

CREATING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Sun Health Virtual Community Town Hall

October 22, 2020 – Online via Zoom

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Arizona communities vary in their individual strengths and their focus on those strengths as starting points for discussion about community health.

In Southern Arizona social and cultural cohesion is the starting point and foundation for building cooperation and collaboration across sectors to improve the community and community health. Additional strengths of Southern Arizona are environmental quality and the proximity to national parks.

In the Northwest Valley of the Phoenix Metro Area one thing that shines is the regional focus on access to parks and recreation. Municipalities have invested in the infrastructure that allows people to participate in affordable sports and exercise, including both large and small community parks, sports facilities, and trails.

In Camp Verde quality of life is front and center. There is a growing collaboration with the Yavapai-Apache Nation which has brought out the best qualities of the different segments of the community, including respect for elders. Transportation systems are another strength in this region, including planned trails that provide access to recreational facilities. This system supports robust employment and a thriving tourism industry.

In the West Valley, there is access to health care facilities and excellent education. West-MEC is a great strength in this region.

During the pandemic the lack of access to digital resources, including computers and internet, has been identified as a gap to be addressed for some segments of the community. It is important to find ways for students and others to connect outside the classroom, for social and emotional health. Schools have been forced to address this need so that students can continue their education while isolated. Another aspect of this issue is the relative unavailability of internet connectivity in rural areas at a time when the pandemic has increased demand. In Prescott Valley where many people are moving into the community, people are reluctant to meet in person due to the pandemic. This creates a need for virtual meetings such as this town hall.

One thing Arizona communities have in common is their interest in leveraging scarce resources and building on their strengths to optimize community health. Several examples illustrate the opportunities for such efficiencies.

By treating mental health problems rather than criminalizing them, we can save substantial sums and improve outcomes.

One police department has developed a successful trauma care program where police communicate information about children who have suffered trauma to schools and child safety agencies.

Schools and libraries are community hubs that already serve as resources and might be leveraged to do even more. The Phoenix public libraries sponsor myriad programs that benefit the public and promote literacy. Most people trust and respect libraries, find them safe and comfortable places to go. Schools are places where families are used to coming and might be leveraged to provide access to different types of information and services families need. We could build on these resources as sources of community strength and connection. However, we should not expect teachers, schools, and libraries to take on new and additional responsibilities without providing additional funding.

In leveraging scarce resources data sharing across communities will be essential.

CURRENT EVENTS AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

COVID-19 has shined a light on existing economic disparities affecting Arizona's communities. Primary among these are the lack of access to health care and affordable housing for some segments of the community. Health care is a complex issue. Many people lack meaningful access to quality care. Even those who have insurance may have difficulty finding a provider who will accept it. There is also a shortage of affordable housing that has put many families and seniors in a desperate situation.

Lack of access to childcare is another issue that has been aggravated by shutdown of K-12 schools. Many people cannot afford or do not have access to childcare that would allow them to continue working during the pandemic or are not comfortable with the quality or conditions of the care that is available to them.

COVID-19 has also highlighted the ongoing problems of K-12 education funding. For example, some teachers laid off during the pandemic discovered that they made more on unemployment than when teaching. The lack of access to broadband internet and computer technology for some students has underscored the impact of poverty and lack of resources on educational opportunity for some communities.

People of color are disproportionately affected by all these issues. The history of red lining and segregation has kept communities of color in "less desirable areas," with fewer resources and investment to make them better. There has been widespread denial of systemic racism. COVID-19 has brought greater public attention to and acknowledgement of the disparities affecting communities of color and the impacts of racism on these communities as well as the need for reform.

WHAT I WOULD TELL ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS

When things get tough, communities cut back. In the COVID-19 era cutting back is not the answer. Instead, we need to provide more services, particularly to communities of color and lower income communities. Problems tend to grow and have ripple effects.

We need to do something for special populations, including people with disabilities, seniors, and youth.

Collaborate. Figure out how to collaborate across parties, levels of government and different sectors of stakeholders.

Engage more of the community in this discussion about how many elements of healthy communities interact.

Put partisanship aside, find common ground, listen to all people and groups. You represent ALL people in your community, even those who didn't vote for you.

As architects of communities designed to produce disparities, take responsibility for the outcomes, instead of blaming the residents of communities that have been deprived of the resources they need to thrive. You can change the outcomes by reversing course and providing more resources to historically underfunded communities.

Stop cutting taxes. Our state budget is about the size of Wyoming's. Their population is just under 600,000, ours is 7 million. Hundreds of millions of dollars are missing from our communities every year because of the tax cuts. We need to fund basic services such as public education.

Get out into the community. Visit people where they live, and see how they live, before you make decisions about their lives.

Have some integrity. Be honest. Build trust. Don't make promises you don't intend to keep. Stand up for what you believe is right.

Reach out beyond the people who voted for you, to educate the entire community, engage them in the public process, support and connect them with one another. Respond to constituent needs and requests, particularly from vulnerable groups.

Continually work toward more civil discourse. Communication may be blocked when people fear aggressive response from others.

TAKING ACTION

We all cannot do everything but we ALL can do something! We can make a difference together.

Encourage people to find ways to stay active during these times.

Be compassionate and kind share what you can.

Vote. Run for office. Get involved in civic organizations and civil discussions of public issues. Encourage organizations in which you are involved to become more diverse and representative. Promote civic engagement in the community.

This Domestic Violence Prevention month remember to check in on your friends, especially seniors, who are still relatively isolated. In Yavapai County they are reaching out to seniors and teens with care packages.

Combat violence and hatred by taking actions that give the world hope. Even simple actions such as picking up trash, or speaking up about something that is wrong, make a difference.

Foster positive peace, by encouraging people to foster one another. Take a meal to an isolated senior, or a homeless person.

Multigenerational efforts such as the cyber-Seniors program and youth teaching seniors, and community building physically and access technologically, are beneficial in preventing walls being built. Tutoring offers face-to-face connection for some students that is a powerful boost for their personal and educational success.

Community engagement is a first step, but engagement alone is not enough. Community empowerment must follow, and it is much harder because it involves the person or group in authority giving up power.

Education and communication are key to activating change. We need to find ways to engage those who are disengaged. Inclusion is a privilege that has great value. Some strategies to consider include changing the timing and location of meetings so that more of the people affected by the decisions being made can participate.

We also need to motivate those who are comfortable and feel no need for change to become more open to empowering others for the good of the larger community. People show up and take actions when something personally affects them. Reframing the message, perhaps by providing information about how improving conditions for others will positively affect them personally, is one strategy that may motivate them.

Become aware of our own implicit biases and create awareness of these issues in others. Encourage dialogue about these issues within family and community groups.

Governmental organizations can implement better communication processes. Some communities have policy workers set up informal events such as "Speak with a Planner" or local official to have community events where they just update in informal settings such as bars, once the COVID-19 threat is diminished.

Organizations should be open to conducting self-assessments, to identify their own implicit biases and to improve their efforts to become more inclusive.

We should resist the “us vs. them” paradigm and build community through listening and learning. Our objective should be to listen and learn, not to tolerate but to understand, to accept and value one another’s differences.

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Sun Health Virtual Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Continue to tutor neighborhood K-12 children who need a personal connection to reach their educational goals.
- Continue to reach out in listening, mentoring and educating with respect to friends and neighbors!
- Bring listening and learning to the West Valley. Grow multiculturally rich programming in the West Valley. Run for office. Seek ways to promote positive peace.
- Reach out to the City of Phoenix vs. Neighborhood Board in dealing with the issues regarding the problems we are experiencing with our current HOA board.