*Mending Fences*
# Supportive Housing and Neighborhood Quality of Life: The Impact of Group Homes and Service Agencies on Worcester Communities

**A Study conducted by Dr. Corey Dolgon
and the students of
Sociology 305: Applied Sociology and Community Research**

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Anyone paying attention to the Worcester media has seen numerous stories about the problem of social service agencies and various housing programs "saturating" different area neighborhoods. Even the Mayor's Social Service Task Force Report discussed the problem of a "high concentration" of these agencies and the resulting "negative impact" they might have on surrounding communities. The fear of "too many" agencies and/or housing programs has led to a variety of organizing efforts by neighborhood residents and property owners concerned about increased crime, lower property values, and the overall "common sense" that "these places" are responsible for detracting from local peoples' quality of life. (Mayor's Task Force Report, 2005)

Similarly, a 2005 report by the Worcester Regional Research Bureau entitled, "Siting Residential Social Service Programs: The Process and the Options," based much of its study on assumptions and anecdotal evidence. From the outset, the report claims that new group homes in the Highland Street area "will inevitably attract others to the neighborhood whose behavior is likely to be incompatible with the peace and safety of the neighborhood." Later in the study, the Bureau explains that Worcester communities are concerned that new sitings bring "the possibility of…increased crime, decreased property values, increased taxes, changes to the character of a neighborhood, changes in parking and traffic conditions." There is no serious examination of data about these issues; no study of other literature documenting the impact of similar programs on neighborhoods; and no ethnographic or quantitative analysis of neighborhood residents. (Worcester Regional Research Bureau, 2005)

Instead, the Bureau cites newspaper articles, public hearings, and police reports as sources for neighborhood impact. The problem with such methodology is twofold. First, the report's focus allows a few activist voices (well-known to the local press and to local legislators) to dominate the discussion. While their experiences and opinions may be valid, so would be the experience and attitude of all neighborhood residents. Yet these same voices come to "stand in" for "the neighborhood" as a whole in an unfair and undemocratic way. In fact, when the study does cite people not usually involved in public

hearings or press conferences, they found that "neighbors of three of the most bitterly opposed group homes indicated that they no longer objected to the presence of these facilities. One neighbor, who lived next to a home for homeless mentally ill adults said, 'The group home is less trouble than some other neighbors I've had.''

Secondly, the study ignores whether there is any statistical evidence to prove that group homes, shelters, or other service agencies actually have a negative impact on property values, crime statistic, or neighborhood attitudes and satisfaction. Like the Mayor's Task Force, the Bureau is left to *assume* the negative impact and then conduct an entire report based on how to restrict the placing of transitional housing programs and other service agencies in various neighborhoods. The common sense thus being that they are bad for communities and should be located elsewhere. But what if so-called common sense is wrong?

As students of sociology, we are trained to critically examine what people consider to be "common sense." This does not mean we simply "criticize the critics." To look at the issue critically means to examine real data about things such as property values, the sources and extent of crime, and the attitudes of more than just a few select neighborhood residents. We wanted to know just what impact service agencies and various housing programs actually have on local communities. The premise that a neighborhood could be "saturated" by such places assumes a negative impact, yet, our job as social scientists and responsible citizens is to examine the facts about crime, property values, and community attitudes toward agencies and housing programs *before* making such a conclusion. Public policy should be determined by factual information and research, not assumptions and opinions.

In fact, what if social service agencies and housing programs don't have a negative impact on communities? What if their presence not only improves the lives of their participants and clients, but actually positively impacts the neighborhoods they reside in? If so, then communities shouldn't be worried about high concentrations or "saturation." Just the opposite, people should be asking how they might contribute to help stabilize and develop effective agencies and programs in their neighborhoods.

To produce the kind of information we need as a citizenry to make such policy decisions, our group decided to conduct the following research. First, we looked for

previously conducted research on the impact of service agencies and housing programs on quality of life indicators such as crime and safety, housing and property values, and overall neighborhood attitudes. Then we looked at statistics particular to Worcester neighborhoods where a number of service agencies and housing programs have been located in the past few years. In particular, we focused on three areas [see Index #1] For each area, we planned to look at how many crimes and/or arrests could be traced back to agency participants or housing residents. We also wanted to look at property value trends over the last 5 years to see if new agencies or programs impacted housing investments. Finally, we wanted to conduct neighborhood attitude surveys about crime, property values and overall residential satisfaction to see how people felt about where they lived.

**What Other Research Has Found**

Numerous studies on opposition to low-income group homes and other forms of "supportive housing" (Mental Health Law Project 1988) have demonstrated that there are three basic concerns that neighborhood residents and local politicians articulate: "the perceived threat to property values, personal security, and neighborhood amenity." (Dear 1990)  These claims, in fact, directly echo the arguments of local Worcester groups opposed to such programs. (Schaffer 2006; Zobak 2006) Our group looked at dozens of articles that addressed these claims to discover what researchers found in other areas. Here are the results.

*Property Values*

According to Colwell, et. al. (2000), "the vast majority or studies on the effects of group homes on surrounding property values suggest that group homes do not adversely affect the property values of nearby homes." (p. 616) They examined numerous articles (Dear 1977; Gooddale and Wickware 1979; Dolan and Wolpert 1982; Ryan and Coyne 1985; Farber 1986; Lauber 1986 and Maskell 1998) and generally agreed with Michael Dear (1982) that "none of the studies on real estate transactions in the vicinity of human

service facilities has demonstrated a property value decline that could clearly be linked to the facility." Dear (1992) and others have concluded that changes in property values "tend to be associated with broader market movements, such as changes in interest rates or the arrival of large-scale property developments nearby like a new shopping mall."

