



WOMEN
WITH A
VISION

THE THRIVE STUDY





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INTRODUCTION

Dear reader,

The Thrive Study was initially conceived of as a 12-month project in New Orleans' 6th Ward to better understand how residents arrive at the decision to call or not call the police to report low-level crimes such as street-level drug dealing, noise, or vagrancy and survey the neighborhood's needs. This question was of particular importance to us at Women with a Vision (WWAV), as our work over the past 30-plus years has focused on those most vulnerable to criminal-legal system involvement—poor folks, sex workers, LGBTQ+ communities, and substance users. As an organization primarily made up of Black women from New Orleans, we are all too aware of law enforcement's legacy of violence, surveillance, mass incarceration, and armed defense of white supremacy in our community and across the nation. Our hope was that in detailing our neighbor's decision-making process, we could better understand what services, resources, and infrastructure actually increase safety and well-being.

When we started the Thrive Study, we didn't know our interviews, analysis, and study release would coincide with the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacted elderly people, Black people, and people of color; the police killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and more; the global uprisings in protests of police violence and white supremacy; Hurricane Ida; the end of Roe v. Wade; and countless other events that would further expose racial, economic, and social disparities.

Our hope is that this report will help equip its readers to advocate for themselves and their communities at a hyperlocal level to advance safety, health, well-being, and equity as we work toward a more just future.

In solidarity,

Deon Haywood,
Women with a Vision Executive Director

PARTICIPANTS

Location

Women with a Vision chose the 6th Ward as the location for this study due to its socioeconomic and racial diversity as well as being home to WWAV offices at the time of the study. The 6th Ward is a narrow sliver of New Orleans that includes parts of the French Quarter, the Treme (one of the oldest African-American neighborhoods in the United States), and Bayou St. John. By recruiting participants through flyers and yard signs as well as canvassing, we hoped to engage a diverse group of folks representative of their neighborhoods. The study took place in two parts, with one group of interviews occurring in spring of 2020 and one-on-one phone interviews with a second round of participants in late summer of 2021.

Demographics

The average age of study participants was 47. There were 14 Black residents, 15 white residents, one Asian resident, one resident of another race and one who declined to identify their race. Two participants were

Latine. Sixteen men, 16 women, and three gender non-conforming or non-binary people participated in the study. Six participants were caretakers of children under the age of 18.

Renters vs. Homeowners

The majority of 6th Ward residents interviewed were renters or had some other arrangement, while nine were homeowners; one participant was unhoused. Six of the participants grew up in the 6th Ward while

another 12 were from New Orleans but had grown up in a different ward. Four residents were from Louisiana but outside of Orleans Parish, and another 13 had grown up outside of Louisiana.

Experience with crime and the criminal-legal system

In terms of police engagement, we asked study participants to reflect on both the social cohesion and safety of their neighborhood, as well as their interactions with the criminal-legal system. Twenty-five participants disclosed that they or a loved one had been the victim of a crime, 20 had spent time in jail

and 23 had a loved one who spent time in jail. Of those same residents, five had spent time in prison, 10 had loved ones who spent time in prison, nine had been on parole or probation and 12 had a loved one that was either currently or at some time had been on parole or probation.

HOW RESIDENTS DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO CALL THE POLICE

Participants reported asking themselves the following questions when deciding whether or not to call the police:

- ? Is the person currently presenting a danger to themselves or to others?
- ? If so, who are the other people involved?
- ? Is the person currently presenting a threat to property?
- ? Is the person incapacitated or unwell physically or psychologically?
- ? Are there viable alternatives to calling the police?

METHODS

WWAV implemented a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1993; Corbin & Strauss, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2013) that considers 6th Ward residents' contexts and decision-making steps and factors. We recruited study participants by targeting areas in the 6th Ward with high volumes of calls for service in the last quarter of 2019. Study participants took part in two group interviews led by trained facilitators. The preliminary findings presented below are based on coding and analysis of the two group interview transcripts using constant comparative methods and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2003, 2013).

All the participants said they would call the police if they observed someone harming another person, particularly if the other person were a child. Many said they would call the police if they observed a man harming a woman. Several participants had called the police after observing people who were intoxicated to the point of being unable to walk down the street.

However, in situations that are more ambiguous – for example, two people arguing heatedly but with no physical contact, or people who are clearly intoxicated but still on their feet – and noise disturbances (e.g. a neighbor playing loud music late at night), participants said they consider police response; the longer-term consequences of initiating a call for service on the person allegedly committing a crime; possibilities for retribution for calling the police; and the degree to which they know or don't know their neighbors.

