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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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A Culturally Appropriate Asset-based Juvenile Crime Prevention Pilot: "Wrap and Map"

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ABSTRACT

The City of Memphis has some of the highest crime and violence rates in the United States. Unfortunately, a portion of these crimes is attributed to our youth population. Crime rates and violence committed by or against youth and/or juveniles is steadily on the rise with the numbers climbing each year. Studies have shown that more than half of violent crimes committed in Memphis are committed by youth under twenty-four years of age (Operation Safe Community). Many children in Memphis live in poverty; this increases the risk factor for youth violence. Most of the juveniles arrested and jailed for crime and violence are minorities, an overwhelming number of these being African American. One intervention implemented by the City of Memphis, the "Wrap and Map" approach, integrated intervention and prevention programs consisting of empowerment and culture-based wraparound and asset mapping techniques to support at-risk youth. The purpose of this article is to explore and describe this program. This article will explore the demand for this program, its purpose and history, and lessons learned.

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Introduction

Memphis is a vibrant urban city with multiple diverse communities. Located on the Mississippi, River in the southwestern corner of Tennessee and bordered by Arkansas on the northwest and the state of Mississippi on the southwest. Like many urban cities across the United States, Memphis communities struggle with the shared responsibility of reducing youth violence and crime. The purpose of this article is to describe a one-year pilot juvenile crime and violence prevention project Just Care 180 (JC 180). The pilot was designed to target first-time non-violent African American male juvenile offenders and African American male youth at-risk for participating in criminal behavior or violence in Memphis-Shelby County, Tennessee. African- American youth are overrepresented in every phase of the juvenile justice process. This is particularly evident in secure confinement facilities. The degree of over-representation increases from the lowest point of arrest to each subsequent stage of involvement with the criminal justice system.

Based on earlier historical data and reports from the Tennessee Department of Health, as a population projection in Tennessee, 21 percent of the population between the ages of 10 through 17 was African American [1]. In addition, based on the information provided in the search results, it is stated that in 2017, approximately 93% of the cases referred to the Shelby County Juvenile Court in Memphis represented black youth [2]. Disproportionately, this rate of involvement is almost two times the amount of African American youth in the population. Forty-nine percent of juveniles in secure juvenile correctional facilities were African- American; 47 percent were White; and 4 percent were other minorities.

It should be noted that youth detained in secure facilities prior to adjudication are more likely to be subsequently incarcerated; thereby, maintaining the infrastructure of the pipeline to prison for African American youth. More than ten years ago, in 2011, seventy-two percent of juveniles tried in court as adults in Tennessee were African American, almost 3½ times their percentage of the population. Twenty-four percent were white; and 4 percent were other racial minorities. Similarly, in 2017, ninety-two cases of children were transferred from juvenile court to adult court. (That same year, four such cases were transferred in Nashville.) In 2018, the transfer number fell to 78 (76 of them were black, according to Just City). Last year (the first full year since federal oversight ended here), the number rose to 90 [3]. Unfortunately, juvenile crime continues to be a pressing concern in poor, urban communities of color across the nation. Law enforcement agencies in the U.S. made nearly 1.5 million arrests of persons under age 18. Nationwide, African Americans represent 26% of juvenile arrests, 44% of youth are detained, 46% of the youth who are judicially waived to criminal court, and 58% of the youth admitted to state prisons. If history has taught us anything, it is that these trends have persisted through 2022.

Blues in the Bluff City: Juvenile Violence and Crime in Memphis

Memphis-Shelby County is a metropolitan area with a history of having some of the highest crime and youth violence rates in

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the country. Violent crimes committed by juveniles jumped by 58% in 2019 compared to the same time last year, according to new numbers from the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission and the University of Memphis Public Safety Institute. According to data provided by the Juvenile Court, there were 671 major violent delinquent charges from January through September of 2019, compared to 423 in 2018. Historically, competent, and longstanding community leaders from a variety of sectors understand how this negative image impacts and often impedes and destroys the community economic and social goals, Youth crime and violence annihilates hope, health, and prosperity of individuals, families, and communities. Lack of public safety is not a standalone problem; it is linked to a city's economic health, quality of education, and other community goals. Accordingly, lower rates of crime are essential to the increased economic growth and prosperity of the city.

