

## **40 Blocks & A Movement:**

*Creating A Caring, Communicating, and Connected Community*

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## Organizational Profile

Organization Name: Northwest Austin Council (NAC)

Industry: Community-Based Organization (CBO) - Nonprofit

Employees/Volunteers: 2

Revenue: \$0

### History

#### *“The Organization’s Background”*

NAC is a grassroots, community-based organization founded in 1972. The founding was a response to the growing disparities in crime, housing, and economic equality on the west side, in the Austin community. Since its inception, NAC has organized several grassroots campaigns, the most significant of these campaigns being: the first community-based organization to be designated a Weed and Seed Neighborhood partner by the U.S. Department of Justice, forming a coalition of organizations, treatment providers, and law enforcement officials to develop the West Side Community Drug Court, opening a Safe Haven program in the Austin Community Academy High School and helping homeowners realize their dream of owning their first home through its partnership with HUD, by way of the Housing Advocacy program. The organization works with elected officials, police, and community members to enhance the quality of life in the Austin community.

### Mission

#### *“The Organization’s Purpose”*

Support the Austin community by combating issues of crime, housing deterioration, and loss of economic resources.

- Use Direct-issue organizing (Boots on the ground, door to door) as the primary method of contact to reach community members.
- Empower community members through education on safety, housing, and leadership.

- Spearhead efforts to improve and preserve the community in which low- and moderate- income families live.
- Collaborate with elected officials, police, community-based organizations, and community members to strategize ways to affect positive transformation.

### Vision

#### *“The Organization’s Direction”*

Lead the Austin community, and ultimately the west side, into a future of stability built on a foundation of sustainability.

- Enhance quality of life in the Austin community.
- Increase homeownership.
- Prevent the proliferation of drugs and gangs.
- Foster better relationships between community members, police, and elected officials.

### Values

#### *“The Enduring Beliefs”*

- Empowerment – The increasing confidence in the ability to control the outcome(s) of your life.
- Community – The shared commitments, goals, attitudes, and interest that result in fellowship amongst a group of individuals.
- Support – Giving assistance in time of need; comforting, encouraging, and loving.
- Sustainability – Long-term prosperity for all individuals that requires a commitment to social responsibility, social justice, and economic inclusion.

### Strategy

*Mobilize the residents of the Austin community to take action on issues that affect their lives by **educating, organizing, and building coalitions** with other CBOs.*

### **Create resourceful, knowledgeable, and successful community members through education**

- Money Making For Millennials – Monthly workshop teaching community members how to become successful property owners.
- Know Your Rights – Annual workshop teaching community members how to effectively navigate confrontations with law enforcement.
- Safety Initiative – Scheduled leadership development workshops for community members that express interest in being block leaders.

### **Build capacity and restore democracy through grassroots alliance building and development of targeted campaigns**

- Block Club Development – Establish and facilitate the connections of neighbors that live on the same block.
- Neighborhood Policing Initiative – Promotes positive relationship building between law enforcement and community members.

### **Offer support to other community-based organizations and nonprofits to enhance quality of life**

- Black Workers Matter
- The Peacemaker's Coalition
- Westside Rising
- The Austin Green Team
- Austin Coming Together
- The Coalition (a Political Action Committee)
- Get To Work

## Overview of the Project

### *The Problem*

Crime statistics for the zip code of 60651 showcase a stark reminder of the violence neighbors in the community are up against. Of these statistics, the rate of crimes being 61.37 per 1,000 residents (crimegrade.org, 2021) puts this zip code in the 12th percentile for safety, meaning 88% of zip codes in the U.S. are safer, and 12% are more dangerous. Within the zip code lies the C.A.N.D. area - Central to Austin, North Avenue to Division Blvd - where the project took place. The CAND area has a total crime index of 16 out of 100, meaning that is safer than 16% of U.S. neighborhoods. This puts the rate of total crime (violent & property) at 46.13 per 1,000 residents (neighborhoodscout.com, 2021). The 40 blocks within the CAND area represent a microcosm of the average predominately African American neighborhood within the city of Chicago. These areas are often violence-riddled, divested, and disconnected from resources, but the neighbors generally bond with one another to improve the conditions they experience. That bond is what the project will address. NAC's understanding of the area, its community ties, and roots in organizing were critical to developing a strategy to combat:

1. The disconnect between neighbors
2. The lack of leadership on individual blocks
3. The high rate of crime in the area

The bond of the neighbors is crucial. NAC’s Executive Director Stephen Robinson articulates, "the most caring, communicating, and connected communities are also the safest". When communities are lower in these dimensions, they will experience higher rates of crime. Neighbors need to increase their bond with one another by becoming more caring, communicating, and connected, thus making the community safer. This theory became the genesis of **40** **Blocks & A Movement.**

### **Root of The Problem**

In Chicago, violence in African American neighborhoods can be attributed to segregation, poverty, and inequality (Fredrick III, E., 2019). The *Chicago Tribune* noted: “The number of poor people living in neighborhoods with extreme poverty — the ones most likely to have conditions that foster violence — grew 384 percent from 2000 to 2015” (Glanton D., 2017). As the wealth gap continues to grow so does the violence in these neighborhoods.

The disconnect of neighbors has exacerbated these issues. “There used to be this necessity to reach out and build bonds with people who lived nearby”. “There was this sort of cohort effect, in which people ... were more inclined in many cases to find security that existed in neighborhoods, they depended on one another much more” (Poon, L., 2015). Working theories for the cause of this disconnect stem from the rise of technology, which has made connecting easier, albeit less

interpersonal, causing people to have shorter attention spans and limited social capital; public spaces are increasingly becoming private, and; developers are designing living spaces top to bottom (condos) where they were once side by side (single-family homes).

Violence and neighborly bonds are interrelated: violence can reduce collective efficacy, and collective efficacy can prevent future violent crime ([www.huduser.gov](http://www.huduser.gov), 2016). Collective efficacy, defined as social cohesion among neighbors and their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good, appears to be an important determinant of violent crime in neighborhoods. Collective efficacy is linked to disorder, such as garbage in the streets or broken windows. Rigorous research suggests that disorder might be a product of root causes such as the concentration of disadvantage (inequity) and low collective efficacy, which also lead to crime (Sampson, R. J., et al, 1997).

### **Goal of the Project**

The goal of the project was to survey the entire 40 block radius of the CAND area and find leadership to develop into block leaders that could raise the collective efficacy of the neighborhood. Strong social organization can reduce violent crime ([www.huduser.gov](http://www.huduser.gov), 2016). Chicago neighborhoods with more connected leadership, as demonstrated by social ties between leaders, tend to have much lower homicide rates even when controlling for factors such as concentrated



disadvantage (Sampson, R. J., et al, 1997). As NAC theorized, and set out to prove, the more caring, communicating, and connected communities are also the safest.