Knowing Your Neighbors

Nearly all participants spoke of the importance of knowing their neighbors. While preliminary analysis is inconclusive, and we cannot yet make the claim that familiarity with one’s neighbors reduced police calls,

Risk of Retribution

Several participants related that they, or their family members and friends, had experienced retribution for calling the police to report noise. Participants reported retribution in the forms of slashed tires or smashed windshields after they had called the police to report noise disturbances. "You and your neighbor feud because you call the police."

Prior Experiences Calling the Police

Almost all participants who spoke about the police expressed feelings of distrust, reported instances of the police disrespecting them or their neighbors, and unpredictable response times.

"The one time that I've had to call was for a parked vehicle that was totaled and we got a seven-hour response time. So that just makes me reluctant to call

Consequences of Calling the Police

Furthermore, participants noted the potential life-altering consequences of criminal-legal system involvement. "So many of our young Black men are already locked up or in the system," said one participant. Another said she was "hesitant about calling the police because you never know if someone's life could be completely changed by that and they have to go to prison, and we all know the horrific conditions of prisons nowadays." Participants' perceptions of the consequences of criminal justice system involvement tended to influence their decisions to not call the police to report a low-level or quality-of-life offense.

the text suggests that participants considered existing relationships with their neighbors in the decision to call or not to call the police to report a low-level or quality-of-life offense.

Based on the analysis of the two group-interview transcripts, it is apparent that participants' perceived risk for retribution is a factor in their decision. However, we have insufficient data to determine how this influences the decision to call or not to call the police to report a low-level or quality-of-life offense.

if it's not an emergency, why put myself through it. And then like you said, when I called, I had to answer 20 questions before they could even do anything. Who's involved? What kind of car are they driving? What is their name? I don't know. I don't know these people. I'm in my house, so it just makes you, it's like, why? Why put myself through that? So if it's a non-emergency, I'll just deal with it." - 6th Ward Study participant

