



RESILIENCE IS THE FOUNDATION OF COMMUNITY WELLNESS

Community wellness is a way of life directed at achieving sustainable health, well-being, and socio-economic potential of the community and its members.

WELL COMMUNITY PROJECT
2012-2015

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Clockwise from upper left, Springwells Village, Detroit; Well Community Summit; Wayne B. Jonas, MD.

WELL COMMUNITY PROJECT

In 2013 the Institute of Medicine (IOM) documented what many in the healthy communities movement had known for a long time. The health and prosperity of the nation was declining.

What was new in this study was that these declines were not occurring exclusively in impoverished or underserved areas, but across the entire nation – across multiple demographics and income levels. In addition, the study documented that this was not a recent phenomenon; in fact, the health of the United States has been declining for more than 30 years. Our lives, the report said, were getting shorter and our health was getting worse.

As the experts dug deeper into the data, they discovered that the United States was investing more than twice as much in medical treatment for diseases compared to preventing them than any other country in the world. The disproportionate spending on disease care was done at the expense of investments in community development and social services that were the underlying causes of the very diseases our medical system was trying to treat. This mismatch is at the heart of our problems, both social and economic.

About the same time as the release of the IOM report, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation decided to fund a unique program to foster community wellness, the Well Community Project. The program aimed to go beyond public health and medical care to understand what community wellness is, and how it is developed and sustained. They funded Samueli Institute, a leader in whole systems, whole person wellness research, to help organize an approach that could look into this process.

Samueli Institute began by convening stakeholders from communities, as well as activists, academics and policymakers to probe the process fostering wellness. The working group adapted a framework Samueli Institute built for the military called Total Force Fitness to this effort.

What we learned in that initial meeting was that frameworks were not the core need nor at the heart of the process. Indeed, many frameworks had been developed and they usually left out some of the most important social and historical causes of illness and wellness. What was needed was a much more basic model of human flourishing. Even more important than any model was fostering a process in which the strengths of a community were tapped and a deep dialogue was created across all stakeholders. Once this process was developed the communities began to create their own wellness. Deep and diverse social dialogue was like water on a garden from which a thousand flowers bloomed.

Samueli Institute worked with three communities from around the country, drawn from locations with some of the worst health metrics. Each was offered an opportunity to receive assistance in a community wellness improvement project of their choice. In addition, we gathered a Council of Elders of experienced community health and wellness experts and advocates to provide guidance and mentoring. The results were showcased and discussed among the participants and with policymakers and investors at the Well Community Summit on April 9-10, 2015.

WELL COMMUNITY PROJECT

Deep and diverse social dialogue was like water on a garden from which a thousand flowers bloomed.

The dialogue and process at the summit was unique in many ways. The event included interactive theater, games, storytelling and a facilitated dialogue to reveal the lessons these communities have learned. These lessons are essential for healing our nation as a whole and reversing the trends documented in the IOM report.

The time has come to go beyond medical care, beyond public health and beyond traditional approaches to disease screening and prevention. It is time to cultivate the roots of human flourishing. It is time to create community wellness for everyone in our nation.

Wayne B. Jonas, M.D.
President & CEO
Samueli Institute

WELL COMMUNITY PROCESS

To support the communities in the **WELL COMMUNITY PROJECT**, Samueli Institute engaged a team of world-class subject matter experts to form the **COUNCIL OF ELDERS**. The Council of Elders helped shape the conceptual framework for the Well Community Project and provided direct support and technical assistance to leaders in **DETROIT, NEW ORLEANS** and **INDIANOLA** over the course of the project. Samueli Institute hosted frequent dialogues between the communities and Council of Elders so that they could learn from each other and share successes along the path to building a healthy community.



HEALING CONVERSATIONS: CREATING SHARED VISION & PURPOSE

In Indianola, a town of 12,000 in the Mississippi Delta region, tough conversations are taking place in the heart of city government.

With the leadership of Mayor Steve Rosenthal and Bessie Gardener of the City of Indianola, the Well Community Project helped build a new council of natural leaders in the city from across the spectrum of citizens.

“We brought together people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, different races, and different religions who—while they all knew each other as you would expect in a town our size—they had never before sat at the same table and interacted on a social, community volunteering basis,” explains Mayor Rosenthal.

The leadership team was comprised of about 20 citizens representing a diverse cross section of the community, such as truck drivers, bank presidents, police officers, teachers and pastors. They met every month for three or four hours at a time to take on big topics: health, economics, education and race.

The conversations on topics as sensitive as race were robust. Discussion facilitators challenged the diverse group to share difficult and personal narratives, such as “When was the first time you realized there was a separation of the races in Mississippi—a true racist remark or event?” The resulting stories were tearful and emotional recollections from when the civic leaders were just eight or nine years old. Although the conversations were challenging, participants responded positively and reported finding that they comprehended each other’s perspectives for the first time.

