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Problem Identification

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## Part 1: Policy Issue

The Shaker Heights' (SH) community is composed of cultural and socioeconomic diverse residents. This, combined with a stellar school system, serves as the impetus for many to settle in this area. While the city as a whole has made valiant efforts to sustain this reputation of diversity and scholastic excellence, the community continues to struggle various social problems that are partly due to this extreme income and cultural mix of SH residents. Some challenges facing SH are the (1) academic achievement gaps between lower income African-American and other students in the school system, (2) the integration of necessary social services to address the needs of residents, and (3) creating effective policies to address increasing crime rates. Many community members perceive the aforementioned problems connected to a growing lower-income community in certain neighborhoods of SH.

### **Challenges**

The challenges of creating effective policies to address increasing crime rates and necessary social services will be addressed in this project. The project will focus on one aspect of the problem, relating to the lack of afterschool activities/options for adolescents in the community. It has been documented that teens participate in high-risk behaviors during the times of day when they are least supervised (3 – 6 pm). This constitutes the same time of day when juvenile delinquency is rampant. This is particularly true in the lower income area of south SH, whose parents are less likely to afford proper supervision or fee –based activities for their teens. The lack of available facilities, welcoming attitudes within the community toward adolescents, and a vision of advocacy for this population exacerbate the problems that result from youth not being supervised. In turn, this further alienates and exploits this group's interests and the long-term interests of the community to provide effective facilities and options for this population. .

The problem maintenance diagram (figure 1) signifies the multi-faceted community need. In addition, the figure shows the far-reaching and concrete ways in which the problem (lack of after school supervised activities for south SH youth) interacts with other socio-economic and political dynamics within the community. Micro to Macro systems are impacted from this policy shortcoming. Family, neighborhoods, and the city as a whole all feel the result of these circumstances and lack of policies. For example, working parents who assume their older children are self-sufficient and responsible enough to make positive, healthy decisions while unsupervised contribute to the lack of necessary supervision provided for adolescents. The lack of a community-wide sustained effort to address this problem in a comprehensive manner continues to provide minimal after school activities geared toward teenagers. City administration has failed to respond to the negative effects of unsupervised teens that currently disrupt residents and public property.

A dichotomy exists between community residents (one group, mostly the higher SES with a voice and the other, lower SES group with no voice) that provide the planning framework for community-wide recreational and leisure activities. It is surmised that part of the population's needs, wants, or desires are accounted for when community dialogue and the respective analysis takes place on policy standards. Although youth were involved in the focus groups and community meetings that preceded the current SH recreation and leisure plan, their opinions were not factored in at the decision-making level. The meetings and focus groups were conducted in such a manner that inhibited the adolescents who could really benefit from after school programming to share their opinions and interests freely. The atmosphere presented these youth with requests of divulging potentially embarrassing information about one's own socioeconomic situation.

From a youth advocate's perspective, the most important faction of this problem is related to its effects on individual adolescents. Research shows that youth who are involved in productive activities are at less risk to become pregnant as teens, experiment with illegal substances and participate in criminal activity. Moreover, the lack of available options afterschool leaves older youth feeling bored, under-utilized and devalued as contributors to themselves, their families and their communities. The opportunity to capitalize on individual strengths and capacities and developing each adolescent's social capital, is missed. The alternatives consist of meeting friends on street corners, in front of public buildings and in front of businesses to join in peer-induced behaviors, some of which are a nuisance to the community.

### **Facts and Statistics**

- a. Demographics of unsupervised youth that are target population for this policy
- b. Risk factors of unsupervised adolescents
- c. Median income of Shaker
- d. Median income in individual shaker neighborhoods
- e. Demographics (race, income, 1 or 2 parent household) per neighborhood
- f. Juvenile delinquency rates / police calls per neighborhoods

### **What knowledge is available regarding the need?**

- a. Number of adolescents 13- 18 residing in south SH
- b. % of these that are in the lower-income bracket (reduced / free lunch or 2x the poverty rate)
- c. Achievement scores from MS and HS for these youth
- d. Juvenile delinquency rates for these neighborhoods

### **Previous attempts by SH**

Based on the SH website the community interest and expansion of youth programming.