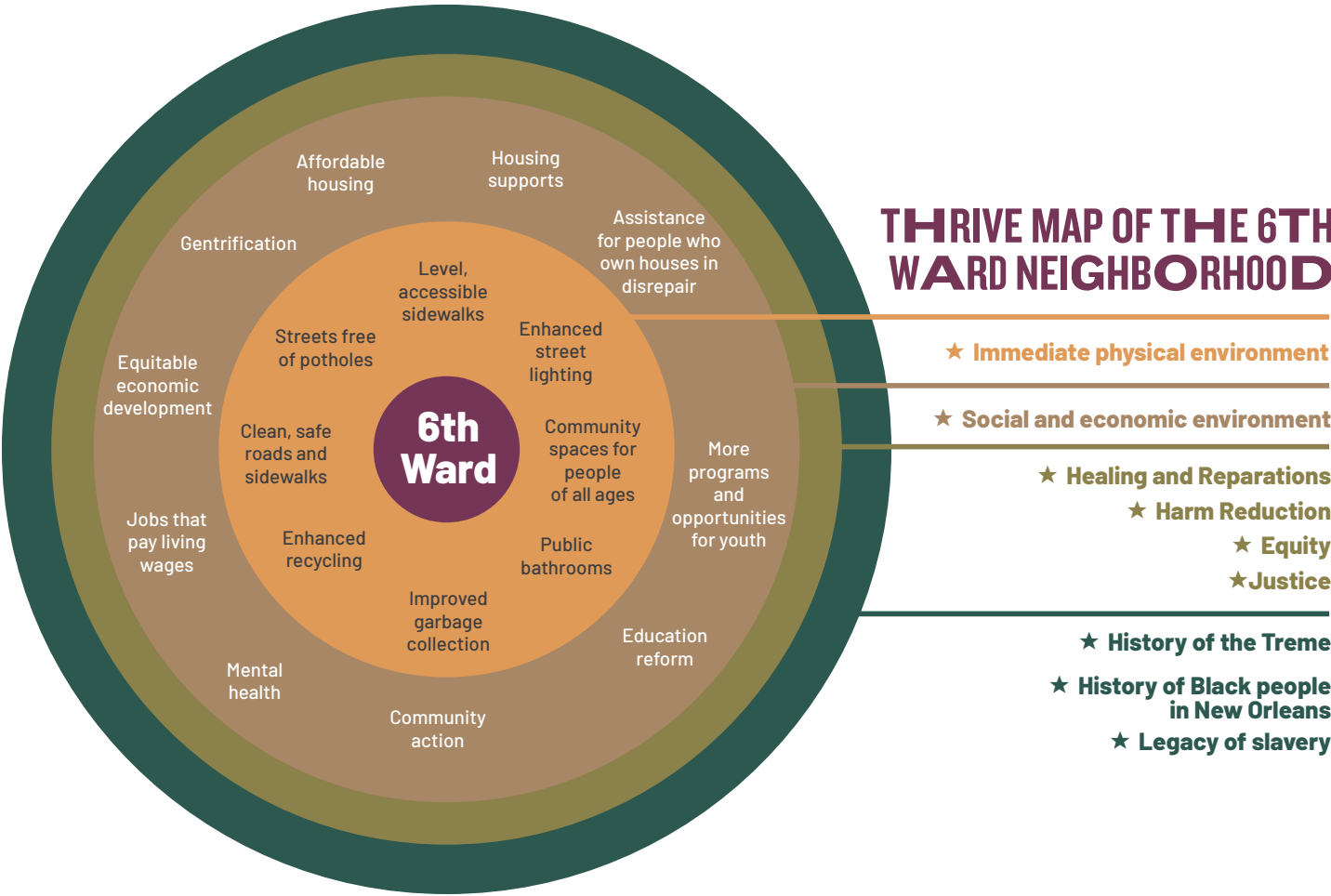
SO MANY OF OUR YOUNG BLACK MEN ARE ALREADY LOCKED UP OR IN THE SYSTEM

NEIGHBORHOOD NEEDS ANALYSIS

We analyzed the needs that our study participants named and described using a framework borrowed from ecological theory.

Ecological theory: Also known as ecological system theory, development in context theory, or human ecology theory, ecological theory was developed by the psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner and provides a framework through which community psychologists examine individuals’ relationships within their communities and larger societies. The theory identifies five environmental systems that individuals interact with (see map below).

At the center of our 6th Ward ecology is our participants’ neighborhoods. The neighborhood is surrounded by multiple ecosystems. The innermost ecosystem is the immediate physical environment of the neighborhood. The next ecosystem is the social and economic environment (this ecosystem also includes the realm of local government policies). Surrounding the social and economic environment is the ecosystem of socio-cultural values. We can think of this as the realm of mindsets and values that imbue social and economic policies and budgets. The outermost ecosystem involves time: this is the realm of history and historical forces that exert force on all the ecosystems.



The Immediate Physical Environment

In the ecosystem of the immediate physical environment, our study participants identified three broad categories of needs:

- 1. Clean, safe streets and sidewalks.
- 2. Community spaces for people of all ages and developmental stages.
- 3. More options for groceries, food, and other necessities.

The following needs were most often named:

Pothole-Free Streets

The poor state of roads was among the most frequently cited problem.

Study participants spoke of disruptive road repair efforts and the stopgap measures that both local government agencies and residents alike take to mitigate potholes. In addition, several participants attributed the uneven sidewalks to both soil subsidence and “neglect” from the City; a few also asserted that streets in wealthier and whiter neighborhoods are not as bad as those in the 6th Ward. Real repair of potholed streets would reduce the wear and tear on cars, our participants noted, and increase safety.

Level Sidewalks

Elderly participants, and participants who need mobility assistance, noted that uneven sidewalks hinder their ability to perform everyday tasks. Others noted that they often opt to walk in the street to avoid uneven or missing sidewalks, placing them in danger of being hit by cars. Some study participants attributed the cause of uneven sidewalks to both soil subsidence and “neglect” from the City.

Enhanced Street Lighting

Several participants said the lack of adequate street lighting created an environment that is “spooky” and perceived to be unsafe, especially when combined with uneven or missing sidewalks. Participants who named this need spoke of feeling like their ability to come and go from their homes was hindered by inadequate street lighting and consequently limited activities like running errands to daylight hours.



Garbage Collection Improvements and Enhanced Recycling

Participants noted a need for more frequent garbage collection¹, preferably a return to the schedule in place before Hurricane Ida. They described the current state of garbage collection as a contributor to poor morale in their neighborhoods. In addition, our study participants also linked the presence of uncollected garbage to an uptick in illegal dumping, hypothesizing that people are more likely to dump “because it looks like a dump.” Some participants also noted a need for more public trash receptacles to discourage littering. Resolving this need, according to our study participants, would increase neighborhood morale and a sense of pride in the community.