The conversations triggered personal interactions that extended outside the meetings and across social, racial and religious dividing lines. They also helped focus effort across the group to a shared vision for the future of Indianola, and helped the group develop a strategic plan to replace Gentry High School, a worn, 60-year-old campus with a 99 percent African-American student body and a 35 percent drop-out rate.

Indianola, Mississippi	
Land Mass (Square Miles)	8.7
Population	12,066
Median Annual Income	\$24,591
African American	79.4%
Hispanic	1.6%
Asian	0.1%
White, non-Hispanic	18.7%
Under 18	36.5%
18-34	20.8%
35-54	25.1%
55+	17.3%
No High School Diploma	4.4%
HS Diploma	77.8%
Bachelor’s Degree or more	17.8%

Historically, Indianola maintained separate schools for its black and white students, with Gentry High serving the African-American community. In 1969 the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled this segregation illegal. The white high school was converted to a middle school and Gentry was integrated, but the white students never came. Instead they enrolled in private schools, mostly Indianola Academy, which in 2010 had 434 white students and two African-American students.

“When you walk through the facilities you get to understand that the black high school was not built to the level of quality and had the level of equipment and background that the white school had, and light bulbs are coming on and I think [the Well Community Project leadership] group is getting a better understanding of we’re not here to correct what happened in the past, but we’re here to go forward and improve our community... it’s a whole different world.”

“A lot of people—more so in the white community than the black community—think that there really was a separate but equal system and that’s not the truth and those who were in our conversations who may have started out with that viewpoint now understand that previous administrations—whether state, county, municipal—orchestrated things a little bit differently,” Mayor Rosenthal explains.



Indianola, Mississippi

CITY OF INDIANOLA, MISS. - Founded in 1882 in the heart of the Mississippi Delta region, the city of Indianola has a rich history of overcoming decades of racial and economic divide, evolving into a close-knit community dedicated to bringing together residents of different races, economic statuses, faiths, and backgrounds to create a unified approach to improving health and wellness in their neighborhoods.



FINDING THE CALM AFTER THE STORM

When Hurricane Katrina swept through the Gulf region in August 2005 it took more than 1,800 lives and caused more than 1.2 billion dollars in damage to communities along the coast. Among the hardest hit was the city of New Orleans, which suffered through the battering of the storm followed by massive flooding when the city's levee system failed.

The community of New Orleans East, a very large section of the city situated east of the Industrial Canal, north of the Mississippi River and south of Lake Pontchartrain, was hit hard by the storm and struggles to recover from its impact to this day.

The Well Community Project teamed with local non-profit organization, the Institute of Women and Ethnic Studies (IWES), in New Orleans East to learn from residents about the effect Katrina continues to have on their lives almost ten years later, and through that understanding begin to heal. IWES hosted Wisdom Circles to help neighbors connect with each other and themselves.

"Wisdom Circles have been around for a long time. They are very ancient technique that indigenous people throughout the planet have used to bring community together to tell stories again and to learn from each other," explains IWES President & CEO Denese Shervington, MD, MPH. "What's slightly different in Wisdom Circles opposed to the public health focus group is that we create rituals to help people tap into a more sacred space. We are really going for truth telling and not advice giving. People just want to be heard and that in itself can be healing."

For more than a year, Shervington's team hosted monthly circles of 20-25 individuals from across the community and encouraged them to tell some of the stories that have been painful in their lives, or to share celebratory stories of overcoming adversity. Through this process, IWES has helped residents of New Orleans East begin to come to terms with how the storm is still impacting their lives and communities. As part of this work, IWES engaged young people in a Youth Participatory Action Research project to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems.

New Orleans East	
Land Mass (Square Miles)	118
Population	64,310
Median Annual Income	\$46,000
African American	92%
Hispanic	2.3%
Asian	3.8%
White, non-Hispanic	2.0%
Under 18	30.7%
18-34	28.3%
35-54	25.5%
55+	15.5%
No High School Diploma	25.7%
HS Diploma	45.5%
Bachelor's Degree or more	28.8 %

People just want to be heard and that in and of itself can be healing.

"We see these conversations as an opening up and increased awareness. For many in our community mental health issues are stigmatized, so we're normalizing it for people and saying, 'If you went through Katrina and you did not have a heightened response there is something wrong with you. You should have felt stressed and you may have PTSD'."

IWES is partnering with a newly built medical center in their community, New Orleans East Hospital, to integrate Wisdom Circles into the hospital's community health and wellness fairs for the community.

IWES' efforts are having an impact. "People frequently approach me in the neighborhood and say their lives have changed since participating in our sessions," says Dr. Shervington.

They tell her they are interacting differently with their children, and are starting to realize that perhaps their children are acting out as a result of struggling with their own experience from the storm.

