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Transforming Communities Institute Re-envisioning Study: Blanding Community Report



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About the TCI Re-envisioning Study

Transforming Communities Initiative, now known as Transforming Communities Institute (TCI), was founded in 2014 by faculty in the Department of Social Work at Utah State University. TCI aimed to conduct research in and for the community while teaching the next generation of social work leaders to be data-driven and civically engaged.

After several years of successful projects and changes in Utah communities, a need existed to reexamine the mission and strategy of TCI. Recently, TCI faculty leadership petitioned USU to advance from an initiative to an institute, with confirmation in February 2022. As part of this growth process, TCI was reimagined through a community-engaged research project to ensure relevancy and maximum impact in Utah communities.

The project was a mixed-methods study that sought to understand 1) the social challenges and resources of Utah communities and 2) ways in which TCI may integrate more fully into communities to meet their needs and expand on their strengths. Surveys and focus group data were collected from community decision makers and non-profit leaders who work in Blanding, Brigham City, Logan, Moab, Price, Tooele, and Uintah Basin. The present report shares the focus group findings from Blanding. (Note: Blanding did not have survey respondents.)

Focus Group Findings

In the focus group for the Blanding area, there were four participants: three government agency workers and one education administrator. The three key topics that the focus group chose to discuss were children and youth being free from abuse, infrastructure problems, and substance use disorders and treatment.

Children and Youth being Free from Abuse

Child abuse and neglect are major challenges in the Blanding community. However, instances of child abuse and neglect are severely underreported due to various factors including mistrust of government agencies and law enforcement, misinformation related to how child welfare operates, empathy for families in generational abuse situations, and cultural and religious reasons.

RISK FACTORS



Generational Poverty



Generational Abuse



Substance Misuse



Mental Health Issues

One of the biggest efforts to address child abuse and neglect, along with other social problems in the area, is San Juan County Prevention, Action, Collaboration (SJCPAC) coalition, which consists of a collaborative of community partners from all arenas (e.g., government, nonprofit, and business) with about 70 to 80 members who meet monthly.



Infrastructure Problems

Participants indicated problems related to local infrastructure in Blanding that impacted their daily lives as well as overall community well-being including economic development.



Affordable Housing

An adequate supply of affordable and quality housing is negatively impacting the Blanding area in many ways. One negative impact is the common rural phenomenon of “brain drain” of people with college degrees leaving to find higher wages and more housing options.



Transportation Options

Residents must travel long distances to access services, go to work and school, and obtain groceries and other needs. With poor road conditions and no public options, these issues add another layer of stress to residents.



Economic Development

In addition to struggling with employee recruitment and retention, larger businesses that support the basic needs of the community are not locating to Blanding because of infrastructure problems like lack of housing, road conditions, and poor internet.

One participant expresses the difficulties of the infrastructure issues by saying:

“We’re pretty much out here in the boondocks. Everybody wants a Walmart, and we don’t have a Walmart. We don’t have a McDonalds. So, yeah they’re moving to places that have those kind of things available to them. And so here, we have to travel everywhere. We’ve got to travel and an hour and a half to two hours, just to shop at Walmart to get groceries and household items...”





Substance Use Disorders & Treatment

Like other rural communities in Utah, the Blanding area is seeing an increase in substance use disorders with minimal to no treatment options. There are no inpatient options or intensive outpatient options – only outpatient counseling. People must travel to Provo (four to five hours) or Salt Lake City (five to six hours) to access services if they are able to afford them and arrange transportation. The local counseling agency is handling the bulk of the service provision with substance use disorders; however, they have been dealing with staffing issues for a few years. Recently, they lost two counselors to a car accident and another to a health issue, which devastated their agency and community. In addition to losing valued community members, replacing qualified social service staff in their rural community is challenging for a host of reasons. The agencies cannot keep up with their caseloads and the influx of patients. The community also lacks peer support systems for successful recovery.