Study participants, particularly those who live in the French Quarter and Bayou St. John, identified a need for enhanced recycling services. They suggested implementing glass recycling programs and public receptacles for recyclable items to encourage people to recycle. Participants envisioned enhanced recycling as a contributor to increased neighborhood morale and cleaner streets and sidewalks.

Flood Mitigation

Some participants reported street flooding on their blocks during both storms and normal rain. While many participants who named a need for flood mitigation mentioned the City’s efforts to clean storm drains, they also spoke of a need to do more to ensure that streets drain fully when it rains. A few participants also linked the need for enhanced flood protection with the need for a more robust electrical infrastructure to minimize power outages when it rains.

Community Spaces

Study participants expressed the need for more community spaces. Some participants spoke of a need for more all-ages parks, greenspaces, and community gardens. Others named a need for more community spaces specifically for children and youth or elders. Some participants envisioned a child-and-youth-centered community space where young people would “have something constructive to do” to “stay out of trouble.” Participants hoped community spaces for elders would help them remain active and give them a reason to get out of the house. A few participants noted that, while elders are welcome at spaces like bars, a community center could serve as more of a common space where drinking alcohol or commercial activity were not at the center.



1 On August 26, 2021 Hurricane Ida, the second-most deadly and destructive storm to date to hit Louisiana, pummeled through south Louisiana. The storm exacerbated long standing failures by the City to regularly pick up resident’s trash. In the months following the storm, as New Orleanians attempted to assess damage and clear their neighborhoods, trash piled up in the streets creating a stench that engulfed the entire city and a public outcry for city service.

Social and Economic Environment

The next ecosystem level is the realm of social and economic environments. Participants named needs like affordable housing, equitable economic development, and healthcare for all. The actions and changes that would meet those needs primarily take place at the local, state, and federal government levels.

In contrast to the immediate physical environment, where changes such as improved garbage collection would be readily observable, changes and improvements to the social and economic environment would likely be more subtle and more discernible over time.

Housing

Participants most frequently cited gentrification as having caused the most change in their neighborhoods, particularly in the Treme, French Quarter, and the area between Claiborne Ave. and Broad Street. Several participants noted their historically Black

Participants named four categories of needs to be addressed in social and economic environments:

- 1. Housing
- 2. Economic development
- 3. Health care
- 4. Programs for youth and children

neighborhoods were “getting whiter.” They mentioned the increased presence of short-term rentals on their blocks; more rental properties bought by out-of-town, absentee landlords; and feeling “priced out” of the local housing market. In addition, several participants noted that their neighbors who are older homeowners were often unable to maintain their homes on fixed incomes, particularly in the aftermath of natural disasters like Hurricane Ida.

Study participants envisioned solutions like policies to make affordable housing more accessible. When prompted, not all participants could describe specifically what might be done to make housing more affordable. Those who were able to share their visions for affordable housing envisioned first-time home-buyer programs and reserving units in new residential construction for lower-income renters and buyers. Some participants called for more programs to keep elderly homeowners in their homes. Nearly all the participants who spoke of the need for more affordable housing hoped such support would preserve the historic nature of 6th Ward neighborhoods like the Treme.



Economic Development

Some participants named a need for equitable economic development, while others alluded to the need but did not elaborate. Study participants named the need for an infusion of capital that would center residents’ needs and would be made widely available to residents with a variety of skill sets.

Study participants who named economic development as a need envisioned a range of actions and policies, including more robust support for small businesses. Other participants spoke of a need for more locally owned and operated restaurants and retail stores. A few participants spoke specifically about restoring the commercial corridor that once existed on Claiborne Avenue, which was destroyed to build Interstate 10²

Many participants noted that the impacts of equitable economic development would be observed at a very personal and tangible level – for example in having a wider array of restaurants and shops in the neighborhood. A few participants envisioned the impact of equitable economic development as a revitalization of an historic Black neighborhood for the 21st century; these participants imagined that equitable economic development would also preserve the remaining landmark jazz clubs and other cultural sites in the neighborhood.

Living Wages and Workforce Development

Study participants mentioned the need for jobs that pay a living wage, which might be thought of as equitable economic development at an individual scale. Several participants spoke of their own experiences as hourly wage employees; of loved ones who work long hours yet struggle to make monthly bills; and of people in their neighborhood whom, they theorized, turn to illegal activities to generate enough income to survive.

While participants were able to describe in detail what this need looks like in the 6th Ward, most who named a need for jobs that pay a living wage were less able to describe how this need might be met. A few participants noted proposed ordinances that would lift the minimum wage to \$15/hour. A few spoke more broadly of creating jobs that are not tourism-dependent and offer more opportunities for advancement.



