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Day 3 - 2022 AmeriCorps Research Grantee Dialogue

HUSSEY-SLONIKER: Welcome to the AmeriCorps Research and Evaluation Dialogue 2022. My name is Katy Hussey-Sloniker and I'm the Learning Officer for the Office of Research and Evaluation. Before we begin our final Day 3 of the Convening, we'd like to cover a few housekeeping items. First, thank you all for your patience as we get started with Zoom events. If you have any questions or experience technical difficulties, please let us know using the chat box feature.

This session will be recorded and posted on the AmeriCorps Impact Webinar page within two weeks of the close of the session. Each session will also be available on the AmeriCorps YouTube channel under the Research and Evaluation playlist. There is no dial-in phone line for our Zoom event today. All audio is broadcast over the internet using your computer speakers. All participants have been muted to avoid background noise and to allow for greater engagement.

You will be in listen only mode throughout the session. You can ask questions at any time during the

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presentation through the chat box. Select Everyone when submitting your questions. A member of our ORE team will be compiling the questions and reading them through the Q&A portion of the session. Finally, closed captioning is available. To activate captions please select the Live Transcript icon on the Zoom menu and select Show Subtitles.

That takes care of our housekeeping items and now for today's agenda. Today's Dialogue session is focused on AmeriCorps foundational research on African American Youth and Civic Engagement. We'll hear a brief welcome from Dr. Mary Hyde, Director of the Office of Research and Evaluation. We'll watch a three-minute video discussing how AmeriCorps translates research into action, followed by introductions, and later facilitated discussions of the presentations by Dr. Andrea Robles and Shane Dermanjian. And finally, reflections from our senior leaders on applying and translating this research into practice.

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As a reminder, this is our final day of speakers presenting their research to inform actionable and meaningful change through national service. Our office would like to encourage each participant in our Dialogue to discover the research and resources available by both the research grantees and AmeriCorps. We'll place links in the chat box for you to page mark and look at and explore after the conclusion of today's session.

And now our Research Dialogue: Embracing the Diversity of Civic Engagement will start. Here to welcome us is Dr. Mary Hyde, Director of the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation.

DR. HYDE: Thank you, Katy, and welcome everyone. Good afternoon or morning, depending on what time zone you're sitting in at the moment. I really appreciate the fact that you're taking a little bit of time out of your day to hear from a fabulous constellation of presenters we have on tap for today. You're going to hear a lot about some research that I think is more timely than ever perhaps in this moment of our

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country. And we are very grateful that they have spent so much time carefully producing this research, but more importantly, taking the time today to share it with all of you.

As Katy mentioned, we are going to kick off today's dialogue with a brief video that describes how our agency, AmeriCorps integrates evidence and data into its daily operation. It's a little opportunity to prime your minds, if you will, to sort of get into the mindset of today's conversation. I also want to thank briefly our colleagues at AmeriCorps who are going to be sharing their reflections on what they hear today about the research findings. And of course I am very grateful for our ORE team members who will be facilitating us through today's dialogue as well as our fabulous tech team, ICF.

So, with that, we're going to dive right into the video and then into discussion. And I'll be back to offer a few final remarks later in the day. Thank you.

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[Video Plays]

DR. HUDSON-FLEGE: My biggest takeaway is just how serious that AmeriCorps is about research and evaluation, how they want to know not only how their programs are working, but how volunteerism and civic engagement in general is working across the country and making sure that they're on the frontline of furthering these goals.

DR. ZIMMERMAN: No matter what part of the research spectrum you're on, you're always building opportunities to build evidence, to gain greater understanding. And when you do participatory research you're not only building knowledge and understanding, but you're creating connections with folks in the community who can not only benefit from that research, but as they become part of research they become empowered to address issues in their community as well.

BULMAN: Without the research that we do in volunteerism, we aren't going to be equipped to

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leverage the workforce of volunteers. So we need to understand the trends in volunteerism, we need to understand the equity issues, we need to understand barriers to being engaged.

DR. NUÑEZ-ALVAREZ: One of the things that makes research grants so critical in advancing our understanding of civic engagement, again, is that it is important to document what is actually happening on the ground.

DR. FRAZIER: I think we're in a time where evidence matters and we have limited funding and you have to prioritize, you got to think about like, what works and put your money towards that. And I think evaluation is the way that we figure out what works.

DR. PAXTON: We all care about outcomes. We care about outcomes for our communities, we care about outcomes for the people that we work with in our nonprofits or in our government programs, whatever it is.

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DR. HUDSON-FLEGE: AmeriCorps really cares about evaluations and rigorous external evaluations and research on their programs. They're not just going to rest on their laurels of saying, you know, we serve our members and we think the program's working. They're inviting scholars in to do rigorous research to identify what is working, but also identify maybe what's not working or where's there room for improvement.

DR. INTRATOR: There's an intellectual renewal that goes on, that you go back jazzed up with new ideas, but at the same time there's sort of, you know, kind of a renewal of conviction. You go back and you're like, wow, people are doing tremendous work. I want to take that idea and see how that works in our project.

DR. ROBLES: Hello, everyone. Thank you so much for attending today. And just as you saw in this video, these are our research grantees who are doing an array of different projects. And so, again, today we're focusing on the specific topic of youth of color and research around that, and how do we think

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about involving the civic engagement issues and how do we bring people together? And so our first speaker is Laura Wray-Lake, who is an Associate Professor of Social Welfare in the Luskin School of Public Affairs at UCLA. Her research centers on the development of youth civic engagement. And AmeriCorps funding has enabled her research to conduct innovative and timely research on civic engagement among urban youth of color and Black youth specifically, that centers youth voices and perspectives and advances academic and public knowledge of youth civic engagement. So I will pass it to Laura, thank you.

DR. WRAY-LAKE: Thank you so much. I'm very happy to be here and have the opportunity to present this work. And of course I wanted to say how much I appreciate the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation both for funding this work and importantly, for prioritizing the experiences and the voices of Black youth through this research and holding this session. You can go to the next slide, please.

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Okay. So actually, you can go to the next one as well. So our project is focused on Black youth who are - There we go, thank you. Our project is focused on Black youth who are highly civically engaged and it's important for us to understand their journeys into civic engagement. So our project was really focused on what kinds of activities Black youth are engaged in, how and why they become engaged, and what helps them sustain their engagement.

So as a White woman studying Black youth, it's very important for me to not do this work alone and so I do this work in collaboration with a multiracial team which is inclusive of multiple Black scholars who have lived experiences and scholarly expertise to bring to this project. This is our team. So I do this with 11 other people which includes scholars, PhD students, masters students, as well as undergraduate students. Next slide, please.

We're very excited to share briefly that we are writing up our findings from our project as a book and it's going to be entitled *Young Black*

Changemakers and the Road to Racial Justice. We're very excited about this. It's scheduled to come out in 2023 with Cambridge University Press. So please stay tuned. We're working to gear this book toward a broad audience and really focus on the practical implications of the work. Next slide.

Today I'd like to share some findings that appear in one chapter of the book, in particular, focused on the role of community-based organizations in sustaining young Black changemaking. Now when we say young Black changemaking and changemaking in general, we're referring to the many different ways that Black youth can be civically engaged in their communities and in the larger society to create a better world. This takes many different forms and that's part of what we wanted to understand. We also wanted to understand Black youth's experiences in organizations that help them grow and sustain their civic engagement efforts and that has implications for best practices in these organizations for supporting Black youth. So I'll focus on that as well. Next slide, please.

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Just to tell you a bit about our study, our study consisted of qualitative interviews with 43 Black young people in Los Angeles who identified as highly civically engaged. So they were between the ages of 13 to 18 years old and they came from all over Los Angeles, they came from 13 different organizations, and 37 different high schools. Data were collected from February to August of 2020. And the interviews included a lot of different questions about what they were engaged in terms of their civic actions, how they became engaged, how they stayed engaged, and other topics like their identity and their experiences of summer 2020, which unexpectedly became some themes in the data because they were living through the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd and others at the hands of police, and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement.

So let me go into the findings. Next slide, please. And we had three main themes that I want to talk about and these three main themes really hit on what the role of the organizations and what happens in

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organizations that help youth sustain their civic engagement. So one is that they were gaining expertise as changemakers. So they were gaining voice and skills and larger systems perspectives through their work with organizations. A second theme was that they were really sustained by supportive adults and connections with others in the community within the organization in the organizational space. And this was especially true when blackness was celebrated and I'll explain each of these a bit more in a moment. And then the third theme was seeing the impact of their actions. So when Black youth could see the tangible impacts of their changemaking that really built their meaning and agency which helped them continue the work that they were doing. Next slide, please.

