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Mini Ecological Study Part III

Community is no longer a word to describe a group of people who coexist with each other. People don't support each other or fight for one another like before. Everyone's for themselves. This mindset shows through behaviors, knowledge, and what people are willing to accept. In my neighborhood, people are struggling to make ends meet and support their families. They're isolated from anyone who can help. To make better changes in my community, we have to make changes within ourselves and advocate for all groups that are connected to us. Parents and adults need support that can be accomplished through the use of community engagement and interaction. Teenagers and children need a place to vent and connect with each other in positive spaces, like in support groups. Most importantly, my neighborhood needs a safe place for toddlers to gain an education and express their curiosity and playfulness with educators who want to see them thrive.

Poverty will continue to devastate common New York City neighborhoods unless communities work together to fight against it. Community engagement is necessary to fight against poverty. Nowadays, there isn't a common ground between neighbors. Most people don't even know their neighbors' names anymore. Since the pandemic, people lost their jobs, struggled to pay for food and bills, and their morale has gone down. Residents in communities no longer

look out for each other like before. When communities are united, they can rally against inequities and injustices that are often found in their neighborhood. In the article, "Community Engagement" by the Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education, it is mentioned, "'Community engagement' is therefore a strategic process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by geographic location, special interest, or affiliation to identify and address issues affecting their well-being...Citizens are 'engaged' when they play a meaningful role in the deliberations, discussions, decision-making, and/or implementation of projects or programs affecting them... [They can] increase the likelihood that projects or solutions will be widely accepted. Citizens who participate in these processes show significant commitment to help make the projects happen. Create more effective solutions. Improve citizens' knowledge and skills in problem-solving. Participants learn about the issues in-depth...Citizens can practice communication and decision-making skills." The Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education explains that community engagement is a group of people that have a common interest, goal, or location. When these groups of people work together, they can collectively gain knowledge and problem-solving techniques to fix any issues in their communities. Community engagement will teach people to advocate for themselves and push for changes that won't be made naturally. If I were to push for community engagement in my neighborhood, I would gather parents, families, and friends within Arthur Tappan School to schedule conferences, fundraisers, and donation pick-ups, develop non-profits, and organize meetings/protests to catch the attention of people who can support the residents in my neighborhood. We would work on improving the connection between members. This would look like providing basic needs for children, such as a clothing drive, food drive, and school supplies. Organizing holiday parties, family outdoor days, sports

games, and creating support groups will further strengthen the relationships within the community. Without the strength of the community, individuals will weaken until the entire neighborhood falls. There needs to be ways for the community to connect with each other. Most importantly, the youth in my community need to be a strong focus in creating stronger relationships.

The youth are often targeted by gangs and people with bad intentions. Therefore, it is important to protect youth and lead them in the right direction. Support groups for youth need to be accessible to children in my community. Most support groups only focus on children, aged thirteen or younger. This is crucial to prevent children from having access to joining gangs or being exposed to violence. However, support groups are missing the most crucial age group between fourteen and eighteen. Preventative measures still need to take place for older children and an opportunity to improve their lives needs to be available as well. In the article “What to Know About Support Groups” by Very Well Health, it is stated, “A support group, or social support group, is a group of people who are led by a professional and come together with a goal of overcoming or coping with a shared problem. With the leadership of the professional, they share help, comfort, encouragement, advice, and guidance to face their challenges together...Support groups can be formed to address any challenge, including physical health conditions, mental health conditions, and life situations. They are common in helping people with mental health issues, and the mental and emotional side of physical health issues...Support groups may meet in person or online using video meeting platforms...Support groups incorporate structured social support to members with common challenges or circumstances, and social support has been shown to improve physical health, mental health, and the ability to cope with stressors. The combination of professional support and member support helps members to

more easily overcome and better cope with their shared challenges.” Very Well Health explains that support groups are professional-led gatherings where people who deal with shared issues come together to receive help. In support groups, people share experiences, and advice, and form companionship to assist each other in bettering themselves. Being a part of a support group greatly improves overall health and there are many ways to become involved in a support group. An organization like the Police Athletic League (PAL) has a great opportunity to create support groups for youth in my community. If I were running PAL, I would divide the support group into age groups that have a maximum two-year age difference. The support groups will have different opportunities for the children to express themselves. There will be different sessions where students will participate in group therapy, art, meditation, develop social-emotional skills, learn positive coping methods, and mixed-group mentorship. Through this, children will gain the necessary skills for self-help and will have access to a positive and nurturing environment. However, once the focus is put on families and the youth, this is still a big concern that lies with parents and toddlers in the community.

Parents with infants and toddlers struggle to find childcare during their hours. This leaves families vulnerable due to an unstable schedule. Daycares are reliable in their care towards their students and provide students with a nurturing and educational environment. However, there aren’t enough daycares to assist the amount of children in my neighborhood. Accessible daycares are desperately needed in my community to support both children and parents. When childcare is uncertain, children struggle to bond and flourish in their environment. Also, parents can’t dedicate themselves to their work. More daycares that enroll more students will greatly support families. In the article, “Better Kid Care” by PennState Extension, it is mentioned, “Promoting the goals of quality early care and education – help children develop to their full potential,

support families in providing a good start for their children, increase professional recognition of early childhood educators, and provide quality programs for all children – is seen as a fundamental activity for early childhood professionals today...Promoting the goals of quality early care and education - help children develop to their full potential, support families in providing a good start for their children, increase professional recognition of early childhood educators, and provide quality programs for all children - is seen as a fundamental activity for early childhood professionals today.” PennState Extension explains that daycares instill the foundation of education for toddlers. Children get started early on the right track and begin to develop their four learning domains at a young age. Daycares are a necessity to bring intentional academics into a child’s life. Since the pandemic, children have fallen behind in crucial subjects in school. Children missed out on the necessary lesson plans that would’ve developed their skills to keep them at grade level. Offering early education for children will combat the falling education rates in New York City. Prince Hall Colonial Day Care offers great opportunities for the families involved, but only having two classrooms with a maximum of sixteen students per classroom doesn’t help the majority of my community. Limited enrollment means most of the children in my neighborhood can’t receive or express the same literacy, mathematics, and creativity skills as children enrolled in the daycare. To advocate for families in my community, I would gather people to organize campaigns, events, and visit legislators. We would focus on funding for already existing daycares in my area. Then, we would encourage the city to use its funding to create more daycares with larger spaces to enroll more children into the programs. To ensure the programs are culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate for children from age birth to four years old, we would advocate for certified educators. All children have a right to get an education and toddlers are no different.

In conclusion, plenty of changes need to be made in my community before it can prosper. My community can benefit from community engagement to foster stronger relationships and make adjustments in my neighborhood. Some forms of community engagement can support the youth who have poor mental health or need a safe place to talk to a trusted person. Youth support groups can tackle the rising violence rates among children and give them strategies to cope with ongoing issues in their lives. Finally, daycare centers are a requirement to combat the falling education rates and help parents dedicate more time to providing for their families. It won't be easy gathering a group of people to advocate for these causes. However, it is essential to try to push for big changes for the future of the community.

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