Specifically, three objectives were set in place:

1. Gauge neighbors' capacity to be caring, communicating, and connected
2. Discover the focal issues for the neighbors
3. Build an interconnected network between neighbors and block leaders

(Network of Neighbors)



**Map of the C.A.N.D. (Central to Austin, North Avenue to Division Blvd) area**

## Literature Review

### **Informal Social Control (Caring)**

Social control refers generally to the capacity of a group to regulate its members according to desired principles that help to realize collective, as opposed to forced, goals (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997). In a neighborhood in which deviant behavior is often met with relatively successful sanctioning behavior, residents will report a high level of collective efficacy regarding providing informal social control. Or, in a neighborhood in which deviant behavior is almost never met with sanctioning behavior, a relatively low level of collective efficacy will exist (Hipp, J. R., 2016).

Informal social control is integral to sanctioning behavior and collective efficacy. If an instance of deviance or disorder occurs and residents in the neighborhood do not respond with sanctioning behavior this will likely reduce these residents' sense of self efficacy regarding engaging in sanctioning behavior; but it will also affect other residents who observe or learn about the event as an instance of deviance in which no informal social control was forthcoming. Consequently, this will have a negative effect on residents' perception of collective efficacy. And if several people alter their opinion, the level of collective efficacy in the neighborhood will be changed. Thus, residents will have a somewhat lower sense of collective efficacy regarding residents' likelihood of responding to such

deviance with informal social control, unless they can cognitively explain away this incident as an instance of ineffectiveness due to unusual circumstances (Hipp, J. R., 2016).

As an example, if youth are seen hanging out on a street corner, and a resident confronts them, but the youth do not leave, this would be an example of a failed attempt at informal social control. If this can be cognitively explained as an unusual instance it would have no effect on future collective efficacy. However, if there was nothing out of the ordinary, this would likely negatively impact residents' perception of collective efficacy and result in lower levels of neighborhood collective efficacy. In contrast, if youth are seen hanging out, and a resident confronts them and is successful in getting them to disperse—which may have the effect of reducing the likelihood of a crime being committed—this successful outcome should increase residents' perception of collective efficacy and result in higher levels of collective efficacy in the neighborhood (Hipp, J. R., 2016).

### **Collective Efficacy (Communicating)**

Collective efficacy is considered an extension of the self-efficacy construct. Collective efficacy is defined as “a group’s shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 477). This construct has implications in both psychology and sociology. In psychology, Bandura noted that “perceived

collective efficacy will influence what people choose to do as a group, how much effort they put into it, and their staying power when group efforts fail to produce results” (Bandura 1982, 143). In sociology, Sampson and colleagues (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997) theorized the importance of collective efficacy for neighborhoods as “the capacity for achieving an intended effect” (Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999).

Collective efficacy speaks to what people are willing to do to improve their neighborhoods. The higher the level of collective efficacy is for a group the more likely they are to intervene against problematic behaviors. Neighbors agree on acceptable behavior and work together to reinforce those behaviors. Collective efficacy will affect the likelihood of individual residents engaging in sanctioning behavior in a particular instance of deviant behavior or social/physical disorder (either choosing to attempt the task, or not) (Hipp, J. R., 2016).

Researchers have argued that increasing collective efficacy can lead to a significant reduction of crime in communities (Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999). Communities with high levels of collective efficacy have been found to have lower rates of violence (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997) and homicide (Morenoff, J. D., et al, 2001), suggesting that community participation in preventing violence reduces crime. Collective efficacy depends on the values shared by community members. If members of a community trust each other and

are willing to cooperate to prevent violence and crime, it is more likely that they will be able to create a safe community environment.

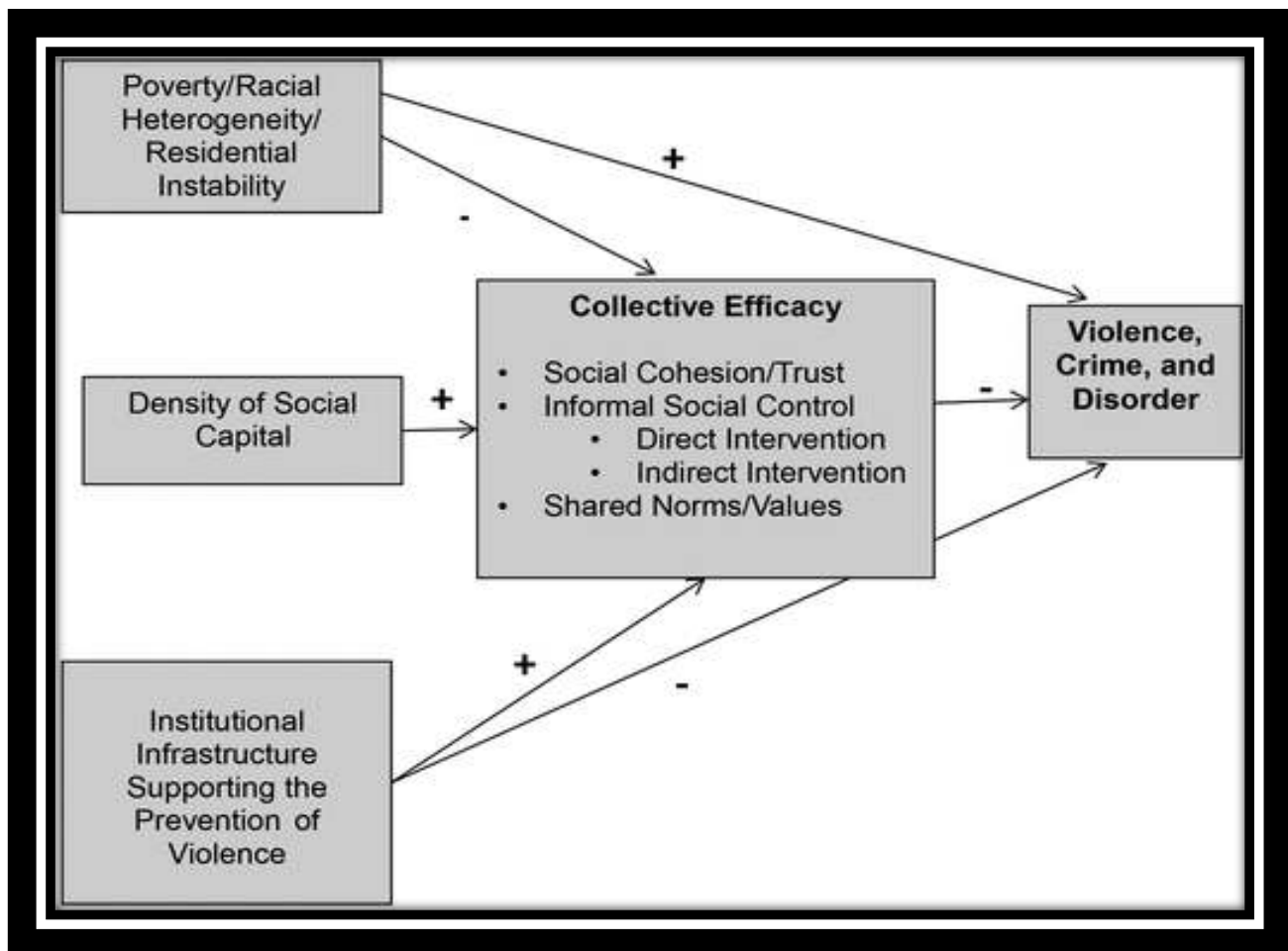
Collective efficacy includes behaviors, norms and actions that residents of a given community use to achieve public order (sociologists refer to these as “informal mechanisms”). In communities where these informal practices are enforced on a day-to-day basis by community members, individuals are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior (Simons, Ronald L., et al, 2005). A key element of the collective efficacy perspective is that it focuses on the effects of informal norms and practices of the community in preventing crime, rather than on the effects of formal, established institutions (such as police forces) (Sampson, R. J., et al., 2002).

