PACDC
PHILADELPHIA ASSOCIATION
OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS

ART-POWERED PLACES:
COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND PLANNING USING ARTS-BASED PRACTICES

A Guide for Powering Up Neighborhoods with the People who Live There, for CDCs and their Allies

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A LETTER FROM LISA JO

Special thanks to Pamela Bridgeforth for being visionary and for her unflagging belief in my work, and to Rick Sauer, Executive Director of PACDC, for committing to the long-game by understanding that resident-driven, arts-based engagement could not only play an important role in community-led equitable development but deserved support. Without them, this model could never have been fully developed. To Laurie Zierer, Executive Director of PA Humanities who was the first to trust me with piloting my untested ideas with ChesterMade which became the core of my model. To Emaleigh Doley for pursuing the dream of a people-centered process for revitalizing Germantown's business district. To Mark Harrell Southwest CDC, Lorraine Gomez of Mt Vernon Manor, Darnetta at Brewerytown/Sharswood, and HACE CDC , Stasia Monteiro and Sierra Cuellar, to all of the residents who trained to be SET Members: Don Newton et al from ChesterMade, GTown Hands, RRR. To David and Zivia.....And finally, to Mary Beth Semerod for endless hours of phone conversations, her steadfast encouragement, insight, and diligent documentation and analysis of our process.

Lisa Jo Epstein

There's much to say about the merit of a community process as processing is one of the most basic ways that we can come to deeply understand our world. The space we've created in this Art Powered Places process has allowed people to reveal their earnest observations of the neighborhood and its people, and has given us more deeply relevant knowledge of the challenges we face as we work to grow wellness in our communities.

--Stasia Monteiro, HACE CDC

RELATIONSHIP IS THE PROJECT

When thinking about the work uncovered in this guide, we were tasked to help facilitate community residents' connectedness to and engagement with new recreation and senior centers on the land and in the shadow of collective memories and emotional attachment to the original center, well-loved hub of community life. People were skeptical, hesitant and, untrusting that their voices would matter, would be heard. Together with a range of residents and community partners we set about to proactively build a new social infrastructure for the Rivera and Mann Centers, led by, for and with resident stakeholders. While the physical renovation of the building was important, relationships mattered more.

Relationship IS the project but unfortunately, growing citizen power in historically marginalized communities is often overlooked in favor of physical improvement that offers a more immediate, tangible product. The other takes time, care and long-term commitment since it is rooted in undoing Black and Brown racism and anti-cultural oppression. Just Act's place-based, resident-led cultural organizing model called Art-Powered Places flips the script on the structurally unjust status quo, and centers residents as the authors of a new narrative. With support and encouragement from the Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations (PACDC), Just Act began collaborating with HACE CDC back in 2017 on a project called "Art-Powered Places." The trust and synergy that was built between us laid the foundation for our work detailed here.

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CONTENTS

Operating and supporting purposeful connection and shared visioning

What makes sense for you and your community?
1. For internal organizational planning and development, Follow Steps 1 & 2
2. For external action to coalesce around community issues, Follow Steps 1-5

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

CDCs--and other community organizers--seeking creative, participatory, place-based methods to:

· 	Build and support brave, purposeful space for residents to engage equally with CDC staff and other city stakeholders in co-planning and creating culturally and community-responsive visions for change; and in doing so, shift relationships and share power to affect desired change.

· 	Energize, cultivate & deepen the community's role in identifying local needs and strengths to propel and shape equitable development.

· 	Center people over profit, prioritizing relationships, multi-dimensional perspectives and residents' lived experiences, wisdom and visions in designing the future of a neighborhood where all can thrive.

· 	Strengthen social agency by providing meaningful opportunities for residents experiencing racism and the impact of systematic disinvestment to experience the power of leading and rewriting the narrative of their neighborhood.

· 	Focus on both the engagement process and the community member experience in order to facilitate shared community discovery, feelings of ownership and authentic inclusion in community development

· 	Cultivate trust and mutual learning through a process that builds capacity in using art-powered approaches in organizing and planning for real change.

