

Crotona Park East Community Needs Assessment Summer 2010

Introduction

WHEDco's mission is to work with families in the Bronx who struggle with the multiple challenges presented by poverty and who, like all of us, aspire to a healthy and financially stable future. The organization seeks to replicate the attributes found in prosperous communities—safe and healthy homes, professional childcare, extra-curricular activities, access to physicians, learning experts and therapists, and opportunities to develop small businesses—for low-income families throughout the Bronx.

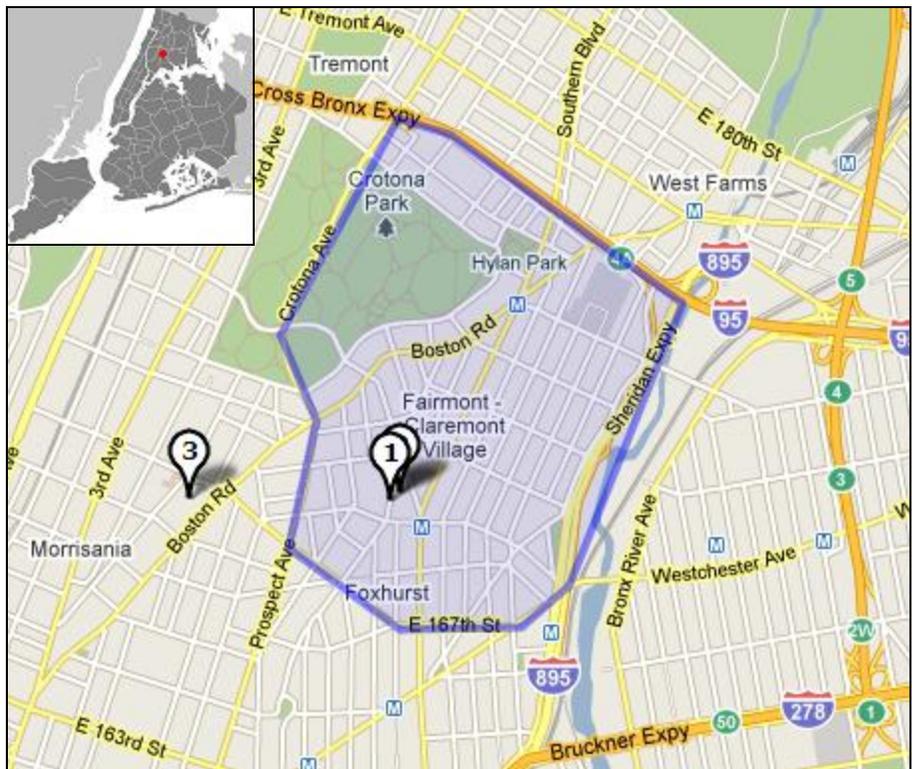
WHEDco is committed to understanding the needs of the communities it serves in order to most effectively meet those needs through direct service provision and strong partnerships. The Crotona Park East Community Needs Assessment is the direct outgrowth of this commitment. Key findings focus on the following themes:

- Families with Children
- Economic and Housing Insecurity
- Health Issues
- Quality of Life
- Civic Engagement

The Crotona Park East Neighborhood

The Crotona Park East neighborhood in the South Bronx (Figure 1) has undergone tremendous changes in the past 50 years. Prior to the 1960s, the area was a vibrant cultural center home to Eastern European and Jewish residents. In the 1960s and 1970s, the neighborhood went through a demographic shift as these earlier residents were attracted to new lower-priced housing in the suburbs and African-American and Puerto Rican residents moved in to take their place. As occurred across the country, private and public disinvestment in neighborhoods of color left resi-

Figure 1: WHEDco services in or near the Crotona Park East neighborhood: (1) Intervale Green Building, (2) Home-base Childcare Program, (3) P.S. 2/P.S. 63 Afterschool Program



dents with little in the way of property values, government services and commercial development. Insufficient policing and unlawful behavior on the part of landlords to collect insurance money led to outbreaks of crime, particularly arson, across the area. Eventually, the neighborhood of Crotona Park East, as featured in Paul Newman's 1981 crime drama "Fort Apache, The Bronx", came to typify the barren landscape left after a long period of disinvestment.