Youth crime statistics in Memphis show a concerning increase in recent years. According to the Memphis Shelby County Crime Commission, there has been a significant surge in juvenile arrests, with a 42% increase in the number of juveniles charged with crimes. In 2022 alone, juveniles were charged with 151 aggravated assault charges, 124 carjacking charges, and 96 aggravated robbery charges. This rise in juvenile crime is not unique to Memphis, as serious juvenile violence has been increasing nationwide since 2020 (ABC24, 2022).

Wrap and Map: A Community-Based Integrated Approach

The goal of Operation Safe Community was to make Memphis one of the safest communities in the nation by using crime and violence prevention policies, programs and practices. Led by the Mayor of Memphis, TN, the Mayor of Shelby County, TN, the Shelby County District Attorney General, and Memphis Police Director, 15 research-based strategies were identified to reduce crime in Memphis and Shelby County. One of the strategies included the Just Care (JC) 180 program. The JC 180 initiative was launched to "turn around" youth charged with unruly and delinquent offenses by introducing concentrated programmatic efforts in two predominantly African American communities, Soulsville, South Memphis and Hickory Hill. JC 180 utilized an integrated intervention and prevention approach consisting of culture-based wraparound and asset mapping. The integrated "wrap and map" approach emerges from a strengths-based and empowerment framework developed and implemented by community stakeholders to support at-risk African American youth and their family. As the lead organization in the JC 180 initiative, Tennessee Voices for Children had several years of experience in successfully planning, implementing, and sustaining systems of care (SOC) programs. Using a strength-based approach is one of the hallmarks of SOC initiatives. Promoting SOCs to focus more attentively on asset building of the child, family, and community level is compatible with the public health model that addresses health concerns such as juvenile violence and crime prevention in the context of a full range of supports and services for youth and their families [4]. The Wraparound approach is the "signature approach" utilized by SOC initiatives across the United States. Similarly, Asset-based Mapping has been used as a strengths-based approach to improve outcomes of community development and public health projects around the world. JC 180 project planners agreed that combining the two strength-based approaches into one integrated effort was worth a try.

Project Development Process

Experts in the fields of juvenile delinquency prevention and reentry, youth development, systems of care programs, community development and community crime prevention participated in planning meetings over the course of two years. During the meetings, discussion topics included evidence-based (EB) models, frameworks, approaches, and strategies to address the rising and daunting issue of juvenile crime in Memphis, Tennessee. Similar to the experiences and evaluative research findings of Miao, Umemoto, Gonda, & Hishinuma [5] the project was developed utilizing five elements essential for community engagement in evidence-based youth crime prevention:

1. Common vision among targeted communities: JC 180 was developed in close alignment with the communities' shared understanding and concerns to reduce juvenile crime and violence.
2. Promoted participatory planning and inclusion in the development process: Program planners worked consistently and intentionally to create and utilize planning and implementation strategies based on mutual trust and respect among partners and stakeholders, and transparency.
3. Valued building and nurtured partnership maintenance: JC 180 leadership and staff sought to build hope and empower youth and families with seemingly small short-term victories while moving larger, longer-term goals. For successful planning and implementation, the project worked to strengthen and institutionalize partnerships and collaborative relationships through teaching constructive conflict resolution approaches.
4. Growth and sustainability of the pilot was supported by capacity building and leadership development efforts: JC 180 planned and implemented two Institutes, the Network Resource Institute, and the Youth Resource Institute. The institutes were planned and implemented to share information and tools specifically tailored to create developmental relationships and to enhance the capacity of partner organizations and stakeholders.
5. JC 180 promoted ongoing information sharing and peer education among partners and community network members. Lessons learned from the pilot were shared during mandatory partner meetings, asset mapping sessions, and parent support gatherings. Participants constructively identified issues and struggled to resolve issues collectively while adjusting to a changing environment [5].

A Culturally Appropriate Approach

Martinez and Van Buren [6] provide guidance to develop culturally competent programs using six domains custom tailored to their client:

1. The organization's leadership should create and nurture a foundation focusing on the need and delivery of culturally competent services and supports.
2. Addresses the services and support needed to help the people served overcome potential and real obstacles and barriers.

