety concerns, and questions about the impact of W&S. All focus groups were conducted by the research team members, one led the discussion while another took typed notes of the discussion. The focus groups lasted between a half hour to an hour, depending on number of residents participating and the length of discussion on each question.

Results

Demographics of Study Participants

Respondents who completed a survey were asked their racial/ethnic, home ownership and age status. Eighty-seven percent of respondents completed the survey in English, and approximately 13% filled the survey in Spanish (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Survey Language, n=346



As shown in Figure 2, nearly 50% of respondents identified their race as White followed by 13% African American. About 27% identified themselves Hispanic.² Survey respondents ranged in age from 18 to 83. Twenty-seven percent of respondents were between 18 and 29 years old, 65% were between 30 and 55, and 8% were over 56 years old (Figure 3). The mean age was 37.46 years, with 68% of respondents between the ages of 25 and 49.

² Race was later recoded into a different variable, Race Recoded, where 50% of the Respondents were White, 27% were Hispanic, 13% were Black, and 13% categorized as "Other", which includes American Indian/Eskimo, Asian/Pacific Islander, Multi-Racial and the original "Other" category.

Figure 2 – Race of the Respondent, n=346

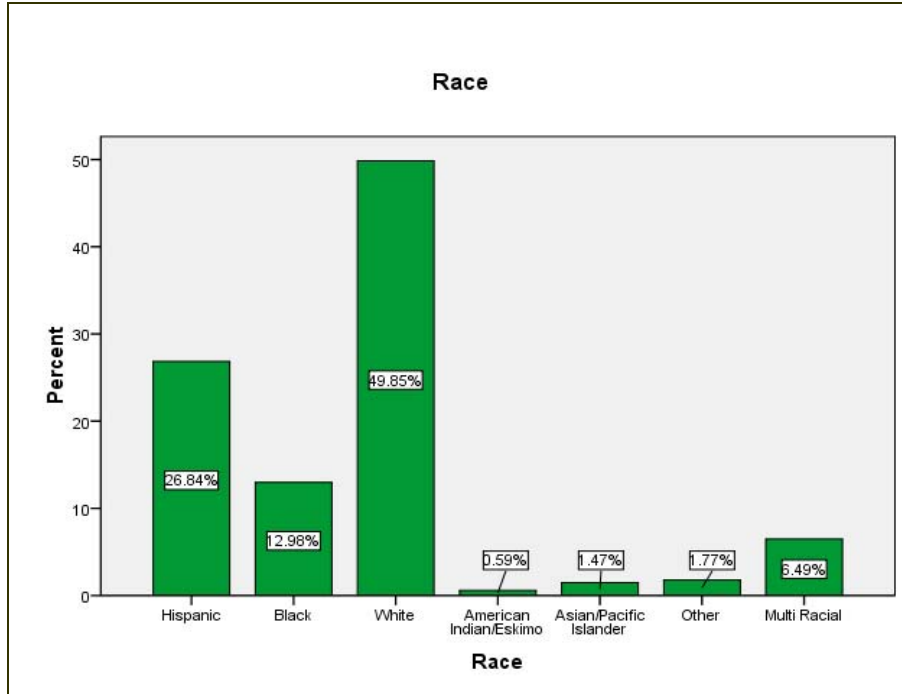
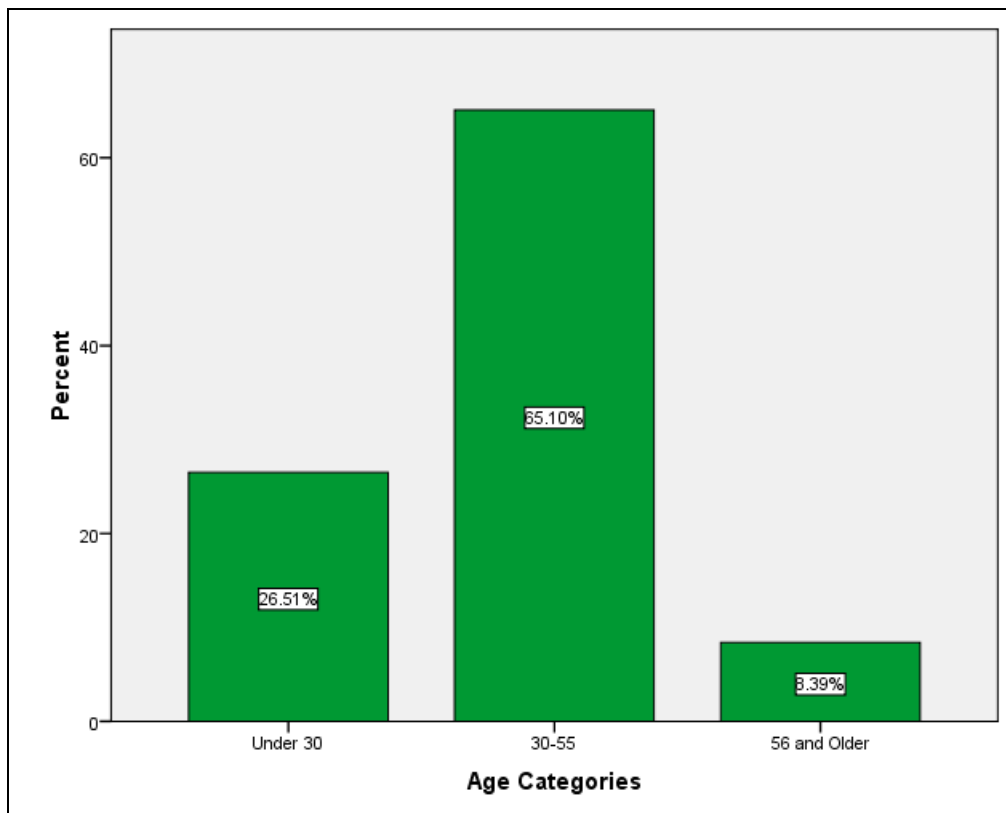