- a. Provided by Shaker Community Center
- b. Provided by Shaker Public Library
- c. Per Councilman Glessier, the program at the library was so popular that they had to shut it down because they could not accommodate the number of teens, safely, in the space they had.
- d. The literature supports the provision of positive afterschool programming for older youth who face socioeconomic challenges, as well as academic achievement challenges.
- e. Currently, in SH, high school students with median household incomes of YYY, are currently achieving at this rate on the Ohio Graduation Tests.
- f. In addition, their average high school graduation rates are SS, compared to those in higher income brackets, with graduate rates of SS and higher (show a table).
- g. Add additional information to support the use of afterschool programs to address these problems.

### **Barriers to meeting the need**

There are many barriers to meeting this need within the Shaker Heights' community. Most people consulted for this project thus far cited necessary funding as the premier barrier to addressing this need, however our analysis points to several other factors which impede the community's capacity to formulate policy changes.

Support for the founding idea that this is a serious and urgent community priority is the most pressing barrier to change.

The need to identify, negotiate and collaborate with both community level and municipal level leaders throughout SH to cultivate strong champions for this cause.

Another barrier to this need involves the difficulty of organizing and empowering the individuals most directly affected by the problem, i.e. the youth. This is particularly challenging to do when considering the complexity of being able to connect with, educate and motivate youth who may feel skeptical of our intentions and their own capacities to affect change. These adolescents may also have had negative previous experiences of feeling targeted by the police, not valued by the community and not invited to create youth-related policies.

**What other efforts have been done to address this problem?**

- a. Midnight basketball
- b. The Teen Room at the Library
- c. Shaker Heights Youth Center-has some activities
- d. Increased police presence to deter congregating youth from assembling near businesses, public buildings and on street corners.

**Develop some alternatives**

Expansion of the Shaker Heights Youth Center to include a basketball court, extended hours of operation, open to all SH teens, with access to productive activities that are youth-driven in creation and conducive to supporting the teens' social, academic and emotional development. This would go hand-in-hand with a new policy approach to be followed by the SHPD to redirect teens, not participating in criminal behavior, to the teen center. In addition, this could be combined with previously utilized programs such as midnight basketball.

Re-institute the teen room in a different facility which is capable of meeting the demand.

Build a new family recreational facility, which has a youth division, and provides for afterschool teen activities.

**Criteria to be used to choose among them**

- a. Funding: what are the possible funding sources for this program, who will provide it?
- b. Willingness of organizations to collaborate behind a particular plan.
- c. What do the kids want?
- d. What does the community want?
- e. Choose a course of action
- f. Expansion of the Shaker Heights Youth Center: based on the fact that John Lisy, executive director, said the following:
  - a. capital funding is possible
  - b. willing to collaborate and look at various funding sources
  - c. has access to SH teens to gauge their interests and ideas
  - d. has ability to create a partnering venture enterprise to provide for operational funding (Namaste Café), that also serves other community and economic development needs. (based on a report from SH that states residents want more cafés on Chagrin Blvd).

**How could you evaluate the results of a policy change?**

A comparison of police calls and juvenile delinquency rates (loitering, vandalism, youth violence, drug activity) before the existence of the programming to after.

A comparison of pre-participation academic achievement earmarks, such as test passing rates and high school graduation rates, to examine the new policy's impact on academic achievement. This would take place at least one year after programs went into effect.

Survey SH business owners/managers pre and post implementation on their impressions toward the teens in the community and how they do/do not impact their business.

Part II: Advocacy Plan

**Identify Needed Advocacy Effort**

As a result of the examination described above, we have distinguished an advocacy effort that represents the interests of our community and more specifically, the youth of SH. The current policy, held by the city of Shaker Heights and the Shaker Heights Municipal Court, when dealing with youth considered to be loitering, is to: --we hope to fill this in after our meeting with Councilman Glessier-----  
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We are proposing that this policy does not adequately address the needs of either the youth or the community as a whole. Its intention is to protect the community, but in reality, this law and its related policies for enforcement, are exacerbating and increasing relational problems among youth and the police. For the supposed sake of community safety, they are also punishing the youth for participating in what is developmentally appropriate for them to do (i.e. congregate in peer groups ). This is based on the idea that it is not the safety force’s role to address the social needs of the community, but that this is the job of other facets of local government and community organizations. However, the local government currently defers responsibility for addressing youth “loitering” to the police department. Meanwhile, the city professes to be committed to breaking through racial gaps in education, arrests and socio-economics. These two approaches seem counterproductive to each other and justifies a proposal of an alternative policy solution.