3. Includes rational planning and on-going quality assurance through evaluation of services.
4. Describes strategies that produce effective working networks, collaborations, and partnerships between community stakeholders, clients, within and outside of the organization.
5. Focuses on communication between all parties involved with the delivery of quality care.
6. Charges the organization with establishing a trained and culturally competent staff knowledgeable of the culturally diverse population being served.

Culture-based Wraparound employs a heavy dose of culturally competent wraparound services. The planning group understood the importance of using the cultural assets of the youth, their families, and their communities to support youth offenders in reentry from re-offending, as well as prevent at risk-youth from offending for the first time. For ex-offenders, it was understood that without strong support systems and experienced leadership reentry can be difficult and often impossible. As progenitors of wraparound, Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs [7] championed incorporating the individual, as well as, the systems they encountered. They defined cultural competence as “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations”.

Wraparound is best understood as a planning process, a philosophy of care, or a service delivery approach, as opposed to, a theory or model. In fact, wraparound is loosely based on, or at least consistent with, several influential psychosocial theories of child development and behavior [8]. These include the social ecological approach of Brofenbrenner [9] and Bandura’s [10] social learning theory, as explicated by Munger [11]. Together these theories stress that the child is influenced heavily by the interactions between a child and the systems (peers, family, and community) in his or her environment and by the interactions among those systems themselves [12].

Culturally competent services insure that the child and family receive community-based support that allows the support teams to continue with the child after the team process is no longer needed or part of the Wraparound process. For African American youth, this ongoing support is imperative to their achievement of success. The wraparound process “centers on individualizing a combination of services and community-based supports selected by the youth and their family to be “wrapped around” a given youth [12]. Ferguson [13] elaborated that, the required functions and activities that make up the process include strengths and needs assessment, the engagement of the participants of the family team, the production of a crisis/safety plan, the development and monitoring of the service/support plan by the community collaborative structure.

The wraparound process mirrors the Generalist Intervention Model of Social Work by incorporating the following phases of services delivery: engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Winters & Metz [14] described the Wraparound process as four phases that include engagement and team preparation, discovery of the strengths and needs of the child or youth and family, initial plan development by the team, plan implementation; and transition to address needs in additional domains (e.g., school, behavior, housing and so forth). Winters & Metz [14] further reported that Family Support Partners (FSP) provide critical peer support to parents and caregivers of youth receiving services. FSPs are individuals whose own children have been through the service systems and are able to share their own stories and knowledge of how to navigate the systems. They provide culturally sensitive, culturally appropriate, non-judgmental support to the family to help increase family involvement and serve as liaisons with professionals to decrease unintentional bias toward parents and youth.

The FSPs and key members of the family’s social support network direct the team approach of the culture-based wraparound process. The team must collaborate to arrive at a coordinated and family-driven plan of care creatively tailored to meet the needs of the individual youth and his or her family. The collective or team approach recognizes the family strengths and empowers family members to be responsible for implementing, monitoring, and adjusting the plan. They meet regularly until all members agree that wraparound is no longer needed. Walter and Petr [15] stated that one of the teams’ key tasks is to ensure that the process reflects the culture of the family. Goals of the wraparound team are shared by team members including family members, organizational representatives, service providers, professionals, community support and informal support i.e. friends, and/or church members.

By virtue of its strengths-based approach, professionals and family members reinforce the youth’s self-esteem while building their sense of self-agency. Just as it has been demonstrated that child-therapist relationship variables are predictive of youth mental health-treatment outcomes, it makes sense that the relationship-building aspect of wraparound is helpful in promoting positive outcomes for children and families [14]. “If you stick with the basic elements of Wraparound, over the long run there is never a bad plan, because the plan changes all the time. If you develop a plan that does not work, obviously, it is not a good plan, and therefore you need to redo it. You keep redoing it until things get better . . . if you stick with it, they will” [16].