Figure 3 – Age of the Respondent, n = 346

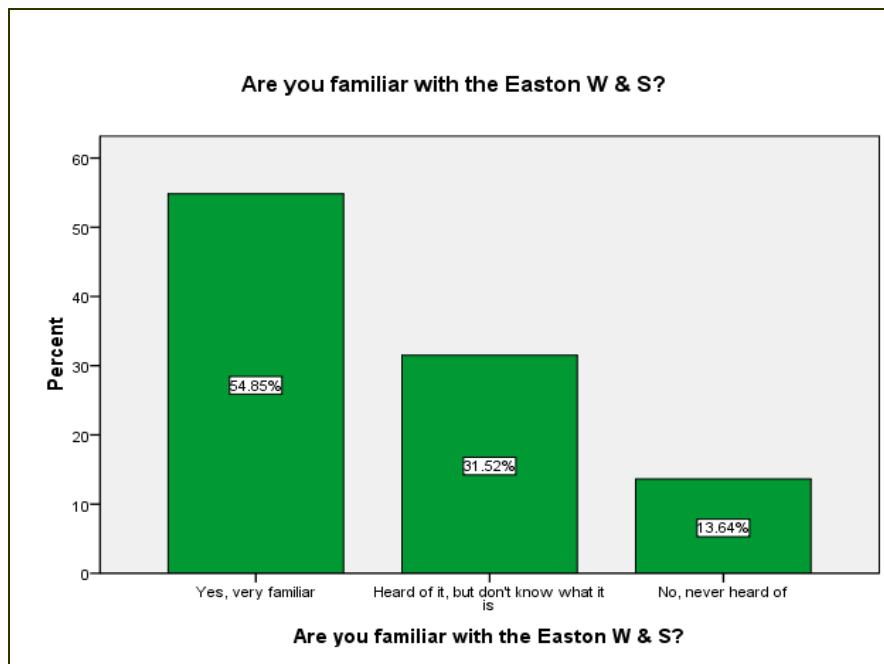


More renters than home owners completed the survey (62% vs. 38%). Respondents who filled out the survey at Paxinosa ES and through the mail were more likely to be home owners while more people at Centennial Park who filled out the survey were renters (16%). Additionally, a slightly higher percentage of residents participating in the focus groups rented vs. owned.

Awareness and Participation of Weed and Seed Program

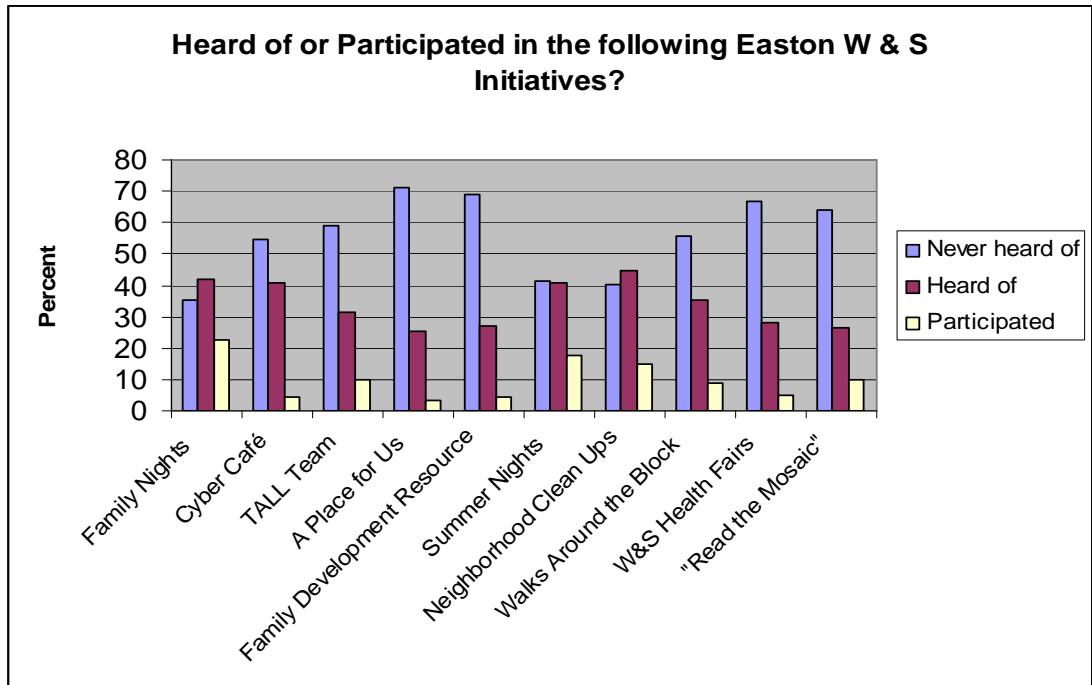
Both survey and focus group participants were asked about their familiarity with W&S (Figure 4). Results suggest that over 80% of residents have at least heard of W&S. Survey respondents were more likely to have been very familiar (55%) or have heard of the W&S initiative (32%) than to have *never* heard of it (14%). Of the three focus groups combined (n = 25), 19 were very familiar with the Easton W&S initiative.

Figure 4 – Survey Results: Familiarity with Easton Weed & Seed (n=346)



To better understand the level of knowledge about the breadth of programs offered by W&S, survey and focus group participants were asked about their knowledge of specific programs. As shown in Figure 5, all activities were heard of by over 25% of the respondents. The initiatives that had the highest percent of resident participation were family nights (23%), summer nights (18%) and neighborhood cleanups (15%). Programs with the least familiarity (respondents had not heard of) include “A Place for Us” (71%), Family Development Resource Center (69%), and W & S health fairs (67%).