In Lauber's work (1986) he cites over 25 studies where no negative impact is found attributable to group homes on property values. In his own study, Lauber examined a wide variety of locations, urban and rural, throughout Illinois. He compared the mean sale price of all residential property sales within a five block radius of each home for the two years before and after the home opened. He also considered control neighborhoods not close to group homes but whose properties were similar in initial value and demographics. As Colwell (2000) reports, "with the exception of the group home in Schaumberg, which outperformed its matched pair, there was no statistically significant difference in mean price change between the two types of neighborhoods." (p. 616)

Colwell, et. al. (2000) did their own study and did find that there were some occasions where property values seemed negatively impacted by issues related to group homes. The irony in these cases, however, was that the establishment or existence of the homes and their residents did not affect values; it was the *announcement* of the intention to build them. In other words, the only negative impact on property values could not be traces back to the group homes, residents, staff or actual presence in the neighborhood, but to the fears of residents in neighborhoods sited for these facilities. It could be argued that organized groups opposed to group homes who generate fear and insecurity with unsupported (and sometimes outlandish) claims, may more negatively impact property values than the actual programs they criticize. More of this dynamic will be discussed in the analysis and conclusion section.

*Crime and Safety*

A second major argument against supportive housing is that residents threaten neighbors' safety and security. Studies demonstrate, however, that concerns over personal safety and household security are related to the particular client groups that are often served by facilities. The more risky, potentially dangerous and unpredictable the clients, the more

neighbors seem to protest existing programs or resist future constructions. (Dear and Gleeson, 1991; Lee, et. al 1990 According to Dear (1992) "substance abusers" (particularly drug addicts who might be associated with criminal behavior to support their habits) and ex-offenders (with manifest records of lawlessness) figure prominently in this category. But residents have also expressed unease about the mentally disabled, who may display aberrant or aggressive public behavior." (p. 4)

In either case, major studies demonstrate that little evidence exists to support the nature of these concerns. (Galster, et. al 2003) It is true that supportive housing units are commonly located in areas where crime rates are already high.[1] Yet, according to Galster, et. al (2002) "there were no statistically significant increases in the rates of any categories of reported crimes (total, violent, property, disorderly conduct, or criminal mischief offenses)" in these communities as a whole, nor were residents perpetrators of the crimes that did occur. The small increases that have been found in particular cases [within 500 feet of sites] seem to suggest that "large facilities "attracted more crime because they provided a mass of prospective victims and/or eroded the collective efficacy of the neighborhood." (p.291)


*Quality of Life and Neighborhood Attitudes*


Dear (1992) found that opposition to supportive housing and similar service agencies also worried about the decline in the neighborhood's "quality of life" as measured by loss of local businesses or declining residents' attitudes toward the neighborhood. The perceived threats included, "the physical appearance of clients, some of whom may appear dirty or unkempt, and antisocial behavior such as loitering, public urination or defecation, and aggressive panhandling. Businesses complain that clusters of clients drive customers away. Residents worry that their enjoyment of the neighborhood will be undermined by the clients and that certain clients will be a bad influence on children and young people." (p. 4) Resident concerns have also been described as a desire to maintain "collective efficacy," defined as high levels of social solidarity and residential stability.

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[1]Building prices and property values are lower in poorer communities where crime rates are often higher than in middle class and wealthier neighborhoods. With limited resources available for developing supportive housing, these neighborhoods are often the only ones accessible for projects like these.

Few studies address these particular areas, though. What information that does exist fails to find any links between supportive housing and neighborhood instability or the loss of business districts and other social amenities. Meanwhile, although many have looked at the organization, strategies, and tactics of neighborhood oppositional groups, and some have studied organized efforts to challenge opposition, none have studied effectively those community residents who were not activists. What do most neighbors of supportive housing think of their communities in general, and of group homes and their impact in particular? Our study attempts to find out some of this information, as well as investigate more commonly researched issues such as property values and crime statistics.

**Methodology**

We began our research by identifying certain areas within Worcester that had more than three or four group homes, transitional housing programs or social service agencies. Below are maps of the three areas we initially designated as neighborhoods that should yield relevant information about the impact of such institutions on local community. The list of agencies we used is included in the back as Appendix 1.

We then identified three major areas of concerns about the neighborhood impact of these agencies: property values, crime statistics, and general residential attitudes towards both the neighborhood and the agencies themselves. We decided that we should add a fourth category that also gets very little attention in the literature on neighborhood impact, and that is the actual community projects and participation of the agencies and their residents. It should be noted that we did not consider the impact of supportive housing and other agencies on residents and clients. The studies on these institutions demonstrate that most have hugely successful impacts on residents but depend on the type of home, the type of residents, the type of services offered, etc. Since the focus for this study was impact on community, we decided to avoid the question of evaluating programs' success for their own clients.

