Wellness Empowerment for Brooklyn
Participatory Action Research in Brooklyn

2020 Focus on Health + Housing in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and East New York
Presentation to the Health + Housing Consortium Annual Convening

December 2, 2020
What is Wellness Empowerment for Brooklyn (WEB)?

We are a team of community leaders, planners and student researchers whose mission is to improve community health within under-resourced and marginalized communities of Brooklyn, New York.
WEB PAR projects to date

**Community Residents Surveyed**: 3,500+

**Community Assets Identified**: 350+

**High School, College, and Graduate Students trained in PAR**: 150+

**Community-Endorsed Recommendations**
(i.e. food justice, affordable housing, building local organizing capacity, leveraging anchor institution resources)

- Brownsville & East New York
- Canarsie, Flatlands, Flatbush, East New York, & Starrett City
- Sunset Park, Bay Ridge, & Borough Park
- Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, & East Flatbush
Some of the things we’ve accomplished so far

.......A LOT

$1.4 Billion for 8,800 Projects across Central Brooklyn
How did we get here?
The Importance of choosing PAR as the research approach
July 9th
High School researchers join. Undergraduate researchers train High School researchers on SDOH, PAR, and survey methods

April 11th
Graduate research associates join. Begin developing curriculum for trainers

June 3rd
Undergraduate trainers join. Begin Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) and PAR train-the-trainers
PAR Study Timeline

July 22nd
PAR Research Question is collectively developed

End of July
Survey and Interview Questions are being developed

August 5th
Data collection begins in neighborhoods

August 18th
1,137 surveys collected and over 2 dozen interviews conducted!

“In what ways can culturally competent medical and social services impact health outcomes and social cohesion in multi generational immigrant communities in Southwest Brooklyn?”
–2019 PAR question
**PAR Study Timeline**

**End of August - November**
Analysis of data, synthesizing findings, and producing recommendations

**December 17th**
Community Report-back
PAR Findings & Recommendations

Who Were Our PAR SWB Survey Respondents?

- The majority of our respondents were social Bookmark entities.
- The majority of our respondents were more than 50 years old.
- The majority of our respondents identified as female.
- 27% of our respondents make less than $20,000 annually.
- 27% of our respondents make less than $30,000 annually.

Housing is the Top Challenge in all 5 Neighborhoods

Housing Challenge

- More than 80% of our respondents found cost of housing to be a problem in their neighborhood.
- More than 50% of our respondents found cost of housing to be a problem in their neighborhood.
- More than 60% of our respondents found that the rent burden is an issue.
- More than 70% of our respondents found that the rent burden is an issue.

Immigrant Advocacy and Support

- Increase cultural competency in medical settings to improve health outcomes and resident engagement.
- Work with government and social service agencies to open and expand the senior centers in Bay Ridge to meet the large and growing aging population.
- Implement mobile clinics for people who are known to have difficulty accessing healthcare or social services, including undocumented or recently arrived immigrants and seniors.

Health: Physical and Mental

- Prioritize the goals of reducing social stigma towards mental health and encouraging people to seek help.
- Develop outreach strategies to engage undocumented immigrants and newly arrived immigrants, who may have fear of sharing health information, to get connected to primary care and healthcare services they are eligible for.
- Connect with community members and service providers to address concerns related to increases in substance abuse and mental health problems and strategies the best way to move forward and effectively manage them.

Housing

- Work with government, housing advocates, researchers and others to increase the number of truly affordable housing options and to improve housing affordability overall.
- Work to increase accessibility to senior living in these neighborhoods.

Community Distributed Report

PEOPLE-FOCUSED RESEARCH:
PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH
IN BAY RIDGE, BOROUGH PARK, KENSINGTON, MIDWOOD, & SUNSET PARK
2020 Health & Housing PAR

Return to Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville and East New York (PAR 1 + 2 neighborhoods) with an emphasis on the ‘action’ aspect of Participatory Action Research.

