BUILDING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY:

What can we do to make and keep our community healthy, strong, and vibrant?

A guide for public dialogue and problem solving

Study Circles Resource Center
A project of the Topsfield Foundation
Pomfret, Connecticut
BUILDING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY:

What can we do to make and keep our community healthy, strong, and vibrant?

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Study Circle organizers bring large numbers of people into these small-group discussions on the same issue at the same time. These study circle programs lead to a wide range of action efforts.

We would like to help you organize study circles throughout your neighborhood. SCRC offers assistance, free of charge, to organizers of large-scale study circle programs. SCRC can provide more detailed advice on organizing and facilitating study circles, more copies of this guide, or copies of study circle guides on other issues (including race, crime and violence, education, growth and urban sprawl, immigration, diversity, and youth issues). Please contact us: SCRC, P.O. Box 204, Pomfret, CT 06258. Phone: (860) 928-2616. Fax: (860) 928-3713. E-mail: scrc@neca.com. Visit our web site at: www.studycircles.org

For more help organizing study circles, please refer to the companion supplement for this guide, Tips for Organizers and Facilitators of Study Circles on Building a Healthier Community.

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INTRODUCTION

When you think about health, what comes to mind? Feeling fine? Happy and fit? Do you think about hospitals and doctors? Health clubs? Eating well? Your favorite outdoor activity? What about laughing and having a good time with friends and family?

Being healthy means many things to many people. And when you put the words "healthy" and "community" together, you can create an even broader range of meanings. Now, when you think about your city, town, or neighborhood as a healthy community, what comes to mind?

Maybe it's jobs. Schools and education. Making sure everyone has decent housing they can afford. How about clean water and clean air? Access to basic health services. A healthy childhood. Parks, ballfields, and bike trails. Maybe you think about how people and groups in your community work together — do you cooperate with each other? Have fun together? Celebrate your successes?

Some people think about finding ways to encourage young people to stick around after they graduate, or being encouraged to become an active part of the community. Others think about the kinds of advertising and other messages that influence their lifestyles — and their children's lifestyles. For some, a healthy community is full of beautiful places...or it offers plenty of opportunities to worship together...or it has a vibrant economy.

Whatever "healthy community" means to you, chances are that, deep down, you're motivated by wanting the best for your community. That's probably what motivates your neighbors, friends, business associates...and just about everyone you meet on the street or in the grocery store...to get involved in the community.

Study circles can help you come together with others who want your community to be the best and healthiest that it can be. Study circles are small-group, democratic discussions with plenty of give-and-take. A neutral facilitator helps participants get to know each other, listen and share ideas, consider different points of view about how to build a healthier community, and think about how to take action.

What's in this discussion guide?

This guide is not meant just for reading; it's meant to be used! Here's an outline of the four discussion sessions in this guide:

- **Session 1:** Connecting with our community
  
  This session is devoted to getting to know each other, talking about your connections to the community, and exploring your ideas about what makes your community a good and healthy place to live.

- **Session 2:** Understanding the challenges facing our community
  
  In this session, you'll identify some of the most important challenges your community faces and talk about what's really going on with these challenges.

- **Session 3:** Considering action options: How can we build on our strengths?
  
  Here's an opportunity to discuss your community's strengths, and talk about some different approaches for making your community stronger and healthier.

- **Session 4:** Making a difference: Setting priorities for action
  
  This session provides an opportunity for you to explore specific ways for you to make a difference in your community, acting individually or together.
In this guide you will also find suggestions for participating in and facilitating study circles.

**What is a study circle?**

The study circle is a simple process for small-group deliberation. Study circles create a setting for personal learning, building community, and problem solving. Here are some of their defining characteristics:

♦ A study circle involves 10 to 15 people who come together to talk with each other about public issues. They meet regularly—usually at least three times—over a period of weeks or months. They work in a democratic and collaborative way.

♦ A study circle is facilitated by a person who helps keep the discussion focused and asks thought-provoking questions. This facilitator does not act as an expert on the issue.

♦ A study circle looks at an issue from many points of view. Study circle facilitators and discussion materials help participants consider different viewpoints, feel comfortable about expressing their own ideas, and explore areas of common ground.

