



Partners for Impact, LLC

Beth Bordeaux, MSW
Co-Owner/Senior Advisor

Stan Holt, PhD
Co-Owner/Senior Advisor

Charlene Reiss, PhD
Consultant

Evaluating the Community Facilitator Pilot Project at the North Street Neighborhood

A Preliminary Report for HOPE NC
March 24, 2024

INTRODUCTION

In September 2023, HOPE NC received a grant to pilot a Community Facilitator program in the North Street Neighborhood. HOPE NC contracted Partners for Impact to provide a developmental evaluation of this pilot project. This report provides a summary of data collected in January through March 2024 as the Community Facilitator assumed his new role.

HOPE NC

[HOPE NC](#) was founded in 2018 by parents of adult children with autism and personal experience navigating the many challenges faced by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). The organization's mission is to create inclusive communities where people of all abilities and ages experience a sense of belonging. HOPE NC's longer-term goals include building a new housing community with units reserved for people with I/DD and other units occupied by older adults and families. HOPE NC will coordinate partnerships with other organizations and service providers to promote support, engagement, and connection among residents. As HOPE NC develops this plan, they are exploring aspects of their inclusive community model. Partnering with the North Street Neighborhood provides an opportunity to pilot a Community Facilitator program and learn in real-time how best to utilize this resource in a community setting.

North Street Neighborhood

The [North Street Neighborhood](#) is an intentional community of residents with and without disabilities close to downtown Durham. The first family moved into this block of refurbished homes in 2012; the last home was completed in 2023. The neighborhood is a mix of owner-occupied and rental units, housing individuals and families in a variety of living arrangements. [Reality Ministries](#), a faith-based nonprofit creating inclusive and supportive spaces for people with and without developmental disabilities, owns several buildings in the

North Street neighborhood. Students from the Divinity School at Duke University live with people with I/DD in the Friendship House, while families and other individuals with and without I/DD live together in the Corner House and the Isaac House. Reality Ministries and the homes they own and operate in the neighborhood are clearly an integral component of the North Street Neighborhood, even as the relationship between Reality Ministries and North Street Neighborhood lacks a single definition among residents. The North Street Neighborhood comprises 14 privately-owned residential buildings and four properties owned by Reality Ministries.

The North Street Neighborhood is a location, a community, and a concept. Those associated with the neighborhood define its boundaries in a variety of ways. For that reason, this evaluation only loosely bounds the population being served. Generally, the North Street Neighborhood includes approximately 120 people, 25 of whom are individuals living with I/DD.

EVALUATING THE COMMUNITY FACILITATOR PILOT PROGRAM

Working closely with Laura Wells, HOPE NC's Executive Director and Collin Flake, the Community Facilitator, Partners for Impact is conducting a developmental evaluation of this pilot program. In a developmental evaluation, the evaluator works with staff to continuously collect, consider, and use information to shape and improve a project as it unfolds, rather than waiting until its completion to measure its success and make changes.¹ The evaluation of this pilot has two main goals: to continually improve the experience for the residents of the North Street Neighborhood as the Community Facilitator program is piloted in their community; and to gather information that HOPE NC can use to develop and fund similar programs in other settings. Using both quantitative and qualitative data creates a more complete and nuanced assessment of not just what the Community Facilitator is accomplishing but also the impact of the methods and approach on achieving the intended outcomes.

HOPE NC consulted with the North Street Residents Support Network to develop the job description for the Community Facilitator position. Using this and additional input from HOPE NC, Partners for Impact created a logic model for the pilot program (See Appendix 1). The job description identifies three overarching areas of responsibility for the Community Facilitator: Build Community and Foster Inclusion; Connect with Surrounding Community; and Provide Support. The long-term goal for the pilot program is for North Street community members to have an increased sense of belonging and self-determination. Researcher Erik Carter defines self-determination as "having the skills, knowledge, drive, and support to direct one's own life in personally valued ways."² The logic model includes medium and short-term goals designed to support this long-term goal. The activities identified in the logic model come from the job description. Findings from this developmental evaluation may shift the activities to better meet the needs of the community.

¹FSG: The Case for Developmental Evaluation

² <https://www.erikwcarter.com/selfdetermination-1>

From January through March 2024, initial baseline data about the experiences of individuals in the North Street community were collected through interviews and an anonymous survey. Partners for Impact's evaluator, Charlene Reiss, accompanied the Community Facilitator in a series of conversations with neighborhood residents with and without I/DD and parents of residents with I/DD. Collin also shared common themes that emerged from one-on-one conversations he had with additional North Street neighbors. Residents were also asked to complete a survey either electronically or on paper. Members of the Residents Support Network provided outreach and assistance to ensure that neighbors were aware of and able to participate in the survey, if they chose to do so.

