



**Working Cities Challenge:
Studying Employment-Related Needs of Residents in West Rock**

STUCK BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: WEST ROCK AND THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

“Everything just boils down to transportation and lack of funds. Because if...I can’t find a job here in New Haven, that means I have to look outside of New Haven. Which means I can’t do that because I can’t afford no 60 dollars a month bus pass or pay somebody’s gas fare to take me all the way out so, lack of funds. It’s like being stuck between a rock and a hard place if you’re in my situation...transportation is hard for me to get a job outside of New Haven, Connecticut because I can’t afford one.”

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October 31, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

The City of New Haven Economic Development Administration has contracted with the Community Alliance for Research and Engagement (CARE) at Southern Connecticut State University to design a study for the Working Cities Challenge Design grant. The study explores barriers that limit access to sustainable livable wages and employment opportunities for residents in the isolated low-income neighborhood of West Rock.

New Haven's goal for the Working Cities Initiative is to improve resources and eliminate barriers for the working-age population of West Rock that will lead to a decrease in unemployment levels and a corresponding decrease in the proportion of residents living in poverty. The target population for interventions is working and work-ready residents 16-65 years of age. Access to transportation is one area that the City will be focusing on if awarded the grant.

The primary aims of CARE's study are:

- Identify barriers and challenges to gaining adequate employment, as experienced by West Rock residents.
- Identify resources needed to help gain adequate employment.
- Explore barriers with transportation, particularly as they relate to finding adequate employment.
- Explore solutions that community members would like to see the city implement.

Throughout the study process, CARE staff worked with city staff (specifically Karla Lindquist and Keith Lawrence) and solicited input from the larger design team to provide input on all aspects of study design: instrument development, recruitment methods, field protocols, data interpretation, and report writing.

The research team at CARE included the following staff:

- Alycia Santilli, MSW, CARE Director, provided guidance and oversight for study design, tool development, IRB approval, data collection, and field protocols. She led data analysis and report writing.
- Kathleen O'Connor Duffany, PhD, CARE Research and Evaluation Director, provided expert guidance on methodology design, tool development, and data analysis.
- Sharon Taylor, MPH, CARE Outreach Coordinator, led all outreach and recruitment activities and field logistics. She administered surveys and facilitated the focus groups. She contributed to data analysis and report writing.
- Meadeshia Mitchell, CARE Graduate Assistant, assisted with all outreach and field logistics. She administered surveys and moderated focus groups and took notes. She contributed to data analysis and report writing.

METHODOLOGY

CARE employed a multi-method approach including a series of focus groups and a pilot survey to collect data.

Focus Groups

CARE conducted three focus groups with 26 residents of West Rock who lived in one of three public housing communities in the neighborhood: Brookside, Rock View, and Westville Manor. All participants were people of color (88% Black or African American) and mostly women (23 women, 3 men). The average age was 44.

We utilized a convenience sample and residents were recruited in the following ways:

- Flyer distribution in the community
- Outreach to community organizations to distribute to residents: Elm City Communities and the Brennan Rogers Family Resource Center
- Survey participants were invited to join focus groups
- Resident word of mouth

Focus groups were facilitated by CARE staff and were approximately 60 minutes each. Participants received a \$20 Visa gift card, a meal, and also childcare for the length of the focus group. Focus groups explored topics related to general barriers and resources for attaining employment, as well as specific transportation barriers related to employment. Please see appendix A for the focus group guide. Discussions veered in several other important directions not covered in the focus group guide and are outlined within this report.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim from audio recordings, de-identified for confidentiality, and reviewed by four staff members. Please see Appendix B for transcripts. We used techniques borrowed from grounded theory to develop themes from the data. We categorized the transcript text into themes and subthemes, outlined in the “Results” section below.

Survey

A survey was designed and piloted with 54 residents of the same three communities. The majority of participants were people of color and women. The average age was 37.

Surveys were interviewer-administered by CARE staff. The survey topics included:

- Demographic information
- Employment status
- Transportation and commuting to work

Please see Appendix C for the survey tool.

We utilized a convenience sample. Residents were recruited by going door-to-door in the same three public housing communities as the focus groups. Focus group participants were also asked to take the survey.

This report focuses on an analysis of the focus group data. Survey data have been submitted in an excel spreadsheet with an accompanying code book. Survey data are being analyzed by City staff.

RESULTS

Focus groups provided insights into the barriers that West Rock residents face related to employment, as well as relevant transportation barriers. The content of the focus group discussions is categorized into seven major themes. Subthemes emerged within each category.

- I. The West Rock Challenge: Isolated, Disenfranchised, and Disempowered
- II. Building a Community Voice
- III. Barriers to Employment
- IV. Resources Needed to Break Through to Employment
- V. Transportation-Specific Barriers to Employment
- VI. Other Transportation Issues
- VII. Other Issues and Resources Needed in West Rock

I. THE WEST ROCK CHALLENGE: ISOLATED, DISENFRANCHISED AND DISEMPOWERED

Isolated

It is well known in New Haven that West Rock is the most isolated neighborhood in the city, particularly when set in the context of the bustling urban communities that make up much of New Haven. West Rock is also one of the lowest income neighborhoods in New Haven. Geographically isolated by West Rock State Park, which creates a physical divide from the rest of the city, the neighborhood has also been subject to isolation by the neighboring town of Hamden, which built a fence along its border to keep residents of low-income housing from cutting through its adjacent neighborhood. Further exacerbating its isolation, the roads leading into West Rock

are not densely populated, with many winding through the woods or past the Hamden town landfill; they lack sidewalks and other walkability and traffic-calming features; and they are poorly lit. These factors have led to a lack of public transportation and limited resources like businesses and community organizations, propagating even deeper isolation. Residents discussed this isolation in various ways throughout the focus groups.

West Rock's geographic isolation is striking. Even more striking, participants in the focus groups quickly revealed how this translates into social isolation. This has been deeply internalized for residents in the neighborhood. The first answer to the first question in the first focus group revealed this immediately:

Facilitator: What are some barriers you experience in relation to finding adequate employment in this neighborhood?

Participant: I feel isolated, like it's a different world. I don't know how to explain it...

Facilitator: Do you all feel that?

Participant: There's nothing really out here.

Impact on Resources

Residents describe how their isolation impacts access to a variety of services like stores, particularly for groceries; and other services like pharmacies, laundromats, and gas stations.

They call this place – and I found out from my 19-year-old – they call this place “out the way.” Out the way of what? There's nothing out here. I don't want to go to my backyard and see woods, put something out here. They have empty lots, empty spaces that have the old convalescent home. Turn it into a laundromat for people that don't have laundry in their house. Put a pharmacy out here. Put a gas station out here for those that have a car but don't have the gas because they burned it all up coming out the way to get home, to get up and not have gas in their car. Put a gas station out here. At least they can get a gas can and put two dollars in it and make it to a big gas station.

This isolation has even had an impact on residents' access to entertainment resources, described in this exchange:

Participant: What if we want to go for entertainment like outside--like if we wanted to go to the movie theater in North Haven. You can't go. Then you have to wait and there's no guarantee that you can get back home in time for the last bus stop.

Participant: We is pitiful out here.

Participant: Yeah, we're like forgotten out here. It's crazy... so you want to take the bus outside of this neighborhood to find cheaper product or something because the store that we have...they've got rotten milk and stuff. I mean it's crazy and you have to bring it back.