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PEOPLE POWER IS CRUCIAL IN THE FACE OF A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

No one CDC or city or neighborhood can do the work of advancing and protecting a civil and just society independently. We need each other to lean on, lift up, give a gentle kick in the pants to one another as we move to strengthen our communities by strengthening one another. Community only works in partnership and collaboration. But that collaboration needs nurturing and support. To change the world for the better, we need to help others access the power within their individual and collective strengths to dream and act on those dreams to meaningful fruition.

When we say ArtPowered Places is about people power, we mean that this process seeks to...
· Challenge status quo, top-down community engagement practices that perpetuate racial inequity and injustice through an intersectional lens, under the guise of engagement.
· Understand this is not 'outreach' into the community led by civic leaders to solicit input or feedback, but a restorative, people-centered, democratic process through which primarily Black and Brown, low-income and working class, seniors and immigrants are invited to dream together and become planners for the development of their own neighborhoods.
· Community self-determination leads to sustainable revitalization: Real change can happen because it is the people directly connected and impacted by the issues and concerns who are generating strategies for community revitalization; the data that emerges is reflective of localized views and aligned with community values.
· identify & build stronger networks around civic as well as community development challenges and interests.
· Build community capacity to lead change thereby transforming community members' vision of their role, of their partners and of planning in community revitalization.

WHY USE THE ART-POWERED PLACES MODEL IMPLICATIONS FOR CDCS

1

Increase & Diversify resident engagement in neighborhood planning for sustainable & equitable revitalization
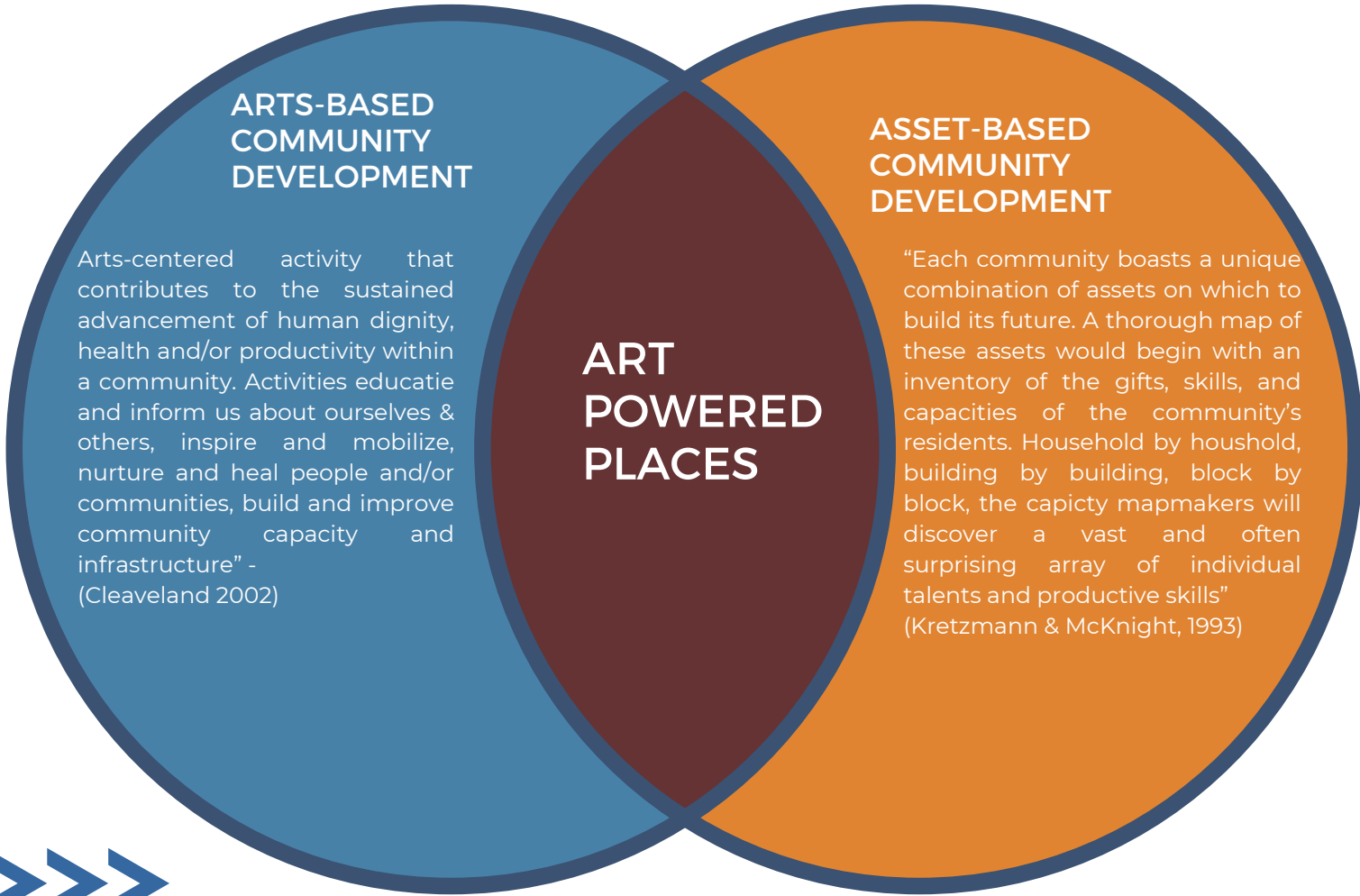
2

