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BUILD WITH HUMANITY

MID-TERM PROJECT UPDATE

JULY 26TH 2019

THE PROJECT

Analyzing the lived experience of displacement in the Montopolis community

RESEARCH PROGRESS OVERVIEW (TO DATE)

20 Interviews

- **10 interviews:** 2 apartment complexes (1 market rate, 1 income based rental)
- **4 interviews:** 1 mobile home park
- **4 interviews:** homeless individuals or at immediate risk of being homeless
- **1 interview:** Home renter
- **1 interview:** Commuter (part-time resident)

Demographic by Ethnicity (% of sample)

- **90%** Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish
- **5%** African American
- **5%** White or other



Summary of the Mid-Term Report

Based on the interviews completed a few emerging needs related to reducing displacement pressure were summarized and presented in the following sections. The insights do not reflect a full analysis of all of the interviews completed, but serve as a snapshot of the high level insights gained to date.

The goal of this phase is not merely to conduct design research but to also develop a scalable process for design research in multiple communities across Austin. Lessons learned on formulating a better approach include:

- increasing the average interview time to 20 - 25 mins while also increasing the incentive to \$20.
- Updating our research framework to reflect leading events chronologically.
- Supporting community members in conducting research themselves using a paper-based guide.
- Provide a list of anti-displacement related resources along with the research guide.
- Proposing that the lead design researchers focus on in-depth interviews based on initial feedback received and conduct rapid research and synthesis to identify key domains of exploration *throughout* the research process.

EMERGING NEED: CHILDCARE AND PREGNANCY SUPPORT

Childcare is a significant cost for low income renters that we interviewed. It is 1.) very expensive and they cannot afford daycare on their income and 2.) they have forgo job opportunities in order to take care of young children themselves. One young father found it difficult to find work because there would be no one to take care of his children. It was cheaper for him to stay at home than to pay for daycare.

Overall rate of rising costs are amplified by pregnancy and unplanned child birth. One woman reported that her health insurance premium nearly tripled once she had a child. She also reported that other mothers in the area that have multiple children often choose between feeding one child or the other due to the rising cost of living. The insight gained seems to indicate that children increase the rate and amplitude of increasing costs more exponentially than linearly.

Pregnancy (particularly unplanned pregnancy) imposes physical barriers on working women. One woman that we spoke to was homeless because she lost her job at 7-11 due to being pregnant, and found it was hard to find another job for the same reason. She felt that as a woman there were no resources for her, and that the ARCH is for men. In another case, In order to keep up with the costs of living, one woman reported worked 3 jobs in order to care for her kids.

Triggers and Indicators

- Unplanned pregnancy (including reported rape)
- Being Divorced / Single Parent
- CPS filings and reports (due to the inability to care for children).
- Being at a job with insufficient maternity leave policies

Trusted Spaces

- Women focused shelters and care facilities
- Familial support

Levers of Change

- Free to low cost daycare centers for pre-school aged children
- Workplaces that provide childcare or supervision
- Support for paid maternity leave
- Shelters geared towards women in need / preferential admission for pregnant women
- Removing stay limits at homeless shelters for pregnant women
- Look at ARCH policies to make it more helpful to homeless women with a focus on prevention of sexual exploitation.

"UNPLANNED PREGNANCY AND CHILD BIRTH IS AN INFLECTION POINT WHERE THE SHOCK OF RISING LIVING COSTS ARE AMPLIFIED, INCREASING THE RISK OF DIRECT DISPLACEMENT"

EMERGING NEED: CRIME AND CRIME PREVENTION

Crime was one of the main reasons people said they wanted to move out of the community. Robbery, stabbings, drugs, and inappropriate conduct of the homeless people in the area were all cited as major concerns (particularly at bus stops).

Over-policing and too many restrictions. There was also a significant number of people in one apartment that said that "they felt like they lived in a prison". Even though the crime rate improved there were extreme restrictions that were placed on the community members in this particular complex. If you were reported 3 times for a violation of apartment rules you could be evicted. People felt harassed by security guards that would report them for very minor violations (having the wrong kind of blinds, 10pm curfew, sitting in car). This kind of harassment led the residents, to report that they were not being forced out by crime but by "over policing" and the feeling they had very little freedom.

There seems to be a feedback loop in which BOTH crime AND overly restrictive crime prevention techniques keep people from connecting with their friends, neighbors, and broader community. There is a sense in which the criminalization of a few can lead to unfair criminalization of the community. One man said, "I have seen this before in east Austin, they just turn us against each other". The mistrust and paranoia created by both crime and restriction seem to wear away the sense of family that was once embodied in the east Austin community.

