2016-17 Year-End Community Engaged Grant Report

Project: Wise Women: An untapped community asset

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Community Partners: Rev. Paul Abernathy

FOCUS Pittsburgh

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Overview

The Duquesne University Fellows and their community partners thank the Center for Community-Engaged Teaching and Research for their generous support of this project. Since receiving the Community-Engaged research grant, the Wise Women Project Team has made significant progress toward their longer-term community-engaged research goals of improving the health of women and babies in the Hill District community by broadening academic knowledge of social networks among women in the Hill District as well as learning what can be done to further support local African-American communities. The Wise Women Project Team has completed Year Two of the project (June 2016–June 2017) without any significant changes to the project plan as initially proposed. This report includes a detailed discussion of the Year Two activities and the Wise Women Project Team’s progress to date.

Project Narrative

Introduction

This project is the result of an ongoing dialogue between two Duquesne University junior faculty from Nursing and Sociology (Dr. Devido, PI and Dr. Appelt, Co-PI) about the maternal-child health crisis affecting African Americans in the U.S. The project team engaged three Partners from a local, African-American Community. Based on preliminary research conducted by the PI, the project team proposed to engage with the community in the service of understanding the critical perspectives of “Wise Women,” who represent an untapped natural strength in the community and are diamonds in the rough for sustainable change within the community. The project team is accomplishing this by exploring ways to utilize one of the community’s existing assets (social networks among African-American women). Ultimately, this research will lay the groundwork for a program of research and a larger scale application focused on improving maternal-child health in the Pittsburgh region.

Wise Women Project Team

Community Partner: Paul Abernathy,
Director of FOCUS Pittsburgh

Reverend Paul Abernathy received a Master of Divinity Degree with distinction from St. Tikhon’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, South Canaan, Pennsylvania and was ordained into Holy Priesthood in 2016. He knew where he needed to be and who needed his help: the people living in the Hill District. He moved there, spent countless hours raising money to open FOCUS, which, under his tutelage, serves the community in a multitude of ways including a backpack feeding program that provides meals for over 2,000 children during their time away from school.

Community Partner: Ms. Celeta R. Hickman
UJAMAA Collective and Equity Advisory Panel to the Pittsburgh Public Schools
Celeta Hickman emerged as a community leader focused on mobilizing and empowering African-American women in the Hill District Community of Pittsburgh. She is the founder of UJAMAA Collective, a wealth building incubator model that incorporates arts, agriculture, and cooperative ownership of spaces and opportunities for micro-entrepreneurs selling handmade, fair trade products in the Pittsburgh region. Ms. Hickman has a longtime passion for issues related to maternal and child health, as well as a deep concern for the underrepresentation of African-American women in health-related careers. Ms. Hickman extended her leadership role and representation of her community by becoming involved with the Hill District Education Council and by serving as a member of the Equity Advisory Panel to the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). Ms. Hickman and her colleagues from the Hill District Education Council and the Pittsburgh Public Schools have been developing a proposal for what they hope will become a new vocational education program focused on maternal-child health-related career preparation.

**Community Partner: Ms. Terri Baltimore**

*Duquesne University Community-Engaged Pathways Community Fellow, Community Ambassador, and Hill House Association*

Ms. Baltimore oversees the agency's arts programs and managing its interests in a variety of community settings. She is at the forefront of some of the most creative and dynamic programs the Hill House offers and also oversees the Hill House Community Collaborative, a powerful program that assists recovering women and their children. She is a member of the neighborhood's network of "green" organizations working on environmental initiatives. Additionally, Ms. Baltimore serves as Duquesne University’s inaugural Community-Engaged Pathways Community Fellow.

**DU Investigators: Jessica Devido, PhD, MSN, CPNP and Cathleen J. Appelt, PhD and**

*School of Nursing and McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts, Duquesne University*

The Duquesne University Investigators, Jessica Devido and Cathleen Appelt, are junior faculty members in the School of Nursing and the Department of Sociology in the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts, respectively, at Duquesne University.

