

2021



TCI Re-envisioning Study: Tooele Community Report



College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Transforming Communities Institute
UtahStateUniversity.



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 (USU). 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.

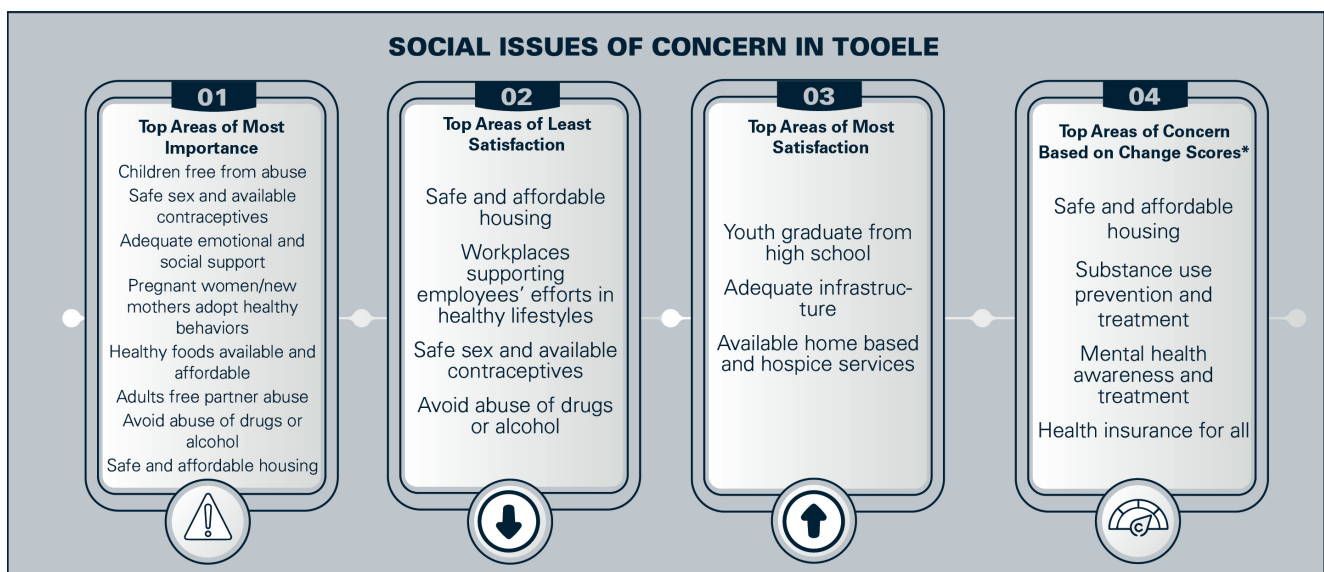
After several years of successful projects and changes in Utah communities, a need existed to re-examine the mission and strategy of TCI. Recently, TCI faculty leadership petitioned USU to advance from an initiative to an institute, with confirmation in February 2022. As part of this growth process, 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. Survey 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 survey and focus group findings from the Tooele area.

Survey Findings

For the Tooele area, there were ten respondents who identified as Community Decision Makers. The mean age of responders was 46.40 (SD= 7.65). and the mean time working in their community was 31.70 (SD= 17.74). All respondents were female and identified as white. Regarding education, half of the participants had completed some college, followed by a college degree (30%). Sixty percent of respondents report \$100,000+ as their yearly household income.

About six in ten participants either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that community members have a voice in the community, yet just less a third of respondents somewhat disagreed. All of the participants either somewhat agree or strongly agree that Utah State University is an asset or resource for the community. Finally, most participants also reported feeling connected to the local or nearby Utah State University campus.



*subtracting the overall satisfaction score from the importance scores



Focus Group Findings

In the focus group for the Tooele area, there were seven participants: one nonprofit worker; one university extension employee; one community health worker; and three government officials. The two topics that the group chose to discuss were issues related to substance use disorders and treatment and housing.

Substance Use Disorder & Treatment

In the Tooele area, substance use disorder – especially related to opioid misuse – is a growing concern. This focus group discussed extensively about the lack of treatment options for people struggling with substance misuse. Only a few agencies (e.g., Warrior Spirit, Bonneville Family Practice, Valley Behavioral Health) exist, and as a result, they have to travel to access service or receive none at all. Although the Salt Lake City area has more options, their systems are also overwhelmed, and thus, clients face long waitlists. Transportation to and from Salt Lake for these services also is a barrier for many individuals, especially those who have lost their licenses and/or are low-income. For those who are struggling day-to-day to remain sober, they need immediate and close treatment options.



Further, community conversations are needed about substance misuse, stigma related to seeking treatment, and resources for aftercare as many residents do not believe that these are real issues. Participants noted that educating the public would increase peer support systems as well as support for more treatment and prevention-friendly government policies and funding. Addressing stigma around substance use and addictions with employers would allow for more opportunities for people who are trying to become productive members of society again but have pasts with substance misuse. One participant pointed out the importance of acquiring employment and other resources such as jobs and housing so that those struggling with substance misuse can break the cycle of addiction.