**Figure 5 – Survey Results: Knowledge/participation of respondents in W&S-sponsored programs
n=346**



Awareness and Participation by Racial Category³

In addition to looking at overall survey respondents, the research team also broke down the results by race, home ownership, and familiarity with W&S. To determine whether the sample results can be generalized to the population of adult residents living in the West Ward, we performed tests of statistical significance. Breaking out the sample by race, overall, higher rates of participation in the W&S initiatives occurred for White, Black and Other racial groups. Hispanic survey respondents were the least likely to not have heard of or participated in the W&S initiatives. When looking at each initiative separately, we see that further racial differences can be identified. Here we focus on the three most popular W&S programs.

*Family Nights** 50% of Hispanic respondents reported not hearing of family nights, while only 34% of Black respondents, 34% “Other” racial minority respondents, and 28% of White respondents. However, there is an even percentage distribution of racial groups that have participated (21% Hispanic, 18% Black, 24% White). These results suggest that it is more likely that if Hispanics are made aware of Family Nights, they will be more likely to participate than other racial groups, as members of other

³ Statistically significant relationships (p<.05) will be noted with an asterisk. We use a Chi-square to test for statistical significance.

groups who had a higher percentage of respondents that had heard about the program but chose not to attend.

Summer Nights * Summer Nights is another popular W&S program where there appears to be opportunity to expand awareness of this program, particularly among Hispanics and “Other” racial groups. Over 56% of Hispanic respondents and 50% of the “Other” racial category had neither heard of nor participated in Summer nights, as compared to 39% of Black respondents and 33% of White respondents. White survey respondents are more likely to participate in the Summer Nights programs than other racial groups but they are also the largest group to have heard of but not participated in this program.

Neighborhood Clean Ups * This program provides another opportunity for expanded awareness particularly among Hispanic residents. Slightly over 60% of Hispanic respondents indicated that they had neither heard of nor participated in this initiative, while only 39% of Black respondents, 33% of White respondents and 31% of “Other” racial minority respondents had not heard of this program. Likewise, fewer Hispanics (6%) than Blacks(18%) and Whites (19%) said they had participated.

Awareness and Participation by Home Ownership

The Research Team also broke out survey results for program participation by home ownership. Though not statistically significant, of the three most popular programs, survey results suggest that home owners are more likely to participate in Neighborhood Clean Ups (20% owners, 12% renters) while renters are more likely to participate in Family Nights (23% rent, 21% own) and Summer Nights (19% rent, 16% own). These percentages are driven by the fact that a large number of Paxinosa respondents, with school-aged children, are renters (61%).

Additionally, home owners are more likely than renters to participate in the Cyber Café (5% owners, 3% renters), TALL Team (15% owners, 7% renters), A Place for Us (5% owners, 2% renters), Walks Around the Block (12% owners, 7% renters), and Read the Mosaic (15% owners, 7% renters).

Awareness and Participation by Familiarity with Weed & Seed*

For those who are very familiar with Weed and Seed, the activities they have at least heard of or participated in the most are Family Nights (81% of people who are very familiar with W&S), Cyber Café (62%), TALL Team (58%), Neighborhood Clean Ups (76%) and Walks Around the Block (62%). In contrast, those who are very familiar with Weed & Seed, were *least likely* to hear about or participate in A Place for Us (62% of those very familiar with W&S), Family Development Resource (62%), Weed & Seed Health Fairs (55%) and Read the Mosaic (52%).

Turning to focus group results, during the focus group sessions, researchers asked for a show of hands to demonstrate either hearing of or participating in each of the W&S

programs. Consistent with our survey findings, focus group participants were most likely to have heard of and/or participated in Family Nights, Summer Nights, and Neighborhood Clean Ups. It should be noted that participation in TALL Team, and possibly other programs, may be skewed due to one of the focus groups being held at a TALL Team meeting, with members of the subcommittee. Very few participants were aware of the Cyber Café, Walks Around the Block and Read the Mosaic. The programs that residents were least likely to hear of or participate in were “A Place for US”, Family Development Resource, and W&S Health Fairs. Certain programs raised quizzical looks from residents. Specifically, while at Paxinosa School, focus group participants looked confused when the TALL team, “A Place for Us” and Family Development Resource center were mentioned.

Table 2: Focus Group: Residents’ participation in and awareness of Easton W&S programs
n = 25

<i>Easton W&S Programs and Activities</i>	<i>Participated in (and heard of) the program</i>	<i>Heard of the program</i>
Family Nights	11	2
Summer Nights	11	4
Neighborhood Clean Ups	11	4
TALL Team	10	2
Read the Mosaic	5	0
Walks Around the Block	4	2
Cyber Café	2	6
W&S Health Fairs	2	1
Family Development Resource	0	3
A Place for US	0	0

Perceived Impact of Weed and Seed on West Ward

During focus groups, participants spoke about the perceived community impact of the W&S program. When residents were asked, “Do you feel that Weed & Seed improves your neighborhood?” the majority of focus group respondents said that it does make an improvement in their neighborhood (no one said it does not improve the neighborhood, but some did not give an answer). Several of the residents quickly responded with reasons regarding children: “making kids involved in positive things instead of drugs and alcohol” and “keeping kids off the street.”