♦ In the first session of a study circle, participants explore their personal connections to an issue. In later sessions, the discussion expands to consider a range of views about the issue and how it might be resolved. Finally, the study circle focuses on what individuals, organizations, and communities can do to address the issue. Study circles give people the chance to take action individually and together with other community members.

Study circles can take place within organizations such as schools, workplaces, neighborhood associations, clubs, congregations, or government agencies. In such settings, a single group of study circle participants meeting for just a few weeks can lay important groundwork for positive change.

Study circles achieve their greatest potential, however, when many are happening at the
same time across a community. These community-wide programs usually have many diverse organizations as sponsors or endorsers. Organizers of community-wide programs strive to involve as many members of the community as possible in the study circles.

Moving from talk to action

Community organizers often take a “top-down” approach. They see a particular problem, come up with a proposed solution, and then ask people to join them in implementing it. Study circles turn that process on its head by getting people involved from the very beginning — first by creating an opportunity for people to talk about the issue, then to consider it from many angles and come to their own conclusions. Study circle organizers also help more people get involved in figuring out the actions and solutions that will work best for them, and then support participants as the action projects unfold. Study circle programs move from talk to action because they:

♦ Build understanding among people of different backgrounds and opinions.

♦ Give people the chance to look at a range of views and approaches, and come up with their own creative ideas.

♦ Build working relationships between people and organizations. Often, study circle programs involve parts of the community, such as faith communities or business organizations, in new and different relationships with each other.

♦ Create more productive ways for citizens to interact with public employees, including police officers, teachers, elected officials, and social workers.

♦ Help people gain a sense of "ownership" of their community and its strengths and challenges. This sense of responsibility increases their determination to find actions and solutions they can be involved in and to carry them through.

To make progress toward stronger, healthier communities, we all need to get involved. Study circles provide a way to do that. Through dialogue and action, we can make our communities better, more vital and prosperous places to live.
Making the most of your study circle

In a study circle, how you talk with each other is as important as what you talk about. These tips will help make your study circle enjoyable, thought provoking, and productive:

♦ **Attend every study circle session.** If everyone in your group makes a good effort to be at each meeting, you will build trust and familiarity. This is essential if you're going to explore how you think and feel about the issue, and to deepen the dialogue with each session.

♦ **Be prepared.** Read the discussion materials before you come to each session. Each part of the study circle guide offers questions, viewpoints, and ideas to help you examine the issue. By preparing ahead of time, you will be ready to jump right into the discussion. The guide also suggests simple things you can do to keep your own learning and reflection going between study circle meetings.

♦ **Take responsibility for the quality of your discussion.** The study circle facilitator's job is to keep the discussion moving and on track. In the dictionary, the word "facilitate" means "to make easier." But participants are also responsible for "making things easier"! The first time you meet, your group will set ground rules for your discussion. Stick with these ground rules and help others do the same.

♦ **Remember that you are not alone.** If your study circle is part of a larger, community-wide program, many other study circles may be going on at the same time in your area. Join with them for a kick-off session, to meet with public officials, or for a wrap-up discussion about taking action on the issue. These joint meetings help build momentum for addressing the issue across the community. Even if no other study circles are going on at the same time, think about ways to include others in this important discussion.

For more information, see the companion supplement, *Tips for Organizers and Facilitators of Study Circles on Building a Healthier Community*.

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**GROUND RULES FOR USEFUL DISCUSSIONS**

Use these suggestions as a starting point for coming up with your own ground rules to guide your study circle.

1. Everyone gets a fair hearing.
2. Share "air time."
3. One person speaks at a time. Don't interrupt.
4. Speak for yourself, not for others.
5. If you are offended, say so.
6. You can disagree, but don't personalize it. Stick to the issue. No name calling or stereotyping.
SESSION 1:  
CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITY

The words "healthy" and "community" can mean different things to different people. In this session, we'll explore these ideas by sharing our own thoughts, experiences, and stories. Doing this lays the foundation for the rest of the study circle and sets the tone for open, thoughtful discussion.

Facilitator Tips

♦ Welcome everyone, tell them about the program, and explain your role.
♦ Help the group set ground rules and post them where everyone can see them. (See sample ground rules on page 3.)
♦ Introduce the recorder, or ask for a volunteer. (See page 2 of Tips for Organizers and Facilitators of Study Circles on Building a Healthier Community for tips on taking notes.)
♦ Break the session into three parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
♦ Don't feel as though you have to cover every question or that you have to ask the questions in order.