This geographic isolation also impacts residents' ability to access adequate jobs, which is the focus of this study. This theme is explored more extensively in Section III, Barriers to Employment.

Disenfranchised & Disempowered

In general, many low-income communities feel disenfranchised – with little or no power to change their lives and subsequent lack of resources and privileges available to each person individually, as well as within their larger communities. In West Rock, this is further exacerbated by the unique impact of being geographically and

socially isolated. Some residents revealed how their social isolation has created a deep sense of disenfranchisement.

Facilitator: So one important thing that...I want to make sure...of what you said...is that you basically have a sense that you are less important because you're out here?

Participant: Yes, because of where we're located.

Facilitator: Because of where you're located...you said you feel like they prioritize this area less because people don't have jobs out here.

Participant: Of course, yes...This is a project, this is how it's been repeated in history, this is what they do. So they put a certain group of people...It's basically just because people can get out of here, they can work hard and go to school and stuff like that, I'm not saying that. But they're putting people, a group of people, I don't know.

Participant: [Sic] She right. You ain't saying the right words, but I got you.

Participant: It comes down to different graphics [sic]. Censuses, when we take these things and because we don't meet a certain criteria, then people downtown Hartford, they don't feel as though we are entitled to as much as people in Hamden...places of that nature. It's sad, but it's true.

The geographic isolation from Hamden has taken its toll on the West Rock community, and residents are subject to explicit discrimination, deeply felt by residents. Residents experience tense relationships with Hamden that continue to reverberate as a result of intentional isolation. One resident reported how their community is the subject of discrimination:

[T]his place was designed to keep you there. If you go to the city hall meetings, which I came to one out in Hamden, I was disgusted about how the surrounding other communities feel about this particular place. They've had someone around this area that was a police officer that said point blank, if I could, if it was legal, I would take my scope gun and pop 'em off. This was a female.

One component of this social isolation is an inability to access resources. Residents internalize this social isolation by describing that they are not given resources from New Haven because they are perceived as not deserving resources.

Participant: Them cleaning the streets, they take their time because we're far out, we're not important.

Participant: Or I think it's because people don't have jobs, because you do see a lot of people who may not work but that's how they're looking at the poor communities.

Lack of city resources and responsiveness is internalized by some residents. The sense of being forgotten is a strong sentiment in West Rock:

Yeah, mine is to ask them to realize that we're human, we're people out here too. We need the same things that people have got in town, we need it too. They act like we don't exist. They forget about us for everything and it's not even funny anymore, but as soon as your kids go into town and do something wrong, they lock them up ASAP.

Discussion focused on a lack of communication and dialogue with City leaders (elected officials and other leaders). Some residents report that they are not being asked their opinion.

...they [politicians] feel as though, why should I come out to Westville, out to McConaughy Terrace...Not all of us want to be stuck in the situation that we've found ourselves in. Not all of us are illiterate but we understand; we can read, we can hear, we can speak. So why isn't people coming out here and asking our opinions?

However, residents reported that when they were asked for their opinion by city leaders and others, they were not listened to and there was little follow through. They feel as though their voice is not heard – and is not as important as more proximal and affluent voices, as demonstrated earlier.

When I first moved out here, everything that they asked me to so far as them passing out whatever...I went to every community meeting...they asked us for our input and our opinions and our complaints and what needs to be changed and nothing was done, so people stopped coming. So I even told that to myself and I stopped going. I said, I'm giving you the same complaints every month. Mind you, when we had our community meeting, it was a community meeting. So management was not there, so how do we know that our complaints were being passed on to the proper people? ... Like I said, I was going and every month, when it came down to complaints or whatever, I would make the same complaints for, I want to say, at least nine months and nothing changed. So I felt like it was a waste of my time and why would I want to go there and complain if nothing is changing. Y'all still doing things y'all's way. At the end of the day, we're the ones that have to live here. When y'all get off of work at five o'clock, y'all go home. So all voices should count for something.

II. BUILDING A COMMUNITY VOICE

Because of these deeply seated issues of geographic and social isolation and resulting disenfranchisement and disempowerment, building a community voice will be particularly important for the Working Cities process, which focuses on resident involvement in decision-making. Many residents are proactive in their neighborhood – and even more are willing to be involved. Residents offered many solutions, including having more meetings and better advertising meetings and events through email, texts, phone calls, and word-of-mouth.

In general, residents believe meetings are an effective way to work together in their neighborhoods. However, they do recognize that participation is a struggle. Residents described that one reason people do not participate in neighborhood meetings and activities is because they are worried about the Housing Authority learning about violations and enforcing compliance among residents who attend meetings.

Participant: I don't want the housing in my business. So the meeting is about whatever they tell you the meeting is about; they're not going to interrogate you about another issue.

Community Management Team meetings offer another avenue for residents to discuss community issues and learn about available resources. Some residents attend their current management team meetings (Westville/West Rock) but would like to see more resident participation from their neighborhood:

Facilitator: Technically, your management team is with Westville, right? So do you feel like you even have a voice in the Westville meetings? Like, do people go there?

Participant: ...I've seen a lot of these faces before but there's a lot of people here that say, they don't help us with this or that but they don't come to the meetings. Like, you've got to speak

out and come to the meetings; the more meetings the better, because two or three people, they're going to think, this is not that serious. But if more people come, they'll take it more seriously.

Some residents reported that they do not receive information about meetings, which illustrates the need for better outreach. As meetings and events are organized, residents emphasized the need to focus on outreach. Residents offered solutions (flyer, emails – mentioned above) for improving attendance at meetings but also suggested utilizing residents who are already recognized as leaders to help 'turn people out.'

Facilitator: So finding the trusted people in the community.

Participant: I'm not pointing nobody out but I know these two right here, even in the schools or whatever, they're in everything. I always see them in everything and I'm like, Jesus.

Participant: That's what I'm saying. They need to get these strong--like the neighbors start knocking on because they're making sure--but these two, I see at the meetings and I see her tag along sometimes.

The focus groups helped to articulate strategies for community organizing and outreach as the city moves forward with initiatives in the neighborhood.

III. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

The focus groups provided insight into some of the barriers that residents experience when accessing adequate employment opportunities. These include discrimination, location of jobs, job readiness and job training, and the job application process. Systemic barriers were also central to discussion related to employment access – particularly in reference to increased monthly expenses when working (rent, childcare, transportation). Because transportation is a central component of the Working Cities proposal, a separate section is dedicated to that theme in Section V, Transportation-Specific Barriers to Employment.

Impact of Isolation and Disenfranchisement: Limited Career Aspirations

In the focus groups, the facilitators struggled to draw out substantive discussion from the participants about their resource needs. They could not identify specific job training needs, which is an important finding of this study. It felt as if the participants did not have suggestions and ideas for solutions related to their employment needs. We can infer that West Rock residents have become so disenfranchised that they are used to functioning with limited resources and weren't able to break out of this mindset. They seemed resigned to their circumstances.

Instead, residents discussed, in general, how difficult it is to find a job, particularly in today's economy. Those who would be satisfied just working in fast-food report that even this field is challenging to break into.