2 In 1968, construction crews demolished the economic and social heart of Black New Orleans – Claiborne Ave. – to make way for the I-10 overpass. The overpass dissected the Treme, one of the oldest African-American neighborhoods in the nation, displaced families, and destroyed dozens of Black-owned businesses.

Health Care

Study participants noted the need for expanded health care access. Participants named a range of healthcare-related services, including more pharmacies and primary care facilities; health care services for unsheltered people; and enhanced programs and services that promote wellness. In particular, study participants who were unhoused at the time of the interview spoke of their difficulties accessing care for injuries and illnesses, healthful food, and clean, potable water.

Study participants noted the dearth of mental health services in general, and specifically for unhoused people. Some participants related stories of family members and friends who experienced mental illness, of their own difficulties in maintaining mental well-being, and of witnessing people in their neighborhoods in psychological distress.

While study participants readily identified these needs, many were less readily able to discuss in more detail the kinds of steps that might be taken to expand healthcare access and mental health services.

Analysis of the texts suggests possible connections between the need for more health care and resources that enhance mental and physical wellness, and the need for clean, safe streets and sidewalks. For example, when asked what they would observe “if a miracle happened, and this need was met,” participants envisioned a huge increase in the morale of the neighborhood. Future inquiries might probe more deeply into a possible connection between the immediate physical environment and the psychological environment of the neighborhood.

Community Action

Participants named a need for more ‘community action,’ which they defined as a range of attributes and collective behaviors, including promoting neighborhood cohesion; collectively organizing to bring awareness and solutions to issues impacting the neighborhood; and more opportunities to come together as a neighborhood simply to celebrate their resilience and strengths. Among the participants who named this need, several noted difficulties in “coming together” as a neighborhood, including not knowing their neighbors; the “touristy” and transient nature of the French Quarter; and the everyday pressures of working and caring for their families.

Our study participants who named this need envisioned benefits such as an increased sense of safety and well-being, and a renewed sense of neighborhood pride arising from increased community action. Some also said that increased neighborhood collective actions would increase their visibility politically and better ensure accountability from City leaders.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS NOTED THE DEARTH OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN GENERAL, AND SPECIFICALLY FOR UNHOUSED PEOPLE.

Youth Programs and Education

Study participants stated two closely related needs for more opportunities for children and youth and education reform. They said children and youth in their neighborhoods need opportunities for prosocial activities and learning beyond the classroom. Some participants specifically called for more arts-related programming for children and youth. Others called for expanded recreational activities beyond intramural sports, such as swimming. Still others called for building youths’ preparedness for 21st century jobs through computer programming and entrepreneurship classes. Participants who named this need spoke of enhanced opportunities for youth and children in

localized terms, typically taking place at a community center or other accessible locations like libraries.

A few study participants linked the need for more opportunities for youth and children with a need for broader education reform, noting that “we’re not preparing our children well” for living and working in the digital age. Those who named this need acknowledged that education reform does occur at the state and federal levels, in addition to the local level.

When asked to envision what would happen if more opportunities were made available to youth and education were reformed, participants said the result would be a reduction in crime and drug use and an overall morale boost in the neighborhood.



SOCIAL AND CULTURAL VALUES

Through analysis of interview texts, we deduced four implicit needs that underlie the explicitly stated needs our participants named. That the needs are implicit does not mean that our participants did not express them outright. Rather, when our participants described changes in their neighborhoods or spoke of what they

Equity and Justice

Sprinkled throughout many interviews were statements like, “My neighborhood has been forgotten,” and “That wouldn’t happen Uptown.” In addition, when prompted to talk about why they thought a particular need exists in their neighborhood, several participants stated quite plainly, “because we’re Black.” Participants compared the condition of their neighborhoods to other parts of New Orleans, such as Uptown and Lakeview, where residents are wealthier and/or whiter. Whether they spoke of police responses to calls for service, trash collection, or potholes, participants relayed a sense of being treated unfairly. Taken together, these statements reflect a perception among participants that resources are unfairly distributed in the City. Many participants said the local government is unresponsive to their needs because 6th Ward neighborhoods are made up of Black and working class people.

perceived to be the reasons that the needs exist in their neighborhoods, they also spoke, often at length and with eloquence, of the need for a renewed sense of justice, equitable allocation of resources, harm reduction, and a need for healing and reparations.