The early to mid-1980s saw the beginning of new housing developments in the area, led by a coalition of private and public funders and local community organizations. Increases in home-ownership began to stabilize the area, eventually encouraging a steady increase in population, primarily consisting of African American and Latino residents. However, socioeconomic challenges remain. Community District 3, where Crotona Park East is located, now has a population of just over 150,000. However, the median household income is under \$21,000 a year and 43% of families are living below the poverty line, the sec-

ond highest poverty rate in the city (Armstrong et al., 2009). In 2009, the adult unemployment rate for CD3 was 18.4%, more than double the rate of 8.8% for New York state overall. The population is also quite young. A third of the residents are under 18, and 55% of these young people are living below the poverty line (Citizens' Committee, 2010). Only a little over half of the students in School District 12 are meeting expectations on standardized tests, compared with almost 70% of students citywide (Department of Education, 2009), and half of the adults over age 25 have not graduated high school (Department of City Planning, 2008).

Neighborhood residents also face barriers when it comes to health and safety. Although the death rate due to HIV disease has decreased recently, the neighborhood still has the third highest HIV-related death rate in the city. The area also has a high proportion of adults with diabetes and double the asthma hospitalization rate of the city overall (Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2006; Citizens' Committee, 2010). The neighborhood is the only area of the city that saw an increase in crime rates from 2002 to 2005 (Armstrong et al., 2006). The felony crime rate for CD3 is 41 crimes per 1,000 residents, compared with 27 for the Bronx and 25 citywide. In the face of these continuing challenges, advocacy and community-based organizations like WHEDco are working to improve the lives of residents through multipronged efforts. Success of these efforts depends on community input.

The Assessment

WHEDco's interest in Crotona Park East stems from its continuing involvement in the neighborhood through housing development, service provision and community activism. In 2009, WHEDco opened Intervale Green, the largest affordable multi-family high-rise Energy Star building in the country. In addition to providing 127 families with a beautiful and secure place to live, the new development utilizes energy-efficient technology and environmentally friendly materials. WHEDco's Home-Based Childcare Program, which trains women to start and maintain quality childcare businesses, will soon be moving into the first floor commercial space at Intervale Green. This program will be able to both train neighborhood entrepreneurs and connect neighborhood parents with childcare providers. WHEDco's Department of Education and Youth Development also provides services on the neighborhood border. The Afterschool Program at P.S. 2/P.S. 63 offers arts enrichment and academic programming,

including Chess, Dance, Choir and homework help, five days a week for students in Kindergarten through fifth grade.

For several years, WHEDco's Department of Housing and Community Development has been in conversation with neighborhood residents, business owners, police and government officials to improve the quality of life for neighborhood residents. These efforts have already re-

Over 70% of residents had spent time in the shelter system or "doubled up", in situations lasting from one week to 18 years.

sulted in improvements in business development and public safety in the area. The Department has developed strong relationships with merchants and property owners, and brought attention and resources to the

neighborhood's transportation, lighting, security, graffiti, district marketing, sanitation, and food access issues.