...because at the end of the day, it's not easy to get a job. Right now, if you try to go get a job in the fast food market, you're competing with the kids, point blank. You could be overqualified for the job; they're going to hire the young ones before they hire us, which doesn't make sense to me because we're more reliable. It doesn't matter what field it is but we just need more local.

This quote also illustrates that residents just want jobs – even at the expense of finding a meaningful field to work in or developing a career track, which is a similarly important finding that relates to limited career aspirations. Facilitators tried to draw out a discussion about the types of careers and fields in which residents would like to be trained. Each time, facilitators struggled to steer the conversation in this direction. Residents

are desperate to find a job – any job – and this is their sole focus. Dreaming about a career or a field was just not an option in the face of huge obstacle of surviving.

Participant: I'll work for anything -- because if you start off with one job, you know you're going to get another. That's usually how it happens. You might start off at Price Right and then go up as you go along, whatever the case may be but one will get you another one because it's showing that it's just going to gradually come until it's what you like doing.

Participant: Like she said, when it comes to the point where, okay, if I have to pick up trash off the street to make money so that I can pay my bills and feed my family, that's what I'm going to do first instead of waiting on somebody to give me the job that I want. I have to have a job to pay bills.

Considering how residents can develop a vision for a career and meaningful work is an important theme for city leaders to consider as they develop initiatives for residents seeking employment.

Discrimination

First and foremost, West Rock is predominantly a community of color. Regardless of geographic location, residents are being discriminated against based on demographic characteristics, specifically race/ethnicity, age, and criminal background. Racial discrimination is prominent, which many residents clearly called out and described as limiting their ability to access jobs:

I put in the application for Walmart, and I ain't going to lie; I lied about my color and everything and passed the test. I redid it and put down African American and I didn't pass the test. I called Walmart and asked about the job and they told me they didn't have it, they're not hiring...I put down that I was white and I passed. I put down that I was 58 and I'm white and I passed. I put down that I'm 58 and I'm African American and the same questions and I did not pass. So I'll say, is it my color or my age? ... I believe I could put down anything and pass. I did the exact same thing and did not pass. So I'm like, okay, it's either my age or my color.

As is common in many communities that are struggling to find adequate employment, many residents in West Rock struggle with criminal backgrounds. This is often cited as a major barrier by city leaders and others working to solve the issue of unemployment and poverty. Focus group participants pinpointed this struggle, describing their personal experiences:

I ain't gonna lie, sometimes it still don't give me a shot with my background. It all depends because some of them -- they pick and choose who they want, that's what it comes down. You've got a dude that can cook and really wants to go to be a chef and he can't get it because of the background...Give jobs to felons...so you can have people driving those buses. I don't think jobs should just be for people without a background. Just because I sold drugs don't mean I can't drive a bus.

Not only do people with criminal backgrounds have a challenging time accessing jobs, but their criminal backgrounds also keep them from accessing education and training that they may need to help them get to the next phase.

So, at colleges, you know how they give you grants and stuff like that and you know, you need more of Participant: that, because a lot of us don't qualify for it that really need it. You've got a dude that can cook and really wants to go to be a chef and he can't get it because of the background and you're not qualified for a grant and you can't pay for books so he's basically out of that career because...

Participant: A mistake he made when he was 17.

External Systems Limiting Employment

Residents reported several external systems that were identified as barriers to finding adequate employment, including expenses related to employment and housing quality.

Residents revealed that once they obtained employment, their rent increased, which disincentivizes finding regular employment. Consequently, some residents tend to work in temporary jobs in order to overcome this barrier – or don't seek employment at all.

Participant: I think a lot of issues is when people find jobs, they increase your rent. So a lot of people don't want to work because of that, because they go by your income, your gross income. If you get a part time job, it'll go up.

Participant: They increase your rent and it's not like it's a low income housing anymore. It's like the more you make, the more they want; so a lot of people won't go to work because of the rent situation. They say it's low income but psh...

Additionally, residents stated that as soon as they are employed, other costs increase such as childcare and transportation costs – all creating a contradictory effect to gaining stable employment and leaving residents feeling trapped in the 'system.'

[Once] I get a job...not only do I have to pay for transportation because I don't have a car but I've got to pay whoever watches my kid. So basically, I'm working to pay child care, transportation, my bills, and I'm not getting ahead like that... With me living in this low-income housing and the way they're set up, you'll never get out of here because you'll never be able to save.

Prisoners to the System

The barrier of these costs increasing when employment is secured created a recurring theme of residents not being able to "get ahead" and feeling as though they are stuck in a cycle of being dependent on public housing and other public resources. Many residents echoed the feeling of being trapped and felt as if they will "never get out..." and "We're prisoners, somewhat." There is an additional burden of having your finances closely monitored by the housing authority.

I mean I don't understand it, it's like a catch-22...[They] telling me I can live but I really can't because of the situations. So it's like, you put me out here so I can better myself and try to save but then, you want to know everything...do I have a checking account... do I have child support...do I have a savings account? You want to know everything so that you can get your hands in on every little bit that I've got. How am I supposed to better my life and move onto a better place and get out of low-income housing if y'all aren't affording me that...

Many residents expressed interest in becoming independent of these services and feel that these additional barriers only hinder that reality.

An extremely compelling and poignant discussion about housing quality emerged in one of the groups. Poor housing quality was linked to a family's ability to gain employment and move up in the world. Residents astutely argued that poor housing quality can eventually lead to poorer health outcomes and employment instability.

[A] lot of the issues that go along with housing go along with the transportation as well. Because if you're not taken care of, how are you going to get up to go to work in the morning? If you're up all night with a coughing baby that got asthma, you've got mold in your bathroom. You've got

to be up all night with this child but you've got to get up and go to work in the morning and the bus doesn't show up, it's late, so you're late, and then you're fired. So it's a lot that goes with the bus company that's also the housing issue because we are out here by ourselves.

Location of Jobs

In addition to racism, discrimination, and other external factors that impede residents from accessing gainful employment, the geographic isolation of West Rock creates an additional barrier. It is not surprising that residents experience job-related difficulties due to job location, and this emerged as a major theme. Most of the residents recognize that because West Rock is so isolated, there are very limited job opportunities available in the community. Many residents shared how they have to seek jobs that are in other towns such as Milford, Hamden, East Haven, and even Wallingford. Consequently, distance becomes a barrier to finding adequate employment for residents in West Rock.

[There's nothing] within our community...I just feel like...there should be more job opportunities available for us within our community. So, if transportation is an issue, it's closer than having to go way to Milford... Hartford...West Haven...Hamden or way to East Haven.

I've been working in North Branford and North Haven and I'll catch the bus quick, but I always did the second shift but that money is not easy to make when you have to live. So, you have to go out further, but if you ain't got no ride [then] how are you going to get there. Trust me, it's hard.

(NB: Issues related to transportation and work are further described in Section V, Transportation-Specific Barriers to Employment.)

Childcare

As already mentioned, juggling childcare is another major issue that keeps residents from accessing adequate employment. Many residents stated that not having someone to watch their kids or having to pay someone for childcare is a challenge. This is particularly difficult when commute times are lengthened by distance and it becomes necessary to take multiple buses to get to a childcare source and then to a job.

Job Application Process

The job application process can sometimes create additional barriers to finding adequate employment among residents of West Rock. Expenses related to the job application pose one barrier for residents. Typical costs include application fees and fingerprinting and background check fees.