The data for this initial report were gathered one to two months after the Community Facilitator officially assumed his paid role in the North Street Neighborhood. Several regularly-scheduled weekly and monthly events occurred during this time. The participation at these events generally fluctuates and may have increased due to the implementation of this new pilot. Because this evaluation seeks to capture a longer-term perspective on the community and the impact on attitudes, not just activities, any change not captured by the delayed data collection is likely to be of minimal consequence for the overall findings.

BASELINE DATA FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

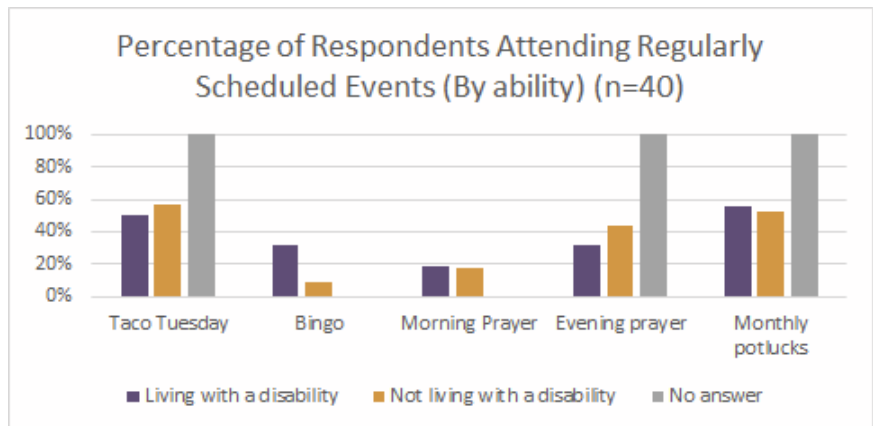
On February 20, the Community Facilitator distributed an anonymous survey using a Google form and paper copies delivered to each home. The survey included approximately 15 questions with some follow-up questions for more detailed answers. It remained open until March 5. At the same time, the Community Facilitator shared a "Gifts and Needs Assessment" in a separate file. This questionnaire is intended to gather additional information about support that residents would like to receive or are able to provide to community members. The Gifts and Needs Assessment is not anonymous and remains available for residents to complete.

The Community Facilitator survey had a total of 40 respondents, of which 16 identified as living with a disability, 23 indicated they do not have a disability, and 1 respondent chose not to answer that question. More than half of the respondents (n=21) are between 18-35 years of age. The other half are almost evenly split between 36-54 years of age (n=10) and 55 or older (n=9). Of the individuals with a disability, 11 are between 18-35 years old.

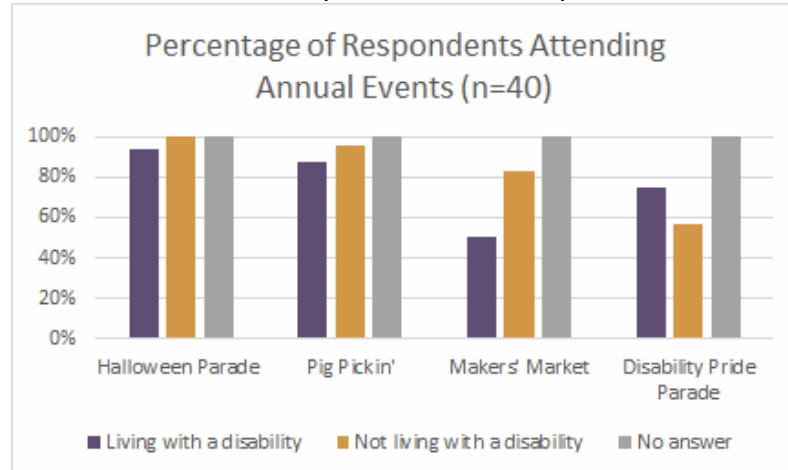
Because of the small sample size and composition of the community, sharing results by both ability and age would result in a category with only one respondent. Therefore, to protect that individual's identity, the survey results are discussed by age and ability separately. Also, because the number of respondents with and without a disability is not equal, most charts display percentages of each group of respondents rather than raw numbers.

Attendance at events

To assess current levels of participation in the community, respondents were asked to indicate how often they attended neighborhood events. Some events occur on a regular schedule, either daily, weekly, or monthly. Several events are held annually. Morning Prayer meets on Mondays and Wednesdays in the homes of residents; Reality Ministries' Corner House hosts Evening Prayer Sunday through Thursday each week. Bingo occurs in the Community Room on Tuesdays in the afternoon, and is the only regular event with