### **Social Cohesion (Connected)**

Social cohesion describes how individuals think and feel about their neighborhood. Neighborhood characteristics that promote social cohesion are high levels of home ownership, long-term residents, and friendships among neighbors. This speaks to the extent of connectedness and solidarity among groups in society. It identifies two main dimensions: the sense of belonging of a community and the relationships among members within the community itself (Manca A.R., 2014).

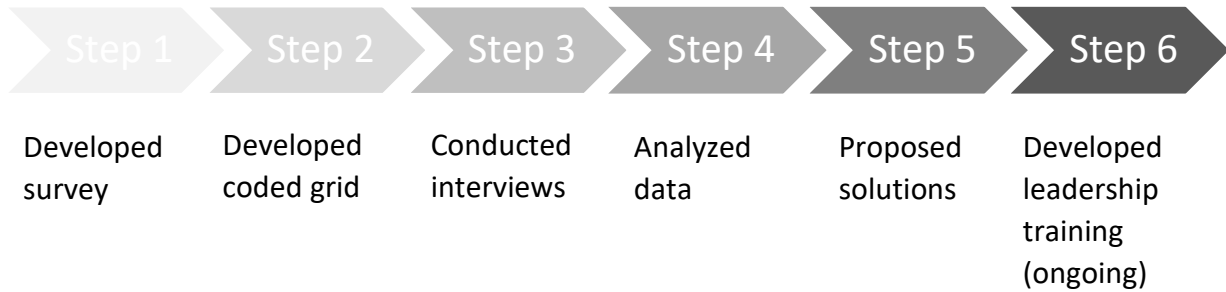
Social cohesion is affected by how much the friendship networks of individuals of different groups overlap (Granovetter, 1973). The strength of those

relationships and the sense of solidarity among members of a community is an indicator of the amount of social cohesion that exists amongst a group. Three metrics to quantify social cohesion are: (1) individuals acting together towards a common goal, (2) positive engagement around common goals, and (3) a vulnerable and trusting attitude that fosters the sharing of private materials (Fonseca, X., Lukosch, S., & Brazier, F., 2018). The lack of social cohesion makes a society more vulnerable to social conflicts and violence.



**Theoretical model of collective efficacy (based on Shaw & McKay, 1942/1969; Sampson, 2008).**

## Methods



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1. D’vraughn Le’Claire, LLC developed the survey used for this project. The survey was constructed on the dimensions of caring, communicating, and connected. The goal of the survey was to discover neighbors’ capacity to create better bonds with one another, their focal issues in the neighborhood, and provide data to be used for future action plans and recommendations.
  2. Stephen Robinson and Barry Koren developed a coded grid to keep the survey data confidential. The coded sequence represented a block and the corresponding home on the block.
  3. Deondre’ Rutues and Stephen Robinson conducted interviews in the CAND area, going to every home in the area. Interviews were conducted from July – October (90 days), on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4pm – 6 pm.
  4. D’vraughn Le’Claire, LLC analyzed the returned survey data via the SPSS data analysis software. There were 228 returned surveys. Respondents indicated Safety to be their #1 issue. There were 24 leaders identified.

5. Based on the results of the survey, which indicated the neighbors were open to building better bonds with one another, solutions were proposed to address the lack of leadership, cohesion, and safety.
6. (In progress) D’vraughn Le’Claire, LLC developed a community leadership training workshop (safety initiative) based on the dimensions of caring, communicating, and connected in response to one of the proposed solutions.



**Left to Right: Stephen Robinson, Deondre’ Rutues, Joshua Flynn conducting an interview with 1200 N. (Division) Menard 93yr old Block Club Pres. Willie Ferber**



## **Survey Design**

D'vraughn Le'Claire, LLC developed the survey used for this project. The survey was constructed with the premise that ease of understanding and a short interview period of 3-5 minutes would be preferred. There was a total of twelve questions on the survey, divided into six sections. The sections of the survey were demographics, engagement, caring, communicating, connected, each with two survey questions for quantitative measurement and two open-ended questions to get respondents' opinions on their neighborhood for qualitative measurement. The survey questions were either dichotomous, ranking, or rating, the exception being the demographic and open-ended questions.

## Results

The data collected during the interview (survey) period yielded results that were useful to next steps. The following results correspond to the 228 survey responses received. The survey contained six sections: Demographics, Engagement, Caring, Communicating, Connected and Open-Ended. For each section of the survey a standard descriptive analysis was run to examine the data further. Descriptive analysis summarizes the collected data and presents patterns that have emerged. All analysis will be presented in table or chart form for ease of visualization.

### *Demographics*

The demographics section contained two questions: Age and Tenure. The age question was asked to identify the age of the interviewee. The tenure question was asked to identify the length of time the interviewee lived at the address. The thought behind this section was that older interviewees, who were also long-term residents, would be more connected to one another, which would correspond to the social cohesion literature. Highlights:

- **Age** – The largest percentage of the interviewees (25.90 %) were between 66-75 years old. Greater than 50 % of the interviewees were 56+. There was 1 (.40 %) non-response. **Figure 1** gives a breakdown of the age demographics. Note: Figure does not contain missing data.