Residents also raised issues related to online applications. Employers are using internal job request forms or automated applications to recruit applicants. Residents report that completing job applications online is time-consuming and very challenging, particularly for residents with limited computer skills and those who have no email accounts.

An additional barrier identified was the lack of personal or direct contact with employers. Personal contact can often help applicants move through the application process more smoothly. Residents also conveyed that when trying to contact the employers about open positions, either an automated system answers or no one answers at all. This can be very frustrating for residents who need a job. One participant described many of these challenges:

Participant: I think another thing is automated now. The phone, when you call, you've got to press this number and if you don't want to press that number that they want you to press, then

you could be on the phone for like 20 minutes, trying to get an actual person on the phone to find out the status of your application...

Participant: And by that time, you're frustrated.

Participant: Because nobody wants to do that every time they call to check on the status of an application. If you put 10 applications in, you're on the phone for like, 5 hours, you understand.

In addition to challenges with the automated application process, residents recognized how their social network was important for finding jobs. When applying for jobs, residents identified that they often need to know someone already working for the employer, who can recommend them, as described by the following participant:

The only way you can really get a job is when you go online to put the application in and you know somebody that works there. So you can pull your application and you don't have to go through all of those phone calls and all of that stuff. Like if you know the supervisor or someone that's employed there...And on that same note, Hampton Inn is hiring, catch the B4, it takes you right in front of Hampton Inn and takes you right back. But the thing is you've got to go online and you've got to know somebody to get into Hampton Inn because that's how I got in.

IV. RESOURCES NEEDED TO BREAK THROUGH TO EMPLOYMENT

Job Readiness, Education and Training

Given the many barriers that residents experience, more resources are needed to help West Rock residents gain adequate employment. As described earlier, it was difficult to draw out conversation related to resource and training needs but residents offered some suggestions.

In general, most of the residents concurred that they would like resources that focus on job readiness, such as GED courses and resume writing workshops. Residents suggested having CT Works come to the neighborhood once per week to offer job readiness trainings and classes. Training related to online job application process would also be beneficial.

Many participants suggested that offering GED courses would be a helpful resource. Most of the residents testified that without a high school education, it is difficult to find jobs.

[A] lot of jobs nowadays, if you don't got your GED, you can't [work for them] ...A lot of these boys is out here because they didn't finish school and most of them, the first thing they come back at you with is, you've got to have a high school diploma. Sometimes these places should be like, listen here, young man. Go to [Inaudible] get a certain amount of classes in and we're still going to let you in and train you, work with them. If you ain't got your GED, we ain't trying to talk to you.

Residents recognized that in order to obtain adequate employment, they either needed more education or job training. They reported that many residents don't have the necessary education and training for today's jobs. Residents suggested specific job training (e.g., for managerial positions) and specific computer trainings. Residents also shared that the computer classes should be more tailored towards applying for specific jobs. For instance, there were previous computer courses that were offered in the community that were not relevant to employment opportunities.

My thing is this, why do we always got to take the computer classes, the same computer classes and you're getting nowhere with this computer class...if I took a computer class for three to six

months here, why do I got to sign up for that same computer class for another six months but you're not helping me with no job.

However, the cost of education and training is a major barrier for some residents. Some of the residents emphasized that the cost of education is expensive and transportation is a barrier to attend school. Residents also felt that even though education is an important component to becoming gainfully employed, being a full-time student can be difficult, especially for single parents:

With the training, you can do anything, you definitely can level up. It's just the timing that's everything. If you're in a situation where you're a single mother and you've got two or three kids, you can't go to school and have a full-time job.

Some residents felt that the classes currently being offered throughout the community are not useful for finding adequate employment.

[They] do a lot of meetings in Brookside...every month, but they try to teach us how to buy houses [and] how to fix our credit. That's not helping us if we don't have a job; like how are we going to buy a house, how are going to build our credit if we don't have jobs? Like you have to help us get a job before you're trying to help us get a house.

For those who do have training and experience, some residents described that they were overqualified for those positions that were easy to get to. Residents also suggested that trainings should be available for senior citizens who are able to work and want to be re-trained.

Elm City Communities as a Resource

In each focus group, participants described the support and resources that they receive through Elm City Communities and view this as a great asset in the community. Participants recognized resident participation in programs was a challenge and has impacted the availability of resources in their community. Additionally, certain staff members seem to be particularly helpful.

Participant: It's a lot that housing authority does, but a lot of people just don't participate in it.

Facilitator: So you feel like the housing authority actually offers a lot of resources but people aren't engaging. Why do you think people don't take advantage of the different – especially employment related things?

Participant: I have no idea

Participant: ...maybe they're working or when they're home, they're just beat and tired and they can't make it if they have work in the morning or like in the evenings like class or whatever.

Participant: ... no one was participating so they took a lot of benefits from this area because of low participation. They just put a GED class, they even took that but they brought it back. You know what this doesn't have? They said we were one of the only ones that's not [involved]. The amount of participants in this area is really low so they took a lot of things from this area.

Participant: Yeah but one thing about living out here, you can come here and [Name] will help you do a resume and everything. She'll log you on the computer. Matter of fact they have a paper up there and she puts them up there every week for job openings. Like what you have to go online for and fill out applications ... they're open all day and you can come right down here. She'll show you how to log on. She'll got a paper that be hanging up every day. She'll go home and look up jobs and stuff and she'll hang them up for the guys or the girls that want to come down here and look for jobs. That's why there's a fax machine there, because a lot of time she prints out -- anything that you need to be done, she'll do -- she'll help show you, it's good.

Create More Local Jobs

Overall, the residents discussed creating more local jobs in New Haven and, more specifically, in the West Rock community. Residents mentioned that when the now-vacate nursing home that was functioning in the neighborhood, many residents worked there.

When the convalescent home was there, everybody who lived in Westville Manor had a job, everybody. The elderly, everybody had a job.

This participant further stated that residents had a diversity of jobs, such as nurses, nursing assistants, secretarial, cooks, and janitors, providing many jobs for people of various skill levels.

You could clean up, you could cook, you could do laundry; you didn't have to be no CNA to work there, they had positions for everybody and most of my neighbors worked there. And I've been living up there since my son was three months and he's 18 and all of the people who worked there worked there forever until they closed.

Residents felt that renovating this building has the potential to not only provide employment opportunities for residents of the community, but this would also resolve some of the transportation issues. Residents could either walk or bike to work if jobs are available within the community.

Residents also felt that Solar Youth, a non-profit organization that serves youth, could be expanded to create more job opportunities, particularly for neighborhood youth. Residents felt that neighborhood youth were not given the same employment opportunities as others from outside the neighborhood.

I really feel like that's wrong. You're going to bring other people from other states, cities, or wherever to come work in this community, out here in this little out the way, and them boys sitting here, looking for the same jobs.

Overall, residents feel that not only should Solar Youth hire from within the community, but they should also consider hiring residents that may have a criminal background. Residents further concluded that more funding needs to be allocated to Solar Youth so the program can better serve residents of West Rock.

Residents also pointed out that – beyond job opportunities – Solar Youth programs do not seem to be benefiting children that are outside of West Rock. One participant testified: "It seems like every program that comes out here to our neighborhood is benefitting other kids from other neighborhoods more than our own kids."

With this notion, residents re-emphasized that they felt disenfranchised: "Because they want to keep us down."

