

THEory into ACTION

A Bulletin of New Developments in Community Psychology Practice

Collaboration to Improve Our Communities

A common bond among Community Psychologists is the desire to make their communities better. For Dr. Rhonda Lewis and her Behavioral Community Research and Action Team (BCRAT), which consists of graduate students David Stowell, Kyras Brown, Jamie LoCurto and J'Vonnah Maryman at Wichita State University, this desire translates into using the unique principles and tools of Community Psychology to build successful, sustaining collaborative projects with several diverse community partners.

Wichita community partners that Dr. Lewis and her research team work with include the Center for Health and Wellness, the Boys & Girls Clubs of South Central Kansas, Grant Chapel AME Church, Kingdom Harvest Church, Mental Health Association, Gordon Parks Academy, and the Sedgwick County Health Department. Many of these partnerships have been long-lasting; for example, Dr. Lewis has been involved with the Sedgwick County Health Department for over 15 years on various projects. Most of these partnerships have existed for over 10 years. Partner organizations often serve as practicum sites for BCRAT members, further solidifying these partnerships.

Several of these partnerships serve adolescents in the surrounding community. A major project that Dr. Lewis and her research team have been involved with is the Youth Empowerment Implementation Project (YEIP), which is a project funded by a grant from the Office of Minority Health. The primary goals of YEIP are to build academic achievement, support cultural enrichment, strengthen families, and improve physical health among students at Gordon Parks Academy, a K-8th grade school which

serves as the implementation site for the project. This program also includes a summer enrichment camp for youth. Approximately 35 youth, predominantly African-American, are enrolled in the program.

Dr. Lewis and her team serve adolescents in collaboration with other partners as well. The Mental Health Association addresses disruptive adolescent behavior. The Boys and Girls Clubs of South Central Kansas provide a safe haven and access to physical activity for youth after school. Grant Chapel AME offers after school tutoring for students of Gordon Parks Academy. The Center for Health and Wellness provides health services to families, as well as a program called Strengthening Families that strives to improve communication between youth and their parents.

The principles of SCRA guide this work, which, according to Dr. Lewis, means that “everyone from the youth, to parents, to partners all have a say and are all stakeholders in the process.” When issues do arise, they are discussed with community partners, which often results in a compromise. No matter what, the project inevitably moves forward with the community’s blessing. Through these collaborations, community partners learn about conducting research, making data-driven decisions, as well as learning that university professors indeed can be true partners in community work.

The Community Psychology approach used by Dr. Lewis and her team has allowed engagement with diverse partners in sustainable collaborations that have made true impacts on the Wichita community – and may serve as a model for similar community work elsewhere. In the case of Dr. Lewis, this work is very fulfilling: “The work we do does make an impact we can see in the data and in the community – the community appreciates us.”

To learn more about the work Dr. Lewis and her team are performing in the Wichita community, please visit their website at

<http://webs.wichita.edu/?u=psychology&p=/labs/LewisLab/>.

This is part 4 of a series of bulletins highlighting the use of community psychology in practice. Comments, suggestions, and questions are welcome. Please direct them to Bill Berkowitz at [Bill Berkowitz@uml.edu](mailto:Bill_Berkowitz@uml.edu).