Housing focus was determined through:
- PAR results
- East Brooklyn Call to Action Balloting results

Key Outcomes:
- Baseline for Brooklyn Communities Collaborative’s Health + Housing Program Area
- Toolkit for East Brooklyn Call to Action, the Brooklyn Worker Council and all interested stakeholders
What are the most effective ways to improve housing conditions - especially those that most affect health - in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and East New York?
Our Research Areas

- The Built Environment
- Indoor Housing Conditions
- NYCHA Developments
- Community Land Trusts
- Vital Brooklyn Housing Developments
- Area Median Income (AMI)
In addition to looking at key data for each of our research areas, we collected information about:

- Who is already addressing each area? (For example, local CBOs, city-wide groups, government agencies, elected officials, enterprises, and others.)
- Who/what bodies have the most decision-making power?
- Are there opportunities to strengthen the civic infrastructure?
- Are there wellness-based development opportunities?
- Are there key policies, practices and/or representations that are helping or hurting the situation?
- What can we do?
The Built Environment
The Built Environment
Food Environment

Why Focus On It

- The built environment has influence over a community’s health through food access, open space, and affordability. Brownsville, East New York, and Bedford Stuyvesant are oversaturated with fast food restaurants, bodegas, and other places that provide inexpensive, low-quality and high calorie food. In addition, they have less open space, bike lanes, and options for physical exercise. Therefore, the quality of people’s built environment has an immense effect on their health.
Key finding(s)

- The NYC average for food insecurity (% of residents) is 15.40%. Bed-Stuy: 25.7%, Brownsville: 32.7%, East New York: 21.8%. All three neighborhoods are above the city average.

- The meal gap is the number of meals needed per year for food security. Bed-Stuy has 6,831,068. Brownsville has 6,890,757. East New York has 6,373,047.

- For every 1 supermarket in Bedford-Stuyvesant, there are 57 bodegas.
What to do next:

- There is substantial need to increase the number of grocery stores, farmers markets, mobile markets, and sites for urban agriculture to provide fresh, affordable, and nutritious food.

- A part of addressing food insecurity and malnutrition is shifting the focus from telling people how to eat healthy, to acknowledging the role the built environment plays in nutrition and accessing healthy food.

- Hydroponics is a way to skip the soil, sub in a different material to support the roots of the plant, and grow crops directly in nutrient-rich water. There are multiple approaches to designing hydroponic systems, but the core elements are essentially the same.
Urban Agriculture playing a critical role

- Urban Agriculture was and remains to be an essential community asset during the COVID pandemic

- In collaboration with Collective Fare, a food catering company in Brownsville, and Universe City, an aquaponic and urban farm collective based in East New York, the Hydroponic Farm based in Brownsville Collaborative Middle School grew produce that were used to fill food boxes and prepared meals for those most impacted by COVID
The Built Environment
Heat Vulnerability

Why Focus On It

During periods of hot weather, certain neighborhoods are more vulnerable to severely hot weather due to a lack of trees and other factors. Similarly, many individuals in lower economic neighborhoods cannot afford air conditioners. Heat Vulnerability can lead to heat stroke and other health conditions.
Key finding(s)

- High Heat Vulnerability in Bed-Stuy, Brownsville, and East New York

- As many as 3,331 people annually could die from heat waves by 2080 in New York City alone if no steps are taken to adapt to warming temperatures and reduce emissions, a Columbia study warns.
The Built Environment
Heat Vulnerability

What to do next:

- Beyond repainting surfaces and adding more vegetation, moving toward cleaner energy sources could keep summers in the city from getting considerably hotter, saving lives now and in the long term, according to NRDC senior scientist Kim Knowlton.

- Cool Roofs Program
  - By installing a cool roof, buildings can reduce air conditioning costs by 10% to 30% on hot summer days.
  - This can reduce energy consumption and GHG emissions from NYC’s building sector
  - Contribute to goal of reducing NYC GHG emissions 80% by 2050

Source: Business Insider
Indoor Housing Conditions
Indoor Housing Conditions

Why we focused on it

Indoor housing conditions are closely associated with various health outcomes. Children are particularly vulnerable to poor housing conditions since asthma, lead poisoning, and other conditions significantly affect developmental health.

Triggers like mold, cockroaches, rodents are over-represented in Bed-Stuy, Brownsville, & East New York.

More than 20% of the households in Bed-Stuy live in poorly maintained housing, twice as high as the city average.