V. TRANSPORTATION-SPECIFIC BARRIERS RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT

Without reliable transportation, residents in West Rock are unable to get to work, to find employment, or even to attend job interviews. Throughout the process of survey administration and focus group facilitation, it became clear that most West Rock residents that participated in the study relied on public transportation to get to and from work. Because of that dependence, residents reported that lack of adequate and consistent transportation directly impacted their ability to secure employment. Residents discussed issues related to public transportation and described other resources that they use (ride shares, carpooling). There were several specific areas for improvement that participants discussed as it related to CT Transit, including bus stops, routes, and schedules.

Residents Rely on Public Transportation

Given the low socio-economic status of the neighborhood, the use of public transportation is aligned with the fact that many households do not have access to a reliable vehicle. Therefore, the reliability of the city bus (e.g., schedule, route, timeliness, etc.) is crucial to a resident's ability to secure adequate employment. City-wide bus routes are directly associated with the locations in which people are able to seek and apply for job opportunities. Similarly, the bus schedule determines which shift some residents are able to work, limiting both early morning and late night employment opportunities. As a main method of accessing employment, it is necessary to address transportation issues in the West Rock community, especially those routes that connect residents to opportunities to other parts of New Haven and surrounding cities.

Expanded Bus Routes

Given the close proximity of the West Rock neighborhood to the town of Hamden, there are employment opportunities and other resources (e.g., grocery stores) that residents access across town lines. With the destruction of the fence on the Hamden border that served as blockade between neighborhoods, residents were under the impression that they would now have access to Hamden in a more direct way, in regards to transportation. Rather, the lack of a direct bus route from West Rock to Hamden maintains this sense of separation and isolation for many residents – greatly limiting transportation options.

Facilitator: What about having to go downtown to get anywhere else? Is that a barrier for you?

Participant: Yeah because they was going to have the BD bus come through when they opened up to Hamden, they were going to have the bus come through there but they [sic] ain't do it yet...Instead of going all the way down when you just want to go to Hamden. Sometimes when I took the bus, I'd get off the B bus by Southern and walk, going up towards [Inaudible]. Get on the D bus right there, that's like too much.

Residents also look for jobs in other areas that have high concentration of jobs (e.g., retail and restaurant opportunities in the surrounding suburbs of Milford, Orange, and North Haven). Because residents are reliant on public transportation, they are limited to search for jobs only on the bus line.

Participant: I tend to look for jobs on the bus line just because it's convenient for me. Versus if I find a job that's not on the bus line, then I have to depend on my children because they have vehicles. Whereas if I get a job that's on a direct route, I know I can get there...

Participant: Yeah and then they wonder why people are not working. A lot of people aren't working because they're not able to get to these jobs in certain places.

Participant: Like the jobs that people are hiring for are like in Milford or way out and even if you do a [Inaudible] you've still got to catch a bus.

Expanding bus lines to other areas with concentration of jobs – as well as improving current schedules – will open more options for residents.

Bus Schedule and Timeliness

Reliability of the city bus was also reported as a barrier to securing employment. Focus group participants expressed that busses were consistently late, especially during the afternoon hours after falling behind throughout the morning. They expected that this was due to the congestion downtown, given that all busses meet downtown as a central point for transfers between bus lines.

Participant: It'll [sic] come good but after morning, by the time twelve o'clock comes, they're running late.

Facilitator: And that's pretty frequent that they're running late?

Participant: They're always late.

Participant: The downtown has all the traffic so they're always late.

Residents reported feeling like most job opportunities were available not only outside of the West Rock neighborhood, but outside of the city New Haven. Therefore, some were willing to take the necessary two or more busses to these locations. While some residents accept this extended commute, they are still faced with bus scheduling issues. They have expressed that public transportation may allow them to get to or from work, but often not both, as in these cases where they work outside of city limits.

Participant: I don't think it's hard for me to find a job. I'll get a job. It's the transportation. It don't be so much of a job because I apply myself hard...so it'll just be the transportation. And I stay out here so if I get on a bus, I can't work no night shift. That's bad, I want to work night shifts, I want to be doing graveyard shifts getting that bread, and I can't do it because of the transportation.

Participant: And it's hard to work first shift too, living out here because there's been a couple of times when I didn't have a car and I'd work 7-3. There's no bus that leaves here at 5 o'clock because out here you have to leave at least an hour and a half in advance if you don't work in New Haven, just to get to your job in Milford or deep out in Hamden. So 5:30, that makes me get to work at 7:30, and now I'm late.

Bus Fares

With the low-income status of residents in West Rock, household budgets are very tight, leaving little room for additional expenses beyond household bills and childcare payments. The continuous increase of bus rates over time becomes a strain on participants and their household budgets. West Rock residents expressed that the combination of having to find work outside of the community, catch two or more buses to get to a low-paying job and pay increasing bus fare, was counterintuitive. This again reinforces the underlying theme of residents feeling like as though they are in a cycle or "trap," unable to secure adequate pay so that they could eventually become independent from public housing.

Participant: Yeah they don't take you but their prices are steadily going up and you can't even get to where you've got to go.

Participant: And then your paycheck is almost the bus pass, \$60 if you work at McDonalds or somewhere.

Facilitator: So is that how much the bus pass is, 60 dollars for how long?

Participant: 31 days but think about. You're paying 60 dollars for 31 days and half of the time, that bus pass don't even get you to where you've got to go. So you might as well catch an Uber.

Use of Taxis & Ride Share Services

Although the use of public transportation far outweighed the use of taxis and ride share services, there were some residents who did report using services such as Uber, specifically due to the unreliability of the city bus. Given the same financial restraints of the rising bus fare, taxis and other car services are not a sustainable method for residents in terms of getting to and from work. Rather, this seems to be a final effort in attempt to maintain a job, given unreliable bus schedules. Some residents even reported that local taxi companies refused to come to areas in the West Rock neighborhood and so they resorted to spending money for transportation using Uber and similar services.

Car Owners: Gas, Taxes & Other Expenses

Even when residents are able to secure their own vehicles, there are additional fees and financial considerations at play that also determine whether or not these are sustainable methods of transportation to work. Specifically, taxes, gas, and maintenance and repairs add expenses for car owners, taking more financial resources away from their limited household budgets.

During one focus group, a participant even expressed how she was finally able to secure a job since she was able to purchase a car. Even though this car was not fully reliable in terms of function, it allowed her to accept a position and begin receiving income.

Participant: I mean my car takes me from here to there, you know what I mean, but it's not in good condition. But it's working for me right now and it's helpful.

Facilitator: And are you working?

Participant: No, I'm going to start a job tomorrow.

Facilitator: Oh congratulations, that's awesome. So was it getting a car that kind of really tipped you over for getting a job?

Participant: Yeah, because when my kids are at school, I don't have child care. So I would have to find a job where they're in school and then if I caught a bus, I had to figure out, okay, I'm going to be here at such and such time and I have to be here on time to get my kids. But sometimes the buses, they'll see you standing there and they'll keep going so you'll miss that bus and then you have to wait for the next one. And then sometimes they don't come on time so it's not fun, it's not. So yeah, that was a big issue for me before I got my car.