Total suggested time for this session: 2 hours

Part 1: Introductions and discussion starter (30 minutes)

1. Introduce yourself. Tell the group a little bit about where you live and how you came to live there.
2. When you think of your "community," what comes to mind? Do you see yourself belonging to more than one community?
3. How are we (in this study circle) connected with each other? Do we feel as if we are part of the same community? Why or why not? Does living in the same place make us feel connected, or is it another kind of community that we're all a part of? Describe an experience you've had that illustrates the different ways people in this community are connected to each other.

Part 2: Exploring health in our community (60 minutes)

1. What goes into making individuals healthy? Think of your own physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. What contributes to your health and well being?
2. What makes this community a good and healthy place to live? Why? Tell a story or anecdote that illustrates that idea.
3. What would you point out to visitors as our community's best features or greatest accomplishments? Why are those important to you?
4. How do we accomplish the good work that gets done in our community? Who does what? How do they do it?

People can see themselves as belonging to different kinds of communities, such as:

- People in the same town or neighborhood.
- Co-workers.
- People in the same profession.
- Schoolmates.
- People who share interests.
- A group of nearby towns.
- Condominium association.
- Family.
- Friends.
- Church.
- People I communicate with electronically.
Part 3: Wrapping up (30 minutes)

One or both of the following exercises will help us wrap up our conversation.

♦ Mapping community and health connections.

Working together, we can create a “mind map” about our community's quality of life. In this instance, a mind map is a way of visually showing ideas and relationships among them. The steps for creating a mind map are simple:

1. Ask someone to be the “map scribe.” This person will draw the mind map, based on ideas from the group.
2. At the center of a large sheet of paper, the scribe draws a circle. In that circle, write something like, "Our town as a healthy community." (Or substitute "neighborhood" or "city" or another kind of community, depending on your focus.)
3. Think about what goes into making our community vibrant and healthy. As we begin talking about these aspects, we can help the scribe map them by suggesting how they are related to each other. Using lines, circles, arrows, and other shapes, the scribe creates a map of what goes into building a healthier community and how those things relate to each other.
4. Not everyone has to agree with each item or connection that is drawn on the map. There are no right or wrong answers. We can ask questions to help clarify someone's idea, but don't criticize or contradict.
5. As our map develops, do we see any connections you didn't see before? What new insights have you gained while this map took shape?

See the sample mind map on page 16 for a general idea of what a mind map can look like. Our own creativity will help us make a map that fits our group and our community.

♦ Our vision for our community.

1. This is a brainstorming exercise. It's a good way to get a lot of ideas out in the open. Here's how it goes:
2. Ask one person to record the brainstorm ideas on a large piece of paper that everyone can see.
3. For a few quiet moments, individually consider these questions:
4. Imagine that, 10 years from now, this community is as healthy, vibrant and prosperous as you'd like it to be. What does it look like? How do things work? What would it feel like to live here?
5. Now, start saying ideas out loud. We'll offer at least one or two ideas. As we are speaking, the recorder will write all the ideas where everyone can see him or her.
6. In a brainstorm, there are no right or wrong answers. We can ask questions to help clarify someone's idea, but don't criticize, contradict, or make comments.
7. Keep moving from idea to idea, rather than stopping to discuss certain ones as they come up.
8. As the flow of ideas slows down, look back at the list. What new insights or ideas do we have now that we've heard all these visions for our community's healthy future?

Prepare for Session 2
Talk with family members, friends, and neighbors about what makes the community a good place to live, and in what ways the community could be doing better. What do they think helps make the community a good and healthy place to live?

Observe how things happen in the community (or in your workplace, school, family, etc.): How do people best work together to get things done? What sorts of things do we do that make it more difficult for us to do good work together?

**SESSION 2: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES FACING OUR COMMUNITY**

Before we begin talking about strategies and specific ideas for making our community a better place to live, we'll spend some time talking about our community's most important challenges. This session helps us focus on what needs attention so that we can understand why these issues may be so difficult to resolve.