Having identified the geographical areas of study and the variables we hoped to measure to gauge impact, we broke into groups and designed the research approach for

each area. We immediately realized that even three segments of the community would be too large an area for us to study in the short time we had allotted for the course, so we decided to focus on one section of Worcester, which labeled area #1 in the maps below. This area is triangular in shape and uses Main St. (from Mill St. to Crystal St.) Crystal St. (from Main St. to Cambridge St). All of the data collected and analysis is particular to that area, and we believe that similar studies should be conducted for each of the other two areas. Preliminary glances at data from those two areas, however, lead us to hypothesize that findings and analysis related to property values and crime statistics will be replicated.

The rest of the methodology was designed collaboratively, but specifically for each dimension being studied. Therefore, we have included those methods in the particular sections that follow.

**Research Data**

1. *Property values*

The class decided that the best way to demonstrate the impact of group homes and service agencies on property values was to look at changes in property values over the time period theses organizations have been located in this neighborhood. Then, the changes in property values on the selected blocks would be compared to the average changes in property values from around the entire city of Worcester. Again, because of time constraints, students could only compare the year 2000 and 2006.

Two students collected data for housing values for the present year 2006 as determined by the City of Worcester and listed on their website at [www.worcester.ci.ma](www.worcester.ci.ma). They chose four streets that surrounded Dismas House and other agencies (Freedland, Crystal, Cambridge, and Richards Sts.) The values of properties from these blocks were then placed on spreadsheets and can be seen as appendix 2-5.

The final step was to obtain property values for the year 2000.  This was a bit more complicated because the information was not available on the Worcester website. Students eventually found the data at City Hall, in the assessor's office.  Robert J. Allard,

Jr., City Assessor, was able to print out each street's 2000 property value. Students then, in turn, transferred this information into the spreadsheet.

a. Findings and Conclusions

As you can see from the charts, the average property increase for each street ranges from 58-70%. These are huge increases over a short period of time. These numbers compare to the City of Worcester averages which range from 60-80% for different neighborhoods from 2000-2006.

 We believe these statistics demonstrate that no negative impact can be traced to group homes and agencies given that the values themselves have kept pace with citywide data. While it would be impossible to prove a negative, we feel confident in adding this data to the plethora of studies that have argued property values are much more a reflection of larger general trends (real estate values, especially in residential neighborhoods, have risen throughout Massachusetts in the past 5 years due to changes in economic transformations, cultural tastes, lowered interest rates, etc.) as well as more particular idiosyncratic factors related directly to individual properties. In essence, though, no significant difference could be found in the positive changes in property values between this neighborhood and others around Worcester.

2. *Crime*

Crime and safety remains the most difficult set of issues to map out the actual impact of group homes on crime rates. Students settled on looking at arrest statistics for the previous year to trace back the residencies listed for those accused of crimes. The *Worcester Telegram and Gazette* archives carry this information and it was therefore accessible and deemed accurate. This focus allowed us to get a snapshot of who seemed to be charged with committing crimes. It does not, however, address issues raised by Galster (2003) where such housing programs seemed to stir an increase in neighborhood crime, not because residents committed them, but because residents were easy victims. While this is certainly a concern, the challenges to supportive housing in Worcester do

not claim that such facilities make their own residents more susceptible to crime, their claims are that residents commit them. Thus, students decided that particular claim should be researched. Other studies might wish to take up the question of whether or not residents of supportive housing themselves become more vulnerable because of location.

    b.   Findings and Conclusion

In looking at actual arrest numbers and addresses (see appendix 6), students found that under 3% (237) of total arrests (7,835) could be traced back to the addresses of group homes in all three of the original areas under investigation. In the particular neighborhood of area #1, only 15 arrests, or less than ¼ of 1%, could be attributed to residents of supportive housing. Given that these neighborhoods have some of the highest arrest rates in Worcester, these statistics seem to show that there is little negative impact from group homes in regards to crimes committed by residents. More research needs to be done to compare these rates with previous years and to break down statistics by smaller units to better contrast with other neighborhoods. In particular, it would be good to discover what elements of neighborhood demographics might best be correlated to high arrest rates.

There are also problems in using arrest numbers, though. Most notable is that arrests, unlike convictions, might also relate to issues of social stigma. Studies have demonstrated that poor people, homeless people, and people of color are more likely to be arrested for behaviors that middle class, white citizens are not. Perhaps the best data on local crime and safety indicators will be gained from more qualitative, ethnographic research conducted over time in the particular neighborhoods of Worcester. For now, however, it seems safe to say that the kinds of arrests and alleged crimes committed in the poorer neighborhoods of Worcester do not emanate in any significant number from the residents of group homes and supportive housing.

    3.   *Neighborhood Attitudes*

In our literature search we discovered very few instances of researchers studying actual neighborhood attitudes towards group housing and service agency sites in their

neighborhoods. While many have looked particularly at oppositional groups (Jacobsen 2004; Oakley 2002; Cowan 2003; Kim 2000; Colon & Marston 1999), there seems to be an underlying acceptance that activists do indeed represent the general community attitude.

We decided that such assumptions needed to be examined. In fact, we wanted to know to what extent neighborhood attitudes might actually mirror those of activists. Thus, we wanted to find ways to measure not only general opposition or support for group housing and service agencies in the area, but also whether or not people believe claims about property values, crime, and the overall impact of supportive housing and other programs on the neighborhood.