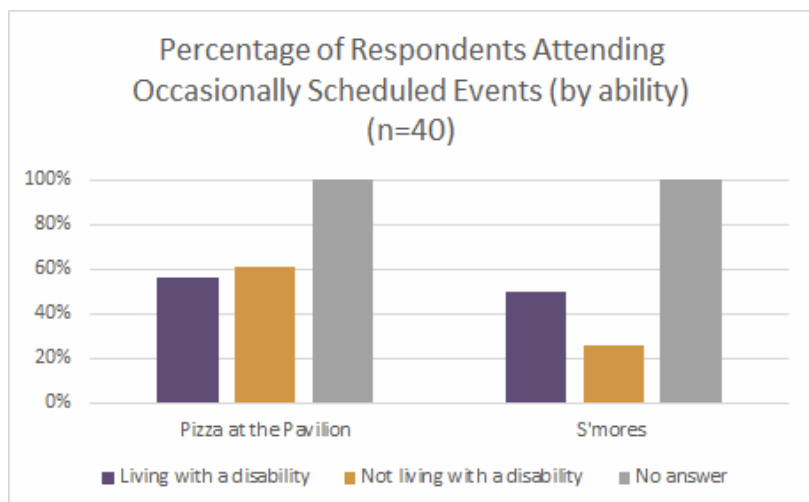


more attendance by individuals living with a disability than those without. Of the regularly scheduled events, monthly potlucks in the North Street Community Room and Taco Tuesday have the most regular attendance. These two events occur in the evening and involve food.



Pickin', a Halloween Parade, a Makers' Market, and a Disability Pride Parade. All of these events are well-attended, according to the survey results. All respondents indicated they participate in at least three regularly scheduled annual events.

Other events in the neighborhood are scheduled more sporadically throughout the year. These include Pizza at the Pavilion and S'mores with the Jollys. Many people indicated their attendance at



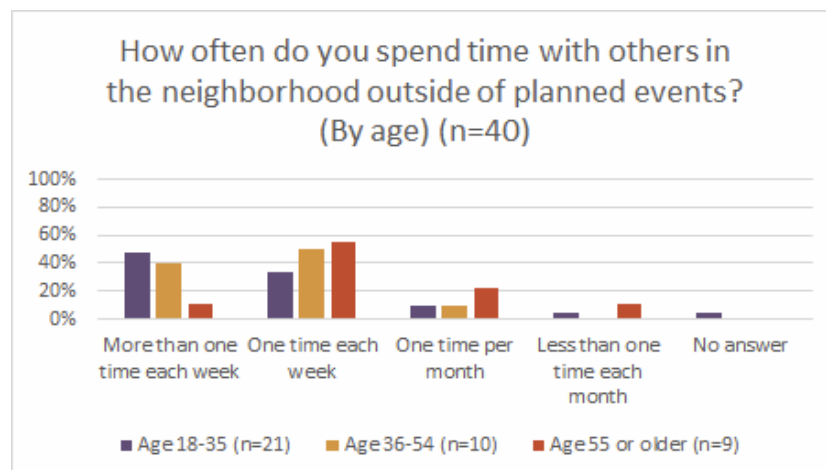
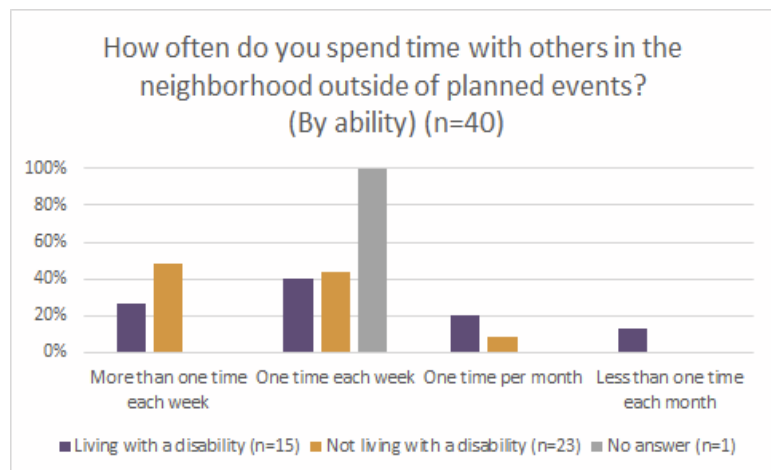
these events, although due to their scheduling, occasional attendance may be interpreted by respondents as more frequent participation than the regularly scheduled events.

Feeling Welcome at Events

Thirty-seven respondents indicated that they feel welcome at all events in the neighborhood. Reasons given primarily reflected being invited, known, and loved. Many respondents said they feel welcome because they have many friends at the events, that people remember them, and others are happy to see them. Being greeted and engaged in conversations are also important. Of the three respondents who said they do not feel welcome at all events, two identify as living with a disability; neither provided a further response. The third person who indicated they do not feel welcome wrote that people have assumptions and do not always meet others where they are at. This newer resident felt that the longer-term residents can create a “high barrier of entry.”