While treatment is a struggle, several local organizations (public and private) have received funding to address substance misuse prevention – particularly in the opioid misuse realm. Many partnerships and collaborations are currently formed. The local health department and USU Extension addressed opioid use disorder with “...every person who leaves the County Detention Center receives training and a naloxone kit, so then that way they have the, in case they go out and use, or they know somebody who uses, they have that prevention measure to... mitigate an overdose.”

Other programs include Communities That Care coalition, Naloxone 101 Training to all law enforcement agents, provision of Narcan, pain management education, community support groups, parenting classes, and social media campaigns for Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) and safe medication disposal. Still yet, a few participants pointed out a lack of coordination among local governments and agencies, Specifically related to collecting data on the issues and developing plans for the future.



Housing & Homelessness

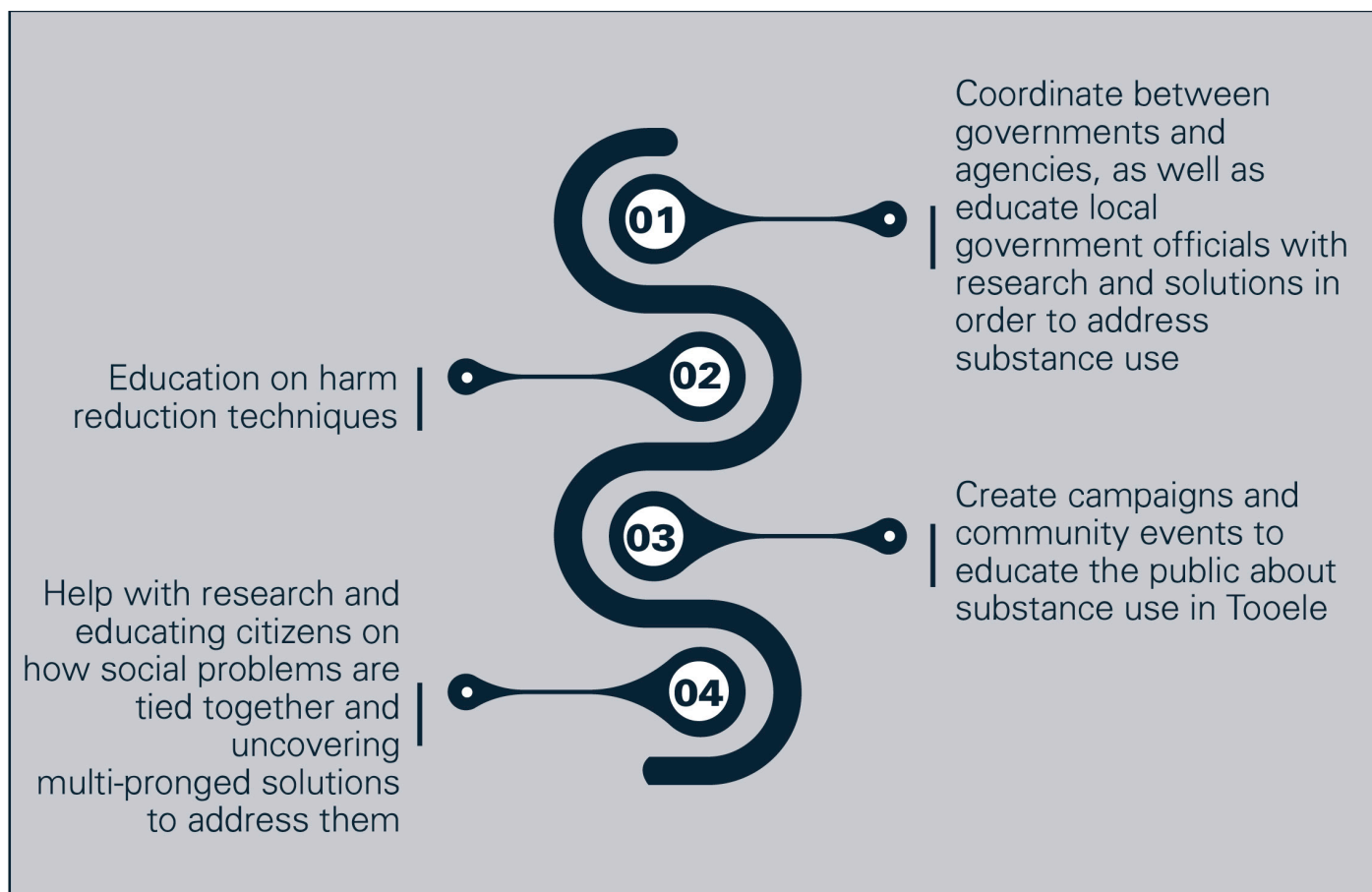
Like other communities in Utah, Tooele also faces a low housing stock with available housing being priced at level that is unobtainable for low-income individuals and families. Few housing programs or affordable housing options exist in the community. As a result, rates of homelessness have risen in the community. The lack of housing is also causing problems for employers as employees cannot find adequate housing. Thus, they are either commuting long distances or quitting because of lack of housing.