**Target Organizaiton**

The target organization is SH City Council. The City Council has the authority to vote on city ordinances that become law and then heavily influence the ways in which these laws are

enforced through policymaking. Other organizations with a stake in this policy change include the SHPD, the business association, schools, and the SHYC. To affect change, we will employ the use of self-education, community education, meeting, discussion and negotiation, letter writing and if necessary, media and petitions.

### **Alternative advocacy strategies**

Alternatives could include the use of the media to highlight the magnitude of the problem on a regional scale, to put pressure on policymakers to take our efforts seriously and to re-consider their positions. Also, the use of media could inform inactive members of the community about the efforts which could cultivate greater awareness and even support from within the community.

Another form of advocacy that could be utilized to convince policymakers that there is a large amount of community support for an effort would be to use petitions. In the process of soliciting signatures of support, we would be able to educate constituents about this issue, perhaps recruit fellow advocates and collect names signifying the level of community support.

### **Choose an advocacy plan**

We will begin our advocacy campaign by becoming informed ourselves, through meetings with various community leaders. These meetings will be with elected officials, organization directors, neighborhood club leaders and youth representatives. The goal of these meetings will be to learn about (1) different perspectives of the problem; (2) perceptions about past efforts to address the problem; and (3) solicit guidance on how to proceed and attempt to identify a champion for our efforts. Once we have gained a wide range of information and identified champions of invested sectors, we will, in collaboration with the Shaker Heights Youth Center, begin to lobby local officials to commit to the allocation of operational funding for an expansion of the SHYC. We will work with other community organizations as well, including local

business owners, the library, schools, SHPD, to discuss how we can all collaborate to cultivate the funding needed to expand the SHYC to include a safe and productive space. Aspects to consider are fostering recreational, social, academic and emotional development amongst the teens. We will prepare for these meetings by considering the interests of those involved and their related stakes in this process. Using these vetted interests as the basis of conversation, we will be prepared to make the case that it is in their respective best interests to support our campaign. Having said this, we will remain open to their ideas about alternative ways to approach this need.