Time with Others Outside of Planned Events

The survey asked residents how often they spend time with North Street neighbors outside of scheduled events. Of all respondents, 43% indicated they spend time with neighbors one time each week, with only a small difference between those living with a disability (40%) and those without (43.5%). Broken down by age, 33.3% of 18-35-year old respondents, 50% of 36-54-year old respondents, and 55.6% of



respondents over age 55 said they spend time with neighbors one time per week. An additional 38% of all respondents said they spend time with neighbors more than once per week, with a larger gap between those with a disability (26.7%) and those without (47.8%). A higher percentage of the youngest group of respondents (47.6%) was more likely to spend time

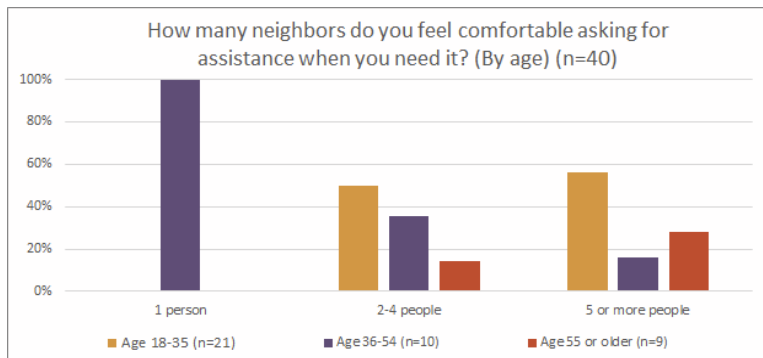
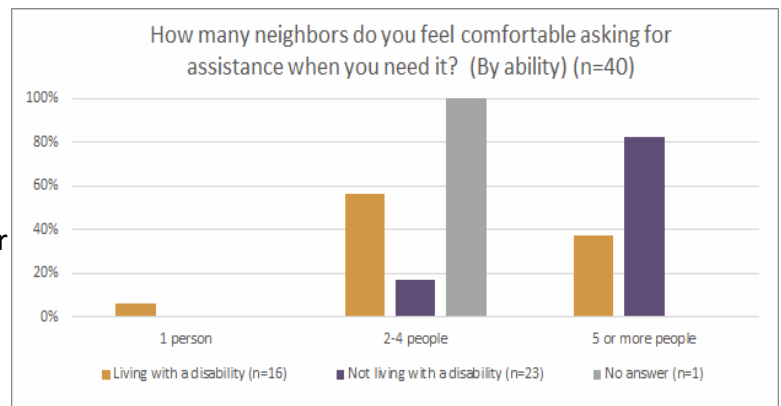
with neighbors more than once per week than those 36-54 (40.0%) or older than 55 (11.1%). Of

the 16 respondents with a disability, two indicated that they spend time with neighbors less often than once each month. None of the residents without a disability chose this answer. One respondent in the youngest bracket and one in the oldest bracket indicated they spend time less than once per month with neighbors.

When considering these responses, it is important to note that residents of North Street live alone, with family members, or with housemates who are not their family members. This question did not specify whether time with others in the neighborhood included people in the same household.

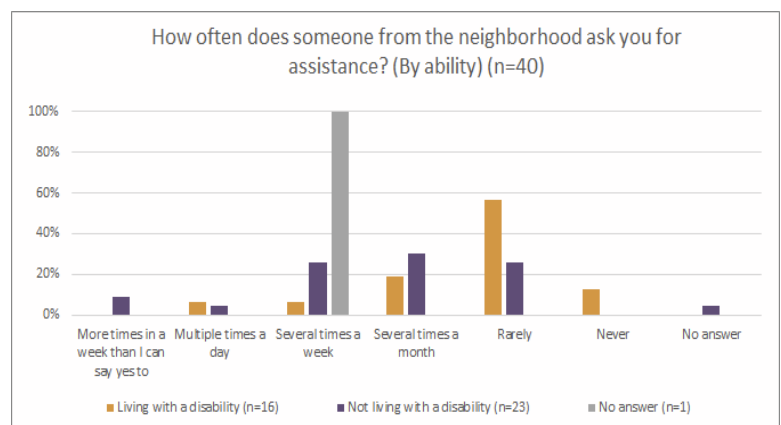
Asking for Assistance

The Community Facilitator aims to help residents of the North Street Neighborhood increase their natural support circles. This includes strengthening the network of neighbors that can provide assistance to each other when needed. This work is two-fold. First, it builds support for individuals when they need assistance. Second, it increases an individual's sense of belonging when they are asked to assist others in their community.