Residents mentioned certain programs as having a positive impact on the community including Family Nights, the Community Day at Centennial Park, Summer Nights, Sit-outs and the Neighborhood Clean-Up program. Summer Nights and Family Nights were mentioned frequently by focus group participants. During Summer Nights, “Kids can play and have fun, knowing nothing bad is going to happen” (mother at Paxinosa Elementary). Another participant said that “Family Nights are really nice; you get dinner, participate with other families, kids can interact with each other. You can interact with parents who you don’t get to interact with very often. It’s really nice... brings community together” (mother at Paxinosa Elementary). A member of the TALL team noted that a “tremendous amount” of people use the parks because of the creation of programs such as Summer Nights and Family Nights. The Neighborhood Clean-Up program was also brought up by a resident at Paxinosa Elementary. She thought that Easton W&S has been “doing a good job with that.” Sit-outs were also noted as making a positive impact on the community via Easton W&S. In the past, residents and police have worked together to send a signal to drug users and vandals on the block of Ferry Street by having a “sit-out”. One TALL Team member commented, “I myself, it was very interesting to me – too bad we don’t have more blocks to do that with.” Others nodded their heads in agreement with this statement.

Challenges to Weed and Seed

Residents participating in focus groups were also asked about any perceived challenges facing Easton W&S as they work to make a greater impact in their neighborhood. According to parents at Paxinosa Elementary, some residents have a negative attitude about being helped. “They’ll see it as someone trying to tell them what to do.” According to some residents, participation in W&S activities may be hindered by groups loitering and creating a sense of fear and wariness in the community. One mother specifically mentioned seeing older children in the basketball courts not listening or respecting her. “You’d rather just stay at home than have to deal with that.” Also, groups of kids on corners seemed to make the focus group participants nervous of walking by. “You find yourself crossing the street to get away from that.” One woman agreed with others nodding, “Yeah, you don’t want to be like that.”

An important topic came up during the discussion with TALL team members. They had mentioned the “Weed & Seed van” creating a negative connotation for Easton W&S. Because the logo is written on a police van, some residents then automatically reference

W&S as a police initiative. Although Easton W&S is connected with law enforcement, this is not their only partnership, nor the extent of its programs or goals. Certain residents do not want their children associated with W&S because they are nervous about police interference in their private lives. “When we try to tell people about it (W&S), the parents of the kids thought the programs was only that everyone worked for the police, so they kept a lot of kids out. When a lot of them found out that it was education for the kids- people could learn- then they got involved” (TALL Team member).

There was an observation of certain TALL team members that the neighborhood’s relationship with the police has gotten better as the department received accreditation and increased staff membership. One woman told the captain of the police department, “you can see the difference from even a year ago.” This TALL Team member reflected on the importance of a strong relationship between police and community members, especially with children of the community.

Visibility of Weed and Seed and Barriers to Awareness

W&S in Easton is made visible in the community in several ways, according to residents in the focus groups. Announcements about events and programs are sent through children at school to their families at home. A resident from the TALL team observed the growth of the Summer Nights program “over the years” because of growing visibility in the community. One resident in the focus group at Centennial Park commented on “seeing the proof of it in the summer” because she lived nearby and saw W&S programs at Centennial Park. Residents participating in the focus group at Centennial Park also remarked on Pastor Paul and other W&S members handing out flyers door-to-door. Local members of the community have also advocated W&S programs. One parent at Paxinosa Elementary saw W&S advertised in a newspaper, while another had seen W&S advertised on the City of Easton’s website (<http://www.easton-pa.com/>). Several have been made aware of W&S’s activity in the announcement Easton W&S sends out through the “Bugler”, the sewer bill for West Ward residents. Several residents mentioned the Easton police van that advertises the W&S logo on its side.

Focus groups also spent time discussing how to get information about programs to residents of the West Ward. As noted by several mothers at the Paxinosa focus group, they believe they find out too late about events in the area. If they do find out, it’s through flyers or phone calls, but usually at the last minute. Residents at Centennial Park commented on peer influence as a barrier for participating in events, as well as being busy with work, the lack of child care provisions, more people needy but not getting help, transiency of residents and the lack of a “feeling of community.” The TALL team members did not think of any barriers that prevent them from participating.

Program and Marketing Suggestions

When asked during the focus groups what suggestions residents had for making W&S more visible in their community, some suggested more advertisements in places such as bus stations, on local television, the local supermarket, downtown barbershops

and hair salons, and movie theatres. Members of the TALL team mentioned advertising through the children of the community – in schools, on kid’s t-shirts, and in the local churches. The Centennial Park focus group had many suggestions: every week/month blocks should have a clean-up with brooms and garbage bags distributed to residents and paint bought to cover graffiti. They also suggested that residents could wear the W&S logo while cleaning up their area and that W&S advertisements could be placed in residents’ yards with statements such as “We support Weed & Seed” and “We are Weed & Seed.” One resident proposed an activity where residents could all write their names on a public space of a wall, with the W&S logo as the header to this mural.

Is Easton W&S lacking in any programs or activities that the residents knew of? The list below proposes some programs that residents of the focus groups recommend:

- A community garden
- Education Fair
- GED classes
- Workshops on resume writing and computer skills
- CPR and First Aid training
- Job Fair
- Health Fair with Blood Pressure and Health Screenings
- Drug education program for youth
- Easton W&S Potluck
- Outdoor programs such as fishing, etc.
- A W&S parade
- Day Camp at Centennial Park – one person commented “had this before, but only one kid would show up”
- Offer meals to those with hunger in the area
- In addition to continuing Summer Nights, having an educational program for the parents while their children are playing
- Better adult supervision at the parks - a security guard or police officer at the parks every day during the summer

In addition, over the next few years, residents would like to see Easton W&S increase their efforts to reduce garbage and litter on the streets, and cover graffiti viewed on buildings. There was a suggestion for the creation of more parks and green space for children. Several residents commented that people drive too fast along the main streets and suggested putting in speed bumps. One resident at Centennial Park recommended that local churches should combine their resources and “get on the same page.” A mother of a Paxinosa student indicated that there are not a lot of activities for children to do. Instead, they drive to nearby Allentown to go to events and businesses that offer recreation for children. She would like to see more activities, businesses and restaurants that focus on children. A TALL team member remarked that more residents are needed to get involved with the W&S initiative. TALL team members also endorsed having a summer daily activity for children.