- Tenure** – The largest percentage of the interviewees (37.30 %) have lived in the CAND area for greater than 30 years. Greater than 50% have lived in the CAND area for 20+ years. There were 21 (9.20 %) non-responses. **Figure 2** displays the tenure demographics. Note: Figure does not contain missing data.

Age Range of Interviewees in CAND area

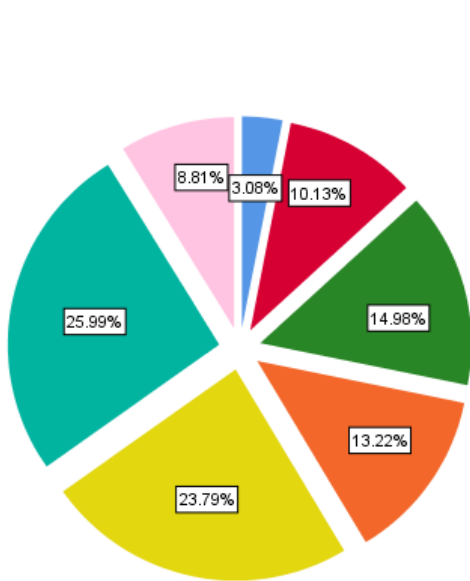


Figure 1

Tenure of Interviewees in CAND area

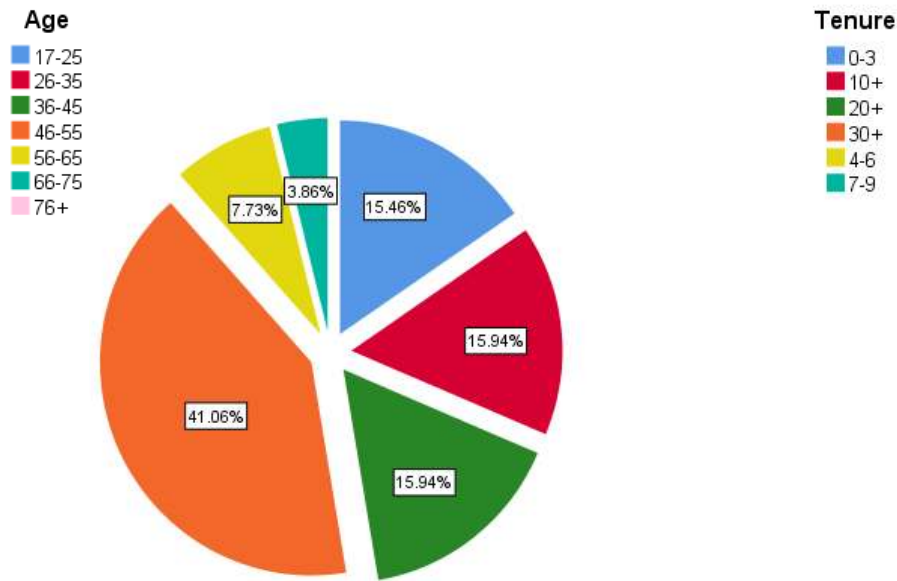


Figure 2

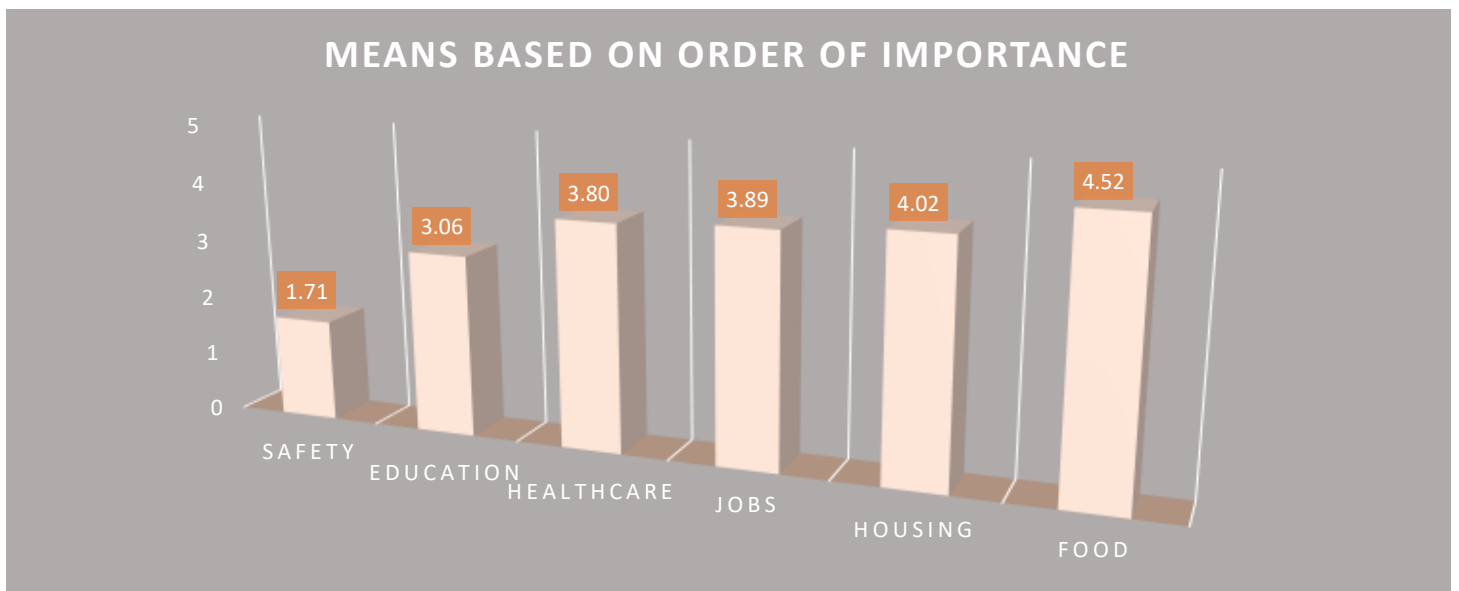
### *Engagement*

The engagement section contained two ranking questions: “Rank in order of importance: Safety, Jobs, Food, Housing, Healthcare, and Education” scored from 1 – 6, with 1 being most important and 6 being least important; and “What do you think needs the most attention in this community, the Austin community” with respondents able to choose their focal issue. The second engagement question added an “Other” selection for respondents that had a focal issue that was not listed in the initial six options. The thought behind this section was to discover what