Students decided to conduct a survey of neighborhood residents. The survey itself was developed by Brian Lussier and Carlo Gaita during March of 2006. The survey was created with the following guidance in mind:

        a. Only ask questions that are critical for the research
        b. Keep the survey as short and simple as possible
        c. Avoid questions that state a specific Group Home
        d. Avoid any personal (private) topics that might seem threatening or
        intimidating, such as questions about residents' children

The survey focused on four main themes, and six questions for each of these were developed.

        a. Crime and safety attitudes
        b. Home ownership/Property Value Attitudes
        c. Overall neighborhood attitude (climate)
        d. Attitudes towards Group Homes

The initial survey with approximately twenty four questions, six from each of the above categories, was brought to the class in early March. The entire class was provided the opportunity for input and recommendations on this initial draft. The survey was revised, based off the collaboration of the class and the Professor's recommendations, and a second draft was implemented.[2] This second draft served as the first survey that was actually administered to the target audience. (See Appendix 7)

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[2]-Keep the survey short and simple. People are more likely to complete a short survey than a long one.
-Keep the survey under two pages. (People often asked how long the survey was. We were able to respond "It is about twenty questions, mostly yes-no type and takes about five minutes to complete."
-Ask questions that are easy to answer utilizing closed probes, vice open probes.

*How the Survey Was Conducted*

The class was divided into four two-person teams and each team was assigned a different sector of the city. The sectors were determined by utilizing a city map and targeting the initial area and then dividing it into sectors. Each team was tasked to complete a prescribed amount of surveys by the following week. Surveys were completed by going door to door or by asking people on the street. The following week the completed surveys were collected in class and the students exchanged ideas on how to improve the survey.

Some groups read the surveys to the people they surveyed and filled in the replies for them. Another group dropped the survey off to the people, and then came by later to pick up the completed surveys. Some groups realized it was important to step back and give them some space; however we remained in the immediate vicinity in the event they had any questions for us. They did not attempt to separate individuals when two or more people were completing the surveys simultaneously; they left them free to discuss the survey among themselves. Each of the three methods worked to get credible data.

The surveys, for safety precautions and in an effort not to dissuade residents from answering door, were conducted during the hours of daylight. Our group conducted the surveys during the work week from the hours of 2 PM to 4 PM. Every attempt should be

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-Questions with 'Yes/No' answers or scaled replies ordinarily yielded the most completed results, and the highest percentage of answered questions.
-Ensure the survey's scope (verbiage) is not above or below the population's level of literacy (education).
-Format your survey in a natural process. The survey should attempt to group related type questions together and in a chronological order. The survey itself should 'read' like a short story, it should have an introduction and state your purpose, affiliation, and point of contact. Lending Professor's Dolgon's and the Worcester State College's name to the survey gave us credibility. Additionally the introduction needs to reassure the people taking the survey that their identity will be kept anonymous. This creates a comfort level for the people taking the survey and will result in candid and forthright answers.
-Know your area, and recognize any foreign languages that may be spoken in the area. Professor Dolgon was able to have the survey translated in Spanish by coordinating with the Foreign Language Department at Worcester State. Additional languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Tagalog were also spoken in the neighborhood, but no translated surveys were available, thus some potential people to survey were lost.
-Clearly mark each revision of the Survey. This can be done a number of ways, simply labeling it as one, two, or three, or printing each revision on a different color of paper. This aspect will be discussed in more detail in the paragraph entitled 'How was Data Analyzed.'
-Avoid asking any questions, if possible, that specifically name the benefiting organization that the research is being conducted for, in this case, the Dismis House. The thought process here was to not influence, fairly or unfairly, the population's answers with any preconceived ideas they may already have had.

made to conduct surveys during different times to attract a very diverse population. It was evident that many people were returning home from work around this time, and some were too tired to complete a survey; others were on their way to work. Conducting the surveys during different times might assist in capturing a larger and more diverse group.

*How the data was analyzed*

The surveys were turned in weekly to Professor Dolgon and discussed briefly in class. Surveying collection trends and methods, positive and negative, were addressed with the class. Actual data was not compiled or analyzed, but it was briefly discussed. The focus of effort was on the actual collection of surveys and the climate of the people we were encountering. It was decided then that we would concentrate on attaining a set number of surveys by a certain date, and that the data would be compiled and analyzed later. During this entire process, the survey was continuously slightly revised and improved based on the feed back provided by the collection teams. Extreme effort was taken not to change basic questions and themes, but certain questions were clarified, shortened, etc. to make efforts more successful.

During early May, all eighty-two surveys were sorted and placed in corresponding piles. This is very significant, although all the surveys are very similar, some are slightly different. The biggest difference is that some of the questions are in a different order from survey to survey. We discovered, but were not alarmed, to find four different versions of the completed survey. Each of the four groups of surveys was then coded by hand and each 'group of surveys' was given its own Grid Matrix, based on the order of its questions. Additionally, each individual survey was given a number and the corresponding number was listed on the Grid Matrix in order to double check data that had been coded.

Once we were certain that we were on the same sheet of music for all four versions of the survey, the data was inserted to an excel spread sheet. The excel spread sheet was done utilizing only numeric characters, and no alpha characters were utilized. Questions that required a yes or no answer were given the value of one for yes, and two for no. Each question and answer format and break down is provided in this report.

*Data and Statistics*

**NOTE**: Percentages below are based off the number of answered questions. Although 82 surveys were administered, some questions were not answered by 82 people, thus some percentages are based off 82 (when answered by 82 people) and others are not.

1. What age bracket are you?
      18-29        30-45        46-59        60-over

This question was asked to 82 individuals, 80 answered, 2 were left blank.