Asset-Based Mapping

For many youths and families in urban communities of color, innovative approaches to rebuilding their lives is a vital necessity to live healthy and productive lives. Well-meaning people are seeking solutions by taking one of two differing roads. The first, believing, "the glass is half empty" concentrates on defining the problem, understanding the problem, and begins by focusing on a family's or community's needs, deficiencies, and problems. Families in urban high-crime communities may be overwrought with trauma associated with living in a difficult environment. This is the road most traveled, and commands the vast majority of personal, programmatic, and community resources. This traditional path is filled with images of needy, problematic, and hopeless neighborhoods populated by needy, problematic, and

hopeless people. Images of crime and violence, hopelessness, gangs, and drugs can be conceived as a "mental map" of a neighborhood or family. This mental map conveys only part of the truth about the actual conditions and seldom addresses the root problems faced by families and communities. But they are not understood as part of the truth; they are regarded as "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth". Finally, the needs map habitually appears to be the only guide ever used by members of the mass media, whose appetite for the spectacular criminal and violent crime story seems insatiable [17]. Believing that the “glass is half-empty” often people who live in impoverished and crime-ridden communities think and believe that help can only come from outside of the community. Oppression along with social factors such as broken families, poverty, and low educational levels can serve as determinants frequently giving birth to frustration, hopelessness, and a devalued sense of helplessness.

But there is another way of looking at the community and family, “the glass is half full”. Everything needed for restoration and resolution already exists to support juvenile offenders, at-risk youth, and their families. While changing life course is never simple, with a little help youth, family members, and providers can identify resources and assets (people, churches, programs, libraries, schools, and much more) that help them to build healthy lives to prevent and intervene in juvenile delinquency. Kretzman & McKnight [17] reminded us that an alternative approach becomes imperative. That alternative path, an asset-based approach, very simply, leads toward the development of policies and activities based on the capacities, skills, resources, and assets of youth, their families, and their neighborhoods. Realizing that all the historic evidence indicates that significant improvements in families and communities takes place only when local community people, including those persons directly impacted by the problems, are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the improvement effort. African Americans are not helpless and powerless. African American communities are not without hope and resources to help themselves. While outside help was welcomed to join in the effort unfortunately the prospect and reality for outside help was dismal. Strong University of Memphis, School of Social Work partnerships were instrumental and beneficial to provide technical support and facilitation of many of the program’s activities.

Asset-based strategies and culture-based wraparound services view culture as an asset. Cultural capital determines our worldview, what we believe, what we value as important, what we take for granted, and what things we think are possible to change. Hegemony allows one social group to impose its symbols and reward system on other groups. The integration of culture-based wrap around and asset-based community development principles produces the good the results from social relationships, social capital. The term originates with Pierre Bourdieu but has been popularized by Robert Putman in his book ‘Bowling Alone’ [18].

The asset mapping process begins with the construction of a new map drawn, by the youth, families, support partners, and network members taking note of their personal and community assets. Their personal assets are identified in the assessment of youth and family strengths. The community assets are through asset mapping sessions involving youth, family members, family support providers, and service providing network members. As described by Kretzmann and McKnight [17] there are three levels of assets to be considered. The first is the "gifts, skills and capacities" of the individuals living in the community. The second level of assets includes "citizen associations" through which local people come together to pursue common goals. The third level of assets is those institutions present in community, such as local government, hospitals, education, and human service agencies. In our case, we were interested in the support services, individuals, organizations, institutions, and networks to mitigate the social determinants of juvenile crime and delinquency. Asset mapping helps youth and families to recognize assets, strengths and gifts all around us. Asset Mapping propels us to identify beneficial relationships and build on them in collaborative action. Asset Mapping opens up opportunities for action toward the greater good.

Discussion

JC180 pilot program was implemented in the Lemoyne-Owen-Soulsville and Southeast-Hickory Hill community areas utilizing the Lemoyne-Owen College Community Development Corporation (LOCCDC) and Southeast Memphis Community Development Corporation (SEMCDC) with funding from the Memphis City Council under a resolution that expressed the City of Memphis’ desire contribute to the efforts and initiatives of Operation Safe Community to address the problem of youth crime and violence. Funding from the City of Memphis was administered by the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission which subsequently entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with Tennessee Voices for children (TVC) headquartered in Nashville, TN, to administer implementation of the program. TVC supervised the planning, development and implementation of client services, identification, recruitment, and hiring of project administrative and line personnel, subsequent and ongoing staff training, and supervision of all program staff. The CDCs: 1. Implemented an integrated culturally-based wraparound support services to youth and their families; 2. Facilitated the integration of an asset mapping initiative to engage, educate, and empower project participants and community stakeholders; 3. Launched a social marketing and information campaign to inform community members about the benefits of JC 180; 4. Developed and trained a resource network of provider partners in the community; and implemented a mini-grant initiative to promote and support community-based youth development service providers.