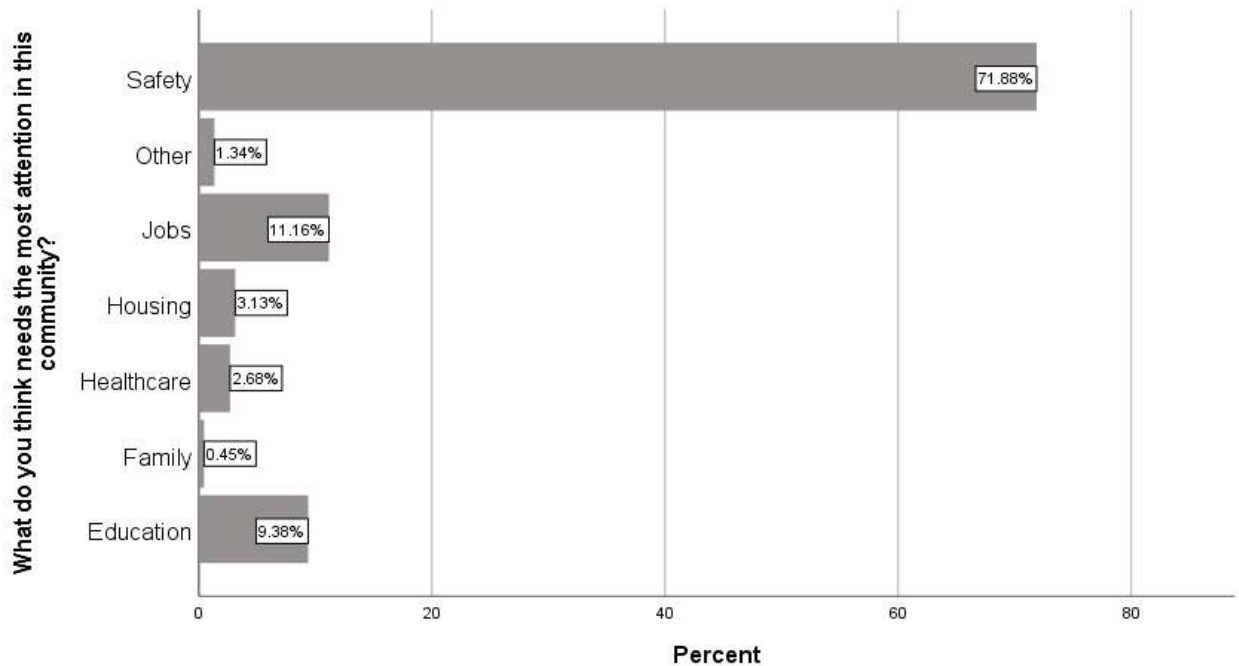
issues were most pertinent to the neighbors and see if those differed in any way individually. This section will help with recommendations for future action as it provides the neighbors with an ordered approach to problem-solving issues.

Highlights:

- **Safety** – The interviewees overwhelmingly chose safety as the number 1 issue in the neighborhood. This item had a mean score of 1.71, and 182 (79.80%) of the interviewees ranked safety as a 1 or 2 regarding importance. 161 (70.60%) of the interviewees indicated safety as needing the most attention in the community. **Figure 3** and **4** displays the results of the ranking questions. Note: Figures do not contain missing data.



**Figure 3**

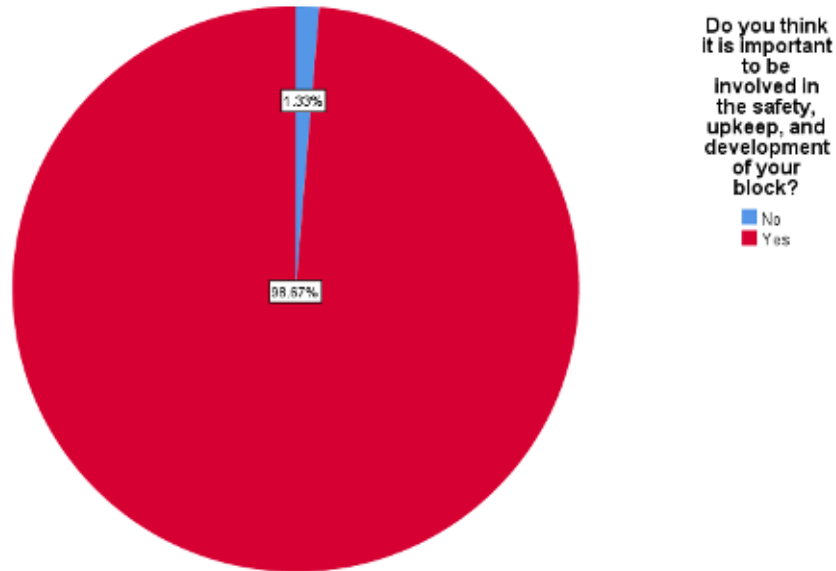


**Figure 4**

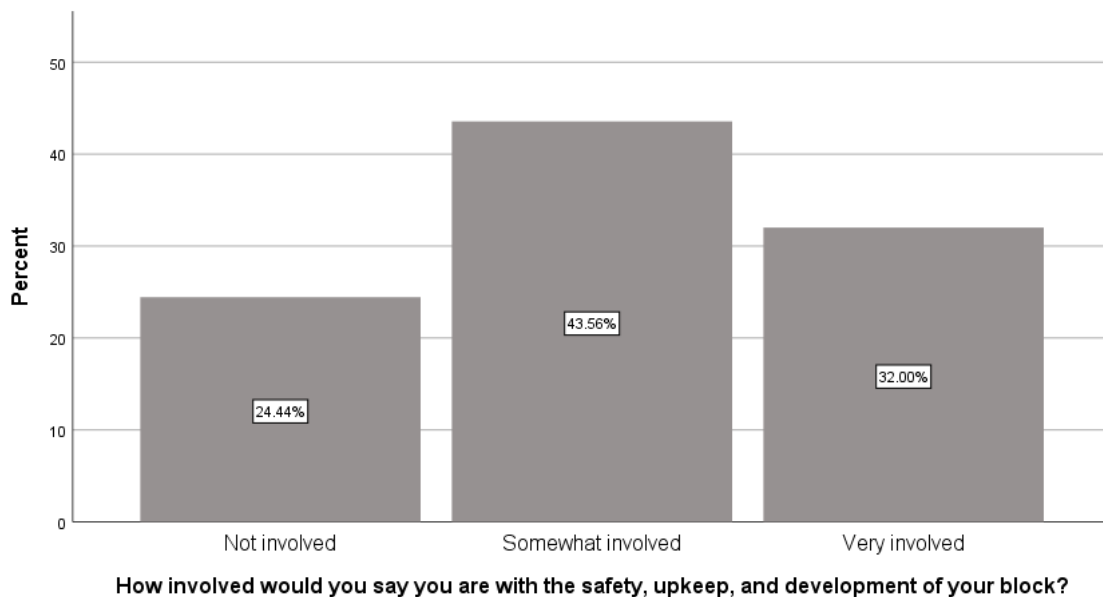
### *Caring*

The caring section contained two questions: “Do you think it is important to be involved in the Safety, Upkeep, and Development of your block?” and “How involved would you say you are with the Safety, Upkeep, and Development of your block?”. The thought behind this section was that neighbors that exhibited a level of informal social control in their neighborhood would be more willing to work with other neighbors to enhance the overall level of informal social control in their neighborhood. According to the literature, this would elevate the level of collective efficacy in the neighborhood. Highlights:

