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Mini Ecological Study Part II

What can you remember about the support in your community? In my community, there wasn't much support for families, but the little support was appreciated by many. Schools, after-schools, and daycares would do the heavy lifting for families that were usually ignored by our mayor and governor. Once children stepped into their support places, the struggles of home life were forgotten. They finally had a chance to be a kid. A sense of security was provided for them during hard times. The nearby programs are a necessity in my neighborhood. Without them, my community would look much different today. Children in my community are prematurely exposed to adult issues such as poverty, gang violence, and their parents overworking to make a living for their families. Therefore, the typical school, after-school, and daycare benefits families with exceptional children by keeping children safe with an opportunity to learn and have fun.

Arthur Tappan School (P.S./M.S. 46), is an institution that provides a great amount of services for families with exceptional children. This school is located at 2987 Frederick Douglass Boulevard and is a very large school. With three floors and many classrooms to accommodate the number of children living near the area, this school has many children to look out for. Classes range from preschool to eighth grade, providing families with one area to place their children

who have large age differences. This school provides free breakfast and lunch throughout the entire year. During the summertime, the school remains open to provide families in need with two meals a day. During the school year, the school runs an after-school program where students are given free snacks, homework support, and fun activities to do, such as track, band, and basketball. Services aside, one of the biggest issues for families in this community is poverty. The majority of students attending this school live in New York City Public Housing (also known as NYCHA) and are exposed to hunger, violence, and inequity. These factors affect students and families who engage in these programs. In the article, “Families Experiencing Poverty” by The University of Hawaii System, it is mentioned, “Factors linked to poverty including crowded housing, unemployment, limited access to transportation and cultural resources, increased incidence of illness and isolation make parenting far harder and more stressful for poor parents. The stress of poverty involves more than just worries about money. It includes hunger, exposure to violence, accidents, discrimination, and multiple family transitions/changes. Out of school factors such as poor-quality day care, lack of access to media resources, and environmental toxicity, exert “a powerful and a limiting role in what can actually be achieved...parents experiencing the stresses associated with poverty often cope by disengaging, a coping strategy that is sometimes effective in the short term but not in the long term.” The University of Hawaii System explains that poverty takes a huge toll on families. Being in poverty affects families as a whole, often leaving children to fend for themselves. Poor mental health and trauma are evident in children who oftentimes don’t know when their next meal will come. This can lead to these children turning to violence or unsafe/self-harming activities. Most of their parents are working long hours to support their family and have no choice, but to rely on afterschool programs to keep their children safe and fed. Arthur Tappan

School does a great job of ensuring that children will be in an environment where violence and hunger are not an issue. This school supports the needs of families with exceptional children because it provides a safe place for children to learn, have meals, and interact with others in a positive environment. My community relies on this school heavily for support during their work hours. Arthur Tappan School is the first choice that is made when deciding which school to send their children to because of their services and proximity to their homes. Despite providing school, after-school, and summer meal opportunities, this school still isn't adequately run. Since schools are severely underfunded, the quality and quantities of the services provided aren't exactly exceptional. In the after-school program, there is an imbalance in the student-to-teacher ratio. This leaves teachers with an unsizeable amount of students to care for and not being able to give all students the necessary attention that they need. Lesson plans during homework/academic help and fun activities are limited due to the educators not having enough resources, time, or support to lead them. Also, students don't always have choices to make when it comes to snack time. Most of the time, one to two types of snacks/meals are provided. If students don't like the snack or have food allergies, they may not get to eat. However, the services that Arthur Tappan School already provides are necessary and beneficial to the community around it. There aren't many institutions around that provide the quantity of services this school does. However, one opportunity that isn't available at this school is a summer school program. For some, being out of school leaves children hungry, isolated, and bored.

Right across the street, is an opportunity for children to take advantage of during the summer. The Police Athletic League (PAL) at Polo Grounds Towers is another institution where a range of support and accommodations are provided. This PAL has the space for a large number of students to attend with a lot of staff to accommodate them. Since this PAL is right across the

street from Arthur Tappan School, students can walk independently from school to after school.

This center is the closest to Polo Grounds Towers, just a couple of feet from the nearest building, which allows students to also walk independently to their homes if they live in the area.

Holistically, PAL is a very sports-focused center. Children have a wide option of athletic activities to choose from, such as kickball, dance, volleyball, double-dutch, and karate. Children enrolled at PAL have access to free snacks every weekday that they attend. During vacations such as Mid-Winter Recess and Spring Break, PAL opens from 8:00am to 5:30pm to provide families with a safe place for children to stay where they will receive food and access to social activities. PAL runs a summer camp program from 8:00am-5:30pm which gives families the same services as provided during the break. This is beneficial because one of the major issues in my community is gang violence and drug trafficking. My community has changed greatly from the time I was growing up to now. Violence and drug trafficking have skyrocketed in the past couple of years. Now, children cannot escape exposure to inappropriate behaviors. It's no longer safe for children to play outside, especially without adult supervision. In the article, "Gangs and Children", by the American Academy of Children and Adolescent Psychiatry, it is mentioned, "Most gang members tend to be adolescents or young adults, however, recent trends indicate that children are being recruited into gangs at a much earlier age, some when they are in elementary school...Gangs can include people of every gender, race, culture, and socioeconomic group. Some children and adolescents are motivated to join a gang for a sense of connection or to define a new sense of who they are. Others are motivated by peer pressure, a need to protect themselves and their family because a family member also is in a gang, or to make money. One of the worst effects of gang membership is the exposure to violence...Consequences of gang membership may include exposure to drugs and alcohol, age-inappropriate sexual behavior, difficulty finding