**Project Description**

The originally proposed project included two distinct project phases: a relationship building phase *(Year One: 2015-2016)* and a research phase *(Year Two: 2016-2017)*.

**Relationship Building Phase (Year One):** The relationship building phase focused on developing rapport and trust among PI’s, Community Partners, and persons from other organizations in the community by identifying churches, church groups, women-led organizations, and organizations that serve women of childbearing age. During this phase, the PIs: 1) hosted initial informal meet and greet meetings that allowed for rapport building and establishment of mutual understanding and 2) attended events held by the groups.
The Research Phase (Year Two): Year two began by making some rather extensive revisions to the project’s IRB protocol to include revision of the focus group interview guide, consents, and additional supporting documents based on all that the project team had learned during the relationship building phase of the project. In the research phase, the study used qualitative focus group design methodology informed by a social ecological model for health promotion and social network analysis. The Wise Women Project Team recruited for and conducted the Organization Leaders Groups first, followed by the Women of the Community groups. These first two types of groups helped us to identify the “Wise Women” for recruitment to the third set of groups.

Year Two Objectives and Research Activities

In this qualitative, social network study, the investigators and their partners seek to answer the following research questions: 1) Are there women in the African-American community who serve as key providers of guidance related to maternal-child health information; 2) What type of health-related information (e.g., conventional or alternative medicine-based information) is relayed and received by women in the community? 3) Are there additional informational, programming, or dissemination needs of the community with regard to maternal-child health?; 4) What are the attitudes of women toward utilization of traditional practices from various African cultures for maternal-child health among leaders, adult women of child bearing age, and “Wise Women” in the community.

Objectives

The primary objectives for Year Two included:
1) To explore if there are women in the African-American community who serve as key providers of guidance related to maternal-child health information;
2) To describe the types of health-related information (e.g., conventional or alternative medicine-based information) relayed and received by women in the community;
3) To identify informational, programming, and dissemination needs of the community with regard to maternal-child health; and
4) To explore attitudes of women toward utilization of traditional practices from various African cultures for maternal-child health among leaders, adult women of child bearing age, and “Wise Women” in the community.

Research Activities

Design: This study utilized focus group methodology. In addition to using focus groups, participants’ demographic characteristics were assessed using a brief self-administered questionnaire and a community contact survey was administered to ask about local organizations with which participants had contact or frequented.

Setting: The study took place in the Hill District, a predominantly (~95%) African-American community in the City of Pittsburgh, where it is estimated that about 40% of families are living at incomes below the national poverty threshold.
**Instruments:** Participants’ demographic characteristics were assessed using a brief eight question self-administered questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire asked information about the participant’s age, race, gender, area of residence, level of education, marital status, estimated gross annual income. This questionnaire was administered prior to the beginning of focus group participation. A community contact survey was administered to ask about local organizations with which participants had contact or frequented.

The facilitators (PI and Co-PI) also engaged the Community Leaders participants and the Women of the Community in a group activity. For the Community Leaders the facilitators asked, “What problems/issues do you feel are related to Maternal-Child Health are most important for women in your community?” This was done in order to understand the top three problems/issues identified by the leaders. For the Women of the Community the facilitators asked “Have you ever received any information or education from anyone about these topics that you just described?” This was done in order to understand the top three sources of information/education identified by the Women of the Community.

A semi-structured focus group guide, was utilized to elicit and refocus the group discussions. This interview guide was somewhat loose in structure to allow focus group participants to ultimately guide the discussion (i.e., concepts/new ideas were brought up by the participants and were investigated).

**Sample selection and size:** The project team recruited participants for three types of focus groups. The three types of participant groups included eligible participants as follows:

1) *Organization Leaders in the Community:* Women or men who are involved at the administrative or leadership level with the Community Partners/liaisons or women who have the ability to connect women of the community to the project team.

2) *Women of the community:* Women of childbearing age (18-44) residing in the community.

3) “*Wise Women*”: Women who attend or participate in churches, church groups, and organizations in the community who are noted to have potential of being “Wise Women” by the Community Partners/liaisons and women of the community.