The survey also included the following open-ended question: “What programs, activities, or initiatives do you think that Weed & Seed could offer in the future in order

to help individuals in your neighborhood?” For those who answered this question, the most repetitive answers were coded into 7 categories as follows: Children and youth activities (n=71), police enforcement (n=30), community participation and involvement (n=24), family initiatives (n=16), drug initiatives (n=19), employment programs (n=6), and maintenance/upkeep of residences (n=7). Some programs and initiatives that residents would like to see include:

- “Something for older teens like basketball leagues”
- “More after school programs for children; more inside places for winter with stuff kids can jump on (ball pits) and exercise programs”
- “More police patrols in warmer months”
- Movie nights in the park
- “More presence in alleyways where drug sales are happening”
- “Neighborhood watch, jobs, training programs”
- “Summer water parks like Lehigh has”
- Job Fairs in Easton Area
- “Build a community center with basketball, video games, etc.”
- “Encourage neighborhood watches and educate people on how to do it safely and effectively”
- “Youth-teen program after school where they get paid to perform work. It helps teach responsibility and helps keep them off the street.”
- “Better screening on renters- code violators fined.”
- “More late night police present anywhere from 4:00 pm to after midnight”
- “More info to help find jobs and activities”
- Parenting class/youth counseling
- “Possibly to meet with the young people and talk more [about] the drugs and [make efforts] to get closer to the gangs.”
- “A community mini-business to generate employment”

Summary of Weed and Seed Program Findings

Overall, it appears that most members of the West Ward community are at least familiar with the Weed and Seed initiative. Summer Nights, Family Nights and Neighborhood Clean-Ups are the most popular programs. There is room for W&S to create more awareness for these programs, particularly for Hispanic residents. Likewise, renters are most likely to know about programs that provide activities for children than neighborhood building programs. With such large turnout of renters at Family Nights and Summer Nights, there is an opportunity to inform these individuals about the broader programming of W&S, particularly focusing on those programs identified in these results that have limited visibility.

The focus groups and surveys provide evidence of an interest in continuing the most popular programs along with adding new programs focusing on children/family, public safety, and further neighborhood building activities. However, it appears there needs to continue to be a balance of programs. Residents participating in focus groups appear to be more interested in neighborhood building activities than survey respondents,

who are more likely to be interested in youth/family activities. The interest in youth/family programming may be due to the large number of surveys received from Paxinosa Elementary Schools. Incorporating some of these suggestions into current programs, with additional marketing, may increase participation rates.

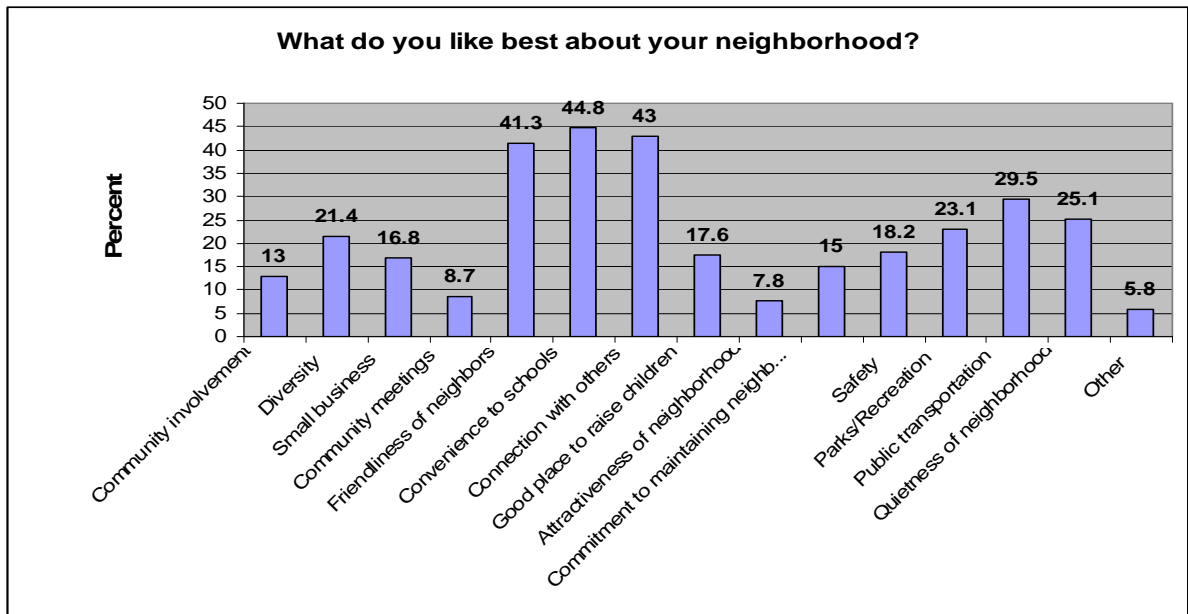
Residents Perception of Easton Weed & Seed Target Neighborhood

In addition to discussing the Weed and Seed program, surveys and focus groups also asked about the general direction of the neighborhood, feelings of safety, and overall appearance of the West Ward.

What Respondents Like Best About Their Neighborhood

When survey respondents were asked what they like best about their neighborhood (Figure 7), the most frequent responses were convenience to schools (45%), connection with others (43%), and friendliness of neighbors (41%). Turning to focus groups, the walkability of Easton is a major benefit. Respondents favor their local proximity to restaurants and businesses and the ability to take the bus downtown. Participants at Community Day like the “kitschy little restaurants” and the festivals held by the river. One woman commented on the number of playmates for her children in the neighborhood. In addition, the local farmers’ market is highly regarded by participants. The movement of Paxinosa Elementary to a more local area is valued by residents with children. One woman at the Paxinosa session, who doesn’t have a car, said that she can now take her child to school and attend events that are held at school.