Triggers and Indicators

- High rates of non-criminal incident Reports at apartments
- Violent crime & theft
- Degradation of community amenities
- Increased reporting of suspicious, **legal** activities
- Restrictive "house rules" created by property managers
- High turnover of apartment managers / owners

Trusted Spaces

- Public places for family time (playgrounds, BBQ areas)
- Group BBQs at parks (transit accessible)
- Community lead events (low-rider shows, parades, and fiestas)
- Low cost movie theaters and community activities for youth

Levers of Change

- Review of apartment "house rules" to monitor for predatory or unfair rules or management practices
- Targeted policing, to prevent unfair and biased suspicion of community members
- Sponsor, support, and provide police to protect community lead social gatherings and events in transit accessible locations

THERE SEEMS TO BE A FEEDBACK LOOP IN WHICH BOTH CRIME AND OVERLY RESTRICTIVE CRIME PREVENTION KEEP PEOPLE FROM CONNECTING WITH THEIR FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, AND BROADER COMMUNITY

EMERGING NEED: RENTAL PRICE SHOCKS & POOR APARTMENT MANAGEMENT

Rental Price shocks. Sudden and arbitrary increases in rent combined with no notice or little notice make it difficult to budget for increased costs. "Where am I going to get an extra \$100.00 when I only have \$30.00 left at the end of the month?". At least 3 residents reported rental price increase of over \$100.00 with very little time to adjust to the increase payment due to the short notice period. One renter was looking for a second job and sold his car due to a sudden increase in living costs.

Apartment management. Among the participants interviewed, there were two examples of residents referring to income based rental payment calculations as arbitrary and unfair. The calculation was so unclear that residents didn't know when they had to pay more. There was also an incident where the apartment complex did not provide the proper notices, they lost tax documentation needed to verify income, and would constantly change the lease terms without the resident understanding why. Lastly, the management problems seem to correlate to a constant change in ownership.

Triggers and Indicators

- unlawful or short notice periods for rent increases
- Disruptive changes in lease terms (e.g. payment deadlines, 'house rules', property management processes)
- Unclear lease terms and rate calculations
- Frequent changes in apartment ownership or management
- Lease cancellations, evictions, and non-renewals outnumber applicants. "people move out but don't move in"

Trusted Spaces

- Outside support for reporting unfair practices (lawyer, legal aid)
- Spaces where violations can be reported without fear, and leverage had to contest unfair rental policies and rules.

Levers of Change

- Flexible payment dates and the need to pay late at times
- Increase Notice Periods for rent increases
- Restriction on the annual amount the rent can increase
- Transparent scale for income based rent calculations

SUDDEN RENT INCREASES LEAVE RESIDENTS WITH LITTLE TIME TO BUDGET FOR INCREASED COSTS, COMBINED WITH CHANGES IN LEASE TERMS, RENTERS' HOUSING SITUATION IS INCREASINGLY UNSTABLE

EMERGING NEED: JOB SECURITY AND WAGE GROWTH

No opportunities for wage growth. If raises are given they are not nearly enough to offset the increasing costs of living. In terms of finding job opportunities, there are 3 main barriers discovered. **1.) Lack of access to work networks:** people that felt they had access to jobs had them because of informal work connections formed while working for cash (day labor) or because they were apart of a trade union **2.) Experience:** It is more difficult to get better jobs because interviewees needed experience, but its hard to get experience when jobs will not entertain applicants without it, **3.) Prior criminal convictions:** one woman reported being fired from her current position due to drug possession and could not get her job back until three years after her conviction. **3.) Physical disability:** physical impairment due to disease, old age, or even pregnancy were cited as reasons that is was difficult to find a job. This seems particularly true for people that have primarily worked in blue collar jobs with a higher level of manual labor.

Lack of opportunity leads to applications for second or even third jobs just to keep up with the cost of living. Elderly people are particularly vulnerable because many live on social security. Elderly people living on social security, and/or disability don't have the ability to earn a higher income leading to greater financial hardship. This problem is exacerbated with elderly residents without children, or that have healthcare costs beyond what medicaid and medicare are willing to cover.

Triggers and Indicators

- Applications for second and third jobs
- roommate requests
- sudden disability (including pregnancy)
- Prior criminal convictions
- The selling or repossession of vehicles

Trusted Spaces

- Home Depot (informal place for day-labor)
- Workforce Commission
- Personal work connections and informal working networks

Levers of Change

- Adopting a trade and being apart of a trade union
- Having access to an informal work network
- Opportunities to get entry level jobs without experience
- Flexible jobs that accommodate physical impairments or disabilities
- Job opportunities for the elderly
- Enforcing anti-discrimination laws against the disabled
- Programs or jobs that aid in the transition away from odd jobs to skilled labor

LACK OF ACCESS TO WORK NETWORKS, CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS, EXPERIENCE, AND DISABILITY WERE ALL CITED AS SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO OBTAINING A JOB OR HIGHER PAYING JOBS