Increase shared knowledge & understanding of neighborhood needs, issues, experiences assets & networks; increase knowledge of self and the group as agents of change.

3

Increase level of collboration, networking & relationships to counter isolation & marginalization; create a culture of connection, conversation & care for community health & well-being

4

Increase capacity for & value of arts-based strategies for community organizing & planning for change.

ARTS-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Arts-centered activity that contributes to the sustained advancement of human dignity, health and/or productivity within a community. Activities educatie and inform us about ourselves & others, inspire and mobilize, nurture and heal people and/or communities, build and improve community capacity and infrastructure" - (Cleaveland 2002)

ART POWERED PLACES

ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

"Each community boasts a unique combination of assets on which to build its future. A thorough map of these assets would begin with an inventory of the gifts, skills, and capacities of the community's residents. Household by houshold, building by building, block by block, the capicty mapmakers will discover a vast and often surprising array of individual talents and productive skills" (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993)

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ASSUMPTIONS

- Identification of shared assets, needs and values support the creation of a shared vision for the community's future
- Building, diversifying and strengthening resident engagement and participation in civic activities will positively affect neighborhood wide planning for revitalization
- Civic engagement requires a mechanism to address isolation, cultivate and improve relationships, social cohesion and stewardship of place
- Value arts-based strategies to explore community needs, shape brave space for inclusion and building social capital
- Sustainability of community connectedness that relies on community members themselves to organize and not necessarily a CDC or other formal entity

STEP 1: POWERING UP

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STEP 2: WIDEN THE CIRCLE

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STEP 3: ACTIVATE & COLLBORATE

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STEP 4: TRANSFORM

STEP 1: POWERING UP

ROLE of the CDC
Setting the Stage: Create preliminary conditions for learning
Shift thinking: Identify your motivation for using the APP model--why are you changing your engagement practice, what are your goals; let that knowledge give you direction and joy, and remain natural.
·   Embrace the pace: Be flexible, ready to invest and commit quality staff time for planning, project development & activation as well as evaluation.
·   Reframe & Redirect focus: Welcome the state of unknowing, value that there will be long-term benefits of this work.
·   Be wise: Invite an arts partner who shares your values and has arts AND community-based facilitation experience; hire a participatory evaluator or work with one with whom arts partner has a relationship. Together, define path forward, discuss roles, create project timeline, establish shared project interests, expectations.
·   Be intentional: Commit staff time to collaborate closely with arts partner and support all aspects of the project.
·   Be Trustworthy: Select staff who will hold the trust of the residents invited to join the planning team & center their ideas
Practice patience and curiosity: Don't expect bells, whistles, or applause. "Change happens at the speed of trust." (Stephen Covey)
·   Be ready to fundraise: As the sponsor of the work, the artist and community members leading the project must be paid; there will also be community events with hospitality, design and printing of materials, documentation & evaluation.
·   Release the need to control the outcome: Support the prioritization of authentic relationship-building, listening and collaboration with residents.
·   Transform problems into possibilities: emergent challenges and bumps in the road become important opportunities for real change.