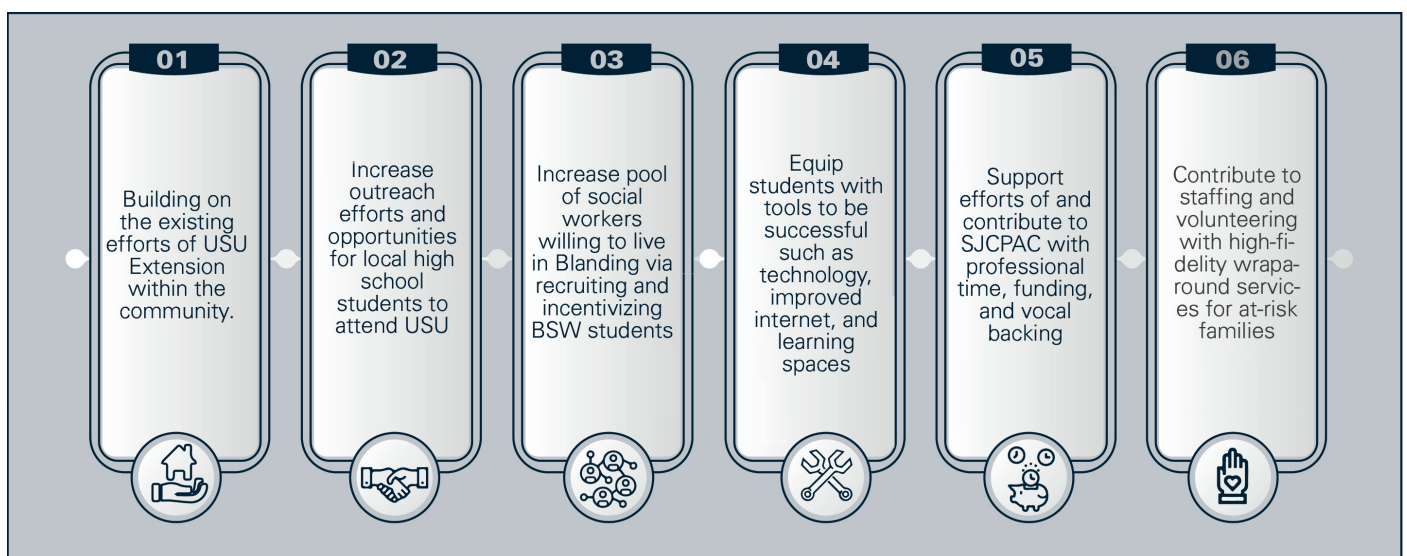
Additionally, intergenerational substance use disorders are prevalent in this area. One participant emphasized the importance of education and awareness of the impacts that substances have on youth, communicating that

“...They don’t think it’s a big deal...Just being aware of what that can do to the teen brain and how important families are in combating that... I think it’s quite a few different factors that need to be involved to help families and us understand the importance of... just what that can do...”

SJCPAC is working diligently on preventative efforts to address the intergenerational substance use cycle through education, peer support, events, family bonding activities, and youth coalition building.

