



MEETING HIGHLIGHTS



COMMUNITY HEALTH AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

A Student Research Showcase

Wednesday, April 20th, 2022
11:00AM—12:00PM
Presented via Zoom; 27 Attendees

All presentations and related meeting materials are located on the HCTF website:
<https://www.dvrpc.org/Committees/HCTF/>

Welcome and Introductions

Karin Morris, Director of Community Planning with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), officially opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and encouraging attendees to complete a poll to get a better sense of who was in the “room.” She provided a brief overview of DVRPC and the Healthy Communities Task Force. She then reflected on what healthy planning means for communities, and the intersection between health and the built environment. Following this, she explained how important design-thinking is as a tool towards solving community health challenges. Noting that the upcoming presenters would provide much more detail on this topic, she introduced the Dr. Yvonne Michael, a Professor of Epidemiology & Biostatistics from Drexel University, who then gave an overview of the topic as well as an introduction into the featured student research projects.

Community Health & The Built Environment: A Student Research Showcase

Dr. Yvonne Michael, co-director of the Center for Health and the Designed Environment, and a member of the AIA Design and Health Consortium, shared her approach to designing healthful community solutions. Dr. Michael began by introducing her colleague and co-teacher for the course, D.S. Nicholas (Dee), who is an architect and researcher from the Westphal College of Arts & Design. Collaboratively, in this course, they sought to foster more interdisciplinary training that would bring together design thinking and public health approaches. The course started with health-oriented research and problem identification, followed by engaging with community members, and then synthesizing potential solutions.

Dee emphasized the importance of the concept of ‘radical hospitality’ and how crucial it is to remember that everyone in every community offers some form of expertise. Projects like these serve to create WITH community, and not solely for community. Emphasis was placed on the collaborative aspect of engagement, and sharing of authorship with regards to final products.

Dr. Michaels then briefly introduced the selected community partners that students in the course worked with: Fabric Health, Writer’s Room, the Domestic Violence Center of Chester County. Other groups also worked with the group Impact Services looking into deterring illegal dumping in Kensington and expanding access to Trauma-informed community training. Groups were chosen by focusing on those who could articulate a solution that required a design solution. Presentations for this meeting featured Fabric Health and the Writer’s Room project solely.

Communicating with Busy Families: Utilizing Technology to Bring Health Services to Laundromats

Gabby O'Leary, MPH '22

The first student presenter of the meeting was Gabby O'Leary, a recent Master of Public Health student, with a focus on Community Health and Prevention. Her presentation reflected the final product of a group of 3 other students.

Gabby provided an overview of Fabric Health, a social impact healthcare start-up that connects community members to healthcare resources by meeting them in a commonly-used community space: laundromats. Fabric Health helps to connect people to an assortment of healthcare services, such as health insurance, routine screenings, vaccinations, SNAP benefits, mammograms, and affordable medication. They have multiple locations throughout Philadelphia, Baltimore and DC and partner with organizations such as Jefferson Health, Pennie and the Hepatitis B Foundation.

Gabby then provided context to the overall public health landscape, noting that there are many factors that contribute to well-being, such as accessibility to services, insurance status, social determinants of health, and the built environment. By providing services in a space that residents are already frequenting, it eliminates some of the barriers to access. Gabby referred to laundromats as a sort of "de facto community center", because they are a space people frequently spend hours at each week. At just one West Philadelphia location, approximately 3,400 families visit a month.

While Fabric Health has had successes with its current model, they expressed a desire to reach more people. Gabby then explained how their group sought to find the most effective way for Fabric Health to engage with more busy families, with a focus on the use of technology. One specific limitation was that Fabric Health has limited staff and that staff can only be in the store for a limited number of hours.

The student team gathered data through observational research and interviews with Fabric Health staff members. They also conducted a literature review and reviewed Fabric Health's survey data. Due to time limitations, they were unable to get interviews directly with community members. A number of methods were used to analyze the data, such as concept mapping, personas, storyboards, matrixes, and prototyping until a desirable solution was reached. It was evident from the data that the majority of laundromat patrons were Black women, who were the primary decision makers for their families regarding healthcare needs. Additionally, most patrons were covered by either Medicaid or Medicare. The data also revealed that there was a wide range of technological literacy levels amongst laundromat patrons.

Gabby then presented a number of diverse approaches to solving this solution. The team focused on digital engagement strategies, such as using instructional videos, text messages, digital office hours, and appointment sign-ups to reach patrons. Additionally, Gabby noted that the expansion of existing Fabric Health computer labs/Wi-Fi access was also an important part of expanding Fabric Health's reach. Alongside the digital efforts, a number of in-person strategies were presented as well, including hosting in-person office hours and appointments. The student team also recommended that Fabric Health continue to strengthen their community partnerships and build community trust. They suggested posting program testimonials on their website to help spread awareness and build trust. The team also proposed that Fabric Health could host promotional events like 'Free Laundry' days to grow their name recognition.

Overall, Gabby emphasized that the solution the group felt would be most effective based on research was the facilitation of in-person and digital appointment sign-ups with Fabric Health staff members. She then also proposed the addition of raffle-prizes in conjunction with the sign-ups as incentive. Gabby then closed the presentation by offering the link to the Fabric Health website to allow attendees to seek out more information on the initiative.

Fabric Health Website for more info: <https://www.fabrichealth.org/>

Gabby then responded to a few questions:

Q: Does Fabric Health have plans to implement any of the proposed ideas?

A (Gabby O’Leary): There was an already demonstrated need for a technological focused solution from Fabric Health, but the presentation was shown to them about a month ago and there are no updates yet. She then went on to explain that everything is in early stages, and there is definitely potential for implementation due to incoming funding that is expected.