TIP: FIND your CORE Social Practice Arts Partner: Before you begin, invite local social practice artist with facilitation of, and experience in arts and community-based experience
TIP: BRING IN a participatory Evaluator with creative placemaking knowledge and experience

INSIDE SCOOP: Invite CDC staff member with graphic design skills to be part of the core team, in charge of the communications plan for building project 'brand'--logo, social media, press, etc.

STEP 2: WIDEN THE CIRCLE

Neighborhood Development begins with Widening the Circle and Creating a COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM (aka the CAT)

Through a series of story and strategic arts-based activities, the CAT will build knowledge, confidence and familiarity not only with the project and community needs, but with each other and how to authentically collaborate. Through deep listening and guided critical reflection on what matters most to the community in regards to the project's focus, the CAT will develop trust in new creative strategies for engagement and action-planning, all of which will support them to make purposeful project choices.

CAT meetings cultivate a sense of belonging as relationships are built and strengthened, and residents' voices remain at the forefront. Neighborhood issues will be honestly raised, illustrating the courage and awareness of community members who are participating.You and your arts partner should utilize a sensitive style of interaction to support participants to voice their concerns and utilize them as a pivotal point for creating a vision for change.

What happens once you designated your CDC staff for the project and preliminary meetings with the local social practice artist have begun:

· Invite wide range of local leaders--both formally and informally known in the neighborhood-- along with city stakeholders to become a Community Action Team (aka the CAT).
· You and your arts partner host an Orientation Session for potential CAT members: introduce project & facilitate a story circle to begin data collection to allow initial needs and strengths to emerge and be identified.
· If doing community-wide engagement: Recruit a Story Engagement Team (aka the SET) of residents who will be trained by theatre partner to lead data collection through story circles and theater.
· With arts partner, create a Communication Plan for media/social media & CDC website; design logo & branding as needed, be ready to write press releases, etc.
· Celebrate milestones!

Q & A: What is Horizontal Community Engagement and Who should CDC invite to be in the CAT?
1.1-2 CDC Staff
2.Community leaders known by CDC and others trusted by the community
3.Local artists
4.Intergenerational, multi-racial
5.City staff/stakeholders in success of project

STEP 2: WIDEN THE CIRCLE
COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM (CAT)

What does the Community Action Team Do?

- Define Partners & Path Forward through strategic arts-based activities   TIP
- · Share project interests & expectations   Schedule same time block for CAT meetings each week
- · Identify barriers impeding community-driven efforts   Co-create weekly agenda w/arts partner featuring APP activities
- · Share visions for change   Co-facilitate, and take "minutes"
- · Identify roles they play in the neighborhood
- · Assess Community Strengths & Needs
- · Create project timeline

"Being in this project helped me to see the importance of encouraging neighbors to make an impact, and to give people the opportunity to share their voices." --local resident, CAT member

"I love the brainstorming; often it's like we are on an island as a rec leader and it's good to feel supported with out of the box ideas that we're not used to doing."--Parks & Rec Staff, member of the CAT

STEP 2: WIDEN THE CIRCLE
COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM (CAT)

Build Knowledge
- Awareness of Neighborhood issues, barriers, & perspectives & experiences
- Awareness of Stated Neighborhood Assets & Resources (People & Partners, formal & informal support
- Awareness of role that individuals play in implementing community change
- Awareness of Role that story & art play in community organizing, planning & engagement

Collaborate for Change
- Identify and acknowledge Community Partners & Stakeholders
- Identify Community Projects and/or initiatives that align with project goals
- Define structure and mechanisms for implementing new engagement for change
- Using project outcomes to develop a targeted plan for future