Community Networks for Carpooling

Members of the West Rock community have had to combine resources when it comes to securing both employment and transportation. Certain residents who do own or have access to a car often share rides with neighbors to get to work, grocery stores, and other necessary destinations. Similar to how the bus route dictates where residents are seeking employment, focus group participants also reported that they will often seek employment with the same employer as neighbors with whom they are likely to share a ride.

Participant: But my friend has a car now.

Facilitator: So do you rely on friends and family for rides? Sometimes in terms of... and is that a strategy? Do you try to look for jobs at the same place so that you can...

Participant: They do, they stick together.

This speaks to the direct relationship between transportation and employment, demonstrating how the window of opportunities becomes extremely limited due to various transportation barriers. The concept of a job opportunity is dependent on hourly rate and access to transportation.

While some residents are able to share resources, others are left vulnerable as they are fully dependent on friends and neighbors with cars. Some car owners charge residents a fee for rides, leading them into the same cycle of paying for transportation that they cannot afford.

Participant: You need somebody to bring you home but you've got to ask and they want a ridiculous amount of money and then are they going to be reliable?

The interrelatedness of poverty, transportation, and employment – and the difficulty of breaking out of this cycle – is perfectly articulated by this participant:

Everything just boils down to transportation and lack of funds. Because if...I can't find a job here in New Haven, that means I have to look outside of New Haven. Which means I can't do that because I can't afford no 60 dollars a month bus pass or pay somebody's gas fare to take me all the way out so, lack of funds. It's like being stuck between a rock and a hard place if you're in my situation...transportation is hard for me to get a job outside of New Haven, Connecticut because I can't afford one.

Walkability and Bikeability in West Rock

A potential area for improving transportation options for traveling to work is to improve the walkability and bikeability of the West Rock neighborhoods. In general, residents reported feeling unsafe walking in the neighborhood. Issues related to the transportation built environment were areas of discussion, including sidewalks and bike lanes, lighting, and traffic calming.

Sidewalks & bike lanes

Overall, residents reported that the walkability of West Rock could be improved, especially for pathways that allow residents to walk and bike to and from the neighborhood. Many residents rely on traveling throughout the neighborhood on foot. Sidewalks and bike lanes would also likely contribute to reducing this feeling of neighborhood isolation from the rest of New Haven.

Participant: They need to cut that down and give us a sidewalk because a lot of people walk. A lot of people walk in town and there actually was one. There was one but they let it get overgrown. That's why it rained real hard--because the sewer is clogged up from the grass, they never clean it out, so the water can't drain. That's why everything be flooded. There used to be sidewalks because I lived out here 20-something years ago.

Lighting

Residents discussed poor lighting around the neighborhood, especially on the roads connecting the three housing developments to central areas of New Haven (e.g. Wintergreen, Springside, etc.) With the low rate of car ownership and access in the neighborhood, there are several people who walk or bike down these dark roads to get in and out of West Rock at night. This is an extreme safety issue that is preventable with sufficient lighting features placed in these target areas.

Participant: They ain't got no sidewalks so you have to ride in the street, there's no sidewalks and that's dangerous. There's no sidewalks in the front and there's no sidewalks in the back; there's just a little walk through, that's dangerous. Especially the backroads.

Participant: And some people do be walking that back roads at night.

Participant: And you can't even see, for real.

Participant: Especially in the back roads.

Participant: Especially out there where it's very dark.

Participant: Yeah the lights are all out, everybody has knocked the lights out.

Traffic calming

Similarly, the overall issue of traffic calming was discussed and residents had clear ideas of where additional traffic lights and stop signs could potentially be placed in the neighborhood to increase street safety. They also suggested the addition of speed bumps in certain to reduce excess speeding throughout the neighborhood, especially on streets with no sidewalk access, which are particularly dangerous for walking/biking.

Participant: I actually was going to try to get them to put a light where they put the store at because kids are kids, and they don't always look both ways. That's a four-way intersection, so with that being said, I've actually stood there and watched where cars do not come to a complete stop and they just go right on.

Participant: They have them [bike lanes] in Brookside but I still feel like that's a safety issue just because kids don't pay attention. We need more speed bumps within the complex, that shouldn't even be just at Brookside because people come in and when it says yield, when they first turn in, once they pass that...They go around the corner and you never know. Especially in the summertime, a kid could dart out for a ball at any given moment. People do not drive safely.

VI. OTHER TRANSPORTION ISSUES

Given the isolation of West Rock residents, there were various transportation issues that were discussed in the series of focus groups that were not directly related to employment but other of areas life. There are other pressing needs for transportation services in the neighborhood, such as medical appointments and childcare or children's activities. In addition, other barriers were discussed, such as lack of sufficient street cleaning during the winter and school transportation for children. These additional transportation-related issues also further contribute to the sense of isolation and disenfranchisement as many residents reported feeling that they did not have these resources because of the neighborhood in which they lived.

Bring Back the Old Bus Route

Feedback about the "old" bus route was consistent across all three focus groups as well as the surveys. Residents continuously referred to the "old" vs. "new" bus route within West Rock and between the three housing developments: Brookside, Rockview Terrace & Westville Manor. They even referenced organizing a petition to bring the old bus route back.

Participant: ...By living in Westville [Manor], I think it's unfair that we've always got to be the last one to get the bus, last one to come home, it's hard. We always have to wait, wait, wait, and then it goes everywhere and we get last so we've either got to wait for the bus to come up the hill to go to work or wait for the bus to come up the hill to go home. There's people such as myself that's old and doesn't feel like walking up and down these hills to meet the bus and we should not have to wait at Brookside in order to get home. We're spending 15-20 minutes sitting up there, 10-20 minutes sitting there when we live up here. It's unfair to Westville Manor residents.

Participant: ...But my thing with the buses is that they need to do it the old way. The old way, coming down...going to Rock View, Brookside, and back out. [Sic] Them buses don't take breaks like that. The only time they took breaks is when they went downtown and they were changing bus drivers. That's the way it was and now we've got to suffer because we've got to wait in Brookside for a whole half hour sometimes, 20 minutes.

This proposed change is something tangible that can be addressed at the city level. Since the majority of residents surveyed and interviewed brought up this issue, residents are likely to feel that their concerns were heard and potentially even empowered by the fact that their voice is used to create change in their community.

Communication of Bus Schedule Changes

Communication around changes of bus routes and schedule was also a topic of discussion. Residents reported that they were not made aware of bus schedule changes until they attempted to catch their regular bus home. Most recently, CT Transit's change from lettered to numbered busses was not adequately communicated, causing confusion and frustration in the neighborhood.

Winter Bus Routes & Disaster Plan

The need for a winter disaster plan was discussed at all three focus groups as residents unanimously agreed that they were "stuck" in West Rock after snow storms, due to road conditions. The spoke on the lack of plowing or poor plowing and also reported that the busses did not drive "up the hill" from Wilmot Crossing to Rock View Terrace and Westville Manor during the winter season. This was a big concern of safety as some residents are elderly or physically unable to make the walk from this altered bus stop to their homes. Some residents talked about needing rides from this point to residence. Neighbors in Westville Manor even reported they rotate turns in escorting a blind neighbor down the hill to the bus stop. They feel that their streets were neglected because of the fact that they were "out there" and that the city was less concerned with cleaning the streets in their neighborhood, contributing to this sentiment of being disenfranchised.