Coding – this question was coded on the excel spread sheet as such:
      18-29   30-45   46-59   60-over
       (1)     (2)    (3)     (4)

|  | 18-29 | 30-45 | 45-59 | 60-over | No Reply | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number | 32 | 28 | 17 | 3 | 2 | 80 |
| Percentage | 40 | 35 | 21 | 3 | N/A | N/A |

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2. How long have you lived in this neighborhood? _____

This question was asked to 82 individuals, 80 responded, 2 did not give a reply. Replies were rounded to the closest year, seven months or more was rounded up, and six months or less was rounded down.

This was coded on the spread sheet with a numeric character reflecting the number of years (rounded accordingly) that the respondents provided.

| Number of People Interviewed | Average Years Living in the Community (Neighborhood) |
|---|---|
| 80 | 8.21 Years |

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3. Do you own or rent the home you live?   Own/Rent

This question was asked to 82 individuals, 79 responded, 3 did not give a response.

Coding – this was annotated on the excel spread sheet in the following manner:
Own – 1
Rent - 2
N/A - 3

|            | OWN | RENT | NO REPLY | TOTAL |
|------------|-----|------|----------|-------|
| Number     | 26  | 53   | 3        | 79    |
| Percentage | 31  | 69   | N/A      | N/A   |

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4.  How many adults live in your home? _____
5.  How many children live in your home? _____

Questions 4 and 5 are very similar and thus provided on the same graph below.
Question 4 was asked to 82 people, 79 responded, 3 elected not to reply.
Question 5 was asked to 82 people, 82 responded.

Coding – the actual numbers provided was inserted to the excel spread sheet.

**Note**:  Some versions of the survey did not specifically ask "How many children live in your home?"  - However they did ask both "How many adults live in your home?" and "How many people, all ages, live in your home?"  - In these versions of the survey, the total number of adults living in the home was subtracted from the total number of people living in the home to obtain the number of children residing in the home.

|                  | Adults | Children | Total |
|------------------|--------|----------|-------|
| Total            | 224    | 85       | 309   |
| Average Per Home | 2.83   | 1.03     | 3.76  |

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6.  Do you plan on residing in this neighborhood in five years?   Yes/No

7. Do you think your property value will go up or down in the next 5 years?   Up/Down

Questions 6 and 7 deal with neighborhood climate and property values, since the items are somewhat closely related, their data is shown together below.
Both questions were asked 82 times.
Question 6 was answered by 74 people, with 8 no response.
Question 7 was answered by 71 people, with 11 no response.

Coding:
        Question 6 was annotated on the excel spreadsheet in the below manner:
                Yes – 1
                No -  2
                N/A - 3

Question 7 was annotated on the excel spreadsheet in the below manner:
Up –    1
Down - 2
N/A -  3

|  | Question 6 | | | | Question 7 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | YES | NO | N/A | TOTAL | UP | DOWN | N/A | TOTAL |
| Number | 40 | 34 | 8 | 74 | 56 | 15 | 11 | 71 |
| Percentage | 54 | 45 | N/A | N/A | 78 | 21 | N/A | N/A |

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Questions 8 to 11 are based on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the best and 4 being the worst.

8.  Do you like living in this neighborhood?   Yes/No
       1, 2, 3, 4,

9.  How friendly do you consider your neighborhood?
       1, 2, 3, 4,

10.  Overall, how safe do you consider your neighborhood?
       1, 2, 3, 4,

11.  How would you rate the relationship between the Worcester Police Department and the neighborhood?
       1, 2, 3, 4,


Questions 8 through 11 all involved a scale with 1 the most favorable, and 4 the least.

Coding:  Replies were coded on the excel spread sheet using the actual number chosen by the person being surveyed.


|  | 1 Excellent | 2 Good | 3 Fair | 4 Poor | No Reply | TOTAL | Average Rating |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Do you like living here? | 16 20% | 39 47% | 18 21% | 9 10% | 0 | 82 | 2.24 |
| Friendliness level here | 14 17% | 30 36% | 27 33% | 11 13% | 0 | 82 | 2.42 |
| What is the safety level? | 11 13% | 39 49% | 19 24% | 11 13% | 2 | 80 | 2.37 |
| WPD Relationship | 6 12% | 36 46% | 24 32% | 11 7% | 5 | 77 | 2.51 |
| Total | 47 | 144 | 88 | 42 | 7 | N/A | N/A |
| Overall | (47 x1) | (144 X 2) | (24X3) | (42 X 4) |  |  |  |

| Cum Avg | 47 | 288 | 264 | 168 | N/A | N/A | 2.38 |
|---------|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|

**NOTE**:  The bottom row reflects the total overall cumulative average for all four categories.  The formula that was used is below.

Total values of each rating multiplied by 1, 2, 3, or 4, and added together (767)
The total (767) was divided by the total number of responses (321) (less the no replies) for the four questions.
This produced an overall cumulative average of 2.38 for these four questions.  This figure is comparable to the four individual averages when each category was averaged independently.

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12. Have you ever witnessed a serious crime take place around your neighborhood?
     Yes/No

13. If yes, did it affect your feelings of being safe?   Yes/No

Questions 12 and 13 were similar questions, in fact it should be classified as two-part or lead-in question.   Questions like these may be best to be avoided for future surveys.