Value of Arts to Promote Equitable Community Revitalization at the Neighborhood level
- Support knowledge building, dialogue and collective action - the power of we
- Understand process for how residents can participate in community change
- Awareness of the collaborative vision of cross-sector partnerships for targeted action
- Experience arts-based play, implement plans for engagement

Schedule the same time block for CAT meetings each week. Co-create weekly agenda w/arts partner featuring APP activities, Co-facilitate and take "minutes:

STEP 3: ACTIVATE & COLLABORATE THE CAT IN ACTION

Personal & Neighborhood Network Mapping
See who is missing, identify how to reach them

Social Power Matrix

Problems into Possibilities
CREATE A VISUAL MAP for seeing the local system & the barriers to health & well-being, the root causes, impact of these barriers, then envision a healthy thriving tree

PROBLEM/VISION TREES: Community members create artistic visuals of current barriers to change, and how their neighborhoods could improve livability on a local level. guide focused brainstorming on local issues, effects, barriers and potential solutions
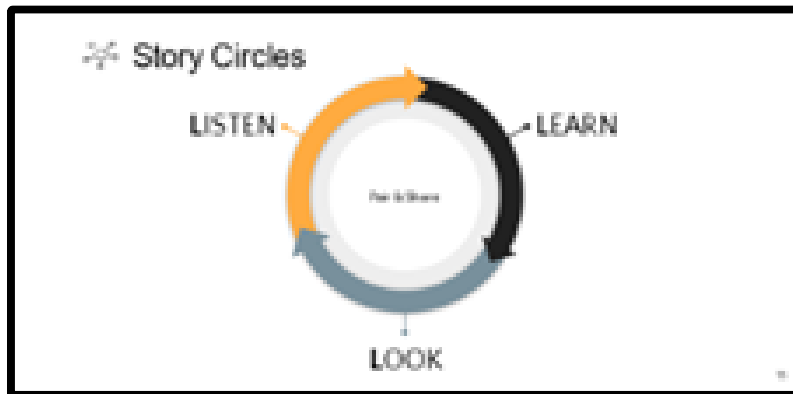

Stepping Stones to Change
Action Strategies to move towards just neighborhood

STEP 3: ACTIVATE & COLLABORATE THE STORY ENGAGEMENT TEAM (SET) IN ACTION

Stepping Stones to Change·
Action Strategies to move towards just neighborhood

The Value of Story in Community Engagement

· Raise/increase awareness, interest & shared understanding from the inside out
· Meaningful, equitable engagement, collaboration, dialogue, communication & repair
· Social cohesion: Build & strengthen insight, knowledge, networks, relationships
· Bring meaning to local data, bring forward unrepresented voices and perspectives
· They transform us & our understanding of who "we" are in the community
Stories are transforming...

STEP 3: ACTIVATE & COLLABORATE THE STORY ENGAGEMENT TEAM (SET) IN ACTION
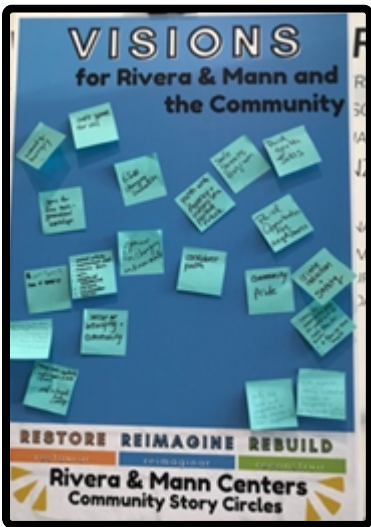
STEP 3: ACTIVATE & COLLABORATE THE STORY ENGAGEMENT TEAM (SET) IN ACTION

Stories are the heart of the work, and the story data is the bridge to bring us from feelings into information that can shape the blueprint for concrete community programming

TIP: Have a Story Engagement Team Coordinator from the community
· Identify, connect and set up community spaces for training the SET
· Coordinate and support SET members