It was two years ago, January 26th, that big snowstorm we had out here. The day of the snowstorm, I tried to walk down the hill to catch the bus to go grocery shopping. At the time, my five-year-old was two, I think he was two. I fell down that hill. As soon as I came down that hill with the groceries, I had to walk back up the hill because the bus did not come. Later on that afternoon, I had a Lupus flare-up so bad I couldn't see for five days; I had to have the medical people come and get me out of the house and they had to put chains on the wheels just to come up into my parking lot to get me out of there. Because the snow was so bad and the ice was so bad, nobody cleaned up anything. So I'm just asking if there's a snowstorm or there's snow on that hill, if it's not so bad that I've seen it, not bad enough for them to not come up the hill, get some transportation to get people to and from. Because there's a lot of people that live out there that are young but still disabled. And you would never know what I go through on a daily basis living with this.

Bus shelters and Seating in the Neighborhood

Many residents also talked about how they would appreciate more sitting areas (e.g., benches, tables, etc.) and more bus shelters for the bus stops. Given that they have expressed having to wait at certain stops like Wilmot Crossing and the entrance of Brookside, these are potential areas for placing bus shelters. They mentioned that once the existing bus shelters were broken or damaged, they were never repaired, downgrading the scenery of the neighborhood.

Participant: Put a bunch outside where the bus has to come to Brookside, I mean Westfield Manor. Put a covered bench out there because I'm tired of standing out there, waiting for that bus and my legs give out.

Shuttle Bus

To address another resource need, residents proposed a solution of creating shuttle bus services. Although there are certain companies that cater to specific populations (e.g., medical shuttle van), there is a need for more extensive transportation services to bring residents to locations such as the grocery store or to other

central resources (in addition to employment) that impact their lifestyle, such as education and entertainment opportunities. This would help them feel less disconnected as a community.

There is an immediate need for shuttle service for the elderly and disabled West Rock residents as the physical isolation is a particular burden for this population for accessing daily necessities like groceries, pharmacies, and other items needed for their households. Although there are some shuttle services that may exist (e.g. My Ride), residents have expressed that there is a gap in services for those that need them, especially given that most of these services require advanced notice (sometimes over 24-hours). A regularly scheduled shuttle service for the three housing developments would ensure that people who are in need of immediate service would still be able to access the resources that they need.

Participant: Like my neighbor, she don't have transportation back and forth to the store. She does call My Ride but sometimes they can't fit her in when she needs to be fit in. So that would be a good idea for a community shuttle type situation and it's not so much, okay, today is going to be dedicated to this one family. They would probably require that to be a group thing. They're just not going to chauffeur one person around. Oh, you've got to go here, here, and here, that's not going to work because financially, they can't afford it. I'm pretty sure there's no budget for that.

Participant: Maybe get a shuttle bus.

Facilitator: And how would that shuttle bus work, what do you think? Where do you need it?

Participant: I feel like a shuttle bus downtown or something.

Participant: They used to do that, where a bus would come out and take you to Stop and Shop back in the day.

Shuttle Services to Bus Stops

Because transportation to and from the bus stop becomes an issue in winter, some residents feel that a shuttle bus to the bus stop would be helpful to avoid the physical dangers of getting up and down the hill, especially for children and older residents. Similarly, a shuttle service to downtown would be beneficial as the bus lines connect at this point. This could potentially save residents time and money. They would not have to wait for the initial bus to bring them from West Rock to downtown, cutting down on an unnecessary extended commute period. This would also alleviate barriers in situations where they need to catch a second bus within the transfer time period (90 minutes).

Participant: Especially when it storms and it snows like when it's time for us to catch the bus for our kids and to go places, we've got to leave early. Why can't an extra shuttle for residents that live in the area come pick them up, bring them to the bus stop...Like can you pick me up or is there a bus because people are coming with kids and some people are disabled, they can't hardly walk. So they should have more transportation...and give a lot of people a ride to get from A to B to C, and make sure that there's more buses and make sure they have extra time and stuff. It's a struggle for people to get to the bus stop.

Street Safety & Child Safety

Although the general topics focused on employment and transportation, the topic of children became a recurring theme in all of the focus group conversations. Most participants were either parents or grandparents and discussed resources needed for children in the neighborhood with equal emphasis as the main topic of employment and transportation, especially as it related to child safety.

With child safety a priority, residents discussed how they were able to adapt and create solutions to protect the safety of the children in the neighborhood. One resident discussed how her child's school bus stop was taken away and she stepped in to make sure that all the children that lived near her got to school safely. This is a potential area to target resources in West Rock.

Participant: So it got to the point when the school bus would come late, I would be that mom to walk them all to school and it didn't bother to me because I'd rather they get to school safe or whatever but at the end of the day, maybe they need to do some funding like she said for a mom that's willing to do that.

Participant: They could come up with that funding and it doesn't have to be the same mom.

Participant: Okay, I have a question because you're speaking of transportation. My child goes around the corner to [Name]. She was in [Name] [Name], she was in kindergarten, she's always had a school bus. Due to one unruly child, the school bus was taken. I started a petition so that we could get the school bus back. Would that go under transportation? Because for me, it's a safety issue for these kids, especially in the wintertime, to walk back and forth to school. I'm not only frightened for the bus for Brookside, I'm frightened for [Inaudible] as well because when I call transportation and I'm like, how can you take the bus? The lady said, well ma'am, you live in close proximity to the school. I don't care if I live across the street from the school, I live in the woods. There's no stoplight, people don't come to a complete stop at that intersection, there's no crossing guard for our kids except for right there in front of the school and them kids have got to walk up that hill. Granted, my daughter only got to walk around the corner ut there's still a lot of woods between the school and my house. If somebody put my baby in a trunk, who's going to know? Ain't no cameras out here, they need that school bus back. So with that being said, the lady is like, well, you can just send your daughter to school with somebody else's kid. I said, you must have got no kids because that's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. Why would I entrust my child to another child?

Crossing Guards

Similarly, with many kids walking to school with the absence of a designated school bus, there is an increased need for the role of a crossing guard to ensure that children are able to travel to and from school safely. With the physical layout of the three main housing developments in West Rock, there are areas for strategic placement of crossing guards and walking programs, where parents would be able to bring their children as they would a normal bus stop.

Participant: The transportation issue with the kids, firstly. Well my priority because I'm a mother first would be getting the school bus.

Participant: Crossing guards for the kids.

Participant: More lights so they can be safe when they're going to school and walking.

Participant: Cameras, I think 100%.

Participant: Cameras like you know downtown how they have all that security? We need something like that.

Participant: Yeah, we definitely need a stoplight at that intersection

VII. OTHER ISSUES AND RESOURCES NEEDED IN WEST ROCK

Several other discussion points emerged during focus group discussions that are not necessarily related to employment or transportation. Issues related to public housing emerged...

Public Housing

Several issues related to living in public housing emerged in the focus groups, some in relation to employment, described earlier. Participants reported concerns with responsiveness of public housing staff when issues arose and, in general, feeling scrutinized by staff.

Participant: Like I was saying, I grew up in the projects and it started from the management. We grew up in the projects but housing did their jobs back then. If you needed something fixed, they came and fixed it. They didn't give you two or three [weeks] to a month to do it...Then, they also, now they want you to do--if your apartment needs painting, they'll really give you the paint but they won't do it...So that's why I don't go to the meetings, because they ain't talking about nothing I want to hear. Like she said, she complains about this is broken, that's broken. They'll come with [Inaudible] comes around and then they care.