Analysis of the interview texts suggests at least two ways to interpret our participants’ need for equity. First, analysis seems to point toward some feelings of mistrust in institutions generally and some institutions specifically, such as City government and NOPD. Second, given both the history of neighborhoods like the Treme and the enduring legacy of slavery, we might interpret participants’ need for equity and justice as a need for greater racial equity and justice. Future inquiry could illuminate this need in more depth and detail.

As one participant put it, meeting the need for greater equity and renewing a sense of justice would “make us all free.”



Healing and Reparations

While our study participants, particularly those living in the Treme, expressed fierce loyalty and pride in their neighborhoods, they also acknowledged the social fabric has been torn apart by crime, “being forgotten” or deprioritized by City leadership, and from the sense that residents of other neighborhoods have their

needs met while they do not. Based on our analysis, we hypothesize that reparations would help to undo 6th Ward residents’ feelings of mistrust toward institutions, generally, and City leadership and the police more specifically.

Reducing Harm

When participants spoke of harm reduction, they expressed a range of definitions, from harm reduction with respect to drug use, to ensuring that minimal harm comes to people on the margins (like unhoused people) by ensuring that basic needs are met for all neighborhood residents. Analysis of the interview text suggests we could conceptualize reducing harm as operating from an ethic of care. Indeed, nearly all our participants expressed at least some level of care and stewardship of their neighborhoods.



CONCLUSION

Learnings

- **Asking people to think about root causes and to envision a better world**
- **Asking people to think about needs of and impacts to their neighbors and neighborhoods; asking people to think about root causes**

It can be a challenge to consider whether something we think of as a need is something someone else would also consider a need. Certainly, we can be reluctant to impose our views on others or claim to speak on others’ behalf. Although the interview ground rules granted permission for this kind of imagining, several participants seemed unfamiliar or needed additional prompting to think of others’ needs and to consider how others might be impacted when the need goes unmet.

Prompting visioning might have been easier had we collected data via group interviews, as we had originally planned. However group interviews were not viable given the pandemic.

In addition, because visioning is, unfortunately, a skill that many adults do not have opportunities to engage in – in fact, it’s often discouraged – the act of envisioning likely imposes some cognitive burdens on participants. Providing additional training and support to

Next Steps

When viewed holistically, the concept of community safety is underpinned by access to resources such as housing, education, and healthcare among other social determinants of health. Attitudes around policing are shaped by more than just the threat of violence in one’s neighborhood. Psychosocial issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress can be exacerbated by unsafe environments, and have been linked to an increase in premature births and low birthweight babies. It should also be noted that multiple participants said a fear of violence or the perceived threat of violence prevented

interviewers so that they would be more empowered to guide participants in visioning may have been helpful.

- Limitations of single touch interviews

Because of limited time and resources, we had a single opportunity to interview participants. One of the limitations of single touch interviews is that interviewers had to juggle several objectives during the interview. In addition, for some of our participants, it’s quite likely that the cognitive burden of completing the interview was heavy; this may be especially true for participants who were unfamiliar with envisioning the miracle or were unaccustomed to considering causes of the needs they observed in their neighborhoods.

Were time and resources not so constrained, we ourselves could envision a multiple-touch data collection event, during which the first interview involved the introduction, ground rules, survey, and identification of needs; and the second interview involved probing deeper about the identified needs and the vignettes. In addition, a brief interval between the first and second touch would have given interviewers an opportunity to tailor specific follow-up questions to present at the second interview.

them from going outside, contributing to an increased sense of isolation, lack of exercise, and less access to healthy foods.

It is our hope that this study will help residents and elected officials to reimagine public safety and to secure the things that truly make communities safe. We look forward to continuing our conversations with 6th Ward residents, and New Orleanians across the city, about what safety means to them, how they engage with law enforcement, and their hopes for the future.

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Theresa McKinney	Corinna Yazbek	Erika Sanchez
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ABOUT WOMEN WITH A VISION

Women with a Vision, Inc (WWAV) was founded in 1989 by a collective of Black women in response to the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS in Black communities. Today, WWAV continues to provide grassroots-level support and advocacy at the intersections of gender, racial, and reproductive justice. Widely regarded as the leading national voice on the criminalization of Black women and girls in the South, WWAV programs touch on human rights, sex workers' rights, reproductive justice, voting rights and ending mass incarceration.

Through relentless advocacy, health education, supportive services, and community-based participatory research, WWAV stands alongside marginalized women, their families, and their communities, and partners with the community to address the social conditions that hinder their health and well-being.



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