**Facilitator tips**
- Break the session into four parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
- If you have notes from Session 1, review them at the beginning of the session. Or put up the "mind map" or brainstorm list you created at the end of Session 1.
- Remember to have a recorder take notes so you can refer to them in later sessions.

*Total suggested time for this session: 2 hours*

**Part 1: Reflecting on what we’re learning** (20 minutes)

1. Since our last meeting, did you have a chance to talk to others to find out what they think about our community? What do they think is good and healthy? In need of improvement? Why?
2. What did you observe about how people work together well? Not so well? Tell a story or anecdote that illustrates your ideas.

**Part 2: Identifying our community's most important challenges** (40 minutes)

1. What would we need to work on in order to make this community a better, healthier place to live? Why is this an important issue? What experiences have we had with this problem?
2. What's keeping our community from addressing these issues?
3. If we think ahead to the next 5 to 10 years, are there any challenges our community is likely to face that we haven't already discussed? If so, what are they?
4. What issues and challenges might community members who are not in this discussion identify?

**Part 3: Understanding our challenges** (40 minutes)

1. Look at the list of all the issues and challenges our study circle group thought of. Do we see any connections? If so, what do they look like?
2. What's at the core of these problems? What really causes them? In other words, what are the “causes behind the causes”?
3. What makes leadership on these issues difficult?

**Part 4: Wrapping up** (20 minutes)
Spark your thinking!

Here are some ideas for you to use to start thinking about trends in your community's health. When people think about healthy communities, they often consider some of the following categories:

- Access to health care
- Relations among different races, people with different income levels, newcomers and "old-timers," and other groups.
- People's ability to move around the community — to get to and from work, school, recreational activities, shopping centers, and so on.
- Quality of education and access to education.
- Employment
- Safety
- Community activities
- Quality of the environment

During the next session, we'll be talking about how to address some of the challenges we identified today. One or both of the following wrap-up exercises will help us summarize today's discussions.

- **Mapping community and health connections.** Working together, we can create a “mind map” about our community's quality of life. In this instance, a mind map is a way of visually showing ideas and relationships among them.

  The steps for creating a mind map are simple:

  1. Ask someone from the study circle to be the "map scribe." This person will draw the mind map, based on ideas from the group.

  2. At the center of a large sheet of paper, the scribe draws a circle. In that circle, write something like, "Our community's biggest challenges," or "What we need to work on for our community to be a healthier place."

  3. Think back to our discussions about what our community needs to work on in order to be a better, healthier place to live. Think about what needs to happen where you live, work, play, worship, and go about other aspects of your daily life. As we begin talking about these challenges and concerns, help the scribe map them by suggesting how they are linked to each other. Using lines, circles, arrows, and other shapes, the scribe creates a map that shows how these challenges relate to each other.

  4. Not everyone in the group has to agree with each item or connection that is drawn on the map. There are no right or wrong answers. We can ask questions to help clarify an idea, but don't criticize or contradict.

  5. As your map develops, do we see any connections we didn't see before? What are our new insights?

  See the sample mind map on page 16 for a general idea of what a mind map can look like. Our own creativity will help us make a map that fits our group and our community.

- **Charting trends: How is our community is doing?** Make a chart that shows the changes you see in the quality of life in your community.

Here's one way to do it:

  1. On a separate sheet of paper, each person draws a chart of how he or she sees the community's quality of life changing. Consider these questions:

     - What trends do you see in our community's health and well being?

     - How is it improving? declining? staying about the same? Explain your charts to others in the study circle.

  2. As you draw your own chart and listen to others’ ideas, what new insights or ideas do you have?

  See the sample chart on page 17 for one idea about how to show trends in your community's health. Use your own creativity to make it fit your group and your community.
Prepare for Session 3

- Pay attention to how some of the issues you talked about are being addressed in your community. What's in the news? Who is taking action? What's already happening in your community? What new ideas are being talked about?
- Are there things being done in other places that might be useful to us here?
- Look around your community. What strengths and capacities do you see for making this a better place to live?
SESSION 3: CONSIDERING ACTION OPTIONS: HOW CAN WE BUILD ON OUR STRENGTHS?