Program Limitations:

Challenges to Program Implementation

The one-year timeline for the implementation of the pilot proved unrealistic. JC 180 involved community mobilization, important administrative partners from outside of the service or catchment area, partnership formation, and service network development, all of which require substantial time and effort to successfully implement. While both CDCs had existing partnerships in the community, development of new partnerships and agreements along with the formation of a

heretofore nonexistent network of service providers proved to be daunting, implausible, and impossible. However, both CDCs conducted extensive community planning efforts and developed networks of service providers and support services. The completed community planning and resultant network of community partners provided an outstanding foundation and promising approach for future initiatives. Similarly, the time constraint of a one-year pilot period proved to be too short as the time required to identify and recruit the project director, clinical director, and family support providers The requisite training resulted in the program not being ready to launch into full implementation in the community for nearly six months after inception of the funding for the program. Consequently, the program was unable to begin serving youth and families until fifty percent of the original implementation period had expired. Future initiatives employing similar approaches will need to plan for and provide sufficient time for start-up and program building prior to the client service period being started.

We found that JC 180 pilot program needed to have the flexibility to make course corrections quickly and adjust program requirements and/or program directions to evolving conditions or lessons learned during the implementation period. This inability to respond effectively to the changing programmatic environment in a timely manner by adjusting program goals while maintaining the integrity of the project was called into question. There was a disagreement among program clinical staff, Juvenile Court personnel, and staff at both CDCs with Operation Safe Community (OSC) regarding the criteria for participation of youth in the program. OSC officials believed strongly that the strategy required actual contact of youth with Juvenile Court. On the contrary, the other stakeholders in the project believed that youth "at risk" of contact (whether or not actual contact with the Court had occurred) was the criteria for admission to the program. This disagreement birthed confusion that was not resolved for several critical months in the life of the pilot until OSC Board of Directors were able to consider and approve a resolution changing criteria for admission by adoption of the definition of the clinical staff, Juvenile Court personnel, and CDCs. Unfortunately, during this time of confusion, disagreement, and ultimately resolution, the project was only able to admit youth directly referred to the program from Juvenile Court which, because of legal processes required after contact with the court, could only refer a small number of youth to JC 180. The delay resulting from the confusion essentially produced a bottleneck in the referral process that was not resolved until only three months of the program implementation.
remained. While referrals increased dramatically following the amendment of the original admission criteria, there remained insufficient time to provide the level and duration of culturally based wraparound supportive services to allow impact measurement of the program. However, the substantial number of referrals received by the staff in both areas strongly demonstrated the critical need for this type of intervention program.

JC 180 was designed using the wraparound and community development tenet of "community-based" meaning physically or geographically located in the community. This is important for access to services and supports. Realizing that it is critical that community-based programs such as JC 180 are based in the community. In the Hickory Hill community, it was originally believed that the primary program site would be located in a city-owned building at no cost. The building also housed the Memphis Police Department (MPD) for the community area. Regrettably, while MPD officials were supportive of co-locating the program with MPD unit, city officials refused to approve the use of the space for a juvenile prevention and intervention project. By the time the decision was made by officials, funds originally designated for space rental had been reallocated for other grant related activities upon the belief that rent funds would not be required. As a result, funding was not available to rent new space. This set of circumstances caused the Hickory program site staff to be dislocated and subsequently disconnected from the community in which it was designed to provide services. The staff was able to continue to provide services to youth and their families. However, absent a physical location in the community, among youth, families, and network partners, it was impossible for the project to generate a sense of being community-based. It is essential that a community-based prevention and intervention project have a physical location in the community being served. In addition to the substantial challenges in building a sense of community among participants and partners, meeting with youth and families became significantly more difficult as did coordinating services.