**NOTE:**

   1. Most people did not answer question 13 if they answered question 12 as 'No'
   2. Only **one** person answered "No" to question 12, and "yes" to question 13.
   3.  It was determined that the only responses for question 13 that would be relevant for our research are those that were preceded with an answer of "yes" for question 12.

  Only 21 people stated they had witnessed a serious crime in the neighborhood; we were **only** concerned with their responses for Question 13.

Question 12 was answered by 80 people, with 2 no response.
Question 13.  Only the data from the 21 people that responded yes to witnessing a serious crime (answered "yes" in Question 12) is tabulated below.

Coding:
       Questions 12 and 13 are annotated on the excel spreadsheet in the below manner:
              Yes – 1
              No -  2
              N/A - 3

|  | Yes | No | N/A | No Reply | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Have you witnessed a serious crime? | 21 26% | 59 73% | 2 | 2 | 80 |

|  | Yes | No | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| Did it affect your feelings of being safe? | 11 52% | 10 48% | 21 |

14.  I think that Neighborhood Groups such as crime watch, neighborhood clean-up or community development groups are beneficial to the neighborhood.  Yes/No

**NOTE**.  Question 14 was asked in the initial versions of the surveys as a "rating value' question with a scale of 1 through 4.  Later versions of the survey modified this question to a traditional "Yes/No" question.  Surveys that had numerical values for this question were converted to yes/no answers by assigning all favorable replies of 1 and 2 a 'yes' and negative replies of 3 and 4 a 'no.'

15.  Are you aware of any community or watch groups in the neighborhood?   Yes/No

16.  Do you belong or participate in a neighborhood group?  Yes/No

17.  More neighborhood groups and community involvement would help decrease crime in the neighborhood.  Agree/Disagree

Questions 14 through 17 dealt with neighborhood and community groups.  Since the questions are similar in nature, their responses are shown below on one chart.

Coding for  Questions 14 through 17 are annotated on the excel spreadsheet in the below manner:

       Yes (agree) –    1
       No (disagree) – 2
       N/A - 3

|  | Yes | No | No Reply | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I think neighborhood groups benefit the neighborhood | 66 83% | 13 16% | 3 | 79 |
| I am aware of community groups in the neighborhood. | 25 32% | 53 67% | 4 | 78 |
| I participate in  community or neighborhood groups? | 8 10% | 65 89% | 9 | 73 |

| More neighborhood groups help decrease crime in the neighborhood. | 65 84% | 12 15% | 5 | 77 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

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A group home is a home funded by federal, state or local government that helps less fortunate people and provides them a place to live. There are many different types of group homes, for many different types of homeless people. These groups include runaways, people with substance abuse problems, parolees, pregnant single teens, etc; the last six questions are about group homes.

18. I would _____any type of group home in my neighborhood.
      1. Strongly Support
      2. Support
      3. Oppose
      4. Strongly Oppose

Question 18 involved a value rating. This question was asked to 82 people and 75 people provided a response, 7 did not answer the question.
Coding – the corresponding numerical value was placed on the excel spread sheet.

| | STRONGLY SUPPORT | SUPPORT | OPPOSE | STRONGLY OPPOSE | NO REPLY | TOTAL | Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number | 10 | 49 | 14 | 2 | 7 | 75 | 2.10 |
| Percentage | 13% | 65% | 18% | 2% | N/A | | |

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19. Group homes in the neighborhood would increase crime: Yes/No

20. Group homes in the neighborhood would increase violence. Yes/No

21. Group homes in the neighborhood would lower property values: Yes/No

22. A group home in the neighborhood would have a negative effect Yes/No

**NOTE**: Some versions of the survey asked if a group home would have a positive effect vice negative effect. These questions were manually coded on the work sheet matrix using a P or N for positive and negative based on the person's response. They were then converted on the excel worksheets to the corresponding numerical figure.

23. I would rather see a house in the neighborhood vacant and abandoned than a group home put there. Yes/No

Questions 19 through 23 all dealt with peoples attitudes to group homes.  All five
questions were asked to 82 people and are yes/no questions and their data is provided
below.

Coding.
Questions 19 through 23 are annotated on the excel spreadsheet in the below manner:

        Yes -  1
        No  -  2
        N/A -  3

|  | YES | NO | NO REPLY | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group Homes would increase crime | 20 28% | 49 71% | 13 | 69 |
| Group Homes would increase violence | 19 26% | 53 73% | 10 | 72 |
| Group Homes would lower property values | 25 34% | 49 66% | 8 | 74 |
| Group Homes would have a negative effect In the neighborhood | 48 66% | 24 33% | 10 | 72 |
| I'd rather see a house abandoned or vacant than a group home | 12 16% | 62 84% | 8 | 74 |

*Lessons Learned and Further Research*

   Overall, we enjoyed a degree of success with the survey.  The process was not
flawless, and some minor mistakes were made along the way.  However, they were
quickly identified and corrected, thus none of the data was compromised.  Many valuable
lessons were also learned along the way.  Some key aspects have already been identified
in the body of this paper; however, some additional ones are annotated below.

1.  Ensure all revisions are clearly marked and identified; this will make it easier to code
them.

2.  Ensure that you are familiar with all foreign languages spoken in the neighborhoods
and have a sufficient amount of translated surveys available.  Coordinate with the
school's foreign language department for assistance.

3.  Make an effort to advertise the survey, utilize local news, local news papers,
neighborhood groups, school groups, church groups, web sites, and public television.