Q: Does Fabric Health work in other spaces besides Laundromats?

A(Gabby O’Leary): Currently they do not, but there is definitely potential in the future.

Q: Are there any other organizations doing similar work to Fabric Health?

A(Gabby O’Leary): There are others doing similar work in other community spaces such as libraries, barber shops or churches, but not really in laundromat spaces.

Grandparents' Day: Writers Room Engagement of Aging Homeowners in Mantua

Ola Onawole, MPH ‘22 and Vanessa Xie MS ‘23

Ola Onawole, an MPH recent graduate with a focus on Health Management and Policy, and Vanessa Xie, an MS student with a focus on Design Research gave the second presentation. Both are representatives from a larger group project.

Vanessa opened the presentation by introducing the Writer’s Room, which is a university and community literary arts program that engages in creative placemaking and art for social justice. Their physical location is situated on the Drexel University campus. Vanessa explained that their work focused on the Second Story Collective, an organization affiliated with Writer’s Room that was founded by someone who experienced residential displacement. Vanessa then explained the primary challenge they sought to address through their research was how to engage the aging community of Mantua to participate in Writers Room Co-living and aging in place projects.

Second Story Collective Website: <https://secondstorycollective.org/>

Writer’s Room Website: <https://www.writersroomdrexel.org/>

Ola then provided an explanation of the research methodologies the group used, including interviewing and observing participants, conducting a literature review, and analyzing existing survey data. Ola noted that the student team wanted to first deeply examine the current status of the neighborhood and its existing relationships to better understand what needs existed.

In order to analyze the large amount of data they had gathered the student team used a method called Affinity mapping to help identify any trends and begin the ideation process. They also used creative matrixes and prototyping of ideas. These methods helped to paint a picture of what the stakeholder and resident needs were, and surface potential solutions that would be most effective to meet everyone’s needs. Ola explained that by taking a few of their example prototype models, they were able to talk to community members and get a better understanding of how they felt about it, and gather that input for the final models. Finding a way to incorporate grandchildren and grandparents simultaneously appeared to be important.

Vanessa then presented their final recommendation: an event called Grandparent’s Day. Vanessa noted that the team observed a strong sense of caring for the younger generations amongst the Mantua community and that the team wanted to build upon the connection between grandchildren and grandparents. Two important words were then defined, ‘Eldership’ and ‘Grandparenting’. Eldership is used to refer to the position that older folks have in communities and families to impart wisdom, values, and resources. Grandparenting, however, refers to care-giving to someone who is significantly younger than you, whether biological or adoptive. Vanessa explained that Grandparent’s Day would provide the Writer’s Room with a meaningful way to connect with elderly homeowners in Mantua—by engaging their grandchildren in intentional programming like story sharing, they could make and foster multigenerational connections. Specific components of Grandparents Day could include joint creative writing activities, storytelling, asset mapping, community exhibition events, and any other existing Writer’s Room program.

Ola then presented a very heartfelt video documenting the story of her grandmother who was affected by displacement, and emphasized the importance of connecting with elders and passing those stories along. This was followed by a few questions about the presentation.

Q: Given a history of neighborhood and institutional trust issues, is this something you think that only works if there is already trust built in a community?

A (Ola Onawole): Ola explained that the proposal has a lot of existing support to draw on because there is already a diverse network of people very engaged with the Writer's Room. She explained that staff often referred to the "Writer's Room experience" and how when you go to the physical location, the atmosphere is always very welcoming and encouraging. It was more of an effort to bring awareness to existing residents about the program, and suit their needs. She suggested that in order to make a project like this work in a neighborhood with more institutional trust issues, you would want to focus your efforts first on existing strong organizations and people within the community, then go from there.

Q: Both presentations mentioned the use of a method using 'Personas' during the ideation process, what exactly does that mean?

A (Vanessa Xie): Vanessa explained that the Personas are put together based on research, to represent your main stakeholders. For example, the elders in the Writer's Room were stakeholders in the project. The Persona process brainstorms as many details about the lifestyles, demographics and attitudes about people involved in the project, to build caricatures that help provide deeper insight into the perspectives and needs of the actual residents.

Q: Personas sound useful for building human-centered design, but how do you stay away from stereotyping?

A (Dee): Dee stepped in to explain that Personas are merely a form of analysis, used in supplementation with other research. They are data driven and do not come from assumptions. They are meant to operate more as archetypes, as opposed to stereotypes. Done correctly, it is just the product of synthesizing data and does require conversations. Dr. Michael also chimed in that it is commonly used in public health contexts.

A (Ola Onawole): Ola also chimed in to answer the question. She explained that due to a number of external factors, they were unable to speak to as many Mantua homeowners that they had hoped to, which was a challenge that using Personas helped with. This method helped highlight the connection that aging homeowners had to their grandchildren, many of which being primary caregivers. This told an important story that heavily influenced the project.

Q: Are there any Grandparents raising Grandchildren programs in the area? Or any similar programming?

A (Ola Onawole): Ola answered by saying they had not yet done exhaustive research regarding this question, but they did see it as a gap that needed to be filled. She noted that it was definitely seen as a given that Grandparents were primary caregivers, and that it was worth looking into for the future. Vanessa added that they intended to keep bringing this project to TRIPOD, Writer's Room, and other meetings to continuously get feedback and make improvements.

Closing

Ms. Verbofsky thanked all the presenters, professors and audience for attending, and closed the meeting by prompting everyone to fill out a post-meeting survey.