

United Way
Community Conversations Summary
Developed by Dr. Chris Ward, The University of Findlay
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Introduction

The United Way developed the Community Conversations as a way to understand the kind of community that citizens of Findlay/Hancock County want as well as determine the most important community issues or concerns. The format for the Community Conversations was created by the Harwood Institute of Public Innovation in collaboration with The United Way. This assessment is an extension of the 2011 Hancock County health needs assessment.

The appropriate facilitators and note takers were secured and then trained. From January to May 2014, around two dozen conversations took place in our community. These conversations were with different groups such as Rotary and Kiwanis, as well as at various venues such as churches, schools, and Coffee Amici.

What kind of community do we want?

It should come as no surprise that the community wants to be flood-free. While this was important, several other priorities emerged from the data. Community members want a safe and drug-free community. Indirectly linked to a safe and drug-free community was a facility for the treatment of mental health and drug addiction. One participant commented “Heroin is the most common. There are many different people that are becoming addicted to the drug molly. Weed has been and still will be prevalent for years to come”.

People also want a more civil, inclusive, and diverse community that accepts people of all economic status, race, and religious views. This also includes advocating for seniors such as providing low-income housing, exercise facilities, and activities (movies, etc.) that are stimulating for seniors. Senior communities should network and communicate to plus have gerontology services. A community that supports artists and the contribution they make to a vibrant city.

Community members would like services associated with healthy lifestyles and find a way to develop healing gardens, fixing run-down places, and ways to be pedestrian-friendly. They wish for Findlay to be a nice place for kids to grow up.

Finally, the community wants service providers to communicate better regarding the services that are available. Some suggestions included creating a community calendar or putting flyers up (or in bags) at grocery stores about activities going on in the community. People want to keep the small town feel and protect historical features.

What are the most important issues or concerns when it comes to the community?

While the intent was to develop two or three issues or concerns most important to the community, it was apparent that more issues were identified. Many of these issues are interrelated but it was important to categorize them separately.

Below is a list of these issues, in no particular order.

1. Safety

The issue of safety revolved mostly around bullying and gang activity. The participants want more outreach programs for kids to teach them how to deal with bullying and how to stop bullying. Also included in this issue was the need for more block watch areas and less cuts in law enforcement.

2. Drugs

There appears to be a consensus that we have our head in the sand regarding the breadth and depth of drug addiction. Drug addiction is an issue across social and economic classes. This comment was made regarding drug testing in schools, “Kids are removed from sports and have their parking passes taken away. Drugs and alcohol are easily accessible from parents or older siblings. There is a lot of peer pressure and kids who feel left out in the world find a sense of community with others who use drugs” and “No one teaches kids how to help with friends that have problems with drugs and alcohol”. A possibility would be to have mandatory sexual/drug issues discussed within the school system each year. The cost and availability of rehabilitation was mentioned as a concern but also cited was that ADAMHS does not do a good job of getting the word out regarding their successes or ability to help. Multiple people mentioned the problem of a path to addition and that we seem to be caught in a dilemma of prevention versus intervention. **The community should have a 24-hour counseling facility available.**

3. Flooding

Flooding impacts families, downtown businesses, and farmers.

4. Poverty and Homelessness

The ‘doesn’t exist’ mentality exists with poverty and homelessness. Several points were made regarding the lack of communication about services and assistance available to people in need and a lack of low income housing.

5. Jobs/Employment and skills training

This issue had multiple components. First, people felt there was a lack of strategy to match the skill needs of the businesses and workers. These skills and training gaps need to be identified and then partner with businesses to match workers with the business’s needs. Second, people are stuck in dead-end, low-wage jobs but they can’t move forward without skills training. Some positions, like welding or construction, don’t need a four year degree. Third, for those under 18, there is a lack of opportunities and access to education. Finally, a plan should be developed to assist felons in getting a decent job. Other communities have programs such as ‘Second Chance Business’ or a ‘Bridges Program’.

6. Youth projects and activities

The youth in Findlay need to have something to do or somewhere to go after school. One participant commented “No activities for youth cause free time, which allows for bad choices, crime, teen pregnancy, drugs and suicide”. Some suggestions were to provide low-

priced or free activities or volunteering, a Kids Car Show along with possibly an Imagination Station to encourage students to think of health and science as fun.

7. Transportation

There is a lack of convenient, affordable transportation. This includes kids missing the bus and cannot get to school, people who are trying to improve themselves by attending classes but cannot get to them, and others who need to get to work. The wait times for HATS is too long and does not run 24/7 for people on afternoon or night shift. **Additional transportation from the senior towers to community and university events along with rides to doctor's appointments and shopping.**

8. Literacy

While this category could be combined with jobs/education, the main points mentioned in the conversations were health, financial, and technical literacy. In addition, some comments regarding teaching life skills in schools and educational settings was brought up. Other participants thought there were educational barriers to enter preschool. **The community should have a high school dropout prevention program. Teachers have a difficult time with the number of mandates combined with the increase in students who are unprepared for school. A solution could be to develop a city or county-wide after school curriculum.**

9. Less divided between city and county

People wanted a sense of community but also wanted collaboration and sharing of resources with agencies – “a collaborative effort by the non-profits”. Several remarks were made about making the city and county less divided.

10. Affordability

While this issue is related to providing low-cost activities for youth, families and seniors, another concern was affordable child care, preschool costs, and the need to develop a Feed a Child Program.

Conclusion

As you can see, there are some connections between the issues. There also was a negative perception of the media. More than one person thought the media tends to put out more negative stories than positive stories. One person stated they “... see nothing but a focus on bad rather than good stories, good journalism is being overshadowed by 24 hour news media, and it is pushing agencies to have their message more strategic (going negative in order for them to compete for limited resources)”. We need to talk about the new Performing Arts Center, historical areas, and research successful people with origins in Findlay and promote all of these positive points.

The most common thing that can be done to make a difference is to engage more people of all ages and background in volunteering! This ranges from encouraging college students and teens to families and retirees.

Finally, the participants strongly encourage The United Way to share the results as well as the next steps of the conversations with the public.