- 223 interviewees (97.80 %) expressed a belief that it was important to be involved in the safety, upkeep, and development of the block. There were 2 (.49 %) non-responses. 98 (43.00 %) of the interviewees reported being “somewhat involved” in the safety, upkeep, and development of the block. There were 3 (1.30 %) non-responses. These responses showcase a high level of willingness to be involved in the informal social control measures that express care in a community. **Figure 5** and **6** displays the results of the caring questions. Note: Figures do not contain missing data.



**Figure 5**

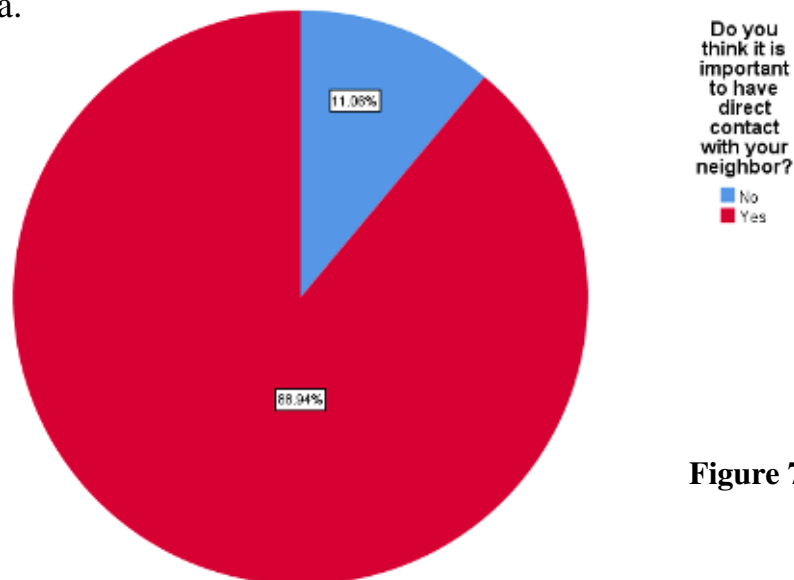


**Figure 6**

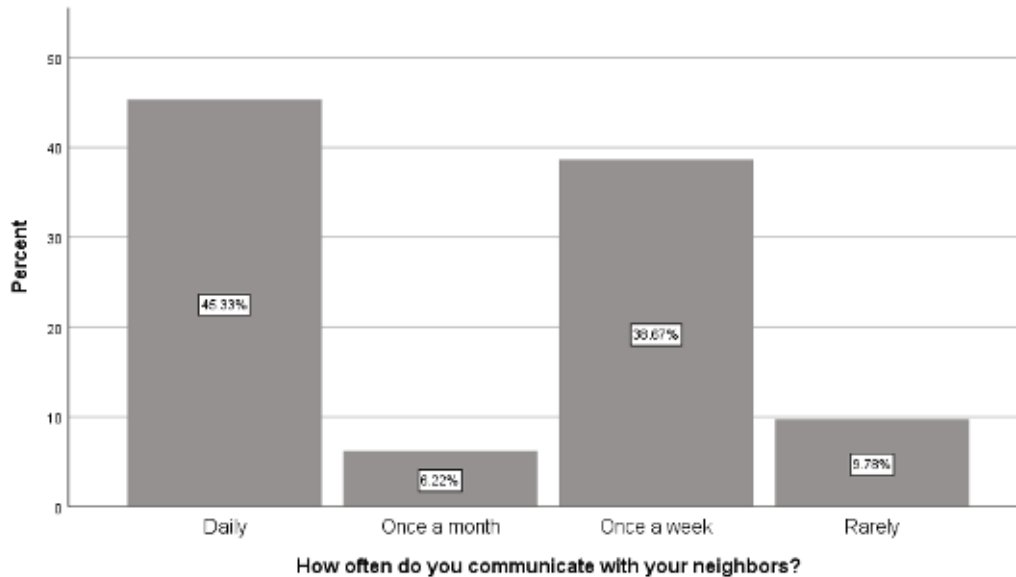
## *Communicating*

The communicating section contained two questions: “Do you think it is important to have direct contact (phone, email, text) with your neighbor?” and “How often do you communicate with neighbors on your block?”. The thought behind this section was that neighbors that were willing to communicate more often would be more likely to discuss the behaviors, norms, and actions needed to enhance the neighborhood’s level of collective efficacy. According to the literature, trust is essential to increasing the level of collective efficacy in a neighborhood. Building trust starts with establishing a relationship that can only come through communication. Highlights:

- 201 interviewees (88.20 %) expressed a belief that it was important to have direct contact with their neighbor. There were 2 (.90 %) non-responses. 102 (44.70 %) of the interviewees reported they communicate with their neighbor daily. There were 3 (1.30 %) non-responses. These responses showcase a high level of willingness to communicate amongst neighbors. This can lead to increased collective efficacy. **Figure 7** and **8** displays the results of the communicating questions. Note: Figures do not contain missing data.