a job because of lack of education and work skills, removal from one's family, imprisonment, and even death.” The American Academy of Children and Adolescent Psychiatry explains that gangs usually target young teens and children for recruitment. Children join gangs for a sense of belonging despite how destructive it can be for themselves. Extreme unchangeable consequences are met for children who join gangs or are exposed to gang violence. Therefore, an after-school center like PAL assists in keeping children in a safe environment where they won't have chances to see violence firsthand. Their services have a very strong quality and lots of quantities because there isn't much support for families when schools go on break. This support is extremely vital and valuable for families raising exceptional children. I'm sure there are areas in which certain spaces are understaffed or need support in dealing with children with trauma or behavioral needs. However, the services are very adequate for a non-profit organization. The only issue with this is the minimum age to enroll in this program is age five or in kindergarten. In my community, many preschool-age children don't meet the requirements to enroll.

For preschool-aged children, there are daycare opportunities close by. Prince Hall Colonial Daycare is a tuition-free organization that provides services for families with exceptional children. Although Prince Hall Colonial Day Care is small, it provides a service that is not available in any other area of my neighborhood. Daycare centers are very rare in my area, with the next closest one being a thirty-minute walk from Prince Hall Colonial Day Care. Most centers in my area are only available for children starting in kindergarten, age five and up. Each classroom has a maximum enrollment of 16 students and has two to three teachers in one classroom. Every day, free meals are made in the kitchen area by two chefs to be served in class. This daycare runs five days a week from 8:00am to 2:30pm. Students are offered a variety of activities to participate in. There is an art station, dramatic play station, writing station, sand and

soil station, and a gated outdoor playground. Prince Hall Colonial Day Care is an all-year-round daycare, meaning students attend school during the summer as well during the same set times. This works well for parents in my neighborhood because oftentimes they have to work long hours to provide for their families. Without childcare, parents can't afford rent, groceries, or other basic necessities, further dragging them down into poverty. In the article, "Child Care is Economic Security for NYC Families", by the Citizens' Committee for Children of NYC, is mentioned, "Pre-pandemic studies were already connecting the rising costs of child care with financial stability for families across the U.S., like in this report from the Carsey School of Public Policy in 2017, "Child Care Expenses Push Many Families Into Poverty", where researchers found that roughly "one-third of [low income] families who pay for child care for their young children are pushed into poverty by their child care expenses"...As our own data show, more than 80% of families overall cannot afford child care... 1 in 10 parents experienced turnover as a result of disruptions to child care and nearly one-third of working parents reported a child care disruption that hindered workforce advancement, demonstrating further the importance that reliable, affordable child care plays in workforce attachment and income security. These are just some income impacting factors that can alter a family's financial stability, potentially contributing to child poverty." The Citizens' Committee for Children of NYC explains that most families in NYC have no way to receive childcare, whether it is tuition or tuition-free. The lack of childcare contributes to problems involving poverty because parents can't commit to working jobs due to the unreliability of their child's safety and happiness. Centers like Prince Hall Colonial Day Care help ease the concern for children's well-being because of the rich services available. This daycare provides support for families raising exceptional children by providing a nurturing environment for toddlers to learn the basics of

academics, develop social-emotional skills, and build their cognitive skills. The quality of this institution helps families supply their children with the early childhood education necessary in schools. However, the daycare's size means that enrollment is very limited. Many families with young children aren't able to send their children to daycares or have to wait on an enrollment that most likely will never come. The quantity of services in this organization is very high for an early childhood center. Every item inside the daycare is intentional to help develop each of the four domains. Children work with a large range of materials each day to further their learning. The services are very adequate for a daycare of this size. Overall, this daycare is essential to my neighborhood and the exceptional children who need their support.

In conclusion, there are institutions in my neighborhood that try their best to uplift and help my community. Arthur Tappan School is a great institution that offers a combination of education, food security throughout the year, and positive activities for children to turn to. The Police Athletic League is an afterschool that focuses on social and emotional well-being and protects children when they're out of school. Finally, Prince Hall Colonial Day Care is designated for the often forgotten age group of children. Toddlers can gain the foundation of education every weekday and build on their skills. Although these institutions aren't perfect, they're doing what they can to make a difference for families in my community. Maybe with a bit more funding, volunteering, and attention, these organizations can transform into reshaping children and their future.

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