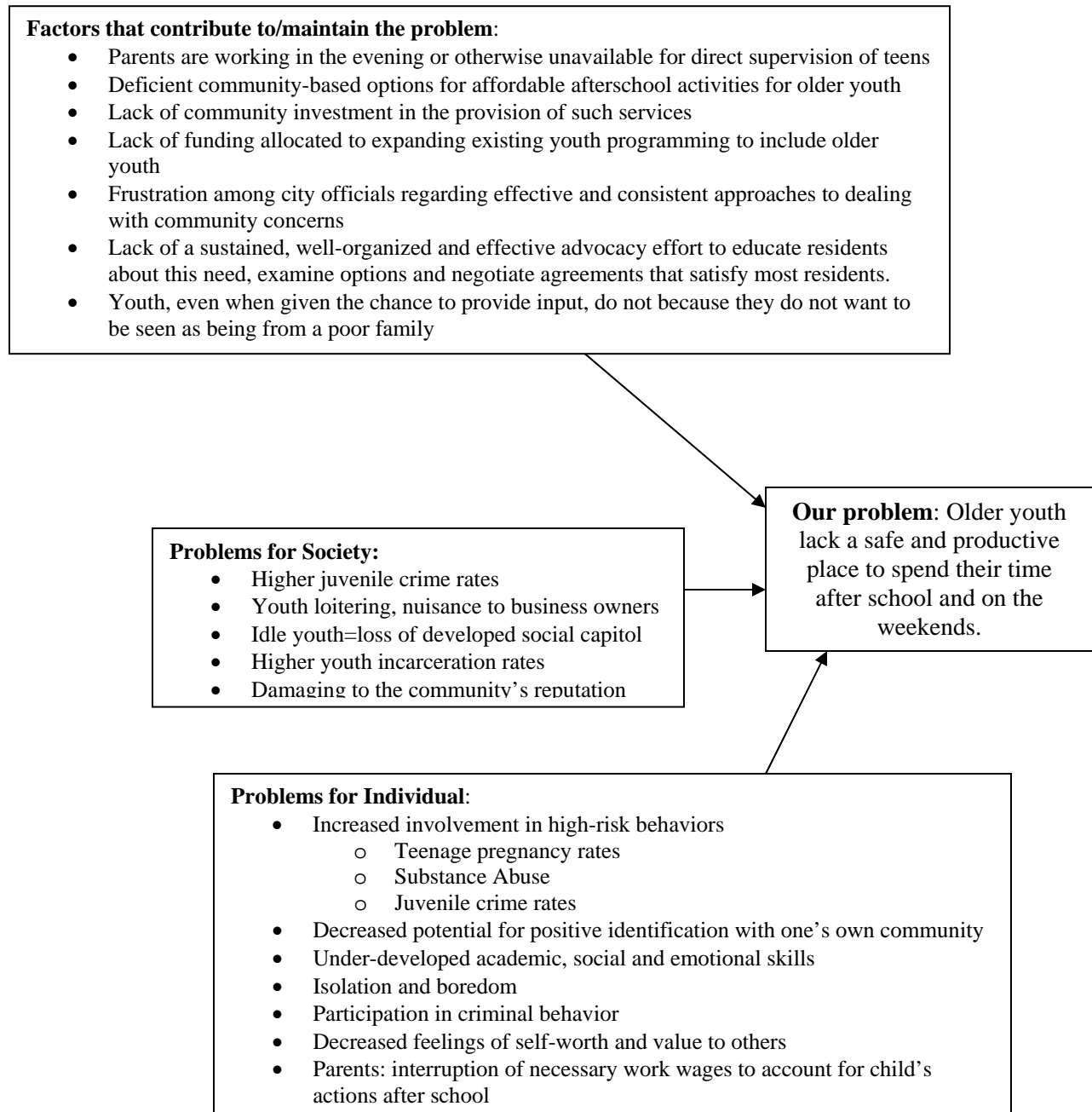
### **Goal**

Within the context of this course, the goal is to develop and implement an advocacy strategy that will culminate in a productive community-level discussion and commitment towards the provision of a safe and healthy place for teenagers after school. Beyond this course, the goal is to actually have our efforts materialize in the opening and sustaining of a teen center for SH's youth. The results of these efforts can be evaluated by comparing our stated objectives to the actual manifestations of our advocacy, once commenced. Also, at the origination of these efforts, qualitative data could be solicited from the individuals we worked with along the way, asking them what made them either support or oppose our efforts. This would shed light on which approaches were most effective and which were not.

### **Timetable**

Please see figure 2 for a detailed task timetable.

**VII. Figure 1: Problem and Need Diagram**



**Figure 2: Timetable  
Shaker Heights' Youth Advocacy Project**

Task	HB	HM	JG	Target Date Completed
Interviews / Meetings				
Obtain schedules for block meetings, city council meetings, check for relevant city committee meeting times/dates.			x	2/28/2007
SHYC			x	Done
SHHD		x		3/10/2007
SHPD		x		3/10/2007
Community Groups	x			2/28/2007
Public Bldgs Employees (library)	x			3/17/2007
Parks and Rec	X			3/17/2007
Homeowners	x			3/17/2007
Adolescents		x		3/10/2007
Block Groups			x	3/17/2007
Councilperson			x	3/3/2007
Collecting Evidence				
garbage	x			3/10/2007
vandalism	x			3/10/2007
police reports-we'll need to submit a public request for information		x		req 2/23/07
juvenile delinquent rates (neocando)			x	3/10/2007
academic performance ( <a href="http://www.ode.state.oh.us">http://www.ode.state.oh.us</a> )			x	3/10/2007
Youth Risk Survey (CWRU)		x		3/10/2007
current policy at SH	x			3/10/2007
Research				
evidence to show benefits of/designs of after school alternatives-teens			x	Done
similar communities' policies	x			3/10/2007
similar communities' programs	x			3/10/2007
current tax expenditures		x		3/10/2007
Present				
This will be dependent on purpose of presentation				
SH City Council	x	x	x	4/5/07, depending on feedback
Potential funding sources (may look at nat'l orgs, such as boys and girls club, children's defense fund,	x	x	x	ongoing until achieved
Organize (as necessary)				
grassroots-petitions-last resort	x	x	x	
political pressure	x	x	x	ongoing
protests-last resort	x	x	x	
media-last resort, will be used diplomatically if possible	x	x	x	