**Figure 7**



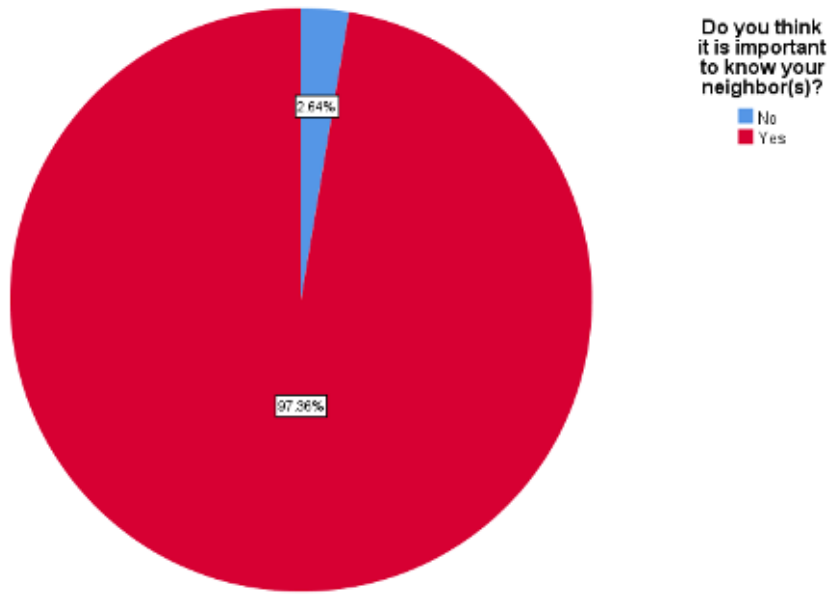
**Figure 8**

### *Connected*

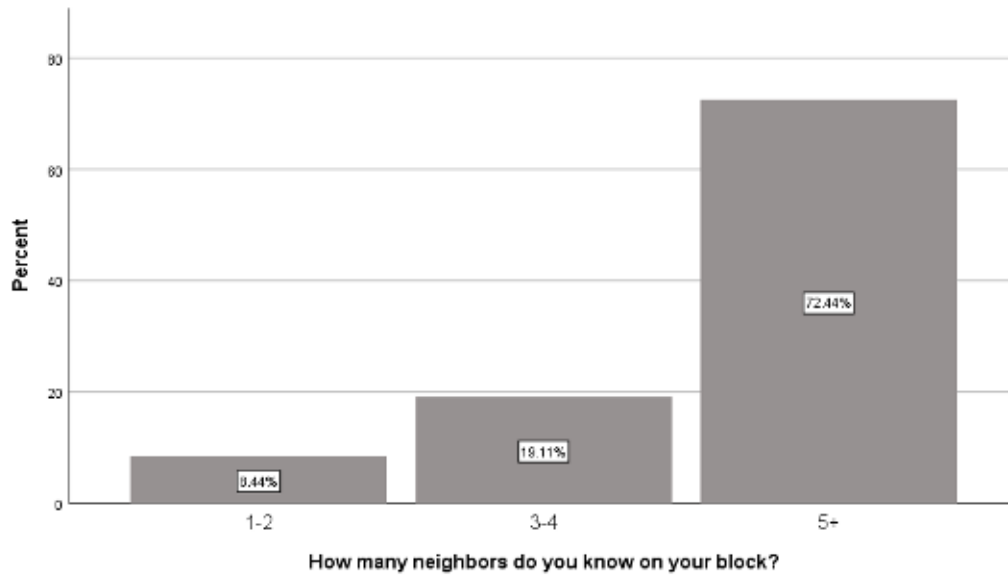
The connected section contained two questions: “Do you think it is important to know your neighbor(s)?” and “How many neighbors do you know on your block?”. The thought behind this section was that neighbors that were willing to establish relationships were more likely to value social cohesion. According to the literature, higher levels of social cohesion result in lower levels of social conflict and can be a mitigator of violence in a neighborhood. Highlights:

- 221 interviewees (96.90 %) expressed a belief that it was important to know their neighbor. There was 1 (.40 %) non-response. 163 (71.50 %) of the interviewees reported they know 5+ neighbors. There were 3 (1.30 %) non-responses. These responses showcase a high level of willingness to connect with other neighbors. The higher the number of relationships a neighbor has, the higher the level of social cohesion will be. **Figure 9** and **10** displays the results of the connected questions. Note: Figures do not contain missing data.





**Figure 9**



**Figure 10**

***Open-Ended***

The open-ended section contained two questions: “How would you describe your block?” and “How do you think your block can be improved?”. The thought behind this section was to understand the interviewees’ perception of their block and give them an opportunity to make suggestions for improvement. Because these

are qualitative questions, there was some codifying (categorizing of the synthesized data) done to generate relationships between the interviewees' responses.

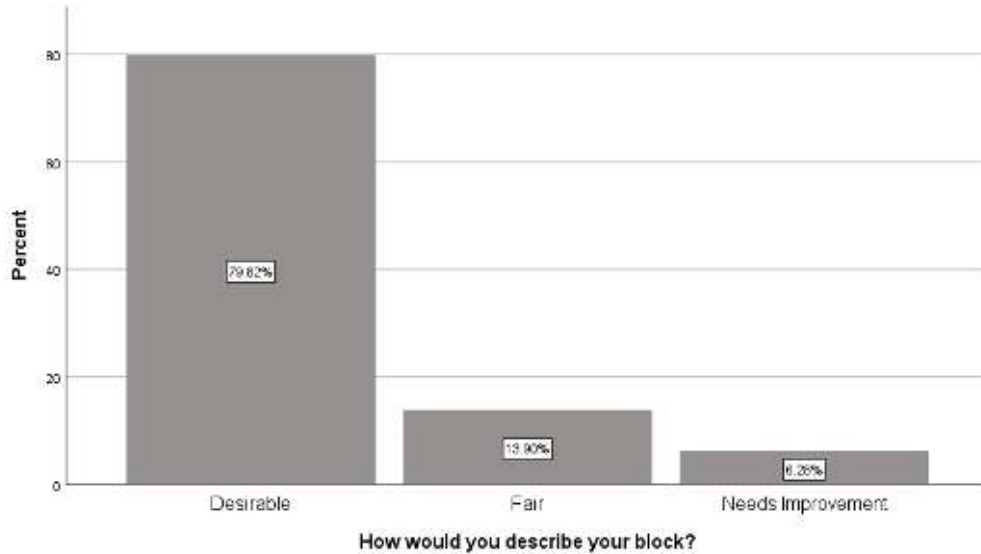
The question "How would you describe your block" was codified into three categories: Desirable, Fair, and Needs Improvement.

Responses that fit into the Desirable category were: Beautiful, Clean, Comfortable, Excellent, Safe, Quiet, Close-knit, Friendly, Good, Great, Nice, Peaceful, Perfect, Caring, Communicating, Wonderful, Homey, Calm, Fine, Lovely. These represent an ideal block.

Responses that fit into the Fair category were: Alright, Better, Fair, Like (it), Moderate, Ok, So So, Stable, Transitioning, Up and Coming, Decent. These represent a "middle of the road" block.

Responses that fit into the Needs Improvement category were: Horrible, Out of control, Problematic, Noise issues, Rowdy, Terrible, Unsafe, Undesirable. These represent a developing block. Highlights:

- 178 interviewees (78.10 %) expressed that their block was desirable. There were 5 (2.20 %) non-responses. This response showcases that the neighbors believe they live on an ideal block despite the violence that happens on or around it. **Figure 11** displays the results of the block description question. Note: Figures do not contain missing data.