Many communities are showing that they can tackle important issues by building on their strong points. In this session, we'll discuss some different views about how people in your community can get better at working together, solving problems, and making this community a healthier, better place to live. This will help us think together about general directions for change before moving to specific action ideas in the last session.

Facilitator Tips

♦ Break the session into four parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.

♦ If you have notes from Session 2, review them at the beginning of the session. Or put up the "mind map" or some of the trends charts you created at the end of Session 2.

♦ Remember to have a recorder take notes so you can refer to them in later sessions.

TO START PART 3

♦ Ask a few members of the study circle to volunteer to read each view out loud.

OR

♦ Ask members to read the views to themselves

♦ After reading the views, ask some of the questions listed in Part 3.

Total suggested time for this session: 2 hours

Part 1: What do we have to build on? (30 minutes)

1. In dealing with community challenges, what are some examples of projects or accomplishments in our community that we are proudest of? Why are we proud of these accomplishments?

2. What strengths or resources do we have in this community for making it a better place to live? What resources does our community have to work with in these four categories:
• Individual and family — and you personally?
• Small groups of people and informal associations?
• Larger groups such as businesses and other organizations, churches, clubs, schools, and other groups?
• Neighborhoods and the whole community?

Part 2: Setting priorities (20 minutes)
1. Thinking back on our earlier discussions, what seem to be the most important challenges for our community to address? (These might be specific issues, concerns about how things get done, or both.)
2. If our list could have only one or two challenges on it, which ones would we pick? Why would these be our priorities?

Part 3: How can we build a healthier community? (60 minutes)
The following views will help us talk about different approaches our community might use to address the priorities we have identified in this session.
Views on how to improve our community

The viewpoints below are written in the voice of people who are answering the question: How can we work together to make our community a better and healthier place to live? Some of these outlooks may sound strange to you, some may sound familiar. Consider each one as you think about these questions:

1. Which views appeal to you and why? Which view is closest to your own?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the different views?
3. What other ideas would we suggest?
4. What do these views suggest about how we should address the top challenges identified in our study circle?

View #1: Get the whole community involved. Set common goals so that each person and group can see what it needs to be doing.

The only way we can make meaningful changes is to get the whole community involved — and keep it involved. We need to get everyone together to create a vision of what we want this community to be, and to set clear goals for getting from here to there. Then we need to create opportunities for everyone to be involved in making that vision a reality. Everyone should be able to see how they can fit in: individuals, families, government, community groups, hospitals, schools, faith communities, businesses, young people, unions, and so on.

View #2: Focus on underlying causes and prevention. Pay attention to what's “upstream” from the problems we usually focus on.

Instead of focusing on symptoms, we need to look at underlying causes so that we can prevent problems before they become unmanageable. If there are problems with families, or early childhood education, or unhealthy workplaces, or an economy that's not providing a basic living for everyone, we need to tackle their root causes. This way, we can make this an attractive and fun place to spend time, and create plenty of opportunities to learn, play, worship, or work on community projects together.

View #3: Influence decision makers. Advocate policies and decisions that will benefit the whole community.

We need to influence the decisions of government agencies, businesses, and not-for-profit organizations. We should demand access to basic health care for everyone, livable wages and good benefits for workers, and environmentally sound practices. We can encourage businesses to invest in community projects, or insist that government cut the red tape that makes it harder to be creative. Often, we can work in harmony with business and government to make these changes. But we shouldn't be afraid to hold them accountable in other ways, too, including petitions, education and publicity campaigns, and lawsuits.

View #4: Celebrate our successes. Focus on good works and good people — it's more effective and fun than focusing on problems.

Let's look more at all the good things that have happened to improve our community — and
the great people who have helped make those changes. Sometimes it seems as though all we do is talk about our problems, and that’s not helping us make progress. As someone once said, “We build the road as we travel.” That means we should be having fun, learning from our experiences, and celebrating along the way! Simply thanking each other for the good things we’re doing will help us move forward.

View #5: Build working relationships. Improve our ability to work together in this community.

Learning to work together will help us get more done — and be more effective. Instead of competing for resources and protecting our “turf,” we need to improve our ability to communicate, share information, and focus on creative ways of working together. We can start by creating more community discussions like study circles. Opening those channels of communication will help us learn to work together better instead of competing with one another.

