



## Final Grant Report to the Yakima Valley Community Foundation

June 15, 2022

### Goal

With funding and support from the Yakima Valley Community Foundation, the Latino Community Fund, and the United Way of Central Washington, The Dispute Resolution Center (DRC) initiated a series of community forums designed to provide a safe place for community members to hear from the Yakima Police Department and to voice their concerns. The primary issue the meetings were intended to highlight was gang activity.

### Process

The DRC held six meetings between October 2021 and March 2022, attended by about 200 adults. A meeting usually began with a meal, followed by a presentation from YPD Chief Matt Murray and officers from the Gang Unit. The presentation focused on the kinds of crime that are most prevalent in Yakima, and the targeted approach law enforcement is using with gang members. DRC Director Sarah Augustine then asked a series of questions. Participants were at tables with from four to eight seats, and a bilingual DRC staff person took notes on each table conversation based on the questions. A court stenographer created a record, and simultaneous translators made the meeting accessible to Spanish speakers.

The character of each meeting differed, as shown below:

| Date     | No. of participants | Location/Participant general description            |
|----------|---------------------|---|
| 10/23/21 | 15                  | Le Chateau/Hispanic community leaders and activists |
| 11/6/21  | 30                  | St. Michael's/ GRIT members 70%, Other 30%          |
| 11/20/21 | 30                  | St. Michael's/ mix of Spanish and English speakers  |
| 12/4/21  | 25                  | Union Gospel Mission/Staff 50% Clients 50%          |
| 1/8/22   | 45                  | St. Joseph's/ Spanish speaking parishioners         |
| 3/17/22  | 60                  | Camp Hope/Residents                                 |

Participants were free to answer or abstain from any question. Everyone was encouraged to write down their comment or question if that felt safer. The police committed to responding to particular issues brought up by individuals within a week.

The questions for discussion were:

- What do you need to feel safe?
- Do you feel safe with law enforcement? If you call, do you believe you will be heard?
- It appears that trust between YPD and the community is low. Why is that?
- What are barriers to safety in your neighborhood?
- What is “appropriate response”? Who would be helpful as a crisis responder that isn’t responding now?

## Results

**The results indicate the participants believe that issues of community safety are much broader than issues with the police.** Twenty-eight responses asked for better city services; ten asserted the need for better street lighting. Other comments included a desire for better bus service, and redesign for pedestrian safety. Twenty-two called for more social services for the troubled. Twelve said that the community asks the police to do too much, and four others called for people to refrain from making negative remarks about the police on social media. Five thought that individuals need to practice more personal accountability. Thirteen think neighbors need to work together in some way to improve safety where they live.

**The highest barrier to community safety was the lack of affordable housing,** according to at least ten participants. Six mentioned gang activity as a significant threat, and three others specified drug dealing.

Other crimes mentioned as a threat to safety were the high incidence of robbery and trespassing.

**In every meeting, more people said they felt safe with the police than said they felt unsafe.** The overall totals were 50 to 29. Twenty-one participants advocated for more police patrols. Fourteen asked for better traffic control, especially when children are walking to school. Five said response times were too long, and six called for better control of public disorder, such as public urination and drunkenness, with ten mentioning troublemakers in stores and other public places.

**Communication between the police and the community was seen as problematic.** Fifteen asked for clarity on what number to call for a non-emergency situation. Twenty-five thought the police should get out of their cars and talk to people in parks and on the sidewalks. People of color, the poor, and the homeless are disrespected according to at least seven participants. Four said the police can be intimidating or frightening out on the street. Ideas about how to improve things included more gender, racial, and language diversity on the police force; more Spanish-speaking officers and dispatchers; and less stereotyping of monolingual Spanish speakers.

**Reporting crime can be difficult.** Five say the fear of being asked about citizenship status was a concern, and eleven said they were afraid of retribution from the neighbor they were calling about. Several people asked that the police not reveal who made the call in a neighborhood dispute.

**Appropriate Response.** To meet emergency needs, five suggested mental health workers and four thought medical staff would be helpful. Other ideas included a community service advocate with resources, and volunteers with de-escalation training.

## Recommendations

**Improve city services and increase affordable housing availability.** Better lighting, and better pedestrian safety were stressed in the focus groups, as was the need for affordable housing.

**Improve communication between the police and the community.**

- Create a monthly meeting between 8-12 community members and YPD representatives, who will report on the activity of the last month and listen to the community reaction. This conversation will be a success if it is ongoing, as an iterative, reflective communication.
- Close the cultural dissonance gap between police and others by identifying police officers who can learn to translate the experience of one group into the language of the other. Allot a specific number of work hours for this task.
  - An officer confronting a member of the public is well aware of the legal and practical limitations of his/her authority. This officer may not understand that the person confronted does not even know the officer’s name, nor the limits of that authority.
  - Our police are often doing fine work, but their ability to communicate that work in language intelligible to outsiders is sometimes limited, leading to frustration all around.

**Initiate a plan to improve appropriate response.** When police are called to a disturbance, and they discover that the root of the problem is not so much criminal intent as profound poverty, or a mental health crisis, they need to have an array of community resource people to assist.

**Covid Relief**

A large portion of the funding provided by the Yakima Community Foundation was distributed to eligible participants who had Covid-related financial needs. The scale of the need was overwhelming. \$48,000 was shared among 52 Yakima Valley families, many of whom had overdue bills totaling in the thousands. People were months behind on housing, utilities, or medical payments. Twelve of these recipients spoke only Spanish.

**Covid Relief funds dispersed**

|               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| Utilities     | \$22,611.32 |
| Medical Bills | \$4,568.64  |
| Phone Bills   | \$2,283.39  |
| Loans         | \$2,547.16  |
| Mortgage/Rent | \$12,211.45 |
| Other         | \$3,735.41  |

Thank you for trusting us with this task. We hope to be an ongoing partner with you as together we work for a better Yakima Valley.

This report has been shared with:

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| Yakima Police Department<br>City of Yakima<br>GRIT-Gang Reduction and Intervention Taskforce | Washington State Department of Commerce<br>Latino Community Fund<br>United Way of Central Washington |
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