Source: DNA Info
Indoor Housing Conditions

Key finding(s)

- 49.4% of households in Brownsville reported cockroaches in their home, 16% higher than the city average

- The average density of building code violation in our study area is 2 times higher than the city average in 2016. East New York has 2.6 times more building code violations per building compared to the city average

- 30.2% of households in Brownsville reported 3 or more maintenance deficiencies in their home, almost 3 times higher than the city average

Source: NYC Comptroller Office
Indoor Housing Conditions

COVID

Quarantining becomes a challenge with Overcrowded Apartments

- As NYC apartments have become more and more expensive, New Yorkers are increasingly living in crowded conditions

- Being that transmission between family members is one of the leading drivers of the outbreak, overcrowded apartments is an issue that needs to be addressed

- 16.6% of rental units in East New York were overcrowded in comparison to Park Slope of 4.5%
Indoor Housing Conditions

Next Steps

- Invite the agencies, CBOs, enterprises and other leaders focused on improving indoor housing conditions to join the East Brooklyn Call to Action for Health and Economic Justice and the Brooklyn Communities Collaborative’s Community Action and Advocacy Workgroup.

- Support resident organizing (education, advocacy tools, etc.) around issues of health + housing.

- Connect with and/or seed local businesses that can contract for remediation and construction and that are committed to living-wages, profit-sharing and unionized worker cooperatives.
NYCHA Developments
Why Focus On It

Bed-Stuy, Brownsville and East New York are home to approximately 50,000 residents in nearly 40 NYCHA developments.

NYCHA buildings provide much-needed affordable housing, but buildings have been subject to decades of neglect, resulting in unhealthy (presence of mold, lead, pests), stressful, demoralizing and often dangerous conditions for residents.

NYCHA’s massive budget shortfalls result in even urgent repairs taking months or years.
New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Developments

9% of those living in East New York live in NYCHA
23% of those living in Brownsville live in NYCHA
13% of those living in Bed-Stuy live in NYCHA

Some of the key CBOs, government agencies, institutions and enterprises serving NYCHA developments in Bed-Stuy, Brownsville and East New York include:

- The City University of New York
- The State University of New York
- Bed-Stuy Restoration
- CAMBA
- RiseBoro
Vital Brooklyn Housing Developments
New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Developments

Next Steps

- Connect NYCHA residents to community health career opportunities through the Brooklyn Health Enterprise Hub workforce efforts

- Explore, in partnership with key stakeholders*, the potential of resident-owned enterprises to carry out remediation and maintenance

- Partner with NYC DOHMH, its Brownsville Neighborhood Health Action Center, resident leaders, and other key stakeholders to carry out PAR-oriented efforts to improve health and housing conditions in NYCHA developments

Source: Green City Force
Vital Brooklyn is a NYS investment in community health breaking down barriers to health and wellbeing through eight integrated program areas:

1) openspace and recreation  
2) healthy food  
3) community-based health care  
4) comprehensive education and youth development  
5) economic empowerment and job creation  
6) community-based violence prevention  
7) affordable housing, and  
8) resilience

Having played a role in catalyzing this investment, and understanding the urgent need that healthcare workers have for affordable housing, our collaboration is especially invested in the success of Vital Brooklyn affordable housing development.
Vital Brooklyn Housing Developments

- Prepared map and baseline data for all developments—especially features with close relationships to health.

- Developed an online toolkit for teaching community members and healthcare workers about the potential of Community Land Trust designation.

- Helped to develop a relationship with VB developer willing to partner on participatory planning to ensure that buildings and their surroundings are supportive of health and wellbeing. The partnership is planned to include construction, marketing, management, maintenance, and other areas.
Next step

- Continued relationship-building and convening with developers and other key stakeholders to begin the participatory action research and planning process around construction, marketing, management, maintenance, and other areas.
Community Land Trusts
Community Land Trusts

Why Focus On It

- **High Rate of Foreclosure** - Since the great recession of 2008, the East New York area has had the highest foreclosure rate in Brooklyn, followed by Bedford Stuyvesant, and Brownsville.

- **High Rate of Rent Burden** - 55% of Brownsville residents face rent burden, significantly over the citywide average of 44%.