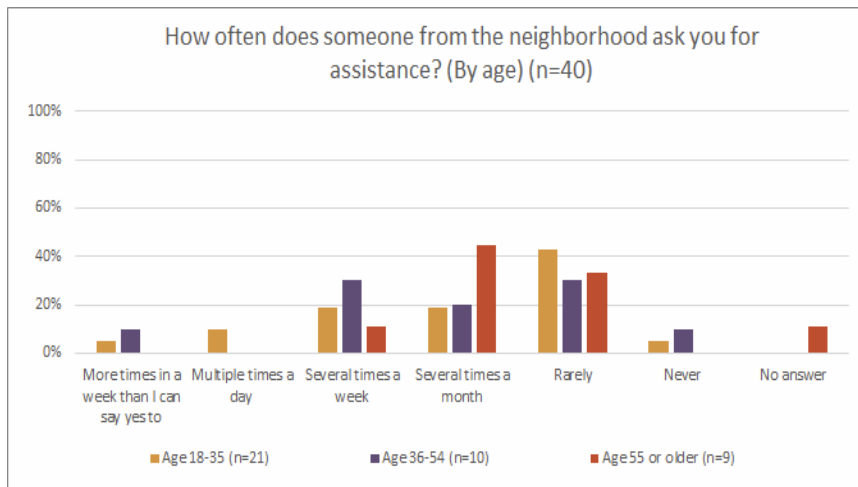


Several survey questions assessed the current network of support among North Street Residents. The majority of respondents (62.5%) indicated they have five or more neighbors they feel comfortable asking for assistance. Of the respondents living with a disability, only 37.5% said they had five or

more neighbors they felt comfortable asking for help, while 82.5% of those without a disability indicated five or more. By age, the younger group of residents (56.0%) were more likely to have five or more neighbors to ask for help than the 36-54 age group (16.0%) or those over 55 (28%). Only one person completing the survey felt they had one neighbor they could ask for assistance. Of all respondents, 35.0% indicated



they felt comfortable asking 2-4 neighbors for assistance when needed.

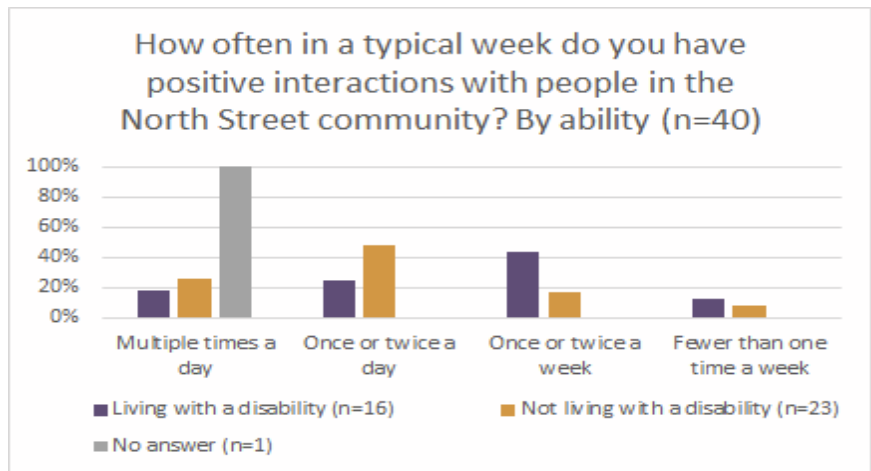


When asked how often someone from the neighborhood asks them for assistance, the largest percentage of respondents (37.5%) answered “rarely,” followed by several times a month (25.0%). Of people living with a disability, 68.8% said they are rarely or never asked to assist a neighbor. Of all 40 respondents, 5% indicated they are asked to

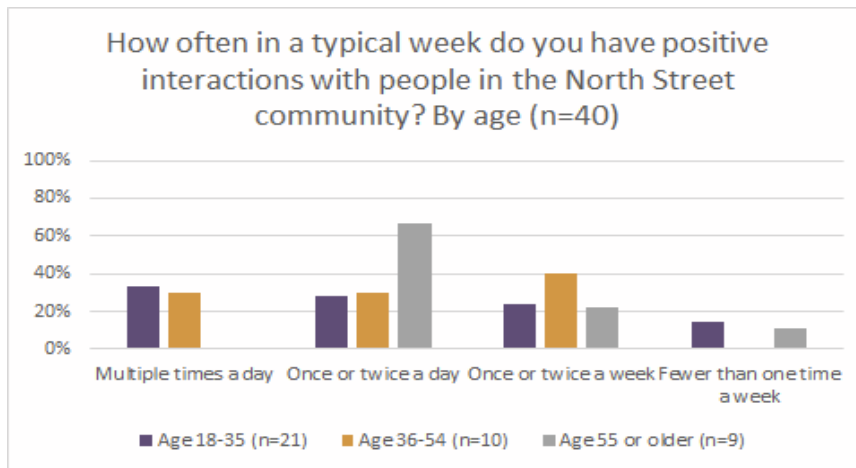
assist more times in a week than they can say yes. These are only respondents without a disability. Of younger respondents (18-35), 47.6% said they were rarely or never asked for assistance. Those over 55 were asked for help several times a month (44.4%) or rarely (33.3%). One person chose not to answer this question.

Positive and Negative Interactions with North Street Neighbors

The survey asked respondents to estimate how often in a typical week they had positive interactions with their North Street neighbors. Of all answers, the majority of respondents (37.5%) said once or twice a day, while 27.5% indicated once or twice per week. Residents living with a disability answered once or twice a week most often (43.8%) and fewer than one time a week least often (12.5%). Of those without a disability, most were more likely to have positive interactions once or twice a day (47.8%) or multiple times a day (26.1%).