"The project was important in multiple ways, not only to the community by embracing the stories in a unique interactive fashion, but also the project trained community members in the art of story circles, story harvesting and interactive listening."--Story Engagement Team member

I felt electricity in the air...There was an enthusiasm there that I appreciated. I felt the positive activity, positiveness, that's the vibe I got. Urgency... And I just felt like people were happy to be there to collaborate with others, to genuinely listen to others and also offer their ideas and thoughts. It was a good feeling. --Reflections on Data Jam Community Event, 9/28/2021)

STEP 4: TRANSFORM

I really enjoyed this process because it makes the reopening of the Centers feel more real; the things we often dream about, this process makes it feel like a realistic thought; I appreciate hearing "We already have…" -- it's nice to know we're connected in some ways and have opportunities, too." Former CDC staff and CAT member

"Lisa Jo facilitated conversations in the project sessions that helped us to identify and prioritize social concerns that require immediate attention. But this was not an abstract discussion about issues, instead it was an opportunity for community members to reflect: "Where am I in this picture?" Where am I in relation to my community and the efforts to create change?--Mark Harrell, formerly NAC Coordinator Southwest CDC

"Participants are recognizing and naming which activities existed before that should come back but with greater resources, as well as what are some possible activities that could happen in the next two to five years were certain things to be put in place."--Community member, RRR

"We're able to speak really from a place of lived experience and expertise about the current condition and what's missing and what has happened
in the past that could be lifted up…" --Community member
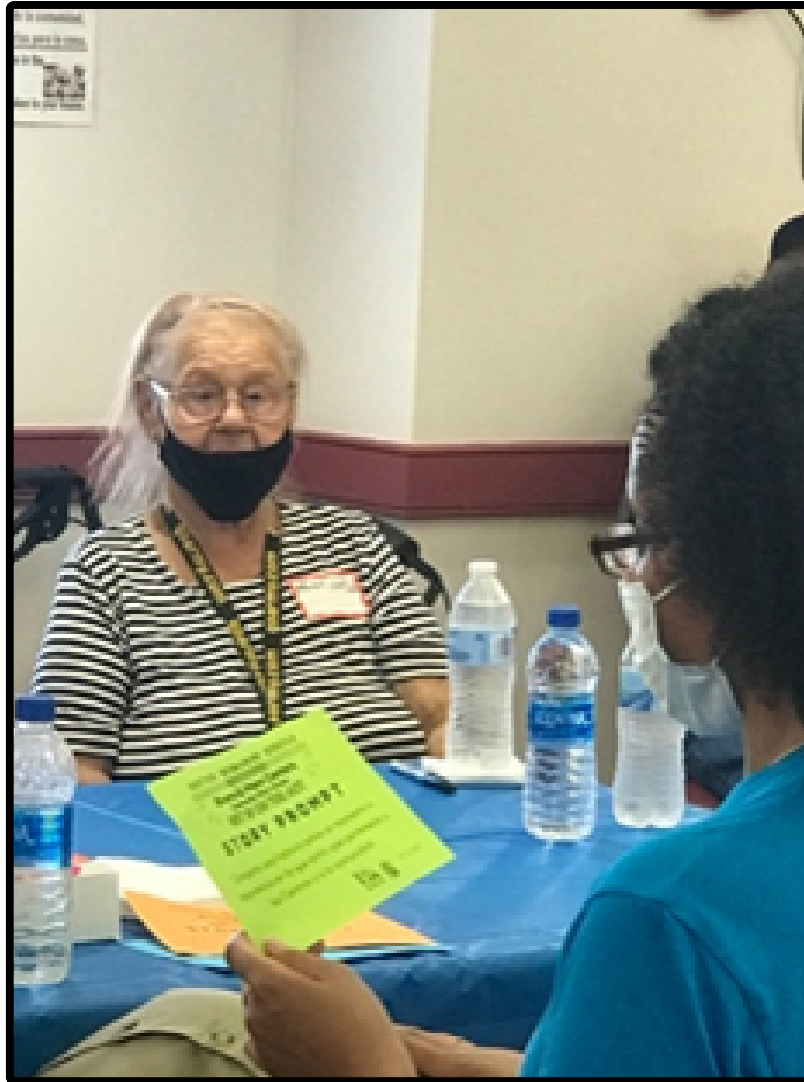
STEP 4: TRANSFORM