"They just never thought that this terrible thing that happened would continue to have such a significant impact on their being and their lives."



Denese Shervington, MD, MPH

INSTITUTE OF WOMEN AND ETHNIC STUDIES is a unity-based organization headquartered in New Orleans, Louisiana, founded in 1993 in response to overwhelming health disparities among women of color. IWES is dedicated to improving the physical, mental, and spiritual health and quality of life for women of color and their families, especially those who are socio-economically disadvantaged.



SPRINGWELLS VILLAGE, DETROIT

SPRINGWELLS VILLAGE, DETROIT

WALKING THE TALK

While other efforts of the Well Community Project encompassed an entire town, or a large section of an American city, the focus in Detroit was concentrated to little more than a single square mile, the neighborhood of Springwells Village in Southwest Detroit.

A densely packed neighborhood by Detroit's sprawling standards, Springwells has lost population at a lower rate than the city as a whole, largely due to an influx of new immigrants arriving to make the neighborhood home.

New and long-term residents face challenges in Springwells that are not unique to Detroit or any economically challenged industrial urban area: safety concerns and blight. Springwells Village does have a unique challenge in education with only 46 percent of the community having at least a high school diploma (compared to 90 percent nationwide and 78 percent in greater Detroit).

As part of the Well Community Project, grantee Urban Neighborhood Initiatives (UNI) took a blended approach to better serve their community. As UNI Executive Director Dennis Nordmoe puts it, "The Well Community Project helped us connect to a deep spiritual issue in the community related to beauty, integrity, participation and belonging. All of our efforts through this process have worked to weave those desires together; desires identified first and foremost by the residents themselves."

In doing so, UNI first built upon the organization's extensive experience reclaiming blighted spaces and vacant lots into clean, green spaces as well as their expert work in the field of youth development.

"One of our large efforts related to building our community's physical resilience by focusing on our parks, open spaces and green spaces. The Well Community Project let us grow our youth employment program and devote an entire youth cohort to the maintenance and future development of those spaces," explains UNI Project Manager Tiffany Tononi. "This also allowed us to engage our neighbors and the community on what they wanted to see those spaces become and in entering into long-term stewardship of those places."

Thanks to the Well Community Project and an additional grant provided by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, a group of a dozen young people aged 16-19 worked with local resident leader and UNI Curator of Parks Lisa Marie Rodriguez for more than a year to transform vacant, blighted areas into pocket parks and community green spaces.

Springwells Village, Detroit	
Land Mass (Square Miles)	1.3
Population	17,000
Median Annual Income	\$32,132
African American	92%
Hispanic	2.3%
Asian	3.8%
White, non-Hispanic	2.0%
Under 18	30.7%
18-34	28.3%
35-54	25.5%
55+	15.5%
No High School Diploma	25.7%
HS Diploma	45.5%
Bachelor's Degree or more	28.8%

"When we started we were faced with limited resources at the city level and longtime community volunteers were overextended, but witnessing the youth participation with parks and green spaces spurred a new wave of residential involvement," says Rodriguez.

The residents of Springwells work long hours, often at multiple jobs, but families found time and energy to work with UNI in reclaiming and maintaining the green spaces they chose for transformation. "One family began using headlamps so they could mow the grass at night after they returned home from work," remembers Rodriguez.

UNI's program work beautified the neighborhood, made it safer and instilled a sense of pride and belonging to a diverse grouping of residents unified around a common goal. UNI then built on that success following the Well Community Project framework to develop a dialogue among the multitude of NGOs that serve SW Detroit.

UNI hosted a series of workshops for the 12 member NGOs of the Springwells Village Development Collaborative leading up to a day-long strategy session to dialogue and develop shared goals.

"We have had a collaborative of NGOs in our community for 8 to 10 years now and we interact well, but when we pull together for a specific deliverable or goal, we really excel," explains Tononi. "The time taken to sit together is precious. It is a time to coordinate efforts, be in relation with one another, and have the difficult conversations that every community wrestles with."

By any measure UNI has been an impactful community non-profit, but at Samueli Institute's Well Community Summit, Tononi revealed the secret to their success: authentic partnerships between community leaders, neighbors, business leaders, funders and other not-for-profit and governmental organizations.

"Substantive forward strides in urban neighborhood development require authentic partnerships and it is these partnerships that allow us to maximize our combined resources in ways that empower communities and sustain the long lasting change that I know we are all looking for."

URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVES (UNI) - A Michigan 501(c)3 non-profit corporation, founded in 1997, works with communities in urban neighborhoods to build safe and thriving environments where people want to live, work, and play.



WELL COMMUNITY SUMMIT, APRIL 9-10, 2015

The capstone of the Well Community Project was the Well Community Summit held on April 9-10, 2015. The summit showcased the work of the communities, experts and advocates and illustrated the power of relationship to promote community wellness.