View #6: Take personal responsibility. Change our community through individual change.

Each one of us needs to take responsibility for our own well being. We each help create the “collective consciousness” of this community. It is up to all of us to make an effort. We need to be more aware of how our choices in our daily lives at work, home, play, school, and everywhere else affect the community. To start, each one of us might go through a whole day where we ask ourselves, “Will the choice I’m about to make help build a better, healthier community?”

View #7: Pick one project and do it right. Build momentum by making a difference in one area.

Our efforts tend to get scattered because every problem and project seems to be at the top of our list. As a community, we are better off if we focus on one important project, or choose one problem where we know we can make a difference. This is the best way to move forward, strengthen working relationships among community members, and learn some lessons along the way that will help us when we focus on other projects in the future.

Part 4: Wrapping up (10 minutes)

1. Which views, strategies or ideas seem most promising? Which ones should we emphasize as we talk about more specific action steps?
Prepare for Session 4

- Read the list of action ideas in Session 4.
- Think about what you can do on your own and with others to move toward the kind of future you want for your community. You might scan the newspapers, television, or radio — or get on the Internet — for ideas from other places.

SESSION 4: MAKING A DIFFERENCE: SETTING PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

By participating in this study circle, we have already helped to make our community a healthier place. When we share our hopes and concerns, and begin to understand each other better, our community grows stronger. For many of us, these discussions have sparked new ideas and connections that we will want to take further action on.

There are many other ways we can make a difference. In this session, we’ll talk about many different kinds of actions, and we’ll look more closely at some of the most promising ideas. We can start by looking at the list of action ideas and examples from other communities included at the end of this session. (See page 13.)

Facilitator Tips

- Break the session into three parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
- If you have notes from Session 3, review them at the beginning of the discussion.
- Remember to have a recorder take notes so you can refer to them later. If your community is having an "action forum," these notes will be helpful in preparing for that.
- People are likely to come up with a variety of actions on different levels. Participants should feel free to choose their own paths, so make it clear that taking further action is voluntary.

TO START PART 1

- Divide into groups of three or four. Ask each group to look over the action ideas and examples (see "Action Ideas," page X). Each group should spend about 15 minutes choosing two or three action ideas they would like to pursue.

OR

- Ask participants to take a few minutes to look over the action ideas and examples.
- After reading the action ideas, use the categories listed in Part 1 to help start the discussion.

Total suggested time for this session: 2 hours
Part 1: Brainstorming about ways to make a difference (45 minutes)

Take some time to brainstorm about action possibilities. We can use notes from previous sessions to help us remember ideas we've already come up with. The list on pages 13-15 gives examples that show some of the different ways of approaching these issues.

Our imaginations will come in handy here! Make a list that everyone can see — on newsprint or a chalkboard. It might help to use four categories:

- Individual and family actions — including what you, personally, can do.
- Projects small groups of people and informal associations could create.
- Activities that businesses, churches, clubs, schools, and other groups could undertake.
- Community-wide actions — including individuals, organizations, and public officials working together.
Part 2: Setting priorities for action — and for our study circle report and the action forum (60 minutes)

1. Which two or three ideas from each category (individuals and families; small groups; organizations; and community-wide) seem most practical and useful?

2. Are any of these ideas already being tried in the community? How could we support those efforts?

3. Pick one or two ideas from the list and talk about them, keeping the following questions in mind:
   - What would it take to turn this idea into reality?
   - What community strengths could we use to help move this idea forward?
   - What kinds of information, support, or help do we need in order to take these steps?
   - What would our next steps be? What other groups might we link up with?
   - Is there an action that each of us — personally — is willing to take? Is there a project or action idea that excites you enough to want to be involved further? What resources can you draw on or bring in to help these actions happen?

Part 3: Reflecting on our study circle (15 minutes)

1. What new insights came to you from taking part in this study circle? What have you learned that surprised you?

2. Has this study circle affected how you think about our community? What about how you'll be involved in our community from now on? If so, how?

3. What did you find most valuable about the study circle?

4. What worked well in our discussions? What didn't work well? What changes would you suggest for future study circles?

5. Does it make sense to get more study circles going in our community?
ACTION IDEAS

These ideas reflect different views about how to work toward healthier, more vital and prosperous communities. We can use them to jump-start our own thinking. For example, you might ask yourself which action ideas best fit your views and our community.