"I think it comes down to people. It involved another person touching their hearts. The process of engagement is more than inviting members to a meeting or an event.
but is gathering.....gathering with." --CAT member on overall experience planning the project and participating in Community-wide events

"I really enjoyed this process because it makes the reopening of the Centers feel more real; the things we often dream about, this process makes it feel like a realistic thought. It's nice to know we're connected in some ways and have opportunities, too." --HACE CDC Staff
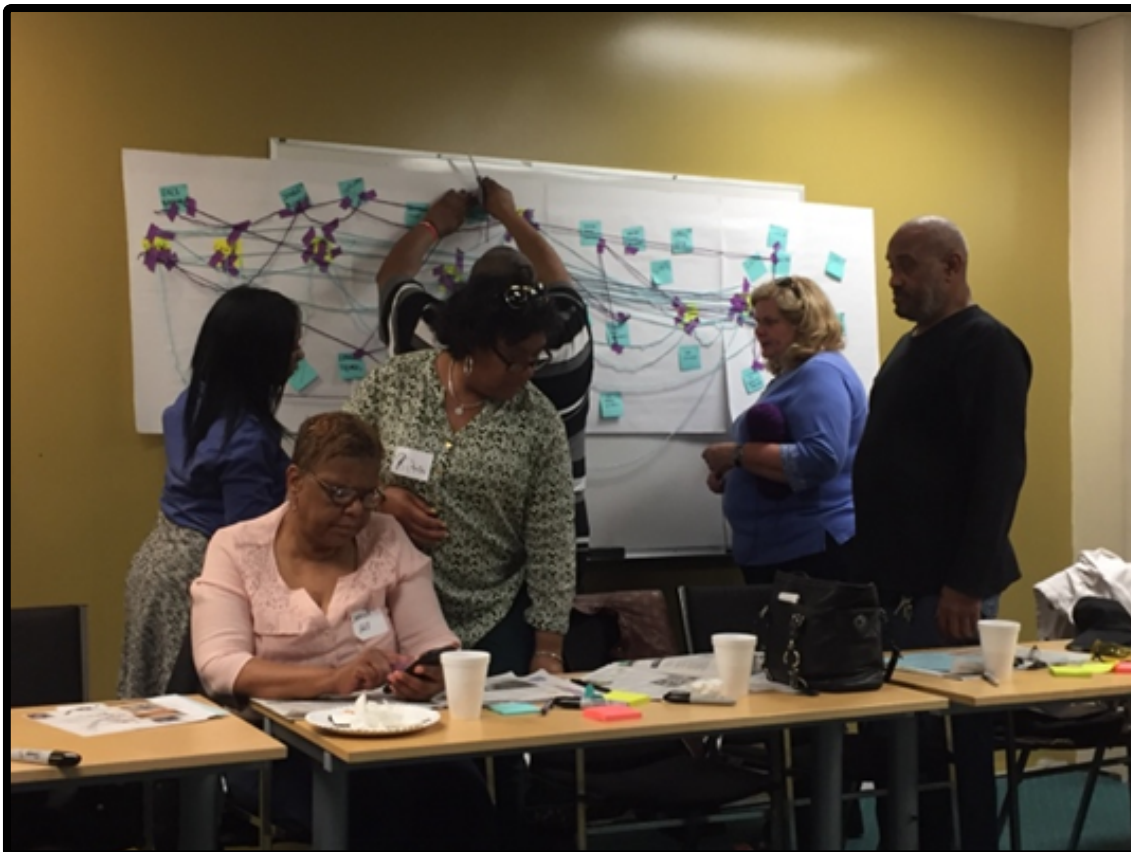
COMMUNITY STORIES CIRCLES

STORY DATA HARVESTING