Potential Solutions Proposed by Communities

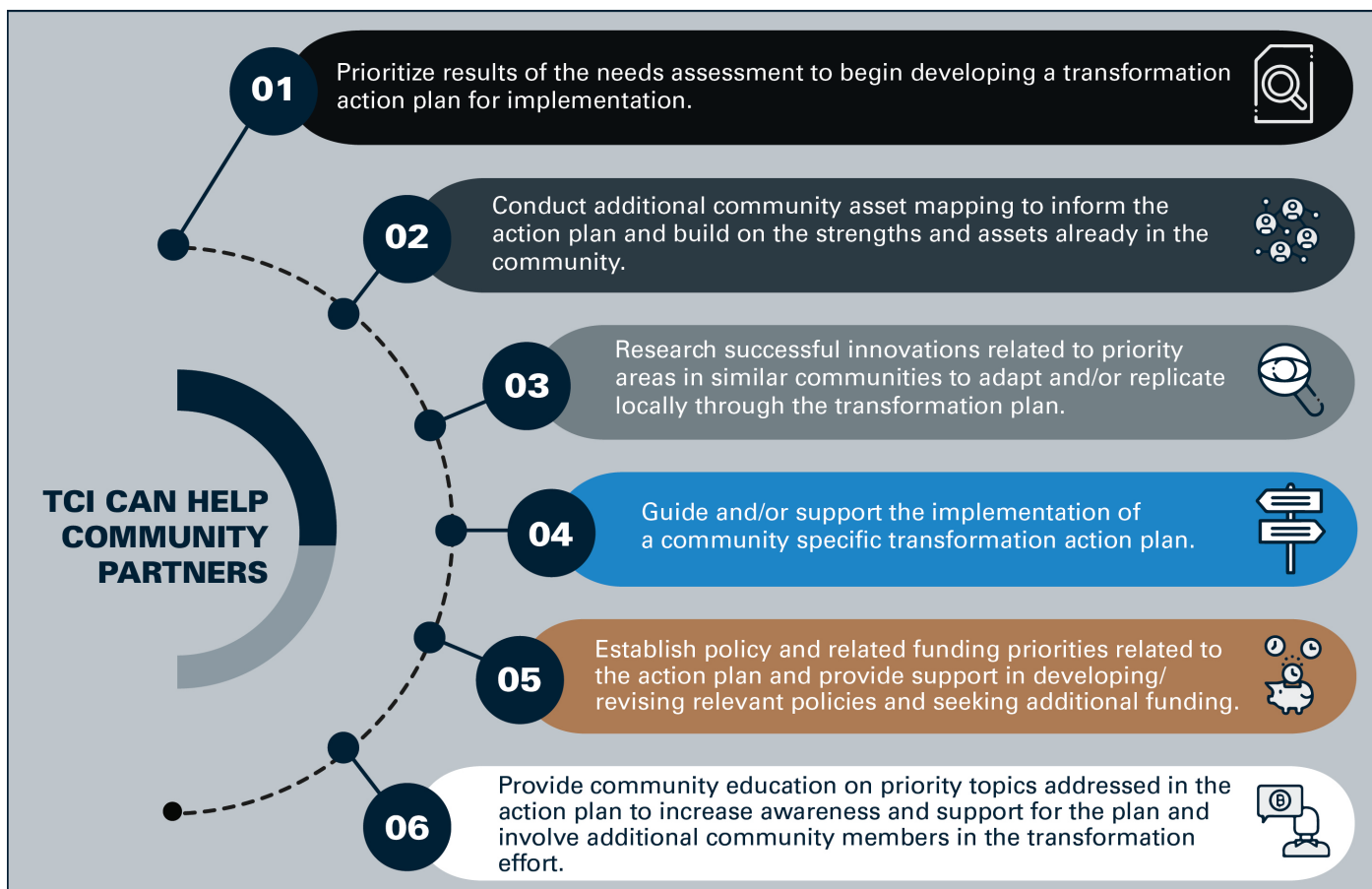
Participants discussed potential solutions and ways that USU, TCI, and other entities could help address challenges in Blanding.





How TCI Can Help

At TCI, we are committed to working with and supporting our community partners through all stages of transformation. This includes working with key stakeholders from initial assessment to implementation of innovative ideas, all the way through to evaluating transformation outcomes. We are interested in providing our community partners with actionable suggestions on how they might apply the results of the most current round of community assessments to advance transformation activities at the local level. Below are several ways that TCI can support key stakeholders to build on the results of this report to cultivate change in their communities:



As community partners consider the next steps for their communities to take in creating meaningful change, TCI is ready to collaborate intentionally and effectively to improve community-identified key outcomes. Together, we can build vibrant, strong, resilient, and inclusive communities where all Utahns can thrive.

To read the full report of the TCI Re-envisioning study, please visit:

<https://chass.usu.edu/social-work/transforming-communities-institute/index>

To connect with TCI, reach out to our director, Dr. Jayme Walters, at jayme.walters@usu.edu or 435-797-7693.