As a one-year pilot project, JC 180 faced insurmountable obstacles. Course corrections were non-existent. For example, confusion over program admission criteria for youth and family participation, nearly all of the participants were admitted in the final three months of the program. JC 180 project timelines were not long enough to allow for an impact evaluation of the intervention and prevention strategies. While process evaluation could have been conducted, it was virtually impossible to conduct any type of rigorous and useful outcome evaluation. It is strongly recommended that future program implementation of juvenile crime and delinquency intervention and prevention programs be provided sufficient time and support in order to conduct an impact evaluation using at a minimum a quasi-experimental design.

Program Accomplishments

The JC 180 Pilot program undoubtedly confronted several substantial challenges during the implementation period. However, despite these challenges, the program was able to implement a considerable number of significant and important accomplishments. Certainly, the accomplishments outweighed the challenges.

- JC 180 demonstrated the critical need for "wrap and map" early intervention programming in African American communities.
- The program developed strong models of community participatory planning that can be replicated in other communities.
- JC 180 identified, recruited, and trained leadership, para-professional staff, and network partners in the "wrap and map" approach.

- The project established and maintained Advisory councils composed of community resource partners in both targeted communities.
- JC 180 launched a social marketing campaign to inform and educate community residents and services providers about the availability of juvenile delinquency prevention resources and services.
- Asset mapping sessions were conducted in each of the two service communities resulting in development of resource databases and improved planning and resource coordination.
- JC 180 organized extensive planning efforts with a wide range of community stakeholders and constructed a substantial foundation for future juvenile delinquency prevention and intervention efforts in Memphis communities.
- Consequently, these planning processes developed new partnerships and fostered the creation of new programs which will be invaluable for future community mobilization, revitalization, and development initiatives in the two communities.
- The asset-based community and program planning efforts, including the Resource Institutes and Neighborhood Strengths Institutes, were models for other community areas for resource development, collaboration, and partnership development to support building social infrastructure and community.

Service Type	Number of Youth	Number of Family Members/Significant Others	Total
Mini Grants	199	225	424
Wrap and Map	148	568	716

Table 1: JC 180 Services.

Note: As reported by the Shelby County Juvenile Court, 26 youth or 18% of JC 180 program juveniles had contact with the criminal justice system while participating in the program.

Conclusion

The purpose of this descriptive article was to describe a one-year pilot juvenile delinquency prevention project Just Care 180 (JC 180) designed to target African-American juvenile offenders and adolescent African-Americans at-risk for contact with the criminal justice system in two communities in Memphis, TN. The results of this investigation show evidence that as an innovative, integrated, culturally appropriate and asset-based community approach "Wrap and Map" has significant benefits in reducing juvenile crime and violence. One clear benefit evidenced was reduced recidivism among youth participants. Recidivism or reoffending among JC 180 youth while participating in the program was eighteen percent. In contrast, recidivism among all juveniles in Shelby County for 2011 was significantly higher at forty-two percent [19]. More broadly, research is needed to better understand the long-term impact of the intervention. So, why was this program important? The insights learned are valuable and can be replicated in future efforts to reduce youth crime and violence. The takeaways include, but were not limited to:

1. Clearly a reduction in violence and crime. The program reduce them preventing violence among young people participating in the program.

2. The program's focus on positive youth, assets, community resources, family, participation, and community involvement proved beneficial to reaching program goals.

3. The program's early intervention with first time nonviolent offenders was particularly important and less costly in dollars and human suffering than responding to violence and crime after it has already happened.

4. Culturally appropriate and sensitive program activities aided in program retention of participants because the activities were attractive to youth, their families, community members, and service providers.

5. Youth, voice and choice empowered the young people and their families by involving them in program, decision making processes and encouraging them to take responsibility for their actions. Empowerment led to increased self-esteem, and a sense of purpose.

6. Finally, the reduction in recidivism (26%) for youth already involved and violent behavior and criminal activities was evidence of the program's effectiveness.

Despite the short duration of one year, this pilot offers great insight into the critical importance of integrating culture and asset-based community strategies.

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