



# Southeast Georgetown Needs Assessment: Documenting Resident Stories and Community Conditions

November 2015





# Southeast Georgetown Needs Assessment: Documenting Resident Stories and Community Conditions

## Executive Summary

The city of Georgetown is experiencing extraordinary demographic growth and demographic changes. To address the impact of these changes, the Georgetown Health Foundation (GHF) commissioned a needs assessment of the southeast Georgetown community that “explores the opportunities, challenges, wants, and needs facing low-income residents in Southeast Georgetown.”

### Methods

From April to September 2015, the Institute for Urban Policy Research and Analysis (IUPRA) conducted a *needs assessment* of the southeast Georgetown community that concentrated on the voices of the community. A *needs assessment* is a method used to determine needs, examine their causes, and set priorities for future action. A *need* is defined as the discrepancy or gap in “what is” and “what should be”. A multi-stage, mixed method was used to conduct the assessment. The first stage consisted of 14 interviews with key informants that worked directly with the community in public and social services. Following these interviews we conducted 13 focus groups with 94 community members. From responses to these focus groups, we created a survey that was taken by 157 people. At this final stage, we also met and interviewed five additional key informants who worked within an administrative capacity serving the Georgetown community. All of this primary data collection was then supported by secondary data analysis of census and other socio-demographic data at the city, census tract, and census block levels.

### Community Voice

In keeping with GHF’s request to “access the voices of our most marginalized community members,” we centered our approach to this study in *voiced research*. Voiced research is a distinct form of qualitative research that is “committed to bringing into existence perspectives previously excluded, muted or silenced by dominant structures and discourses” (Smyth & Hattam, 2001, p. 407). In other words, we wanted to listen, hear, and acknowledge the voices of the southeast Georgetown community. We were careful not to assume that we fully understood the opportunities, challenges, wants or needs of the southeast Georgetown community, their cause or any solution. As such, we designed our data collection strategy in such a way that each phase was informed by voices from the community.

## Findings

Findings from the focus groups and surveys suggested these critical needs:

- 1) **Better public transportation option.** Participants discussed the need for public transportation to assist in meeting their basic needs (going to the doctor, school, and grocery store), and highlighted challenges for homebound seniors and children who may not have an adult child or parent to help them access services or amenities. Participants pointed to the lack of public transit affecting recreation and limiting choices for children to maintain healthy lifestyles.
- 2) **Affordability and availability of quality housing.** Housing was a commonly-mentioned concern for focus group participants, particularly with regard to issues of safety, discrimination, and mistreatment. Government subsidized housing was described as difficult to obtain.
- 3) **Access to college readiness programs.** Parents shared a desire for the expansion of college readiness programs such as Upward Bound and College Forward, as well as more training and education on the college application process, including how to apply for financial aid.
- 4) **Accessibility of daycare, afterschool programs, and play for children.** While participants appreciated programs like Head Start and the Boys & Girls Club, they acknowledged that pre-school programs are largely inaccessible and involvement in afterschool activities are complicated by the lack of public transportation. Parents underscored the challenges of giving their children safe, affordable, accessible places to play and difficulty in affording afterschool and summer programs.
- 5) **Equitable access to healthy foods and nutrition education.** Concerns were expressed about access to nutrition and culturally-relevant nutrition education programs in the community, as well as affordable and equitable access to food options.
- 6) **Greater economic security.** Participants acknowledged that while costs for housing, food, and utilities are rising, wages are not. They voiced gratitude for their jobs, but a desire to have better job choices and opportunities to earn a living wage.
- 7) **Treatment at Georgetown health care facilities and affordability and access to dental care.** Issues around affordability, comfort with treatment, and the need for dental care were frequently-expressed concerns.

- 8) **Availability and accessibility of quality mental health services.** The youth focus group spoke courageously about depression, bullying, and suicide. Parents shared experiences in which their children were bullied and their need for support in helping their children manage mental health issues and bullying by their peers.
- 9) **Acknowledge and reframe power differentials in systems.** Throughout the project, participants discussed feelings of shame, anger, and exclusion within the community; they expressed a sense of unequal treatment due to race, ethnicity, citizenship, education, and socioeconomic status.
- 10) **Leaders to connect with Southeast Georgetown community.** Participants felt they had little voice in decisions, even those concerning their communities and neighborhoods.

The full report to Georgetown Health Foundation highlights these emerging critical needs and the voices of the community in the form of quotes serve as evidence.

## Recommendations

In the last section of the report, the project team offers recommendations, both short-term and long-term. Some examples of recommendations include:

- Install an affordable, public bus system
- Increase transportation options and partnerships to provide mobile services
- Expand positive after-school and summer activities that include transportation
- Expand college access support
- Provide health, housing, education, legal, transportation, and other social services in Spanish
- Provide school conferences and events in Spanish
- Provide adult English as a Second Language courses for varying competency levels
- Increase access to healthy food options and culturally competent nutritional programs
- Establish a School-Based Health Center in a southeast Georgetown school
- Increase prevention services



- Increase mental/behavioral health capacity and mental health training in GISD
- Strengthen connectedness within GISD campuses and make it easy to report problems/issues
- Establish one or more community liaison positions

### Inclusion and Gratitude

Georgetown is a thriving city with many acknowledged strengths. Within our study, we found that the low-income communities and communities of color especially appreciated the safety and community of the small town. With the positive good will generated through this project, we hope that GHF and other city leaders will hold in mind the health of their most vulnerable citizens when making policy decisions.

The entire research team extends deep gratitude and appreciation to all the individuals who shared their expertise, time, and insights into their lives.