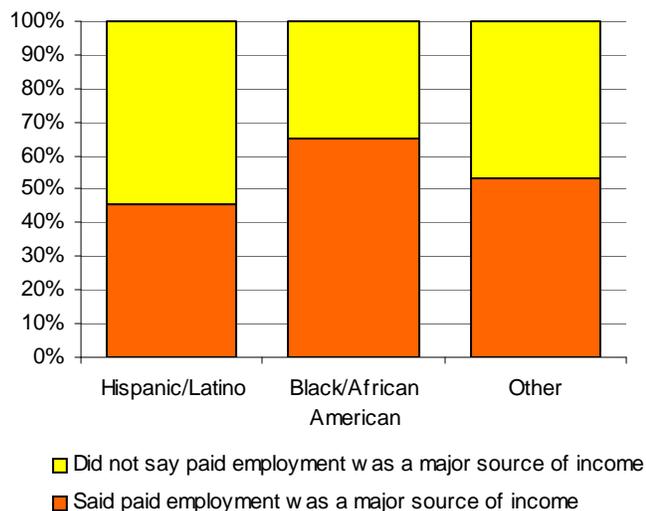
Between the Summer of 2009 and Spring of 2010, WHEDco conducted a Community Needs Assessment to identify key concerns for residents of Crotona Park East. A short survey taking a few minutes to complete was distributed at subway stations, grocery stores, community meetings, libraries, schools and online. The survey was conducted in person by WHEDco staff as well as local students, and as such constituted a first step in reaching out to community residents. Findings from the survey will help WHEDco identify the pressing, interrelated issues facing community members and point the way toward effective planning for community success and stability.

After describing the participant population, this report discusses resident needs and interests as they relate to service provision and then moves on to an exploration of residents' feelings about their neighborhood. Throughout the report, detailed analyses break down responses by respondent demographics in order to clarify any similarities or differences between groups. The final section discusses implications of these findings for WHEDco's programming and community efforts.

The participants

Over a period of six months, staff from the Department of Housing and Community Development collected 448 surveys. Of these surveys, 317 reported living in one of the four zip codes within the study area: 10456, 10457, 10459 and 10460 (95 reported a zip code outside the study area and 36 did not report a zip code). Of those 317 total respondents, 87% took the survey in English and the other 13% took it in Spanish. Respondents were somewhat evenly split along gender lines. Just under two-thirds were Hispanic or Latino, just under one third was Black or Afri-

Figure 2: Paid Employment as a Source of Income by Respondent Race



can-American, and the remaining respondents were multi-racial, Asian and White. Over a quarter of the respondents were under 18, under ten percent were 55 or older and the median age was 27. In comparing these percentages with those for the neighborhood overall, Hispanic or Latino residents and those between 18 and 55 are slightly over-represented in the survey. Conversely, Black or African-American residents, those under 18, and those 55 or older are slightly underrepresented in the survey (Department of City Planning, 2008).

In addition to requesting demographic information, the survey asked respondents to report their household composition and income. Almost 62% percent of the households surveyed included children under 18. This is much higher than the 41% of households that included children in the Bronx overall (U.S. Census, 2009). About a quarter of these households had more than two children, with female respondents reporting a significantly higher number of children in the home than male respondents. Sixteen percent of households surveyed included one or more senior members, somewhat lower than the Bronx overall percentage of 22%.

Almost 72% of households reported an annual income of less than \$35,000, the median household income for Bronx County. Nearly 28% reported a household income of less than \$10,000 a year (see Note). Just over half of respondents reported wage income as a primary source of household income and just over a quarter listed public benefits as a primary source of income. Respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 were most likely, and those over 55 least likely, to report wage income as a primary source of household income. African-American residents were more

likely than Hispanic or Latino residents or other groups to rely on wage income (Figure 2). Only a very small percentage listed both wage and benefits income as sources of income.

Most residents had experienced housing insecurity: over 70% had spent time either in the shelter system or “doubled up” with another family in one residence. For the 70 people who gave more details about their experience, these situations lasted from one week to 18 years, with a median stay of just under one and a half years. Those aged 25 to 54 were more likely to say they had lived in temporary or “doubled up” situations than both younger and older residents.