What can we do as individuals and families?

Sometimes it seems that one person can’t do much to make a difference in the community. But there are simple, everyday steps that each of us can take:

- **Meet your neighbors, and welcome newcomers.** Getting to know each other is one way to start building strong working relationships.
- **Think about how your decisions affect the community.** Start by taking part of a day asking yourself, "Will this decision or action make my community healthier or not?"
- **Take part in activities that help make your family a creative, supportive, fun, and healthy group of people.**
- **Share your skills and talents with the community.** Could you coach a kids' sports team? Help others to learn English? Tutor school children? Work on a community garden or clean-up project?
  
  *Example:* A resident in Jacksonville, Oregon, started the Home Gardening Project to build public gardens for the poor and elderly. Project volunteers build more than 100 gardens each year, providing a healthy, inexpensive, and local source of food.
- **Attend meetings of the school board, zoning board, city council, community development corporation, or other groups that make important decisions.** Do your homework, give your ideas, and get others to attend with you.
- **Get to know the names of your neighbors and the kids on your block.** Especially for young people, being greeted by their name is a sign that someone cares about them.
- **Take care of your own health.** Eat well, exercise, and get enough sleep. Try something new each day! Make sure you’re taking time for yourself — take a walk, relax in the bathtub, pray or meditate, do something you love.
- **Be active in neighborhood and community groups, your church, or school group.** These organizations can make a big difference in people's lives and in your community.
- **Express your thoughts.** Write letters to the editor, communicate with public officials, talk with neighbors, friends, family, and co-workers. Keep the dialogue and the learning going. Continue your study circle. Help organize study circles on other issues.
- **Be a mentor.** Young people, new mothers, people starting a new business, and others often need some support and guidance. Who would you be willing to share some time with?
  
  *Example:* Female heads of households in a Maine housing development receive support and mentoring from local church volunteers in the "Mother to Mother" program.
- **Organize a block party or a get-together to help new and diverse people at work get to know each other.**
- **Think about how you could use your contacts or your position within an organization to support the kinds of changes your study circle talked about.**
Example: As part of the executive loan program, an IBM employee was granted a one-year social service leave to coordinate a community-wide study circle program in New Rochelle, New York. Focusing on youth issues, almost 200 participants attended forums and took part in study circles to talk about violence, youth empowerment, and substance abuse issues.

- **Support local businesses.**
- **Volunteer for a neighborhood crime watch.**
  
  Example: Citizen volunteers in Delray, Florida, have been trained and equipped by the police department to create citizen-observer patrols. The patrols use donated cell phones and radios to report suspicious behavior and problems. In every Delray neighborhood that has a citizen patrol, there has been a 75% drop in crime.

**What can we do together as a community or in smaller groups?**

If you want to solve a problem or create a project, look around you. There are many people in your neighborhood, workplace, school, church, or the study circle program who might want to join you. Use the organizations you belong to, such as businesses, clubs, neighborhood associations, and congregations to recruit more people and give more weight to your efforts.

- **Get more study circles going.** Often, study circle participants volunteer to help expand study circle programs to include more people in their communities. Maybe more people need to use this healthy communities guide, or perhaps study circles could be used for other issues that come up.
  
  Example: The success of widespread study circles on race relations in Lima, Ohio, led the community to expand the program and to address other issues.

- **Find creative ways to use community spaces and resources.** Many communities have buildings, parks, and other facilities that are unused for much of the time.
  
  Example: In Chicago, Illinois, Ekhert Park offered its facilities to a local community college to hold English-as-a-second-language classes for the community. Soon families that originally came to the park for these classes began to participate in the park's recreational and fitness programs as well.

- **Host events where speakers, people with slide shows, and others can help educate the community.**
  
  Example: In Lyndale, Minnesota, the neighborhood association's Lyndale Environmental Education Project invites speakers to address a variety of environmental concerns affecting the neighborhood, including sprawl, recycling, and water management.

- **Map neighborhood assets and help people find out about services available to them.**
  
  Example: In Bridgeport, Connecticut, study circle organizers created a simple directory listing area services and programs to connect new volunteers with community service projects.