So I want to start with the theme of gaining practice and gaining this expertise in using voice and gaining civic skills. Young people developed leadership and organizational skills through their works with organizations, and like I mentioned, they were able to start thinking about larger systems and structures

as they worked to try to make change in their communities. And I want to give an example from Camille, who was highly engaged in the service organization for Black youth and families, and she said, "It's like our job to organize it ourselves. So as I've gotten older in the organization, I've really gotten more of an appreciation for doing civic engagement and organizing it myself based on what I care about. Because when I'm younger, it's like, oh, let's make lunches for homeless people. But now that I'm older, it's a lot more in my hands. And I've take that into account more. I've taken that experience into a lot more areas of my life... I've learned to advocate not only for myself, but like, for people who don't have voices and stand up for everybody."

So this example really illustrates how organizations can provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for civic engagement by offering young people more chances to make decisions, to develop and show leadership, and to speak out about what really matters to them. Next slide, please.

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A second theme that became really important was finding supportive communities within organizations. And when young people were able to do this, it helped them sustain their civic engagement, and this support could come from peers or from adults. I want to give you an example of Cory who's involved in a socially justice focused organization that does education and participatory action research with young people of color. And Cory shares how adult leaders supported him when he was speaking his mind at a meeting.

He says, "It was like the gut feeling I got from being in there, because everybody there we just had a good energy and they really wanted to just help people. They really uplift you. It just felt like a family in those spaces. It felt more like I wanted to be there with those people. The adults, they would just be like, so cool. They would support you in any way. I was at this meeting last week, I talked, I gave an answer. And then the adults, they were just like clapping, they'll give you encouragement. They'll have so much positive energy that it's like, really good."

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So for Cory and other young people in our study, the organizational space can create a sense of community like a family where young people feel welcome and supported. And these organizations are especially welcome and safe spaces for Black youth when blackness is celebrated. So I want to give you an example of that next. Next slide, please.

This example comes from Quinn, who was engaged in a community organizing nonprofit in a majority Black community. And she shares, "I have people at my school and people at the organization, it's like, it's so you know, it's not a bad thing to be Black, it's beautiful to be Black. All these problems, these things happening right now. It's doesn't mean it's bad to be Black. And that's basically what I'm learning. That's what I'm getting from people."

So these kinds of welcoming spaces and messages that Black youth can receive, in the organizations that they spend time in, can show them that they're valued and offer them a sense of safety and belonging to

find connection, especially when young people are engaging in racial justice work, it can be very difficult and Black youth encounter quite a bit of racism and oppression, and we have lots examples of that in our study as well. But, having these positive safe spaces can be very sustaining during the challenging work that they're engaged in. Next slide, please.

The final theme involves young people having opportunities to see the impact of their civic actions through work with organizations. And I want to give an example of NA. By the way, young people choose their own pseudonyms for this project. But, NA is engaged in an organization that does volunteer work and she really sees the impact through helping others. She also highlights, again, this theme of community.

She says, "Oh, what keeps me going? Just like, knowing I'm supported because a lot of times, it wouldn't just be me there. It would be my classmates and a few teachers would also be there with me and

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other volunteers, so knowing that I was like, helping those people and then thanking me and me feeling good that I helped them, and then also other people being by my side through the whole thing and believing we could really these people and help them survive, so yeah, those two things really helped me to keep going and stay passionate about it.”

So, again, she’s picking up on the theme of community, of having shared space with others who are doing the work together, and supporting her, but also, she’s seeing the direct impact of the ways her helping makes other people’s lives better and that gives her the motivation and passion to continue what she’s doing. Next slide, please.

Other types of changemaking also allow young people young people to see their impact and I want to give you another example where Unique describes her experience with community organizing and she successfully organized a phone bank around an important issue in her community. And she shares, “I felt empowered. I felt like I could move the world.

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Because we actually got it to happen, that's the crazy part. Like it's one thing when you want something to happen, and then you're just speaking on it, but when you're really acting on it, that's something different. So when that happened, I was like, 'Oh, we can really do this, like we're really out there. So yeah, I felt empowered. Like, I felt unstoppable, I was like 'Okay, Unique, you better go girl.'"

So these opportunities to see the real tangible impacts of their civic engagement, whether it's small or large, whether it's helping or political action, it really helps young people build a sense of meaning and build a sense of agency or empowerment which sustains their future engagement. So next slide, please.

I just want to end on a few implications of this work for community-based organizations and think about what are some actions that organizations can really take to help support young Black changemaking. One is providing opportunities for young people to take

ownership of their activities. So allowing young people to have a voice to lead activities and develop other skills in the process like speaking out, advocating, organizing events. This really requires adults to step back sometimes from our own agendas and let young people take the wheel, and that seems really important and meaningful for young people as they're continuing their civic engagement.

A second takeaway is that supporting and mentoring youth through new challenges can really support their engagement. So young people need to be encouraged and uplifted during their civic work and it's these moments that are really memorable to them in making a lasting impact. So this just reiterates what we probably all know, that relationships do really matter and they're so key in civic engagement work. Celebrating Black culture and identity is especially important for Black youth to feel safe and to feel welcome in organizations. So organizations that work with Black young people should definitely be thinking about ways to do this.

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And finally, offering opportunities for young people to see the impact of their actions and then emphasizing, as adults, emphasizing the positive impact of young people's actions can be empowering and can help young people continue this work of making positive changes in their communities. So I will stop there. Thank you very much.

DR. ROBLES: Thank you, Laura. I think your work is always wonderful, but I think this is particularly important in AmeriCorps, right, because we fund organizations, we fund nonprofits to have members, right, and volunteers. And so I think these lessons learned could really play a role in what it means like, the meaning that you're mentioning and being able to really see what your impact of doing that work. So thank you very much. And I'll be curious to hear from our program leadership in a bit.

So our next presenter, or presenters, Maren King, who is an Associate Professor in Landscape Architecture at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry and Director of the ESF Center for Community Design

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Research. Through her work she builds university community partnerships such as with their collaboration with the Syracuse Peacemaking Center, of which you'll hear more about. Christina Limpert is an Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse as well. And Dr. Limpert's research focuses on community engagement with youth and gender dimensions of the environment and popular culture.

Their recent community design project, such as the one funded by the AmeriCorps research grant, has led to continued research on developing partnerships to utilize youth-oriented community-based research and placemaking to address the crime, and violence, and degraded physical conditions, or environmental violence that plague many low income neighborhoods. So for their work, they were just given an award, which they'll maybe talk about, but from the New York Upstate Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects. And so Maren and Christina, I will pass this on to you. Thank you.

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KING: Alright, thank you everyone. I can start my video, there we go. thank you. It's great to be here today. And I want to acknowledge that both Dr. Limpert and myself are here to present findings from our project that was funded as part of the AmeriCorps Community Conversations Grant which began in 2018. And to thank AmeriCorps for the opportunity to advance the research collaboration between our institution and local neighborhoods, and the important engagement with community members, and I would say the different types of support we've received over the last four years.

I also want to acknowledge that both of us are on the ancestral lands of the Onondaga Nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Now in terms of where we are in our project, we're finishing up our process and project evaluation. I guess you could start our presentation, if you could go to the next slide. Thank you.

So we're finishing up our process and project evaluation. We're writing about our findings and

outcomes, and we're staying in touch with the activities of our community partner, who is the Syracuse Peacemaking Project. And the Peacemaking Center is located in Syracuse, New York in the Westside neighborhood, in a low income community with a diversity of races and cultures. And the neighborhood has many assets including close family relationships, supportive institutions and services, but it's challenged by poverty, low education and employment rates, unhealthy living conditions, and high rates of crime and violence.

And those of you who are familiar with the 2018 grants, a major requirement of those grants was collaboration between an academic institution and a community partner, which had already started strategic goals at the time of the grant that the grant could help accomplish. And the other requirement was that the research process had to engage community members through a community-based participatory research process. Could you go to the next slide?

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And so in discussion with the Peacemaking Center about their activities and goals, we learned that they had been really successful in involving families with young children as well as older adults in their healthy living and community building activities, they were not as successful in engaging teenagers and young adults. And had established a goal of creating a youth impact team that could work alongside their existing adult community impact team. So together, as we were developing the proposal, we decided that our process would engage teenagers, ages 13 through 19, as core members of our research team, and we refer to them, of course, as a youth participatory action research team. Could you go to the next slide?