Programming Needs and Interests

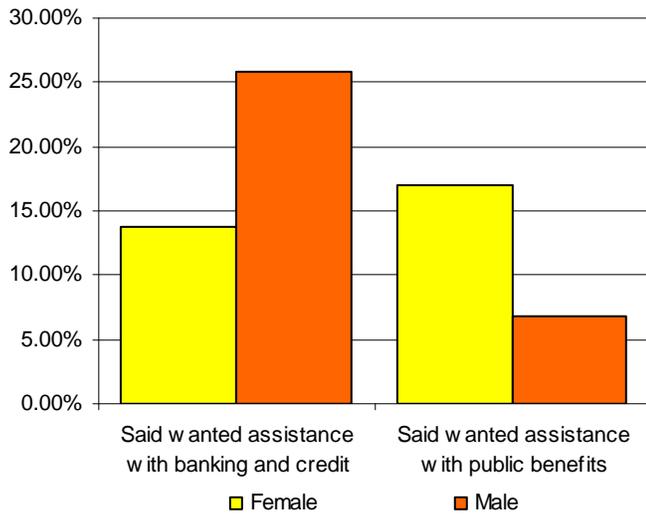
The primary aim of the survey is to identify key issues of concern to the residents of Crotona Park East in order to map out targeted, practical solutions that WHEDco and its community partners can provide to meet the community’s needs moving forward. This inquiry was framed by WHEDco’s already existing expertise in several programming areas (childcare and youth, social services and green education and health) and its continuing work in community development, particularly around business development and public safety in Crotona Park East. This section addresses needs and interests in WHEDco’s primary programming areas. The next addresses perspectives on community development.

Most parents, almost 88%, reported that all the children in the household were doing very well or OK in school. Despite the fact that parents believed their children were do-

Figure 3: Issues Ranked by Respondent Interest

Issues	% Seeking Assistance
Employment/Job Training	35%
Housing	25%
Continuing Education	22%
Youth Education	20%
Banking and Credit	19%
Computer Training	18%
Counseling	15%
Health/Dental Care	14%
Health/Dental Insurance	14%
Public Benefits	12%
Debt Management	12%
Legal Issues	11%
Budgeting	11%
Domestic Violence	10%
ESL/Literacy	10%
Emergency Food	9%
Energy Conservation	8%
Immigration	8%
Child Welfare	7%
Other	3%

Figure 4: Banking and Benefits Interest by Respondent Gender



ing well in school, they could use some help. Twenty percent were interested in assistance with youth education, and almost 40% said they were interested in more information on childcare and afterschool programs. Women were more interested in these programs than men, and respondents between the ages of 25 and 34 were more interested than other age groups. These numbers suggest mothers in their late twenties or early thirties might be interested in connecting with WHEDco’s afterschool program nearby. In addition, fifteen percent of respondents said they were interested in workshops on how to start a childcare business, suggesting there may be an opportunity to train new providers and thereby increase the amount of quality care available to parents.

Crotona Park East residents are also interested in specific types of social service assistance. Across the board, residents desired assistance with employment and job training and continuing education (Figure 3). Interest in other types of services differed between groups. In the face of financial insecurity, women and men approached the issue differently. Men were more likely than women to say they were interested in assistance with banking and credit issues, while women were more interested than men in assistance with public benefits (Figure 4). This difference may be the result of variety of things, alone or in combination. These activities, banking versus benefits, may be gender demarcated within a traditional household. Or male respondents who are reporting a lower average number of children in the household might be less willing or able to apply for family benefits. In any case, these differences should be noted when developing and marketing assistance programs.

Other differences in respondent interest also appeared.