Figure 7 – Survey Results: What respondents like best about the target area, n = 346



What Survey Respondents Like Best About Their Neighborhood by Racial/Ethnic Category

Breaking out respondents by race/ethnicity we find that there is general agreement across survey respondents regarding neighborhood friendliness and convenience of schools. For example the friendliness of neighbors was the most frequently selected feature of the West Ward by Whites (41%), Blacks (50%), and Hispanics (40%) (not a statistically significant difference). The convenience to schools was also selected by a high percentage of respondents regardless of race. About 40% of Whites, 55% of Blacks 42% of Hispanics indicated this positive feature of the neighborhood*. Additionally Blacks and Hispanics are more likely than Whites to believe the neighborhood is a good place to raise children (29% and 25% vs. 10%)*. Also, these groups were more positive about the parks and recreation available (31% and 34%)*. While Blacks were more likely to indicate that they like the diversity of the neighborhood (43%) only 18% of Whites and 15% of Hispanics find this a positive feature*. Safety, attractiveness of neighborhood, small businesses, connection to others, and community involvement were not selected as favorable (less than 30%) by respondents, regardless of race.

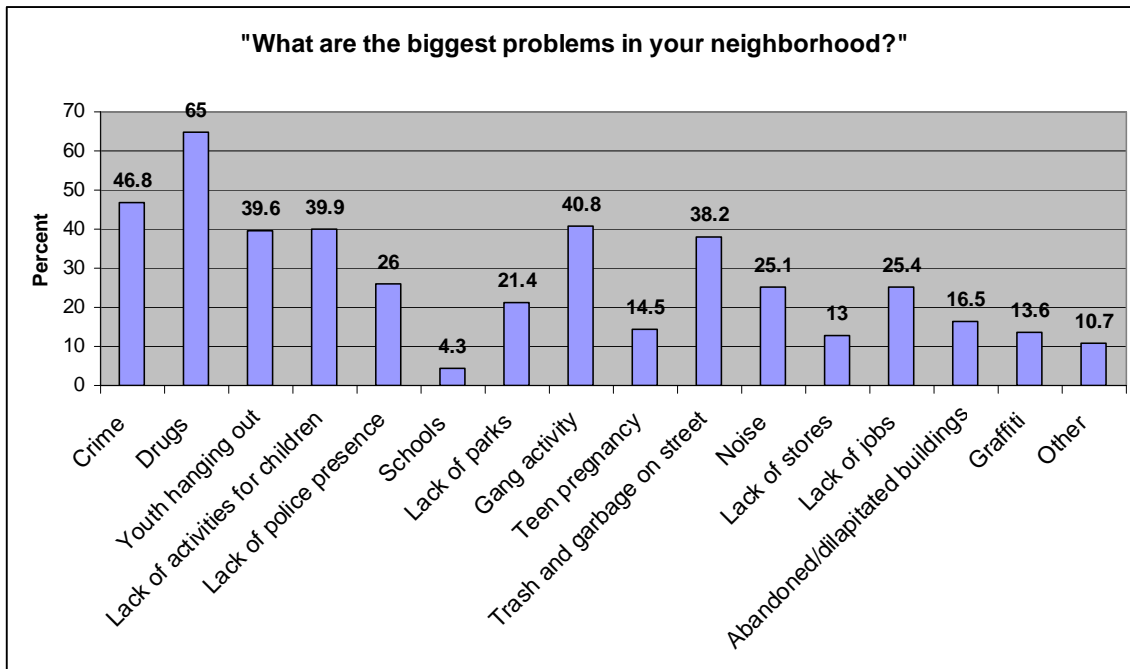
What Survey Respondents Like Best About Their Neighborhood by Home Ownership

As is the case above, both home owners and renters indicated that friendliness of the neighbors is a positive aspect of the West Ward (43% and 40%). Although not statistically different a higher percentage of renters (48%) than home owners (38%) selected convenience to school. The two statistically significant differences in home ownership were that more renters (22%) chose safety as something they liked best about their neighborhood as compared to owners (12%) and more renters (36%) chose public transportation as something they liked best about their neighborhood than owners (19%)*. Finally, renters also find the quietness of the neighborhood more appealing than home owners (29% vs. 19%).

What They Like Least About Their Neighborhood

When residents were asked about what they liked least about their neighborhood (Figure 8), survey respondents' most frequent responses were drugs (65%), crime (47%), and gang activity (41%). This was reiterated during the focus groups, with several residents citing drugs, gangs and violence causing concern. Focus group respondents frequently discussed these problems with their neighborhood throughout the interview. One woman at Community Day said there are people outside her house who leave broken bottles on her basement windows. Many residents in the TALL team focus group discussed curfew enforcement and agreed that it is beneficial for children living in the area. However, they then went on to discuss the issues of enforcing this curfew such as the need for an increase of police on staff and the necessity of childcare for unsupervised children. Some residents inferred that the parents are out "partying" while the children are left to fend for themselves. One woman commented, "Kids rock and rolling in the street, their parents are rock and rolling in the bar." However, it could very well be that the parents are at work, and a lack of child care is why the children are unsupervised. There was also mentioned a lack of activities for children.