So I've learned a significant amount about collaborating with youth and Laura has talked about that as well, and the importance and value of the teens personally, as well as to their neighborhood and broader community when they're creatively engaged. In contrary to what we read and hear in local and national media, where youth are seen as

problems and troublemakers, we see them as assets and leaders.

And now what's shown in this image, at a community event in the summer of 2019, while they came to this event with serious intentions as researchers, they also tapped into their fun-loving and joyful side. And when given the opportunities and support, they have the capacity to make really significant positive contributions and change as partners, amplifiers, and community builders. And our presentation will illustrate these themes. Could I have the next slide, please?

This chart shows the stages of the process, and where, and the extent to which different individuals and groups were involved. So you see we had a fair number of groups, individuals as part of our process. And as was the original intent, our teen team members were involved in all stages of the research process, except for really the proposal development and the Institutional Review Board application, although, they actually benefitted from that process. And as

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you know, partnerships don't just happen, they require shared goals, trust, follow through, commitment, and the desire to collaborate and work together. And partnerships change and evolve over time, and we had a good amount of time for this whole process to develop.

Our adult and teen memberships took time, but began to really emerge initially when the teens started to feel confident in the skills and knowledge that they were actually bringing to the project, in addition to what they were learning through the project. And a major shift occurred during this stage when they identified potential issues or problems and framed the research project. Can we have the next slide, please?

So while the adult team members provided them with a framework to work through the process, working in pairs and then as a group, they were very capable of identifying the possibilities, discussing and considering the pros and cons of the options of research, and then coming to an agreement on the

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questions that they wanted to explore with other community members. In choosing to investigate how crime and violence were affecting the lives of people in the neighborhood, they were seeking to understand and bring attention to a problem that was affecting their own lives, with the intention of communicating those results to those with the power and influence who could influence and who could figure out ways to help address them. Next slide.

And I have to admit that this was not a topic I personally had much experience with, although we had done some crime prevention through environmental design activities within the neighborhood, but, upon reflection, it actually turned out to be a really good thing, because our team learned about the topic and its impacts on the neighborhood together and in that way we were all teaching and learning from each other and from other people who we brought into the process. And this action really shifted the power and balance, and put us on more equal footing as team members and partners. Next slide, please.

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So with basic mentoring from adult team members, as well as contributing ideas that they had used in school, the teens determined the research questions and developed the methods to ask them. Together we brainstormed the possible groups and individuals we would invite as research participants. After some practice sessions with our advisory committee members, the teens became the primary facilitators and the data collectors for seven different focus sessions. And while not all of them were totally confident in all of the roles, they worked as a team and really supported each other, and they were definitely encouraged and supported by those who were research participants.

And the adults especially were impressed by their confidence and poise, and really proud of them. So I'd like to turn the rest of the presentation or the next portion of the presentation over to my colleague, Christina Limpert.

DR. LIMPERT: Next slide, please. So this next set of slides illustrates a central question for the team

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which was, what are the strengths and assets that we can build upon? So this project created opportunities for power sharing, as Maren mentioned. And this is especially important when urban youth are positioned as objects of public conversations about wicked problems like crime, violence, and safety. So this type of research allowed youth to engage as active participants in civic issues that affect their lives and community. The more opportunities youth have to use their social-emotional insight to understand new landscapes, the more promising their transition to adulthood would be.

And so we did our research on the Near Westside of Syracuse. And the Near Westside is often framed by others outside of the neighborhood as dangerous and undesirable. And even though the teens were highlighting challenges faced in their neighborhood, their aim was to focus on strength and assets when addressing and framing the issues. And here you see the research team walking the neighborhood and discovering everyday signs of care like gardens and places to hangout. Next slide, please.

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Here you see the research team at their first public outing as a team wearing their teen t-shirts and conducting research at a well-attended annual neighborhood festival. Their focus here was to gather neighbor's understandings of both the concerns and strengths of the community, and you can see that illustrated on the poster there, the question, "What do you love about the Near Westside?" is framed as a way to amplify assets, and they got a lot of data in that particular poster in particular.

We argue that having teens as lead researchers, who interact with a broader spectrum of people in the neighborhood, amplifies the teens themselves as assets. In other words, the notion that youth as a neighborhood asset is made public by their participation and leadership. Next slide, please.

This picture on the right is one of the various focus group workshops the teens conducted. Their engagement with neighborhood stakeholders took seriously the information and responses that were shared by people.

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In addition to the stories that were told, many participants were pointing out the challenges and how their lives were affected by criminal activity, but also what came out of these conversations were the community strengths and assets including, for example, the Muddy Branch Library and other various organizations and institutions that you can see represented on the left side of the slide. Next slide, please.

This is a set of posters the teens developed to communicate their process and findings and action project. They were designed with graduate students and undergraduate students in landscape architecture to communicate the process in a way that would be interesting and understandable to other people in the community, but also, and more importantly, reflected the design ideas of the teens. These posters were distributed to our community partners at Muddy Branch Library at the Syracuse Peacemaking Center, and to various service providers, to the mayor's office, and other stakeholders in the city. Concurrently, the teens created a narrated PowerPoint which they

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presented to community organizations via Zoom. And as Maren mentioned, the service provider's network really loved hearing directly from the teens. Next slide, please.

Here you see the teens interacting with elders in the neighborhood. And we know that cross-generational partnerships enrich youth's connection to place which strengthens their understanding of community assets, as well as strengthening the community's notion that teens are an asset. Next slide, please.

So this next theme of youth as community builders. We have already established that youth are amplifiers and assets. And as the team sort of progressed through their action projects, we began to see ways in which these youth were also community builders. And here you see them working on the Gathering Garden, which was a project of placemaking and improving place together, alongside of other people from the community with the same aims. In other words, this project built capacity to address the

wicked problems and issues facing their community.
Next slide, please.

And these last two slides pictures illustrate the bridge building and community connections made through youth leadership. The picture on the left was taken after the team interviewed a neighborhood officer from the Syracuse Police Department, who is pictured third from the right there in that slide. As our research showed, there was tension between the police and people in this community, so the teens felt it was important to interview police. In fact, the officer confirmed some of our findings, which was really exciting for the team.

The picture on the right shows the team presenting their research in an open community event where they provided dinner and details about the project. This was a celebration of the first year of their work. It was also a demonstration of the team's sustained commitment to addressing neighborhood issues in their capacity as civic leaders. Here we see youth as present representatives of the neighborhoods and as

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the future which is the same message that's represented on their t-shirts that says, "We are next. We are now." Maren?

KING: Okay, next slide, thanks, Tina. So COVID had a significant impact on our project process and the ability of the teens to maintain consistent involvement in the project. In addition, as you know, teens also grow older, and that's great for them, and they move on to other opportunities, and so that's kind of the curse of time, right. They are moving on and that's been terrific. However, the teen research process and its outcomes did provide the foundation for the Peacemaking Center to actually form the Youth Impact Team which was a major goal of our project. That started last summer and is continuing now.

And building on the strengths and outcomes of the teen research project, the Peacemaking Center has been able to hire a youth program coordinator and the teens from middle school through high school are meeting twice a week, and their activities are focused on learning and applying the skills of

peacemaking, which is a big focus of the center, and placemaking, which now has become a focus of the center, in addition to what ESF has brought into the community. Next slide, please.

And so we've come to realize that YPAR is a practice and methodology that provides youth with ways to learn more about and to serve their community. YPAR taps into their innate curiosity and ability to ask questions and they get to know, or got to know the people and place, and it helps them understand the things that can and should be changed, and the roles that they have now and way into the future. We also realized the value of partnerships of adults and youth in understanding and addressing the issues and wicked problems, like the ones that the teens identified. And that the diversity of ages, skills, experiences, and perspectives can contribute to creating equitable, adaptable, and resilient solutions.

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So thank you very much for listening to our presentation and we look forward to questions and discussion.

DR. ROBLES: Thank you, Maren and Christina. That is fantastic work. I hope you are putting together a manual or a guide that you can share. There's I just think so many organizations and groups that could use the process and knowledge that you and the youth have gained through this work. So it's fantastic, thank you. So if any of you have tuned in the last few days, you will see that a lot of the work that's been done it's team-based and it's academics, it's community members, it's students, other community partners working together.

