

Wonderful Westside Neighborhood Interview Findings

A report on major themes, community values, and project suggestions collected during interviews with Wonderful Westside Neighborhood (WWN) residents during Spring 2023.

This project is conducted through a partnership between the Pheasant Ridge Neighborhood Center (PRNC), students in “Creative Placemaking Through Community Development” at the University of Iowa, the Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities (IISC), and many Wonderful Westside residents and community leaders.

Findings were synthesized by Molly Kresse and Mae McDonough, University of Iowa Creative Placemaking students.



IOWA

Urban Planning & Community Development Findings

Overarching Themes



The Wonderful Westside Neighborhood is home to a **diverse** array of residents from many **different backgrounds and experiences**



The Pheasant Ridge Neighborhood Center can serve as a **hub for community support**, education, and creativity



The **close-knit community** nature is a major neighborhood strength



Residents expressed interest in events and **initiatives directed towards all ages**, from young children to parents, to older adults



The importance of **support for English language learners**

Community Values

Community and family connections

- Many interviewees reported that connections with both their families and the Wonderful Westside community are very important to them. Some interviewees explained that Sundanese culture and religion teach one to care for community members like family. Several residents explained that the close-knit Sudanese community was a major deciding factor when choosing to reside in the WWN.

A safe and calm community

- Multiple interviewees mentioned that they appreciate the peaceful nature of the neighborhood. Responses overwhelmingly indicate interviewees feel that this is a safe community for children but are interested in additional neighborhood traffic initiatives.

Opportunities to enjoy music and food

- Several interviewees emphasized that events pertaining to music and food are a key source of connection and joy in the neighborhood.

Multicultural learning and enrichment

- Several interviewees who are immigrants to the US discussed their journeys learning English and settling into life in Iowa City, while simultaneously

emphasizing the importance of staying connected to their upbringing and teaching their children about their native languages and cultural traditions.

Lifelong Learning and Education

- Many interviewees discussed their educational pursuits such as taking English classes, obtaining advanced degrees from post-secondary institutions including the University of Iowa and Kirkwood Community College, teaching their children to speak their parents' native languages, and teaching their children about different cultures.

Theater Arts & Creative Placemaking Findings

Overarching Themes



Closeness to **family and youth**



Cooking meals and recipes from home to pass on to children



The importance of incorporating **multigenerational gathering spaces** into the neighborhood



Blending **Sudanese and American culture**



Celebrating through **religious events**



Connecting to **family back home**

Community Values

Honoring culture and having a strong community, and inviting others into the community

- Several interviewees mentioned that they would like to invite those from outside the community to events, it was also mentioned several times the honoring of Sudanese culture, as well as American culture.
- Inclusivity during community events
- Parenting as an art form; sharing culture with children, cooking traditional meals, attending arts programs as a family.

Religious appreciation

- Several interviewees discussed religious events; their enjoyment of these events, and the importance they have for the community.
- Getting to know people through the church regardless of their faith.

Suggestions for Projects from Interviews

Khalda

- Expand **community space** for children in the neighborhood.
- Host formal **English classes**. Begin with efforts to identify needs and inform grant applications, possibly through a partnership with the University College of Education.
- Offer more **connections to relevant resources** for the community.
- Khalda has experience as a community organizer which could play an important role.

Mohamed

- Support **healthcare access** initiatives.
- Develop **programs envisioned by youth** in the community.
- Host **religious celebrations**.
- Invite those who do not live in the neighborhood to events.
- Facilitate a downtown Iowa City **dancing program**.
- **Connect** community members with additional non-profits to meet needs.

Bakhiet

- Offer **funding** for Sudanese families to visit family in Sudan and cover funeral services of family members.
- Initiate preliminary **community surveying** about interest in having **Sudanese educational opportunities** for children.

Hanadi

- **Extend childcare to evenings** occasionally on Fridays/Saturdays to give parents some respite.
- Offer more **cultural events** to share culture with children born in the United States.
- Host **tutoring services** including English learning support.
- Offer **language hours**: time to converse in a specific language together to support multilingual fluency and education (student suggested).
- Create a **community garden or edible classroom** (student suggested).

Connie

- Facilitate opportunities to connect with neighbors and **work together** as a community.
- Expand Christ the King's "**National Night Out**" programming to meet with police and emergency service providers in a safe, comfortable, and educational environment.
- Conduct **Neighborhood communication** through email blasts, bulletin boards, or other strategies (student suggested).

Andy

- Offer **networking events** with other community organizations.
- Host **English language classes**.
- Develop a **community advisory board** (student suggested).
- Conduct a **formal community needs assessment** (student suggested).
- Bring in experts to speak such as public health experts (students suggested).

Ibtisam

- Offer English classes with a focus on **conversational language**.
- Expand **partnerships with other Sudanese organizations** and act as a linkage to community services.
- Further investigate of what “community” means to residents through interviews and focus groups to find a collective that could serve the Wonderful Westside (student suggested).

Zinab

- Offer **art classes** featuring collaborations with local artists and expanding art initiatives in the neighborhood (Zinab currently leads a drawing class).
- Host **parent-child cooking classes**, bridging cultures and generations. This could be a one-time event or a series of events throughout the year focused on specific dishes (from Sudanese and American traditions).
- Hold **holiday celebrations** in the neighborhood to connect residents and friends across the community to bridge cultures and experiences together.
- Collaborate with the UI College of Public Health on **health initiatives** including support for Maternal and Child Healthcare (student suggested).
- Facilitate the development of **3+ bedroom apartments** in the WWN for larger families.

Asmahan

- Continue the excellent work at the PRNC after-school program.

Ivette

- **Support small-business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs**. This could empower community members to generate their own income while developing and sharing their skills with the community.
- Begin a **welcome program** to those moving to Iowa City. A welcome program could connect new residents to support resources as they transition into the neighborhood. This would also provide an opportunity for new residents to meet new people and create a community, making their move to a new place meaningful and engaging.

Sulima

- Create a **computer lab**, with expanded printing and copying services to support residents, including students.
- Offer **English classes** and/or support English conversation and study groups.
- Host **snow day events** for both youth and adult residents such as sledding and snowman-making contests to connect the community and welcome new residents in the wintertime.

Suzan

- Continue **community building events** like potlucks
- Support for single immigrant mothers **navigating professional services**, like finding an attorney or purchasing a vehicle

David

- Facilitate community building through **local events**.
- Advocate for equitable spending for better, **safe infrastructure** such as sidewalk improvements, public road safety and public gathering spaces.
- Support **minority representation** and further equity initiatives in Iowa City.

Natalie

- Create **spaces for children** to play and socialize.
- Continue the excellent work of the Pheasant Ridge Community Center and neighborhood.
- Begin a program to foster a better **relationship between the community and the police** (student suggested).
- Host a **neighborhood block party** (student suggested).
- Offer **artist seminars** or art classes (student suggested).

Huda

- **Address traffic blind spots** and traffic safety issues. Requiring parked cars to switch sides daily could reduce some traffic problems.
- Conduct initial **surveying** to gauge community views on updates to parking/traffic policies (student suggested).
- Create more **supervised opportunities for children** to play and do activities in the community to reduce instances of unsupervised play. Educate children on what areas are safe to play in. Children could help with mural projects and the community garden.
- **Partner with PEACE Iowa**, a local peace education and action center, to promote community engagement, especially during the ongoing crisis in Sudan.
- Incorporate **musical and theater-related events** into the PRNC's programming.