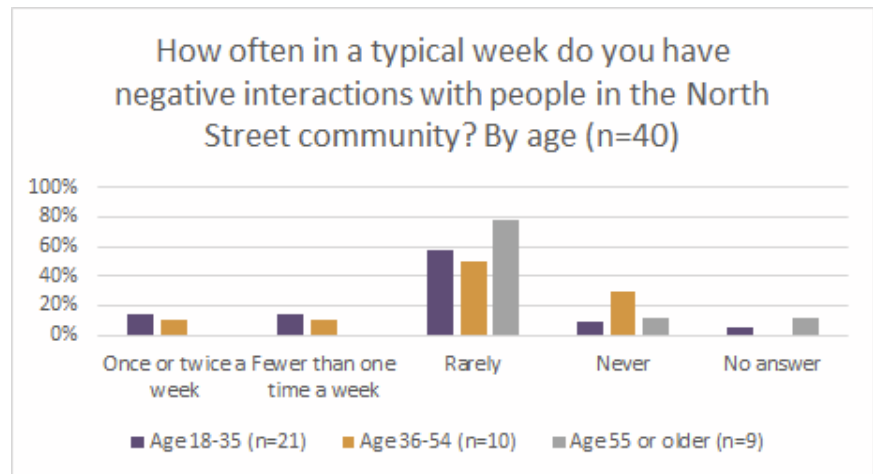
By age, a small percentage (14.3%) of the younger age group (18-35) have positive interactions fewer than one time per week; the remaining are fairly evenly distributed among the other options, with more individuals in this group having multiple positive interactions a day (33.3%) than once or twice a day (28.6%) or once or twice a week (23.8%). Two-thirds of respondents over 55 (66.7%) said they have positive interaction once or twice a day; 11.1% have positive



interactions fewer than one time per week. No one in the 36-54 age group indicated they had positive interactions less often than once or twice per week.

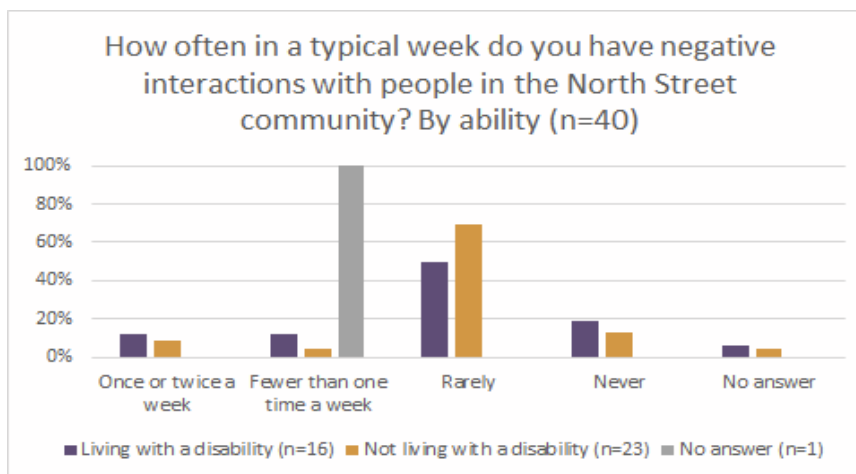
When asked about negative interactions with people in the North Street community, three-quarters of all respondents chose rarely (60%) or never (15%). The

distribution of responses for those living with and without a disability was similar. Of those individuals with a disability, the highest percentage (50.0%) said they rarely have negative interactions and 18.8% indicated they never have them. Of those without a disability, 69.6% answered rarely while 13.0% answered never. The responses by age reflected the same distribution; 77.8% of respondents over 55 rarely have negative interactions



with neighbors and 11.1% indicated they never have negative interactions. The remaining 11.1% in this category chose not to answer the question. In the younger groups, more people

indicated rarely - 57.1% of 18-35-year olds and 50% of 36-54-year olds - than any of the other choices.



EMERGING THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS AND SURVEY RESPONSES

In January and February, Collin and Charlene met with 19 members of the North Street community, including seven people living with a disability. Nine of those interviewed are parents of North Street residents; some of these parents live in the neighborhood and others live nearby. In some interviews, the adult children were present and spoke for themselves. Some parents participated without their children. Parents were asked about both their own lives as part of the neighborhood and about their perception of their children's experiences. Three residents of the neighborhood who do not have a disability were also interviewed. Some of those interviewed are homeowners in the North Street neighborhood; others are renting from homeowners or living in Reality Ministries homes. A qualitative analysis identified common themes from the interviews. Many of these matched themes from Collin's conversations with an additional 10 individuals and with three people whom he and Charlene also interviewed together.