Agencies are beginning to address this problem. One nonprofit is building transitional housing units, though it will be a while before they are completed. A few smaller towns in the area (e.g., Grantsville) are constructing low-income apartments. Other agencies and local government are working on funding housing assistance programs, but they need buy-in from other government entities to move the measures forward. Another issue is that even with assistance in the form of vouchers, finding landlords to participate is a major barrier.

Coordination and communication about housing issues between government agencies, government officials, and nonprofits is beginning to happen, though slowly, through regular meetings. Another area of improvement is the focus on social determinants of health by USU Extension – trying to get to the root of social problems and realizing that backgrounds and environments of people impact their success.

Potential Solutions Proposed by Communities

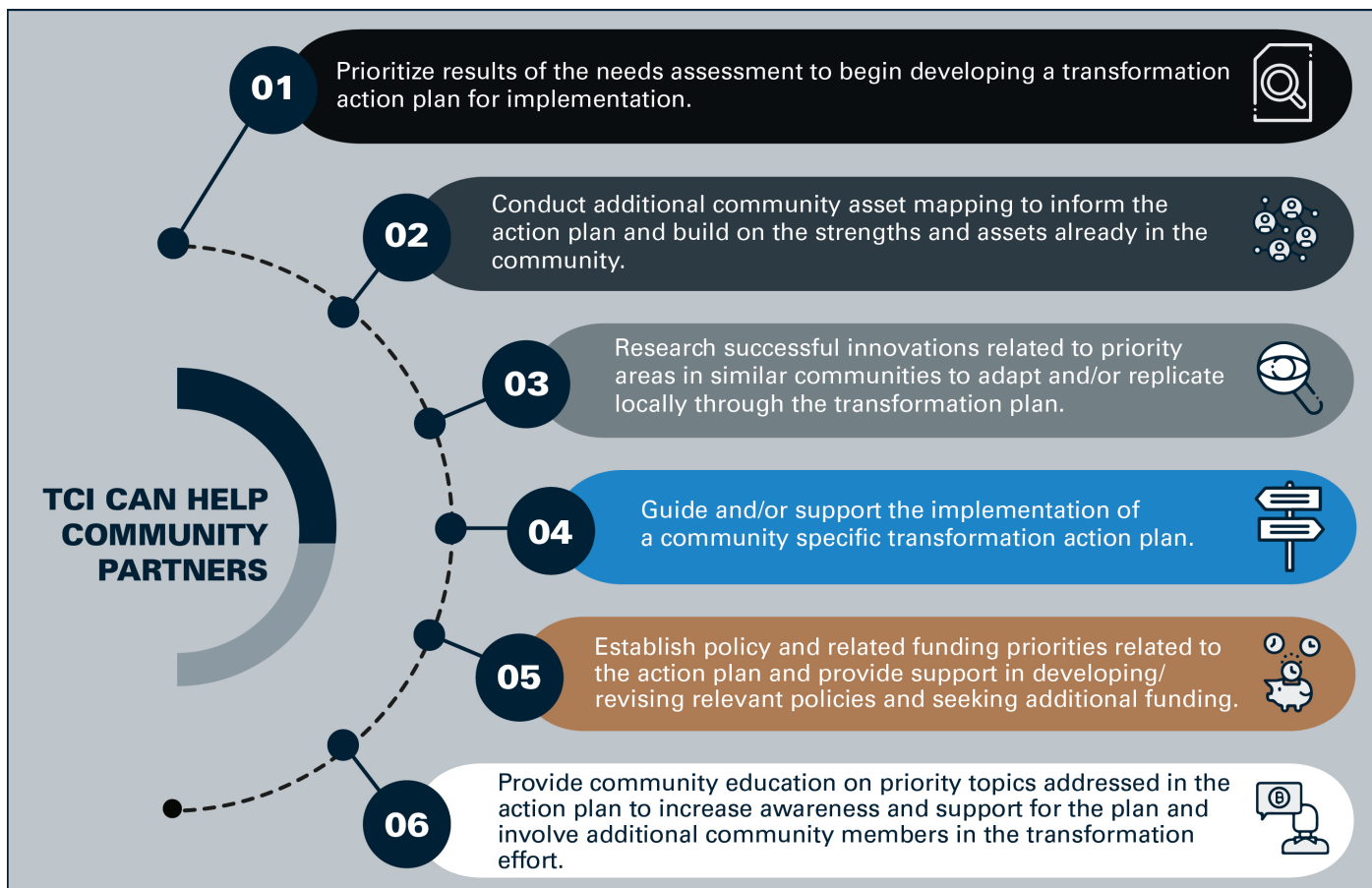
Participants discussed potential solutions and ways that USU, TCI, and other entities could help address challenges in the Tooele area.





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/>

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