And so in this next presentation we have a group of people from Drexel and the Writers Room. We have Dr. Ayana Allen-Handy, who is an Assistant Professor of Urban Education and the Founder-Director of the Justice-oriented Youth Education Lab at Drexel University School of Education. She's a native Philadelphian and former elementary school teacher

and high school counselor. She has dedicated her career to social justice and urban education.

Rachel Wenrick is a Founding Director of the Writers Room, a university community literacy arts program at Drexel University. Dr. Wenrick works to connect collaborators across sectors to develop innovative arts programming and transformative learning experience. They are committed to building capacity through collaborative research that benefits the community and promotes their abilities to develop, implement, and sustain their own solutions to gentrification and displacement.

Carol Richardson McCullough is a Founding Member of the Writers Room who has been an integral part of each stage of the program's growth, from its regular programming, to the NEA funded festival celebrating the life and work of Zora Neal Hurston, to Tripod, an intergenerational photo essay project. Her work as a cultural liaison has helped forge partnerships with institutions including the Free Library of Philadelphia and Mural Arts Philadelphia.

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Devin Welsh is currently an Artist Year Fellow. He is originally from Lansdale, Pennsylvania and a graduate from Drexel University with a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in writing. He has had a passion for telling stories since he could hold a pencil. He is a creative writer and photographer who uses creative nonfiction and photography to explore his sense of self and his community. So I'll turn it over to Ayana.

DR. ALLEN-HANDY: Good afternoon, everyone. Next slide, please. So our presentation is talking about our project. It's a community-led project, Anti-displacement: The Untapped Potential of University Community Cooperative Living. And I'm going to turn it over to Carol to get us started.

McCULLOUGH: So our CPAR study, our community-led participatory action research study investigates the effects of gentrification on residential displacement and affordable housing options in West Philadelphia. Gentrification is something that has been going on at

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an increasing rate throughout the country and we certainly have felt it in our community, sometimes even within our own selves. So we are attempting to look into this and find a way that we can do something to help the situation.

The program that we are implementing calls upon different voices in the community. The lived experiences of residents, community members, as well as the youth at different levels. And it is intergenerational, which we find is one of the strengths, because it's best when everyone can learn from each other, everyone has a gift, and if it is recognized and utilized then the end result might be something beautiful. So we have people from all walks of life, ages 18 to 80.

Paul Robeson High School, which is African American youth, then we have a group that is Youth Build Philly, which calls upon like green building construction. And we have Drexel students, as well as Mantua, Powelton neighborhoods that border and touch upon the Drexel community. Our program is also

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interdisciplinary. We use a wide range of techniques involving creative writing, photography through the Tripod group, and we have architecture, design, music, and as I mentioned before, green building construction.

DR. ALLEN-HANDY: Next slide, please. Thank you, Carol.

MCCULLOUGH: Sure.

DR. ALLEN-HANDY: So I want to talk a little bit about our study design. And so it's a community-led PAR project, as Carol shared. Community-led PAR work is dynamic, it involves community-generated and executed problem identification, research and plan development, collection and analysis of evidence, reflection on the findings, sharing of those results, and taking action to address the problem.

Our study design has evolved over the last three years. And so after we kind of thought about all of the ways in which we collected and analyzed data, our project is really kind of a multimodal research

design. So we've collected data through interviews with community residents and our civic leaders. We've conducted focus groups. We've done more kind of quantitative census and GIS data analysis. We've incorporated some photovoice and narrative analysis as well as document analysis. And also we've engaged in this very collaborative data analysis process, so you'll see on the right-hand side some of our kind of co-constructed data analysis processes where we've gone into our focus groups, gone into some of our narrative data, and as a collective team of, as Carol mentioned, 18 to 80 year old residents, students at Drexel, graduate students, faculty, staff, just a really dynamic team of youth, again, from Robeson, and we've collectively coded and done our data analysis together. Next slide, please.

So our findings, and I'll be brief so that we can get to really talking about how we've empowered and engaged African American youth in this work. The findings from our first research question which was really looking at the landscape of gentrification and displacement in our neighborhood, Mantua and

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Powelton, which again, are neighborhoods that are adjacent to Drexel. And so our first finding was what we found to be this sandwich effect, which is this active gentrification and displacement of Black residents in particular, really happening at expeditious rates from the north and from the south, kind of resulting in this squeezing remaining residents into the center of our neighborhoods.

And this was kind of conducted through some of our GIS census data analysis to really see what were these patterns of gentrification and displacement that were happening. And in some of the census blocks we've seen evidence of up to 200% displacement of African American residents on some of the census designated block groups. Our second finding is that Mantua residents in particular are particularly cost burdened where housing costs are more than 30% of income and even 50% of some neighboring census blocks.

And so one of the things our kind of second research question was really looking at, what are the

affordable housing options that are available to residents and how well are those options understood by residents in need? And so we really see this high percentage of neighbors that are really cost burdened and especially from the onslaught of gentrification. We see, you know, where new residents are able to take advantage of tax abatements for up to ten years not paying taxes when existing residents are having to kind of foot the bill of the taxes in the neighborhood.

And then our final finding is what we'll focus on really is not so much problem generated but solution generated. And so in this kind of research question we're finding, number three, we're looking at, what are the prospects of cooperative living at the intersection of the university and the community as an anti-displacement strategy? And so our findings thus far in this work is that we are currently examining housing typologies for aging in place, that's a critical component of our work. And findings show that the community is excited about cooperative living and co-living as an anti-displacement

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strategy, including new partnerships with Lomax Real Estate Group and Village Square on Haverford Affordable Housing Project, which my colleague Rachel will talk to you a little bit more about.

But on the right-hand side you'll see we have a team that includes architects and incredible interior designers who have been conducting case studies with some of our existing residents around how we can take their homes and redesign them and rebuild and do some development and construction so that they can age in place and perhaps we can really execute this cooperative living model. And next slide, please, and I'll turn it over to Rachel.

DR. WENRICK: Hi, everyone. I'm so happy to be with everyone today. Okay, so I'm talking about some of the action. So the Second Story Collective is the partnership that has grown out of our CPAR work and our arts programming. It's a cross-discipline, cross-sector partner network that has its roots in creative placemaking and placekeeping. And that is work that integrates arts and culture and design into efforts

that strengthen communities. That is kind of the story so far in the work that we've done so far is through our arts programming and through the CPAR work we have been able to forge this partnership network, which is neighborhood and university public and private stakeholders.

The story from this point forward, that we're really excited to share, is this partnership with Charles Lomax and Lomax Real Estate with the development on Village Square on Haverford, which is a two city block development. It's the largest parcel of undeveloped land in our neighborhood. And that's a local family that has been awarded that parcel and has been working in partnership with our civic partners to develop the kind of housing and mixed use development that our neighbors would like to see.

And what we are working on together, as Second Story Collective, is a partnership to transition 18 families from public housing rentals to home ownership through our art-centered model of co-living. And what we hope to do is contribute an

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alternative anti-displacement aging in place strategy in a community that very much needs all of the strategies. Thank you.

WELSH: Hi, everybody. So I'm going to tell you a little bit about what this work brings us to as far as engaging African American youth. And when I think of engaging some of the folks that I've been fortunate enough to work with, I think of this young person down in the bottom right-hand corner. Their name is Keish. I first met Keish at our home symposium in October of 2018, where we really started to engage neighborhood voices and tell the story of the neighborhood so that everyone was on the same page as we started to think about what issues faced this community and what solutions everyone wanted to see.

And the former President of the Mantua Civic Association and then Secretary was sort of talking about these issues and explaining how it didn't seem as though the youth were particularly interested in the solution. And I was helping to photograph and document, and I see this hand raise out of the crowd,

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and I hadn't yet met this young person, but that was Keish. And this room was full of all of our partners, so that means it's full of residents, it's full of scholars and experts, and Keish, who was then a high school student at Paul Robeson, they were with their Artist Year Fellow at the time, Jasmine, and Keish set the record straight and explained very clearly that they were interested in being a part of the solution.

And it's that kind of - that empowerment that we see, the sharing of the expert hat, you know, that everyone in this space is an expert and that really facilitates a lot of the exchange of knowledge from a high school student to a long time resident of the community. It's not a one-way street and it's back and forth. And so much so, that in this bottom right photo, this is actually a symposium from this year, 2022, where Keish has since graduated and is about to get their associates at CCP. They've taken some of the skills that Carol led us through, as we were doing this research in interview training, and they've taken off.