Figure 8 – Survey Results: Biggest Problems in the Neighborhood, n=346



Level of Safety Felt Within Neighborhood

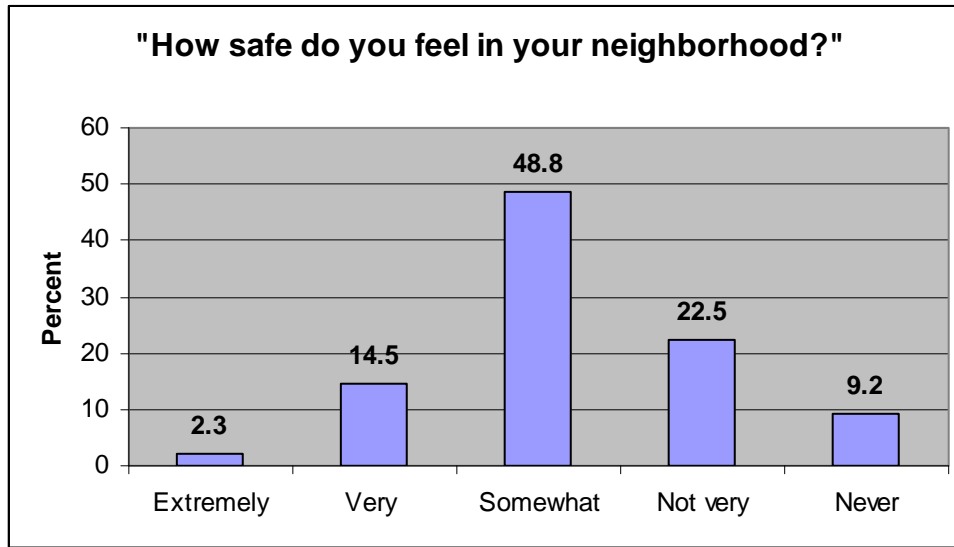
Almost half of survey respondents feel somewhat safe in their neighborhood; 17% of respondents feel somewhat to extremely safe, while 32% feel not very to never safe in their neighborhood (Figure 9). Although not statistically significant, when broken down by home ownership, we find that 54% of owners say they feel somewhat safe while 48% of renters feel somewhat safe. Of the owners, 14% say they never feel safe as compared to 2% who say they feel extremely safe. Of the renters, 13% never feel safe as compared to 2% who say they feel extremely safe.

We also broke down this question by age. Again, though not statistically significant, of those who are under 30, 30% feel never to not very safe, as compared to 32% of 30-55 year olds and 17% of those aged 56 and older. Of those who are under 30, 54% feel somewhat safe, as compared to 51% of those 30-55 and 54% of those 56 and older. Those who feel very to extremely safe were most likely to be 56 and older (29%) as compared to 17% of those under 30 and 17% of respondents aged 30-55.

Residents feel safe in the daytime to walk around, but not in the dark, though some participants of the TALL team focus group had mentioned walking to the meeting that very night in the dark. Residents feared that there were gang members and grown men who have been drinking that “hang out” on the corners. A mother at Paxinosa school perceives the majority of the families here to be “normal working families” while a small but influential proportion decreases her feeling of safety in her community.

Another mother has heard gun shots in the night and fears for the safety of her son who sleeps in a room facing the street.

Figure 9 – Survey Results: Respondent Level of Safety within Neighborhood, n=346



Creating a sense of safety was a theme that was discussed during the TALL team focus group. A local safety group named the “Guardian Angels” provides some level of safety for residents. One focus group respondent complained of the way the Guardian Angels “flash their lights around the park,” saying this may not be the most successful way to handle safety. This may be so, but the Guardian Angel’s main goal is not to apprehend, but to create an environment “where citizens can enjoy their communities without fearing for their safety” (<http://www.guardianangels.org/index.php>). One resident spoke of her own confrontation with residents who may be unsafe for the community, and that she sits outside of her residence and encourages others to feel comfortable doing the same. “You gotta let people know you’re not afraid to walk- otherwise they think that they have the neighborhood covered. You can’t live like that.”

Remaining anonymous when contacting police was a concern for residents who attended the Paxinosa and TALL team focus groups. One mother commented on the issue that “if you call the cops on someone, your name and address shows on the scanner, so they don’t want to report something to the cops.” Another mother suggested calling the anonymous tip line, commenting that it may not be as fast but it leaves your identity nameless, and another mother said she had called on a local drug dealer and that person was removed.

Change in the Appearance of Neighborhood Over Past Two Years

Has the appearance of the West Ward changed since the inception of Weed and Seed? At Paxinosa school, one woman replied to the question by stating that her block is “getting worse” compared to two years ago. One woman has witnessed drug dealers dealing to children, while another has had her car broken into twice and has had bicycles

stolen. The relocation of people from the Southside to the West Ward due to a local housing development initiative has some at Centennial Park worrying about the impact on their neighborhood. They see a “steady decline” in the residential area and site the Southside relocation as a causal factor.

In contrast, members of the TALL team saw the neighborhood as “a little better” from two years ago. One resident mentioned drug dealers being apprehended, and another commented on a local resident, now a TALL team member, moving in and becoming a positive influence in her neighborhood.

Availability of Sports, Recreation, and Other Programs for Youth

Parents in the focus group at Paxinosa Elementary had the perception that there is availability of sports for their children but feel that people don’t know about some activities because advertisements and sign-ups are not disseminated through the community. The teams that their own children are on have not reported sign ups in the past; parents only knew about the timing of the sign ups because their children were on the team the last year. Another parent commented during this focus group that Easton recreation should send any flyers through the schools. Also, as mentioned previously in this report, it appears that more youth are using the public parks as a direct result of W&S programs.