4.  All attempts should be made to code and compile the data as it arrives.  A spread sheet
should be set up and the data should be inputted as the surveys arrive.  A standardized

data collection plan needs to be clearly defined **prior** to tasking groups to code data.  If all the groups working independently coding the data are not on the same sheet of music, then their efforts are fruitless.  Gathering the data as it arrives will also lesson the burden upon the conclusion of the survey, additionally it will provide the class a snap shot of any trends.  Additionally, possible questions that are skewed can be quickly identified and modified or removed from the survey.

5.  Similar research should be repeated in which days and times of interviews can be randomly varied to perhaps capture a more diverse group of neighborhood residents.

6.  Similar research should be repeated in the other two areas identified early in the process. Also, the findings here could be compared to the findings from other sections more clearly.

7.  Most important, real ethnographic work should be done in all of these communities to investigate the complexities of feelings and experiences held by residents.


*Findings*

   These statistics tell us many things about many things. But what they tell us is not always clear, in part because questions could have been designed better and data more effectively collected, and in part because residents themselves weren't always consistent Still, there are many statistics that seem very significant and give us some very clear insights into the head and heart of the neighborhood.

   The initial four questions do give us some perspective on the demographics of the area (which could be supplemented by census data). The actual statistics do reflect census data in that they run fairly evenly distributed along a very wide spectrum. While the ages here were a bit younger than census data demonstrates, it is clear that the neighborhood has a wide variety of generational representation. Similarly, while the average length of residency is 8.21 years, the data represents many young people very new to the area and some residents who have lived in the neighborhood for 15 years or more. The younger than average age of residents is in part explained by the majority of renters interviewed as opposed to property owners. And the average household occupancy of almost 4 also represents the diversity of residences as many were single units and households often held 5 or 6 or even more.

   Once we get into the thematic issues of resident's attitudes, however, the data seems much clearer. The majority (54%) of people living in the neighborhood expect to be

living there 5 years from the time they were surveyed. An overwhelming majority (56%-15%) expect that neighborhood property values will go up over that time. And over 50% believe the neighborhood to be a safe place to live. Meanwhile, by over 2-1 (55%-27%) residents liked their neighborhood and felt people were friendly. If you add category 3 (fair) to the first two categories, only a small percentage of those surveyed (9%) did not like their neighborhood or (11%) thought people were unfriendly, or thought the neighborhood significantly unsafe (11%).

Along the lines of questions concerning safety, approximately one quarter (26%) had actually witnessed what they perceived of as a crime. But less than half of that quarter actually felt less safe because of these incidents. Although less than half of the people surveyed thought the Worcester Police Department had a good relationship with the local community, they did feel overall that the neighborhood was safe and they did not feel significantly afraid of crime with any regularity.

The next set of questions concerned an idea that Sociologist Robert Putnam (2001) has popularized as "social capital." These questions looked to gain data on attitudes towards and participation in community organizations. An overwhelming number (86%) believed community organizations benefited the neighborhood, although only a third were aware of them and only 10% actually participated in them. Still, over 4/5ths (84%) thought that more neighborhood organizations would help decrease crime.

The most surprising data, however, came from question 18. Here we specifically asked if residents supported group homes in their neighborhood. Over three-quarters (78%) said they supported or *strongly* supported having any type of group home in their neighborhood. Affiliated questions found similar positive attitudes towards group homes, including 2/3rds or more responding that group homes did not cause "increased crime" (71%), did not cause "increased violence" (73%), and did not result in lower property values (66%). It is true, however, that 66% did say that more group homes would have a negative effect, but when given the choice of a vacant or abandoned home or a group home in their neighborhood, 84% chose a group home.

*Summary and Conclusions*

The overall sense of the neighborhood from these surveys is of a community that is in some transition. Young renters and older homeowners; rapidly rising property values and growing ethnic and racial diversity; long term poverty, but a developing infrastructure of local business and social capital; all of these dynamics hold both promise and potential instability. Yet, amidst these changes, local residents seem to be very clear in their support for group homes and other service agencies in their neighborhood. They don't think that such programs negatively impact property values or crime and, in fact, many understand that such places can be stabilizing forces in lower income and transitional neighborhoods. Still, there seems to be some hesitancy when it comes to the impact of new homes.

We believe these surveys give us some initial insight into the dynamics at work concerning the neighborhood impact of supportive housing and the challenges that arise to group homes. Despite the overwhelming majority of studies that demonstrate group homes have no negative impact on the neighborhoods they are located in, the oppositional voices continue to claim otherwise. While the falsity of these claims has been well documented, it has been pretty well accepted that movements were somewhat representative of neighbors' feelings, regardless of how poorly informed they may have been. We think these surveys show that such scenarios are not necessarily true.

But that doesn't mean that oppositional groups don't have an impact on the general consciousness of the community. If a small, militant group continue to make claims, and the press reports them without adequate balance, and local legislators act upon because they have more political or social or economic power, then the claims gain a certain legitimacy or "common sense" regardless of how false they are. We believe this dynamic helps explain why people responded that groups homes would have a negative impact on the neighborhood despite the fact that they responded overwhelmingly that they haven't so far.

Given the increasingly dominant position of oppositional voices in the media and City Council, what becomes so surprising that there is actually strong support for group housing and service agencies within the area. Thus, we wondered what conditions create

such support given the hostile and divisive public culture created by opposition, media, and local politicians?