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And so they've been building their own practice as an interviewer and a storyteller. And so Keish had the opportunity to interview the keynote speaker for the symposium, Kia Weatherspoon. And so going from a participant in the crowd, shakily raising a hand, to being at the front and center really telling the story of this work is what we see as part of our everyday as Writers Room and in the work that we're doing. And really co-constructing knowledge across difference and all of these intersecting identities from Paul Robeson High School students to Drexel students and our neighbors.

So seeing - My apologies. Seeing the development of young people like Keish, after graduating through Robeson and really taking this work onto their own, has been really special to see. Ms. Carol, did you want to add anything as far as the work that we've been doing on Tripod? You're muted.

McCULLOUGH: Okay. I was just going to mention, I said before, one of the strengths of the program I think

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is the intergenerational quality of it, because if it were not for that, I'm getting to the point where I might have been pushed over to a corner or set in a little box somewhere off to the side, but thankfully we've established an environment where everyone, we recognize that everyone has something to contribute, particularly the youth, because they keep us, they keep our eyes on the future and they give us a fresh outlook to things, and provide a perspective.

So Tripod photography component is setup with a high school student, a student from Youth Build Philadelphia, a Drexel student, and an older community member. Each of the groups have people from different ages and stages and places in life. And we all come together and document our community. The youth have a voice and their voice is heard, and their voice often influences us, you know.

Particularly academics and older people, you know, they think that they have all the answers, and often we do, but surprisingly, well not surprisingly, youth can add another perspective and often times open our eyes to consider part of a solution that we may not

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have even have seen or may not have even known was coming up. So there are a lot of little Keish's running around doing big things.

DR. ALLEN-HANDY: And thank you. That concludes our presentation. We're looking forward to the forthcoming discussion. Thank you.

DR. ROBLES: Thank you, all. That was amazing. And you really do see the ripple effects from this work, right, that shows that, number one, research isn't linear and neither is community development and all these efforts. So thank you. I am going to pass this over to Shane Dermanjian. Shane, are you there?

DERMANJIAN: Hi, everybody. So my name is Shane Dermanjian. I'm a Research Assistant here at the Office of Research and Evaluation. And as it all fits into research and evaluation, we of course not only value meaningful research, but also how that research and any findings associated with it can be utilized. So with that in mind, we're thrilled to have Meg Ansara, the Director of VISTA, Billie Udofia, the Senior

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Advisor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion here at AmeriCorps, and Jackie Dulude, who is the Recruitment and Outreach Manager at AmeriCorps. So we've asked them to give some reflections on what we've heard today from our wonderful speakers. And with that, we can start with you Meg.

ANSARA: Thank you so much, Shane. And thank you everyone for such incredible work. I have so many thoughts. It's hard to figure out kind of where to focus. So the program that I run, AmeriCorps VISTA, is over 50 years old and is focused on capacity building in low income communities to alleviate the effects of poverty. And I think one of the things that really struck me across all of these conversations, or presentations I should say, was the emphasis on an importance of community.

That relationships, that work without mutual and reciprocal relationships just is not sustainable, and I think about that quite a bit in terms of the AmeriCorps VISTA experience because we have members who serve 12 months of full-time service, and often

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we have conversations around, should we explore different terms of service? You know, many of the other programs at AmeriCorps have different terms of service, but one of the things that you get from 12 months of full-time service is the time and space to build relationships. Now over 70% of VISTAs serve in their own community, so, you know, they're bringing relationships and knowledge and expertise from the beginning, but I think we often hear that people do gain different relationships and perspective and that just takes time, and that's not even factoring in things like a worldwide pandemic. And so I think that is one thing that really kind of stands out to me.

I think the second is just the power of youth as changemakers, as translators, and interpreters, right, and we saw that in the storytelling, we saw that in terms of amplifying in the Syracuse project, and we saw that in the quotes that were in the first presentation around just how they can create bridges across communities and constituencies as these powerful translators and interpreters, as well as

being leaders, and that I think is very much affirmed in my observations of AmeriCorps VISTA projects.

With AmeriCorps VISTA, we have members who are 18 years and older, and we have VISTAs who are 18 and we have VISTAs who are in their 80s, and everyone in-between. But, about 65% of VISTAs are between 20 and 26. And so, you know, on the younger side of the spectrum and I think their voice is so powerful in terms of being able to translate, and especially when we talk about kind of cross-cultural and cross-generational work. And I think it's just an incredible thing to see, in particular Black youth, you know, kind of not being able to be a part of the solution, and being able to really drive the change.

And that was I think sort of another thing that really struck me and obviously it's at the core of all of this, you know, this style of research which is that the importance of kind of partnership and creating change with rather than on behalf or for. And I think that's particularly important when we come to issues of economic justice, racial justice,

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and I think hearing the voices talk about the importance of community and the value of community as a part of the change work I think is a good reminder for me, in terms of how to think about how we structure that through the AmeriCorps VISTA program.

We have 7,000 individuals who give a year of service across the country, every state and territory. Often they are serving in smaller settings and by themselves, and so how can we foster that sense of community and also celebration? I was particularly struck in the first presentation about the importance of celebration, and in this context, celebration of blackness, and that as we engage in these very serious often life or death issues, that joy and celebration of racial, cultural, and just personal individual identity is so important.

And I think it'd be easy to overlook if you're not centering the experience, centering the work really on people with lived experience, in this case and, you know, in many cases Black youth. So lots for me to process in terms of, you know, I think how we

think about incorporating much of this finding. You know, sort of concrete things. You know, we provide a modest living allowance and just the impact for our own VISTAs, not to mention the people they serve on what are soaring costs of housing, and what used to be 30% of their living allowance or stipend is now closer to 50% and in some places even higher.

So I have practical thoughts around how to address that, as well as I think the more conceptual thoughts around how to really think about all of these different kind of modes that young people can play, and particularly Black youth, in terms of being changemakers, designers, architects, translators, interpreters, strategists, storytellers. I think the more that we think about change and in that multifaceted way, the more human-centered it is, and we see the evidence of that in terms of incredible work and sustained activism and engagement and, you know, civic engagement throughout a lifetime.

So really, really appreciate the time to listen and to learn, and so grateful for the work that everyone

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is doing. I'm very eager to incorporate it into AmeriCorps VISTA.

DERMANJIAN: Thank you, Meg. Next we can go to Billie for your reflections.

LOUIS: Thank you. And I just want to start off by saying thank you to my colleagues in ORE for creating this platform for us to learn more about this research and to our partners for the research that you have done and the information you shared with us today. I had a couple of reflection points, even in my own career here at AmeriCorps. I ditto everything Meg said, so I'll try not to be redundant and add something a little bit different to the table.

But, you know, one of the things that I think about or that first hit me as I was listening, even within the first presentation that became a trend, you know, our major output is grantmaking. That's how we foster civic engagement is through grantmaking. And a great deal of conversations that I've had with both internal and external stakeholders when we talk about

promoting equitable grantmaking is the lack of BIPOC led organizations or the lack of Black-led organizations, not just within our portfolio but it's a nationwide concern.

We've had conversations with many of our grantmaking partners, we've had presentations from grantmaking partners working in this space who talked about this concern, and so when we talk about the theme, one of the main themes that I saw stretch across all three presentations, seeing youth as assets, seeing them as leaders, changemakers. In the first presentation there was something about giving youth a system's perspectives. You are much more than what happens on the ground floor. That really resonated with me because when we talk about leadership, we are talking about the macro activity that happens in the nonprofit, in the public sector. And we are talking about the lack of representation, particularly of Black Americans in those sectors.

And so if we're focused on empowering our youth now, if we're focused on letting our know youth know that

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they have a voice and they can take action now, we have an opportunity to change the dynamics and what the landscape looks like both within the federal sector and the nonprofit sector. So that really hit home for me because I saw that as being a long-term solution for how we create change and we create solutions in communities that are developed by those being impacted by the issues in those very communities as well.

The other thing that really resonated with me, and Meg touched on this as well, is youth seeing themselves as positive and seeing their surroundings as positive. A lot of times, and I can speak to this too as a former Black youth, just feeling like things were happening at you and there was nothing you could really do about it, you know. You don't really have much choice, you don't have much decision, you don't have much power. So I really appreciated the conversations about the roles that adults play in power sharing, and modeling, and passing the baton, because that I know is a conversation I've had with

youth that I've mentored, at least in this generation, that they feel isn't happening, right.

And so when Andrea, my colleague from ORE, said there needs to be a guide on how we work with youth, how we empower youth to be changemakers, that's true. I mean, that's absolutely what we need because a lot of our grantees, particularly for AmeriCorps, work directly with the youth. And I think it is important for anyone working with youth to help understand how to move the needle of power, how to do the exchange of power between the elders, between adults within communities to the youth.