To date, the project team has conducted a total of eight focus groups with forty-nine total participants at two locations centralized in the Hill District Community (Hill House and Carnegie Library Hill District location). These locations were chosen, with the input of community partners, to facilitate maximal inclusion of targeted community members. There were three Organization Leaders in the Community focus groups, three Women of the Community focus groups, and two “Wise Women” focus groups.

**Community Organizations Engaged in the Organization Leaders in the Community Focus Groups**

**FOCUS Pittsburgh**

FOCUS Pittsburgh, seeks to serve those in need by providing food, occupation, clothing, understanding, and shelter. They serve through holistic wrap-around programs, choosing to walk hand-in-hand with a single person over many miles of life recovery, rather than walking with a
large crowd for a short distance. Reverend Paul Abernathy serves as its Director and Kristina Abernathy serves as the Clinic Administrator.

**Divine Intervention Ministries**
Divine Intervention Ministries serves currently and formally incarcerated and at risk youth. Debra Morrison Germany serves as the Executive Director.

**UJAMMA Collective**
UJAMAA Collective is a non-profit organization funded with a social mission to create spaces, opportunities, networks, education and support for Africana women to grow as entrepreneurs, artisans, and servant leaders so that they may “lift as we climb.” LaKeisha Wolf serves as the Executive director of the collective.

**Macedonia Family and Community Enrichment Center (FACE)**
Macedonia FACE is a faith based non-profit community outreach of Macedonia Church of Pittsburgh addresses disparities that impact the African-American family with a mission to encourage the development of healthy families. Tinisha Hunt serves as Program Manager.

**Recruitment of subjects:** The project team recruited for and conducted the Organization Leaders Groups first, followed by the Women of the Community groups. These first two types of groups helped us to identify the “Wise Women” for recruitment (to the third set of groups). Working with the Community Partners, the project team identified other leaders in the community for participation in the Community Leader Groups. For the second wave of groups, the Women of the Community, the project team used a variety of recruitment approaches. The team asked members of the Community Leader Groups to assist us in inviting women to participate. The team wished for the Women of the Community groups to represent a diverse group of women in the community. Toward this end, the project team used a snowball sampling technique once an initial group of women were identified by community leaders. During both the Community Leaders and Women of the Community Groups, discussion facilitators (Project PI and Co-PI) requested the help of participants in identifying “Wise Women” in the community for participation in the third wave of groups (the “Wise Women” groups). The project team networked through the community partners and women of the community to identify “Wise Women” in the community. The project team asked community leaders and the women of the community to reach out to the “wise women” to invite them to participate, provide flyers about the study to potential participants, and encourage them to tell potential participants that if they are interested in participating to contact us, by phone or email. Ultimately, recruitment continued and data were collected until data saturation was reached (i.e., there were no new emergent themes or other information obtained).

**Transcription/Analyses:** All recordings were transcribed by a trained graduate student and to protect privacy of participants; after transcription was complete digital recordings were destroyed. All typewritten transcripts are stored in password-protected files on a computer and backed up on a server, to which only the project team has access.

The project team is currently analyzing the results of the study. The PI and Co-PI will, in naturally occurring segments of text, analyze transcribed data. Emerging themes will be assigned initial codes determined by the. The PI’s and Co-PI’s codes will be compared and where there
are discrepancies, consensus will be reached through discussion. When necessary, new codes will be created. The review process will reduce analytic bias and promote consistency in the analysis of the data. Findings from the coded data will be shared with Community Partners. At the final stage of analyses, the findings from study will be shared with the Community Partners.

**Dissemination:** The DU Investigators plan to work with Rev. Abernathy, Ms. Baltimore, and Ms. Hickman with regard to dissemination of the findings from the project which include both presentations and publications. Further, this group will work together to strategize the next steps for this project based on the findings from the present research. Additionally, the project team is currently planning a gathering at the Carnegie library Hill District location during Fall of 2017 to share some general findings with interested stakeholders and members of the community.