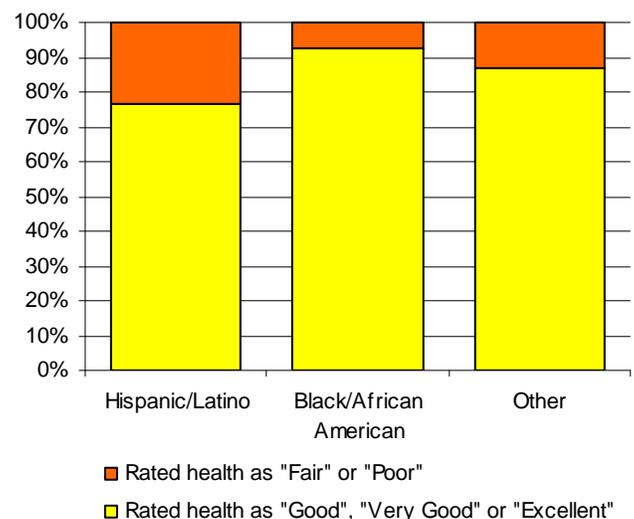
Respondents between the ages of 25 and 44 were more likely to be interested in housing assistance than both younger and older respondents. Interest in computer training differed by both race and geography: Hispanic or Latino respondents, and those in southernmost zip code 10459, were significantly less likely to express interest in computer training than other groups. Respondents living in 10459 were also less likely to express interest in assistance with health care and health insurance than those living in other zip codes.

Only a quarter of respondents were currently receiving assistance from a social service agency other than WHEDco, most often naming Children’s Aid Society and Urban Health Plan, both located in the neighborhood. Older respondents were more likely to say they were receiving assistance than younger respondents. This suggests there might be a gap in service for younger residents that WHEDco might be able to fill.

WHEDco is also considering expanding its workshop offerings to the Crotona Park East community. Over 15% of participants were interested in life skills workshops on things like parenting, budgeting and health. Social services are also deeply intertwined with “green” education, particularly as they relate to both saving money and improving health. Over 20% of respondents were interested in “green” workshops designed to lower energy bills by learning about things like energy-efficient lighting and appliances in the home.

Given the continuing dire news about health in the South Bronx, particularly surrounding obesity-related illness (Matte et al, 2007), WHEDco is looking to expand its community efforts around healthy living activities. The

Figure 5: Health Self-Rating by Respondent Race



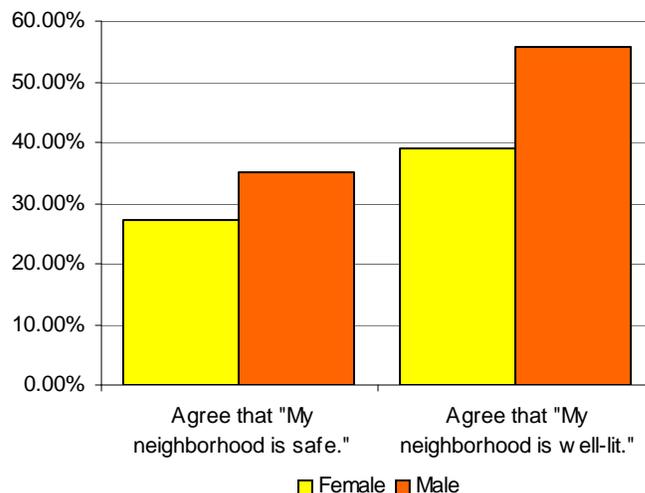
survey asks participants both about their current health and activity level, as well as what types of healthy activities they might be interested in if they were offered. Overall the survey reveals considerable health issues among residents of Crotona Park East. About 18% percent of respondents rated their own health fair to poor. Hispanic or Latino respondents were more likely than other groups to rate their health poorly (Figure 5).

In addition, 89% of those responding said they ate less than the recommended five servings of fruit and vegetables per day, with 13% reporting they did not eat any at all. Residents are also not likely to get enough exercise to offset unhealthy eating patterns. Just under 40% of Bronx residents overall do not walk the recommended ten blocks each day to reach a healthy level of physical activity. Alarming, 62% of Crotona Park East residents do not reach this recommended amount of activity. On a more positive note, over 20% of residents were interested in learning more about healthy living activities such as gardening and walking clubs.

Perspectives on Community Development

In addition to questions about programming needs and interests, residents were asked to rate how they felt about certain aspects of their neighborhood. There was an overall sense that the neighborhood is accessible, with 92% agreeing that “My neighborhood is close to buses and subways.” The Southern Boulevard commercial corridor encompasses three MTA train stations and is well-served by several bus lines. The only exception was those living in

Figure 7: Feelings of Safety by Respondent Gender



the easternmost and less well-served zip code 10456, who were less likely than other respondents to feel the neighborhood was accessible by public transportation.