- **Housing Cost outpacing Income** - the median household income for renters in Brownsville is only $29,000 while the median asking rent per month is $2,200.
Community Land Trusts

What is a Community Land Trust (CLT)

- Overall, Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are not widely known among NYC residents. A Community Land Trust is a non-profit organization that owns and oversees land on behalf of a community.

- In order to combat the government's inability to address affordable housing and displacement, the development of CLTs in underserved communities like East New York and Brownsville/Ocean Hill has gained momentum.
Community Land Trusts

Key Findings

- **Land Acquisition is difficult** - In urban areas where the land value is high, it’s difficult for CLTs initiatives that are made up of low-income members to acquire land.

- **Building a CLT is time consuming** - It can be hard for community members, especially those who work long hours and/or do child care to attend meetings and organize

- **Grant Funding Impact on CLT Resources & Priorities** - CLT’s that lack financial resources often over rely on grants, which may take a significant amount of time and resources
Community Land Trusts

Key Findings

There has been a recent emergence of more than 12 CLTs across all five boroughs in New York City.

CLTs Gain Momentum through Government Initiatives:
- CLT Learning Exchange (2017)
- Mayor De Blasio’s “Blueprint to Save Our City”
- $870,000 FY2020 City Council Discretionary Fund
- Community Land Trust Capacity Building Initiative by Attorney General Letitia James
Community Land Trusts

CLT Initiatives in Brownsville and East New York

East New York CLT Initiative
w/ assistance from Community Solutions

Goal: Expanding access to affordable housing, locally owned businesses and green space

Strategies:
- Ensuring residents voice
- Financial education
- Promote sustainability
- Community leadership

Currently: Advocating for an end to the Annual Tax Lien Sale which impacts New York’s Black communities the hardest
Brownsville CLT Initiative
w/ assistance from Cypress Hills LDC

Goal: To transfer control of real estate assets to local residents and community stakeholders to maintain affordability, economic diversity and local access to essential services within the neighborhood.

Strategies:
- Ensuring residents voice
- Financial education
- Coalition Building
- Community leadership
Community Land Trusts

Next Steps

- Piloting the CLT toolkit with Brooklyn Worker Council members to grow a ‘train-the-trainers’ model

- Re-initiating conversations with NYS Department of Homes and Community Renewal regarding CLT acquiring designation for VB developments

- Inviting the ENY and Brownsville CLT initiative leaders to be part of the Community Action + Advocacy Workgroup.
Eligible Income Levels by Household Size

Area Median Income
Area Median Income

Area Median Income (AMI) is used to set the rents of subsidized apartments and what household income levels qualify for them. (ANHD)

AMI is calculated each year by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). It is the combined average of the income levels of residents in the entire New York metropolitan area, meaning that it includes very wealth areas like Westchester and the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

The higher the AMI, the fewer affordable housing units are available to neighborhood residents.

The Area Median Income for New York City is up to 3x higher than average incomes in Brownsville and East New York.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Median Household Income [2018]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brownsville</td>
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<tr>
<td>$32,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>East New York</td>
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<td>$41,000</td>
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AMI for family of 3 in NYC-metro area [2019] $96,000
Area Median Income

Next Steps

- Congresswoman Yvette Clarke introduced H.R. 4984 in November 2019

- In partnership with Congresswoman Clarke’s office, convene a virtual field hearing in early 2021 to raise awareness and advocate for the bill

- Continue to raise awareness and create spaces for education, advocacy and monitoring in partnership with existing efforts and stakeholders

H. R. 4984

To increase the supply of, and lower rents for, affordable housing and to adjust calculations of area median income for purposes of Federal low-income housing assistance, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

November 5, 2019

Ms. Clarke of New York (for herself, Ms. Meng, Mr. Danny K. Davis of Illinois, Mr. Serrano, Ms. Norton, Mr. Nadler, and Mr. Espaillat) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services, and in addition to the Committee on Ways and Means, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To increase the supply of, and lower rents for, affordable housing and to adjust calculations of area median income for purposes of Federal low-income housing assistance, and for other purposes.
Incorporate community stakeholder feedback on our findings and proposed next steps to determine the best ways for Brooklyn Communities Collaborative to support affordable, well-maintained housing and access to healthy food and fitness.
THANK YOU