**Project Outcomes**

This project has provided the Wise Women Project Team with the opportunity to partner with and support the University’s neighbors in the Hill District to promote health among women and children. It has allowed, through meetings with key stakeholder and interactions with women of the community, the opportunity for the Wise Women Project Team to strengthen their relationship with the Hill District Community.

**Scholarship**

1. The Project’s Co-PI Dr. Appelt will be presenting findings from this project at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction in Montreal, Canada in August 2017. This presentation is based on a manuscript (in preparation) that is focused on the relationships between identity and priorities for community change related to the maternal-child health crisis in Pittsburgh’s African-American community. Drs. Appelt and Devido expect to submit this manuscript to a social science journal during the next academic year.
2. The results of this project contain publishable findings for at least three manuscripts and two additional presentations, either poster or oral, in preparation by the project team.
3. Additionally, this project provided solid pilot data for the research team to seek external funding to continue this valuable work.

**Teaching**

1. The PI and Co-PI created an interdisciplinary mentoring program containing 18 Duquesne University students (fourteen undergraduate Nursing students, one graduate Nursing student, two graduates for the McAnulty College of Liberal Arts, and one graduate student from the School of Education).
2. These students received mentoring and hands-on training in community-engaged research from the PI and Co-PI throughout the entire community-engaged research process by including them in the relationship building phase and in the research phase.
3. During the the relationship building phase, the Duquesne University students working on the project have developed positive relationships with the organizational leaders and women of the Hill District Community.
4. During the research the students participated in: CITI training, data collection, transcription, and dissemination for this project.

5. Specific to the graduate students, the PI and Co-PI were able to employ a graduate student so she could focus on her thesis and gain marketable job skills related to her career goals. An additional graduate student was able to learn much about the research process which led to her development of an instrument that was used during the study to collect some data that are will be used to publish a manuscript this year.

Community-Engagement

1. In Year One the project team established positive relationships, through a series of five meet and greet events with 69 persons, including both community leaders and residents from the the Hill District Community. While there was some overlap between event attendees (from Year One) and the 49 research participants (in Year Two), the project team established a positive rapport with a large number of persons from this rather small community. The project team raised awareness of the maternal child health crisis through the meet and greet activities, a video shown at the start of each focus group session, and through the focus group discussions.

2. This project brought women together creating a supportive dynamic. This is extremely important considering that some of the focus group discussions with the women of the community were quite contentious at the start.

3. The focus groups gave 'voice' to the perspectives of women who are often not heard and who actually vocalized having felt discounted by the medical establishment and members of their own community and families.

4. The project team has represented Duquesne University as an organization concerned about the health of persons in this community and, through the involvement of nursing students, one that is actively working to create a culturally sensitive and educated health care workforce.

Conclusions

The project team intended for this two phase study to be a starting point for relationship and trust building among the community and academic center for a collaborative partnership. Results from this exploratory study, which are in-progress include identification of the needs of the community related to topics relevant and important to maternal child health as well as identified needs for programming and intervention. Funding for this project was intended to be used as seed funding, the findings of this project will inform the next steps for subsequent projects, possible program development, and/or intervention and appropriate sources for external funding will be sought.

Dr.s Appelt and Devido have opened a dialogue with Dr. Christine Pollock to begin identifying suitable external funding for work that will extend from this initial project. For example, the Hillman Innovations in care grant seeks proposals that address the health-care needs of vulnerable populations including Maternal and Child Health. Another possible grant is through the Anna Lalor Burdick program, which seeks to educate young women about healthy reproduction in order to broaden and enhance their options in life. The program focuses particularly on young women who have inadequate access to information regarding reproductive
health. Finally, after discussing the aims of this project with Michele Cooper from the McAuley Foundation, she expressed that the Foundation would be interested in support of initiatives focusing on the development of vocational opportunities for young women in the Hill District.

**Project Budget**

In the table below both the originally proposed budget and the amounts that were actually spent in each budgeted category. The Wise Women Project Team had originally requested $10,000 and spent a total of $9,878.03. Please see the attached Microsoft Excel file for details regarding specific categories for expenditures.