And so a lot of the conversations around intergenerationalism, particularly because of our many streams of service, really resonated with me because I do think that is something that's lacking and I do think it also speaks to where we are today when we talk about the leadership in the nonprofit and public sector portfolio, and the lack of diversity within that leadership.

But, I definitely also want to go back to the conversation about youth seeing themselves as positive and being able to identify their strengths, but more so being able to identify the strengths of their own community. Another thing I saw a connection with, particularly with the last presentation, when I think about urban neighborhoods there's this flight, right. There's, 'I got to get out of here. I got to make it out of here one day. This place is not for me.' And so seeing that exercise of having youth walk through their neighborhood and identify what's right and less focus on what's wrong, also was a really big moment for me in terms of, you know, what it means to build community, what it means to appreciate community, but more importantly what it means to lead a community.

And so I thought that was a very visual perspective of, not only how we empower our youth, but also how we save our neighborhoods through our youth. So I really appreciated that as well. Lots of great themes. And like I said, I think in terms of, from this level and where I'm sitting at, and thinking

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about, where do we go now, where do we go next, where do we need to go in the future? I definitely agree that this needs to be a model or that these trends, empowering our youth, the focus on intergenerationalism, the focus on identifying strengths, not just within self and seeing youth seeing themselves as positive, but also seeing the positives of their own communities is going to be critical in moving the needle.

So I thank you again for these findings and I hope that we can share them broadly.

DERMANJIAN: Thank you, Billie. And then next, Jackie, we can go to you for your reflections.

DULUDE: Thank you, Shane. I also just want to echo that thanks to our colleagues at Office of Research and Evaluation for allowing us to be a part of these conversations. I've had the privilege of being present on each of the three days for this dialogue so far and all of the presentations have been fantastic, wonderful. So shout out to everybody who

presented again today about this research. It's hugely important and super fascinating.

And I would just like to say it was so encouraging I think to hear how positive the experiences were for all of your research participants, just to echo what Meg and Billie have said. When you put Black youth in the driver's seat, I think this theme was kind of echoed throughout, but our SUNY presenters said it in a really clear way of, you know, if we make them the protagonist and give them that ability to lead the solution and use that asset-based model, what can happen, what are the possibilities in just opening up that world?

So that certainly was a piece that resonated for me. And how does this connect all to our recruitment priorities? I think there's probably three different ways that I would probably want to touch on here. Those are project development, recruitment - generally -, and retention. So kind of looking at the full lifecycle of recruitment and how we can apply

your research to our activities and the centralized recruitment unit that we're building for the agency.

So to start that first project development piece, right, what I was hearing was that Black youth are interested in types of projects that are going to be a benefit to their community and we have this local focus within the recruitment realm that we've been kind of bringing to the forefront. So how do we build projects that are going to peak their interest, get them inspired, and excited to serve with us?

The intergenerational piece that Billie touched on, I love as well. We have our AmeriCorps Seniors project or our AmeriCorps Seniors programs that often times do have an intergenerational model, but getting our elders involved in advancing some of these solutions so that they can benefit is wonderful. So definitely love that aspect of the Drexel project.

With regard to recruitment. So it is clear to me that all of your youth research participants would make amazing AmeriCorps members or AmeriCorps volunteers,

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AmeriCorps seniors volunteers in their older days. They are clearly highly qualified, they have a love of community, they're already civically engaged and maybe service oriented already, and they're building those skills, right. So it's super clear that these audiences are the folks that we want to bring into our program and strengthen our programs. So how do we speak with them? How do we get them engaged again and bring them into the process so that we're building projects and building a place where they can come and learn as AmeriCorps members and then go back out into their communities and apply the skills that they continue to learn?

And then the third piece around retention, right. I heard, I think in all three of the presentations, especially in the first one around that fostering this sense of community, celebrating our diversity among the corps, and especially celebrating blackness specifically, creating structures of mentorship, so how do we engage our grantees and ensure that there are inclusive systems in place so that when our AmeriCorps members come in, no matter where they're

from, whether they're serving in their community or if they're leaving their hometown to serve in a different area, that they feel welcome, that they have that sense of community, and then they can connect with the folks that they're serving with, whether it be on the organizational level or with their fellow AmeriCorps members.

And that kind of might just go back to the project development piece around the grantmaking side that really was referencing, right, we need to make sure that we have good representation so that it is a fully inclusive model. So those are kind of the three pieces there that I wanted to mention. I think these projects in particular touch on, like I said, every kind of stage of the recruitment cycle from project development, to bringing folks in the door, to retaining them, and making sure that they have a positive experience.

And so, again, just want to thank you all for your wonderful, thoughtful presentations, and for allowing me to be a part of it, thank you.

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DERMANJIAN: Great, thank you very much. So now that Meg, Billie, and Jackie have given their reflections, thank you again, we can start our Q&A section of today. So feel free to drop a question in the chat box so we can get to it. It could be for anybody who's talked today. But just to start, I have a question for our researchers, and it kinds ties together in the idea of recruiting for AmeriCorps, but in thinking about from when the youth that participate in these programs first started towards either the end of when they were participating or just a year later, however much later, have they demonstrated any change in what they want to do with their future plans, whether it be going to school for something related to social justice, pursuing a career in social justice, something related to what the program was about? Was there any sort of pre, post-examination going on with that? And that's for everybody who has presented, so whoever wants it.

DR. WRAY-LAKE: I can just briefly jump in. We didn't have a pre, post-design because we just really

interviewed young people about their journeys to civic engagement like, how they got involved, and so what it's looked like for them over time. But, definitely I think all of the Black youth we interviewed were very future oriented, so they were thinking about what they were doing now, and connecting that to what visions they had for the world and also how they saw themselves engaging in that later. So definitely they're figuring that out and actively thinking about it.

And many of them did talk about moments in their civic engagement where they recognized that they wanted to do a specific thing in their career, so whether it be like, they were talking to an elected official and realized they wanted to go into politics, or they were doing service, and I remember one young person talked about how she wanted to be a doctor and give back in ways that sort of promote health equity for the people that she was meeting. And so definitely those wheels are turning and they are thinking about the future, and civic work is a really big part of what they're thinking of.

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DERMANJIAN: Thank you. And I guess to call you out, Devin, have you seen anything of that sort of from when you started working with youth towards months later, if there's been any sort of changes in attitudes or beliefs or commitment to being civically engaged?

WELSH: Totally, 100%. So the young person I was talking about, Keish, so I had met them when I was an undergrad at Drexel and they were a high school student. Fortunately, they've stuck around and continued to work with us. So I've seen as they, just been out of high school, started engaging in some of these projects towards social justice whether it's social media campaigns, or leading a rally, or speaking at rallies. And now has designed sort of an entire project around kind of gathering these experts in social justice and changemaking.

Just recently they had almost a symposium of sorts of their own where they invited these panelists in the work that they were interested in and to talk and share their story. So it was really interesting for

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me knowing them as the high school student and seeing them kind of be nervous, but in the end kind of deliver on the vision that they had set out for themselves.

And last year, so this is my second year as an Artist Year Fellow, last year we were all virtual working with Paul Robeson High School, and one of the Tripod members, we met every Friday with the whole group, actually decided to study at Drexel, and that is Lyric and she was on the slide, and we were kind of talking about with Keish as well. And so seeing kind of that passion and know that like this community is still going to be there for me when I get there on campus, which is exactly what you want to see.

DERMANJIAN: That's great to hear. Does anybody else from Drexel or from SUNY, any ideas or comments along these lines?

DR. ALLEN-HANDY: I can share just because I think Devin has highlighted some of our youth, but I think he is a prime example of a student who was a part of our

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project that now is in the AmeriCorps family as an Artist Year Fellow so I just wanted to shout him out for being just an incredible advocate and representative of not only our project, but the work that you all are engaging in AmeriCorps.

KING: Yeah. And this is Maren. I would say that the connection, youth to youth, is really important. So we can tell ourselves we're mature adults and that relationships between the college students who were working the youth and helping to mentor them, and especially those that were landscape architecture students, the teens were very interested in place and placemaking, and being able to work with people who are just a few years older than them was inspirational for them and it was fun for them.

There was this relationship that they could build and the other aspect of it was that much of that interaction, especially from the development of the posters, actually took place online, and they were able to communicate using Google Slides and that whole process of the teens actually saying, here's

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what are results were or are, how do we express those? And having those conversations back and forth were really quite amazing that they were able to do that, not necessarily in-person, but using a tool that they were able to then develop designs through essentially.