What emerged from the Well Community Summit was a new way to help communities heal—a paradigm shift from paternalism to partnerships; a way of life that creates health and fosters well-being. This involves first, establishing a deep connection around universal value of human life. In recognizing that we all share in injury, we can then also see that we all gain resilience through reconciliation.

The power of dialogue, storytelling and listening to strengthen a community's capacity to heal was a theme throughout the project.

From that shared understanding a coordinated and meaningful action can emerge. This action is not hierarchical with those in power handing down help to those in need. Rather it is a collective resolution to let a unique solution emerge from all participants. Only then can meaningful help happen.

From the Well Community Summit a new way forward was illustrated. One based on the ancient wisdom that all persons are connected and valued, not because of their roles, but because they just are.



Springwells Village, Detroit

The power of dialogue, storytelling and listening to strengthen a community's capacity to heal was a theme throughout the two-day meeting and a driving factor in the success of the participating communities over the multi-year project. The summit opened with interactive theater that illustrated the typical power dynamic embedded in the support of "underserved" areas—and the failure to hear and adapt to community needs that accompanies that dynamic. It then went to an emotional testimony about breaking the cycle of domestic violence from members of the Southcentral Foundation in Anchorage, Alaska; the meeting repeatedly returned to the theme of the importance of dialogue in the process of healing.

Participants from Detroit shared their experience bringing longtime residents and new immigrant arrivals together through shared labor to create and restore common green spaces. New Orleans East reported on the success of using Wisdom Circles to foster emotional healing in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. And a Mississippi Delta community discussed how their town was able to knit together new connections across racial, economic and religious divides in their community with the power of shared vision and purpose.

At the Well Community Summit these impact reports from the field were paired with talks and discussions with national policymakers, global philanthropists and corporate leaders to share perspectives and foster understanding.

What emerged was a process of deep and authentic dialogue across diverse stakeholders. Shed were the roles of power and need.

What emerged was a process of deep and authentic dialogue across diverse stakeholders. Shed were the roles of power and need. No longer were there the "underserved" populations looking for resources and "fundings" providing services and money. The strength and value of all present was seen and respected as humans rather than roles. Those who spoke were deeply heard and a skill of collective listening emerged among the group.

This is how communities, policy makers and investors come together to create the way of life focused on health creation and optimizing potential for well-being.



Top to bottom, Springwells Village, Detroit; Well Community Summit; Well Community Summit

REALIZING THE PROMISE

WHY DO WE NEED TO JOIN TOGETHER IN A WELL COMMUNITY SUMMIT?

The healthy communities' movement has shown for over 25 years that it can make a difference in communities but the potential has yet to be fully realized by policy makers, investors and community leaders across the land. Well Communities can promote greater prosperity, better social health, lower health care costs and greater wellness for individuals in their pursuit of well-being and happiness; in other words, the promise of a way of life that optimizes the potential for the community and its members to achieve sustainable health and wellness.

WHY DO WE NEED TO BE TOGETHER NOW?

Leaders across all sectors have reached the realization that we as a nation must alter our collective lifestyle and embrace a culture of wellness or we risk being overwhelmed by the burdens of chronic disease, stress, violence, racism and cultural tension. Integrated private and public sector efforts provide experience that if scaled will take us across the threshold to the tipping point of community wellness.

WHY DO WE NEED A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO COMMUNITY WELLNESS?

We have seen successes in addressing the individual dimensions of health and wellness. However, to achieve sustainable improvements more quickly, we must focus on promoting resilience in the multiple dimensions required for health and human flourishing. For example, programs focused on childhood obesity are necessary but are not sufficient unless we address the cultural-spiritual, psychological and socio-economic resilience of the community in concert with nutrition and exercise. Addressing problems without understanding interconnections will not fully meet the circumstances; we need to transform our way of life and realize community wellness. The time is now to go beyond individual healthcare and treatment to creating community well-being.



Well Community Summit

In April 2015 Samueli Institute hosted a convening of leading experts in community health, including representatives of community organizations, government agencies, philanthropic foundations and public health institutions. Representatives of each expert organization were asked to make short presentations to the group in order to inspire authentic dialog across sectors. Ten of these short, inspirational talks are streaming now on Samueli Institute's website,

SamueliInstitute.org/WellCommunity



Samueli Institute is advancing the science of healing worldwide by applying academic rigor to research on healing, well-being and resilience; translating evidence into action for the U.S. military and large-scale health systems; and fostering wellness through self-care to create a flourishing society.

WELL COMMUNITY PROJECT COUNCIL OF ELDERS:

To support and guide the Well Community Project, Samueli Institute convened the Council of Elders, a panel of subject matter experts from academic and community organizations across the country that provided guidance to project grantees.

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