"Number 1, 2, and 3 good things about North Street are the people"

The theme recurring most often centered around the good people who comprise the North Street Neighborhood. Almost every person spoke of the welcoming community, about caring neighbors, and of the unique environment that North Street offers. Multiple people spoke of the many ways that individuals contribute to the vibrancy of the community, from donating space for events to organizing activities to stepping up to assist when a request for help appears on the neighborhood list-serve. The deep commitment to the neighborhood and its continuation as a shared endeavor is very clear. As one parent said, "we are bringing the best that we can bring to bear to improve our community." Another said, "It is a hopeful place; it's an innovative, beautiful way for living in community."

A second important theme focused on the opportunities for independence and companionship for people with disabilities afforded by the North Street Neighborhood. Being able to live independently and have their own space is an important aspect of living at North Street for many of the residents with I/DD. One resident remarked, "A lot of people with disabilities are told they can't live independently – that's not true; I feel that I can live independently." At the same time, several expressed wanting more time with others and more opportunities for social interaction. Those interviewed did not express strong preferences for more structured events, but instead additional ways to reduce the time they spend alone or only with family members.

While almost all respondents to the survey and those interviewed indicated they do participate in at least some of the regular neighborhood events, several expressed a preference for meeting people one-on-one or in smaller groups. Social anxiety, discomfort attending events alone, difficulty navigating large groups, and a lingering post-pandemic fear of spending time indoors with a lot of people arose in the interviews. According to one interviewee, "Crowds are complicated."

In interviews and in responses to open-ended survey questions, the importance of being invited to activities and events was mentioned frequently. Parents felt that their family members may be more willing to engage if they were personally invited and accompanied by a neighbor to activities. Multiple survey respondents mentioned feeling welcome at events when they receive a personal invitation; others suggested reaching out to individuals separately in addition to general community-wide emails.

While the survey and most interviews indicate that North Street residents generally feel very welcome in the neighborhood, some interviewees shared that they do not feel comfortable at all events. Members of the community who are not Christians are not comfortable attending the Christian-focused events that occur in the neighborhood or that many residents participate in at Reality Ministries. One person commented, “I would like prayer day to be not so Christian but all religions, not centered on one book; I would like more openness to people of non-faith as well as other religions; more openness to other faiths – an intertwining welcoming of faiths.”

Traveling in and around the Neighborhood

Connections with others also emerged when interviewees spoke of traveling to and from events in the neighborhood and beyond. Accessing transportation was not as significant a concern as that of traveling alone. Many residents are able to travel by walking, taking public transportation through ACCESS, using Uber or Lyft, or asking someone to drive them. A repeated theme, however, was about individuals traveling alone. The greatest concern was expressed for the safety of individuals walking alone after dark, but the surrounding construction that has brought more non-residents into the neighborhood has also heightened unease during daylight hours. Parents worry that their children with disabilities, who are often very trusting and have difficulty maintaining appropriate boundaries, may be taken advantage of by ill-intentioned strangers as the areas adjacent to the North Street Neighborhood become more populous.

Looking to the Future

The most significant stressor for the parents interviewed is the future well-being of their children with disabilities. Their concern about what will happen when they are no longer present or able to care for their children is ever-present. Many parents spoke about this time as a period of discernment and conversation to determine whether and how the North Street Neighborhood can adapt to the changing needs of its community. While the connections between many residents is strong, North Street’s current configuration is a group of neighbors with a common vision. The minimal formalized structures create challenges for supporting individuals who have limited capacity to advocate for themselves and their needs in the long-term. These conversations began before the North Street Neighborhood formed, are ongoing, and are echoed by other residents of the community concerned for their neighbors. Several people remarked that the Reality Ministries approach of enabling individuals with disabilities to live in homes with people without disabilities seems to be working well. Families continue to learn from other intentional communities, share information, and assess how best to plan for their children’s future.

DEVELOPING THE COMMUNITY FACILITATOR ROLE

The interviews, survey, and conversations with North Street community members provided specific ideas and suggestions for the role of the Community Facilitator.

Strengthening Support Networks

While all respondents and interviewees indicated they feel comfortable asking for help from at least one neighbor, several people requested that the Community Facilitator take additional steps in this area. In particular, parents would like their children to have a clearly-defined list of neighbors to call who could respond to specific needs. They do not want to overburden any one neighbor while also hoping to build their children's capacity to access assistance from a wider network. Building a stronger network that facilitates asking for and providing assistance can be useful for all residents to meet needs large and small. Strengthening the internal neighborhood network can complement the work of identifying residents' natural support circles listed in the original logic model.

Creating a culture of mutual aid can also increase the opportunities for residents living with disabilities to provide assistance to their neighbors. In multiple interviews, individuals spoke of doing something meaningful and helping others as a component of their own or their children's flourishing and sense of belonging. Several parents and others without IDD suggested assigning specific tasks as part of planning neighborhood gatherings, particularly for residents with disabilities. Neighbors may feel more comfortable attending events when they know in advance how they will be involved and participate. One parent described this as "security – when you go to something, you know what you'll be doing."