DERMANJIAN: Great, thank you. So we can hop to the next question. I see Meg, you put in the chat, the reality of mental health right now - Okay, so thinking of the reality of mental health right now and how it is impacting activists and changemakers, thinking that what was stressed was so optimistic, so how has there been any changes in mental health amongst the youth which you worked? Or Meg, you can ask the question as well.

ANSARA: Thanks, Shane. You know me, I always have all the questions. I was so struck by the optimism that was shared and the power particularly for young people and young people of color to engage in activism early in their lives. And just in addition to doing good works, it felt good. And there's a lot

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of energy for the solutions, right, we heard that in terms of energy and excitement about co-living situations, the power of being in a community. And the quote from NA from Laura's presentation really struck me in terms of having people by my side.

And so much of what was stressed throughout the researchers' presentations was incredibly optimistic and we definitely see that, I see that every day in terms of AmeriCorps VISTA. I also see just very escalating issues of depression and very real mental health needs. I see it in my own life as a parent, I see it in my work being the Director of AmeriCorps VISTA. And this isn't about apathy at all, actually, I don't see that, but there's very real discouragement and it is hard to be a human these days. So I'm just interested from the researchers, in terms of how to be honest and realistic about where we are as a world, as a society, what are some incredibly difficult things and balancing that with what is an incredible spirit of optimism that's clearly cultivated through these projects.

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KING: Hi, this is Maren again. And I have been working with some other organizations and did a series of interviews with, what are the issues that communities are addressing right now or trying to deal with right now? And I heard a lot about trauma, I heard about survival mode, and that many of the neighborhoods in Syracuse and the people who are living there are really challenged right now. And what seems very positive to me are the organizations that are embedded in those neighborhoods and the people who are working with them.

And we experienced that during our project and during COVID, and now afterwards that our community partner is really able to build on the findings and the work from our project, and get additional funding to continue the work that was started. The idea that, yeah, things are really tough for the teenagers in their families, in school that - once somebody said to me, the schools are not operating essentially, I mean, they're there but they're not working.

And so the idea that there are places and people that can provide alternative options for kids right now is really important.

DERMANJIAN: Thank you. Laura, I see your hand up.

DR. WRAY-LAKE: Yeah, thank you, Meg, for this question because I think it's so important to think about this other side of activism and civic engagement for Black young people in terms of the emotional burdens of racism that they experience on a daily basis. So in our study we have - In the book we're writing we have a couple of other chapters that really dive into this in a lot more depth than what I presented, but in schools young people, Black young people are experiencing racism from their peers and from administration that happens on a regular basis.

When you look at the national context, the murder of George Floyd that happened during our study was a time of incredible emotional difficulty for Black young people as they have to process and deal with anti-blackness, and even, you can imagine, what just

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happened in Buffalo with the racist shooting and how much that affects Black young people across America to have to witness and process those experiences and acts of hate.

And so that's definitely a piece of what's happening with Black young people that we can't ignore. I think some of our work, you know, with showing that organizational spaces can be these positive and joyful communities for Black youth specifically, especially when blackness is centered and celebrated, they can be healing spaces. And a lot of organizational partners that we have in this study, we've been talking with them about that and their working and thinking through how can we create these healing spaces because it's so important for Black youth to have that.

DERMANJIAN: Thank you. Anybody from Drexel care to comment on mental health and your programs? No? Okay. And let's see, Tina, I see your hand is up.

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DR. LIMPert: Yeah. I just wanted to quickly add something about trauma-informed approaches and having the team be at the ready to kind of address these issues. I think it was Ayana who's also a former school counselor, sometimes you have to bring your skills and whatever skills you have to address these issues. There was one point at which there was a shooting, actually several shootings where at least one of our team members knew somebody who had been murdered. And it was a heavy weekend and we were having a meeting, and it was going to be an online meeting, and there was some challenges for our team, they were exhausted being online between school and the research project.

And Maren and I made a decision to just be present and listen, and open up a space for the teens to talk, and we were also really sort of emotional as well with them. We were human, right. We acknowledged our own place in White supremacy and these other kinds of systems of power and oppression, but it was really an important meeting for us, and it was emotional, and I don't want to say it was a team

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builder, but it was an opportunity for them to see us in a different light, so.

DERMANJIAN: Great, thank you. And then Billie, did you have a question?

LOUIS: Yeah, absolutely. This conversation and the information that's shared today, just again, allowed me to do a lot of my own self-reflection as a Black youth. And I'm really interested in learning more. There was something that was said in the first presentation, and I loved it, "we are next, we are now." And I think about the "we are next" in the grooming and the support, the power sharing that takes place through intergenerationalism.

But, I want to hear more, or if there are any stories more so about the "we are now." I'm thinking about the examples and the models that a lot of the youth, you all worked with and interviewed, and the impact that they had on their peers. And what the peer-to-peer impacts may have been throughout these different processes and studies and what now. I would love to

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hear about any successes or challenges that they faced when trying to bring some of their peers along this same journey.

DERMANJIAN: Maren, you can go ahead.

KING: Can I go?

DERMANJIAN: Yeah, you're good.

KING: Yeah, just real quick. So in terms of the challenges in terms of our research project, was really they were challenged by engaging teenagers, other teenagers. And part of that had to do with the IRB, the Institutional Review Board requirements with engaging other teens because they had to get, not only the teen's assent, they had to get the parent's consent, right. And so that as a research project and following ethical standards, they had a really hard time engaging people of their own age, which was problematic for us in terms of realizing that like, wow, do we have time to even go back now and see if we can change that? And we didn't.

But, one of the things that we found was supportive of the teens being involved in this process actually was a middle school program in the city of Syracuse that was an expeditionary learning program where kids were actually in a public school encouraged to do hands-on learning and questioning learning. And so thinking about how public schools or other schools can encourage this type of engagement and really more experience-based learning, which I think this participatory research actually encourages. So I don't know, Tina, if you wanted to add something to that.

But, engaging other teens within our process was hard. Now the Peacemaking Center does not have those conditions and so they are carrying on what was started in our process.

DERMANJIAN: Christina, did you want to add anything? Or otherwise we can go to Laura. Okay, Laura.

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DR. WRAY-LAKE: I just wanted to speak Billie's question about the peer-to-peer impact piece. And one of the things that really impressed me about the Black youth stories that we interviewed was that they are doing a lot of peer-to-peer education and sort of motivation to get them engaged in civic work on a day-to-day basis, and partly, as we probably can guess, they're doing this on social media. This is just like part of the day-to-day of being a young Black changemaker that we found in our study is that, you know, in addition to a lot of the on the ground organizing or volunteer work they're doing, they're talking to peers, they're getting them plugged into opportunities, they're trying to raise awareness about issues. And that's just a day in, day out activity that they're doing.

And some of them are doing this with White youth or non-Black youth around racial justice. And so it's challenging work, often, that they talk about doing about, you know, bringing non-Black youth along in this, you know, and becoming anti-racist. And so

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there's a lot of challenges to it, but it's something that they're committed to on a daily basis.

LOUIS: Thank you for that, Laura. That's pretty enlightening. As I know that these conversations, I work with a lot of youth, and I don't see a lot of spaces for them, I think it's been said earlier, to have these conversations, and to talk about what's happening, and to get education around what's happening, but that peer-to-peer context is definitely critical. Because they see each other every day, they're engaging in ways that we don't engage with them, so definitely insightful. Thank you both.

DERMANJIAN: Great, thanks. I'm going to hand it back to Andrea.

DR. ROBLES: Thank you, Shane. And so since this is a dialogue and we have both people from national service and our research grantees, one of the things that we talk about quite a bit is look at all the volunteering and civic engagement that's happening

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both informally and in organizations across the country, right. But, we have formal national service and volunteering, and so the question comes up, and I think I'll hand it Meg, how do we work with the youth that you're working with? What is it of interest? How do we connect all their great work that they're doing to be part of national service? It has benefits in terms of educational awards and some stipends, and how does that happen? So I'm just going to pass it over to Meg to maybe say it more articulately and see what our research grantees have to say since they work in lots of these communities and with all these wonderful young people.