**Group Homes Service to the Neighborhoods**

One aspect of supportive housing rarely mentioned by opponents or even local legislators and researchers is the work that many programs do to serve their neighbors. In other words, many agencies and group homes not only provide services for their clients and formal participants, they also provide services for their entire neighborhood and larger communities. This study on the impact of group homes on their surrounding communities takes a more complete look at what programs do in the neighborhood. Thus, we conclude by looking at a variety of projects run by group homes in the designated area.

The Salvation Army is an adult residential facility where residents are there for drug, alcohol, or other substance abuse recovery. It is a secure facility where the residents are under twenty-four hour supervision by staff members. The residents are seen by councilors and attend regular meetings within the home. The residents are not involved with activities outside of the facility, but they are allowed guests (during specific times). Although the Salvation Army facility on Cambridge Street does not involve their residents in the community, there is another affiliated location about a mile down the road that has a food pantry and offers some assistance to the homeless in the area. They are also involved with community outreach and public education on substance abuse and homelessness.

Jeremiah's Inn is also an adult residential facility where the residents are treated for drug, alcohol, or substance abuse. This is also a secure facility where the patients are mandated to attend substance abuse meetings. Residents get a plan that is catered towards their recovery while staying at the home, which is a way to make sure they are on the road to recovery.

Jeremiah's Inn residents and staff do participate in neighborhood activities, though. They clean the islands that are located around the facility, and residents are

responsible for weeding and feeding the plants located there (such as the renown banana plant). They also help to keep the area clean and trash-free by organizing clean-ups. The residents participate in other activities as they arise in the community, including attending local meetings on issues related to economic development, social services, etc. Jeremiah's also sponsors a local food pantry that feeds about two hundred families a week! Much of the food is either donated or received from the Worcester County Food Bank. Residents help to organize the distribution of the food for local families.

Jeremiah's also does community education in schools and churches about homelessness, alcohol, and drugs. In many ways, it helps to enlighten the community about the problems, causes and what others can do to help those who suffer from homelessness or a substance abuse problem. Jeremiah's does not just do the community outreach, but it also helps refer walk-ins to a program that would be suited for them. No person is ever turned away if they are seeking help for a substance abuse problem.

Dismas House is also an adult residential facility treating residents who were just released from serving time in prison. The residents must attend regular house meetings and go to substance abuse meetings. These patients apply for the program and are monitored by the Correction's department. Dismas House residents have been involved in a number of community activities, such as a community garden and trash-clean ups.

The community garden of Dismas House is worked by not only the residents in the program, but is also maintained by residents in the community. The garden hosts a variety of organic food which is given to those in the community. The garden is worked by the residents of Dismas House and the residents of the area, along with the mentally challenged and elementary school children.

Dismas House also organized a large clean up of 11 Richard Street, a former crack-house. By closing and cleaning up the area around the house, the crime rate actually went down and helped to beautify the block. Dismas house also helped to develop a neighborhood crime watch and helped coordinate its activities. In total, it seems clear that a program's level of community engagement impacts the neighborhood's perceptions of transitional housing and service agencies. In this neighborhood's case, groups like Dismas and Jeremiah's Inn participate and direct many projects that benefit local residents and local residents are overwhelmingly supportive of them.

# Survey

I am a Worcester State College Student conducting a survey for a class project and your help in this short survey is very important to my research. This survey will take approximately five minutes to complete. I assure you that your identity will be kept anonymous; I will not even ask you what your name is. You may skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. If you would like more information on our class project please contact Professor Dolgon at (508)123-4567.

1. What age bracket are you?
    18-29                30-45                45-59                60-over

2. How long have you lived in this neighborhood? _____

3. Do you own or rent the home you live?   Own/Rent

4. How many adults live in your home? _____

5. How many children live in your home? _____

6. Do you plan on residing in this neighborhood in five years?   Yes/No

7. Do you think your property value will go up or down in the next 5 years?   Up/Down

Questions 8 to 11 are based on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the best and 4 being the worst.

8. Do you like living in this neighborhood?   Yes/No
    1, 2, 3, 4,
9. How friendly do you consider your neighborhood?
    1, 2, 3, 4,
10. Overall, how safe do you consider your neighborhood?
    1, 2, 3, 4,
11. How would you rate the relationship between the Worcester Police Department and the neighborhood?
    1, 2, 3, 4,
12. Have you ever witnessed a serious crime take place around your neighborhood?
    Yes/No
13. If yes, did it affect your feelings of being safe?   Yes/No
14. I think that Neighborhood Groups such as crime watch, neighborhood clean-up or community development groups are beneficial to the neighborhood.  Yes/No
15. Are you aware of any community or watch groups in the neighborhood?   Yes/No

16. Do you belong or participate in a neighborhood group?  Yes/No

17. More neighborhood groups and community involvement would help decrease crime in the neighborhood.
Agree/Disagree

*A group home is a home funded by federal, state or local government that helps less fortunate people and provides them a place to live. There are many different types of group homes, for many different types of homeless people. These groups include runaways, people with substance abuse problems, parolees, pregnant single teens, etc; the last six questions are about group homes.*

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21. Group homes in the neighborhood would lower property values:  Yes/No
22. A group home in the neighborhood would have a negative effect   Yes/No
23. I would rather see a house in the neighborhood vacant and abandoned than a group home put there.  Yes/No

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