Facilitating Connections

When asked whether they would like to do more activities with others in the neighborhood, nearly 70% of survey respondents living with a disability said yes. Only 44% of those without a disability answered in the affirmative to that question. Interviews and survey responses included a variety of suggested activities. Movie nights, shared meals, game/card nights, dancing, shared sitting activities such as crafting or art, and outdoor activities were mentioned multiple times. Facilitating small-group gatherings and opportunities to talk and get to know neighbors outside of large events can be a facet of the Community Facilitator's work of fostering connections between community members and ongoing positive interactions among neighbors.

Strengthening Community-Living Skills

Activities in the initial Community Facilitator logic model included educating adults with disabilities, their families, and caregivers on community safety and well-being. Additional areas for skill-building around living in a community with others emerged from the data. One area concerns the issue of boundaries - setting boundaries, holding boundaries, respecting boundaries. This applies to people with and without disabilities and is intertwined with building the network of support within the community. Helping people ask for assistance can necessitate helping people learn when to say yes and how to say no. Additional themes emerging from the

data include building skills for conflict resolution, self-advocacy, and personal and community safety.

Welcoming New Residents

In several different ways, people interviewed touched on concerns around the shifting environment in and around their community and what that means for maintaining the intention and culture of the North Street Neighborhood. Some long-time residents expressed a feeling of nostalgia for the early days of the neighborhood, sharing a sense that the community had more cohesion and shared purpose. Durham and the area surrounding North Street was also very different when the first residents moved in, and has since become a much busier area of the city. With the additional changes brought about by the COVID pandemic, a common theme reflected a feeling of major transition from North Street Neighborhood then to North Street Neighborhood now.

While Reality Ministries has a formal process for accepting new residents into the homes they own in the neighborhood, other new residents do not receive a detailed orientation to the community. One person interviewed commented that expectations of new residents can be very different depending on the homeowner who has welcomed them into the neighborhood and the different ways they may convey the culture of North Street. Creating a more formal “Welcome Wagon” package that reflects a collective voice and includes information about expectations associated with living in community with people with all abilities was suggested. This orientation may share information about setting and maintaining boundaries, as mentioned above, and also increase understanding of when it is necessary to do something *for* a person and when it is more appropriate to act *with* a person. While creating this orientation package is not within the Community Facilitator’s scope of work, helping new community members feel welcome may include helping the Residents’ Council, Resident Support Network, and homeowners to develop a shared approach and materials.

Sustainable Change

Sustainable improvement requires structures and systems that continue to function through times of change and turnover. While interacting with individuals in the neighborhood builds relationships and strengthens the connectivity, lasting change needs structures that do not depend on the efforts of specific people to maintain it. At the more visible level, this may look like implementing regular routines or standard processes, e.g. a process to welcome new residents; a shared platform to facilitate a “buddy” system for walking to events; or an ongoing committee to continue skills- development efforts. At a deeper and more long-term level, sustainable change will require shifting the culture of the North Street Neighborhood toward meeting the needs of the evolving community.

As nearly every person interviewed and surveyed reflected, the North Street Neighborhood is living into its vision of “an intentional community of people with and without disabilities who

flourish in a shared life of welcome, belonging, and mutuality with Jesus at the center.”³ While that vision continues, over time the composition of the community has changed and the needs of its residents have evolved. In interviews, individuals spoke of looking for more from the community as they and their loved ones age. A desire for multi-layered social supports emerged from the data. The most basic social connections create a network of people who can provide assistance when asked. A more advanced level of connection promotes checking in regularly with neighbors to make sure they have what they need for their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The highest layers promote strong relationships that include regular invitations to spend time together and provide a mutually-beneficial sense of belonging. While building community and fostering inclusion, connecting with the surrounding community, and providing support, the Community Facilitator can work with North Street residents and its supporters to construct a sustainable structure on which these layers of connection can grow and flourish.

CONCLUSION

This report seeks to provide a snapshot of the North Street Neighborhood’s social network in early 2024, as the Community Facilitator pilot project commences. These initial data suggest that a high level of neighborhood cohesion already exists. Change over the year in these elements may be best reflected in the qualitative data in the next stages of data collection. This developmental evaluation is also designed not just to capture change but also to identify the facilitators and barriers for the best implementation of the program. The learnings will reflect the what and how of the Community Facilitator’s work, providing input for North Street and HOPE NC’s future efforts to facilitate a sense of belonging in intentional communities.

Next steps in the evaluation process will be to identify, survey, and interview North Street community members who did not participate in this first round of data collection. The sample may include residents who are less actively engaged in the shared social life of the community. This phase will endeavor to create a more detailed and robust description of the social cohesion and culture of inclusion in the neighborhood. Questions will be similar to the first survey and set of interviews, with additional probing of the themes that emerged from that data. A third round of interviews and another survey will be conducted at the end of 2024.

³ <http://northstreetneighborhood.weebly.com/about.html>