ANSARA: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for asking what is very much a \$64,000 question for me as the Director of AmeriCorps VISTA. But, you know, there is - and your research points to it - there's such incredibly impactful work that's happening in formal settings, but also, to Laura's last point, in informal settings, right. And at such young ages, I just put in the chat, but middle school students. I mean, it's so incredibly inspiring. What more can we do as an

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agency and through our programs to connect with more people so that they do they know that the support exists, that there are so many different opportunities if they are looking for something and benefits that go along with it, whether it's the living allowance that comes through VISTA, the stipend and awards, or the Education Award which can be put towards past or future educational costs. How can we better connect and also help young people see themselves in the work of AmeriCorps?

DR. WRAY-LAKE: I'm sure others will have more developed answers than me, but just thinking about the findings from our research, I think it just shows that Black youth are looking for opportunities in the future that are meaningful and that really help them address issues that their community is facing. So I think making that link to like, local, you know, the local issues and how AmeriCorps does that. I know you do do that, so I think making that pitch to young people that this could be an avenue to address local issues is one thing.

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And then the second thing I'll say is that going back to wanting to be in organizations that are welcoming spaces for Black youth. I think they want to see themselves in the organization. And I think it was Billie who talked about representation of Black-led organizations in AmeriCorps or Black leaders in organizations. And I think Black youth want to see and feel that they're going to be welcomed, they're going to be valued, and that they're not the only ones in the organization because that can be uncomfortable, it can be challenging to navigate, and so feeling that sense of acceptance and that there's representation of other people like you in the organization I think would be important.

DERMANJIAN: Great, thank you. So at this time I'd like to hand it back to the Director of the Office of Research and Evaluation, Dr. Mary Hyde.

DR. HYDE: Thank you, Shane. I just wanted to share three or four reflections after listening to everyone today, but also over the last three days that I hope people walk away with and continue to ponder and

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continue to discuss, quite frankly, beyond today's dialogue. And first and foremost, what has struck me is that community-led and action-oriented research is a form of civic engagement. I think we heard that loud and clear, not only today, but also over the last two days.

It is a form of engaging in social justice and it is a way in which individuals and organizations can foster agency empowerment skills and knowledge development. So, you know, again, it's worth repeating, creating these types of opportunities is one that allows people to become civic leaders and that it creates space for all people to become civic leaders. On day one we talked about older Americans. We talked about residents of rural communities. Yesterday we heard from our researchers who talk about refugee communities and immigrant communities. Today we heard about young populations, people of color, young people of color.

Creating these spaces and opportunities for everyone, even groups who tend not to have these opportunities

is critical for strengthening our civil society, it will lead to better community solutions. Every individual and community has assets that can contribute to addressing whatever issues they're facing.

I think also what really struck me, particularly today as we heard from the different teams and the work that they're doing, we can all be bridge builders. These teams demonstrate and reflect the diversity that national service programs are trying to promote in their project teams across the country. Everyone has something to contribute. We heard about intergenerational teams, we heard about cross-sectional teams, we heard about cross-cultural teams, we heard about interdisciplinary teams, this is the model that we're trying to strive for in all of our national service work and this is illustrated in the work that we've heard about today.

And last but not least, I really just want to reemphasize I think what several of you have said today, we have through this research identified

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people who very much want to contribute to the change in their community, they are civically engaged, they have learned incredibly important community leadership skills as a result of participating in these projects. How do we harness that? How do we encourage them to come and join in another type of way to contribute and build civic participation in more formal programs through national service?

So I would ask all of us to continue bridging those kind of relationships so that all of these folks, who are so actively engaged and already contributing in important ways to their community, continue to think about doing that through more formal opportunities. And I'll just leave it there. So thank you.

DR. ROBLES: Thank you, Mary. So in these last few minutes I just want to give people an opportunity, our presenters to just comment or last concluding remarks on something you've heard, something you didn't get to say. In response to Meg, we could always follow-up after the Convening. But, I will start with, I'll start with Laura.

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DR. WRAY-LAKE: I learned so much from all of the other presentations and also really appreciated all of the AmeriCorps staff, you know, speaking to all of these issues. I think for me a big takeaway across this whole conversation is that Black youth have so much power to create positive change. And that with all of these questions about how to recruit them, how to support their health and wellbeing, I think we need to bring them to the table. So that's kind of one thought percolating is like, let's ask them, let's see them as true partners in this work.

DR. ROBLES: Thank you very much. And we will take that.

Next, I'll have Tina and Maren.

KING: What do you think, Tina? You want to go first?

DR. LIMPert: I would say thanks to everybody. And just in this small cohort I see so many connections. What resonated with me was Carol's comment about the importance of intergenerational work, as a lot of people mentioned, but also community partnerships and

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having established community partnerships. And as an academic not to be afraid to be part of the community, get out of your bubble and get into the community, it's really important. Thank you. Thanks for this opportunity.

KING: Yeah. And I would echo that, definitely. And also the idea that youth really need to see people who look like them and live in their same neighborhoods to provide leadership and the example of yes, this is how we should be working. And at the same time, I think we also heard a lot about asset-based processes and thinking. We heard so much about needs and the idea that there are strengths, and recognizing those, and being proud of those, and using those will be a big step up for a number of neighborhoods that we're working with.

DR. ROBLES: Thank you. Okay. So the Drexel group: Devin, Carol, Rachel, and Ayana.

McCULLOUGH: I guess I could maybe say a little tiny bit here. But, the thing that stood out to me in this

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session, and the beautiful thing, was the idea of seeing youth as positive. Often times they get such a bad rap and they're all grouped together, you know, and there's so much potential there. Sometimes they may not know what all is out there, what all is available. So it was good to hear the discussion on ways to sort of bring them into the fold and let them know what is available.

They have such power and such - Gosh, just such a shining light that sometimes may not get a chance to shine because they might not even know that it's within them. So seeing the youth as positive and letting them see the good that is within themselves.

DR. ROBLES: Thanks, Carol. Rachel, Ayana, and Devin?

DR. ALLEN-HANDY: I would just say a lot of times we come from a perspective that youth have to be empowered when actually, in actuality they're already empowered. There's those assets inside of them that are already driving them in different directions. And one of the things that I think our team, which makes

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it so special, is how we really employ kind of the cultural wealth of familial capital. We are like a family and so you can't get away from your family even if you have different iterations in your life, you know.

We do life together. And even thinking about the four years that we've been on this project, many of our students stick around. We find other ways for them to be engaged in the work. For example, myself, Keish, Carol, and one of my grad assistants we meet every single week to continue the work in kind of a smaller group and it turns out being about family, right, Carol? But, I think that's a great way to think about engagement like, you can't get away from your family, they're always going to be there, no matter what.

DR. ROBLES: Thank you. Rachel and then I'll end with Devin.

DR. WENRICK: Apologies, I had to step away for a second because I had a community member at the door. I mean, that's the thing is like the work never stops

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and that's a really wonderful thing. I do think, and just echoing what everyone has said, is this work goes in all directions, right. So it's our youth who are empowering us, reminding us, keeping our feet to the fire, and we're seeing things in each other and highlighting and amplifying things in each other, and I think that's something that once you experience it, you really can't walk away from it.

DR. ROBLES: Thanks. Devin, you have the final word.

WELSH: Echoing that point, I think that's been central in these last four years is I've seen, you know, in a pivotal point in my own life, I've been incredibly inspired by all of these young people that I've had the privilege to work with and they've really shaped the direction that my life is taking. And so I'm very grateful for them and I'm grateful to know that there are other programs where they can be, where similar students and similar young people can inspire others and continue to effect that change. So I'm just grateful to be a part of it.

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DR. ROBLES: Thank you. And thank you all for participating today. So I will hand this over to Katy and have a great day.

HUSSEY-SLONIKER: Thank you very for attending today's session. We want to thank our speakers for their presentations and reflections as well to our audience today for a great discussion. Our dialogue objectives will have been met if the presentations and discussions stimulated ideas, collaboration, and partnership for the betterment of communities through meaningful, equitable, and actionable change. As a reminder, all three sessions of the 2022 AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation Dialogue were recorded. The recordings will be available in two weeks on the AmeriCorps our Impact Webinar page. You may also find them on the AmeriCorps YouTube channel under the Research and Evaluation playlist.

We cannot forget to thank our webinar facilitation team, ICF Next. Their staff: Larisa Crewalk, Alexandra Owens, and Jenelle Azore, and their colleagues for their technical support and

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coordination. Thank you and have a wonderful rest of your day.

DR. LIMPert: Thanks everybody. Good to see you.

DR. ALLEN-HANDY: Thank you.

DR. ROBLES: Thank you. I will follow-up with everyone.

Bye, thanks.

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