Participant: The point of it is that after the inspection is over, if they find any flaws in your apartment, then they come in and say you owe us this for fixing that. You broke this, you broke that. Okay, my thing is this; how in the world is a 5'2" woman going to jump up into the ceiling to make a hole for the bathroom light?

Participant: I just want to piggy off of what he said as far as putting work orders in. When you put them in, they don't come but mind you, right now, if we all go to my house, maintenance is in my house fixing everything that I didn't even mess up, just the regular basic stuff. Why? Because it's time for them to get their funding. They only do stuff when it's time for them to get their funding. They come replace light bulbs, just everything, they'll come caulk your tub, everything. Making sure the doors open and close, like they're literally down there trying to make my apartment brand new, minus the painting. It's ridiculous...Why come and live in Brookside when they want to come four or five times a year? Because you want to be nosy, because at the end of the day, as long as I'm in compliance with my lease, if I'm not calling in work orders every other day, there's no need for you to come in and inspect my apartment five times a year. I'm sorry, it's only me and my nine-year-old.

Perceptions of Safety: Limited Violence Amidst the Woods and Wildlife

West Rock residents describe feeling safe from violence in their neighborhood because they are isolated and 'in the woods.' It was encouraging that residents felt relatively safe from violence.

Interestingly – and paradoxical to typical perceptions of safety in low-income, urban environments – the issue of the woods and wildlife emerged as a big safety concern. Several participants discussed that they were surrounded by the woods and wild animals, both as a point to illustrate the physical isolation (from central New Haven) and the issue of safety. People expressed fear about wild animals like raccoons, foxes, and other animals – especially when describing walking through the poorly lit neighborhood. When reaching out to the Animal Control, they were not given solutions for resolution, increasing the feeling of helplessness as it related to transportation and general livability of the West Rock neighborhood.

Participant: When I first moved out here, my baby come up to my step mom's house. She was playing, her and my nieces and they were like, we've seen the red foxes and I was like, red fox, I've never seen them. So me being the mother that I am, I go outside and there was a baby red fox outside, broad daylight, playing with the kids. Playing with the kids and when we called

animal control, they said there's nothing they can do because that's wildlife. I said, so what happens when one of these are rabid and attack one of the kids? Because this is broad daylight and mind you, it was still little but it was a fox. The mother wasn't too far.

Participant: And not only that, people don't realize that because of the wooded area, not everyone has seen them but there are a few animals running around and you don't want to meet them. I mean seriously. I'm a man and the only thing I fear is God but I'm not going to be out here tousling with foxes and raccoons.

There was also a lot of discussion around additional resources that residents felt they need in their neighborhood. They are briefly outlined below and transcripts can be pulled if this is identified as something the City is interested in pursuing in relation to this grant or otherwise.

- Grocery store: residents reported dissatisfaction with the current convenience store. It is overpriced and lacks a full range of grocery items. They currently need to take two buses to get to a grocery store or find a ride with a friend/relative.
- Mobile market for food: Residents requested more consistent and more frequent mobile food bank stops.
- Laundromat: Residents would like a convenient location to do laundry.
- Activities for children are needed.

KEY RECOMMODATIONS

Focus groups provide rich discussion and ideas for how to improve resources in the West Rock neighborhood. Recommendations are outlined below based on these ideas.

I. Building a Community Voice in West Rock

Because of the deep sense of isolation and disenfranchisement, extra effort will be needed to bring residents together to help build solutions with the city around access to employment opportunities. City staff should consider more intensive outreach and organizing efforts in the neighborhood. Leadership development training for West Rock residents may be an effective method to consider in this community. In general, it will be important to host more community meetings and provide more avenues for regular communication, allowing opportunities for resident feedback.

Some specific ideas for consideration include:

- Host regular community meetings, particularly with elected officials and other city leaders.
- Develop methods for adequately responding to resident requests and need. Even if needs cannot be met, that should be communicated back out to the community.
- Conduct extensive outreach using multiple methods for communicating information: flyers, text, email, door knocking.
- Utilize resident lay leaders to lead outreach efforts and communicate with residents.

II. Barriers to Employment

Ideas that emerged from the focus groups related to removing barriers to adequate employment are outlined below. However, since residents struggled to identify resource and training needs in their community, more outreach and/or focused meetings about specific employment needs should be considered.

Offer relevant job training & education. Provide training and education courses that respond to the practical needs and skills requested by West Rock residents. These include:

- GED courses
- Vocational trades
- Management skills training
- Resume writing
- Assistance/training with the general online application process

Consider career coaching vs. job training: Provide career counseling to assist residents in developing long-term employment goals and plans.

Create more local jobs: Consider ways to increase employment opportunities within West Rock and surrounding neighborhoods of New Haven. One idea in particular is to restore the old nursing home in West Rock, creating jobs for adults and activities for children.

Address obstacles related to criminal backgrounds: Collaborate with employers to review and modify organizational policies to appropriately accommodate applicants with criminal histories, (especially for non-violent offenses). Provide tailored resources and assistance to help people with criminal histories attain positions

Housing Authority Policies: Reassess and revise Housing Authority policies regarding increases in rental payments for tenants who find employment.

Childcare: Provide affordable childcare services and/or subsidies for working parents. Advocate with the State of CT to increase Care 4 Kids subsidies.

III. Employment-Related Transportation Recommendations

Residents provided considerable feedback about transportation-related issues for obtaining suitable jobs. Many of these recommendations are concrete and direct and may go a long way toward fostering a sense of responsiveness in the West Rock Community.

Bus Changes: Adapt elements of the CT Transit bus system to better suit West Rock residents and their ability to travel to and from work.

- Extend **bus hours** for B-line and other routes where people are employed (e.g., Milford, North Haven, Hamden, East Haven).
- Provide **direct bus routes** (e.g., to Hamden, Downtown New Haven) to minimize transfers and commute times.
- Bring back the old route in West Rock.
- Control prices on **bus fare** or give incentive to those using transportation for employment purposes.
- Improve **communication** to residents regarding bus route/schedule/name changes.
- Add **bus shelters** at major bus stops throughout West Rock.

Shuttle Services: Provide regular shuttle services for residents to frequently traveled locations.

- To bus stops (especially during the winter months)
- Grocery stores and other amenities
- Downtown

Street Safety: Address hazardous elements of the current built environment to increase resident safety when traveling by car, bike, or foot in West Rock.

- Improve street lighting in West Rock, specifically on dark roads (Wintergreen Ave. and Springside Ave.)
- Provide additional traffic calming features (e.g., traffic lights, speed bumps) for high-traffic areas in West Rock.
- Create additional sidewalks and bike lanes.

IV. Other Recommendations

Provide additional resources in the West Rock neighborhood:

- Grocery Store (appropriately priced and full service/full selection)
- Mobile food pantry (increased hours/days)
- Pharmacy
- Laundromat
- Gas station
- Entertainment (e.g., movies)
- Activities for children

Child Safety: Provide fundamental resources for West Rock children that allow them to travel to and from school and around the neighborhood safely.

- Offer school bus access for all children in the neighborhood.
- Provide crossing guards at key intersections.
- Offer walk-to-school programs, prioritizing the hiring of West Rock parents and other residents.