Other measures reveal mixed feelings about the neighborhood. Only a little over half of respondents agreed that they liked their neighbors and felt comfortable in nearby parks. Just about half felt that their neighborhood was affordable and less than a third of respondents felt the neighborhood was safe, clean, pretty and well-maintained (Figure 6). As Figure 7 shows, gender differences appear with varying descriptions of safety. Though there were no significant differences in gender with respect to general feelings of safety, women were significantly less likely than men to agree that the neighborhood was well-lit. This difference may be because lighting brings up fears of night

Figure 6: Percent of Residents Agreeing with Statements about their Neighborhood

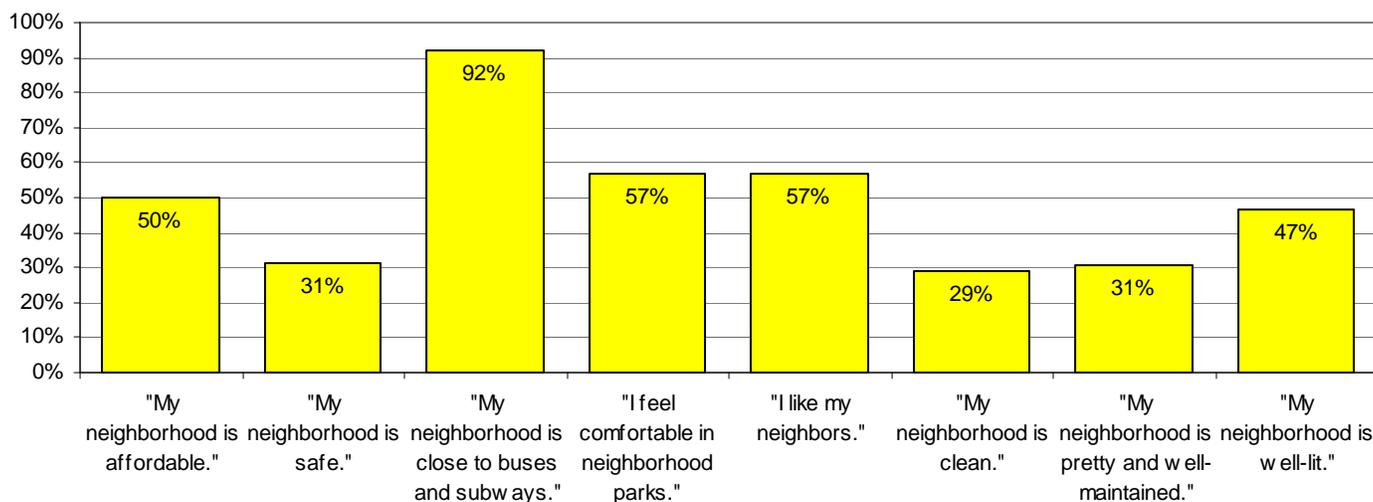


Figure 8: Limited commercial development on Southern Blvd under the subway tracks in Crotona Park East



crimes, particularly crimes involving sexual aggression, which are of particular concern to women. Despite these mixed reviews, however, nearly three out of four respondents were very or somewhat happy about living in Crotona Park East. This may indicate residents do not expect or need much to be happy with their neighborhood, or alternately that residents judge neighborhood satisfaction on the basis of indicators other than those discussed above.

Neighborhood residents also expressed their desires for certain kinds of community development, specifically the types of businesses and organizations they would like to see more of in the area. Previous WHEDco research suggests land use in Crotona Park East does not reflect the vibrant commercial center the community needs. Although retail activity is strongest around the three MTA stations, the entire corridor has struggling pockets of commercial activity. Only 45% of the activity on Southern Boulevard is retail; 22 vacant lots along with a commercial space va-

cancy rate of 14% inhibit the area's retail identity (Figure 8).