**Figure 11**

The question “How do you think your block can be improved?” was codified into six categories: Caring, Communicating, Connected, City Services, No improvement, and Other. An interviewee’s responses could be sorted into multiple categories.

Responses that fit into the Caring category were: Cleanliness, Respect, Help, Home repairs, Get rid of negative elements, Get rid of shady neighbors. These represent a need to increase the level of care amongst neighbors.

Responses that fit into the Communicating category were: Better Communication. These represent a need to increase the level of communication amongst neighbors.

Responses that fit into the Connected category were: Events, Engagement, Block parties, Youth activities, More involvement from neighbors. These represent a need to increase the level of connection amongst neighbors.

Responses that fit into the City Services category were: Alley repaving, Traffic Circles, Police Cameras, Resources, Infrastructure, Stop signs, Speed bumps, Street repairs, Rats. These represent a need to increase the resources the city provides to upkeep a block.

Responses that fit into the No Improvement category were: No improvement. These represent either no comment or idea of how to improve the block. This also indicated satisfaction with the block.

Responses that fit into the Other category were: Alderman presence, Police presence, Jobs, Green Spaces, Leadership, Community Organizations, Parking, Safety. These represent what interviewees felt were most necessary to improve conditions on their block. Highlights:

- 23 (10.10 %) interviewees expressed that **Caring** would improve their block. 23 (10.10 %) interviewees expressed that **City Services** would improve their block. 26 (11.40 %) interviewees expressed that **Communicating** would improve their block. 34 (14.9 %) interviewees expressed that **Connecting** would improve their block. 46 (20.20 %) interviewees expressed that **No Improvement** was needed. 35 (15.40 %) interviewees expressed that **Other** solutions were needed to improve their block. There were 6 (2.60 %) non-responses. These responses showcase that despite neighbors holding their block in high regard there are opportunities that can enhance how they perceive their block. **Figure 12** displays the results of the block improvement question.

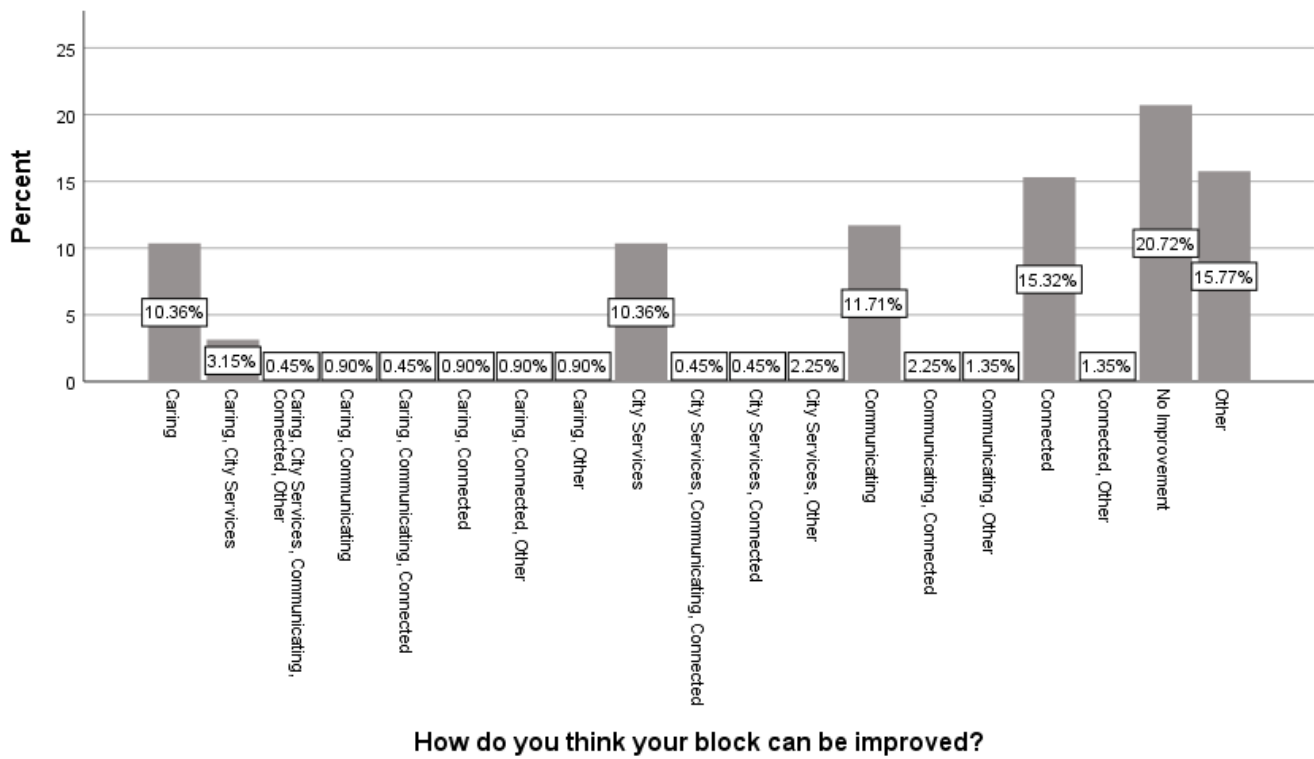


Figure 12

**Action Plan**

***Recommendations***

The CAND area is composed of several desirable blocks surrounded by some challenging blocks. Long-time residents have been integral to maintaining the desirability of the blocks. Interviews with long-standing block leaders revealed some informal social controls that are in place and others than need to be instilled. There is a large contingent of neighbors who encourage the development of relationships with others and would be happy to facilitate those relationships. Based on the survey results, the following recommendations are given to increase the caring, communicating, and connected dimensions in the CAND area:

- Establish block leaders from each block and connect them with one another
  - NAC located 24 interviewees willing to be block leaders.
- Create a training workshop to enhance the leadership capabilities of the leaders; the training should focus on the dimensions of Caring, Communicating, and Connected to increase collective efficacy.
  - D’vraughn Le’Claire LLC has developed the training. It is ongoing.
- Create a training workshop for the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier neighbors (non-leaders); the workshop would focus on Leader Member Exchange (LMX) and incorporate the dimensions of Caring, Communicating, and Connected.
- Establish a Block Leader conference where leaders have an opportunity to connect with one another and learn from one another.
- Establish Block Development events, with the help from Block Leaders, to facilitate connection between neighboring blocks.

### *Next Steps*

To build on the initial success of the 40 Blocks & A Movement project, the following actions are recommended next steps:

- Develop Network of Neighbors (connect leaders to neighbors)
- Start next ‘40 Blocks’ project in an adjacent area (checkerboard movement)
- Generate support for project via media, political, & community connections

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