- **Organize an arts project — such as a photo exhibit, mural, cultural festival, musical event, or theater production.**
  
  Example: In Boston, Massachusetts, a neighborhood association sponsored the "Unity Through Diversity Mural," which was designed and painted by young people, and is now a prominent landmark.

- **Get together to help the less fortunate.**
Example: The Good Shepherd Alliance is a partnership of local clergy, civic organizations, developers, and businesses working together to fight homelessness in Loudon County, Virginia. By working with developers, church groups, local youth, and homeless individuals, the Alliance turned homes that were slated for redevelopment into temporary shelters. Other local businesses donated trash removal, beds and linens, and construction materials. Volunteers established a transportation system to get shelter residents to work or training, and a local community college opened its early childhood development program to homeless preschoolers.

Example: After their study circles, people in Lima, Ohio, got together to help the Daily Bread Soup Kitchen expand its operation and add tutoring and recreation activities.

Create a skills or talent bank in your neighborhood. Often, neighbors don't know what they can do for each other, or what kind of assistance is available to them close to home. Creating and circulating a simple list of what each neighbor (including young people) is good at doing, or willing to offer as a service, can help people make those connections. The skills can range from gardening to bookkeeping, and from musical or artistic talents to car repair.

Get youth involved.

Example: In New York, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the Salvadori Educational Center partnered with teenage skaters to build the Riverside Skate Park in upper Manhattan. The park was built by teenagers and is maintained and administered by the skaters.

Provide innovative services that create a good fit between community needs and resources.

Example: In South Bend, Indiana, Memorial Hospital established the Community Health Enhancement program to explore how the hospital could better use its funds to improve the overall health of the community. One project, Women in Touch, used aggressive educational campaigns and referral services to cut the number of African American women diagnosed with advanced breast cancer in half within four years.

Example: In Washington, DC, the Third District police station has established a community-policing station at a local McDonald's. The station is open part-time. Officers can opt to spend part of their shift in the sub-station, where they are available to talk with residents and answer questions.

Organize to make sure your voices are heard.

Example: The residents of the Chatham Court Apartments in Washington, DC, formed a tenants' association to make sure that their concerns and interests are represented in the operation of the apartment complex — and in the surrounding neighborhood. They publish a regular newsletter to keep tenants informed about community events and neighborhood issues.

Help create new business opportunities.

Example: In Chattanooga, Tennessee, the residents of the Westside neighborhood teamed up with city officials, local educators, and business professionals to create the Westside Community Development Corporation (WCDC). Working with the City, the Junior League, and local foundations, WCDC turned a former elementary school into a community resource center. The new center provides adult education programs, job training and small business management courses, youth clubs, substance abuse counseling, and senior citizen programs.
The school's kitchen houses one of the community's first small businesses: HomeGirls Catering.
Sample Mind Map

- **Jobs**: Good jobs, Good pay, Healthy workplaces, Things we love to do, Things that built our community, Connect with everything
  - **Volunteers**: Do our jobs make it possible for everyone to live in great neighborhoods?
  - **Health in Our Community**: Hospitals and clinics, care for people, Preventing illness, Care for children, Sometimes not able to, Educating parents, Can't do everything, Can't make things worse
  - **People**: Health care for everyone, Public health programs, Work with low-income folks, Sometimes not able to
  - **Hospitals & Clinics**: Health care for everyone, Public health programs, Work with low-income folks, Sometimes not able to
  - **Education**: Adults, Kids, Peer Counseling, School, Home, TV Ads
  - **Great Neighborhoods**: Safe, Good housing, Great Neighborhoods, River clean-up, Government regulations, Litter pick-up
  - **Clean Environment**: We're all responsible, Litter pick-up, We're all responsible
  - **Clean Environment**: Litter pick-up, We're all responsible
  - **Connect with everything**: Good housing, Safe, Great Neighborhoods, Clean Environment

Lots of people find satisfaction or frustration in their jobs.
Sample Chart of Community Health Trends

We have great schools in our community and I expect things to get better and better.

After the factory closed down, there weren’t many high-paying jobs. Things have gotten better, but I don’t know where we’re going from here.

I see the cost of health care and health insurance skyrocketing and I don’t think most people’s incomes can keep up.