Survey respondents were most likely to say they wanted an entertainment facility, a fitness facility and a grocery store nearby. Government services (library, post office), food establishments, pharmacies and community centers were also popular choices (Figure 9). As might be expected from traditional gender roles, women were more likely to express a desire for a childcare facility than men. Residents were also interested in developing a sense of community through civic participation: nearly a quarter were interested in participating in tenants' associations, homeowners' associations, the Community Board or some other civic group. This desire to be involved is reflected in the fact that over two-thirds of respondents left their names on the survey so that WHEDco could follow-up with them on their interest in various activities.

Summary & Implications

Families with Children

The preceding discussion suggests many ways in which the needs of Crotona Park East residents can be addressed by WHEDco's programming and community development efforts. First, it is clear that any efforts must address the needs of the high proportion of households with children. Women are not only more likely to be caring for more children, but also showed more interest in child-related services and activities, including childcare and afterschool programming. Youth education was one of the top requests for assistance across all demographic groups.

This set of findings has several implications. Businesses that cater to the needs of families, such as those that sell children's clothing or shoes and family-oriented food and entertainment, have a higher chance of succeeding in Crotona Park East. The development of safe parks, stroller-accessible sidewalks and affordable childcare and afterschool programs would also benefit this population. WHEDco's partnerships with neighborhood schools, including its own afterschool program at P.S. 2/P.S. 63, along with its expertise in helping women start child care businesses, suggest real opportunities for better reaching the needs of families with children in Crotona Park East.

Economic and Housing Insecurity

Crotona Park East residents are experiencing high levels of economic and housing insecurity. Nearly three quarters are living below the median income for the borough, and over a quarter reported annual incomes less than \$10,000. Most have also lived in temporary or overcrowded housing, some for extended periods of time. These findings are reflected in the fact that over a third requested assistance with employment and job training, and about a quarter with housing and continuing education.

Any efforts to attract businesses should target those with affordable pricing structures that are therefore able to meet the needs of lower-income populations. Currently WHEDco is in conversation with several stores already serving the South Bronx who may be interested in opening another location in Crotona Park East. Business development could also play a role in employment assistance by attracting organizations that hire those with a variety of skill sets. Any potential programming efforts should focus on connecting residents to services that help to increase incomes through employment assistance, job training, edu-

Figure 9: Businesses and Organizations Ranked by Respondent Interest

<i>Business or Organization</i>	<i>% Wanting More</i>
Entertainment	45%
Indoor Fitness Facility or Gym	31%
Grocery, Supermarket	25%
Government Service	21%
Food Establishment	21%
Pharmacy	20%
Community Center or Social Service Organization	20%
College, Technical School, University	18%
Childcare Facility	17%
Other Retail Store (e.g. clothing)	16%
School	15%
Other Service	15%
Police Precinct or Fire Dept	14%
Financial Service	12%
Produce Vendor	10%
Religious Establishment	8%
Small Grocery, Deli, Convenience Store	8%
Other	7%

cation, credit counseling and benefit assistance. Financial education classes held at Intervale Green have been very popular, and should attend to the demographic differences discussed earlier, particularly along race and gender lines, in order to provide the most effective programming. Lastly, these findings point to the continuing need for safe, affordable housing in the neighborhood.

Health Issues

Programming and community efforts should address substantial health issues facing neighborhood residents. Nearly one in five residents rated their own health as fair to poor, with Hispanic or Latino residents more likely than other groups to rate their health as fair to poor. Diet and exercise patterns support this finding, with nearly nine out of ten not eating the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables, and nearly two out of three not reaching the recommended amount of physical activity. On a positive note, residents are interested in healthy living activities and fitness centers, suggesting they would take advantage of activities and resources were they readily available.