Summary of Weed and Seed Neighborhood Findings

Regardless of race or home ownership, respondents seemed to highly favor the convenience to schools and friendliness of neighbors. Also, connection with others was a frequent response to what they liked best about their neighborhood. The walkability of Easton was another quality stated by focus group respondents. To better promote programming W&S could build on this knowledge and advertise activities as within walking distance. Results broken down by race/ethnicity suggest that Black respondents were overall more likely to feel more positive about their community than White and Hispanic respondents. However, regardless of race, safety, attractiveness of neighborhood, small businesses, connection to others, and community involvement were all least likely to be perceived as positive aspects of the neighborhood. W&S could focus on neighborhood building activities as it is apparent that there is a population of “friendly” residents, though a sense of community is not felt by these same residents. Turning to home ownership, renters found convenience to schools as a positive neighborhood characteristic, more so than home owners. W&S could use the schools as a facility for community meetings and activities, because it seems to be within walking distance to the population of renters.

Respondents’ most frequent responses to what they liked least about their neighborhood were drugs, crime and gang activity. Curfew enforcement and child care and youth activities were brought up as a need for the community throughout surveys and focus groups. A need for children’s activities seems to be of major importance to respondents, although this may be due to the larger amount of Paxinosa respondents.

However, with complaints of teen loitering and lack of parental involvement in the home and through W&S, a focus of Easton W&S could be to increase the availability and information on child and teen activities.

Overall, some level of safety is felt by the majority of respondents. Home owners feel safer than renters, and those 56 and older were more likely to feel safe than those 55 and below. Creating a sense of safety in the community is something W&S could help to increase by having more police patrol the neighborhood at night, along with a greater visibility of residents through a W&S neighborhood watch. Maintaining anonymity when calling in crimes to the police is of major concern to these residents. W&S could help to advertise information on how this service is provided. This possibly increase the level of safety felt by residents and then increase of community involvement in the neighborhood.

Summary

This evaluation and residential assessment of the Easton W&S Initiative resulted in several key findings and suggestions. Most importantly, over 85% of survey respondents had heard of Easton W&S, reflecting a base knowledge of the initiative. While this high percentage could be attributable to bias of the sampling (for example, we surveyed people at a W&S event) our research leads us to be confident in concluding that there is general awareness of the program in the target neighborhood. While a high percentage of survey participants had heard of W&S, there were certain programs that were more likely to be heard of and participated in than others. Certain programs were highly regarded and should be continued in future years because of their positive impact in the community. These include, but are not limited to, Family Nights, the Community Day at Centennial Park, Summer Nights, and the Neighborhood Clean-Up program. Programs with a low rate of participation, such as W&S Health Fairs, the Cyber Café, A Place for Us, and Family Development Resource should be assessed for their impact in the community, and to find ways to increase knowledge and participation about these certain programs, particularly for minorities.

Certain segments of the population may not be targeted and/or reached by the existing programs. Residents commented on the loitering of youth and lack of activities for children in the area. These findings suggest that more programs could be developed that concentrate on the youth of the area outside of the regular school day. The working parent may also not be reached by the existing programs. Residents who attended the Centennial Park focus group suggested that it is easier to get kids involved in activities, but less so for adults because of work schedules. They suggested offering payment or some form of compensation to adults who attend Weed & Seed activities. Educating parents and adults was a concern in the focus groups and surveys. One recommendation is to offer an educational program for parents while their children are playing at a W&S event such as Summer Nights or Community Day. Unfortunately, our survey sample did not reach many over the age of 50 and this may be an area of additional assessment and could highlight certain programs that retired and elderly population may need or be interested in.

Transiency is a critical issue because of the number of rental properties within the target area. W&S could work with the Housing Authority to increase incentives for home ownership, and participation in the Weed & Seed initiative. This should help bring a sense of community and interest in investing in the neighborhood. For example one mother at Paxinosa ES advocated the need for landlords to be more scrupulous when renting, and that W&S could possibly work with landlords in the community.

Almost half of the respondents had some feeling of safety in their neighborhood. However, over 30% felt not very to never safe, with the biggest problems stated as crime, drugs and gang activity. The relationship between police department and the community should be assessed for its impact on the target area residents. One suggested change is a program that could be initiated, focusing on improving positive communication between residents and police. An increase in residential participation of crime-watch and anonymity when calling in crimes would possibly help increase the feeling of safety of respondents and increase the likelihood of their community involvement.

Overall, results suggest that the Easton W&S Initiative has made progress fostering a feeling of community in the West Ward, particularly through programs that bring the entire community together to utilize the recreational facilities of the neighborhood. Residents also feel generally safe in their community and appreciate its walkability. Moving forward, the W&S program team has the opportunity to build upon their accomplishments over the last eight years, focusing their efforts on those areas identified in this report as needing greater attention. The results of this study suggest that residents of the West Ward desire the programs and services provided by W&S and look forward to more programs in the future.

About the Lehigh Valley Research Consortium

The Lehigh Valley Research Consortium (LVRC) is a collaboration among academic researchers, governmental, not-for-profit, and business groups throughout the area, which has joined together to examine social, political, economic, health, and environmental issues in a regional context. The LVRC draws upon experts from local four and two year institutions of higher education in order to examine community issues, disseminate information about our community to citizens, engage in collective dialogue, and augment the classroom learning of our local college communities. This collaboration fosters new insights into regional challenges in the hopes of enhancing our understanding of complex issues and solutions.

Recognizing the intertwined nature of the region's communities, we have created a community-based information system, which is a compilation of over 300 indicators. By pulling together many facets of community well-being into one location, this information system creates an opportunity for richer, more productive conversations about our future direction, keeping in mind the unique nature of our diverse communities. Faculty researchers and college students work with community organizations to evaluate existing programs and policies as well as analyze current conditions to offer enhancements to existing policies and practices.

The LVRC is organized through the Lehigh Valley Association of Independent Colleges, a 501(c)(3) organization. For more information about the LVRC visit our website <http://www.lehighvalleyresearch.org>.

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