As mentioned below, parks are one of the most favored features of the neighborhood and can provide an excellent existing resource for healthy living options. WHEDco already has been working with Crotona Park to publicize park events among community residents, including this year's EmblemHealth Bronx Open, a major tennis tournament that included free tennis lessons for children. In order to answer the desire for gyms in the neighborhood, WHEDco is working to bring in affordable fitness centers already located in the Bronx, such as Planet Fitness and Curves, and to advocate with the Department of Education

to make school gyms open to the public during non-school hours. WHEDco's residential building, Intervale Green, is forming a walking club that could provide a model for walking clubs in the community at large.

To increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in Crotona Park East, WHEDco is offering technical assistance to help community members start their own neighborhood businesses as New York City Green Cart fresh produce vendors. In addition, WHEDco tenants and community members received training in 2010 to create a rooftop urban farm at Intervale Green, bringing healthy meal choices and exercise to families participating in the vegetable gardening club and in the broader community. Intervale Green also holds healthy-living and green workshops on site that can help residents not only live healthier but save money in the process. Given the race disparity discussed above, these efforts should be bilingual and culturally appropriate to attract all residents equally.

Quality of Life

Residents are expressing concerns about the quality of life in their neighborhood. They appreciate the neighborhood's accessibility, enjoy its parks and like their neighbors, but the neighborhood falls short on all other quality indicators. Only about half felt the neighborhood was affordable and well-lit and only about a third felt it was safe, clean or pretty. Though all were concerned about safety, women were more likely to be concerned about lighting than men. Topping the list for desired businesses and organizations in the neighborhood are things that make life easier and more enjoyable: nearby entertainment facilities, gyms and grocery stores.

WHEDco is currently working closely with the NYPD and other community organizations to improve the safety of the neighborhood. In the summer of 2009, WHEDco successfully advocated for additional lighting in the neighborhood to be installed in the near future by the city's Department of Transportation. WHEDco is also working with merchants on public safety issues, encouraging them to stay open later to increase eyes on the street, to keep their facades in good repair to discourage vandalism, and to increase exterior lighting and light flow from the interior to aid visibility on the street.

WHEDco is also working to improve the availability of

fresh food vendors and entertainment facilities. Partnerships with local bodegas encourage them to offer more healthy and diverse options. WHEDco is also investigating the possibility of bringing in small ethnically-specialized movie retailers or cafes to provide entertainment options for the neighborhood. Underlying all these efforts is the idea that when residents spend their money locally instead of driving to another location, it creates a feedback loop that encourages both further business development as well as street safety as more people can walk to get what they need.

Civic Engagement

Despite their concerns about quality of life in the neighborhood, most residents claim to be happy about living there. This might suggest residents are invested in their neighborhood and interested in improving it, an excellent basis upon which WHEDco could help build successful community engagement. That one in four residents said they were willing to be part of a civic association and one in three agreed to continue the conversation initiated by the survey, gives further encouragement to the belief that thriving civic participation is a real possibility in Crotona Park East.

Nearly a quarter of residents were interested in participating in tenants' associations, homeowners' associations, the Community Board or some other civic group.

Currently, WHEDco is working with community residents to connect them to existing community groups, such as the NYPD Community Council on safety and the Community Board, both of which meet monthly to address community issues. WHEDco is also working with merchants and other community members to maintain a newsletter and develop a website, both of which include community resources, highlights and events. WHEDco will follow up with survey respondents who included their contact information to see if they would like to take part in these organizing efforts.

Above all, results from the survey show residents are ready for change. With the right efforts, businesses and organizations can make a tremendous difference in the lives of residents, helping the neighborhood rebuild and become a reflection of its diverse, vibrant families.

Figure 10: Community Participants in the Southern Blvd Clean-Up Day, October 2009



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Note: Respondents under 18 were significantly more likely to report household incomes over \$35,000 than older respondents. These young people likely overestimated on the basis of unreliable sources. Other age groups reported a steadily decreasing likelihood of incomes over \$35,000 with increasing age.

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